

REACH

Tulare County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



Fall 2008

Post-Adoption Services Program

The holidays are fast approaching and we are sure many of you find will soon find yourselves overcome with the hustle and bustle of the holiday season! Amidst all the upcoming celebrations, don't forget that November is National Adoption Awareness Month and that Saturday, November 15, is National Adoption Day. Did you know that there are well over 7,000 adoptions in California each year through public and private agencies? And the numbers continue to grow. At a local level, Tulare County will be celebrating National Adoption Awareness Day with an open house celebration. We hope to see you there! Please anticipate a flyer with more details in the mail. Also, we'd love to hear from any of you who might like to share your "Adoption Day" experience for a future newsletter article. In this issue, you'll find a wonderful adoption story of one of our Aspiranet Visalia families (on page 4). For more information about National Adoption Awareness Month, please visit www.nationaladoptionday.org or contact us.

This is the second issue of our new quarterly format. The next newsletter will be circulated in January of 2009. With the decrease in circulation from monthly to quarterly, please utilize the website in those off months for additional support and information or give us a call. We'd be happy to hear from you. Also, please email us at stripp@aspiranet.org if you are interested in receiving your newsletter via email rather than a hard copy.

Just a reminder that our satisfaction survey is available on our website. If you received services from REACH Tulare County, we would appreciate any feedback through this secure website. Feedback is one of the primary tools we will use to continue to improve upon the services we provide so please do not hesitate to offer your opinions, thoughts and suggestions via the satisfaction survey.

Thank you for allowing us to serve you and do not hesitate to come by our office or contact us to find out more information about our services.

Your REACH Tulare County Support Team

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Post-Adoption Parent Evening Retreat and Simultaneous Child Play Group

Open to all Tulare County families who have adopted or are currently in the process of adoption. Share your concerns and learn with others in a supportive environment. Meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month from 6:30 - 8 p.m. at the Visalia YMCA, located at 211 W. Tulare.

Upcoming Topics:

- **October 14:** The 7 Core Issues Of Adoption
- **October 28:** Contact With The Birth Family, Pros And Cons
- **November 11:** Open And Closed Adoptions
- **December 9:** Explaining Adoption To My Child And Others
- **September 23:** The Impact of Adoption on Life Transitions

REACH is looking at starting support groups in the Tulare and Porterville areas. However, we do not want to begin a group if there is not interest for this service. Please contact Marji at (559) 741-7358 if you would be interested in attending a Support Group/Parent Evening Retreat in either of these areas or in a different area of Tulare County.

REACH Tulare County

2436 E. Valley Oaks Dr., Visalia, CA 93292

Ph: (559) 741-7358, Fax: (559) 741-7368

www.reachtularecounty.org

SUPPORT GROUPS

POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

The **Kings County** REACH Post-Adoption Support Group meets the second Monday of the month in Hanford at Jefferson Elementary from 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. Support groups in Madera and Oakhurst are also provided on a monthly basis. Contact Kathy Steele, LCSW, at 222-4969 for more information. This fall, the Hanford group will be held on October 13, November 10 and December 8. Please RSVP.

REACTIVE ATTACHMENT DISORDER SUPPORT GROUP

Meets the fourth Tuesday of every month from 7 - 9 p.m. at Porterville Youth Services. The meetings are comprised of an educational and group interaction component, Q&A time and networking where parents/caretakers can learn and encourage each other. This educational component has a strong emphasis on parent interventions for the child with special needs. For more information, please contact Nancy Gomes at Porterville Youth Services at (559) 782-4165.

FOSTER & KINSHIP CARE EDUCATION PROGRAM

College of the Sequoias is offering several informative trainings over the next several months. Topics include the Effect of Meth on Children, Memory Books, Reactive Attachment and Talking To Teens About Love & Sex, to name a few. Please visit the COS website at www.cos.edu and type in the initials FCKE in the Search box for a full listing of current trainings available. This will direct you to the current trainings and also to the COS Lending Library. If you have further questions about the COS Education Program, please contact Linda Paredez, Director of FKCE/ILP at: (559) 737-4842.

