

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



Happy New Year REACH families!

Winter 2015

We hope everyone is enjoying the holiday season and savoring extra time with family and friends. The holidays and New Year give us the opportunity to set new goals as a family and enjoy long-held traditions. As many of you know, National Adoption Day is celebrated in November. In Tulare County, more than 100 children and parents gathered with adoption professionals at Roller Towne on November 17th to celebrate. The children enjoyed skating, games, face painting, raffle prizes, pizza and cake. Special thanks to all the families and their social workers that attended and made this a memorable evening!

In the past, adoption was often kept a secret. Many adopted children were never told that they were adopted and any connection with a child's birth family was prohibited, or looked down upon. The common belief was that a lack of birth family connections or lack of openness in adoption would make it "easier" for the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the children to "move on". However, this pattern of secrecy and shame around adoption can be incredibly harmful to children and families. As the years have progressed, the negative stigma associated with adoption has decreased due to an increase in adoption education. Today, most children are aware that they are adopted and many have had some type of contact with their birth families. According to a national study in 2009, one-third of all adoptive families have had some type of contact with the birth family after the adoption. Post adoption contact with birth family more often occurs in private domestic adoption (68%), as compared with adoption from foster care (39%) and international adoption (6%) (Retrieved from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/chartbook>). According to "Growing Up Adopted: A Portrait of Adolescents and their Families":



- Forty percent of the adolescents studied wanted to know more about their birth history (45 percent girls, 30 percent boys).
- Sixty-five percent would like to meet their birthparents if possible (70 percent of girls, 57 percent of boys); far fewer actually ever search.
- For those interested in meeting their birth parents, the primary motivations the adopted adolescents gave were these:
 - To find out what they look like: 94 percent
 - To tell them I'm happy: 80 percent
 - To tell them I'm okay: 76 percent
 - To tell them I'm glad to be alive: 73 percent
 - To find out why I was adopted: 72 percent

In This Issue we wanted to focus on the importance of birth family connections and the varying degrees of contact that are possible between adoptive families and birth families. There are always cases in which birth family contact may not be possible. In those cases, we offer suggestions on different activities that parents

Inside This Issue

1. Happy New Year
2. Post Adoption Contact
3. What If Contact Between My Child and Their Birth Parent Is Not Possible
4. Interview With a 13 Year Old Adoptee
5. Calendar of Events, Support Group Info
6. REACH Services

Your REACH Tulare County Support Team

Shamra Tripp, LCSW
Associate Division Director
stripp@aspiranet.org

JulieAnn Jones, MSW
REACH Program Supervisor
jujones@aspiranet.org

4128 South Demaree, Ste. B
Visalia, CA 93277
Ph: (559) 741-7358
Fax: (559) 741-7368
www.reachtularecounty.org

NEED HELP?

Is your adoptive child exhibiting any of the following behaviors?

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequent running away• Sexualized behavior• Posttraumatic stress disorder• Aggressive/assaultive behavior• Oppositional/defiant behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-injurious behavior• One or more hospitalizations in a Mental Health facility• Substance use disorder• Fire starter• Minor criminal behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.

To The Parents of Adopted Children

Written by Dr. Joyce Maquire Pavao, who was adopted
(printed with permission)

You cannot change the truth
these are your children
but they came from somewhere else
and they are the children of those places
and of those people as well

Help them to know all about their past
and all about their present
help them to know that they are from extended families
that they only have one parent or set of parents
but that they have more mothers and fathers
they have grandmothers, godmothers,
birthmothers, mother countries and
mother earth
they have grandfathers, godfathers, birthfathers and
fatherlands
they have family by birth and by adoption
they have family by choice and by chance

Childhood is short
they are our children to raise
they are our children to love
and then they are citizens of the world
What we do to them creates the world that we live in
Give them life
Give them their truth
Give them love
Give them all that they came with
Give them all that they grow with

Your children do not belong to you
but they belong with you
you cannot keep them from what is theirs
but you can keep loving them
You do not own your children
but they are your own

child calls for a new paradigm of parenting. We know that adoption is based on loss for all members of the adoption triad (the child, birthparents and adoptive parents). Many enforce their promises with good faith and perseverance. However, good intending families can find post-adoption contact easily overshadowed by the sheer hardness of following through.

