# Adoption News

*A Newsletter From:*

Adoptions From The Heart®

## Listening, Learning, and Supporting Every Adoption Story

National Adoption Month began as an effort to raise awareness about the thousands of children in foster care waiting for permanent, loving families and the need for adoptive families.

Adoption is more than a legal process. It is a lifelong experience shaped by relationships, identity, love, loss, and personal growth. For adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents, each journey is unique and deserves understanding, respect, and ongoing support.

This National Adoption Month, Adoptions From The Heart invites our community to listen to the voices of those touched by adoption, learn from their experiences, and strengthen the relationships that help individuals and families feel supported throughout their lives.

### *Why National Adoption Month Matters*




National Adoption Month highlights the importance of finding permanent, supportive families for children and teens in foster care. For older youth especially, lasting relationships can provide a sense of belonging, stability, and security as they transition into adulthood.

Every child deserves to feel safe, valued, and connected to people who will support them as they grow. These connections can extend beyond a legal relationship, offering the encouragement and emotional support young people need to build confidence and navigate the future.

National Adoption Month also provides an opportunity to increase public understanding of adoption and the experiences of everyone involved. By recognizing the perspectives of adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents, we can encourage more compassionate conversations, promote access to helpful resources, and strengthen support systems that recognize the needs of the entire adoption community.

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### *Listening to the Voices of Adoptees*

Adoptee voices are an essential part of the adoption conversation. Listening to adoptees helps us better understand the many ways adoption can shape a person's identity, relationships, and sense of belonging.

Every adoptee has a unique story. Some may feel comfortable sharing their experiences openly, while others may prefer to keep certain parts of their stories private. Creating space for adoptees to express themselves on their own terms means respecting their boundaries, listening without judgment, and allowing them to decide what they want to share and when.

Support groups and educational resources can also help adoptees explore their experiences and connect with others who understand aspects of their journeys. These opportunities can foster meaningful conversations, introduce different perspectives, and remind adoptees that they are not alone. Join us at the adoptee support group to connect with other adoptees.

Most importantly, listening means recognizing that no single story represents every adoptee. By approaching each experience with curiosity, empathy, and respect, we can create an environment where adoptees feel heard, valued, and supported.

### *Understanding the Adoption Triad*

The adoption triad traditionally refers to three groups of people connected through adoption: adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents. Each brings a distinct perspective, and each deserves recognition and support.

Adoptees may explore questions of identity, family history, and belonging. Birth parents may navigate grief, healing, ongoing relationships, and the emotions that can accompany an adoption decision. Adoptive parents may work through questions about parenting, openness, and how to support their child's understanding of their adoption story.

These experiences are not one-dimensional. Joy, love, uncertainty, grief, and personal growth can coexist, and feelings may change over time. No two people experience adoption in exactly the same way.

Recognizing the perspectives of everyone in the adoption triad encourages empathy, honest communication, and a more complete understanding of adoption. It also reminds us that support should not end when an adoption is finalized. Adoption is a lifelong journey, and access to education, resources, and supportive relationships can make a meaningful difference at every stage.



### *Ways to Support the Adoption Community*

Supporting the adoption community begins with listening, learning, and respecting each person's experience. Small, thoughtful actions can help build a more understanding and inclusive environment.

**Listen with empathy:** Give adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents the opportunity to share their experiences without assumptions or judgment. Respect their boundaries and remember that no one is obligated to share personal details about their adoption journey.

**Keep conversations open and age-appropriate.** For younger adoptees, books and educational resources can help introduce conversations about adoption in ways that are appropriate for their developmental stage. Allow these conversations to grow over time, making room for questions and emotions as children develop a deeper understanding of their stories.

**Build meaningful connections.** Supportive relationships with family, community, and cultural connections can help individuals feel a stronger sense of belonging. When appropriate, honoring an adoptee's background and cultural identity can also be an important part of supporting their well-being.

**Explore support groups and educational resources.** Connecting with others who have adoption-related experiences can provide reassurance, understanding, and opportunities to learn. Support groups and educational programs can help members of the adoption community navigate questions, strengthen communication, and better understand the emotional and practical aspects of adoption.

**Recognize that support continues over time.** Adoption experiences and needs can evolve throughout a person's life. Continuing to check in, remain open to difficult conversations, and offer support beyond placement or finalization helps build lasting, meaningful relationships.


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## 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 08002

856.665.5655

### *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**

## *At Adoptions From The Heart, Every Story Matters!*



At Adoptions From The Heart, our mission is to provide education, support, and resources to everyone touched by adoption. We are committed to creating an inclusive, supportive environment where individuals and families can explore their options, make informed decisions, and feel supported throughout their adoption journeys.

