



2016-2017 Annual Report

Our open adoption
has evolved
into something
I never expected.
We are family.

~ Katelyn, Birthmother

OA&FS birthmother Katelyn celebrates her marriage to husband David with birth son Zachary and Zac's adoptive parents Rick and Shelley.


Open Adoption
& Family Services
Creating Lifelong Connections

Photo Credit: Ben Lundberg Photography, Eugene, Oregon.

A story of empathy and love.

by Shari Levine

Josh and Matt are natural stewards of open adoption; the core tenets of compassion and respect are reflected in their relationships. It's a worldview that is deeply meaningful to them. When asked what inspired this philosophy, Josh said, "My own struggles with my family – we had a pretty significant falling out over the whole gay thing. I know what it feels like to be abandoned and lost and not able to get your head above water. Coming from my own trauma I am able to find more compassion for people who have experienced or are experiencing a trauma."

First step, foster adoption.

Initially Josh and Matt planned to adopt through DHS in a state adoption. As foster parents they quickly fell in love with the sibling group of three who were placed in their care, and hoped to adopt them. However, they were troubled by the DHS process and that the birthmom, Misty, felt vilified.

Misty: "I felt that DHS was trying to control the situation, verses considering the needs of me and my kids, and how they could help us succeed."

Josh and Matt saw Misty in a sympathetic light and wanted to connect with her and understand her. As they reached out and created a bridge into her world, they listened to her story and empathized with the challenges she'd faced in her life. "It was our choice to sit and get to know her. Everybody deserves a chance, and because we loved the kids we were fostering so much, we wanted to get to know her and find out where she was coming from. It's basic compassion."

Respect + listening = trust.

Misty hadn't experienced many people in her life who sincerely wanted know her and she slowly let her guard down. Said Josh, "in these talks we learned of the tragedies in her life. We listened and she began to trust us. She saw our compassion, and knew that we really cared. She saw that we treated her the same way we treated her children – with love, kindness and respect."

Adoptee Preston meets birth sibling Randy.



OA&FS open adoptee Preston and adoptive dad Matt with birthfather Bryan holding newborn birth sibling Randy.

... "Empathy and Love continued from Page 1

That enabled Misty to have a true appreciation for the stability they provided her and her children. This trust redefined what adoption could look like for her. It was no longer an adversarial DHS process rooted in failure. She knew that through this bond with Josh and Matt, she and her children would all have an ongoing relationship. She wasn't being marginalized or demonized. She was being accepted, understood and welcomed into their lives.

A real bond develops.

Ultimately, of the three children Josh and Matt were fostering, the two older children were returned to Misty's care. The youngest, who was a baby at the time, lives with his father and aunt. But the bond Matt and Josh had with Misty and her children was very real and they continued to visit and provide a network of support. They

genuinely cared about her and her children. "She had gratitude for us for everything we did for her kids. We wanted to be a support for her as well and provide some of that normality she'd never experienced."

Exploring open adoption.

Josh and Matt decided to move forward in creating their family through open adoption and attended the OA&FS seminar. Having an ongoing relationship with the birth family was a priority for them. "Our foster care situation

showed us how important it is to stay in contact with the birth family. We were hoping for a situation with a birthmother and family that wanted to be involved in the child's life – that extended family feel where we can support each other."

After her children were returned to her care and the youngest went

... continued on Page 3

Preston's family album.



From left: OA&FS open adoptee Preston (in vest) with birth siblings Nikita, Alex and Owen, with adoptive parents Josh and Matt and with birth brother Alex.



to live with his aunt and father, Misty became pregnant again. She decided to put her newfound trust into action, bravely crossed the divide and pro-actively planned an open adoption with Josh and Matt. They openly embraced Misty, birthfather Bryan and their child. Together, they planned an identified adoption through OA&FS and Preston was born two weeks later.

Over the past two years, Josh and Matt have created an extended family relationship with Bryan, Misty, Preston's siblings and his entire birth family. They've reached out and cultivated a network of love and support for Preston. They also continue to be a safety net for Misty as she parents her other children.

"It's fantastic. We make a point of seeing each other pretty much every holiday and most birthdays. We just saw them on Sunday, they're coming over for dinner next weekend. We talk, and come to pick up the kids on occasion to see them too." Josh said.

Bryan and Misty live together now and recently had baby Randy, who they're also parenting. "And the new kicker, Preston now has a full-blooded brother, Randy! She and Preston's father came back together and now have a new baby son. We were among the first people in the hospital to meet him! He just turned two months old."

