

Adoption News

A Newsletter From:

Adoptions From The Heart



Finding Community at the Annual Picnic

Every summer, the Adoptions From The Heart Family Picnic becomes so much more than a day of games, laughter, and family fun. It is a reunion, a celebration, and a reminder that adoption is built on relationships that continue to grow long after placement.

This year, those connections were on full display.

For many waiting families, the picnic is their first opportunity to experience the AFTH community in person. Caitlin, a waiting single mother working with our New York office, attended the picnic after meeting other waiting single parents through AFTH's Single Parent Support Group.

"Most of us meet virtually," Caitlin shared. "So we decided to come to the picnic and finally meet in person."

What could have been a nerve-wracking experience quickly became one of belonging.

"Everyone has been so welcoming," she said. "Especially because I'm here on my own. It's been absolutely lovely, and I hope to come every year; especially once I'm placed."

Caitlin credits both the Single Parent Support Group and the Waiting Parent Support Group with helping her through the adoption journey.

"Since we're all going through similar experiences, we're really there for each other," she explained. "We celebrate one another, offer emotional support and advice, and we've become friends outside of the support group. It's been such a wonderful resource that the agency has been able to provide."

That sense of community extends far beyond waiting families.

For birth mothers Whitney and Morgan, the picnic was another opportunity to celebrate a friendship that began through AFTH's Expecting and Birth Parent Support Group.

Whitney first attended the Family Picnic with her daughter ten years ago. This year, she returned alongside Morgan, a friend she met through the agency.

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Finding Community at the Annual Picnic Continues...

"I met Morgan through Adoptions From The Heart, and we've created such a close bond together," Whitney shared. "The agency has always made me feel like I have a safe, open space where I can share my feelings, feel comfortable, and always feel welcome. I'm just so grateful to be part of this community."

Morgan has placed two children through AFTH and says the Expecting and Birth Parent Support Group helped her find something she never expected: lasting friendship.

"I've met Whitney, and it's been such a growing experience," Morgan said. "It's a great community."

Both women enthusiastically recommend the Expecting and Birth Parent Support Group to others.

"It's a safe space to talk, get advice, and honestly make friendships," Morgan explained. "It's nice having someone who truly understands."

Those stories capture the heart of what the AFTH Family Picnic has always been about. It's a place where birth parents reconnect with one another, waiting parents find encouragement, adoptive families celebrate milestones, open adoption reunions take place, children play together, and social workers witness the relationships they've helped nurture over the years.

Open adoption isn't simply about maintaining contact. It's about building a community rooted in trust, respect, and support. The Family Picnic is a beautiful reminder that adoption doesn't end with placement. For many, it's where lifelong friendships begin, familiar faces become family, and every connection is celebrated.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who joined us this year and helped make the day so meaningful. We can't wait to gather again next summer and continue celebrating the relationships that make the AFTH community so extraordinary.

Stay connected with the AFTH community!

Follow [@adoptionsfromtheheart](#) on social media to keep up with upcoming events, agency news, inspiring stories, educational resources, and all that's happening.

Locations

Connecticut Office

38 Security Dr. Avon, CT 06001
860.657.2626

Delaware Office

18-A Trolley Square Wilmington, DE 19806
302.658.8883

New Jersey Office

523 Hollywood Ave, Suite 209, Cherry Hill, NJ 0800
856.665.5655

New York

87 Mineola Blvd, Mineola, NY 11501
800.355.5500

Virginia Office

1403 Greenbrier Parkway St. 560
Chesapeake, VA 23320
757.361.0008

Pennsylvania Office Mailing Address

30-31 Hampstead Circle Wynnewood, PA 19096

Central Pennsylvania

717.399.7766

Greater Philadelphia

610.642.7200

Lehigh Valley

610.432.2384

Western Pennsylvania

724.853.6533

Toll Free: 800.355.5500

Website: www.afth.org

Dear Friends,

AFTH Played an Important Role in Your Life, Will You Help Shape Its Future?

The landscape of adoption and reproductive healthcare continues to change. Many agencies have closed their doors, and many of those remaining do not align with the ethical standards and compassionate care upheld at AFTH. We believe every expectant parent deserves honest information, supportive counseling, and the freedom to make the decision that is right for them without pressure, coercion, or judgment. *We will never pressure expectant parents to choose adoption.*

Adoptions From The Heart Remains Committed To:

- Providing options, resources, and compassionate support for expectant parents
- Serving the LGBTQIA+ community, recognized by the Human Rights Campaign for inclusive and affirming practices
- Ensuring all members of the triad are active on our staff and Board shaping AFTH through their lived experience
- Creating opportunities for education and peer connection through support groups, webinars, and playgroups
- Offering lifelong support, with our social work team available for questions and guidance at every stage
- Amplifying honest and diverse adoption voices while promoting ethical, transparent practices

