

# REACH

**Tulare  
County**

*Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope*

*Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support*



## REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

**Summer 2010**

Greetings REACH families! We hope you are enjoying the summer and taking time to relax with your family. The REACH Lending Library has expanded again, so if you are looking for craft ideas, books, or movies with adoption themes let us know. Don't forget to attend our summer support groups to connect with other adoptive families to share their company and support.

We have some great news about expanding the REACH Program. We are now able to provide services to families who have adopted through foster care, private agencies, and international agencies. We have already spoken with two families that adopted internationally, one from Russia and one from Ethiopia. We look forward to enriching our REACH adoption community with families that have different and interesting adoption stories. The more the merrier!!

If you know an adoptive family that did not adopt through Tulare County foster care, please share your newsletter and invite them to contact us about services. As a reminder, REACH provides a quarterly newsletter, support groups for adults and teens, crisis and support counseling, a lending library with books and other materials for kids, adolescents and adults, case management, advocacy, referrals, and adoption education and information. Typically the REACH program is utilized to help with family adjustment issues, developmental concerns, referrals to mental health services, support and education for adoption communication at home and school, and support for parents who are parenting children with special needs and teens.

A second bit of good news; REACH will begin offering adoption support groups for children in the fall. Many REACH parents have heard about the success of our teen support group and asked for similar services for younger children. Our estimated launch date is October 2010 and you will hear more before then. If you have any suggestions for our new children's support group, let us know. We value your opinions and ideas.

Finally, REACH will begin offering monthly workshops in October of 2010. We plan to invite speakers to address current adoption issues and areas of interest. Again, we welcome your suggestions.

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### Your REACH Tulare County Support Team

Shamra Tripp, Aspiranet Visalia  
REACH Program Director  
stripp@aspiranet.org

Marji Peterson, MFT Intern,  
Adoption Social Worker  
mpeterson@aspiranet.org

Toni Brown, MFT Intern,  
Adoption Social Worker  
tbrown@aspiranet.org

### REACH Tulare County

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

Ph: (559) 741-7358

Fax: (559) 741-7368

[www.reachtularecounty.org](http://www.reachtularecounty.org)

# Like The Sun Breaking Out On A Cloudy Day

## Meet Tom Lewis, New REACH Adoptive Parent



Tom and Bonnie Lewis adopted two young girls five years ago, Jenna now age 12 and Anna age nine. Recently Jenna was having problems at home and at school with her peers. She was not fitting in and trying too hard to belong with the wrong kids. Jenna's principal suggested Tom and Bonnie go back and check with the agency they adopted with for guidance.

The Lewis' soon found their way to the REACH Program. According to Tom, the day he called REACH he was, "Depressed, not knowing where to turn, not knowing what to do." Tom said he and Bonnie were at a dead end. They tried everything they knew from raising two older boys and, "We were at our wits end."

Tom remembers feeling hopeful after calling REACH because he found out he and Bonnie could, "Learn more about what was going on and what we needed to do." Tom said, "After that call I knew someone was going to stand with us until we got help."

Tom recalls meeting with REACH staff, telling his family's story, and beginning to understand no one was at fault. He and Bonnie started to understand his girls were not trying to be disobedient; they were trying to cope with what happened earlier in their lives. Just that simple understanding was, "Like the sun breaking out on a cloudy day." Tom also recalls learning about Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD), and why some young children have trouble forming relationships later in life. Tom said, "We walked away knowing there was hope and we would be able to figure this thing out."

Tom and Bonnie were referred to a local mental health practitioner who specializes in RAD. Tom recalls within a month everything came together. The Specialist was working with his family and he and Bonnie felt a lot better. Tom said he noticed a big difference in his

wife's attitude, "She was like a new person with a new outlook on life, because the burden lifted."

Recently Tom reported things at home and school are much more relaxed, and the girls are doing much better. The principal called a few weeks ago and reported Jenna was like a different child at school with new friends. Tom says there are still bumps in the road, and there always will be, but "Overall, things changed from the middle of winter to the middle of spring."

Looking back, Tom said he most appreciates learning about RAD and the Specialist's ability to recognize what the family's problems were. One of the biggest changes is how Tom and Jenna discipline the girls. Now when the girls misbehave, there is a big difference between punishment and consequences. They use a poster board that lists chores, consequences and rewards, which helps keep the family organized and on track.