We recognize that every adoption story is different. By listening to adoptees, supporting birth parents, and educating adoptive families, we strive to foster understanding and strengthen the connections that matter throughout a lifetime.

This National Adoption Month, we invite our community to listen, learn, and connect. Take time to hear a perspective different from your own, explore an educational resource, or reach out to someone who may benefit from additional support. Together, we can help create a community where every person's experience is treated with compassion and respect.

***Every story matters. Every connection counts. And every person deserves to feel heard, valued, and supported.***

Follow along with **@adoptionsfromtheheart** on social media throughout National Adoption Month to see what AFTH has in store!

From birth parent perspectives and powerful adoptee stories to educational resources and more, we'll be sharing meaningful voices and experiences from across the adoption community. Join us as we celebrate every story, encourage understanding, and continue building connections that last a lifetime.

We hope you'll follow along, learn with us, and be part of the conversation!

# A Decade of Dedication: Celebrating Alyse's 10 Years at AFTH



For the past 10 years, Alyse has been dedicated to supporting individuals and families throughout their adoption journeys at Adoptions From The Heart (AFTH). As District Supervisor for Connecticut and Social Services Program Manager, she has grown from an Adoption Social Worker into a leadership role, expanding her impact while remaining committed to AFTH's mission of supporting every member of the adoption triad.

Alyse's passion for social services began after traveling to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, helping rebuild the community. Inspired by the experience, she pursued a career centered on helping others. After living and working in Vermont, she returned to Connecticut, where she discovered an opportunity at AFTH. The agency's mission and commitment to open adoption immediately resonated with her, making it an organization she knew she wanted to be part of.

Over the past decade, Alyse has found some of her most meaningful moments in watching relationships between birth and adoptive families grow. What may begin as a relationship filled with nervousness and uncertainty can develop into a lasting connection built on trust, communication, and mutual respect. She has had the privilege of seeing families celebrate milestones together, from attending one another's weddings to sharing visits in each other's homes.

These experiences reflect the lasting impact of open adoption and the meaningful connections that can develop over time. For Alyse, witnessing these relationships evolve as children grow has been one of the most rewarding parts of her work.

Today, Alyse's role involves much more than direct client support. Her days can include community outreach, in-home visits, teaching adoptive parent education courses, meeting expectant parents at the hospital, supporting staff, and overseeing social services programs. Although her responsibilities have expanded, her focus remains the same: understanding the unique needs of each person and ensuring everyone feels supported throughout their adoption journey.

Her decade at AFTH has also shaped her perspective, both professionally and personally. Through working with members of the adoption triad, Alyse has developed a deeper understanding of the different experiences and emotions that can accompany adoption, including the loss that individuals may experience in different ways. These experiences have reinforced the importance of approaching every person with kindness, compassion, and an open mind.

Alyse has also learned valuable lessons about resilience and the power of community. She recognizes the strength individuals and families demonstrate when navigating challenges and the difference that meaningful relationships and mutual support can make along the way.

When asked what has kept her passionate about her work for 10 years, Alyse points to the individuals and families she has had the privilege of supporting. Each story has left a lasting impression, continually reminding her why this work matters.

As she looks toward the future, Alyse is excited to continue working with clients while helping AFTH navigate the evolving adoption landscape. She looks forward to contributing to the agency's continued growth and ensuring its programs and practices adapt to meet the changing needs of the individuals and families it serves.

AFTH is grateful for Alyse's 10 years of dedication, compassion, and commitment to the adoption community. Her work is a meaningful reminder that adoption support extends beyond placement, helping foster relationships and connections that can last a lifetime.


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Every family's story is unique, and every act of generosity can help make a difference in the lives of those touched by adoption. On Friday, November 20, 2026, Adoptions From The Heart (AFTH) is participating in ExtraGive, a special opportunity for our community to come together, give back, and support the families and individuals who turn to us for guidance, compassion, and support.

We invite you to join us for ExtraGive and make a gift to help AFTH continue its mission of building families through open adoption while providing support to expectant parents, birth parents, adoptive families, and adoptees.

### *What Is ExtraGive?*

ExtraGive is a community-wide day of giving that encourages people to support the nonprofits making a difference in their communities. It brings individuals, families, and businesses together around a shared goal: creating positive change through generosity.

For Adoptions From The Heart, ExtraGive is an opportunity to raise essential funds that help us continue providing compassionate, individualized support to people navigating the adoption journey.

### *Your Gift Makes a Difference*

Since its founding in 1985, Adoptions From The Heart has been committed to helping build families through open adoption while ensuring that everyone involved in the adoption journey feels supported, respected, and heard.

