

# REACH

## Tulare County

*Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope*

*Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support*



**Fall 2009**

## Post-Adoption Services Program

Fall is upon us! Our children are back in school, family schedules are busier, and before we know it another holiday season approaches. Longer evenings at home with our families provides time to reflect on our joys, sorrows, dreams, and accomplishments over the past year.

REACH is also reflecting on our goals and accomplishments for the 2008-2009 fiscal year. We had a successful Open House with 45 participants in July. REACH families got to know one another and share their adoption experiences. REACH added over 75 new items to our lending library and developed a new tracking system. Many of our new books are designed to support adoption conversations between parents and young children. We also have a good selection of books for teens and tweens, and many more books on adoptive parenting. All REACH families are welcome to use our library; call our office to confirm the library is open.

REACH provided services to 30 new families this past year, and the same number of families continue to utilize services on a regular basis. This summer we successfully launched a new support group for adopted teens and they have decided to continue meeting on the first and third Friday of each month, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at the REACH office. The REACH Fall Newsletter will provide updates on our support groups, National Adoption Day, and the importance of family traditions during the holidays. Additionally we are pleased to present two articles written by REACH families. Finally, we hope all REACH parents take time over the next three months to acknowledge the special skills and love they bring to parenting, which is one of the most challenging and rewarding roles life has to offer.

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## National Adoption Day

**National Adoption Day is November 21st, 2009**

The REACH Tulare County and Tulare County Adoptions celebration will be on  
Saturday, November 14th  
11:30am - 2:30pm  
Imagine-U Children's Museum  
700 East Main Street, Visalia



- Clown
- Face painting
- Bearamy from Build-A-Bear
- Family photos
- Craft project to add to the Tulare Co. Adoption Tree

### Your REACH Tulare County Support Team

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# The Peaks and Valleys of Adoption

*The author, a REACH adoptive mother, chooses to remain anonymous*

My husband and I adopted three children through Tulare County. Our first son was placed with us as an infant about 10 years ago. We soon discovered he was autistic and he started receiving services through Central Valley Regional Center. Four years later we adopted two more babies, another boy and a younger girl. Five years later our middle child started having problems at school and his teacher agreed that he had some serious issues. I called the County Adoptions Unit and they told me about a mental health provider called Synchrony of Visalia. They diagnosed my son with ADHD and he is doing better with medication.

Although our youngest child had some behavior problems at home, they never occurred outside the home environment. But by the time she was six, her anger and defiance erupted on family outings, in parking lots, and other social situations. I am talking about behaviors such as throwing things at us, kicking doors and car windows, and knocking bookcases and other furniture over. She would lose control and hit and kick me and my husband. She would even follow us when we tried to walk away from her when she was being physically aggressive. If I went into a separate room and closed the door to escape her, she would kick and pound on the door. She screamed so loud and uncontrollably it frazzled your very soul. These are just some of the behaviors we faced almost every day.

Central Valley Regional Center and Synchrony have been great sources of information and services for our autistic and ADHD children, but our youngest child did not meet their requirements to be clients. I was forced to find solutions and mental health providers on my own. This was a very challenging task, especially for stressed out parents. I started out with the phone book but all I got was answering machines. I needed to talk to live individuals to answer questions and to point me in the right direction. I got frustrated because I was limited to providers covered by my insurance, but none of them were taking new clients. I tried for a couple of years to get connected but I felt like I was in a never ending loop. There seemed to be brick walls everywhere. I felt all alone.

In the mean time I tried calming music, one on one time, physical activities, and healthy diets and supplements. I took child behavior classes and read books on spirited children, explosive children, attachment disorders, mental illness, and believe me I tried all the tips and suggestions on discipline. Nothing had an impact on our daughter at all. I could not help her control her emotions and she wasn't able to connect her behaviors with consequences. After her rages passed she felt bad and embarrassed by her actions, but she could not explain why she acted that way.

By this time I was dizzy, out of focus, and had physical signs of stress. I knew I was at the end of my emotional rope. I had been getting REACH newsletters in the mail, but I just put them aside thinking I didn't have the time to read them. One day I got a newsletter and I took the time to read it. It was like grabbing a rescue ring or

a life preserver. I called REACH and talked to Marji Peterson and that was like somebody giving me oxygen. We made an appointment and just talking to someone made a world of difference. Marji was so supportive and offered to call mental health providers for me. She found a Clinical Psychologist in Fresno who was taking new clients. He referred me to a psychiatrist in Visalia, and from there I was referred to a Clinical Psychologist in Visalia. Marji also suggested that I seek counseling for myself and I did. I only needed a few sessions to get my self confidence and strength back.

