

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

Spring 2010

Greetings REACH families! Here we are, just over two years into the REACH Program and going strong. Parents are reading and enjoying our quarterly newsletter, attending parent retreats, and utilizing our case management, crisis counseling, referral, and support services. Our dynamic adopted teen support group is going strong, and we have a wonderful lending library with more than 250 adoption books and other materials for people of all ages. Finally, the REACHtularecounty.org website is improving as we go. If you have any suggestions, please let us know.

To date REACH has provided services to more than 80 families and continues to provide ongoing services to about 30 families at a time. Together REACH staff members and adoptive parents are learning more about what parents need to parent their children. We are all learning how to communicate openly and effectively about adoption, and we applaud each other's accomplishments along the way.

While family life is never dull and always challenging, it's important to joyfully celebrate family traditions and rituals on a regular basis. Predictable activities are a part of coming together as a forever family, and springtime offers many opportunities to celebrate. What are your family traditions? If nothing comes to mind, remember it's never too late to begin!

Easter – will be celebrated on April 4th this year. Historically Easter is a time of endings and beginnings. The day is filled with spiritual services, family BBQs and ham dinners. Many Americans follow traditions like coloring and hiding hard-boiled eggs and sharing baskets of candy. If you would like to know more about the history and origins of Easter, as well as suggestions for creating new Easter traditions, go to <http://www.theholidayspot.com/easter/>.

Earth Day - is observed on April 22. Earth Day was designed to promote ecology and encourage respect for life on earth, as well as highlight pollution concerns. Earth Day gives parents an opportunity to teach kids about preserving resources and how to improve the earth's condition all year long. For ideas to celebrate Earth Day with your children go to <http://www.ehow.com> and search for earth day activities.

Mother's Day - celebrates Mothers every second Sunday of May. In recent years, a day for honoring Birth Mothers was established on the Sunday preceding Mother's Day. Carnations have come to represent Mother's Day following President William McKinley's habit of wearing a white carnation, his mother's favorite flower. For child friendly Mothers Day crafts, ideas, cards and gifts go to: <http://holidays.kaboose.com/mothers-day/>.

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Memorial Day - is a federal holiday observed the last Monday of May. It originally honored people killed in the American Civil War, but has become a day to honor all Americans who died in wars. Veterans are remembered in special programs held in cemeteries, churches, and other public meeting places. Flying the American flag is widespread. Go to <http://www.apples4teacher.com/holidays/memorial-day/> to learn more about celebrating Memorial Day with children.

Father's Day - is celebrated the third Sunday of June. Father's Day began in 1909 in Spokane, Washington, when a daughter requested a special day for her father who was a Civil War veteran. He raised his children alone after his wife died. The first presidential proclamation honoring fathers was issued in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson. Adoptive fathers play a special role in adoptive families, where parenting can be a full time 24/7 job. Go to <http://www.apples4teacher.com/holidays/fathers-day/> for activities and projects.

In Honor of Birth and Adoptive Mothers

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

In 1914 the United States Congress passed a Joint Resolution establishing a national Mother's Holiday emphasizing the role of women in their families called Mother's Day. Traditionally this has been a time to honor and celebrate our own Mothers and for those of us who are Mothers to be honored and celebrated as Moms. But what if one gave birth to and then gave up their child? Seventy six years later and much well less known, in 1990, a group of Birth Mothers from Seattle created Birth Mother's Day to honor Mothers who lost children to adoption.



Birth Mothers were essentially the silent Mothers, unrecognized and often forgotten. I believe that Birth Mothers whose children were taken from them by Child Welfare Services are even more silent and forgotten because they are held responsible for abusing or neglecting the child taken from them. Yet most Birth Mother's do not forget and quite often think of the child(ren) they gave up or had taken from them for adoption for the rest of their lives.

In adopting from CWS, the majority of the time a physical connection between Adoptive and Birth parents is not possible; however, it is always possible to honor a child's Birth Mother. There are several ways to do this and it can be done quietly and privately through good thoughts, prayer, telling your child their story and speaking lovingly of the Birth parent, reading your child books about a Birth parent, etc. Some parents may chose to send a card and a picture of their child to the Birth parent on Birth Mother's Day. Still other Adoptive Mothers keep a file with copies of pictures throughout the child's life that the child can give to the Birth parent when they are an adult (if they choose to meet the Birth parent).

Mother's day falls annually on the second Sunday in June. Birthmother's day falls on the Saturday before Mother's Day. Both Birth Mother, and Adoptive Mothers are essential to the life of adopted children. Without the Birth Mother, there would be no child and no Adoptive Mother. This year in addition to your family's own Mother's Day celebration, consider honoring and celebrating your child's birthmother on May 8th, 2010 Birth Mother's Day. By repeating this annually you can establish a new family tradition that will benefit your adopted child.

Are You Interested in Adopting Again?