Josh and Matt's natural hospitious nature has created a model for Preston as he develops relationships with his birth family. When asked what they hope that looks like Josh shared, "I hope it deepens over time, that Preston will have special activities with them. I guess a similar role would be a close knit family friend, or aunt, or uncle. A role model and someone that they do stuff with – have special times."

Josh and Matt feel very comfortable in their open adoption relationships. I asked what's contributed to this feeling, and Josh said, "every time we visit with Misty and Bryan we can see that they still care about Preston very much, and light up when they see him. They really did this from a place of love themselves, and

that makes me feel good that they made the best choice for them. Birthdays, Christmas, any time we see them we feel this. It's ongoing."

I asked him to describe a defining moment in their relationship. "When we invited Bryan and Misty over as friends. It wasn't to see the kid or because of our open adoption agreement. We invited them to this Christmas party we host and they came! We felt that that was a really big deal. They didn't know anybody but us!"

These birth and adoptive parents have formed a genuine friendship. They love and care about each

other for who they are. **Josh and Matt expressed that this kind of bond was only made possible by the fact that Misty openly choose to entrust Preston to them.** It wasn't being forced on her in a disempowering and adversarial battle. Instead, she was able to pro-actively and intentionally place Preston with a trusted family, one who would always honor her.

Many prospective adoptive families are fearful of welcoming birthparents who are struggling and are at risk of DHS intervention

into their lives. I asked Josh how they overcame that fear. "Learning empathy. We now look at birthparents as someone who's made a sacrifice, not someone doing something because they don't love their kid. That no matter how horrible someone's situation is, they are people too. Learning how bad Misty had it growing up has given

us insight into how and why she is the way she is, and why she's made the choices she has. We've been able to look at her with compassion and see her humanity."

When asked what they'd want other adoptive parents to know about developing an open adoption relationship with birthparents who are struggling, Josh said, "Learn the birthparents' history. Find out where they're coming from. When you know their background and history and what's happened in their life, you'll have compassion for them. You have to be open to that and want a compassionate relationship. Opening up your heart to those people, even if they might not want to let you in. Respect that person for the choice that they're making, and learn to look with the eyes of compassion." ■

Shari Levine is the Executive Director of Open Adoption & Family Services and an adoptive parent of two children in open adoptions.

Misty: "I wanted to know Preston as he grew up. So far it has exceeded my expectations."

Misty: Advice for at-risk pregnant and parenting moms: "If it's important for you to maintain some control over the situation then I would recommend open adoption. It's a lot easier to have a say what happens to the kids and who adopts them verses DHS making that choice."



OA&FS open adoptee Preston with birth siblings Nikita and Alex (r-l).

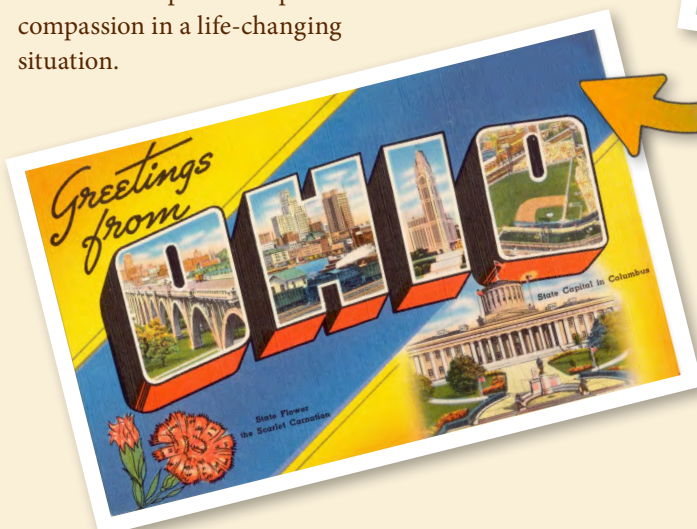
WHY DO YOU GIVE TO OA&FS?



Birthmother and OA&FS volunteer Adrienne with birth daughter Emma, (r-l).

What do you appreciate about the OA&FS mission? What aspects of the agency's work are meaningful to you?

At the core, the OA&FS mission is people-centered and begins with all options counseling. 25 years ago, when I was a college student in rural Ohio, I pieced together options and outcomes for my own unexpected pregnancy with support from my sister, and fully appreciate what it means to experience openness and compassion in a life-changing situation.



When did you first hear about OA&FS?

When my schedule opened up to offer room for volunteering, I started by exploring open adoption organizations in the area. It immediately became clear that OA&FS provides an expansive experience for adoptees and their parents.

What attracted you to the agency?

The warmth and support that comes through everyone I've encountered at OA&FS is a big draw. They sincerely care about all parties involved, are interested in each person's circumstances, and strive for transformative adoption experiences.