Finally, our daughter was prescribed a medication for ADHD and depression. Life is WONDERFUL compared to what it once was. No one ever considered her symptoms might be related to depression before. Now she is eight years old and much calmer. When she gets angry she doesn't erupt like a volcano, she goes to her room to regain her composure. My husband and I can leave her with trusted friends and go out on our own, our daughter can make friends, and she can handle activities outside the home. I can use logic and reasoning and she can hear me. I think before all she heard from me was "wa-wa-wa" like a cartoon character.

The REACH program is set up to help parents of adopted children who did not have the best of circumstances at birth (drug/alcohol exposure) or suffered some other abuse. As times goes by our children will face many challenges. REACH provides support in a professional manner with compassion and understanding. Thank you REACH and a great big thanks to the Tulare County Pre & Post Adoption Program.

# Holidays & The Adopted Child

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Rituals of the holiday season give families a sense of tradition and belongingness. In healthy families when young children become old enough to understand what the holidays are (from about age 3 on) they thrive on the anticipation and joys that come with the holidays. The repeated structure and familiarity of annual rituals and traditions tend to make them more memorable over time than the memory of a particular present. As children age, they continue to look forward to, participate in, and enjoy family traditions and celebrations all the way into adulthood. Unfortunately some children adopted through the child welfare system did not get to celebrate holidays in a healthy way prior to being placed with their adoptive family. This can be repaired with time as the adoptive family creates and celebrates family holiday traditions. Celebrating the holidays with family rituals and traditions is a gift to children and something that they can take with them and carry on as they form their own healthy families as adults.



For adoptive families, celebrating holidays often means blending the traditions of two cultures as adoptive parents choose to honor the heritage of their adopted child, which may be different from their own. For example, traditional Latin American holidays to celebrate include: Las Posadas, Nacimientos, and Day of the Three Kings. Additionally adoptive families often choose to celebrate the day their child came to be in their home annually; as well as, the day that their child's adoption was finalized (often referred to as their "Gotcha Day"). Incorporating these holidays gives the adoptive family more opportunities to celebrate.

Looking at the time of year that the adoptive child came into the adoptive parent's life can add special meaning to holidays and yearly traditions as well. According to one Tulare county adoptive mother, "when my daughter came to us, a couple days after she was born in November, we felt she was our Thanksgiving miracle and Christmas present all in one. This time of year is so special to us now and these holidays in particular have additional meaning for us".

Here are Some Good Tips for  
Family Rituals / Traditions

- Involve children with planning and preparing for holiday festivities
- Repeat celebrations each year
- Honor your child's heritage/culture in some way
- Celebrate your child's "Gotcha" Day
- Create yearly holiday scrapbook and/or photo album to preserve memories

# Support Group Updates

## Parent Retreats

The REACH Parent Retreat/Adoption Support Group continues to meet at the YMCA in Visalia, 6:30 to 8:00 pm. We will meet the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month in September and October, however due to the holidays we will only meet the 2nd Tuesday in November and December. All adoptive parents in Tulare County are invited, child care and training hours are provided. Go to [reachtularecounty.org](http://reachtularecounty.org) and click on Support Groups to explore topics and resources offered in past weeks.

## Fall topics are listed below:

**October 8th-** Bonding With Children Through Music

**October 22nd-** Attachment Interventions Across the Lifespan

**November 13th-** Process Painting: Creative Exploration of Adoption Issues

**December 10th-** Adoption Life Books, Poems & Quotes: Bring your favorite to share to reflect on the past year

## Adopted Teen Group

Good news! REACH is facilitating a new support group for adopted teens the 1st and the 3rd Friday in October from 5:00 to 7:30pm at the Aspiranet office. Due to the holidays we will only meet the 1st Friday in the month of November and December. Participants have agreed to take turns bringing a hearty snack to share, drinks and sweets are provided by the REACH staff.

Please contact Marji Peterson at (559)741-7358 to refer an adopted youth, ages 13 to 18, for a screening interview.

Topics are not predetermined for this group at this time.

## Meeting dates are listed below:

October 4th  
October 18th  
November 9th  
December 6th



# Bonding Through Music

## An Adoption Story

*by REACH Adoptive Parent, Rebecca Seargeant*



When we first got Lily she was four months old and had already gone through a lot. She was exposed to drugs in utero and domestic violence after she was born. She was so miserable she screamed and cried all the time. As new foster parents, my husband and I froze. We were trained to foster DEI babies, but there wasn't a manual for Lily. Just like childbirth our life changed forever and we didn't know what to do at first.

Besides holding Lily, we needed other ways to bond and create positive feelings. I spoke with a relative who was a Kindermusik teacher and she explained music is beneficial because it stimulates all parts of the brain, and music is a nurturing way for parents and children to bond. Parents learn about intentional touch which is sort of like massage and they generate feelings of closeness by cradling and playing with their babies. Most important, Kindermusik is something parents and children do together. I was curious about Kindermusik because I love music and have a background in music education.

