

# inside Open Arms

SPRING/SUMMER 2009

OPEN ARMS ADOPTION NETWORK

## Director's Remarks

### Making it Last



**One of the most** frequently asked questions about open adoption has to be “How do you make the connection last?” I do not need to offer a well developed, highly researched or analytical answer to that question. My response is typically, “How do you make the *other* relationships in your life last?” That’s it. We all know that there are common elements in all of our enduring relationships...whether this relationship is with a childhood friend, a college roommate, cousins, aunts or even people you knew for a brief, but important time in your life – there are likely similar reasons why this connection has continued to hold steady. Typically, there is an acknowledgement that this person and your connection to them is valuable and meaningful. You are likely to be very flexible, patient and compassionate because this relationship is important to you. My point is that if you have successfully managed to keep connected to friends and family over the years – maintaining a vital open adoption will be a natural for you. Our long-term relationships are often dynamic in nature – you can expect the same from

your open adoption relationship. There will likely be months or years when you are in frequent contact – and other months or years when your contact wanes. A “drop-off” in contact does not mean your connection is faltering or failing – but simply reminds us that our open adoption relationships are dynamic and can change over the years... just as all your other relationships do. Cultivate it! Nurture it! If your commitment to always staying connected is strong – you will weather the dynamic nature of this most important relationship. As I watch my eleven-year old daughter emailing her birthmom about the happenings of her weekend, I feel great satisfaction that we kept our connection vital and healthy over the years – so that at this stage of my daughter’s life – this important relationship is hers to access and enjoy. We, at Open Arms, wish you the best in looking ahead to your future open adoption and we look forward to supporting you to make your open adoption thrive and endure, so that your child can reap its rich benefits.

Happy Summer!  
—Meredith Rose, Director  
MRose@OpenArmsAdoption.net

## Staff Inside Open Arms

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Director                                 | Meredith Rose     |
| Adoption Coordinator                     | Erica Davis       |
| Outreach Coordinator                     | Michelle Figueroa |
| Administrative Assistant                 | Diane Graham      |
| Report Coordinator                       | Gail Koplin       |
| Adoptive Family Support Leader           | Michele LeMasney  |
| Adoption Coordinator                     | Michele Smeal     |
| Life-Long Learning Institute Coordinator | Shlomit Twersky   |
| Adoption Manager                         | Lisa Walters      |
| Adoption Coordinator                     | Kelly Worrell     |

To reach us, call 267.256.2229

### EDITOR

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| Director of Marketing and Public Relations | Holli Elgart |
|--|--------------|

### 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                              | John Sawyer           |
| Vice President of Development and Communications     | Pia Eisenberg         |
| Human Resources Director                             | Byron Hedges          |

JFCS partners with the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia



## Congratulations to Open Arms Families Who Have Recently Adopted

### Domestic Infant Adoption:

|                    |           |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Suze and Troy      | Sept. '08 |
| Heather and David  | Sept. '08 |
| David and Michelle | Sept. '08 |
| Shawn and Michelle | Sept. '08 |
| Sue and David      | Dec. '08  |
| Megan and Thor     | Dec. '08  |
| David and Michelle | Dec. '08  |

|                     |           |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Craig and Christine | Jan. '09  |
| John and Joann      | Jan. '09  |
| Amy and Jamie       | March '09 |
| Trish and Jerri     | March '09 |
| Dee and Naomi       | March '09 |
| Andrew and Miriam   | April '09 |
| Megan and Thor      | May '08   |

### International:

#### China

|                  |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| Tim and Amy      | Sept. '08 |
| Hidee and Robert | Feb. '09  |

#### Korea

|                 |          |
|-----------------|----------|
| David and Kathi | July '08 |
|-----------------|----------|

## “Coffee Talk”...

**We have had** five sessions of “Coffee Talk” so far and all I can say is “Wow!!!” I am Michele LeMasney, the Adoptive Family Support Leader and the mother of four children, two of whom were adopted through Open Arms. While I had envisioned that this program would be both helpful and enjoyable for our families and potential families, I had no idea just how much it would grow to mean to them...and me! Each session brings us something new and exciting to talk about. I cannot believe the range of topics that we manage to cover in such a short amount of time! Friendships have been formed and much support has been offered to those who are excitedly waiting “to be chosen” and for those who are new parents! We are growing at each Coffee Talk session as the word seems to be spreading about us and I always look forward to greeting new families and to see what each new month brings!