Why do you choose to donate your time to OA&FS?

At the top of my giving list has been to find a way to support the work of a progressive open adoption organization. I only wish I could do more to give back to the people who paved the way for open adoptions.



How has your open adoption experience changed your family's life?

Through open adoption, my birth daughter Emma's family life is a loving, joyful, and stable. With Emma well-cared for, I was able to stay in college and get an education that led to a great career here in Oregon. Keeping in touch across the distance with Emma and her parents meets a very fundamental need of a parent-child connection. ■

Katelyn's wedding album.

Newly married birthmother Katelyn reflects on her open adoption relationship with birth son Zac and his family.

How did it feel to have your birth son and his adoptive family attend and participate in such a special event in your life?

It was so great to have them all there. We had asked Zac from the day we announced our engagement if he wanted to be in the wedding. He initially told us no. He then said he wanted to walk down the aisle, but not stand up at the alter during the ceremony. The day of the ceremony he decided he wanted to stand up there by David's side. That, to me, was huge. It was a silent, but physical, acceptance that David was now part of his family too. And that physical sign was louder than any words Zac could have said.

Reflecting back to the time you placed Zac with his parents and thought about the future, how does what you envisioned then compare to your actual relationship today?

When I first placed Zac I honestly thought that our relationship would be just the letters, pictures and three visits a year. I could never have envisioned it would turn into what it is today. Mine is the third wedding in my family that Zac and his parents have been a part of. Each time I reflect on their commitment not only to Zac and me, but to my extended family as well. Zac's parents make every effort to include everyone and give Zac opportunities to be included with his birth family. Looking into the future, in four short years he'll be graduating high school. And I can't wait to stand up and cheer for him, like he and his parents have done for me for the past 15 years! I'll do whatever I can to continue to support his parents in their journey and him in his own journey. I am so thankful that our relationship evolved into an organic extended family. It's much more natural than I ever expected. ■



Watch Video: The Placement and Entrustment Ceremony.

Shelley, Rick, Zac and Katelyn participated in a 2011 OA&FS video to share how they built the foundation for their relationship that continues to thrive today.

From top:

OA&FS adoptee Zachary dances with birthmom Katelyn, Zac (far left) looks on as David presents Katelyn with her ring, Katelyn (center) flanked by Zac, husband David and Zac's adoptive parents Rick and Shelley. Photo Credits: Ben Lundberg Photography, Eugene, Oregon.

The year in review: Alternative to state adoption is our cornerstone initiative.

At Open Adoption & Family Services we provide services to a wide variety of expectant parents. There's always a reason someone is choosing to plan an adoption. Perhaps they simply don't feel ready to parent at this time. Or maybe they're struggling with issues related to addiction, incarceration, mental illness or domestic violence. These moms are at a high risk of having their child removed by the state child welfare system. We want to reach out to these women and offer them a compassionate and viable alternative.

Misty's experience, (see story on page 1), speaks volumes about what a vital alternative our open adoption services provide to moms at risk of state intervention. The differences in the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and OA&FS paths are rooted in their fundamental missions. The state child welfare system is intended to protect children from abuse and neglect. Their focus is on child safety. Consequently, they perceive the birthparents as potential threats to the child, leading at-risk moms to feel scrutinized, judged and often, vilified. This sets the stage for an adversarial relationship with the caseworker and the DHS system. Through this lens, the concept of adoption is associated with the failure to parent, and in fact in order for an involuntary adoption to occur, the birthparent has to fail. The threat of this failing looms large over moms, coloring their world with self-doubt, hopelessness and dread. This is a disempowering process that inevitably makes vulnerable birthparents even more at risk.

At OA&FS, our services always start with respecting and honoring the expectant parent. Through our all options pregnancy counseling, she receives non-directive counseling as she explores all of her choices. If she decides to pursue an open adoption this empowerment process continues as she reviews detailed and transparent info about the families. She chooses, meets and forms a lifelong relationship with the adoptive family. She is a part of her child's life as they grow.

Like the state child welfare system, our focus is also on the child. We're alarmed by the negative outcomes of children in foster care. According to the Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACES), these traumatized kids, face a lifetime of challenges. We've found that when birthparents are given choices and pro-actively plan an open adoption, the child avoids foster care and creates the early and essential bonds they need to thrive.



Shari Levine

We meet the child's ongoing needs by cultivating a network around them of love and support from their birth and adoptive parents. We have a relationship-based model. Rather than demonizing birthparents and tasking adoptive parents with rescuing the child from harm, OA&FS teaches birth and adoptive families the skills and tools they need to navigate their open adoption relationships. Our vital ongoing guidance is easily accessible over the years.