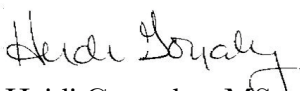
Through AFTHtv, we are reshaping the conversation around adoption by sharing honest stories, educating communities, and making space for the full range of emotions adoption can hold. *Adoption is not a single moment, it is a lifelong journey and AFTH is here to support each step of the way.*

AFTH does not receive government funding. Our work is sustained through agency fees and the generosity of donors who believe in ethical adoption options, education, and lifelong support. With fewer adoptions each year, donor support is more essential than ever to ensure these services continue.

We hope that you will stand WITH us, whether by joining as a Year-Round Supporter with a recurring monthly donation or a one-time annual gift. You can make your tax-deductible gift by donating online at www.aftth.org/donate or scanning the QR code.

Every person navigating adoption deserves to feel seen and supported. *Together, we can ensure that AFTH's resources and support continue for years to come.*

With Sincere Appreciation,


Heidi Gonzalez, MS
Executive Director


Maxine Chalker, MSW/LSW
Founder



Scan the QR code to make a donation!

A Look Back at Our 2026 AFTH Family Picnics



One of the greatest joys at Adoptions From The Heart is seeing the lifelong connections that continue to grow through open adoption. Every summer, our family picnics provide an opportunity for birth families, adoptive families, adoptees, waiting families, and staff to come together. Not just to celebrate adoption, but to celebrate the relationships that make open adoption so meaningful.

This year's gatherings reminded us that while each picnic may look a little different, they all share the same purpose: building community, strengthening connections, and creating lasting memories.

36th Annual Family Picnic – Horsham, PA



Our 36th Annual Family Picnic on June 14 was once again the largest celebration of the season, bringing hundreds of members of the AFTH community together for an unforgettable day.

Families traveled from across our service areas to enjoy an afternoon filled with laughter, games, delicious food, face painting, crafts, and time spent reconnecting with one another. For many families, the picnic is a yearly tradition. A place where children can play together, friendships are renewed, and birth and adoptive families continue to celebrate the relationships they've built through open adoption.

One of the most meaningful parts of the day was watching those connections in action. Birth parents and adoptive families gathered side by side, children proudly introduced the important people in their lives, and waiting families had the opportunity to witness the beauty of open adoption firsthand. These moments are a powerful reminder that adoption is not a single day or event. It's a lifelong journey of relationships, trust, and love.

The picnic also gave families the opportunity to meet with AFTH staff, reconnect with familiar faces, and celebrate the incredible community that has grown over the past 40 years. Whether it was a family's first picnic or their fifteenth, the day was filled with smiles, hugs, and stories that remind us why these gatherings matter so much.



To everyone who attended, volunteered, sponsored, and helped make the day possible, thank you. Your presence made this year's picnic another wonderful celebration of connection.

Celebrating Our Regional Gatherings

Virginia Family Picnic



Our Virginia Family Picnic was another wonderful opportunity for families to reconnect. We were excited to spend time with many families and ten adoptees ranging from 8 months to 10 years old.

While some of our larger reunion groups were unable to attend this year, it was for a beautiful reason: many of those birth and adoptive families have cultivated relationships that continue well beyond our annual picnic. Seeing those lifelong connections flourish is exactly what open adoption is all about.

Hearing adoptees share their thoughts, questions, and experiences as they grow continues to teach and inspire our staff, helping us better support the families we serve.

Connecticut Family Picnic

Our Connecticut Family Picnic may have been a smaller gathering this year, but it was filled with meaningful moments. Families enjoyed spending time together, catching up, sharing stories, and simply enjoying each other's company.



Sometimes the smallest gatherings create some of the biggest memories, and we are grateful to everyone who joined us for another wonderful afternoon of connection.

New York Summer Meet-Up



This year, adoptive parent and board member, Andy Moriarity, stepped up to keep the New York summer meet-up tradition alive, and we are incredibly grateful for his leadership and dedication to bringing families together.

Although only three families were able to attend, they enjoyed a wonderful afternoon connecting, sharing experiences, and strengthening the community that makes AFTH so special. These smaller gatherings remind us that it's never about the size of the event; it's about the meaningful relationships that continue to grow long after placement.

Thank you to everyone who joined us at one of our family picnics this year. Whether you attended in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Connecticut, or New York, each gathering served as a beautiful reminder that open adoption creates connections that last a lifetime. We can't wait to see everyone again next year!