Adoption is a lifelong journey, and support should extend far beyond placement. AFTH provides resources and guidance to expectant parents exploring their options, birth parents navigating life after placement, adoptive families preparing for and growing through adoption, and adoptees as they explore their own stories and connections.

Your ExtraGive donation helps support this work, including resources for expectant and birth parents who may need assistance with essentials such as food, housing, and transportation. It also helps AFTH continue offering educational opportunities, support groups, and resources that empower individuals and families throughout their adoption journeys.

Every contribution, no matter the size, helps us continue showing up for the people who need us.

### *Help Us Make This ExtraGive Count*

You don't have to make a large donation to make a meaningful impact. Whether you give $10, $25, $50, or whatever amount is right for you, your generosity helps AFTH continue providing compassionate, unbiased support to the adoption community.

You can also make a difference by sharing our fundraiser with your friends, family, and social media followers. Spreading the word helps introduce more people to AFTH's mission and encourages others to join us in supporting the families and individuals we serve.

***Mark your calendar for November 20 and join Adoptions From The Heart for ExtraGive!***

Together, we can continue building beautiful families, strengthening connections, and ensuring that no one has to navigate their adoption journey alone.

**Ready to make a difference?** Mark your calendars now to remind you to visit our ExtraGive fundraising page on November 20 to make your gift and help support AFTH's mission.

Thank you for being part of our community and for helping us make a lasting difference, one family and one story at a time.

# Finding Her Roots: Donielle's Journey Home.

*After spending her childhood outside Philadelphia with little connection to her Paraguayan heritage, Donielle spent 10 years searching for her biological family. What she discovered helped her better understand her identity, her family's history, and the circumstances surrounding her adoption.*



Donielle Carman always knew she was adopted from Paraguay. Born on June 6, 1988, she joined her Italian-American family at approximately two months old and grew up in a loving, stable home just outside Philadelphia. Yet, despite the love and support surrounding her, she often felt that something was missing.

Growing up in a predominantly white community, Donielle rarely encountered others who shared her background. She knew she was from Paraguay, but she wasn't raised speaking Spanish or learning Paraguayan traditions. As she got older, she began asking questions about where she came from and where she belonged.

Her curiosity grew during high school, when Spanish classes introduced her to more about South American cultures. Later, after becoming a mother at age 22, her desire to understand her history became even more urgent. Medical professionals often asked about her family's medical history, but she had no answers.

"I have no idea. I have no family history," she recalled.

That uncertainty helped motivate her to begin searching for her biological relatives.

### *Ten Years of Searching for Answers*

About 10 years ago, Donielle began taking DNA tests and researching her ancestry. For years, however, she found only distant relatives and few clues about where to turn next.

Eventually, she joined an online community for Paraguayan adoptees, where she connected with people navigating similar questions about their origins. Through the group, she found genealogist Alan Aponte, who specializes in Paraguayan genealogy and helping adoptees locate biological family members.

With his guidance, Donielle gathered her adoption paperwork and uploaded her DNA to additional genealogy websites. Her first meaningful connection was a distant relative named Paulina Fernandez. Donielle's birth name was Maria Fernandez, and the connection gave the genealogist a starting point to trace her family tree.

The search eventually led to members of her extended family. Donielle learned that her birth mother had passed away and that she had nine biological siblings. She was the only one of the 10 children who had been adopted.

The discovery brought excitement, grief, and relief. Although she could no longer meet her birth mother, her siblings helped her learn about the woman who had given birth to her.




According to what Donielle learned from her relatives, her birth mother struggled financially and could not raise her. But she had wanted to know what happened to Donielle and had told her older daughter to find her sister and make sure she was okay.

"I was too late to meet my mother," Donielle said, "but I found out through the siblings that she did know, she did want me, but she couldn't keep me."

Learning this gave Donielle reassurance she had long hoped for: her birth mother had wanted her, even though she had been unable to raise her.

Today, Donielle continues building relationships with her siblings and extended family, mostly through social media. Language can make communication difficult because she speaks English while many relatives speak Spanish and Guaraní. Still, she is determined to keep those connections growing.

### *Reconnecting With Her Paraguayan Heritage*

Finding her biological family has also opened a new chapter in Donielle's relationship with Paraguay. She has explored Paraguayan food and culture, including visiting a restaurant called I Love Paraguay in the Bronx, and hopes to travel to the country to meet more relatives and experience her heritage firsthand.

Her older son is excited about Paraguay, too. They have watched documentaries together, and he has developed an interest in Paraguayan culture and soccer. Sharing this part of her story with her children has helped Donielle feel closer to a culture she did not grow up knowing.