As Josh and Matt's story exemplifies, the qualities at the heart of our open adoptions – compassion and empathy – inspire adoptive parents to form a genuine friendship with the birthparents and offer their understanding and acceptance. In the DHS process, when birthparents who are struggling are judged by their limitations, it's easier to assume the worst about them. Our cultural stereotypes lead to images of them not loving their child and “giving them up”. At OA&FS we know that supposition is untrue and unfounded. In our relationship-based model, in which birth and adoptive parents create an honest and authentic connection, they see each other through a multi-faceted lens. That inspires everyone to form an honest and lasting bond.

The local and national state child welfare systems are overcrowded and overburdened. We'd like to provide our assistance by offering our alternative open adoption path to at risk pregnant and parenting moms. Our child-centered model dovetails with the state's mission by ensuring that children are not only safe, but their long-term emotional needs are met through easy access to the love and support of all of the people who are dear to them. This partnership with the state child welfare system costs the taxpayers nothing. In fact, it potentially saves millions of state and federal dollars that are currently dedicated to foster care payments, court fees to involuntarily terminate the rights of birthparents, prevention and then treatment services for traumatized kids.

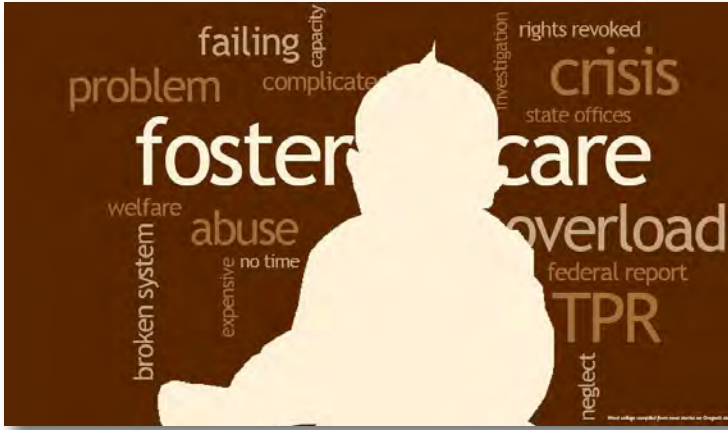
It's time to bring innovative solutions to overwhelmed child welfare systems across the US. We are proud to provide this solution.

Warm Regards,

Shari Levine
Executive Director

Open Adoption Alternative to State Adoption.

The cornerstone initiative for Open Adoption and Family Services this year was to increase awareness of our [open adoption alternative to state adoption](#) with state officials who make the policy decisions for Oregon DHS, and their frontline case workers. Our ultimate goal is for DHS to give high risk moms ongoing access to our



viable alternative. We reached out to state child welfare workers via trainings, emails, webinars and networking.

In October Shari Levine met with Governor Kate Brown's Policy Advisor, Abby Tibbs. Joining her were our state licenser Tom Heidt and Maurita Johnson, who was then the Clackamas DHS Supervisor. They supported our proposed collaboration, as did Abby. However, Abby left DHS before she was able to implement any policy changes to advance our alternative.

On April 21 Shari met with two Oregon City DHS Supervisors about a proposed pilot project to encourage [Child Protective Services \(CPS\)](#) workers to have a transparent conversation with moms about all of their options before their child is removed. This



includes allowing OA&FS to talk with the mom about the option of open adoption as an alternative to state adoption. Shari spoke about how this

paradigm shift can destigmatize the way caseworkers view moms so DHS isn't seen as an adversary, but a supportive partner. They were concerned that their family preservation mandate prohibited them from having this conversation.

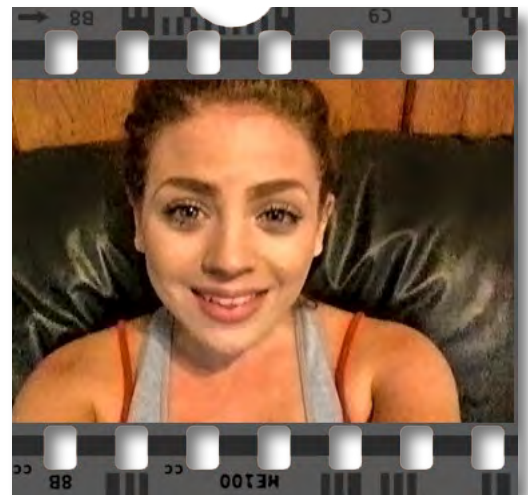
On May 19 Shari then met with DHS Supervisors from Beaverton and Hillsboro to continue the conversation. She proposed making our open adoption materials available to women who already have kids in the system and are pregnant again, as well as those who haven't been successful at parenting and are having their child removed and placed in foster care.