Looking For an Available Child?



Meet John (named changed to protect privacy), a 15 year old Caucasian young man with a pleasant personality and even temperament. He loves working with animals and computer games. Although John has some attention issues, he does well in school and loves woodshop.

John is looking for a family with specialized parenting skills and experience, a comfort level with continuing birth family contact, and parents who can advocate for adoption resources and services.

For more information about John, call Kathleen Trevino, MSW @ Tulare County Adoptions, 733-6180.

Community Resources

COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS

The College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Program offers trainings of interest to adoptive parents at no charge. Many of the 2010 spring workshops deal specifically with fost/adopt issues, including:

**Effects of Meth on Children
Learning Disabilities-IEPs
RAD
ADHD
FAS
Building Moral Intelligence
10 Days to a Less Distracted Child**

Instructors, dates and times are listed on the COS website @ www.cos.edu. Click on the site index, scroll down to the Foster and Kinship Care Education Program, and follow directions.

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.

ADOPTION TAX CREDIT INFORMATION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

Go to North American Council on Adoptable Children @ <http://www.nacac.org/postadopt/adoptiontaxcredit.pdf> or contact REACH for a copy of the article. Information is available for adoptive families who finalized between 2003 and the present date.

Support Group Updates

PARENT RETREAT SUPPORT GROUP

Join our dynamic group and share your adoption story. Enrich your parenting by learning from experts - other adoptive parents! Child care provided. Training hours available. RSVP with Marji Peterson @ 741-7358.

Visalia YMCA @ Court & Tulare Ave
2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month
6:30 to 8:00pm

April 13	Adoption Loyalty Issues
April 25	Open discussion
May 11	Letting Go of the "Ideal" Child
May 25	Open discussion
June 8	The Importance of Adoptive Fathers
June 22	Open discussion

ADOPTED TEEN SUPPORT GROUP

To join our spirited adopted teen support group please call Marji Peterson @ 741-7358 for a screening interview. Participants have agreed to take turns providing a hearty snack. Drinks and deserts are provided by REACH. There are no assigned topics for this group.

Aspiranet office @ 2436 East Valley Oaks
1st and 3rd Fridays of each month
5:00 to 7:00pm

RSVP with Marji Peterson @ 741-7358
for the following meeting dates:
April 2nd & 16th
May 7th & 21st
June 4th & 18th



Deciding to Adopt Again

by Marji Peterson, MFT Intern/Reach Social Worker

A family's decision to adopt for the second time can be momentous and complicated. After all, children are already present in the home and family life is busier and louder. While some parents don't hesitate to add more children to their family, others have questions about their ability to stretch their financial resources and physical and emotional stamina. These concerns can be amplified by adopting through foster care as many children have special needs and many parents are single or older. These circumstances can add to concerns about a parent's ability to manage the demands of a larger family.

REACH spoke to two fost/adopt mothers, Kathy Fagundes and Jenna Webb, about their decision to adopt a second time. Kathy and her husband Doug adopted their first son, an infant boy named Luke, through private adoption. In 2009 they adopted their second child through foster care, a boy named Levi. The boy's current ages are 3 and 2.

Jenna and Tom Webb have adopted four children through foster care. Two young girls, Claire and Katie, were placed late in 2008 and adopted in 2009. Luke and Jack were also placed and adopted in 2009, a very busy year for the Webbs! The children's current ages are 6, 4, 3 and 1.

Oftentimes, parents want their children to have siblings to grow up with to share memories and legacies after the parents are gone. After all, sibling relationships can last longer than any other, including parent /child and marital relationships. Also, parents who have adopted transculturally or transracially may want their child to have a sibling who shares their ethnic or cultural heritage. Some parents always planned for a big family.

Kathy Fagundes shared that she and her husband always wanted 2 to 4 children. Now that they have two toddler boys, they would like to adopt a girl. Kathy noted that her husband is happy with their family size now, but he respects Kathy as the primary caretaker, and is willing to do what she thinks is best for their family.

Jenna Webb shared that she and Tom always wanted a large family and their desire grew once the girls were in their home. Katie kept reminding her parents, "There are more babies out there, and they are crying for us." Both girls kept asking when they could get more brothers and sisters, and Katie is holding out for one more baby.

When it comes to providing a comfortable home and educational opportunities, parents tend to take their responsibilities seriously. For the most part income is a

consideration when it comes to growing a family and meeting the needs of each child.

Kathy noted that finances were part of their initial decision to adopt Levi, which is why they chose to adopt through foster care. While they didn't question their ability to raise another child, they found their AAP reimbursement to be helpful due to Levi's special needs.