Looking back, she wishes she had experienced more of her heritage during childhood. She loves her adoptive parents and speaks positively about her upbringing, but she remembers how difficult it was to feel disconnected


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from both her birth culture and the community where she grew up.

"It was hard growing up not knowing where you belong," she said.

Her experience has shaped her advice to adoptive parents raising children from different racial or cultural backgrounds: make cultural connection an active part of family life. She encourages families to explore their child's birth culture through food, language, traditions, and opportunities to travel when possible.

For Donielle, providing a loving home and maintaining a connection to a child's heritage can both be important parts of an adoptee's experience.

### *Every Adoptee Deserves to Know Their Story*



For Donielle, searching for her biological family was about more than finding names on a family tree. It was about understanding her medical history, learning about her ancestors, and finding answers to questions she had carried into adulthood.

She believes adoptees should have access to information about their origins and the freedom to explore their biological connections if they choose. She also recognizes that every adoptee feels differently about searching. Her brother, who was also adopted from Paraguay, has chosen not to pursue his birth family, while Donielle wanted to know more.

Neither experience should be judged.

Donielle encourages adoptees considering a search to explore resources such as DNA testing, adoptee communities, and genealogists who specialize in family reunification. She also acknowledges that searching can be expensive and that finding biological relatives is not always possible.

Her own journey is still unfolding, including unanswered questions about her biological father. But finding her maternal relatives has given her a deeper understanding of her beginnings and a sense of connection she did not have before.

### *Understanding the History of International Adoption in Paraguay*

As Donielle searched for her family, she also began learning about international adoption in Paraguay during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the period surrounding her birth.

Her research introduced her to troubling accounts of adoption practices during that era, including allegations of coercion, falsified documents, and children being separated from birth families without informed consent. Donielle learned about reports of pregnant women being pressured to sign paperwork they did not understand and allegations that some babies had been taken from their families.

These accounts led her to question the circumstances of her own adoption.

"When you look through the history," she explained, "you're like, 'Oh, what if they stole me?"

Through her personal search, Donielle learned that her birth mother had struggled financially and had been unable to raise her. Her relatives also shared that her mother had wanted her family to find Donielle. These discoveries helped answer questions about her own story, but her experience cannot establish what happened in every adoption from Paraguay during that period.

The broader historical concerns highlight why transparency, accurate records, informed consent, and access to family history matter. Birth families can also face significant barriers to finding children adopted across international borders.

Donielle's relatives knew about her but had not known how to find her. It was her decision to search, along with DNA testing, genealogical expertise, and the support of an online adoptee community, that ultimately helped reunite them.

Learning about Paraguay's adoption history has not changed Donielle's love for her adoptive family or erased the positive experiences of her childhood. Instead, it has added another layer to her understanding of her life.

Today, she continues to build relationships with her biological family and hopes to visit Paraguay to experience the country firsthand. Her journey is a reminder that adoption stories do not end when a child joins a family. Questions about identity, heritage, and biological connections can continue throughout an adoptee's life. For Donielle, finding her roots has been a journey toward understanding, connection, and healing.

If you are an adoptee through AFTH and interested in sharing your story, we'd like to hear from you. Email Mayra Herrera at MayraH@afth.org.

# AFTH's Building Beautiful Families Calendar




## *All Sales Support AFTH's Expecting & Birth Parent Support Fund*

At Adoptions From The Heart (AFTH), we believe that every expecting and birth parent deserves compassion, support, and access to resources during life's most challenging moments. Through our Expecting & Birth Parent Support Fund, we provide financial assistance to individuals and families experiencing unexpected hardships, helping ease some of the immediate financial burdens they may face during pregnancy and throughout their adoption journey.

For many expecting and birth parents, circumstances beyond their control can create additional stress during an already emotional and uncertain time. An unexpected bill, difficulty making rent, a utility shutoff notice, or a lack of reliable transportation can quickly become overwhelming. The Support Fund was established to help address these urgent needs and provide assistance when it matters most.

"The holidays are incredibly difficult, both emotionally and financially, as you try to get back on your feet after pregnancy. AFTH's donations and support mean more than you can imagine. They made it possible for me to give my son a Christmas that first year and every year since."

***- Alison, AFTH Birth Mother***

### *Every Calendar Makes a Difference*

One of the ways AFTH replenishes this important fund is through the annual Building Beautiful Calendar fundraiser. Every calendar purchased directly supports the Expecting & Birth Parent Support Fund, helping ensure that resources are available for individuals and families who reach out for assistance.

Your purchase is more than a calendar for the year ahead. It is an opportunity to give someone peace of mind, help a family maintain stable housing, keep the lights and heat on, or make sure an expecting parent can get to an important appointment.