ADOPTION RESOURCES ON THE WEB

- www.adoptiveparents.com
- www.childtrauma.org
- www.adoptionsupport.org
- www.openadoptioninsight.org
- www.adoptUSkids.org
- www.tapestrybooks.com
- www.adoptionclubhouse.org

Adoption & Foster Care LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

The Invest in KIDS Act (H.R. 5466)

"To improve outcomes for vulnerable children by investing in families, improving accountability in the child welfare system, and finding safe, stable and permanent homes for foster children." The bill was introduced in Feb. and referred to the Ways & Means Committee.

Fostering Connections to Success Act (H.R. 6307)

"To amend parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act in order to assist children in foster care in developing or maintaining connections to family, community, support, health care, and school and for other purposes." As of publication, the bill had passed in the House, was received in the Senate and has been referred to the Committee on Finance.

Improving Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act (S. 3038)

"To amend part E of title IV of the Social Security Act to extend the adoption incentives program, to authorize States to establish a relative guardianship program, to promote the adoption of children with special needs, and for other purposes." Referred to Finance Committee.

To contact your Congressional representatives visit:
House of Representatives: www.house.gov/writerep/
Senate: www.senate.gov/contacting/index.cfm

NOVEMBER 15, 2008

Celebrate the Rewards of Raising your Child...



Comforting.
Inspiring.
Caring.
Making a lifelong connection.

Raising a child brings so many rewards.

**In Honor of National Adoption Day
Come and Celebrate your Adoption with Us
at our Open House/Adoption Celebration**

Thursday, November 13th, 10 a.m. to noon
for Tulare County Fost-Adopt parents and their children
(and for families at any phase in the adoptive process).
Location: County of Tulare Adoptions Unit Office,
3500 W. Mineral King, Ste. B, Visalia, CA 93291



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Utilizing Artwork For Fun and Healing

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Artwork is a non-threatening and often fun way to get children to express their feelings, their history and their stories. If something is bothering even a small child it is often helpful to ask them to make a drawing about it. This serves many purposes:

- 1. It is often informative for the parent working with the child** – Children’s drawings may offer a detail that they have not verbalized and that you were unaware of until the child told you about the drawing. For example, one young child when asked to draw her house, drew each of the five homes she had been to prior to her adoptive placement. This provided the adoptive parent more history through the eyes of their child.
- 2. It allows the child to externalize something that they have been holding onto inside** – Nightmares and flashbacks occur in part because the child has no other release for the traumatic material that the body remembers. Every time this material is expressed in another way it is externalized further from the child and can help decrease the frequency of these symptoms.
- 3. It gives the parent a landscape upon which they can dialog with their child** – Asking your child about a picture they drew gives the parent an entry into the child’s inner world, and being inquisitively curious with your child about the picture is a good approach to use.
- 4. Creating artwork can build a child’s self esteem with praise and encouragement** – Praising your child’s artwork can boost their self-esteem, confidence and will increase the likelihood they will draw again.

A positive side effect for children who have been suffering from post traumatic symptoms (such as frequent nightmares and flashbacks of scary memories) is that doing artwork can help their troubling symptoms to decrease. In fact, artwork is often used with children in therapy by professional therapists as an effective and powerful intervention. Parents can assist children’s healing with artwork. Following are some guidelines to get started:

1. Have art work materials on hand at home. I suggest good, white drawing paper pads, crayons, washable magic markers, colored pencils, and stickers.
2. Follow your child’s lead. If they bring up something upsetting or appear to be upset without verbalizing their feelings, suggest drawing it, but do not ask them to draw something just because you know about it and find it troubling.
3. If your child says, “I can’t draw that,” ask them to draw something else first that they like, and participate with them if they have trouble drawing that (e.g. help them draw Sponge Bob, etc.).
4. If your child does not want to draw, do not pressure them to do so.
5. Once the drawing is completed ask your child about each detail of the picture from top to bottom so you know exactly what they drew. Even if part of the drawing appears insignificant to you, i.e. a messy small blob to the side that looks like a mistake, ask what it is (often these little details are most telling).
6. Praise your child for each picture that they draw.

