

inside Open Arms

FALL 2008

OPEN ARMS ADOPTION NETWORK

Director's Remarks



This is the first edition of the triannual newsletter of Open Arms Adoption Network! Within the pages, we will offer you lots of useful information that will help your family thrive, we will extend invitations for fun and learning and we will provide a forum for you to express yourself. We envision this newsletter as a team effort – with contributions from not just the staff but from birth and adoptive families and children too! Our hope is that this newsletter will be yet another way for us all to stay connected and feel a sense of belonging in the adoption community within Open Arms and a connection to the ever growing adoption community all around us.

As you know, in December 2006, we (the adoption program of JFCS of Greater Philadelphia) took on our new name, Open Arms Adoption Network. The *adoption* of our new name was our first mark in the sand to enhance our program and to build on the 150 years of adoption service JFCS

has enjoyed with great integrity. The significant changes include the reinvigoration of our domestic infant adoption program and new partnerships formed with international placing agencies which enables us to continue to provide services for people hoping to complete their family through international adoption.

Good News: Open Arms is delighted to announce the receipt of a generous gift from the Rosenberg Family Fund. This gift will enable Open Arms to reach out to the community in ways only dreamt of before. Under this grant, we have established three new programs: The Life Long Learning Institute, a series of workshops and events designed for all touched by the adoption experience; a scholarship fund to help families with the fees associated with adoption; and a campaign to recruit African American families interested in adopting newborns. Open Arms and JFCS are forever grateful for the support of Margie and David Rosenberg and for their commitment to building healthy families through adoption.

At the invitation of Samost JFCS of Southern New Jersey, Open Arms will be

providing our full range of adoption services at their site in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Open Arms is licensed in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey, but having “a place to call home” in South Jersey will enhance our ability to provide exemplary services to both potential adoptive and birth parents living in New Jersey. We greatly look forward to this partnership and to all the new exciting opportunities it will provide for both agencies and for the families with whom we work.

We hope you enjoy this first edition of the *Inside Open Arms* newsletter. Your suggestions and contributions are welcome!! Although Open Arms has seen some incredible growth in the past 18 months — we feel poised for lots more! We thank you for being a part of our family and we are honored to feel like we are a part of your family. Child-centered adoption is a life-long journey — it's a rich and rewarding journey and we hope you'll keep us around for the life of it — forever!

My best to you,
Meredith Rose, Director
MRose@OpenArmsAdoption.net

Congratulations to Open Arms Families Who Have Recently Adopted

Domestic Infant Adoption	Debra and Mike	May '08	Barbara and Jeff	Sept. '07	
Jill and Karl	Oct. '06	Brian and Julie	July '08	Shari and Jim	Dec. '07
Sacha and Craig	Oct. '06 & Nov. '07		Victoria and Anthony	Feb. '08	
Karen and Richard	Dec. '06	International Adoptions	Randi and Rich	March '08	
Lori and Steven	July '07	Guatemala:	Donna	March '08	
Mary and Philip	July '07	Lisa and Gerry	Dec. '06	Kezia and Randy	April '08
Michele and Michael	Oct. '07 & June '08	Cathy	Jan. '07	Russia:	
Cynthia and Mark	Oct. '07	Tammy and George	March '07	Eve	Dec. '06
Lorraine and Richard	Nov. '07	Sheila and Uziel	April '07	Rebecca and Josh	March '07
Andrea and Ulrich	Dec. '07	Debra and Steven	April '07	Beverly and Christian	April '07
David and Bob	Jan. '08	Amy and Keith	May '07	Miriam and Larry	May '07
Shannon and Eric	March '08	Andrew	July '07	Judy and Avi	Aug. '07
Sheri and Stuart	March '08	Celia and Irving	July '07	Estonia:	
Kimberly and David	March '08	LeeAnn and Lester	July '07	Rodney	Feb. '08
Irene and Ted	April '08	Beth and Carl	Aug. '07		
		Krista and Steve	Aug. '07		
		Martha	Aug. '07		

Staff Inside Open Arms

Director	Meredith Rose
Adoption Manager	Lisa Walters
Outreach Coordinator	Michelle Figueroa
Adoption Coordinator	Michele Smeal
Adoption Coordinator	Erica Davis
Adoption Social Worker	Kelly Worrell
Life-Long Learning Institute Coordinator	Shlomit Twersky
Administrative Assistant	Diane Graham

