

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

Summer 2012



Deborah Gray, MSW, MPA

A warm welcome to adoptive parents and professionals in Tulare County! Summer is here, children are spending more time at home and despite hectic schedules, we hope you and your family have many opportunities to enjoy each other's company.

The REACH staff enjoyed meeting many parents and professionals at the Deborah Gray training on June 20th. We were proud to introduce Deborah Gray, adoption therapist, national educator and author of the books *Attachment*

in *Addition: Practical Tools for Today's Parents* and *Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resiliency after Neglect and Trauma*. The training was entitled "Nurturing Today's Adoptions: Practical Approaches to Treating and Parenting Adopted Children and Teens". Ms Gray focused on how prenatal drug and alcohol exposure changes the brain. While education and training is readily available in our community for drug exposed infants, more information and education is needed for parenting and treating drug exposed children and youth. Consequently Ms. Gray focused constructing a home life, discipline strategies, case management services and therapy to bring out the best in adopted children and youth.

Originally REACH planned for 75 participants and these slots were filled three days after registration opened. Because interest was so high, another 50 slots were added. We are happy to report 125 people were in attendance. If you were not able to attend Deborah Gray's training, information will become available on our website (reachtularecounty.org) mid July. Also this topic will be explored during REACH support groups in July and more information will be provided in our next REACH newsletter.

In This Issue: The end of the school year is a busy time for adoptive parents to advocate and make decisions about the next step in their child's education. This newsletter will focus on learning needs for adopted children and obtaining services in a school setting. We've included information about resources and individual education plans as well as articles by an adoptive parent, a high school teacher and a professional education advocate. Additionally, we've included recommendations for books and web sites on this topic. Please call the REACH office or attend a support group if you have questions or concerns about your child's educational needs.

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PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SCHOOL: One Adoptive Family's Journey

by Alison Acton, LMFT

When my adopted son was ready for kindergarten I agonized over what school would be the best option for him. He was smart and rambunctious, active as they come, and loved life. Also he was born a drug exposed infant. My husband and I were worried that a traditional kindergarten would be too crowded and we needed a longer kindergarten day due to our work schedules. I stood in line, bright and early on Visalia Unified School District's kindergarten registration day, which is an initiation rite for parents of school age children. We chose to register for morning kindergarten as a back-up option, and planned to send our son to a private school for kindergarten. We were quite happy with the results; there were 14 children in his class, his teacher was nurturing, and the kindergarten day was from morning until mid-afternoon. While in kindergarten our son met his best friend (a friendship that continues to this day) and he enjoyed school. He did have problems with self control and many times had his apple moved to red (on the behavioral chart at school) but the teacher was good natured and worked well with him.

We chose to keep our son at the same school for first grade since we had such a positive experience in kindergarten. However we were disappointed with first grade. The class size almost doubled, the teacher was a strict behaviorist without any nurturing, and as we came to find out, she felt challenged and offended by our son. Despite this our son continued to love school and was devastated when the school closed at the end of his first grade year. Going into second grade we chose a larger private school with an excellent reputation. We began the year with high hopes and our son was excited. By then he had been diagnosed with ADHD and was on medication to help manage his symptoms. Unfortunately, the school was unable to meet his needs. For example, we asked his teacher or someone else to walk him to the office after lunch to ensure he took his medication, and the teacher said, "No, I have 24 other students." Yet she was the first to complain when his focus deteriorated in the afternoon. Despite a hefty tuition, we were also dismayed to learn there was very little staff manning the playground at recess. When children's behaviors got out of hand other children were called on to tattle on their fellow students. This intervention never worked for our son. Also our son's teacher was often absent, had poor follow through with daily feedback and would complain to the principal about our child exhausting her. The principal in turn began calling us frequently. When our son was attacked on

