



Bright Things

"all things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small, ..."

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,
a program of The Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, Volume XI, Winter 2011

ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY PROGRAM IN FULL SWING

Starting in July of 2010, the Adoption and Permanency Program began welcoming families interested in adopting children in the custody of the MA Department of Children and Families (DCF). We are delighted to announce that our first group of families are in the process of being matched and placed with children who are thrilled to be joining their forever families. In addition to welcoming, training, assessing, matching and supporting adoptive families, the Adoption and Permanency Program also provides child and family assessment services to DCF area offices on a fee for service basis. We are delighted to welcome two new licensed social workers, Keriann Combe and Cheryl Peltier, in the Adoption and Permanency Program. Both have worked in adoption and permanency planning for many years and bring a wealth of practical experience to the program. As this newsletter goes to print, we are also in the process of hiring a part time Family Resource Worker to work with our adoptive families.



Sisters who have been living in separate foster homes will come together forever in their new adoptive home this month!

Have you ever thought about giving back to our community by parenting a child in need? Do you know any families that would be interested in adopting older children? The need for families open to adopting children of color and adopting sibling sets is tremendous. If you or anyone you know is interested in our Adoption and Permanency Program, please have them call or email Karen at 978-263-5400 or kcheyney@rfkchildren.org.

All adoptions through the Adoption and Permanency Program are free.

KEEPING UP TO DATE

How many years has it been since you made an adoption plan for your child? How many years has it been since you adopted your child?

If even a few months have gone by, you may have important information to share with your child (if you are the birth parent) or your child's birth family (if you are the adoptive parent). At the time of placement, Bright Futures collects social, family and medical history information from birth parents and shares this information with adoptive families (in either an identifying or nonidentifying manner as elected by the birth parents). This information is a wonderful place to start, but as time goes by that social, family and medical information changes. Birth parents go on to complete school, resettle, get married, have additional children, learn a new trade or develop a new medical concern. Adoptive families move, get new jobs, add children to their family and develop medical concerns. Several years ago, a child that we placed was diagnosed with a genetic disorder that often goes unnoticed and untreated. This child had a birth sibling close in age who was living with the birth parents and who was at risk for the same genetic disorder. Sadly, we were not able to reach the birth family to notify them of the concern. It is crucial to the wellbeing of all of our children that we continue to share information with one another. Enclosed with this newsletter is a Family Update Form. Please complete this family update form and return it to us in the enclosed envelope so that we can know how you are doing and have updated information about you and your family. Here's to keeping all of our children healthy and knowledgeable about themselves and both of their families!

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR 2010 DONORS!

The "Helping Hands" CAMPAIGN

Bringing Together Big & Little Hands through Compassionate and Ethical Adoption
continues through March 30, 2011.

Donations in Memory and Honor of Ed Johnson

Richard & Joan
Frank
The Westminster
Village of Holden
Susan
Michelle
Jodi & Joseph
Julia
Stacey
Joy
New England
Association of
Multiracial Families
John & Gloria
AECOM Technology
Corporation
John & Janet

*"In Memory of Ed
Johnson. Keep
helping kids like
Colin find awesome
parents like
Lisa & Ed."*



Picnic Fund Donations

Mary & Mike
David & Charisse
Mary & Pavlo
Linda & Roger
Kim & Jim
Nancy & Kjartan
Bob & Valerie
Mary Rose & Michael
Susan & Tom
Chantal & Blaine
Ellen & Jim
Kim
Mike & Trisha

Laurie & Rick
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Helping Hands Campaign

Alan
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Mary Rose & Michael
Michael & Mary
Janet
Carol & Peter

Sara & Joe
Virginia & Terrence
Amy & Andy
Dave
Beth & Jill
Jeffrey
Laurie & Rick
Debbie & Ed
David
Gerry & Regina
Nancy & Kjartan
Paul & David
Bob & Valerie
Brett & Elisa
Robert & Sheila
Marilyn & Ray

*"Enclosed is our
check for \$100 to
help you in your
wonderful work.
This is in honor of
our grandson,
Tanner."*

*Donations can be mailed to 5 Broadview Street, Acton, MA 01720 or made online by going to
www.bright-futures.org and clicking on the 'Donate Now' Button.*



Ed, Lisa, Jazmine & Colin at
Bright Futures' 2009 picnic

Remembering Ed Johnson

Lisa and Ed have been great supporters and advocates for Bright Futures. They adopted their son through Bright Futures in 2003 and in 2004 they hosted a pregnant woman in their home as she planned her adoption. Sadly, Ed passed away in April of 2010 after a brief battle with cancer. We remember Ed as a family man, dedicated to his wife Lisa and his children, Jazmine and Colin. Ed was thoughtful, kind, generous, and giving of his time. He wanted his children to love learning and to shine as individuals, something they certainly do already! As Colin says, Ed was "my best friend" and "I miss him."