To reach us, call 267.256.2229

EDITOR

Director of Marketing and Public Relations	Holli Elgart
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JFCS Leadership

Chairman of the Board	Douglas F. Schleicher
President and Chief Executive Officer	Jack Dembow
Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer	Howard Sitron
Chief Financial Officer	Susan Wyland
Vice President of Development and Communications	Pia Eisenberg

JFCS partners with the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia

Potluck Picnic

Open Arms Adoption Network's First Annual Potluck



On a pleasant Sunday afternoon in June, Open Arms hosted our first annual potluck for birth, adoptive, and waiting families in our Domestic Infant Program. Over 60 people attended! Everyone had the opportunity to talk with each other and share stories regarding their adoption experiences. Children played games together and all had the chance to feel like part of a larger community.

It was a great setting for families to make connections and offer support for one another. Several families thanked the agency for providing the opportunity. "It gave us the time to talk with others and see how the families have grown through Open Arms."

For us as an agency it was inspiring to see such a gathering of families all in various stages, but coming together as a community to support each other. To provide more of these opportunities, we will be hosting potlucks for adoptive families at least four times a year.

We are looking forward to our next get together, the annual adoption picnic coming up on September 28 from 11am-2pm at Neshaminy State Park for our domestic and international families.

For more information, please call Michele Smeal, Adoption Coordinator, at 267.256.2233 or email MSmeal@OpenArmsAdoption.net.

International Adoption Update

As many of you know, The Hague Convention of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption entered into force for the United States on April 1, 2008. Implementing the Convention has led to many changes in the U.S. intercountry adoption process. The most prominent change to our program is the halt of adoptions from Guatemala. We all anxiously await news that Guatemala will implement a Hague compliant plan that will allow adoption by U.S. citizens to resume. Currently the focus of efforts in Guatemala has been to work towards completing the adoptions that are still in process since the Hague took force, and to bring those children home to their waiting families. We are pleased to announce that all of our Guatemala families are safely at home with their children, however there are still more than 1,000 U.S. families who have yet to bring their children home.

Open Arms currently provides international adoption services in partnership with two agencies who work in Korea, China, Russia, Colombia, Moldova, and Bulgaria. Adoptions in these countries have not been interrupted by the implementation of The Convention. What partnership means is that Open Arms provides the local adoption services such as homestudy, education, dossier support, and post placement services, while the partnering agency provides the placement portion of the service. The placement agency maintains the relationship with overseas representatives and facilitates the referrals of children in need of adoption.

For more information about the international adoption services of Open Arms, please contact Lisa Walters at 267.256.2232 or lwalters@OpenArmsAdoption.net.

African-American Family Recruitment

Making the decision to plan an adoption for an unborn baby has historically been a choice rarely made by African-American women. Traditionally the African-American community has absorbed these children into its kinship circle and eliminated the need for private, voluntary adoption services. While the number of African-American women choosing adoption is still small in comparison to some other ethnic groups, there has been an increased interest among African American women seeking options counseling during their pregnancies. But for many of them, the options are limited.

African-American women considering adoption are rarely afforded the opportunity to select their child's adoptive home from a pool that includes African-American families. Most agencies have so few minority families waiting to adopt that it is impossible to offer birth parents the option of a same race family for their child. Although many of these children are placed in loving trans-racial adoptive homes, African-American birth parents should have the option of selecting a same race family for their child.

Open Arms Adoption Network, recognizing the need to increase the

number of African-American families available to serve as an adoptive family resource for our birthparents, is pleased to announce a generous grant from the Rosenberg Family Fund to educate, prepare and support minority families committed to adoption. This new initiative will engage community groups, professional organizations and adoption agencies specializing in African-American adoption as partners to provide informational meetings, seminars and ongoing educational workshops for these families. In addition, my role as the liaison between the families, local organizations and Open Arms will offer a streamlined process for all involved with one primary point of access and information. It is our hope that our efforts will allow African-American birth families to have a range of choices when making an adoption plan for their child.