the school bus by an older child, he was not protected and the staff and principal did nothing about it. The final straw came when our son said a bad word on the playground and he was punished by not being allowed to go to a class skating party the next day, even though my husband offered to attend and supervise our son directly. This was a blow that just crushed our son's spirit. When this happened we chose to pull our son out of that school and enrolled him in a public school. On the first day we informed his new teacher and the principal that we thought he might need a 504 plan to accommodate his special needs. They were wonderful and said – whatever he needs, let's see how he does first. Our son's teacher was a skilled, experienced and loving woman who welcomed him into the classroom and made him feel wanted and accepted. Our son began to flourish at school again. For the first time I felt that we, the parents, were not being blamed and the school staff would do whatever was necessary to help him succeed. Gone were the every other day calls from the principal, gone were the horrible emails from his previous teacher, gone was our son feeling bad about school, feeling that he would not be protected, and feeling like he was being targeted. Now our son looks forward to school much as he did when he was in kindergarten.

Additionally our son was grappling with the issue of being adopted and he was nervous about presenting a timeline of his life in class. He chose to share his adoption story, despite his concerns, and his teacher responded with such a special regard that he felt wonderful. His teacher shared that one of her best friends was adopted and that is a very special thing. Our son's classmates responded with genuine interest and curiosity. Some of his classmates even told him they wished they were adopted.

In conclusion our family learned a valuable lesson regarding our son's education. Due to his needs, public school is a much better choice for him. From our perspective, public school teachers have more training and experience to deal with children who have special needs, as well as a school nurse and staff members who are able to work with a child's disability rather than label it as a character flaw. We now look forward to our son's continued education journey in the public school system. At the same time we realize that public school is not the path for everyone and that private school has other advantages that might be a good choice for some children and families.



Special Education Services - *An Overview* by Marji Peterson, MFT Intern

Many adopted children have learning challenges such as developmental delays or attention disorders. While special education services are available, the process of obtaining and implementing services can be confusing and overwhelming for parents. This article is a brief overview of special education services available to children with learning challenges and disabilities. For more information see the book reviews and web sites provided in this newsletter and discuss your concerns with your child's teacher. If you continue to have questions you might contact the special education department at your county's Office of Education.

If parents are concerned about their child's learning delays or other challenges in the classroom, the first step is to become familiar with special education services and how the process works. It takes time to learn how to advocate for a child's needs and navigate the education system.

If parents or teachers notice a child is struggling in school, they can meet to discuss concerns and decide how to proceed. Often a team meeting is called and attended by parents and educators. The purpose

is to develop a plan to address the child's needs.

When it's determined a student needs special instruction in reading, math or another subject due to falling behind grade level, he or she may work with a resource teacher. Usually a resource teacher provides instruction on a one on one basis or in a small group for a portion of the school day. The resource teacher designs specific interventions and instructions to maximize the child's learning potential. Classroom and resource teachers, parents and other professionals work as a team to address learning delays while the student continues the bulk of their education in a regular classroom setting.

If parents or a professional determines a student's educational needs are still not being met, parents can ask for a special education evaluation. It's a good idea to make the request in writing because a time line is set once a request is received. The evaluation includes specific tests and observations, interviews and report card reviews. Parents, professionals and others with a vested interest in the child's education meet to determine if the child is eligible for special education

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Insights From A Professional Special Education Advocate

by Norma Erwin

Norma Erwin is a professional Special Education Advocate in Tulare County. We asked Norma a few questions about her background and the highs and lows of her job. We also asked about adoptive parent's questions and concerns. For parents of children attending Kings County Schools, please contact Susan Brewer @ 559-589-7076.

Although I have a BA from Concordia University, the most important part of my education came from my daughter Elaine. Elaine was born with developmental delays. She had a high APGAR score at birth and looked normal during infancy. However, eight months later we were told she would have limitations, but there wasn't a specific diagnosis. Years later I can say my husband and I are well acquainted with the cycle of grief and loss and other emotions that occur on the long, long road to accepting different dreams for a child with disabilities. Together we faced many challenges at school, at home and within the community as we learned how to best meet her unique needs. Elaine graduated from the Tulare County Office of Education Maple Learning Complex fourteen years ago with two other students. Her family and grandparents were just as proud of her as any other high school grad in our family. For me, it was the culmination of many hours in the classroom exchanging ideas and learning from all her teachers through the years. It prepared me for the next stage of her development; her transition into the big world. I credit Elaine and all her teachers for preparing me for the position I hold today as a parent liaison.