Sharing Adoption Experiences

Christine's Story. OA&FS open adoptee Christine Bergman was in foster care for eight months before being adopted at age three by OA&FS Board president, Erik Bergman and his wife Susan. We worked with Christine (who's now a young adult) to produce a [video](#) and [article](#) in which she shares her story. [We also filmed Erik and Susan](#) answering questions about their family's adoption experiences to create a second video. These first-person narratives clearly show the benefits of open adoption as an alternative to state adoption, and are featured on our website and used in outreach presentations.

Adoptee Videos. [Paige Reohr](#) was the latest in a great lineup of OA&FS [open adoptees that have kindly shared their experiences](#) with the wider world via video diaries. The adoptee video project began in 2015 as a commemoration of OA&FS' 30th anniversary, and has grown to include many viewpoints and situations that together tell a compelling story of the power of open adoption. All of the open adoptee videos are available for viewing on our website, of which Paige is now a proud addition. These long-term views of open adoption as told by people living them differentiate OA&FS' program from practices of other adoption agencies, facilitators and attorneys.

Birthparent Videos and Stories. Just as the kids of open adoption are uniquely qualified to convey their history, birthparents are also the best spokespeople of their perspectives on their open adoptions. This realization inspired a new project – [Birthparent Experiences](#). We reached out to OA&FS birthparents with an email deployed October 12 that requested video diaries, family photo albums or blog posts. We also built a new website section for these stories.



Service Provider Outreach

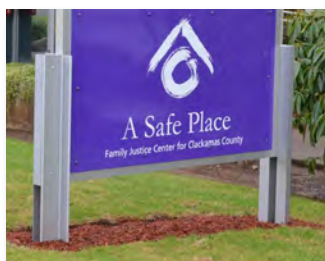
A Warm Reception. After we held a [training](#) at the [Tillamook Women's Resource Center](#), their director wrote, "We were all excited and humbled to see the wonderful work your organization is doing. As we processed our experiences of your training, what came up most often is the focus on dignity for everyone involved in the process". These warm words were much appreciated and a great incentive to keep up our outreach efforts to service providers that work with pregnant and parenting women and couples.

Hospital Social Worker Relationship Building. Last minute placements comprise 20-30% of our adoptions. In this fiscal year we focused on building relationships with hospital social workers. This included providing presentations to hospitals who have called us for last minute placements and strengthening collaborations with outreach referrals. OA&FS counselors contact referral organizations to learn more about their services and suggesting presentation swaps. We've also been inviting other organizations to present to our staff and join our committees.



Self-Sufficiency Worker Training. Shari Levine met with a group of Oregon DHS Supervisors regarding the ways in which our organizations can work together. They opened the door for us to connect with the 70 Self-Sufficiency offices throughout Oregon, who graciously welcomed our contribution to their efforts. DHS Self-Sufficiency helps with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), domestic violence services, child care assistance, refugee services, disability benefits and the Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid). Last year, Shari and several counselors held presentations in Oregon City, Clackamas, Beaverton, Hillsboro, addressing approximately 50 workers per office. With this connection, our program gained awareness with moms who are at a higher risk for state child welfare intervention. We also began pursuit of a similar networking project in Washington. By extending our services to these vulnerable women and children, we can provide them with a safety net and make a real difference in their lives.

A Safe Place Partnership. A Safe Place is a collective of agencies under one roof that provide wraparound services for adults and children impacted by family violence. Shari Levine met with their Director, Angela Brandenburg, on May 3. They're expanding this innovative model, and invited OA&FS to their group of collaborative organizations which also include Clackamas



Women's Services, Clackamas County Sheriff's Office, Clackamas County District Attorney's Office, Legal Aid Services of Oregon, Self-Sufficiency, Victim's Rights Law Center, Clackamas County Health, Housing and Human Services, and El Programa Hispano. This model allows women access to a variety of vital services in one place, removing the obstacles of transportation, time and childcare that have proven to be barriers to services in the past. Our materials will be distributed, and we'll be called in to do options counseling with pregnant and parenting victims of domestic violence. We're proud to be a new member of the Safe Place team.

Annual Outreach Mailing. Our annual outreach mailing is important for keeping awareness of our program high among the service providers who refer to OA&FS. In April we sent an outreach email that was followed by direct mail packages to 1,750 recipients. We emphasized that as various federal and state programs come under increased scrutiny or threat of losing funding, we'll be there as a partner for the professionals who will be scrambling to fill the gaps. The heart of this outreach effort was to express the collective sense of responsibility we share with service providers, one that compels all of us to provide expectant parents with the highest level of support, despite political, cultural or financial obstacles.

