

2007-2008

Annual Report



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Dear Friends,

This is a very exciting time for all of us at Open Adoption & Family Services (OA&FS). We completed 56 adoptions this fiscal year, surpassing our totals for the past five years. And we still hold the distinct honor of completing more domestic infant adoptions than any other agency in Oregon or Washington.

At OA&FS, we have made great strides in building partnerships with Planned Parenthood, Healthy Start, Backline and other organizations who support women facing unplanned pregnancies. This year I became the Co-Chair of the Teen Pregnancy and Young Parenting Network and a Board member of the Oregon Teen Pregnancy Task Force. We have been invited to present at the Oregon Adolescent Sexuality Conference and the Oregon School Based Health Conference. We have recently hired an Outreach Specialist in our Seattle office who will engage in similar networking efforts in Washington.

This past year has also marked the completion of several of our special projects. Our children's book *Rain or Shine*, is now in print and available on our website. Through the feedback of our Board, staff and OA&FS families we are integrating the Culture of Openness into our program, seminar and *Open Page* articles. We are also in the midst of re-branding, having recently designed a new logo and stationery suite. Please watch for our new website later this fall and new brochures in the winter months. This coming year, we are excited about our continued expansion of services to the Latino population and to Eastern Oregon and Washington. We have greatly increased the distribution of our Spanish materials and have improved our Spanish interpretive services. And our outreach contacts in Eastern Oregon and Washington now number over 100, thanks to the excellent work of our two new staff members in those areas.

Most importantly, we are fortunate to enjoy the ongoing support from all of our OA&FS community members. Many families who adopted several years ago regularly send pictures, share their stories, and reach out to new families as mentors. We continue to welcome new OA&FS families into our community as we help them build lifelong connections through their open adoptions and make new friends at OA&FS events. We look forward to nurturing our active open adoption community in the future as it continues to grow and expand. From all of the Board and staff here at OA&FS, thank you for your support. We could not do this important work without you!

Shari Levine

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OA&FS Executive Director

Board Member Profile

This fall, OA&FS Adoptive Mother Beth Paros, of Seattle, Washington, will join our Board of Directors. In addition to being mom to Samuel, age 7, and Lela, age 3, Beth is an active advocate for OA&FS having written numerous articles and speaking about open adoption at a number of public forums.

I. How did you first learn about open adoption and what was your first impression?

I first learned about open adoption through my husband's co-worker who had adopted through OA&FS. My first impression was that open adoption was not necessarily for me! I was very hesitant, as most of the anecdotes I heard sounded like co-parenting to me. The IT boom happened shortly after that- Dan was swept up with work, I went back to graduate school, and it was many years before we revisited our options, including adoption.

...continued on page 5

2007-2008 Highlights

Reaching Out to the Latino Community

This past year has seen a tremendous increase in our services for the Latino Community. Our efforts have ranged from partnering with local professionals who work closely with the Latino populations in OR and WA to hiring two new Spanish speaking counselors. We have been able to increase our marketing efforts and create more formal relationships with translators in both the Portland and Seattle offices. A number of factors, such as the high rate of unplanned pregnancies and the parallel between open adoption and the open family network in the Latino culture, continue to fuel our commitment to better serve the growing Latino populations in OR and WA.

Expanding Services in Eastern OR and WA

Eastern OR and WA are historically under served in numerous social and health care arenas. This is due to geographical barriers and to larger populations residing on the western urban seaboard of both states. OA&FS has received overwhelming feedback from social service agencies in the Tri-City Area of Eastern WA and from Eastern OR expressing their need for adoption services. In February 2007, we hired Angie Lunde, in Joseph, OR and in March 2008, we hired Ellen Kathren, in Richland, WA to serve the rural regions of both states. Through making phone calls, providing presentations and visiting local social service agencies, Angie and Ellen have secured over 100 new professional contacts. These new outreach contacts include DHS workers, hospital staff, and high school teachers and other professionals who support women who are faced with unplanned pregnancies.