Jenna shared that she and Tom talked about finances after Claire and Katie were placed with them. Ultimately they decided fancy restaurants and college savings were not as important as permanent loving homes. She said, "Children don't even need to know their parents are making most sacrifices, and Tom and I can always work more when the kids get older. Plus there are scholarships and other educational programs for adopted children." Jenna also shared her parents were older when her younger sister was born, and they took her birth in stride. She recalls her father saying, "It doesn't cost that much more to feed a baby. Things will work out as we go along."

As far as time and energy, both Kathy and Jenna are the primary caretakers of their children. Kathy is grateful she is a stay at home mom and wonders what it would be like to add an infant to her family because she has a place in her heart for a baby girl. In the end,

she knows she and Doug would make it work. Jenna shared that once they boys were placed in her home, she decided not to work during they day and that helped a lot. She also noted, "I have more energy now than ever because I've adapted to the kids schedule!"

Once a family has children, some parents wonder if they have the capacity to love other children just as well. Kathy said she thought about that before Levi was placed, but quickly realized it was not an issue. She said, "I was a teacher before a parent and I invested a lot of time in my students. For me teaching and parenting are different, but loving children is all the same, and that's never been a problem for me."

Jenna shared that the ability to love more children was something she and Tom took for granted. She shared, "We would fall in love with the kids we babysat and cry when they left because our house was too empty. We are one of those families that love everybody."

Taking time to consider your financial resources and physical and emotional stamina are important to making sound decisions about adopting for the second time. In the end, each family must decide what's best for them.

*"I was a teacher before a parent and I invested a lot of time in my students. For me teaching and parenting are different, but loving children is all the same, and that's never been a problem for me."
-Kathy Fagundes*

Adoption Credit for 2009 Tax Year

The following adoption tax credit information and forms are available through the REACH office. These materials can be emailed or picked up at the REACH office. Call Marji Peterson @ 741-7358 for more information.

To get the adoption tax "credit," families need to have paid taxes during the year and have a modified adjusted gross income under \$182,180.

Families who are eligible for the tax credit and have a special needs adoption do not need to document expenses (in California, to receive AAP, children have already been determined to be special needs).

Consult the NACAC article, "Claiming the Federal Adoption Tax Credit for Special Needs Adoption" for a clear explanation and several examples of who can claim the Adoption Tax Credit.

Utilize the IRS Adoption Tax Credit Form 8839 for the 2009 tax year.

Utilize IRS form W-7A, Application for Taxpayer Identification Number, for adopted children who have not yet received their new social security number.

Adoption Websites

CASE (Center for Adoption Support & Services)
<http://www.adoptionssupport.org/>
 CASE offers educational workshops in the form of "webinars" for parents and adoption professionals via their home or office computer. Go to the CASE website to register (usual fee \$25). CASE also offers articles, books, and other materials containing current adoption information and research.

CTA (Child Trauma Academy)
<http://www.childtrauma.org/>
 CTA offers excellent information for parents and professionals interested in learning more about childhood trauma and its influence on brain development. Click on CTA Materials for articles in Spanish and English. Books, trainings, and other materials are also available.

Book Reviews



Book Review for Children

heaven
 by Angela Johnson

"heaven" is a 1999 Coretta Scott King Award book. It is a first-person narrative centered around the notion that some truths in life may bring a sense of sorrow and loss, but they can also turn painful feelings and emotion into real joy, hope, and acceptance. When the main character Marley discovers that she's adopted, knowing what to do with that truth becomes a real issue. For 12 years Marley has lived in Heaven, OH with two doting parents, a quirky but lovable brother, and good friends and neighbors that she adores. Now it seems that her life has been a lie! Even though trust is broken in her adoptive family, their continued love and support wins her over and helps her to find the answers she needs to know about her life. "heaven" was written for middle schoolers and is available in the REACH Lending Library.

Book Review for Parents

Ambiguous Loss; Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief
 by Pauline Boss

While adoption results from loss, communicating openly about loss can be difficult for parents and children. Pauline Boss describes a particular kind of loss in situations such as adoption, divorce, and addiction. With sensitivity and lucidity, Boss explores the emotions stirred up when there is no closure or finality. Boss's approach encourages families to talk, mourn and celebrate together. Her simple stories are sensitive, insightful, practical and refreshing. "Ambiguous Loss" is available in the REACH Lending Library.

Movie Review for Families

The Blind Side
 Directed by John Lee Hancock
 rated PG-13

"The Blind Side" is a true story about a young man's journey from childhood abandonment to success as a pro-football player. Michael Oher (Quinton Aaron), a hulking but gentle African-American teen in Tennessee, gets taken in by a well-to-do white family. The mother, Leigh Anne Touhy (Academy Award winning Best Actress Sandra Bullock), motivates and mothers the boy, who eventually wins a football scholarship. The Blind Side is intelligent, genuine, funny and moving. Several REACH parents have praised this film. They especially enjoyed watching all the real-life photos of Michael, Leigh Anne, and others who are featured in the credits because they relate so well to their lives.

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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.