If you have any family members or friends in the African-American community interested in learning more, please invite them to attend our next information meeting on Thursday, November 13, 2008 at 6:30pm or contact Erica T. Davis, Adoption Coordinator at 267.256.2236 or EDavis@OpenArmsAdoption.net

An Adoptive Family's Perspective

After having two biological children, we knew that any other children we brought into our family would be through adoption. We met Meredith Rose through a mutual friend and loved her right away, but we were already working with another agency. We were blessed with a daughter through that other agency and thought we could not have been happier.

But we were wrong. When our daughter Xola was 7 months old, Meredith, who had remembered us and kept our email address, contacted us about another baby girl who needed a home. We knew

instantly that this baby girl, whom we named Omega, was destined to be in our family. Our homestudy had already been updated and it worked out perfectly, even though it didn't happen in the usual way.

Working with Open Arms Adoption Network was such a joy, that when we were ready to adopt again, (less than a year later!) we came back to them to help unite us with another little angel. We were matched very quickly with a birthmom, whom we met and loved. After giving birth though, she decided to parent. We wished her the absolute best and felt honored to have been involved in her process, and while we were heart-broken for a brief time, we trusted that there was a baby out there who needed us more. And very shortly after that Open Arms contacted us about another little



baby, born 12 weeks early, who needed a home. We went to pick up Quincy from the hospital just a few days later.

Some of the things that we really love and appreciate about Open Arms Adoption Network are how well they take care of not only us, but the birth families. It gives us peace knowing that while the birth families

likely are going through one of the most difficult times in their lives, Open Arms is there to support them in any way that they can. We also love how this agency is creating such a wonderful community of

adoptive families with their picnics and get-togethers. And how they continue to offer workshops to support adoptive families as they raise their children. And of course how supportive they are of open adoption.

While we had always craved openness with all our children's birthmothers, Meredith has helped us to develop that relationship, which we had really hoped for, with our youngest baby's birthmom. We look forward to our next visit with her.

Now our little house is bursting at the seams with children, noise, laughter and most of all love. And we wouldn't have it any other way.

—Sacha and Craig Wade and their children, Tenzin, Quincy, Xola, Omega, and Chakra

Notes from a Birthmother

I first found out about Open Arms Adoption in the hospital after my son was born. My boyfriend and I were holding out hope that we would be able to raise our son, but when he came, we knew we couldn't do it. So in the hospital, I spoke with a social worker who told me she would call some adoption agencies and she would get back to me. Two hours later I received a phone call from Michele of Open Arms saying she was going to stop by to speak with me.

Michele was very pleasant from the moment she walked in the door. She took the time to get to know me and to ask why I was choosing adoption for my son and if there were any other options to help me raise him myself. We went over my thoughts of what open adoption was and she gave me a few adoptive family profiles to look over. She stayed while I went over them and asked if I had any questions about the families she was showing me. After my son was placed with his family, she would call me up and ask how I was doing and told me that if I needed someone to talk to, I could call her.

I have to say from the moment that Michele walked into that hospital room until now, I've had a great experience with Open Arms. Everyone I have spoken to so far has been so friendly and caring. They take the time to get to know you, your family and your background. It has been wonderful working with Open Arms and I would recommend it to any woman thinking about adoption for their child.

—Vanessa

BOOK CORNER

CHILDREN'S BOOKS:

Carolyn's Story: A Book About an Adopted Girl by Perry Schwartz will help children understand the adoption process and explore their feelings about being adopted through Carolyn's thoughts on her birthparents, her blended family, and looking different.

I Love My Hair by Natasha Tarpley is a sweet story of self-acceptance, empowerment, and hope. It is a tender tribute to African hair and the bond formed between mother and daughter through the rituals of combing, parting, oiling, and braiding.

The Best Single Mom in the World by Mary Zisk is about a girl whose career-minded mom decides to become a parent and travels overseas to adopt her.

Adopted: The Ultimate Teen Guide by Suzanne Slade enables young adults to explore their feelings as they read the personal experiences of other adopted teens, a question and answer section written by experienced adoption professionals and information on transracial, international and open adoptions.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS:

Adoption and Prenatal Alcohol and Drug Exposure: Research, Policy and Practice, Edited by Richard P. Barth, David Brodzinsky, and Madelyn Freundlich is a resource that pulls together all the known information and interprets it in the light of adoption practice. This new book, published by the Child Welfare League of America and the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, draws on the knowledge of national and international experts in the fields of prenatal substance exposure and adoption.