Adoption Dialogue

On November 15th, 2007, in partnership with Backline, we hosted the Adoption Dialogue, an educational event for professionals. The Adoption Dialogue was more successful and had greater impact on the pro-choice community than we had dreamed possible. We mailed invitations to over 2,000 professionals and sent a series of emails and press releases. Our work resulted in an amazing turn-out of almost 70 people from 6 different states. One of our original goals for the Adoption Dialogue was to break down stereotypes and educate attendants about open adoption and how OA&FS upholds a pro-choice practice. Based on comments from participants and further conversations well after the event, we were overwhelmingly successful. Since the Adoption Dialogue, we have visited over 10 organizations providing further education on all-options counseling and open adoption. We view the Adoption Dialogue as a monumental step in changing the face of adoption in the NW to one that is progressive, honest and collaborative. We are very proud of the lasting impact the Adoption Dialogue had on the Reproductive Rights community. In fact, we recently hired Jodi Bernstein, an enthusiastic attendee of the Adoption

Dialogue, as a counselor in our Seattle office. She left her position of ten years at Planned Parenthood when a job became available at OA&FS, stating we were the only other agency she would ever consider working for!

Reaching Out to Professionals

This past year we have been able to greatly increase our outreach efforts and improve the tools we have to promote the agency. OA&FS adoptive father, Scobie Puchtler, volunteered considerable time and effort producing, directing and editing two DVDs for OA&FS: A Birth Mother's Story and Teens of Open Adoption. In March, we had 2,000 of each DVD made and at the end of April we sent out free copies to 1,200 of our outreach contacts. The cutting edge DVD format has been enthusiastically received by the community, especially by teens and the professionals that work with them. With the DVDs in hand, we have had some very important and specific breakthroughs in forming new relationships with our outreach contacts. These relationships are with three major organizations: the OR Department of Human Services, Healthy Start and the Portland Public School district.

Culture of Openness

Although we distinguish our open adoptions as being characterized by genuine, face-to-face relationships, we recognize that openness can be manifested in many ways. Beginning in June 2007, we embarked on a year long journey in which we explored the range of openness in OA&FS adoptions. We created a focus group made up of staff, board members and adoptive parents to gather stories about the variety of experiences adoptive families have. The feedback has helped us to specifically address the ongoing needs of families with little or no contact and insure they feel part of our community. We have assessed all phases of our program (seminar, adoption planning, post-placement support, etc.) and are in the process of altering or adding to our services to prepare families to strive for and maintain a healthy, child-centered culture of openness regardless of the amount of face to face contact with birthparents. In response to the three issues of the Open Page dedicated to the Culture of Openness, we received a number of emails and phone calls from adoptive parents expressing their gratitude and relief. Many adoptive parents shared their stories with us which turned out to be a great way for counselors to reconnect with clients and offer support.

Did you know? In 2007-2008:

- OA&FS received 272 calls from women facing unplanned pregnancies.
- OA&FS received 476 calls from prospective adoptive parents.
- OA&FS staff spoke face-to-face with over 2,500 professionals and students about open adoption.
- Over 300 people attended OA&FS events.

Thank you, 2007-2008 Supporters...

Gifts of \$1,000 +

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Beth and Dan Boerner
Maureen Burke and Michael Tucker
Chris Chandler and Adam Baker
Mark Hunker and Jeff Shields
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Gifts of \$500 - \$999

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Gifts of \$100 - \$199

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57% for Lifegivers

In 2007-2008 OA&FS received a record number of donations from OA&FS community members in support of Lifegivers, covering 57% of the expenses for our annual Birthmother's retreat. *Thank you!*

Gifts to \$99

Anonymous (3)
 Jason Allor and Erika Johansen
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 Our friends who use Good Search
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Thank you, Volunteers...

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 Alex Trotter
 Melanie Turnbull
 Britt Udy
 Melissa Valencia-Manerini
 Matthew Werres and Arjan Emmerich
 Megan Zimmerman

100% Giving!

In 2007-2008 OA&FS
 received donations from each
 of our employees and board
 members. *Thank you!*

Board Member Profile...continued from page 1



2. Why in particular, did you choose OA&FS?

When we reconsidered adoption, I actually started with the yellow pages. Of the services available, most were faith-based. OA&FS was not religiously affiliated, so that attracted me. By that time, the Seattle office of OA&FS was fully

established and we also had the opportunity to participate in a seminar for prospective adoptive parents. After reading the required materials and completing the seminar, I went from “You’ve got to be kidding!” to: “This makes a lot of sense!”