Thank You to Our 2026 Family Picnic Sponsors

Our 36th Annual Family Picnic would not have been possible without the generosity of our incredible sponsors, whose support helps create a day where birth families, adoptive families, adoptees, and waiting families can come together to celebrate the beauty of open adoption.

A special thank you to our **Purple Sponsor, [Law Offices of Debbie E. Spivack](#)**. For many years, Debbie, Esq. has been a trusted partner and unwavering supporter of Adoptions From The Heart and the families we serve. As an attorney dedicated exclusively to adoption and assisted reproductive technology law, Debbie has helped thousands of birth parents, adoptive families, agencies, and children navigate the legal aspects of building families with compassion and expertise. Her longstanding commitment to ethical adoption practices and family-centered care mirrors AFTH's mission, and we are deeply grateful for her continued partnership and generous support.

We would also like to thank our **Yellow Sponsor, [Entrust Financial LLC](#)**, for supporting this year's picnic. As an independent, woman-founded wealth management firm committed to helping individuals and families achieve their financial goals while giving back to the community, Entrust Financial's generosity helped make this special day possible.

Adoptions From The Heart Support Groups

Our support groups provide a welcoming space for expecting and birth parents, waiting and adoptive families, adoptees, and extended birth families to connect through their shared adoption experiences. Join others who truly "get it" to ask questions, share concerns, find encouragement, and celebrate milestones together. Families who are currently in the adoption process can earn 1 Continuing Education (CE) credit for attending a support group.

Expecting & Birth Parent Support Group

This is a welcoming space to connect with other expecting and birth parents, share thoughts and feelings, and find support from those with similar experiences. There is no expectation to stay for the entire meeting or to speak. Participation is always at your comfort level.

Waiting Family Support Group

Join AFTH's waiting families as we share the highs and lows of the adoption process.

Transracial Adoption Support Group

This support group is to connect adoptive parents who have also adopted transracially. It is a safe space to discuss thoughts and concerns.

Post Placement Support Group

Join AFTH social work staff and families in post placement. Parenting itself is a challenge, when adding adoption issues, support and guidance may be required to assist in navigating these struggles.

Single Parent Support Group

AFTH staff and other single waiting and placed families join for a time to connect and process the different aspects of your adoption journey as single adoptive parents. [Click here](#) to hear from this adoptive mother sharing how the support group has helped her.

LGBTQ+ Adoptive Parent Support Group

Join our LGBTQ+ adoptive parent support group for meaningful conversations about the unique experiences and challenges of LGBTQ+ families. Open to all past and present AFTH LGBTQ+ families, this group offers a safe, supportive space to share, connect, and learn from others who understand.

Adoptee Support Group (Ages 15+)

We understand the challenges that can arise while navigating identity, relationships, and emotions throughout life. While every adoption story is different, many of the feelings, questions, and reflections we carry are shared.

[Our Adoptee Support Group offers a safe, peer-led space](#) where adoptees can hear the stories of others, share their own experiences, and begin to find their voice without pressure or judgment. The Adoptee Support Group is open to adoptees seeking connection, understanding, and community. Where all experiences are honored and none are simplified.

****NEW* Extended Birth Family Support Group***



A peer support group for extended birth family members of children placed for adoption, facilitated by an AFTH social worker.

This group offers a supportive space to connect with others who share a similar experience, share your story if you wish, gain understanding, and learn from one another. Together, participants can find encouragement, support, and connection from others who truly understand the unique perspective of extended birth family members.

You can register to all of AFTH's support groups on our calendar of events at calendar.afth.org

AFTH's Summer Educational Series

Open Adoption: Birth and Adoptive Parent Perspectives

Navigating an open adoption relationship can be both challenging and rewarding. Please join a panel of birth and adoptive parents who will share their perspectives on open adoption issues, ranging from meeting at the hospital, ongoing contact through sharing pictures, letters and visits, and how to manage your child's thoughts and feelings when there isn't contact with birth parents.

Wednesday, July 29th | 6:30-8:00 PM

Registration deadline: July 22, 2026

Open Adoption: Navigating Changes While Honoring Commitments

Join us for an interactive webinar for families navigating open adoption and relationships with birth families. We'll explore common questions, discuss how relationships with birth families can evolve over time, and share practical ways to build trust while maintaining clear and healthy expectations for all.

Thursday, August 20th | 6:00-7:30 PM

Registration deadline: August 13, 2026

Adoptive Parent Panel: Navigating the Wait, Challenges & Openness

The panel will include past AFTH Adoptive Parent's sharing their stories about their wait, hospital experiences, challenges navigated, and what navigating varying relationships with their birth family has looked like since placement.