From Long-Shot to Legacy: An Aspiranet Visalia Adoption Story

When Luis Sosa married his wife Maria, they had no idea how quickly their lives would change. Luis's three children from a prior marriage lived with their mother, and Luis and Maria found their house was just too empty. Because Luis had grown up alongside foster kids in his home, he thought it would be a great idea to foster some of his own.

In 2001, twins Lena and Samantha, age 5, arrived to be part of the Sosa household for a short time. "We knew we wanted this to be permanent as soon as we saw them, these two adorable beautiful little twins," Luis recalls.

Separated since infancy, it was the first time the twins were living under the same roof. Over the next five years, the twins' biological sisters also came to live with the Sosas. They welcomed baby sister Heaven, big sister Jennifer, and, finally, a second set of twins, Ruby and Priscilla.

Mom Maria reflects back to their earlier days with the girls. "They were really lovable kids from the very beginning, always hugging you and giving you kisses."



Gathered round... the talented Sosa family.

It wasn't always smooth sailing, however. "It was a roller-coaster ride," says Luis emphatically. When Lena and Samantha went back to live with their mother after just six months with the Sosas, Luis and Maria were heartbroken. Because the girls' biological mother was still in the picture, and because the six girls were scattered in different homes, it took several years to reunite the family.

One day several months after the twins had gone back to their biological mother, the Sosas got a phone call asking if they could take in the twins' baby sister, Heaven. They jumped at the chance. Soon after, Lena and Samantha came back to live with them again. And after that, thanks to the help of their social worker, so did their big sister Jennifer. In 2005, the Sosas adopted all four girls.

The family still wasn't complete, though. Twins Ruby and Priscilla were living elsewhere. The Sosas were determined that they shouldn't be separated from their sisters. They worked tirelessly with their Aspiranet social worker to bring them into their home.

"We wanted to keep the girls together," says Luis. "We knew it was a long shot. It took awhile to get them all. But Aspiranet was with us every step of the way. They are great!"

On June 6, 2006, the Sosas adopted Ruby and Priscilla as well. Throughout the process, Luis and Maria didn't breathe a word of the plans to the girls, because they didn't want them to be disappointed if things didn't come together.

"We were holding our breath, waiting until it was for sure," recalls Luis, "because then we could say we're a family, and nobody can come here and take you to another house."

A record producer and owner of a successful DJ company, Luis has passed on his love of music to his daughters. Under his direction the girls formed their own band, the Sosa Girls. They are making quite a name for themselves, recording a CD and playing in venues around the state.

Jennifer, now 13, plays the bass. Lena, 11, performs lead vocals while her twin Samantha provides supporting vocals and plays the keyboard. Priscilla, 8, plays the guitar, and her twin sister Ruby is on the drums. Even 6-year old Heaven (fondly referred to as "Hurricane" Heaven by her dad) performs percussion.

"You have to do stuff with your family," says Luis. "We all need a legacy to leave behind, and music is something I can leave my children."

Behavior Charting with 3- to 5-year-olds

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Most young children love stickers and routine rewards, so behavior charting is a simple and effective technique to help children behave. Parenting 3- to 5-year-old children can be trying on a good day and exhausting on a bad day. This is a very tough age group. At this stage of development children are normally beginning to assert their independence, test limits, and challenge authority. Many children recovering from child abuse respond well to structure and limits, and a simple behavior chart can be a useful tool for parents.

The following guidelines are recommended in creating a simple behavior chart for a child:

1. Identify five good behaviors with your child that you would like to have happen on a daily basis for one week. Give the child something positive to do, for example "use a quiet voice inside" instead of "do not scream."
2. If possible, have your child be involved in choosing some of the behaviors that need to be worked on. Acknowledge what they say and redirect them if it is not appropriate to the task.