If you have not heard about “Coffee Talk” yet, it is just a very informal opportunity for our families here at Open Arms to come together and share adoption experiences, build friendships and support one another. It is not a mandatory agency event and none of the other staff members from Open Arms are present. In order to accommodate everyone from both Pennsylvania and New Jersey, we alternate between both states every other month. I am hoping that you will consider joining families at one of our upcoming discussion groups. Even if you can only spare an hour, or cannot bring your partner...come anyway and share your experiences, your hopes and even your frustrations with us...and if you are shy...just come and listen! We’d still love to see you there!

I very much look forward to meeting you and I hope to get to know you all better in the coming months! In the meantime, if you have any questions, concerns or meeting location ideas, I’d love to hear all about it!

**For more information, contact Michele LeMasney, Adoptive Family Support Leader, at 856.701.1563 or MLeMasney@OpenArmsAdoption.net**



## African-American Family Recruitment: Can You Afford to Adopt?

**Many African-American families** often perceive the fees associated with agency adoptions as roadblocks to their building a family through adoption. Although many families can afford to pay the fees associated with private adoption, they often state that paying a fee for services makes them feel as though they are “buying a baby.” As a result many families choose to adopt through the public child welfare system or not at all. Because of this fact, many agencies have a lower fee scale for families open to adopting African-American infants. Open Arms’ fee schedule is based on the premise that fees should be assessed based on the professional services provided and not on the race of the child. Families who adopt African-American infants are embraced, educated, and supported as fully as all families working with our agency. *Why then should a child’s race determine the adoptive family’s fee?* Justifying this practice would diminish the worth of the child and Open Arms’ believes in the intrinsic worth and value of all people and therefore will continue to promote equity and fairness in its policies and practices. Families planning to adopt should be aware that there are several avenues available to them that could help defray or eliminate the costs of their adoption related expenses. The Adoption Tax Credit, employer sponsored adoption benefit programs, and grants through private organizations can be valuable resources for families considering adoption.

**The Adoption Tax Credit** is a federal guarantee that provides a tax credit (an amount that can be deducted directly from the taxes you owe for six years) for expenses

incurred in the adoption of a child. Adoptive parents take the full amount of the credit if their income does not exceed \$182,180 and a lesser amount as their household income increases. The tax credit is now \$12,150. This is a dollar for dollar tax credit and is a wonderful opportunity for families hoping to build their family through adoption.

Each year the **Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption** applauds companies with adoption friendly policies. The benefits range from \$5,000 to \$23,000 and include various weeks of paid maternity/paternity leave. More information is available at [www.davethomasfoundation.org](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org).

Many private organizations such as **HelpUsAdopt.org** and **Shaohannah’s Hope** assist families planning to build their families through adoption. These organizations have eligibility requirements and most require a completed homestudy by a licensed adoption agency at the time a family submits their application for assistance.

The internet is a wonderful resource for finding out more about all of the options listed above. If you have any family members or friends in the African American community interested in learning more, please invite them to call our offices for details on our next information meeting geared towards adopting in the African American Community.

**For more information contact Erica T. Davis, Adoption Coordinator, at 267.256.2236 or via email at EDavis@OpenArmsAdoption.net**

## New Jersey Happenings!

**In addition to** our offices in Pennsylvania, Open Arms is up and running in two new branch offices in New Jersey. We have always held licenses to practice in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but have only recently had “a place to call home” in New Jersey. Our new New Jersey offices are located in Cherry Hill and Mt. Laurel. And we are fully staffed in both offices — providing services to families hoping to build their families through adoption and for women exploring their pregnancy options. In addition, we are also happy to report that we have expanded our Lifelong

Learning Institute programming into New Jersey. You can find a list of trainings, events and information sessions on our website, [www.OpenArmsAdoption.net](http://www.OpenArmsAdoption.net). Our information meetings are also now held monthly at the Cherry Hill JCC for anyone interested in learning a little more about adoption and our program!

