

REACH

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Tulare
County

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



Greetings REACH families!

Fall is approaching and with the seasonal change comes new inspirations. If you have been around the REACH office recently you know that we are experiencing changes as well. We said goodbye to Marji Peterson, who has been an integral part of REACH since its inception seven years ago. Marji's expertise, commitment, and leadership in the program will be greatly missed. We wish her all the best as she is exploring a new community and growing in her career path.

While we grow and change at the REACH program, we continue our commitment to supporting our families during the course of their adoption journey. This summer our REACH social workers had the privilege of hosting a W.I.S.E. UP! group for adopted children between the ages of nine to thirteen. The kids had the opportunity to process questions they've been asked about adoption, and develop new and empowering techniques of response. If you are interested in receiving information about this program, please call a REACH social worker at 559-741-7358.

In This Issue: Many children and families are confronted with private questions about adoption and their personal family background. Adoption questions and answers can be intrusive and uncomfortable. Our goal is to empower children with the appropriate tools for responding. As adoptive parents, we must examine our own feelings about our child's adoption and work through any personal emotions that may be painful or negative. We must also be equipped with appropriate adoption language and the tools to talk with our children, family and friends about our adoption journey. In this issue we will explore ways to empower our children when faced with adoption questions as well as share tools for parents' adoption dialogue.

A Goodbye From Marji Peterson. . .

As many of you know, my time with REACH has come to an end and I'm moving back to Southern California. That's where I grew up, so I'm looking forward to being closer to family. However, developing the REACH program and serving adoptive families has been a joy, an honor and a privilege. You have all taught me something I needed to help other families. And I'm proud to pass the REACH program to JulieAnn Jones, a vastly experienced adoption social worker. I'm proudest of the trainings now offered by REACH; Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent and Trust-Based Relational Interventions. If you don't already know about these trainings, contact JulieAnn! If you've had these trainings, share what you've learned. You have so much to offer other families!

Fall 2014

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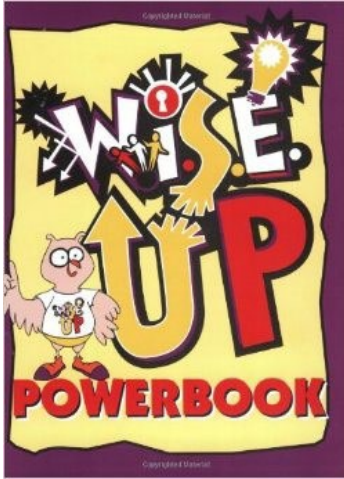
NEED HELP?

Is your adoptive child exhibiting any of the following behaviors?

- Frequent running away
- Sexualized behavior
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Aggressive/assaultive behavior
- Oppositional/defiant behavior
- Self-injurious behavior
- One or more hospitalizations in a Mental Health facility
- Substance use disorder
- Fire starter
- Minor criminal behavior
- School behavior/truancy problems
- Beyond control of parents and or primary care adults
- Mild Developmental disorder not recognized by a Regional Center

If so, we can help! The REACH program can connect adoptive families to services that can help. Some of the services available to your family include Therapeutic Behavior Services (TBS) and Tulare County Wraparound. TBS is an intensive one-to-one behavioral mental health service. The service is available to parents/caregivers of children/youth who experience serious emotional challenges. Tulare County Wraparound provides high-risk youth and their families an alternative to group home care. Wraparound is a family-centered, strength-based, needs-driven philosophy promoting the reestablishment of at-risk youth and families into community support systems.

Wise Up! PowerBook



W.I.S.E UP is a workbook for adopted children created by Marilyn Schoettle, M.A., former Director of CASE. The books' mascot is an owl who spends "a lot of time trying to W.I.S.E UP the rest of the world about adoption". In this workbook, the W.I.S.E. UP owl leads young readers through the book with questions about feelings, different ways

the topic of adoption is brought up by peers, and how to handle situations as they arise. Kids are given choices on how to respond with several different examples. The owl also introduces the topic of adoption in the media and asks kids to examine what they have seen, heard, and read and to decide what they think about the way adoption is portrayed. Is it true information or not?