Thursday, August 26th | 6:00-7:30 PM

Registration deadline: August 19, 2026



Prenatal Drug & Alcohol Exposure:



\$100/family - [Click for a Video Message About the Class](#)

AFTH wants families to make informed decisions when completing their profile keys. Dr. Erin Meyer, an internal medicine and pediatric hospitalist, NICU provider, and adoptive mom, will discuss the effects of drug and alcohol exposure during pregnancy, including withdrawal symptoms and potential short- and long-term impacts on newborns. Questions are welcome.

Upcoming Webinar Dates:

Link is emailed 1-2 business days after registering

- **Thursday, October 15 | 7:00PM - 8:30PM**

REGISTRATION DEADLINE:

1 week before webinar

AFTH's Summer Ed Series is held on Zoom to welcome families from all over our service area to attend.

Registration Closes 1 Week Before Classes - Classes Fill Up Quickly

Ed Series classes fulfill AFTH's CEU requirements.

Classes are \$40/family unless otherwise noted. Click [HERE](#) to Register.

Our Educational Series is designed to provide valuable information and support for everyone touched by adoption. We're always looking for new topics that matter most to our community! If there's a subject you'd like to see covered in a future class or webinar, we'd love to hear from you.

Send your ideas to adoption@afth.org, your feedback helps shape future programming!

Staff Spotlight: Christopher Peszka

For more than a decade, Christopher Peszka has been a dedicated leader at Adoptions From The Heart, helping families navigate the adoption journey with compassion, experience, and an unwavering commitment to doing what's best for children.



Chris joined AFTH in March 2015 after building a diverse career in child welfare and education. His professional journey began as a foster care caseworker in Philadelphia, where he eventually became Director of the Foster Care Program after spending 15 years with the agency. He later taught fifth-grade social studies before

returning to social work at another foster care agency. Today, he serves as District Supervisor for AFTH's New Jersey office and has also provided leadership to the Virginia, Connecticut, and Wynnewood offices throughout his tenure.

What drew Chris to AFTH was its mission of putting the best interests of children first, along with its commitment to inclusion, diversity, and empowering clients through choice.

Over the years, Chris has witnessed many changes in adoption, but one aspect continues to stand out to him: the growing recognition of the importance of open adoption. He believes maintaining a child's connection to their heritage, history, and birth family creates meaningful lifelong relationships that benefit everyone involved.

Among the many families he has worked with, Chris is especially proud of supporting adoptive parents who open their hearts to older children from the foster care.

"Providing permanency in the form of a forever family for a child has been very fulfilling," he shares.

His years at AFTH have also shaped him personally. Working alongside birth parents, adoptive families, and adoptees has given him a deeper appreciation for the relationships in his own life. Just as meaningful, he credits the incredible team at AFTH for helping him grow both professionally and personally.

When asked what inspired him to pursue adoption work, Chris points to one simple but powerful goal:

helping children achieve stability and permanency. He recognizes that birth parents make adoption plans for many different reasons, all centered around wanting the very best for their child. He also hopes people better understand that adoption is a thoughtful choice and that families are formed in many different, unique, and special ways that deserve to be celebrated.

Outside of AFTH, Chris's interests are as diverse as his career. A true lover of the outdoors, he enjoys fishing, kayaking, boating, sailing, scuba diving, gardening, cooking, and cheering on the Phillies. He's also an accomplished artist whose nautical artwork is sold at outdoor festivals and local shops, as well as a professional musician and singer-songwriter who has performed at clubs, wineries, and breweries. Many of his coworkers may not realize that he's also a published writer, having contributed to numerous fishing and boating magazines, and has even completed a novel manuscript that's waiting to find its way to publication.

Chris describes his time at AFTH in three words: adaptable, collaborative, and resourceful; qualities that reflect both his leadership style and the ever-evolving world of adoption.



Those who know him would probably agree there's much more to his story. He starts his mornings with a percolated Café Bustelo Cuban espresso, feels most at home anywhere near the beach, and rarely goes anywhere without his phone so he can enjoy his favorite music. Although he jokes that his dream of becoming a professional baseball player ended with his Little League days as a light-hitting shortstop with a weak arm, his love for the game remains as strong as ever, especially when it comes to rooting for the Phillies.

Whether he's helping families find permanency, creating artwork inspired by the sea, performing music, or simply sharing a great cup of coffee, Chris brings dedication, creativity, and compassion to everything he does. We are grateful for the leadership, expertise, and heart he has shared with the AFTH community over the past 11 years and look forward to all that is still to come.

Heart to Heart Partnerships: Creating Change Together

At Adoptions From The Heart, we've always believed that our mission extends far beyond our offices. Every adoption journey is strengthened by the support of compassionate individuals, dedicated organizations, and businesses that believe in giving back. That's the inspiration behind our new **Heart to Heart Partnership Program**: an initiative created to build meaningful relationships with businesses, community organizations, and local leaders who want to make a lasting difference in the lives of children, expectant parents, birth parents, adoptive families, and adoptees.