Calendar sales are an essential part of keeping this fundraiser going, and we need your support to continue making a difference. Whether you purchase one calendar, several for friends and family, or share the fundraiser with your community, every purchase helps replenish the fund and extend a helping hand to those who need it.

Purchase a Building Beautiful Calendar today and help AFTH continue providing meaningful support to expecting and birth parents facing difficult circumstances. Together, we can make a difference, one calendar at a time.

## Calendar Details

**Price:** $15 per calendar
**Shipping:** $2 per calendar

***Visit our online store to purchase your calendar.***

Thank you for supporting AFTH and helping ensure that expecting and birth parents have access to the assistance and resources they need during life's most challenging moments!



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# "I'm Going to Be Big for Her": Cienna's Adoption Story

Cienna's story didn't just end after she made the difficult decision to place her then 6-month-old daughter Autumn for adoption. Her story continues beyond placement after that decision, including maintaining an open relationship, navigating grief, and building a future for herself while continuing to love and celebrate her daughter.

### *Backstory*



Cienna was 16 when she gave birth to her daughter, Autumn and the birth father was 18. They worked together to parent Autumn for the first six months prior to considering adoption for her. While adoption is often discussed in the context of newborns, some parents consider adoption after parenting their child for months or even years. In recent years, AFTH has heard from an increasing number of parents of infants and toddlers seeking information about permanency options, including open adoption.

"You don't hear much about late placement. So, I can definitely say just the taboo effect of it does make it a little harder."

Cienna and the father's decision to place Autumn for adoption wasn't prompted by an unsafe home environment or an immediate financial crisis though money was tight. They were thinking about Autumn's future and the opportunities they wanted her to have and they recognized that they wanted more for her than they felt they could give her.

"I had just known that I wanted more than I could give her. She wasn't in an unsafe situation and we weren't going through any hard money struggles, but I didn't want to reach that for her.

### *Open Adoption*

Cienna chose to have an open adoption and she and Autumn's father selected a family that was open to four visits a year as well as photo and letter updates through an app 23 snaps which Cienna says she checks daily and even send videos with the family from Autumn's first 6 months of life. They text and video chat together as well. Cienna loves receiving updates, photos, and videos of Autumn's everyday adventures.

"It's the best thing for me. It is hard, obviously, seeing my baby so happy with other people. It is hard but it's also bittersweet. It's so amazing knowing that she is so happy…I love my pictures."

"The fact that I had built such a strong bond and love to her that I know that I could not give her the life that I had dreamed of for her and that there were other people that could while I still loved her. I mean I'm Mama Cienna. She knows. She knows as much as she can for being two and a half."

### *Building a Future for Herself*

Now, two years after placement, Cienna remembers back to the goals she shared with her social worker that she wanted to strive to reach if she chose adoption.

"I remember saying this to you and I quote it all the time. I said I'm going to be big for her! And I just finished my fourth semester at Del Tech and I have a 3.9 GPA and I'm in Phi Theta Kappa the national honor society for community colleges. And I just committed to Delaware Newark campus for next year. I'm going for secondary education. I want to teach middle school math."

Cienna credits much of her motivation to Autumn and the future she wants to build for both of them.

"I do it all for her. I have to."

Cienna is an active member of AFTH's Expecting and Birth Parent Support Group as she continues to navigate the emotions post-placement.

"I feel like I'm finally realizing that I'm allowed to say that in turn, like in return of giving her a better life, I also gave myself a better life…I thought that I was never going to be able to go to university and that I was going to be stuck in my parents' house for a long time. Just while I'm seeing her live a life I couldn't have given her, I'm also living the life that I never thought I'd have."

*Continues on next page...*

### *"i'm going to be big for her": cienna's adoption story continues...*

### *AFTH's Support Beyond Placement*



Cienna wants to make sure other mothers who might be in situations like hers where they might be considering permanency options for their children to know that it's okay to explore your options. That calling Adoptions From The Heart does not obligate you into moving forward with adoption and that there is no pressure. Exploring adoption doesn't mean that has to be their final choice.

"At six months I made the call and you guys came out and you spoke to me about all my options. There was no pressure into adoption."

Cienna's story is also a reminder that support doesn't end when an adoption is finalized. Through AFTH's expecting and birth parent support group, she has continued to find community, navigate the emotions of placement, and connect with others who may be facing similar decisions. She has even offered to serve as a mentor to other expecting and birth parents who want to hear from someone who has walked a similar path.

For Cienna, having that continued connection and support has been an important part of her journey.

"I just love you guys and think that you guys really helped me and Autumn out in ways that I don't think we would have been helped"

Her words reflect something important about the adoption journey: every story is different, and the need for support, understanding, and connection doesn't end with placement.

If you'd like to see Cienna's AFTHv interview click here.