**For more information contact Kelly Worrell, Adoption Coordinator, New Jersey at 856.424.1333, ext 177 or KWorrell@OpenArmsAdoption.net**

## Love Story: Irene, Ted and T.J.

**Ted and I knew** we wanted children since we began dating. After being married for three years, we ran into some obstacles. We never thought that adoption was going to be where the love of our life was going to come from, but after three years of failed fertility treatments it was time to take the big step. Fortunately I worked with many women who had similar experiences and had adopted years earlier. Although times were different then, the emotions were all the same. Ted works with all men and he said it was amazing how once he started talking about adoption, many of them came out of the woodwork and opened up about their own experiences with adoption.

Meredith Rose had been highly recommended from a social worker who had heard her speak. After losing her telephone number a few times, I finally called, only to find out she no longer worked with that agency. Back to the drawing board! I discovered that Meredith was working at Open Arms. We set up a meeting. Meredith made Ted and I feel comfortable and safe and we were on the road to adoption.

Initially we weren't decided on either domestic or international adoption. At the time we started the process the international route was going through some changes. We decided to go domestic and would wait and see where that would take us. I thought the waiting was going to be the hardest part, in actuality it wasn't. We frequently attended seminars. Sometimes I went with my husband, sometimes alone and sometimes with our Open Arms social

worker Michele Smeal. **Open Arms** helps keep you busy and makes you feel so special during this emotional time. You make good relationships, not only with birthparents, but also with other adoptive parents who understand exactly what you're going through.

Our son's birthparents could not have been more open to us. Our first meeting with Ted and Eileen (coincidentally our names are Ted and Irene) was at their home. We sat outside together on that beautiful April day. It took off from there. Meredith was wonderful in opening up the door and we just chatted away getting to know a little bit more about each other. We only met six days before T.J.'s birth, which was a scheduled C-section. The



Ted, T.J. and Irene

birthfather, whose name is also Ted came and got us after T.J. was born and we all went together to the nursery for the first time like one big happy family. Needless to say, some tears were shed. T.J.'s birthmother, Eileen allowed me to be the first one to hold T.J. — there are no words to describe how I felt holding my adorable son.

We were at the hospital with T.J.'s birthparents every day from sun-up to sun-down. Three days later, we brought our most precious and beautiful son home. One cannot imagine all the emotions you feel until you actually go through it. Eileen had said "I want this day to be perfect for baby T.J., Irene and Ted" as she stared out the window with the birthfather by her side. After our time together, we truly understand why open adoption is absolutely the way to go.

— Irene and Ted

## Adopting from Korea

**International adoption** from Korea remains one of the oldest and continually stable options for adopting internationally. Open Arms partners with Spence Chapin for Korean adoptions and in 2009, fifty to sixty adoptions are expected to complete. The program began in 1975 and has continually found wonderful permanent US families for about fifty orphaned children from Korea each year.



Noah and Matthew

The adoption services of Korea are unique because of the wonderful foster care system and the level of openness they offer in adoption. Children wait for their permanent families in loving foster homes as opposed to being in an institutional setting. A Dear Birthparent letter prepared by you is given to your child's birth family and they have access to continued information through the Social Welfare Society (SWS) in Korea. You will also have social and medical information about the birth family to share with your child. While the level of openness is not the same as in a domestic adoption, it is an unusual exchange when compared to other international adoptions. The Spence Chapin/Open Arms partnership works with the SWS in Korea to ensure that loving permanent homes are identified for waiting children in Korea. Families receive a thorough child study profile completed by a social worker employed by the SWS, a medical report, and several pictures. The referral information is quite extensive when compared to other countries. Most of the children are about 8-10 months old when they come home with their adoptive families. Travel to Korea is now required. Married couples under the ages of 44 years are eligible to adopt.

For more information contact Lisa Walters, Manager, at 267.256.2232 or [LWalters@OpenArmsAdoption.net](mailto:LWalters@OpenArmsAdoption.net)

## BOOK CORNER

### CHILDREN'S BOOKS:

**Nappy Hair**, by Carolivia Herron (\$6.99). Explains the love of a large extended family for their little girl. Celebrates African American hair and culture. Endorsed by our own multicultural family, The Martins

**Sam's Sister**, by Juliet C. Bond (\$18). Tenderly describes a birthmother's choice to plan an open adoption and how her 5-year old daughter, who she's parenting, understands the plan and experiences a continued relationship with her little sister.