Partnerships are about more than financial support. They're about bringing people together around a shared purpose. Whether it's sponsoring an event, hosting a fundraiser, organizing an employee giving campaign, donating products or services, or creating a unique community initiative, every partnership helps us expand our reach, strengthen our programs, and ensure that families continue to receive the education, resources, and compassionate support they need.

One partnership that perfectly reflects the spirit of the Heart to Heart Partnership Program is our relationship with [Heart & Soul'd](#).



Founded by two sisters who are both adoptive mothers through Adoptions From The Heart, Heart & Soul'd is more than a thrift shop. It's a business built on the belief that every purchase can make a difference. Their mission is to collect high-quality new and gently used items, sell them in their store, and donate proceeds to carefully selected nonprofit organizations that support foster care and adoption services throughout Delaware County and the surrounding communities.

Since becoming one of their Mission Match partners in 2024, Heart & Soul'd has become an incredible advocate for Adoptions From The Heart.

From hosting community events and fundraising initiatives to continually finding creative ways to support our work, they have shown what it truly means to invest in families. Their dedication has already made a meaningful impact, **contributing approximately \$3,000 to Adoptions From The Heart's programs in 2026 alone and counting.** Those funds directly support the education, counseling, and lifelong services that help families navigate every stage of the adoption journey.

Heart & Soul'd is a wonderful example of what's possible when businesses and nonprofits work together toward a common goal. Their generosity has not only helped raise critical funds but has also increased awareness about adoption and inspired others to become involved in our mission.

As we continue to grow our Heart to Heart Partnership Program, we're excited to build more relationships like this. We know there are businesses, organizations, and community members who are looking for meaningful ways to give back, and we'd love to work together to create partnerships that benefit both your organization and the families we serve.

If you own a business, work for a company, or are part of a community organization, we'd love to connect with you. Whether you're interested in sponsoring an event, hosting a fundraiser, organizing a workplace giving campaign, or creating a completely new partnership idea, we're eager to explore how we can make an impact together.

When communities come together with compassion and purpose, incredible things happen. Through our Heart to Heart Partnership Program, we hope to build lasting relationships that strengthen families, expand opportunities, and ensure that everyone touched by adoption has the support they deserve.

If you are interested in partnering with AFTH, you can email MayraH@afth.org to learn more about our partnership opportunities.

AFTHtv Returns This August with a Fresh New Look



For years, AFTHtv has been a place where the voices of the adoption community take center stage. Through honest conversations and personal experiences, we've shared the stories of birth parents, adoptive parents, adoptees, and adoption professionals; creating opportunities to learn, connect, and better understand the many perspectives that make up the adoption journey.

This August, we're excited to welcome Season 21 with a refreshed look and feel!

While viewers will notice updated visuals, improved production, and a more polished viewing experience, the heart of AFTHtv remains the same. Our mission has always been to amplify authentic voices and provide a platform where real people can share their stories with honesty, vulnerability, and hope. From navigating open adoption relationships to celebrating lifelong connections and discussing the complexities of adoption, these conversations continue to educate, inspire, and remind us that every adoption story is unique.

The first episode of Season 21 premieres on Tuesday, August 4, and we can't wait to share everything we've been working on. Whether you've been following AFTHtv for years or are discovering it for the first time, we invite you to subscribe to our YouTube channel so you never miss a new episode. Each story offers a chance to learn something new and to hear directly from those whose lives have been shaped by adoption.

Be sure to [subscribe](#), tune in on August 4, and join us as AFTHtv enters an exciting new chapter, bringing even more meaningful adoption stories to our community.

Some of the topics we will be sharing about this season are:

- placing a child for adoption after parenting for 6 months
- adopting a second time
- experiencing infertility
- and much more!

Do you have an adoption story you'd like to share?

We are always looking for members of the adoption community who are willing to share their experiences and perspectives. Whether you're a birth parent, adoptive parent, adoptee, or someone whose life has been touched by adoption, your voice has the power to educate, encourage, and inspire others.

To share your story or learn more about being featured on AFTHtv, please contact Kristy at kristyg@afth.org.

Learn Anytime, Anywhere: New On-Demand Webinars

NEW OnDemand Webinars



Whether you're just beginning to explore adoption or looking to deepen your understanding, our growing library of on-demand webinars offers valuable education you can access anytime, from anywhere. Designed for prospective adoptive parents, adoptive families, extended family members, and anyone interested in learning more about adoption, these webinars cover a variety of topics led by experienced adoption professionals. From preparing for the adoption journey and navigating open adoption relationships to parenting and lifelong adoption education, there's something for everyone.