3. Write the behaviors down on the chart and have a spot to check off each behavior for each day of the week.

4. At the end of each day of the week go over the chart with your child and have them put a sticker in the box for the behavior if they achieved it. It is a good idea to ask your child for their input on whether or not the behavior was met. Do not expect your child to get all of the stickers each day. For behaviors they did not accomplish, stay positive and use encouraging words such as, "okay, we need to work on this more tomorrow."

5. Use small stickers that fit in the chart boxes and are specific to what your child enjoys (e.g. princess stickers, Spiderman stickers, animal stickers, sports stickers, etc.).

6. Praise your child for accomplishing behaviors on the chart each day and put the behavior chart in a spot where your child can readily see it.

7. At the end of the week create a new chart. Revise the five behaviors to what will be worked on the following week; some may stay the same, some may be removed to make room for new good behaviors.

Book Review for Kids

Books reviewed in this section are available to check out from our REACH Lending Library. A complete list of titles can be requested from our office or accessed via our website: reachtularecounty.org. If you would like to review a book for upcoming Newsletter editions, please contact Marji Peterson at 741-7358.

I Don't Have Your Eyes

by Carrie A. Kitze
EMK Press, 2003

This book's author, Carrie A. Kitze, is an adoptive mother, writer, and speaker at adoption events and conferences. She is an advocate for families and believes that each child deserves a special place to belong. For transracial and transcultural adoptees, and for children in foster or kinship care, belonging is founded on celebrating differences and similarities. Ms. Kitze proposes one of the most significant ways for parents to strengthen family bonds is to embrace the differences that make our children unique.

One of our REACH families reviewed this book and stated, "This is a beautiful and uplifting book with a wonderful message. My daughter asked me to read this book every day and especially enjoyed the page that illustrates, 'I don't have your hands... but I have your way of gently touching

others.'" The last page of this book reads, "I don't look like you on the outside... but I look inside, and in our hearts we are the same."

Book Review for Parents

Ithaka: A Daughter's Memoir of Being Found

by Sarah Saffian

As adoptive parents, we sometimes wonder what it will be like if and when our children meet their birth parents. Birth family reunions can have positive and negative outcomes; in either case they are always challenging. This book offers some insight into the thoughts and feelings of adoptive children as they journey toward birth family reunions.

As a 23 year old woman, the author receives an unexpected telephone call from her birth mother. The call challenges Sarah's sense of family, identity, and belonging, and culminates with her adoptive father hugging his daughter and whispering, "It was very courageous, to do something that must have been so hard. I'm so proud of you, and I love you very much."

For parents and professionals alike, *Ithaka* is an inspiring book about the complexities of adoption and how they play out in families, including issues of identity and loyalty in families based on love.

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We're on the Web:
www.reachtularecounty.org



Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support Services

Resource: We provide 1) telephone support & referral to local services 2) referral to local adoption related community trainings 3) linkage to local therapists with experience working with adoptive families 4) lending library and website access 5) quarterly newsletter which includes book reviews, and relevant adoption related information.

Education: Educational support groups and meetings are held twice a month and offer a variety of topics pertinent to adoption. In addition, access to the lending library and website offer many opportunities to learn more about adoption and the impact of adoption on all members of the triad (adoptive parents, adoptees and birth family).

Advocacy: We are here to help navigate common issues facing adoptive families. We assist adoptive parents with advocating for the assistance needed in working with educational, legislative and community partners to best meet their children's needs.

Crisis Intervention/Case Management: Participants are eligible to receive short-term therapeutic services, free of charge, by master's level social workers who are trained and experienced in adoption-related issues. Families are also eligible to receive in-home case management services as needed. Spanish translation services are provided.

Hope: We utilize our agency values of Respect, Integrity, Courage & Hope (RICH) to guide our work with adoptive families. Our goal is to promote safe, healthy and stable adoptive families through access to our services.