As far as the highs and lows of my job, the highs are definitely when a student receives the services he or she needs. Thankfully I have many of those stories. My main focus is to assist parents with the same hurdles I once jumped. These include understanding the IDEA laws (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) that govern special education, how the Individual Education Plan process works and how a parent can effectively participate in the process.

Adoptive families experience many of the same concerns for their children as other families. Typically, parents are the first to notice developmental delays, challenging behaviors or homework difficulties. They may consult with family and friends and their child's teacher. These are usually stressful conversations. However, my observation has been that adoptive families experience a heightened level of stress.

In some cases, adoptive parents have unknown variables such as a lack of prenatal history, or they are unsure of what to expect from their child, or when and how to talk to kids about adoption. It's clear a lot of reassurance and support is needed to help adoptive families with special needs children.

My advice to adoptive parents, who may find their child struggling in school, is not to panic. Secondly, in this age of information, it's certainly appropriate to conduct your own research via the internet, especially if the child's doctor has given you a diagnosis. However, I would advise that parents consult with their child's teacher to learn what may be happening at school. It's beneficial to identify concerns and goals for your child and communicate them to the teacher. Finally, schools have a vested interest in your child's success. Often times, I find that schools have already targeted interventions and informal supports aimed at specific academic or behavioral needs. Parents are often surprised to see this.

If you find that your child does not appear to be making progress in school, make an appointment to meet with his or her teacher or ask for a school team meeting. There will be a review of academic or behavioral data to see how your child's progress is shaping up. If your child continues to fall behind, ask for a formal assessment. Special education interventions or specific behavior shaping strategies may be needed. In any case, positive communication is critical to any successful partnership.

For more parent tips regarding the special education process in Tulare County call Norma Erwin at 730-2910 ext 5125. To identify a child who is not receiving services contact the Child Find program at 559-730-2910 ext 5120. Parents can find more information at their web site: <http://www.tcoe.org/Special/ChildFind.shtm>



Working With Adopted Children at School

by Jesus Renteria

Jesus Renteria is a high school teacher in Hanford California. We asked him about his experience working with foster/adopt students in his classroom.

I have been teaching for six years, five of those years with the Hanford Joint Union High School District. My career has allowed me to meet students with diverse backgrounds and experiences. I've met students who come from single parent homes, homes with biracial couples, same sex couples, foster and adoptive parents and more. Counselors and students identify themselves to be from different backgrounds when they need extra attention from teachers. I'm usually told if a student is in foster care or adopted, but there are times when students and parents choose to keep this information private. Therefore I may have had more foster and adopted students in my career that I'm aware of.

I want to focus my attention on two particular students. The first student was a female junior in high school, and the second student was a female freshman in high school. Both students were Caucasian, but the first student was adopted and the second student was in a group home. I had good communication with both students even though the girls had different personalities and ambitions.

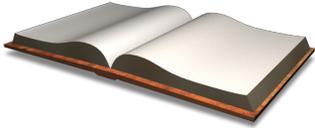
As a teacher I did not have to accommodate the first student in her English class. For the most part she behaved like the rest of the students. She was actually a little more advanced than most of her peers. She mentioned wanting to go to college and needed some guidance when it came to her

feelings about her personal life. She was open about being adopted and said she had good communication with her parents.

The second student lived in a group home and she was more demanding of me as a teacher. She required a lot of side talks because of her behavior and the way she interacted with other students. She was disruptive at times, but I built a strong relationship with her so she respected me and adhered to my demands in the classroom. Although she displayed a tough demeanor and mentioned how she got in fights in her group home, she was a sweet person at times. She said she was in foster care since she was 4 years old, and that had obviously taken a toll on her trust in people, teachers and education in general. She was only with me for one semester, but it was a learning experience nonetheless.