Another thing Tom appreciates is learning how to react to his girls' interest in their birth mother. Tom used to explain that the girls' parents loved them, but chose drugs over parenting. He thought that was a good answer because it was true and logical. Now he realizes there are different ways to say the same thing, and tries to match what he says to the girls' level of understanding. He said, "We put a box on the fireplace for the girls to put letters into for their birth mother because we understand this is something they need to talk about."

Finally Tom reports some extended family members have started counseling and as a whole the family is recognizing and dealing with issues. He said, "That REACH phone call has had a ripple effect and touched the circle of life in my family. We all have a different outlook, and for Jenna especially, there has been a big, big difference."

# • • • Support and Resources • • •

## Community Resources

### COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS

The College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Program offers trainings of interest to foster and adoptive parents at no charge. Many 2010 summer and fall workshops deal specifically with foster/adopt issues. Contact Linda Paredez for dates, times, and locations @ (559) 737-4842 or lindap@cos.edu.

### 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 4:30-6:30pm. Support groups in Madera and Oakhurst are also held on a monthly basis. Contact Kathy Steele, LCSW, at (559)222-4969 for more information.

## Tulare REACH Support Groups

### NEW SUPPORT GROUP FOR ADOPTED CHILDREN

REACH will begin offering a 6 week support group for adopted children in the Fall of 2010. For more information call Marji Peterson @ 741-7358.

### 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

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|-----------|---|
| July 13   | New information on attachment & brain development |
| July 27   | Open Discussion                                   |
| August 10 | Permanence: What children need to heal & grow     |
| August 24 | Open Discussion                                   |
| Sept. 14  | Childhood resilience: A new look                  |
| Sept. 28  | 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:

- July 2nd & 16th
- August 6th & 20th
- September 3rd & 17th

### 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.



# Transitioning From Foster to Adoption Parenting

By Marji Peterson, MFT-Intern

Recent statistics reveal that 75% of foster parents adopt foster children. Currently the average age of children in foster care is 8. That means that most foster parents adopt “older” children that have lived in more than one home and had more than one caretaker. Consequently transitioning from foster care where change is common, to a forever adoptive home, can involved a lot of significant changes. Fortunately experienced adoptive parents and professionals can offer some valuable insights to ease this important period of time.

**Grief:** One of the most important things parents can do is give their adopted children permission to grieve their losses. Often children’s grief goes unrecognized because it’s expressed with grumpiness and irritability. Children can be uncertain about the future and lack trust because they haven’t experienced reliable relationships in the past. In the beginning, it’s helpful for parents to realize their children’s new attachments to loved ones don’t replace old ones. Most people need time to grieve before they are ready to move on and begin new relationships. By nature children want to attach to their caregivers, and just as parents can love more than one child, children can love more than one parental figure.

**Communication:** Another important aspect of adoptive parenting is open communication. The sooner developmentally appropriate adoption conversations start the better. While some parents are uncertain about where to begin talking about adoption, studies show that parents are comfortable talking to children when they have the language for it; when they have examples, stories, movies, and other resources to draw from. If you are looking for ways to begin adoption conversations with your children, consider the book, Telling the Truth to your Adopted and Foster Child, by Keefer and Schooler. Additionally, to help children express their feelings, consider the book, Double-Dip Feelings: Stories to Help Children Understand Emotions by Cain and Patterson.

*Here are some helpful insights for parenting during significant periods of family transition. They apply to new and experienced adoptive parents.*

1. Parents can recognize adoptive parenting is different than biological parenting. Adopted kids have different needs, so discipline and other parenting tasks need to accommodate these differences.
2. It helps when parents emphasize and deepen attachments throughout the day to create loving relationships with their children.
3. It helps when parents develop their own sense of entitlement toward their children and pay attention to integrating them into the family.
4. It helps when parents develop self-satisfaction without relying on children’s behavior.
5. Parents can use humor to decrease stress in most situations.
6. Parents can develop non-verbal communication skills: eye contact, smiles and hugs.
7. Parents can balance structure and boundaries with flexibility and spontaneity.
8. Parents can integrate children’s race, culture and heritage into family culture.
9. Parents can provide age appropriate and honest information about their child’s life story and honor birth parents.
10. Parents can validate their children’s feelings and create a positive atmosphere to talk about adoption.

## Adoption “Back to School” Tips

Believe it or not, in the middle of summer it can be helpful to think about the next school year. Whether your children are beginning kindergarten or elementary school, here are some helpful tips to bring adoption awareness to your child’s teacher, classroom and school.