Tulare REACH hosted a summer W.I.S.E. UP group for youth between the ages of nine and thirteen. The kids enjoyed the opportunity to talk about adoption questions they've faced, and were able to process how the questions make them feel. They enjoyed role playing opportunities to test new skills and considered questions they were comfortable addressing and when they wanted to "walk away" or tell someone their question was "private". Significant connections with other adopted children were made as they openly discussed what can be hard about being adopted, questions they think about in regards to their birth family, and what's special about being adopted. All of the children have asked to come together again next summer for an entire week! This was a great reminder that as parents we need open communication with our children about the adoption questions they face and to empower them with the proper tools.

W.I.S.E. UP is simple. The letters in WISE stand for the four options children have for responding to questions or comments about adoption:

- W** Walk away or ignore
- I** Say "It's private and I don't have to answer it"
- S** Share something about my adoption story
- E** Educate others about adoption in general

REACHTulare has several copies of the W.I.S.E. UP Powerbook if you are interested in sharing these ideas with your kids! The website Adoption.about.com states that we should teach our children to answer honestly and simply when they are comfortable doing so. They also offer the alternative of using humor when faced with uncomfortable questions. The website offers these guidelines for helping our children when answering adoption related questions:

- Help the children to establish boundaries. Due to past neglect and abuse, especially sexual abuse; some children feel that they are literally "everyone's property". It is important that children learn that their body and life is not available to everyone's use and/or knowledge.
- Teach the difference between privacy and secrecy. Privacy is about respecting yourself enough to set boundaries, allowing only those who need to know information into your business. Secrecy is about shame and guilt, things instilled into some children's lives due to past neglect and abuse.
- Protect the child. We as parents are to protect our children from further abuse and harassment. With too much information floating around, our foster/adoptive children could be setting themselves up for further maltreatment.
- Sometimes a good cover story may prevent some questions from even being asked.
- There is a stigma attached to being in foster care or with being adopted. We have to prepare our children so that they may deal with any situation with confidence and pride.



10 Talking Tips for Parents

Betsy Keefer Smalley, L.S.W. and Jayne Schooler have worked together to write several books and articles for adoptive families and adoption professionals. Smalley has 36 years of experience in child welfare, adoption, and training. Schooler has spent over 20 years in the field of adoption and foster care, and she and her husband were foster parents for 8 years and eventually became adoptive parents. Smalley and Schooler understand that adoptive parenting is different and sometimes complex. They recommend foster and adoptive families remember the following “10 Commandments of Talking: Observe These Rules to Foster An Open Atmosphere Within Your Family.”

1. Initiate the Conversation – “You must look for opportunities to raise the topic and ask your child for questions.” Introducing the topic of adoption to your child is not always easy but it doesn’t have to be awkward or overly stressed. A natural way to bring up the subject might be when watching a movie or television show with an adoption theme. This gives a parent the opportunity to ask their child how the film made him/her feel and if there were any similarities or differences to their own adoption story. While celebrating Mother’s Day, a parent could ask their child if they would like to make a card for their birth mother. When a child accomplishes an achievement, a parent can include the birth parents in giving praise to their child, “What a great job! Your birthparents would be as proud of you today as we are!” Parents need to show a consistent effort in giving their children permission to talk about their feelings regarding their adoption. As children get older, they often have more questions about their history and they need parents that will help guide them through this journey.

2. Use Positive Language – There is a lot of negative adoption language that is spoken without taking into account how this may affect members of an adoptive family. Remembering to use positive adoption language around your child, friends, and family can help model what is appropriate. For example, a child’s “birth parents” is a term that can be much less offensive than a child’s “real parents”.

3. Never Lie to Your Child – As parents, we want to protect our children from pain and sadness. We know that children in foster care have suffered significant abuse and neglect and they were separated from their birth parents for this very reason. However, it is important for a parent to tell the truth to their child about their adoption story and their past, no matter how difficult it may be. Every child deserves to know their own story and how they came to be a part of their forever family.

4. Allow a Child to Express Anger Without Joining In – Give your child permission to express positive and negative feelings about their birth family members and try to fight the urge to “chime” in. Remember that you “share” your child with another family (regardless of the amount of contact your child may have with their birth family).