As adoptive parents, it is our responsibility to help our children celebrate their birth, grieve their losses, find their truths, embrace their differences, and incorporate their birth heritage into their forever families. The intent of ongoing contact is to provide your child with the stability of a forever family, while giving them honest and open knowledge of their birth family. The agreement is always meant to serve what is in the best interests of our children. As adoptive parents, we need to be thoughtful and honest when entering into these agreements. Most importantly, never make promises to birth family that you don't intend to keep. Here are a few thoughts to keep in mind regarding your contact:

- * Sending pictures is easy, especially if you are able to send them via email. Realize that these pictures may be the only view into the life of your child that the birthparents or birth family ever have. Choose your pictures carefully with thought and consideration. Most of us take hundreds of pictures of our children every year. Make an effort to go above and beyond the pictures you have promised, let the pictures show how much you treasure and love your child.
- * In addition to pictures, write a note telling about your child's interests, sport activities, or how they are doing in school. We all LOVE to talk about our children, take this time to give them a vision of what your child is like.
- * Remember that holidays are difficult times for birth parents and family members. Make an effort to step up your pictures and letters around such times.
- * Do you throw away crafts and activity sheets your child does in school? You are missing a great opportunity to share them with someone who cares! Save a few and mail them out with your next round of pictures or letters.
- * In some cases, face to face contact is both appropriate and healthy for all parties. Even if it wasn't part of your original agreement, you can always decide to do it if it is mutually agreed upon.
- * Keep in mind that your children are watching and listening to everything you say. Treat their birth families with respect, and remember they believe that what you say about their birth family reflects directly on them.
- * Sometimes confidentiality and privacy is in a child's best interest. We live in an era of technology that provides opportunities for contact with privacy and security. This opens up new possibilities that have not been available in the past.
- * Adoption is a life long journey. While we all get busy with our daily activities, a child's adoption doesn't become less important with time. Continue honoring their birthparents and keep the promises you made when you became your child's parent.

The benefits of fulfilling your post adoption agreement can be substantial. Understanding origins can help youth form racial and individual identity, reduce loyalty conflicts between birth and adoptive families, and maintain cultural and family traditions. We champion the importance of helping youth understand where and how they belong.

Post Adoption Contact

More and more adoptions involve keeping in touch -- adopted child, and adoptive parents, maintaining a relationship with the birth family. In an open adoption, birth parents and adoptive parents agree to ongoing contact between themselves. They come to some sort of agreement on the frequency and manner of contact. They could exchange letters and photos, either directly or through an agency, or schedule phone calls and visits. The goal of keeping in touch is to minimize loss and celebrate connections. Sometimes, families enter into what's called "Post Adoption Contact Agreements" between prospective adoptive families and members of the child's family of origin. These agreements are filed in court with the adoption paperwork at the time of finalization.

As adoptive parents, we set out on this open adoption journey with the most honorable of intentions, realizing that raising an adopted

What if contact between my child and their birth parents is not possible?

Dr. Stephanie Taplin published a discussion paper entitled, "Is all contact between children in care and their birth parents 'good' contact?" Dr. Taplin's paper reviewed some of the research that was available regarding children in foster care and the decisions to be considered about contact. Post adoption contact with birth family can involve similar potential issues. Adoptive parents must consider several major factors before making a decision to have contact with their child's birth parents and/or birth family. These factors include questions such as:

- Are there risks to the safety of the child? (Is the child protected from abuse and/or distorted messages?)
- Are the child's wishes for and reactions to contact being taken into account?
- How old and at what developmental stage is the child?
- How supportive are the birth parents?
- How have the birth parents reacted to contact arrangements?
- Are there changes in the relationships and situations since last assessed?
- Has contact with fathers and other family members been considered?
- Has indirect contact been considered?

These are just some of the questions to be considered and every adoption case is going to be different. Some families determine that direct contact (such as visitations) with a birth parent and/or birth family member is not possible due to safety issues or other concerns. This could always change as time moves forward, but indirect contact with a child's birth family is another option. Indirect contact can include counseling with the child and/or the adoptive family with a focus on exploring birth family connections, the exchange of treasured possessions, photographs, special activities, rituals, and letters to keep the connection alive.