3. Where were you when you got the call?

With my son, Samuel, I was in the hospital awaiting my discharge. My appendix had ruptured and I almost died. I got a call from Dan who asked, “Are you sitting down?” and I said, “Are you joking? I’m in the hospital!” He told me that we had been chosen by a woman who was 6 to 7 months along in her pregnancy. I remember pacing up and down the halls with my IV tree, telling all the nurses that we had been selected. I was so excited over the prospect of becoming a parent.

With my daughter, Lela, it was totally different. Our counselor in Seattle called us while Dan was at work. Lela had already been born when we were chosen. Dan left work, picked up diapers and we went straight to the hospital to meet Lela and her birthmother. It happened so fast, but after a much longer wait of 10 months. With Sam, we were in the pool for only 6 weeks, but waited months for him to be born!

4. What was the most awkward question someone has asked you about adoption and what was your response?

After both Sam and Lela were born, there were a lot of questions about why we needed to keep in touch with their birthfamilies. There was a lot of unfounded fear that the birthmothers would take them away. Everyone was very protective of me. It’s interesting, because in reality nothing could be further from the truth. When I was up all night changing diapers and getting bottles, I never once worried about this or felt insecure as a mother. My standard response had become: you can never have too many people who love you!

5. As your open adoption relationships have unfolded, were there any surprises along the way?

There has been nothing except pleasant surprises. Seeing all of the relationships develop has been wonderful. We have become very close to Samuel’s birth grandmother and great

grandmother. And Lela’s birthmother has been so confident and supportive. And of course, there is Ashleigh, Lela’s birthsister. Ashleigh is a beloved member of our family; she’s like a daughter to me.

6. Why is openness important to you today, seven years after becoming an adoptive mother?

Openness is actually more important to me today because my son is very aware at his age and is asking questions about the circumstances of his birth. We talk about his birthfamily and read *Rain or Shine*. I want him to be aware of his entire family history and appreciate the choice his birthmother made. A lot of people love him and I want him to be proud of that.

7. What hopes do you have for your children as they grow up in open adoptions?

I hope they understand and appreciate their own family history. Dan and I both want to impart our values to our kids. In an open adoption this comes naturally. We can model honesty, respect for other people, and healthy, loving relationships. And it works! On his last birthday, Sam walked around, telling everyone, “I have a birthmom and she is so cool!”

8. Words of advice for prospective adoptive parents?

You need to stay open to all of the potential that exists. You have to be secure in the decisions you make in order to deal with skeptics. You need to be honest when dealing with yourself, with other people, and with your kids. Don’t ever operate out of fear. Adoption needs to be an affirmative choice. The birthmother will choose you as adoptive parents based on the quality of your shared experiences, your honesty, as well as your individual strengths and vulnerabilities.

9. As a new Board Member of OA&FS, what do you hope to accomplish?

I have a secret agenda! I want to support the Seattle office in their outreach efforts and in their work with prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents. I am excited to present my perspective to the Board while acting as a liaison for these clients. I am personally committed to the projects like the Culture of Openness, which encourage public dialogue and ongoing education for adoptive parents and anyone else who is interested. For me, it all comes back to education and providing resources in the form of logistical support to those in need.

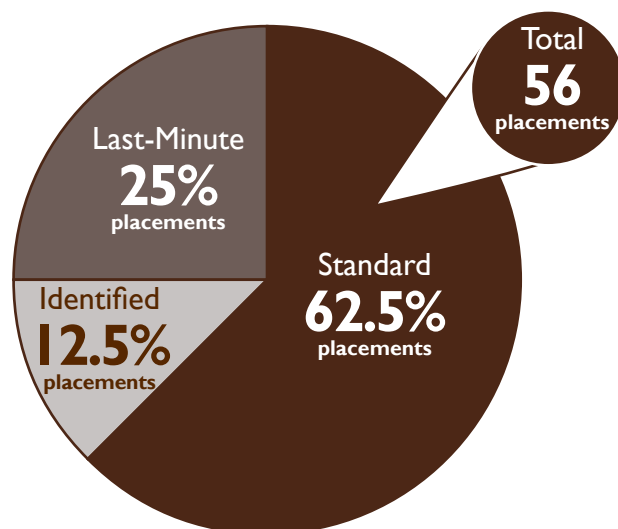
10. Pets?