When Lily was nine months old I decided to enroll us in Kindermusik classes. The first time we signed up for 15 weeks of 45 minute sessions. In the beginning Lily was clingy, shy and overstimulated. She wasn't comfortable with a lot of touch, loud noises, or groups of people. But we did our best to sit in the circle on the floor with other parents and children. It took a few classes for Lily to start mingling with other kids and play with them or me, but she improved every week. Pretty soon I looked forward to being with the other parents and hearing their stories. Sometimes children screamed and

cried like all kids do, but we learned to take things in stride and calm and distract our babies with musical toys, songs, and movement. Sometimes we took our children away from the group so they could calm down and continue with the class.

Before we started Kindermusik, Lily was fretful and seemed like she felt threatened all the time. Pretty soon she started to relax. She started letting the music in and gradually opened up in a way we might never have discovered without music. We took music, lessons, and games home to practice, and it didn't take long for us to learn how to make music together. I learned how to play with Lily, giving her my intentional, undivided attention, and that made her feel safe. She started being more trusting and comfortable with me and my husband, and then I noticed she was calmer in large groups, more social, and more comfortable with loud noises. Over time she was much less clingy and learned how to share with others and play on her own. All these wonderful qualities emerged through Kindermusik.

Within a short period of time I became passionate about Kindermusik and its benefits. Overall it's wonderful to be a part of something that enriches lives and supports family relationships. But most important, music was the one thing that helped Lily and me overcome her lack of trust in others, and that will continue to provide benefits her whole life. With the help of Kindermusik, Lily is a happy and settled child and the star of our family. She is curious, open to relationships, and enjoys learning new things. She has come a very long way in the first two years of her life.

If you would like to know more about Kindermusik call Rebecca Seargeant at (559)799-7711 or go to the web: [musicalchairsacademy@comcast.net](mailto:musicalchairsacademy@comcast.net)

## Community Resources

### COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS

The College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Program is offering 30 no cost workshops this fall. Many of these workshops deal specifically with fost/adopt issues such as: The Importance of Life Books, Working With Birth Parents, The Effects of Meth on Kids, and Building Moral Intelligence. Instructors, dates and times are listed on the COS website @ [www.cos.edu](http://www.cos.edu). Click on the site index and scroll down to the Foster & Kinship Care Education Program. Follow directions to register.

### KINGS COUNTY POST ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

The REACH Kings County post adoptions support group meets the second Monday of the month in Hanford at Jefferson Elementary School from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Support groups in Madera and Oakhurst are also held on a monthly basis. Contact Kathy Steele, LCSW, at (559)222-4969 for more information.

### PARENTING CLASSES

The Family Referral, Education, & Empowerment (FREE) Collaborative offers parenting classes in Spanish and English throughout Tulare County. Call Rebecca @ 559-622-1853 for times and dates.

## Book Reviews



### Book Review for Teens

#### All About Adoption – How to Deal with the Questions of Your Past

*By Anne Lanchon and illustrated by Monike Czarnecki*

All About Adoption was written for teens who have questions about school, friends, love, sex, peer pressure, and family. All families have certain ways of doing things and challenges to overcome, but there are more layers to sort through when we are adopted. Anne Lanchon wrote this book to help adopted teens figure out where to look for answers to questions about growing up adopted and questions about the past, present and future. This book is available through the REACH Lending Library.

### Book Review for Parents

#### Ambiguous Loss – Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief

*By Pauline Boss*

In this highly recommended book, Pauline Boss explores the emotions we experience when we lose someone through adoption, divorce, addiction, chronic mental illness or other circumstances. In these instances we have “frozen sadness” because we cannot really know what we lost and our emotions fluctuate dramatically between hope and hopelessness. Ambiguous Loss offers strategies to cushion our sadness, help us cope, and move on. Boss encourages families to talk together and reach a consensus about how to mourn losses and celebrate what remains. She supports open communication between adoptive parents and their children as that’s what builds strong bonds and healthy relationships. This book is available through the REACH Lending Library.

### Movie Review for Families

#### Fly Away Home (1996)

*Rating: PG (Parental Guidance Suggested)*

Fly Away Home is a classic film about a youth finding her spirit during trying times such as divorce and the loss of a parent. The main character finds her true spirit by bonding with a changed or different family. Fly Away Home, based on Bill Lishman’s autobiography, is a story of a 13-year-old girl (Anna Paquin) who goes to live with her estranged, eccentric father (Jeff Daniels) following the death of her mother. At first she’s withdrawn and reclusive, but finds renewed happiness when she adopts an orphaned flock of baby geese, and later, teaches them to migrate. Sensitively directed and stunningly photographed, the movie has flying sequences that are nothing short of astonishing, and Daniels and Paquin make a delightful father-daughter duo. This DVD can be rented or purchased on the internet for appropriately \$3 to \$9.

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We're on the Web:  
[www.reachtularecounty.org](http://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.