

# REACH

Tulare  
County

*Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope*

*Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support*



Winter 2010

## Post-Adoption Services Program

Happy New Year! We hope you had many opportunities to celebrate in 2009 and your family is savoring the milestones accomplished- the pleasures and stressors. Don't we all know that family life includes smooth and rough patches, and both offer some of the most enriching and gratifying experiences life has to offer? Please take a moment to appreciate all the energy and compassion you and your parenting partners bring to your family. Also keep in mind, REACH is designed to build a supportive community for families who have adopted through foster care. Everyone touched by adoption has an important role to play including new and experienced parents; those seeking parenting wisdom, and those who have wisdom to share.

In This Newsletter – We have an update on Tulare County Adoptions and REACH's National Adoption Day Celebration. We also have reviews on adoption books and movies, and in keeping with February's Black History Month, we are talking with a multiracial adoptive family approaching finalization. Additionally, we have some resources for honoring Black History Month in your home and community.

The REACH Parent Retreat/Support Group is embarking on a new adventure in 2010. Parent Retreats in January, February and March will be devoted to a dynamic parenting curriculum called "Parents Helping Parents". We have adjusted the curriculum to specifically address the needs of adoptive families. While parents are invited to attend any meeting of their choice, we highly encourage participants to attend all six meetings to receive the full benefit of the class series. These

Parent Retreats are a great way to begin enriching your family in 2010, and we look forward to seeing you there! Additionally, our Support Group for Adopted Teens continues to flourish. Please look inside for dates and times.

Finally, we are always looking to make more people aware of the REACH program. Nearly everyone has a friend or acquaintance touched by adoption so please tell your friends and family friendly organizations about our program. REACH is available for community presentations for children and adults to learn about stable and secure adoptions.

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# In Celebration of Adoption from the Foster Care System

*By Alison Acton, LMFT*

November 21st, 2009 was the 10th annual National Adoption Day. National Adoption Day is always held on a Saturday in November during which thousands of families adopting from foster care across the nation finalize and celebrate their adoptions. Since its inception, over 25,000 children have had their adoptions finalized on National Adoption Day. This past year (2009) ten families adopting from Tulare County Child Welfare Services finalized their adoptions on National Adoption Day. In honor of National Adoption Day on November 10th, 2009, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors recognized the Tulare County Adoptions Unit and Tulare County adoptive families with a Proclamation at their meeting. Additionally, two adoptive families spoke about their adoption story at this Board of Supervisor's meeting.

To celebrate adoptive families this year Tulare County Adoptions partnered with Aspiranet and the REACH Program to host a National Adoption Day event on Saturday November 14th at the Imagine-U Kid's Museum. Adoptive families attended the event. Build a Bear mascot Bearmy was on hand to meet the children, a clown put on a great magic show and did beautiful face painting, the clown's assistant made balloon figures for the children, the Picture People took family portraits, and the Visalia Fire Department brought a fire engine for the children to explore. A highlight of the event was when Renee Smylie, Tulare County Child Welfare Services Deputy Director read an adoption book to the children, *A Mother For Choco* by Keiko Kasza (see a review of this book in the November 2007 edition of the REACH Tulare County Newsletter available at [www.reachtularecounty.org](http://www.reachtularecounty.org)). Each family received a children's book on adoption as well as a ticket that put them in the running for several fun filled family prizes. Imagine-U provided pizza, cookies, and punch.

At this event for the second year in a row, Tulare County Adoptions Unit staff added to their large felt Adoption Tree by placing a personalized butterfly or cloud on the tree for each Tulare County child whose adoption was finalized on National Adoption Day



*Tulare County celebrates children adopted on National Adoption Day*

2009. The Adoption Tree is currently on display at the Tulare County Adoptions office. On November 21st, the actual National Adoption Day, the Tulare County Superior Court provided a celebration for the families that were at Court to finalize their adoption. The entire month of November has also been named as National Adoption Awareness month. For all parents who have adopted children, November is the month recognized by the nation to celebrate adoption.

The National Adoption Day Coalition picked two national spokespersons for the November 2009 National Adoption Day. The first is Nia Vardalos, Academy Award & Golden Globe nominated movie screenwriter (*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*) who with her husband adopted their daughter from foster care in 2008. The second is Victoria Rowell, dancer/model/TV and movie actress, and author of the New York Times bestseller "*The Women Who Raised Me*". Both women celebrities are advocates for the 129,000 children currently in foster care that are legally freed to be adopted.