Does Anybody Else Look Like Me? A Parent's Guide to Raising Multiracial Children by Donna Jackson Nakazawa offers advice from both parents of children with multiracial or transracial adoption backgrounds, and from the children themselves.

Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother by Jana Wolff immerses the reader in the experience of an adoptive mother living through open, transracial adoption.

Soul Sunday: A Family's Guide to an Exploring Faith and Teaching Tolerance by Carrie Brown-Wolf explores a practice developed by author Carrie Brown-Wolf to teach her internationally adopted children about world religions.

The Kid: An Adoption Story by Dan Savage is a hope-filled story of a gay adoptive couple's journey into parenthood. As an added bonus, it provides a wonderful sense of how an agency committed to open adoption works.

FOR ALL:

Now We Are One: Faces of International Adoption by David Wecker profiles 15 Cincinnati families who were formed through international adoption. Short, descriptive essays accompany Michael Wilson's black-and-white photographs of each family, giving us glimpses into their everyday lives.

JFCS

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2008 Open Arms Adoption Network Fall/Winter Calendar

LIFE-LONG LEARNING INSTITUTE: WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS

Open Adoption Seminar

September 14, 2008, 10am–4:30pm, \$50 per family

FACILITATORS: Meredith Rose, MSW, MPH, Michelle Figueroa, MS

Location: Lower Moreland Township Community Room 2nd Floor of the Huntingdon Valley Library 625 Red Lion Road, Huntingdon Valley, PA (use entrance by lower level parking lot of the library)

Domestic Adoption Law Night

October 6, 2008, 6–8pm

FACILITATORS: Denise Bierly, Esq. (licensed in PA),

Donald Cofsky, Esq (licensed in NJ)

Transracial Adoptions

October 30, 2008, 6–8:30pm

FACILITATOR: Abby Ruder, BA, MFT



Creating & Maintaining a Healthy Open Adoption

November 12, 2008, 6–8:00pm

FACILITATOR: Meredith Rose, MSW, MPH

Creating Family Profiles and Child Lifebooks

November 20, 2008, 6–8:00pm

FACILITATORS: Meredith Rose, MSW, MPH, Michele Smeal, BSW



International Adoptions: The Effects of Institutionalization

December 4, 2008, 6–8:30pm

FACILITATOR: Davida P. Harlem, PHD

The Life-Long Learning Institute, a program of Open Arms Adoption Network, is committed to offering supportive and enlightening workshops to all those touched by adoption or considering adoption.

REGISTRATION AND COST: Registration required at least 48 hours prior to scheduled date. To register call 267.256.2053 or email info@OpenArmsAdoption.net. \$25 per family unless noted. Location: JFCS Center City Office, 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia (unless noted)

FREE INFORMATION MEETINGS ON ADOPTION

Thinking about adoption? We welcome you to attend our free information meetings to learn about our programs and meet the staff.

Domestic Infant Open Adoption

September 3, 2008 • 6:30-8pm Penn Wynne Library, 130 Overbrook Parkway, Wynnewood

September 15, 2008 • 6:30-8pm Chestnut Hill Library, 8711 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia

October 2, 2008 • 6:30-8pm 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia

October 16, 2008 • 6:30-8pm Ludington Library, 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr

November 3, 2008 • 6:30-8pm Chestnut Hill Library, 8711 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia

December 3, 2008 • 6:30-8pm 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia

December 15, 2008 • 6:30-8pm Doylestown Library Center, 150 S. Pine St., Doylestown

Adopting in the African American Community

September 9, 2008 • 6:30-8pm 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia

November 13, 2008 • 6:30-8pm Imperial Towers #123 3801 Conshohocken Avenue, Philadelphia

International Adoption

September 18, 2008 • 6:30-8pm 10125 Verree Road, Philadelphia

October 22, 2008 • 6:30-8pm 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia

November 20, 2008 • 6:30-8pm Imperial Towers #123 3801 Conshohocken Avenue, Philadelphia