Our thoughts are with you, Lisa, Jazmine and Colin.

Fondly, your Bright Futures' family

NEW ARRIVALS -- SOME BIG SIBS WELCOME LITTLE ONES!



CONGRATULATIONS TO 2010'S NEW ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Beth, Jill & Elias on the arrival of Cora

Karen on the arrival of Jesse

Beth & Milo on the arrival of Sylvie

Jess & Zoe on the arrival of Kaya

Nathan & Robert on the arrival of Virginia

Amy & Andy on the arrival of Charlotte

Chip, Ben & Ellie on the arrival of Trey

William & Davida on the arrival of Maryah & Jordan

Nancy, Kjartan & Adam on the arrival of Erik

Jennifer, Paul & Thomas on the arrival of Christopher

Words from Our Families

Words from a Big Brother

Hi Karen. We had a lovely parent-teacher conference today with Jamie's first grade teacher. Jamie is doing so well at school. Makes us proud. The teacher shared a story Jamie wrote and illustrated:

"My Special Time by Jamie

My speshel time is when I adopted my bruther. It was fun. It was special because I allways wonted a bruther. I really enjoyed it. It was really important to me. My mom and dad went with me. We got him in Indyana. We took him on a plane home. I felt good."

So you see, this was all Jamie's idea. Ha! I just emailed this to my family, but wanted to share it with you. I am sooooo glad you encouraged us to take Jamie with us to Indiana. He really remembers it and talks about it every so often. I am so glad that he will be able to tell Tanner about it first hand when he is old enough to start needing more information. And that even when they are two old men, long after we are gone, Jamie will still be able to bear witness to what happened.

-- Jennifer



Words from a Birth Mother

It dawned on me the other day...that in February, G will be 10 (if my math is correct anyway)!

Has it really been a *decade*, Karen?

Am I where I thought I'd be? Were my reasons for that decision at the time meted with actual results?

LOL...random thoughts, I suppose, but I wanted to reach out and say to you (and Tammy!) that I still feel that my decision then was the right one. It was the right one then, and remains so even now.

10 years...

So, obviously, I've been thinking of you as well.

Thanks for checking in on me from time to time.

Hope all is well in your world,

Warmest regards, Tami

BRIGHT FUTURES' WISH LIST

Please consider donating any of the following items to Bright Futures:

A **Digital Camera** (new or used). This would allow expectant parents or Bright Futures to take pictures of newborns during their hospital and/or interim care stay. Every child should have photos of their arrival in the world!

Frequent Flyer Miles and/or Hotel Points so that we can sponsor birth mothers to attend the BirthMom Buds Birthmother's Day Retreat in Charlotte, NC in late April 2011 (see calendar section).

Prepaid phones and phone cards so that we can provide expectant parents with a safe way to contact us, their doctor and the adoptive parents.

**There was plenty of action at
Bright Futures' 2010 Picnic!**



Hi Karen -- Just wanted to say thank you for the work you put into the picnic. We enjoyed attending it and meeting other adoptive families. We only wish we lived closer to some of them!
-- Mary, Pavlo & Lucas



**The cotton candy machine was a BIG hit with the kids!
Thanks Gary & Michelle!**



Good morning, Karen -- We had a great time at the picnic... especially Morgan. She was so excited about going to the picnic. Morgan and N really do seem to enjoy playing with each other. We walked back to the parking lot with [N's parents], so Morgan and N were able to spend a few more minutes together before we had to say "good-bye." We're going to try to get the girls together. It was great to see you and Eleanor again. -- Miki

Getting Comfortable with Open Adoption

by a Bright Futures' Adoptive Family

When we first started the adoption process we believed open adoption meant periodic cards and letters sent using the adoption agency as the point of contact. Even after we opened our minds to the possibility of direct contact with birthparents, initially, we were concerned about the extent of the contact, how it would work, how do we establish boundaries and trust. Some of these concerns were preconceived notions of maintaining these relationships but they were also compounded by having two unsuccessful adoption matches.