In the book entitled "The Whole Life Adoption Book", authors Jayne E. Schooler and Thomas C. Atwood highlighted several activities that families can use to help keep the dialogue open between a parent and child about birth family and their adoption story:

- **The Lifebook**– This is a tool to help bring together a child's past, present and future. It is a book that is created by the child but can include a parent as the "helper." The book documents a child's history, key life events, important memories, celebrates accomplishments, and enables a child to explore their future hopes and dreams. A child's Lifebook should only be expressed from the child's perspective and include pictures of their birth family and/or poems or letters in which a child is able to express how they feel about their birth family.

- **The Life Map** – A life map is a tool that can be useful for a child who has experienced multiple changes and moves in foster care before finding a forever home. The child can draw his/her life map in any manner he chooses. The purpose of using a Life Map is to open up discussion with the child about their history, to give parents a chance to ask questions and to clarify any misconceptions or unanswered questions the child may have, and to provide support for the children to process difficult feelings and reassure them that they have found their forever home.

- **The Family Tree** – This exercise is a modification of the typical Family Tree and is one in which a child is able to visually recognize and organize all of the people who have been an important part of his/her life. The roots of the tree are often identified as the birth family and the genetic heritage of the child. The foster and/or kinship family can be represented on the trunk of the tree since they helped the child grow. The adoptive family is often represented as the upper trunk, branches, leaves, fruit, and flowers of the tree. Through this activity, a child can learn to celebrate the importance of family and the various types of family that have played an important part in his life.

- **Let's Tell a Story/Let's Write A Story** – Joint storytelling can be instrumental in helping a young child to communicate their thoughts and feelings about their birth family. The child is asked to choose a favorite animal and name him. Then the adult starts telling a story about the animal that reflects the child's history. After several sentences, the adult asks the child to continue the story. This exercise gives the child an opportunity to share emotional reactions to life events and their perceptions and desires for the future. This exercise is also very useful in bypassing resistance from a child who has difficulty opening up about their history.

- **Can You Tell Me What They Think?: Doll and Puppet Play** – This is an activity in which the parent can use small Fisher-Price figures, other small dolls, or puppets to represent important figures in the child's past or present. Explain to the child that you are going to "play out" a story. Identify the characters, using the real names of the child, birthparent, adoptive parent, siblings, and others, or use "fake" names but be sure to include the actual circumstances of the child's adoption. Allow the child to control and speak for the "child" doll and talk about his/her own perceptions and feelings. Parents should never correct feelings, but they can correct the actual events in the story by saying, "Let's play the story this way – I think this is the way the story might have happened." This activity allows learning through a visual and experiential activity and can be repeated over and over (as many children love to do!) It is another tool to help children process their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their past. It also can help parents to correct a child's fantasies or misconceptions (often related to magical thinking).

Interview With a 13 Year Old Adoptee

How old were you when you found out you were adopted?

I was three years old.

Do you have memories of the first meeting with your parents?

We met at a park. I remember being on a swing. I don't think my siblings were there at that first meeting.

Do you remember how you felt as you spent time with them for the first time? I was comfortable. I got used to it quickly. I remember I called my Mom "Mommy" quickly after adoption.

What do you remember prior to being with your family? I was only with one foster family. I don't have any memories about my foster parents or my birth parents as a baby.

Do you think about your birth parents often? Well, I'm able to see my birth Mom every year, sometimes up to two times a year.

How is having your birth mother in your life?

I'm happy to see her and be with her.

How is your relationship with her? We love each other.

How often do you contact her?

I've been meeting with my birth Mom since I was little.

How is it when you meet with your birth mother?

We go watch a movie, go eat dinner, and then go home.

What other activities do you do when you're together? We are both very shy, so a lot of what we do is look into each other's eyes and smile. We both know we feel the same way. Every time I see her, I stand next to her and check our heights. This year I did the same and for the first time, I was taller than her.

How do your parents feel about it? My Mom and Dad are open to reuniting with my birth mother around this time every year.

How do you see the role of your parents in helping you connect with your birth mother? I'm glad my parents have helped me connect with my birth Mom. They have helped me ask my birth mother questions about my birth Dad. Although my birth Mom doesn't remember everything.

Would your life be different if you didn't know your birth mother?

I don't know that it would change me but it is a good thing that I know her. I have never met my birth Dad and I don't know a lot about him.

How is not knowing a lot about your birth father? I'm curious about him. I wonder if my birth parents were ever married. I think about how I really like ribs and how I heard my birth Dad may have loved ribs as well.

I also have thoughts about my birth family.