5. After the Age of 12, Share All Information – Smalley and Schooler understand that children understand adoption differently depending on their developmental level. They recommend that parents share all of the information to a child by the age of 12 because the teen years can create a whole new set of challenges. “Children of 11 or 12 will understand and accept information that an older youth might not.”

6. Consider a Third Party – Sometimes parents need to reach out to a professional or a third party to help share difficult and/or negative information about the birth family to the child. However, Smalley and Schooler stress that this does not mean the parents are “off the hook.” Even when utilizing a third party, it is important that a parent participate in this discussion with the child and be a part of the process in order to provide emotional support, remember details that the child may have forgotten or misunderstood, and to communicate your unconditional love and acceptance to your child.

7. Don’t Try to “Fix” the Pain of Adoption – Working through feelings about adoption can involve feelings of pain or sadness. This can be difficult for a parent to watch their child experience. However, nothing you say or do can “erase” that pain or sadness. The best thing a parent can do is simply validate their child’s feelings and remain emotionally present so that healing can occur.

8. Don’t Impose Judgments – Even when the details of a child’s history are negative, it is important for a parent to communicate the simple facts and not impose judgments. If a child feels that a parent is rejecting their birth family, they may internalize this negativity and feel that the parent will reject him.

9. A Child Should Have Control of His Story – A child needs to be taught that their story belongs to them and they can choose to share it with friends and extended family members, or not. Smalley and Schooler recommend that parents role play with their children a “short, simple version” of their story and practice what it would be like to share this with others.

10. Your Child Probably Knows More Than You Think – Smalley and Schooler cannot stress enough the importance of the parents sharing as much information as they can with their child about his/her history. Sometimes parents do not share information directly with the child but to a family member and this information ends up getting back to the child. Unfortunately, the child may be hearing distorted or false information if it does not come directly from the parent. Children need direct parental support and guidance when hearing difficult information about their birth family.

Transracial Adoptions

by Marji Peterson

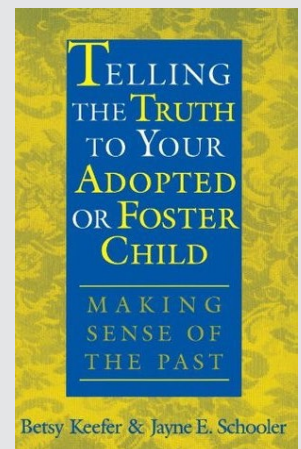
Transracial adoption occurs when a child from one race is placed with a family of another race. More than 50% of adoptions create families with more than one race or culture. This was the experience of the Moulthrop family. Jerry and Mary Moulthrop are Caucasian and have a large blended family that includes their biological children and adopted children and a variety of cultures. After their own children left home, Jerry and Mary decided to become foster parents. The Moulthrops were certified in 2007 and several months later two young African American girls were placed in their home; Olivia age six and Ko-Ko age 2. After the courts determined the girls were available for adoption, Jerry and Mary decided Olivia and Ko-Ko were meant to be Moulthrops. While not much is new for Jerry and Mary when it comes to raising children, parenting children of another race is a bit different. Initially the Moulthrops noticed people staring at their family in social situations, and asking, "Are you baby-sitting?" Or, "Are these your grandkids?" Much to their amazement, the Moulthrops realized elderly people are the most supportive of their multiracial family. Mary said, "Generally speaking, the elderly tend to bless our family and want to touch us. It's like they've lived long enough to put things aside and focus on what's important. They can see beyond skin color and recognize love, which is way more important." While the vast majority of people's reactions are positive and complimentary, Olivia has a harder time at school. Occasionally her classmates make racial remarks about her skin color. When this happens, Jerry and Mary tell Olivia that children learn from their parents, and parents who don't appreciate the beauty of skin differences aren't very smart. On one occasion Mary asked Olivia to look in the mirror to see if she saw anything ugly. When Olivia replied she did not, Mary explained, "God made you perfect Olivia, and you are beautiful just the way you are." Additionally, the Moulthrops emphasize that skin color does not indicate inner beauty because wonderful and unpleasant people come in all colors. The Moulthrops know there are interesting times ahead, however their lives are full of loving people, and the family is committed to embracing Olivia and Ko-Ko's race and culture.