- Write a letter to your child’s teacher explaining your family background.
- Offer to educate parents at a PTA adoption presentation.
- Offer to give a classroom presentation on adoption.
- Suggest a community project for National Adoption Day in November.
- Help teachers reconsider traditional assignments like family trees, life timelines, and star of the week. In this case, perhaps a recent photo is a better idea than a baby photo.
- Help the teacher blend adoption into the curriculum by identifying adopted heroes, inventors, leaders and teachers.
- Prepare your child for questions he/she might be asked on the playground and prepare answers for your child’s teacher for common questions like:
  - Is that your real mother?*
  - Why don’t you look like your parents?*
  - Why were you adopted?*
- Help your child’s teacher introduce racial and cultural differences and place adoption in the context of non traditional families.
- Read an adoption story to your child’s class. Many books are available through the REACH Library.
- Donate a packet of adoption materials to your school.

# Summer Fun with Your Adoptive Children

*Many adopted children do well in stable, predictable, and consistent settings. School routines can help with that, but what about long summer breaks? Developing a list of things to do can help kids and parents navigate extended periods of time at home.*

**REACH Lending Library** – feel free to check out 3 books per week for young children, adolescents and adults. Track and reward the number of books you children read.

**Get Together With Another REACH Family** – attend support groups to connect with families that share common interests and children with similar issues.

**Planned Laziness** – relax by a pool or lake, campout in the living room or backyard, eat popcorn and tell stories by candle light. Don't forget board games!

**Lessons/Sports** – swimming, soccer, and art lessons provide breaks for kids and parents. Don't forget drumming and dance. Rhythmic sounds and movements can help active kids relax and self soothe.

**Scouting** – for boys and girls combines learning and fun. There may also be day or week long camps available for older children; don't forget to ask about scholarships.

**Cultural Activities** – check the local newspaper for cultural events. Get kids excited to learn about their culture.

**Crafts** – check the internet for adoption craft ideas. Also check the REACH Library.

**Life Books** – this is a great time to focus on adoption stories and family life. Check the internet for ideas. Also the REACH Library has many examples, information, and suggestions for life books.



## Book Reviews



### Book Review for Parents

#### Siblings Without Rivalry

by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

Faber and Mazlish also wrote another popular book with REACH parents called *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*. *Siblings Without Rivalry* was published in 1988 and remains a best seller. The central message of the book is parents need to avoid comparing their children, but oftentimes that's easier said than done. Faber and Mazlish talk parents through different situations and outcomes to help teach their brawling children a new set of responses. The highly informative text has helpful summary/reminder boxes and cartoons to illustrate key points. It's a must-read for parents with children because rivalry is inevitable. The authors help parents manage the rivalry with intelligence and compassion, and offer a wealth of good advice. Two copies of this book are available through the REACH Lending Library.

### Book Review for Children

#### Little Bunnies Say Goodbye to Birth Mom

by Sherri Malloy, PhD

This lovely little book with excellent illustrations is the story of three young bunnies as they are separated from their birth mother and placed in foster care. Their foster mother teaches them how to express their feelings and seek comfort. She helps them understand their ambivalent feelings for their birth mother and teaches them to share and take turns. A wise judge helps the birth mother understand her little ones cannot keep waiting and waiting to know where they will grow up. Ultimately the birth mother takes responsibility for her own issues and gives her bunnies permission to love their new family. *Little Bunnies Say Goodbye* is an excellent resource for adoptive parents to help their children understand and express their feelings about being adopted. This book is available through the REACH Lending Library.

### Movie Review for Families

#### D.A.R.Y.L.

Directed by Simon Wincer, with Mary Beth Hurt, and Michael McKean

Daryl is a part human, part robotic child, with many special talents. He's abandoned by a scientist and left on his own until he's adopted by a foster family. Of course, the military wants him back, and an argument ensues as to whether Daryl is a lab rat or developed enough so that he is human. While there are many twists and turns, the real magic of this story is the characters. It's fast paced, charming, and has some genuine tear-jerking moments that stir the imagination. This DVD will soon be available in the REACH Lending Library. Copies can be rented or purchased from Amazon.com for less than \$10.

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151 Canal Drive  
Turlock, CA 95380

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Local Office  
2436 E. Valley Oaks Drive  
Visalia, CA 93292

Phone: (559) 741-7358  
Fax: (559) 741-7368



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.