Learning About Adoption-Competent Therapy

Join licensed clinical social worker and adoption competent therapist Julia Ruggerio for an in-depth look at what makes adoption-competent therapy unique. Julia explains how it differs from general or adoption-informed therapy, who can benefit from this specialized approach, and why it's essential for adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive families alike. Drawing from her own personal connection to adoption, Julia explores common challenges faced by members of the adoption constellation, the potential benefits of adoption-competent care, and how to recognize when additional support may be needed.

Adding a Sibling Via Adoption

Bringing a new child into your home, whether your current children are adopted or biological can be both exciting and sensitive. This webinar explores the do's and don'ts of adding a sibling through adoption, including how to prepare your children, support them as family dynamics shift, and recognize common reactions such as regression, parentification, or "peacemaker" behaviors. We'll also discuss differences in openness with birth families, how those relationships may evolve over time, and ways to strengthen your adoptive family system. Additional resources for families are provided.

Elevating International Adoptee Voices: An Adoptee Panel Discussion

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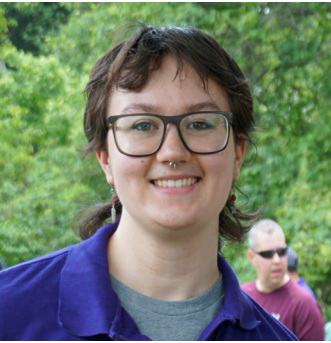


Join three international adoptees as they share their lived experiences and answer thoughtful questions from adoptive parents. In this honest conversation, panelists explore identity formation, the impact of transracial adoption, and how varying levels of openness shaped their journeys. Panelists also reflect on the unique perspective gained from working as adoption social workers and how it brought new understanding to all parts of the adoption triad. This session offers an important opportunity to listen, learn, and better understand how to keep adoption conversations open, making space for the full range of feelings adoptees may carry while growing up between two worlds.

To discover all the classes currently available please visit our [OnDemand webinar page](#).

Open Adoption in the Age of Social Media

Perspective provided by Fletcher Gamwell, an adoptee and video consultant at AFTH



As an adoptee placed through an open adoption, I have always known that I was adopted. I cannot pinpoint a moment in my life where I was told and there was a “before” and “after” of knowing, as it’s always been a part of me. However, my experience as an adoptee does have one “before” and “after”, and that’s when I

discovered the social media accounts of my birth parents

Before I found my birth mother’s Facebook and my birth father’s Instagram, there were so many things I didn’t know.

I didn’t know which birth parent I got my eye color from. I knew I had biological siblings being raised by my birth parents, but I didn’t know the texture of their hair or that they liked to go on hikes in the woods. I didn’t know that I shared a sense of humor more with my birth mother than my birth father. Before, I didn’t know what the voices of my birth mother, sister, or brother sounded like. Now, after, I know all these things and more. Knowing, while wonderful, came with a complexity that I was not prepared for.

Grief is a normal part of the adoptee experience.

I feel grateful for the windows into my birth family that social media offers, and so glad that I can see pictures and videos of my birth family members when I otherwise can’t see them. When I first found their accounts as a teenager, I did not yet understand what feelings were normal or not normal for an adoptee, and I was not equipped to navigate how pouring over social media pictures and posts would make me feel. What surfaced were all the “what ifs” I had never considered, imagining what it would have been like if I were with my birth siblings in those moments captured in the photos I found.

While I was growing up halfway across the country, my birth siblings were growing up too, and I had missed their first day of middle school. When I heard my birth mother speak in a video, I was happy to hear her voice for the first time. Then, I felt grief - because I was hearing it digitally instead of in the same room as her.

Social media is a powerful tool for adoptees and others in the adoption triad.

It can bridge connection to an adoptee’s birth family members, and create community with other adoptees in digital spaces. This requires awareness and care. Self-regulating for adult adoptees, and parental regulation from adoptive parents for their child are important. Normal curiosity can resurface grief for an adoptee. Social media makes discovery immediate, informal, and deeply personal, with no filter.

Reaching out to birth family for the first time is more accessible for an adoptee than in the past, where it would be a more formal process.

It used to be challenging for an adoptee to get an impression of the birth family without first creating a plan to meet them in person. Social media creates opportunities for small discoveries about your birth family, and allows adoptees to gain greater understanding of their birth family members. Sending a message is very easy and you can connect better with birth family members if you wish, without a mediator or social worker to facilitate the process. Connection can be initiated by an adoptee themselves, which can be a lot of responsibility and pressure.