Oregon Mother's Care Webinar. We developed our "Empowering Expectant Parents" webinar, as a training tool for service providers far and wide. Since each organization has its own specific mission and needs, we customize versions for individual agencies. We were thrilled to have the opportunity to work with Oregon Mother's Care to build a presentation for their staff. The webinar was live-streamed at OMC's staff meeting on Jan. 26. Counselor Ally Simone provided the audio, and all watching came away with a deeper understanding of all-options pregnancy counseling and our alternative to state adoption. We followed up with links to the webinar and resource materials.



Local Networking

Planned Parenthood Partnerships. Planned Parenthood Federation of America recently redesigned their website. In the course of this redesign, the referral links to our National Pro-Choice Adoption Collaborative page increased from one to four! Many local Planned Parenthood affiliate sites redirect to the national pages for adoption information. We were pleased to see this additional exposure for our program. It's good to be pro-choice!

Conferences. OA&FS counselors staffed exhibitor tables at the Oregon Public Health Association, Oct. 10-11 in Corvallis; the School Nurse Organization of Washington, (SNOW), Oct. 14 in

Centralia; and the Oregon Public Health Association Public Health Nurse Home Visitor training vendor fair on Oct. 27 in Wilsonville.

National Networking

National Pro-Choice Adoption Collaborative (NPAC). To increase our connections with expectant parents nationwide, we've teamed up with Friends in Adoption, our partner in the National Pro-Choice Adoption Collaborative. Our new brochure provides highlights on our unique program of empowering expectant parents via all-options counseling, and open adoption as an alternative to state adoption. We emphasize that regardless of what state they live in, our support is available to them. Service providers can give these brochures to the pregnant women and couples they work with across the country. This piece is also distributed at conferences, and works in tandem with our Planned Parenthood Federation of America referral partnership to further extend our message to those who can benefit from it the most.



In early November, Shari Levine, Dawn Smith-Pliner and Sally Shuey exhibited at the Forum on Family Planning Conference in Denver. This event was sponsored and organized by Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), the Society of Family Planning and the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals. This was an amazing networking opportunity, as there were over 900 conference attendees including reproductive health physicians, medical students, researchers, clinicians and Planned Parenthood staffers from across the country. Many of them were unaware that a national pro-choice adoption agency existed. We handed out over 175 packets of our brochures and info. They loved our materials, and were eager to learn about our services and how to access them.

Because of the essential connections we made at the Denver Forum, we were invited by Planned Parenthood Federation of America to exhibit at their Medical Council Annual Meeting on Jan 19-21. The 100+ attendees included the medical director and many patient services directors from every PP affiliate from across the country. We distributed our materials and worked to create partnerships both nationally for NPAC and locally for OA&FS.

Website

Open Page Blog. Thanks to a super assist from volunteer and OA&FS adoptee Christine Bergman, we now have compiled an archive of stories from OA&FS publications. We're using these as content for our website's Open Page blog. Each blog entry has five category tags that help it appear in browser searches. We can also link to these stories in our social media, creating even greater awareness of what it's truly like to live in an open adoption.

Search Engine Optimization. We contracted with web design specialists Watermelon Webworks to enhance the search engine optimization (SEO) for our website. Connecting these technical dots makes our site easier to find for those looking to connect with the types of services we offer.

Online Family Albums. People are curious about open adoption, and want to know what it's really like to live in an open adoption relationship. To share a sense of this, we added a series of family albums to the Open Adoption Stories and Videos section of our website. These albums feature individual vignettes of OA&FS families and include photos, essays, quotes and videos. They paint a rich picture of the love, kindness, hospitiousness, diversity and inclusiveness that open adoption is all about.

Media Opportunities

Adoptive Families. Adoptive Families magazine contacted us about writing an article on birth siblings after watching our open adoptee videos. We had a conference call with reporter Barbara Herel who was extremely impressed by our agency's philosophy on openness. She interviewed OA&FS adoptee Gabriel and included his experiences in their story, which published in January. We're continuing to work with Barbara on writing a second article about open adoption as an alternative to state adoption initiative.

Child's World America. Shari Levine was contacted by Michal Conger, a writer from Child's World News, for a quote regarding the Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act. This allows faith-based foster and adoption organizations to act according to their "sincerely held religious beliefs" – meaning they can refuse to place children with any same-sex couple. Said Shari, "It's a thinly veiled way of being discriminatory. It's not up to the public to decide who an expectant parent chooses to adopt her child. What's important is the expectant parents' perspective. She has the right to choose a family for her child



who embrace her values and beliefs." OA&FS adoptive dad and Board member, Brady Howe, was also interviewed and



said, "While prospective parents often have a choice of whom they adopt through, children in the foster system do not. A child doesn't have that luxury. It seems like [the Inclusion Act] would be moving this country backwards."