When we first met our son's birthparents and their families, while we were still a bit guarded, we realized that maybe having direct contact was not so scary after all. We were given the opportunity to attend a few doctor visits and were asked to be at the hospital when he was born. During this time, we formed a bond with both birthparents. Our main fears still remained - how would this work and what if the birthparents didn't remain in contact after a certain point in time. Then we realized that if we put our fear aside and put our son's needs first, having an open adoption might be the right answer. It was not until our son was born that we realized all the benefits of open adoption. As we continue our story, you too will understand why open adoption was the only answer for us and, more importantly, for our son.

Open adoption became particularly important in our son's first days of life as he had some medical struggles that began the day he was born. At that time there were new medical privacy laws and so the hospital initially would not speak with us regarding our son's emergency medical care. Even though his birthmother wanted to be informed about his health and have the ability to see him while in the hospital, she made sure that we, as his parents, had the ability to make all medical decisions right from the start. With the seriousness of his condition we bonded even further with the birthparents and their families, it became clearer that having more open contact with the two birth families would truly make a difference. It was at that point we came to whole-heartily embrace open adoption!

Our open adoption agreement included a couple of visits within the first few months and after that it was twice a year. For the first two to three years everyone adhered to this agreement though none of us probably looked back at the agreement. We just felt that while that document made it clear what expectations were on both the birth and adoptive parents that it was really only a guide. From our perspective, we believed the more open and respectful our relationship is with the birthparents, the more likely our son would not feel awkward should the time come that he wanted to ask questions. Therefore, we sent updates not only about health concerns but also about exciting events in his life and even some of the more mundane events. We have gone out of our way to ensure more information rather than less has been shared so that our son would always feel the birthparents and their families were part of our family.

With recent high school graduates as birthparents, visits were at milestones, such as his when he turned one month old, his Baptism, and before going off to college since both birthparents went to colleges outside the Northeast. His birthmother wrote a beautiful letter that was presented to the judge at the adoption finalization. During college years contact from both birthparents was fairly limited - which is probably quite typical. Several years have passed since they graduated from college and the amount of contact with each has changed again.

Our relationship with birthmother.

The three of us took a plane ride to see the birthmother graduate from college. We could tell that everyone appreciated the effort we made to attend the graduation and the dinner that followed. After that, although we

(continued on back)

Telling Kids the Truth

Does your child know that he or she is adopted? Does your child know the truth about his or her birth family (whatever that truth may be)? Sometimes we will get a call from an adoptive parent when their child is five asking, “how do I begin talking to my child about adoption?” It is so easy to not talk about adoption when a child is a baby or toddler that adoptive parents fall out of practice. When they were waiting to adopt, adoption was often all that was talked about, the process, the wait time, the excitement of getting selected and the wonderful birth of the child. But then life gets busy and adoption can drop out of the forefront of our minds especially if there is limited ongoing contact between the adoptive family and the birth family.

Sometimes we will get a call from a distressed birth parent who has ongoing contact with their child, but the child does not know what role the birth parent plays in their life. They know the person as a “family friend” or special aunt or uncle, without knowing the truth: this woman is my birth mother or this man is my birth father.

Sometimes we have heard that birth parents do not tell the children they are parenting or their extended family about the child they placed for adoption. Sometimes birth parents go so far as to lie about the child, telling others that their child died at birth.

Why? Why do we all struggle so with telling our children and families the truth? Because the truth is complicated, it can impact more people than just the child, the birth parents and the adoptive parents, and it can be painful to relive whatever circumstances gave rise to the child’s placement. How do our choices or omissions impact our kids?

Imagine the pain of a twelve year old who knows her birth siblings on her mother’s side, has met her birth father and knows that she has siblings on her father’s side who don’t know that she exists. What does that tell her about what her birth father thinks of her? What images does she conjure up of her paternal siblings? How long will it take her to find them on Facebook?