Before adoptees begin searching on their own, it can be helpful for adoptive parents to look into and be aware of the social media presence of their child’s birth family. While it’s not realistic to expect birth family members to manage their online presence with the adoptee in mind, adoptive parents can prepare their children for what they might find. Sharing age-appropriate information about birth

Open Adoption in the Age of Social Media Continues...

family members helps adoptees feel more grounded and empowered in their curiosity. Open discussion ensures trust between adoptive parents and their children, so they feel comfortable asking questions that may feel big, intense, or hard for them to understand on their own.

Media literacy and internet safety should be part of that preparation. As adoptees become more active online, guidance around privacy and communication with birth family members becomes especially important. When children are young, conversations and interactions may need to be facilitated. As they grow, it's equally important to support their independence in navigating those relationships.

This awareness also extends beyond the adoptee.

Adoptive parents should also consider their own social media presence. Anything shared online can eventually be found by their child. Even with privacy settings, the internet is not a closed space. Posts expressing frustration or negativity about the adoption process may one day be read by the adoptee themselves, and could become part of how they understand their own story.

There is no perfect way to navigate being an adoptee in a world where access to information is instant and constant.

There isn't a single "right" way to approach it. What is important is awareness, support, and open conversation between adoptees and adoptive parents. For adoptees like me, that means giving yourself empathy to feel that grief that may resurface. For adoptive parents, that means recognizing that an adoptees' curiosity and grief are natural, and that guidance and openness builds trust.

Birth Mother's Day Gathering



This year, Birth Mother's Day was observed on Saturday, May 9, 2026, a day dedicated to recognizing and honoring the love, strength, and lifelong journey of birth mothers. While the day can be one of celebration and reflection, it can also bring a mix of emotions, including joy, grief, pride, longing, and hope. Every birth mother's experience is unique, and Birth Mother's Day serves as a reminder that each story deserves to be acknowledged with compassion and respect.

At Adoptions From The Heart, we were honored to celebrate with several of our Virginia birth mothers during a special Birth Mother's Day gathering. On Friday, May 29, the group came together for an afternoon of axe throwing, laughter, conversation, and connection. It was a wonderful opportunity to step away from everyday life, celebrate one another, and strengthen the supportive community that has grown through shared experiences.

The gathering was filled with encouragement, smiles, and meaningful moments that reminded us of the importance of creating spaces where birth mothers feel seen, heard, and supported. We are grateful to everyone who joined us and helped make the celebration so memorable. We look forward to continuing to provide opportunities for our birth parent community to connect throughout the year.



Agency News

Domestic Program Update

As we come to the close of another fiscal year, we want to express sincere gratitude to every member of our team. Following last year's restructuring, staff across every department have come together with remarkable dedication, flexibility and teamwork to ensure that our clients continue to receive the high-quality services, education, and support they deserve and made a meaningful difference in our community. Their commitment throughout this period of change has not gone unnoticed and each of their unique talents are unmatched.

We also want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to our clients. Thank you for placing your trust in AFTH and allowing us to be part of your journey. Your willingness to participate in our services, education, and support programs helps create positive outcomes for adoption. Whether you are an expectant parent exploring your options, a birth parent, or an adoptive family, your courage, openness, and engagement are the foundation of the work we do. We are honored to walk alongside you and are grateful for the confidence you place in our team.

This year has also brought several encouraging trends that reflect the impact of our collective efforts, to include:

- An increase in the selection of our longest-waiting families, single parents, and LGBTQ+ couples.
- More intake appointments with expectant parents who are exploring both pregnancy and parenting options, allowing us to provide comprehensive education and support regardless of their decision.
- 94% of our waiting families have been waiting less than two years, reflecting the effectiveness of our services and the dedication of our staff.

For families who are waiting, we wanted to share some trends as well:

- An increase in birth parents requesting names and direct contact with prospective adoptive families.
- A decrease in requests for living and medical expense assistance.

These accomplishments are a direct result of the hard work of our staff and the trust and participation of the clients we are privileged to serve. Together, we continue to strengthen families, empower informed decision-making, and advance our mission. Thank you all for making this year one of growth, resilience, and meaningful impact. We look forward to continuing this important work together in the year ahead.

Agency Waiting Statistics

Over the years, we have observed a significant reduction in the number of families experiencing extended wait times of over two years for placement. While extended waits can still pose challenges for those affected, our current wait time statistics are notably lower compared to other agencies offering domestic adoption services.

As of July 1st, 94% of our waiting families have been waiting less than 2 years, 84% of AFTH's waiting families have been waiting for 18 months or less and 76% a year or less.