I feel that students who are in foster care or adopted may need extra attention depending on their personalities and ambitions and goals. Some of these teens like to be treated like other students, while some cannot function like other students because their home life affects them. The best advice I have for parents, care givers, teachers, and counselors is to keep communication open. As long as the teacher gets support from the teen's caretakers when they need it, things can run smoothly in the classroom. I feel blessed to work with these students and look forward to working with more foster and adopted students in the future.

Book Reviews



Summer Readings for Adults: Adoption and the Schools Edited by Lansing Wood and Nancy Ng

Adoption and the Schools was created by two adoptive mothers who wanted classrooms to acknowledge adoption in ways that support children. This book is a great resource for parents and teachers of kids aged preschool through high school. The authors claim, "This not an answer book but a guide to help parents explore the impact of adoption on education and the educational process, by educating educators about adoption." There are many expressive poems and delightful drawings used throughout the book which were constructed by adopted youth. This book is available through Amazon.com and the REACH lending library.

From Emotions to Advocacy: The Special Education Survival Guide by Peter W. D. Wright and Pamela Darr Wright

From Emotions to Advocacy: the Special Education Survival Guide is an excellent resource for parents of children with special needs. This book will help teach parents how to play, prepare and organize in order to get quality special education services. This book is and an easy to read strategy guide which includes: worksheets; forms; sample letters; guidance on writing IEP goals and objectives; negotiation strategies for special education services; etc. This book is available through Amazon.com.

No Biking in the House without a Helmet by Melissa Fay Greene

No Biking in the House without a Helmet is a funny yet serious book celebrating parenthood; and children from birth and through of loss and bereavement. Its both hilarious and enlightening. This book demonstrates a joyous portrayal of the unique situations and experiences an adoptive family in the twenty first-century might endure. This book is available through Amazon.com.

Summer Readings for Children:

Red in the Flower Bed by Andrea Nepa

Red in the Flower Bed is a children's book illustrating the journey of adoption through the imagery of a poppy flower who is welcomed into a garden family. It is a story of "seeds" being planted in the right place – exactly where they belong. This is a simple yet meaningful book capturing the essence of adoption and family. This book is available through Amazon.com.

Summer Readings for Youth: Jessica Lost

by Bunny Crumpacker and Jil Picariello

Jessica Lost is a story about a reunification after 40 years of separation between a mother and her child. This is a powerful story of love, loss, and reunion. The intertwined tales between the mother and child offer different viewpoints on the multiple meanings of motherhood.

Resource Websites:

Special Education Law & the IEP

<http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/special-education-law-29626.html>

Understanding Special Education – A Guide for Parents

<http://www.understandingspecialeducation.com/index.html>

Children With Special Needs

<http://specialchildren.about.com/od/specialeducation/a/iepfqa.htm>

<http://specialchildren.about.com/b/2007/01/31/your-iep-questions-answered.htm>

ADD/ADHD Information Library - 504 Plan vs. IEP

<http://newideas.net/504-iep-adhd>



Summer Movies

August Rush (PG)
Martian Child (PG)
Despicable Me (PG)
Matilda (PG)
Problem Child (PG)
Big Daddy (PG-13)
Bella (PG-13)
Juno (PG-13)
White Oleander (PG-13)
December Boys (PG-13)
The Kids Are All Right (R)
My Own Private Idaho (R)
Live and Become (UR)
The American Girl Samantha movie (PG)

Don't Forget the Regal Cinema's will be offering a 9 week Summer Movie Express Program where selected G or PG rated movies will be shown on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings at 10:00 am, for only \$1. Visit <http://www.regmovies.com/summermovieexpress/default.aspx> to find the participating theater closest to you and for a complete schedule of movies.