Imagine the 15 year old who knows he is adopted, has visited with his birth mother every year, has every gift his birth mother has ever given him lined up on his dresser, but has never been told that she is anything other than a special family friend. Does he wonder or fantasize about who his birth mother is? Has he already figured it out? What does he think of the adults in his life not telling him this information?

Our kids are smart and insightful. They often figure things out long before we explain them. Withholding truth from our children affects their ability to trust us. So how then do we tackle the tough stuff? Is there ever a right time?

- * Talk to your partner, trusted friends and family and get support about how and when to address difficult adoption issues.
- * Talk to an adoption competent therapist about your fears about disclosing the truth.
- * Talk to other triad members about how they jumped this hurdle.
- * Most importantly, take the time talk to your child’s birth or adoptive parent so that you can address this in a unified and collaborative way so that your child knows that you both care deeply about how the information shared impacts the child.

No question is too silly or too mundane. We are here to help. Let us support you as you navigate the complexities of living as a birth or adoptive family. -- Karen Cheyney

FAREWELL TO ELEANOR

For eight years Eleanor Allen has trained, home studied, counseled, and provided post placement supervision and support, and legal finalization services to Bright Futures' families. She has brought a culturally aware and clinically astute perspective to our work and has always pushed Bright Futures toward the best possible practices for our infant adoption program. We want to thank Eleanor and publicly honor her contributions to Bright Futures. While Eleanor is finishing up some of her work here at Bright Futures, we all want to take this opportunity to wish Eleanor well as she moves on in her career. Eleanor will continue her private therapy practice with a specialty in adoption. If you have thoughts you'd like to share with Eleanor upon her departure from Bright Futures, please email kcheyney@rfkchildren.org and your message will be forwarded to Eleanor.

OPPORTUNITY IS KNOCKING! WIN A 2011 HONDA Pilot EX-L

Help sponsor a birth mother to go to the Birth Mother's Day Retreat on April 29, 2011 (the same day as the grand prize drawing)!

For each \$100 ticket that we sell, Bright Futures will receive \$50. The remaining \$50 will go to helping all of the children served by the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps.



If you are a birth mother and are interested in attending the Retreat, please contact Janet at jtyndall@rfkchildren.org or call 978-274-2144.

Only 1,560 tickets will be sold in total giving you a great chance of winning:

- Grand Prize: 2011 Honda Pilot EX-L
- 1st Place: Vizio 42" LCD Flat Screen HDTV
- 2nd Place: AcerNetbook
- 3rd Place: Apple iPod Nano (6th Generation)

The Honda Pilot has been donated by American Honda Motor Co., Inc. Entrants must be at least 18 years old, live in Massachusetts and have a valid driver's license.

To enter, email Karen at kcheyney@rfkchildren.org or call 978-263-5400.

ADOPTION CALENDAR

Please note that items 1-7 are sponsored by the Adoption Community of New England. For more information or to register, please call ACONE at 1-800-93-ADOPT or visit www.adoptioncommunityofne.org.

1. THE 38TH ANNUAL NEW ENGLAND

ADOPTION CONFERENCE, Saturday, April 2 2011, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. A must for all families touched by adoption! 100's of workshops addressing all aspects of adoption. Bright Futures will be exhibiting and our staff will be presenting.

2. Baby Care for Pre-Adoptive First-Time Parents

Learn the basics of baby care, feeding, bathing, clothing and nurturing your new adoptee in the first eighteen months of life, in a friendly environment. Choose from one of the regularly scheduled Saturday classes or call to set up a private class. Saturdays, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm. Next class April 9, 2011.

3. For the Extended Adoptive Family...Your

Special Role What it is like to be an adoptive grand parent, aunt, uncle or other extended family member, how you can embrace and support your children and grandchildren, the language of adoption, issues specific to adopted children and the unique challenges and joys of adoptive families. Next meeting to be announced.

4. Talking About Adoption with Your Children,

Family and Friends Designed for adoptive parents of children up to age 12. How and when to talk with your child about adoption, what is age appropriate adoption language, how to answer intrusive questions from family and friends, what to tell and not tell others about your adoption experience. Next meeting to be announced.

5. Triad Group, Meet with adult members of the

adoption triad who are not in your immediate triad. Come share your experiences and receive support from other adoptive parents, adoptees, birth parents and other family members touched by adoption. Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon. Next meeting March 5, 2011.