### *Applications for the Spring 2027 Birth Parent Scholarship Fund are NOW OPEN!*

Adoptions From The Heart is accepting applications for the Spring 2027 Birth Parent Scholarship Fund! This scholarship supports ***birth parents who placed a child for adoption through AFTH*** in pursuing their educational goals.

Scholarships may be used toward undergraduate degrees, certificate and accreditation programs, or vocational and trade schools.

Eligible applicants must have been accepted into an accredited college or trade school and meet the program's additional requirements.

Learn more about eligibility and application requirements in our scholarship brochure and apply online here.

**Deadline to Apply is December 1, 2026**

If you would like to support birth parents like Cienna, make sure to make a donation to AFTH's Scholarship Fund.

Adoption is a lifelong journey, and no one should navigate it alone. AFTH's support groups provide a welcoming space for adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees to connect, share experiences, and find encouragement.

Visit www.afth.org to explore our support groups and find one that's right for you!



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# A Reminder About Sending Gifts Through AFTH

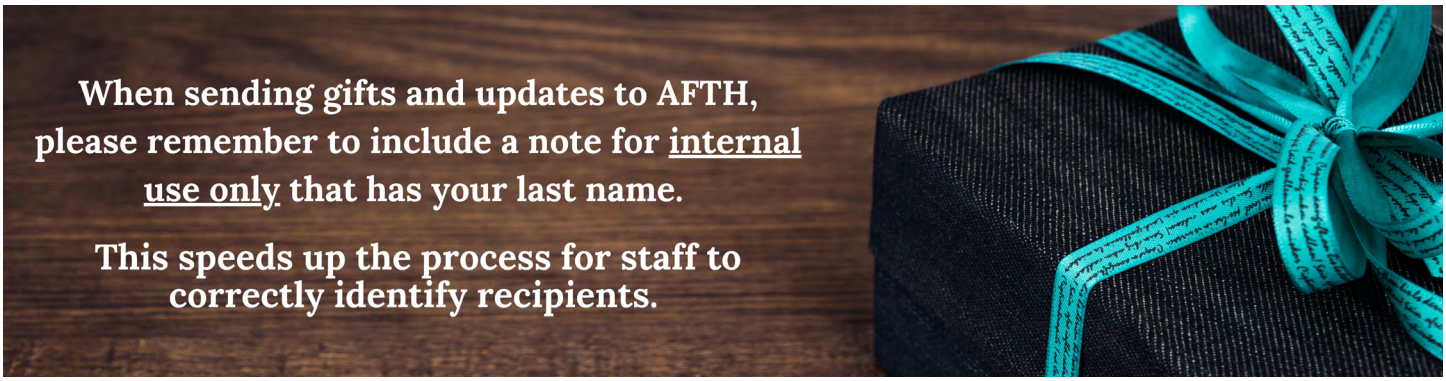



During the holiday season, AFTH receives gifts to forward along to members of the adoption triad. We ask for you to please include funds to cover the postage needed to repackage and send the gift from our office. To ensure enough time for mailing, **please have packages delivered to our offices no later than Monday, December 7th.**

**Gifts received after this date cannot be guaranteed to ship before AFTH's holiday closing.**

We ask that packages remain under 5–7 pounds and no larger than 12 inches. Packages within this size range can be easily stamped and mailed directly from our office without additional trips to the post office. Suggested gift ideas include photos, books, jewelry, artwork, or gift cards.

If your package is heavier or larger than this, please contact the local AFTH office where you plan to send it. Our offices have UPS accounts and can provide a price quote for shipping that way.




## Address Mailing Guide for Clients

Please send your gifts to the office listed below based on the birth parent's location. Be sure to include your first and last name for internal use only.

**If the birth parent's office is…**

**Virginia:** 1403 Greenbrier Parkway, Suite 560, Chesapeake, VA 23320

**New Jersey:** 523 Hollywood Ave, Suite 209, Cherry Hill, NJ 08002

**All Others:** 30-31 Hampstead Circle, Wynnewood PA 19096

## Holiday Closing Schedule

AFTH offices will be closed for the holidays starting **Tuesday, December 22nd, and will reopen Monday, January 4th at 9:00 AM.** Social workers will remain on call for emergency placements and will continue to support expectant parents who may deliver during the break.

# Coming Back to Adopt a Second Time: Jack and Paul's Story



Every adoption journey is unique, and for Paul and Jack, building their family through adoption has been a journey of love, learning, and growth. In a recent episode of AFTHtv, the couple sat down with host Amanda Aliberti to share their experience adopting their son, Oscar, and preparing to grow their family for a second time.