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.

Support and Resources

Kings and Tulare REACH Support Groups

KINGS COUNTY ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

2nd Tuesday of each month

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents.

July 10th, August 14th, September 11th
5:30 to 7:00 PM

Kings County Support Groups are held at
Hanford Family Connections
315 Lacey Blvd. Hanford, CA 93230
(Between McDonalds & Burger King)
Child care and training hours provided
Contact: Vanessa Gutierrez @ (559)741-7358 or
vgutierrez@aspiranet.org

COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS

The College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Program offers trainings of interest to foster and adoptive parents at no charge in Visalia and Hanford. Classes are presented in English and Spanish. Register with Linda Paredes at (559)737-4842 or lindap@cos.edu. A schedule of classes in July, August/September can be found at: <http://www.cos.edu/Academics/ConsumerFamilyStudies/FosterCare/Pages/default.aspx>

TULARE COUNTY REACH SUPPORT GROUPS

Now Offered Every 1st & 3rd Tuesday

WAITING/IN THE MAKING FAMILIES MIXER

1st Tuesday of each month

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement, and parents with children recently placed in their homes. Topics relate to family transitions and adjustments.

July 3rd, August 7th, September 4th
6:30 to 8:00 PM

Tulare County Support Groups are held at the Visalia YMCA
211 West Tulare Ave. Visalia CA 93277
Child care and training hours provided
Contact Marji Peterson @ (559)741-7358 – mpeterson@aspiranet.org

PARENT RETREAT/SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

3rd Tuesday of each month

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents as well as others touched by adoption. Participants are encouraged to share their family's challenges and triumphs. The topics are generated by parents and focus on developing specialized parenting skills.

July 17th, August 21st, September 18th
6:30 to 8:00 PM

Tulare County Support Groups are held at the Visalia YMCA
211 West Tulare Ave. Visalia 93277
Child care and training hours provided
Contact Marji Peterson @ (559)741-7358 – mpeterson@aspiranet.org

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services. The decision is based on test results that determine there is a disability that impairs learning. Eligibility is based on specific criteria such as:

- D-B** = Deaf Blindness
- VI** = Visual Impairment
- HI** = Hearing Impairment
- ED** = Emotional Disturbance
- MR** = Mental Retardation
- MD** = Multiple Disabilities
- OI** = Orthopedic Impairment
- SM** = Social Maladjustment
- SP** = Speech Impairment
- LI** = Language and Speech Impairment
- TBI** = Traumatic Brain Injury
- SLD** = Specific Learning Disability in:
 - (1) Basic reading skills
 - (2) Reading comprehension
 - (3) Oral expression
 - (4) Listening comprehension
 - (5) Mathematical computation
 - (6) Mathematical reasoning

If a child is determined to have a learning disability, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed. This is a formal process where measurable goals and objectives are determined based on the specific capabilities of each child. Learning accommodations and/or modifications are designed to meet learning goals and objectives. Often classroom placement is considered, such as resource services in a regular class or special day class. After an IEP is implemented, progress is measured at least once a year and the child is reevaluated every three years. Parents are very much a part of this process.

If it's determined a student has a disability but does not qualify for an IEP, a 504 Plan may be proposed. This service is offered when a student can be successful in a classroom with accommodations only. 504 Plans often meet the needs of students with ADD or ADHD as well as other issues, however, for the most part they are able to keep up with their classmates. These students may be allowed extra time for taking tests, permission to take tests in a quieter location, or reduced levels of homework. If the 504 Plan does not improve a student's performance, an IEP may be reconsidered.

Again, if you have questions about your child's education, start by educating yourself and speaking with his or her teacher. You may ask for a team meeting, to develop a learning plan. If your child continues to fall significantly behind, you might request an IEP. If your child does not qualify for an IEP, you may consider a 504 Plan. Call your school district's special education program for more information.

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



ASPIRAnet
Raising Hope. Empowering Community.



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.