Family Book Review

Telling The Truth To Your Adopted Or Foster Child: Making Sense Of The Past

By Betsy Keefer & Jayne E. Schooler

The authors are very clear: our kids come first. And if the truth makes us uncomfortable, here are the tools to help. The book begins with an exploration of the damage secrets can do to families, to relationships, to individuals - to our children. We are challenged to face our own insecurities and fears in order to tell our children the truth with age appropriate tools; to help us start and expand discussions as their ability to understand words and concepts grows. And this book covers them all - death, rape, incest, crime, drugs, mental illness, abandonment - words that hurt every parent's heart and move us to shelter and protect through silence. The lesson of this book is that shelter and protection are truly found in truth.



Upcoming Events and Training Opportunities

November is **National Adoption Awareness Month** and REACH will be partnering with Tulare County to celebrate and honor families who have recently finalized their adoption. More details regarding the specifics of this event will be included in an upcoming invitation that families will receive.

2nd Time Around Moms – Tulare REACH is starting an informal meet up group for moms who are parenting for the "2nd time around". These moms include grandmothers who are parenting their grandchildren and moms who are parenting a second generation of children. Please call the REACH office if you are interested in this support opportunity.

"Empowered To Connect" is coming to California! A two-day conference will be held in Orange County on February 13-14, 2015. This conference is designed to help adoptive and foster parents, ministry leaders and professionals to better understand how to connect with "children from hard places" in order to help them heal. The conference features Dr. Karyn Purvis, director of the Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University, and Michael and Amy Monroe. To find out more information about this conference and/or to find out when you can register for the event, visit <http://empoweredtoconnect.org/conferences/>.

SUPPORT GROUPS

UPCOMING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October

- 7** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat
6:30 - 8:30 pm
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
- 14** Kings REACH Support Group
6:00 - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church
- 17** Becoming a Trauma Competent
Healing Parent
6:00 - 9:00 pm
COS Tule 500, Visalia
- 18** Becoming a Trauma Competent
Healing Parent
9:00 am – 3:00 pm
COS Tule 500, Visalia
- 30** Talking to Kids About Adoption
6:00 – 9:00 pm
Kings County HSA Cedar Room, Hanford

November

- 4** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat
6:30 – 8:30 pm
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
- 11** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 – 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church

December

- 2** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat
6:30 – 8:30 pm
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
- 9** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 – 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church

TULARE COUNTY REACH PARENT RETREAT

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents as well as others touched by adoption. Training hours provided.
PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILD CARE.

Where: Visalia Boys and Girls Club (Directly behind the Visalia YMCA)
215 W. Tulare Ave., Visalia, CA

When: 1st Tuesday of the month, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM

- October 7th
- November 4th
- December 2nd

Contact: JulieAnn Jones at (559) 741-7358 ext. 4506 or email
jujones@aspiranet.org

KINGS COUNTY REACH ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement and parents of adopted children. Training hours and childcare provided. **PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILD CARE.**

Where: Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church
12536 Hanford Armona Road, Hanford, CA

When: 2nd Tuesday of the month from 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

- **October 14th**
- **November 11th**
- **December 9th**

Contact: Toni Brown, M.S. at (559) 741-7358 ext. 4509
Email: tbrown@aspiranet.org

COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS FOSTER & KINSHIP PROGRAM

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship Program offers training of interest to foster and adoptive parents at no charge in Visalia and Hanford. For a complete list of classes, Google the key words COS Visalia Kinship. Register for classes with Linda Paredez at (559)737-4862 or email lindap@cos.edu. Classes are available in English and in Spanish.

In October, REACH will be conducting the following trainings through the College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Program:

Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent

COS Tule 500, Visalia
October 17th from 6:00 – 9:00pm
October 18th from 9:00am - 3:00pm

Talking to Kids About Adoption

Kings County HSA Cedar Room, Hanford
October 30th from 6:00 – 9:00pm

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



ASPIRAnet
Strengthening Children, Youth, Families and Communities



REACH and Tulare County 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.