6. Birth Families Meet to Discuss Adoption

Come share, laugh, and yes even shed a few tears with other birth family members. This group will take you where you need to go to understand the complexities of living with adoption. Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon. Next meetings February 19, 2011 and March 19, 2011.

7. Other ACONE Offerings: *Making a Lifebook: A practical how to put one together; The Power of Touch: Infant and Child Massage for Pre- and Post-Adoptive Parents; The Silent Children in the Adoptive Blended Family; Adoption in the Schools; Open Adoption Group and many more.*

8. Adoptive Families Together Parent Support

Group Meetings -- Monthly meetings are held in numerous communities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. For information about location, dates and times, please call Lori at 617-587-1522 or visit www.mspcc.org/Page.aspx?pid=446.

9. BirthMom Buds Annual Birthmother's Day

Retreat, April 29, 2011 and through the weekend, Charlotte, North Carolina. This FREE event is a time for birthmothers to come together to celebrate and honor their motherhood and their children. For more info visit www.birthmombuds.com or call 877-790-4174 and ask for Coley.

10. 3rd Annual Rudd Adoption Research

Conference: New Worlds of Adoption Conference 2011: Research-Based Interventions Promoting Attachment, Friday, April 8, 2011. To register or for more information visit www.psych.umass.edu/ruddchair.

11. PACT Family Camp for families who are parenting children of color -- Putting It All Together: Families, Adoption & Race, July 17 - 21, 2011 in Tahoe City, California. This camp brings together families with adopted children of color to share experiences, learn from experts and enjoy community. Connect your children with adopted and non-adopted mentors of color. For more information visit www.pactadopt.org.

**SAVE THE DATE FOR BRIGHT
FUTURES ADOPTION CENTER'S
ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC
AUGUST 13, 2011!**

Talk to your child's adoptive family or birth family now to arrange to spend some time together that day.

Getting Comfortable with Open Adoption (continued)

continued to send updates to her via e-mail, we began to hear much less from her over the years. In fact, there was a gap of several years where we did not hear from her until recently when she contacted us since she would be visiting this area of the country. It was a nice surprise for our family. There are likely several factors as to why we don't hear from her - one of which could be that she still finds the adoption difficult. Also it is not easy to visit since both she and her family live in different states. We make no judgments since everyone experiences life and adoption differently. Our only hope is to continue to ensure she knows that our door is always open. We believe ultimately our son will benefit tremendously. We continue to hope that this recent visit will open up the possibilities of having more contact going forward.

With the maternal grandparents also no longer living in this area, although we stay in touch we do not get to see them but every few years. There are occasional calls, cards and gifts for special occasions. After a fairly recent visit we are talking about possibly using Skype to stay in touch a bit more.

Our relationship with birthfather:

Through the years we have had contact, even if only a few times during the year, including a visit or two sometimes even for Christmas or Easter. This had also been supported by our relationship with his parents, who still live in the area. If he could not be here for a birthday or Christmas, he typically sent a simple gift like a book that meant something to him when he was little. Even though the birthfather lives far away we frequently keep in contact with him via e-mail or phone calls. In fact, recently while visiting he expressed an interest in having more contact than in the past and expanding his relationship with our son. We were delighted when we heard this news!

We continue to maintain a close relationship with our son's paternal birth grandparents. We are very fortunate they still live in this area so we are able to see them quite often.

Everyone experiences life differently - especially birthparents and adoptive parents - birthmothers and birthfathers. Perhaps our son's birthfather has worked through his feelings about the adoption while it might take several more years for the birthmother to arrive at the same place or maybe she never will. Whatever the outcome we remain committed to always being here and open to visits in the hopes that it will create a situation for our son where he can ask questions of his birthparents and possibly in the future, if they both have other children, that he may know the joys of having half siblings.

As we did in the beginning of this process, we need to remember that it is about our son and not about the birth or adoptive families. Only time will tell his whole story and we need to remain open to all the relationships that make him as happy as he can be!



**Come Join the Bright Futures'
Community, Share your Adoption
Stories, Share Photos, Learn from
Others -- Like us on Facebook!**

Enter "Bright Futures Adoption Center Facebook" in your search engine and click on the link.