Expectant Parent Materials

Accordion Brochure. We distilled descriptions of our OA&FS services for expectant parents into a compact brochure that folds like an accordion into a business-card size. The advantages? It's small enough to pocket, yet still big enough to house the necessary information expectant parents want and deserve. We debuted this hard-working piece at a national Planned Parenthood conference held in January and have been distributing to our service providers network. It's been well-received and much requested.

Diversity

Transracial Adoption Materials Update. Board member and OA&FS adoptee David Tilchin brought to our attention the feedback of his friends, who are a family of color working with the agency. They felt that many of our transracial adoption materials didn't reflect their experience as a family of color seeking an adoption. Shari Levine met with them and listened to their concerns. Their comments prompted us to create a Diversity Committee, which will focus on several projects, including changing our adoptive parent materials to be more inclusive of a wider variety of transracial situations. As an agency that's continually evolving, we place a high value on feedback from our clients.



and they've been quite popular! Each group is moderated by our counseling staff, but the real purpose is to provide a safe place for each of these very special groups to talk among themselves. In this way, they get to know each other, share pictures and stories and learn from others' experiences. The support they can provide each other is vast, profound and one-of-a-kind. We're more than happy to be the conduit.

Events

Birthmother Retreats. In three cities over two weekends, 18 birthmothers gathered for their annual OA&FS retreat in May. Attendees had placed between 2.5 and 16 years prior and traveled to the event both locally and from hours away. Along with opportunities to relax and create, groups were provided with time and guided activities to encourage sharing of their unique stories and experiences. ■

Social Media

Facebook Groups. We created two private Facebook groups – one each for OA&FS birthparents and adoptees who were placed through OA&FS. Invite emails with access instructions were sent out to let people know these were now available,

Participate in birthmother Alleia's research study.



OA&FS open adoptee Finn with birthmother Alleia (center) and adoptive parents Scobie and Sarah.

Fellow OA&FS Families,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Alleia Kelly and I'm a graduate student in the Professional Communication program at Southern Utah University. I'm also a birthmother who placed with OA&FS just over 10 years ago. (Wow, the time sure does fly by!)

I'm looking for OA&FS birth and adoptive parents to participate in an interview for my graduate research project. My research focuses on communication between adoptive and birth families during the formative stages of the adoptions. I'd like to survey open adoption families in which both the birth family and adoptive family consider their open adoption to be successful and happy, and then look for communication patterns that exist within those relationships. I will be focusing on positive strategies of communication in order to create an outline for future families. My research delves primarily into language used in the adoption, levels of intimacy and disclosure between the parties involved, boundary setting, and conflict resolution strategies in successful adoptions. The end goal of this research is to present a model for successful communication in open adoptions. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Alleia Kelly

- Is your family at least five years into your adoption?
- Is there ongoing communication between the birth and adoptive family?
- Do you consider yourselves to have a successful open adoption relationship? If so, and you think both parties would be willing to participate in interviews either over the phone, in person, or via Skype, please contact Alleia at alleiadanae@gmail.com.

Thanks for your generous support of Open Adoption & Family Services!

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Nick Veroske
Ruth Warbington &
Richard Hausken
Chris & Priscilla Williams

Gifts of \$100-\$199

Don Anderson & John Sharp
Anonymous United Way
of King Co.
Lori Aoki & Skyler Stone
Ann & Jay Arney
Kent Beckton
Janet Bolendz
Mary & Hoyt Bonar
Sara Johnston &
Danica Bornstein
Guy & Margaret Calladine
Chris Carlson &
Elizabeth Thomas
James Chandler in honor of
Chandler/Baker family
Janice Chappell &
Michael Demanche
Jeffrey Chochon & Marije Peek
Dustin Clarke & Kim Leberti
Alice Dale & Frank Evans
Laurie & Paul Daley
Kris Davis
Diane Dickoff
Darr Durham in honor of
Crabtree/Bergman Family
Shawn Farrell
Lisa Garfield
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Irie Hoffman
Jan Jamieson
Jennifer & Larry Johnson
Lisa & Doug Klink
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Kroger/Fred Meyer Program
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Merrie & Seth McGaw
Christy McMannis &
Ronald Renschler