**Bonding Through Touch: Infant Massage for Adoptive Families** (DVD) by Three Hearts (\$20). Video instruction on how to engage your new family member in bonding through touch, voice and scent. The video encourages all members of the family, including older siblings, to participate in bonding via massage and touch.

### ADOPTIVE PARENTS:

**Adoption and The Schools: A Resource Guide for Parents and Teachers**, by Lansing Wood and Nancy Ng (\$25). The book is written by two adoptive mothers for

parents and teachers of children from pre-k through high school. They provide practical knowledge exploring "the impact of adoption on education and the educational process by educating educators about adoption."

**The Joy of Family Traditions**, by Jennifer Trainer Thompson (\$16.95). The book celebrates the interaction of the adoptee's culture and customs into the multicultural families' traditions. It consists of four seasonal sections that describe holidays and special occasions originating in Russia, China, Thailand, India and other countries

## 2009 Open Arms Adoption Network Spring Calendar

### LIFE-LONG LEARNING INSTITUTE: WORKSHOPS

**WORKSHOP LOCATION:** 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia (unless noted)  
**FEE:** \$25 per family (unless noted) for families not yet affiliated with Open Arms Adoption Network.

#### Open Adoption Seminar

**April 19 • 10:00am–4:30pm**

**FACILITATOR:** Meredith Rose, MSW, MPH

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

**FEE:** \$50 per family

#### Attachment and the Adoptive Family: Focus on the Parents' Journey

**April 23 • 6:00–8:00pm**

**FACILITATOR:** Joni Mantell, LCSW

#### Baby Care Basics

**May 6 • 6:00–8:30pm**

**FACILITATOR:** Susan Slear, RN, CCE, CHBE, IBCLC

#### Domestic Adoption Law Night

**May 13 • 6:00–8:00pm**

**FACILITATORS:** Denise Bierly, Esq., licensed in Pennsylvania;  
Donald Cofsky, Esq., licensed in New Jersey

#### The Effects of Substance Abuse During Pregnancy

**May 19 • 6:00–8:30pm**

**FACILITATOR:** Roxanne Green, MPH

#### Transracial Adoption: Becoming a Multi-Racial Family

**June 4 • 6:00–8:30pm**

**FACILITATOR:** Abby Ruder, MFT

#### Exploring Children's Developmental Understanding of Adoption

**June 16 • 6:00–8:30pm**

**FACILITATOR:** Abby Ruder, MFT

**REGISTRATION AND COST:** Registration required at least 48 hours prior to all meetings. To register call 267.256.2053 or email [info@OpenArmsAdoption.net](mailto:info@OpenArmsAdoption.net)



### 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. Registration required prior to all meetings.

#### Domestic Infant Open Adoption

**April 14th • 6:30-8:00pm** 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA

**May 11th • 6:30-8:00pm** 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA

**May 12th • 6:30-8:00pm** Katz JCC on the Weinberg Jewish Community Campus  
1301 Springdale Road, Cherry Hill, NJ

**May 27th • 6:30-8:00pm** Yardley-Makefield Library  
1080 Edgewood Road, Yardley, PA

**June 8th • 6:30-8:00pm** Katz JCC on the Weinberg Jewish Community Campus  
1301 Springdale Road, Cherry Hill, NJ

**June 25th • 6:30-8:00pm** 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA



#### Adopting in the African American Community

**April 2nd • 6:30-8:00pm** 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA

**May 5th • 6:30-8:00pm** Katz JCC on the Weinberg Jewish Community Campus, 1301 Springdale Road, Cherry Hill, NJ

**June 3rd • 6:30-8:00pm** Imperial Towers, 3801 Conshohocken Avenue, #123, Philadelphia, PA

#### International Adoption

**May 21st • 6:30-8:00pm** 10125 Verree Road, Philadelphia, PA

**June 18th • 6:30-8:00pm** 10125 Verree Road, Philadelphia, PA



**TO REGISTER** call 267.256.2053 or email [info@OpenArmsAdoption.net](mailto:info@OpenArmsAdoption.net)