Until 1980, most children detained from birth parents were never returned home and did not become part of a new permanent family. These children remained in foster care until they aged out of the system at 18 years of age. According to the Child Welfare Information

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Gateway in 1980, the ground-breaking Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act reconceptualized foster care as a temporary service. Family involvement, assessment, planning, and permanency became core elements of child welfare practice. Children are now freed for adoption after a legal hearing to remove the birth parent's parental rights once family reunification services have been terminated, or if services were not offered to the birth parents. If you would like to write about your family's adoption from foster care story for upcoming editions of the Newsletter, contact Marji Peterson at (559)741-7358.

*Reading an adoption themed story to children at our event., Rene Smylie, Director of Child Welfare Services, and John Mauro, Child Welfare Services Manager, both employees of Tulare County Health and Human Services.*



## Community Resources

### COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS (Update)

The College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Program offers trainings of interest to adoptive parents at no charge. Many of the winter workshops deal specifically with fost/adopt issues, such as Rebuilding Children's Lives, Reframing Discipline, Parenting Across Racial & Cultural Lines (2 sessions), The Sexually Abused Child, and Don't Give Me That Attitude! Instructors, dates and times are listed on the COS website @ [www.cos.edu](http://www.cos.edu). Click on the site index, scroll down to the Foster & Kinship Care Education Program, and 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.

### FEDERAL 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 Retreats

Adoptive Parenting 101  
Visalia YMCA at Court & Tulare Ave  
Tuesday Evenings 6:30 to 8:00 PM  
January 12th & 26th  
February 9th & 23rd  
March 9th & 23rd

Join us for six consecutive meetings devoted to Adoptive Parenting. We recommend participants attend all six sessions:

- The Couple Relationship
- Healthy Communication
- Creating A Family
- Adoption Core Issues
- Parenting With Love
- Adopting Younger & Older Children

Training hours and childcare are available. Contact Marji Peterson @ 559-741-7358 or [mpeterson@aspiranet.org](mailto:mpeterson@aspiranet.org).

### Adopted Teen Group

2436 East Valley Oaks Dr.  
Visalia, CA 93291  
Friday Evenings 5:00 to 7:30 PM  
January 8th & 22nd  
February 5th & 19th  
March 5th & 19th

Have you ever wondered what adopted teens have in common? This support group is designed for youth between the ages of 13 and 18 who have been adopted through Tulare County foster care. Teens who were adopted privately and siblings formed through adoption may also attend. Participants have agreed to provide a hearty snack; drinks and sweets provided by REACH.

Please contact Marji Peterson @ 559-741-7358 or [mpeterson@aspiranet.org](mailto:mpeterson@aspiranet.org) for a screening interview.

# Transracial Adoptions

by Marji Peterson, MFT Intern

Transracial adoption occurs when a child from one race is placed with a family of another race. More than 50% of adoptions through Tulare County create families with more than one race or culture. In honor of Black History Month, REACH is highlighting the Moulthrop family. Jerry and Mary Moulthrop are Caucasian and experienced parents. They have a large blended family that includes 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. Its 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.

# Practical Suggestions for Building Strong Racial Identities

According to Beth Hall in her article entitled, "Building Racial Identity: Strategies and Practical Suggestions" ([www.pactadopt.org](http://www.pactadopt.org)) there are a few things every multiracial family needs to know. First, race is not something people chose or earn. Second, racism is a choice that reflects a state of mind, and third, parents must recognize and acknowledge racism when they see it, otherwise children may believe they've done something wrong to deserve racist behavior. Here are some practical suggestions to help children build strong racial identities:

- Surround your family with people of your child's race and others of color.
- Counterbalance negative stereotypes by choosing doctors, dentists, and other professionals from different cultures and races.
- Choose schools with children of multiracial families and after school programs that teach cooking, languages, arts, and sports from different cultures.
- Attend public places like shopping malls, theaters, and vacation destinations where there are people from other cultures and races.
- Dress and groom your children according to the styles of their own race rather than of yours.
- Expose your children to the history and culture of their biological ancestry. Point out how their history relates to them and provide opportunities to learn from people from their race or culture.
- Recognize the importance of mastering skills to build self-esteem. Teach children they can do well with whatever they set their minds to, and do not allow others' diminished expectations limit your child's achievements.
- Children of color (especially those raised with White parents) are scrutinized carefully in social situations and susceptible to harsh criticism by others. Politeness and knowledge of appropriate behaviors in different cultural settings can open doors and relationships.
- Develop family rituals to create a sense of belonging, which is essential for children to manage the challenges of transracial adoption. Rituals emphasize the similarities among family members without denying differences. Rituals can be simple such as eating meals together; having special family songs, inside jokes or conversations; and maintaining traditions for events and holidays.
- For more information about adoption and multiracial parenting, go to [www.pactadopt.org](http://www.pactadopt.org).

## Tips on Honoring Black History Month and Racial Diversity in Your Home:

### Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park:

We have an important African American historical site in our community. Allensworth is the only town in California completely founded, owned, and developed by African Americans. It was created in 1908 and declined after World War II. California State Parks purchased the site in 1974 and several buildings have been restored or reconstructed. Festivities are scheduled for Saturday, February 13th and 27th. No cost family activities will be offered from 10 :00am to 4:00pm, including fun and educational guided tours and soul touching talks about living free of the discriminatory laws and practices of the time. The state park is located north of Bakersfield; 20 miles north of Wasco on Highway 43; and seven miles west of Earlimart on County Road J22.

**African Mask Making:** Masks are a part of many African traditional celebrations, along with instruments, singing, praying, dancing, and tribal clothing that correlates with special events. Your family can create masks using paper plates or construction paper and paint, scissors, glue, string, or feathers. You might ask your child to think of a ceremony or celebration their mask could be used for.

**Historic Black Americans:** Many black Americans have made a significant impact on American culture, including Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman. You might use the internet or local library to research your favorite African American and find out where he/she was born, the challenges they faced, and the contributions they made to all Americans.

**African Folktales:** Introduce your children to African folktales via the internet or library and talk about how folktales preserved history before people knew how to write them down. Discuss the beginning; middle and end of your child's favorite folktale, then recreate the story in a play or drawing. Also you might ask your child to write a folktale about their adoption journey, or interview an older member of your family to discover an old family tale.

## Book Reviews



### Book Review for Children

#### Brown Like Me

*By Noelle Lamperti*

Brown Like Me is a wonderful book because it speaks from the heart. The book encourages young children in multi-racial families to take pride in themselves and their appearance. The main character, Noelle, is an African American adoptee raised in a Caucasian family. She identifies the color of brown in everything around her - brown leaves, brown sand, brown eyes, and brown skin - ending with the words, "I am strong brown." The accompanying pictures are very appealing for both children and adults. This book is available in the REACH Lending Library.

### Book Review for Parents

#### Inside Transracial Adoption

*By Steinberg and Beth Hall*

The authors of Inside Transracial Adoption are founders and co-directors of PACT- An Adoption Alliance and mothers who have adopted children with different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The book cover states a better title for the book might be something like, "How to Get to the Place Where It Feels Almost Fun to Let People Wonder How You and Your Kids Could So Clearly Belong to One Another When You Look So Different!" Inside Transracial Adoption provides direction for building close and loving families with individuals who are proud members of different races. The authors blend academic research and personal experience into a must read that pulls no punches and confronts reality with humor and empathy. Transracial Adoption is available in the REACH Lending Library.

### Movie Review for Families

#### Fakin' Da Funk

*Directed by Timothy A. Chey*

Watching a movie as a family can be a good starting point for important discussions. The key is to find a movie that interests the child and portrays relevant issues without making adoption seem negative. In the highly acclaimed movie Fakin' Da Funk, an accidental switch is made at an adoption agency that sends a Chinese baby to an African-American family. Julian is accepted into the family in his tight-knit Atlanta neighborhood, but the search for a better life takes the family to South Central L.A. where new neighbors think Julian is pretending to be black. For the first time Julian faces an identity crisis. Fakin' da Funk pokes fun at stereotypes and proves that what's in your heart is most important. Actors include Ernie Hudson, Pam Grier, Margaret Cho, Dante Basco, and Duane Martin. This DVD is available in the REACH Lending Library.

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We're on the Web:  
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## 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.