When exploring their adoption options, Paul and Jack considered several paths before deciding that Adoptions From The Heart was the right fit. Open adoption was especially important to them, as they wanted their child to have the opportunity to maintain a connection with their birth family. They also appreciated the guidance, education, and ongoing support that AFTH provides.

Oscar joined their family through an emergency placement when he was just two days old. Paul and Jack had the opportunity to meet his birth mother at the hospital and have continued sending her photos, letters, and videos. Although their communication has looked different than they initially expected, they remain hopeful about maintaining a relationship whenever she feels ready.

"I really want to have a relationship with her. I want Oscar to have a relationship with her," one of the fathers shared.

He also acknowledged that building an open adoption relationship sometimes requires patience and understanding, especially when birth parents need time and space to heal.

As a transracial adoptive family, Paul and Jack have also been intentional about helping Oscar develop a strong connection to his identity and culture. From seeking out diverse community spaces to advocating for greater representation in his playgroup, they recognize that supporting a child's cultural identity requires ongoing effort.

Reflecting on their experience, they emphasized the importance of remaining open to new experiences and learning along the way.

"As long as you stay open to these different experiences and different people, they will find their ways into your life," they explained.

Now, as they prepare to adopt for a second time, Paul and Jack are approaching the process with a new perspective. They are thinking more deeply about the possibility of having two children with different levels of openness and different birth family relationships, as well as how to navigate the unique needs of a growing transracial family.

Their advice to prospective adoptive parents is simple: "Expect the unexpected." They encourage families to trust the process, remain open-minded, and understand that there is always more to learn.

Paul and Jack's story is a reminder that adoption doesn't end at placement. It is an ongoing journey of building relationships, embracing differences, and growing together as a family.

Watch their full story on AFTHtv! Hear more about their adoption experience, the lessons they've learned, and their hopes for growing their family.



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## Triangle Time Winter Dates 2027




Join AFTH and adoptive parent/early childhood educator Jacquelyn for a supportive story time for adoptive families to play and engage with their children.

### What to Expect:

- Fun, adoption-centered activities with songs, stories, games, and hands-on crafts.
- Led by a facilitator experienced in adoption, social-emotional growth, and early childhood development
- Opportunities for children to meet other adoptees and build social skills like sharing and cooperation.
- A meaningful space for adoptive parents to share experiences and strengthen their support network.

### Triangle Time Sessions Winter 2027:

- January 16
- February 13
- March 13

**All sessions are from 10am - 11am.**

Deadline to register is the Wednesday before each session. If interested in joining after deadline, reach out to Sheila for availability.

### Pricing:

**One Child:** $35 for 1 session | $100 for 3 sessions
**Add siblings (12+mos):** $15 for 1 session | $40 for 3 sessions per child
**Siblings Under 12mos:** Free of charge

**Who can attend:** AFTH Families with children up to 5yrs old.

### Location:

AFTH Wynnewood Office
30-31 Hampstead Circle,
Wynnewood, PA 19096

Visit AFTH's calendar of events to register.
If you have any questions, please contact SheilaK@afth.org

# Agency News

### *Holiday Office Hours & Placement Support*

As we approach the upcoming holiday, please note that AFTH offices will be closed from December 22nd, reopening offices January 4, 2027. Although our offices will be closed, Social Workers from each office will remain on call to assist with placement needs and emergencies; we are so very grateful to have such a dedicated team each and every day.

Thank you for continuing to be part of the AFTH community. We appreciate the trust you place in us and the connections we build together throughout the adoption journey. Wishing you and your families a safe, peaceful, and joyful holiday season!

### *Reviewing Your Profile Key*

We want to take a moment to revisit the importance of your adoption profile and the commitments reflected in your profile keys and emailed situations. When profiles are presented to expectant parents, it can be one of the most meaningful, emotional, and complex parts of the adoption planning process. Expectant parents are making deeply personal decisions, and the information shared in your profile plays an important role in helping them consider which family may be the right fit for their child.

The profile keys and situations you indicate that you are open to represent more than preferences; they communicate the commitments you are willing and prepared to make throughout an adoption plan. It is important that each selection reflects what you genuinely feel comfortable with and can confidently honor. We encourage you to revisit your profile keys and carefully consider whether you remain comfortable with each item you have selected.

Our goal is to help ensure that families and expectant parents enter the adoption planning process with shared understanding, realistic expectations, and confidence in the commitments being made. If your circumstances, feelings, or level of comfort have changed, please have an honest conversation with your Social Worker. It is always better to discuss questions or concerns before a potential match than to experience hesitation later in the process. Your honesty helps us support you while also honoring the expectations and trust of the expectant parents and children at the center of every adoption plan.