What thoughts come to mind when you think about your birth family? I wonder if they like the same things I like. What they do and whether they all like each other. It makes me wonder how it would have been different if I had been raised by my birth family.

What are some activities or hobbies that you like that you think your birth family may have liked as well? I like ribs. I like cornbread. I play soccer and piano. I've been playing piano since I was little. I started playing at family reunions. I remember the first time I went to press the keys on the piano at a family reunion and I played a song I made up. It makes me wonder if anyone in my birth family also played piano.

Will you continue to explore more about your birth family when you become an adult?

I would like to explore more in the future with the help of my parents.

You've had the experience of meeting your birth Mom and not meeting your birth Dad. In a way, you know how it is to have met a birth parent and not the other. How does knowing your birth Mom make you different in comparison to other children who have never met their birth parents? I feel like I do know more than other children who don't know their birth parents. I also think that I think differently because of it. I may be more accepting of some things.

What would you tell children who are able to meet their birth parents but choose not to? I would tell children to give their birth parents a chance. Their parents may have changed and they probably love them. Even if parents and children are far apart and they can't be together, they can still do things, like write letters. People who haven't seen their birth parents may think that their birth parents don't love them but the reality is that adoption may have been the best choice.

Besides seeing you birth Mom up to twice a year sometimes, what other activities do you do to stay in contact with her?

I have given her written stuff, like an admiration paper. I have given her school projects. This makes me remember how once my sister wrote an admiration paper about my birth Mom, it was totally unexpected for me. It made me feel good. My birth Mom also gives me things.

Of all the things your birth Mom has given you, what would you say you treasure the most?

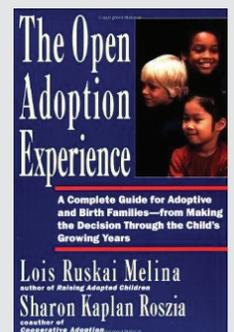
A stuffed Tweety Bird that I still have with me.

Do you talk about it with a lot of people? I don't mind giving direct answers when people ask me about adoption. My sister and I have different skin colors so in school, people have asked questions. For example, I remember a classmate saw my sister and me together and she asked whether we were related. I just answered that I was adopted.

Family Book Review: The Open Adoption Experience

By Lois Ruskai Melina and Sharon Kaplan Roszia

The Open Adoption Experience offers a road map for adoptive and birth families that are considering open adoption and would like to understand and prepare for what is involved. This book offers realistic examples of all stages of the relationship and suggestions regarding how to nurture the relationship as a child grows and changes. There are advantages of open adoption as well as challenges. The authors hope that this book will help adoptive and birth families know what to expect in an open adoption as well as how to cope with the unexpected hurdles that may arise.



SUPPORT GROUPS

Upcoming Calendar of Events

January

- 6** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 - 8:30 pm
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
- 13** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church
- 29** Becoming a Trauma Competent
Healing Parent
6:00 - 9:00 pm
Kings County HSA Cedar Room, Hanford

February

- 3** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 - 8:30 pm
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
- 5** Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent
6:00 - 9:00 pm
Kings County HSA Cedar Room, Hanford
- 10** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church
- 12** Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent
6:00 - 9:00 pm
Kings County HSA Cedar Room, Hanford

March

- 3** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 - 8:30 pm
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
- 5** Understanding the Impact of Parenting
Traumatized Children
6:00 - 9:00 pm
COS Visalia Campus (Room Pending)
- 10** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church
- 19** The Adoption Process
6:00 - 9:00 pm
COS Visalia Campus (Room Pending)

TULARE COUNTY REACH ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

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

- January 6
- February 3
- March 3

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

- January 13
- February 10
- March 10

Contact: Toni Brown, M.S. at (559) 741-7358 ext. 4509 or 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.

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

Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent

Kings County HSA Cedar Room, Hanford

January 29th, February 5th, and February 12th of 2015- 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Understanding the Impact of Parenting a Traumatized Child

COS Room Pending, Visalia

March 5th, 2015- 6:00 to 9:00 pm

The Adoption Process

COS Room Pending, Visalia

March 19th, 2015- 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Aspiranet
151 Canal Drive
Turlock, CA 95380

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Stockton, CA
PERMIT NO. 451



Visalia Aspiranet
4128 S. Demaree, Ste. B
Visalia, CA 93277

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



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 and 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 once 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 and 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.