We have one big cat, Noki, who is over 7 years old. The newest addition to our family is a land snail, named Gary (after the snail character in *SpongeBob SquarePants*).

Service Statistics

July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008

- OA&FS completed 56 adoptions during the last fiscal year. On average, we complete 40 to 60 adoptions per year.
- Placements with gay and lesbian couples totaled 13 (23%).
- 98% of the children placed were newborns.
- 59% of the children placed were male and 41% were female.
- 61% of the children placed were Caucasian, 28% of mixed ethnicity, 9% Hispanic, and 2% African American.
- 52% of the children placed had no prenatal drug or alcohol exposure; 29% had mild exposure; 12% had moderate exposure; and 7% had severe exposure.
- The average wait in our adoptive parent pool for all families was 11.5 months.
- The average wait in our adoptive pool for gay and lesbian families was 18.5 months.
- The average number of adoptive parents in the pool was 57.
- Adoptive parents and birthparents agreed to an average of 3 visits per year in their Open Adoption Agreements.
- Birthparents received counseling for an average of 10 weeks prior to placement.
- The average age of birthmothers was 23 years old.
- The average age of birthfathers was 23 years old.
- The average age of adoptive parents was 38 years old.
- 34% of placements involved no pregnancy-related expenses. 66% of placements involved pregnancy-related expenses at an average of \$1,437.



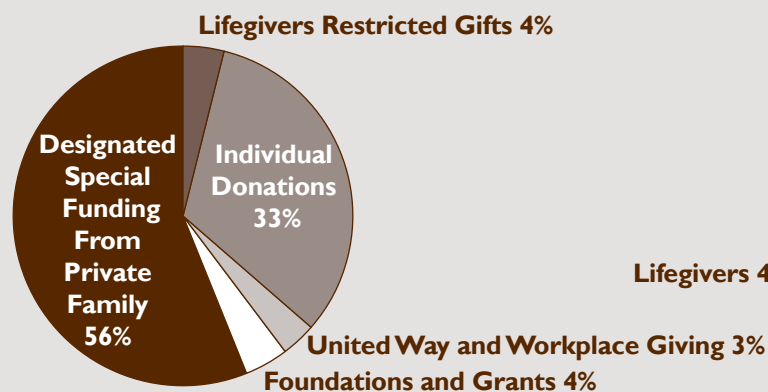
Type of Placements

Standard open adoption: The agency brings together adoptive parents and birthparents and provides adoption planning prior to birth of child.

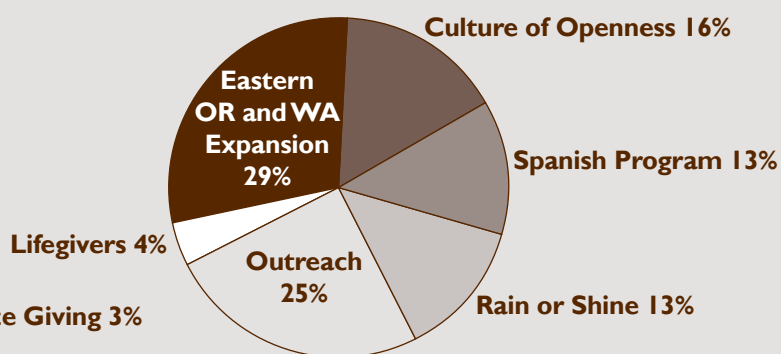
Last-minute placement: Birthparents contact agency for the first time from the hospital during delivery or after baby is born.

Identified adoption: Birthparents and adoptive parents find one another outside of the agency process and come to the agency for adoption planning and placement services.

Donations



Special Projects



Each year the funds generated by our adoption fees cover most of the costs associated with our adoption program. However, in order to implement special projects, like the ones listed above, we are reliant on grants and donations. We could not continue this work without your generous support. Thank you!



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