### *Staying Prepared for "The Call"*

Since the beginning of January, 69% of placements have involved emergency situations. While not every placement happens unexpectedly, it is important to be prepared in the event that you receive "the call" and need to travel within 24 hours. We encourage all families to have a plan in place for children already in the home, pets, transportation, travel arrangements, and household responsibilities. Thinking through these details ahead of time can help make an unexpected opportunity a little less overwhelming. Would you like a refresher on placement preparedness? Ask your Social Worker for our preparedness flyer, which includes helpful suggestions and ideas shared by adoptive parents who have experienced this firsthand.

### *Honoring Your Child's Identity & Lifelong Connections*

We continue to see an increase in adolescent and adult adoptees reaching out with questions about their backgrounds, biological connections, and personal identities. These conversations are an important reminder that adoption is a lifelong journey, and questions about identity, history, and biological family connections may evolve as children grow.

As adoptive parents, one of the most meaningful ways to support your child is by demonstrating that their entire story matters. Honoring your child's biological family, personal history, cultural background, and identity helps create an environment of security, openness, and trust. Our hope is that your child will always feel comfortable turning to you for support, encouragement, and guidance as they explore their history and, if they choose, pursue connections with their birth family. We are working on presenting a “Parenting an Adoptee” course that will explore the lifelong complexities in adoption and parenting that evolve long after placement.

AFTH offers a variety of educational opportunities to help families navigate openness throughout every


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# 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 June through Sept:

- Erin
- Prashant & Genoveva
- Andy & Claire
- Kevin & Alexis
- Eric & Ryann
- James & Hannah
- Thomas & Cathy
- Jay & Vivek
- Steven & Jessica (siblings)
- Joseph & Joseph
- Kevin & Angela
- Ruth
- Sean & Caroline
- Abby
- Caitlin
- Jacob & Al

stage of their child's life. Whether you are preparing for conversations about adoption, navigating changing questions as your child grows, or working through challenges with openness, we are here to help. Please see the educational opportunities on our website for more information. If you are finding openness challenging or need additional guidance, we encourage you to reach out to your local office. Our Social Workers are available to help you navigate these conversations and remain intentional about honoring the commitments and connections established with your child and their birth family.

## Adoption News

***A Victory for Marriage Equality in Virginia***

Virginia voters have officially approved a constitutional amendment repealing the state's ban on same-sex marriage, marking a significant milestone for marriage equality and LGBTQ+ families. While federal protections have been in place since 2015, this vote adds another important layer of security by protecting marriage equality at the state level.

At Adoptions From The Heart, we celebrate this historic moment and remain committed to inclusion, equality, and dignity for all families. Every family deserves to feel welcomed, supported, and protected. We are proud to stand alongside our LGBTQ+ families, colleagues, and allies as we continue working toward a future where all families can thrive.

Read more about this historic vote.

## 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.

Adoptions From The Heart®

Nov
2026

*30-31 Hampstead Circle*
*Wynnewood, PA 19096*

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## Preparing for Tax Season:

***Understanding the Adoption Tax Credit and ATIN***

Tax season is right around the corner, and Adoptions From The Heart wants to help families who adopted or began the adoption process in 2026 understand the federal Adoption Tax Credit (ATC). This tax credit helps offset qualified adoption expenses and can provide valuable financial relief to eligible adoptive families.

Some families may still be waiting for their adoption to be finalized and may not have received their child's Social Security Number (SSN) in time for tax season. In these situations, families may be eligible to apply for an **Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number** (**ATIN**), a temporary nine-digit number issued by the IRS for tax purposes.

***Here's what families need to know:***

- **What is an ATIN?** An ATIN allows eligible adoptive parents to identify their child on their tax return and claim certain tax benefits, including the Adoption Tax Credit, when applicable.

- **How do you apply?** Families can obtain Form W-7A, Application for Taxpayer Identification Number for Pending U.S. Adoptions, through IRS.gov, by calling 1-800-829-3676, or by visiting an IRS Taxpayer Assistance Center.

- **What documentation is required?** Families must submit documentation verifying that their child was placed in their home for legal adoption by an authorized placement agency. AFTH may be able to provide placement documentation upon request. Please contact your local AFTH office for assistance.

- **How long does processing take?** The IRS generally takes 4–8 weeks to process a completed application, so families are encouraged to apply early.

- **How long is an ATIN valid?** An ATIN is valid for two years. If the adoption is not finalized within that period, families may request an extension. Once the adoption is finalized, parents must obtain a Social Security Number for their child.

**Don't miss out on a valuable tax benefit!** Start gathering your documentation early and consult a qualified tax professional to determine your eligibility and understand when you can claim your adoption-related expenses. If you need placement documentation, AFTH is here to help!