Adoption News

Virginia Adoptees Can Now Access Their Original Birth Certificates

Beginning July 1, 2026, adult adoptees (18+) born in Virginia who have a Virginia amended birth certificate are now able to request a copy of their Original Birth Certificate through the Virginia Office of Vital Records. Requests can be made online (mailed delivery) or in person at the Richmond Office of Vital Records. A valid photo ID and a \$15 fee are required.

When completing the application, adoptees should use their adoptive name, list their adoptive parents, and select the "Pre-Adoptee Certificate" option on the form. Only the adopted person may request their own original birth certificate.

For the latest updates, helpful tips, and guidance throughout the process, adoptees are encouraged to follow the Virginia Adoptee Rights Alliance (VARA) on Facebook.

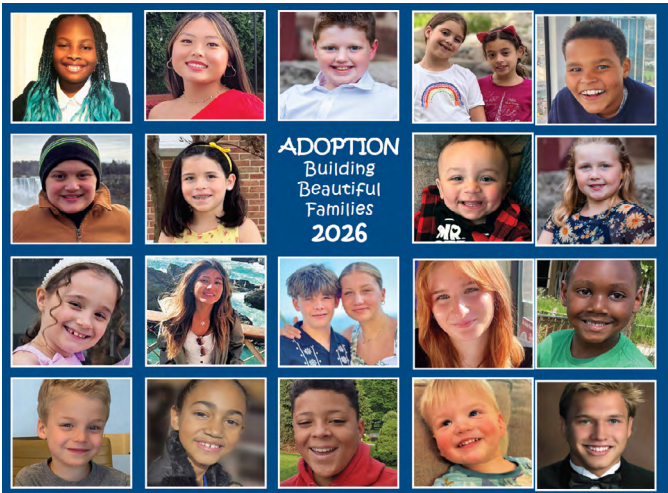
Congratulations to AFTH's Newest Families!

Wishing you all joyful days and endless happiness as you embark on this beautiful adventure together.

Forever Families Formed February through May:

- Jamie & Chantel
- Scott & Meghan
- Christoper & Kristen
- Caroline
- Timothy & Tiffany
- Phillip & Elizabeth
- Brandon & Noah
- Von & Kaitlyn
- Gretchen
- Christopher & Amir
- Katherine & Elizabeth
- Zachary & Danielle
- Amber
- James & Laura
- Andrea
- Drew & Danielle
- John Zachary & Alia
- Joshua & Jason
- Matthew & Sarah
- Jayden & Melissa
- Sean & Nicole

AFTH's Building Beautiful Families Calendar



If sending multiple emails due to the file size, number your emails so we can confirm we received them all (ex. email 1 of 4, email 2 of 4, etc.)

Information to Include in Your Email:

- Child's Name (as you want it to appear in calendar)
- Child's Age
- AFTH Program (USA, China, Vietnam, etc.)
- Parent(s) Names & Address (internal use only)

or you can MAIL your photo submissions to:

Adoptions From The Heart
Attn: AFTH Calendar Search
30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096

Deadline to Submit: August 14th.

We are now accepting photos of children who were adopted through AFTH for the 2026 calendar.

Photo Submission Tips:

- Send horizontal photos when possible those are best for the large photos)
- Send photos of ONLY the children (make them the stars, pictures with siblings are great too)
- Send multiple pictures, seasonal photos work too

How to Submit Your Photos...

Email your photo submissions to KristyG@afth.org
(you will receive confirmation of receipt)

The calendar is a fundraiser for AFTH's Expecting and Birth Parent Support Fund. The Fund helps women and men who are or who have worked with AFTH to make an adoption plan for their child who could benefit from assistance securing food, transportation, housing, etc.

[Learn more about the support fund here](#)



30-31 Hampstead Circle
Wynnewood, PA 19096

Adoption News is a publication of Adoptions From The Heart, a private, non-profit, licensed agency.

New Season Coming!



**ADOPTIONS FROM
THE HEART TV**
WITH AMANDA ALIBERTI

A new season of AFTHtv is coming out on August 4th with an new episode coming out every Tuesday morning!

AFTHtv is our video series dedicated to sharing real stories and meaningful conversations around adoption. Centering the voices of birth parents, adoptees, adoptive families, and professionals who support them. Each episode offers honesty, education, and connection across every part of the adoption journey.

You can watch the newest episodes now on [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#).

Make sure you [Subscribe](#) to not miss new episodes coming out every week!

Consider Making A Donation Today:



We believe every expectant and birth parent should have the support they need **to make informed choices**. Your donation helps provide critical resources, counseling, and financial assistance to those navigating the adoption journey.

By giving a **one time donation or becoming a Year-Round Donor (YRD)**, you ensure that expectant and birth parents have ongoing support, adoptive families receive the guidance they need, and children find safe and loving homes.

[Donate today](#) to help us
build brighter futures.