Natalie McNabb
Roger & Elizabeth Nielsen
Kathryn Olson & Jeff Petee
Megan O'Leary &
Shannon Sedlacek
Mary & Donald Perry
Victoria Petkau, in-kind
Annie Roberts
Michael & Wendy Russo
Dennis & Judith Samer
Robert Samson & Robin
Schauffler in honor of
Crabtree/Bergman Family
Patrick Sexton
Ally Simone
Emma Timmins-Schiffman
& Ronen Elad
Alex Trotter
Thomas Valvano
Suzie Williams

Gifts Up to \$99

Scott & Heather Allmain
Amazon Smile
Les & Janet Atlas
Mike Banker & Michele Greco
Jessica Blei
Colleen Borst &
Lindsay Twombly
Benny & Wright Burnett-
Smith \$50
Mary Ellen Bushnell in honor
of Chandler/Baker family
Lee Catalano
Arthur Donnelly
Julee & Mark Dyer
Kevin Eakes & John Hyatt
Amanda Friss in honor of
Jeff Shields Hunker
50th birthday
Cynthia & Jeff Eckart
Euphoria Chocolate, in-kind
Peter Fallaw & Brady Howe
George & Halina Gagne

Richard Hanout &
Richard Tournour
Andrea Hardy
Lilly Hankins
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Claire Lematta
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Kari Miles
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Corey & Debra Omev
Sari Prevost
Norma Shelan in honor of
Joann Terranova's Birthday
Daisy & Ronald Stahlberg
The Standard Employee
Giving Campaign Match
United Health Foundation
Donor match
Delphine Veith
Abigail Wentz ■



*OA&FS is a charitable organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

Service statistics: the numbers behind the mission.

July 2014 through June 2017

Open Adoption & Family Services (OA&FS) is a pro-choice, nonprofit adoption agency with offices in Oregon and Washington. We provide free, all-options pregnancy counseling for pregnant women and couples, plan open adoptions at no cost to birthparents and offer lifelong services for our clients. We've completed more than 1,400 open adoptions since the agency was founded in 1985.

Placements

- For fiscal year 2016-17 we completed 38 placements.
- Average number of placements per year: 44.
- 32% of placements were with gay or lesbian families; 0% were with single parents.
- 45% of placements were "last minute" – when adoption planning begins at birth.
- Adoptive parents waited an average of 15.5 months between entering the waiting families pool and placement.

Children Placed

- 95% of children placed were newborns; 5% were between 15 and 32 months.
- The majority of the children had little to no prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol. 27% had no exposure; 25% had mild; 31% had moderate; and 16% had severe exposure.
- Of the children placed, 67% were full Caucasian; 5% had Hispanic heritage; 8% had Asian heritage; 13% had African American heritage; 1% had Native American heritage; 5% were of other ethnicities.

Expectant Parents

- In fiscal year 2016-17, 344 expectant parents contacted us to inquire about our services.

Birthparents

- Birthparents received an average of six weeks of counseling prior to adoption planning.
- 56% of placements had pregnancy-related expenses at an average of \$1,434.
- Open Adoption Agreements had an average of three visits per year.
- Birthfathers signed consents to adoption in 48% of placements.
- The average age of birthmothers was 26 years old, 28 for consenting birthfathers and 40 for adoptive parents.

In FY 2016-17 OA&FS staff has ...

- Hosted events attended by 431 members of the open adoption community including a birthmothers' retreat and our first birthfathers' gathering.
- Delivered 78 presentations about open adoption to 1,563 service providers, 106 college students and 331 teens.
- Sent promotional mailings and materials to 1,828 organizations. Of these 300 requested additional materials. ■

Board of Directors, 2016-2017

Heather Allmain
Adoptive Parent,
Communications Services
Manager at Clark Public Utilities

President Erik Bergman
Adoptive Parent, Self-Employed
at Word Surgeon

Vice-President Melissa Busch
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to Head of School at
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Secretary Michele Greco
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David Tilchin
OA&FS Adoptee,
Computer Programmer

Alex Trotter
DHS Child Welfare Manager

Love our volunteers!

Thank you to the following individuals and organizations who contributed their time, talents and expertise to support the agency's mission last year. Thanks to all the OA&FS community members who donated their photographs in this year's annual report, the agency website and other publications. If you would like to volunteer or donate photographs, please contact us at info@openadopt.org.

Heather Allmain
Erik Bergman
Kerianne Bernstein
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David Tilchin
Alex Trotter
Carrie Wilton
Lynette Winter
Jaime Whitsett ■





*OA&FS open adoptee Petey
with adoptive parent Lisa.*

5200 SW Macadam Avenue, Suite 250

Portland, Oregon 97239

1-800-772-1115

Para Español 1-800-985-6763

www.openadopt.org

