



OPEN ADOPTION & FAMILY SERVICES 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



*Inside:
Resiliency and
Child-Centeredness
in Open Adoption.*

LOOKING BACK AS WE MOVE FORWARD.

Dear Open Adoption Community:

In May 2021, after 27 years with the organization, I had the honor of stepping into the role of Executive Director of Open Adoption & Family Services. Given this change in leadership, it felt especially timely when John Etter recently invited me to meet. John's late wife, Jeanne Etter, founded OA&FS in 1985. John and I talked about Jeanne, the beginnings of the agency, and the Etters' open adoption journey.

When the Etters adopted in 1978, it was considered radical to have an ongoing relationship with their daughter's birth mother. They did it anyway. Seeking a relationship with their child's birth father was considered risky. They did it anyway. Forty-three years later, the family's open adoption relationships continue. Asked what led their family to embrace open adoption, John said simply: "It felt like the right thing to do."

John described his wife as a creative risk-taker. Though secrecy was the norm in 1970s adoptions, Jeanne didn't let that stop her from embracing openness and the vulnerability that comes with it. She was ahead of her time. In a spirit of social progress that resonates today, Jeanne strove to shine a light on truth and to reject secrecy – she wasn't afraid of change.

Jeanne went from facilitating her own family's open adoption to helping other families do the same. She and agency president John Chally then formally established what came to be OA&FS.

This first-of-its-kind agency was founded on child-centered open adoptions and all-options pregnancy counseling. By honoring each constellation member with inclusion, honesty and respect, Jeanne practiced the values that ground OA&FS to this day.

Change is complicated, painful, and promising. Our agency has thrived by evolving with change and listening to the voices of people with lived adoption experience. The principles Jeanne Etter established in the 80s have guided us through seismic shifts in the adoption landscape. Openness went from the fringes of adoption to the widely accepted norm. In the meantime, improved reproductive rights and

better access to birth control has resulted in lower birth rates and fewer domestic adoptions. And more recently, growing awareness of systemic racism has challenged us to examine the importance of race and culture in adoption, and to evolve our practices accordingly. Change is inevitable, and we welcome it.

These are tumultuous times in our country, and in the world. Social justice doesn't progress in a straight line. There are setbacks and victories. Texas' recent abortion ban is a stark reminder of how tenuous reproductive rights are. But we won't let difficulty keep us from advancing our mission.

Our agency has a stake in social change. OA&FS echoes the call for equity, integrity, and justice for children and families. We believe adopted people have a right to know their origins. We believe people are entitled to sufficient food, shelter, education and health care to make pregnancy and parenting choices from a place of fundamental security, and not from a place of scarcity. We believe in reproductive justice and access to abortion. We honor the importance of race and culture. We value diversity in gender and sexuality. We join our community partners in the child welfare and adoption systems to promote equitable, inclusive, and ethical services.

I will do my best to channel Jeanne Etter's risk-taking, creative spirit as OA&FS evolves with the changing times. I am proud to stand behind OA&FS' board, staff, and clients as we make decisions and take actions that, as the Etters might say, "feel like the right thing to do." ■

Best,



Suzie Williams
Executive Director



Jeanne Etter: Leader, innovator, organizer, counselor, clear thinker, OA&FS founder.

During Jeanne's influential tenure at OA&FS, she used her "great sense of what is right" to create unconventional change in adoption. Her combination of personal insights as an adoptive parent, great concern for human

nourishment and an ability to persevere led to an inspiring life as an open adoption advocate. These articles, shared by Jeanne's husband John, tell a small part of that story. ■



Birth parents deserve society's understanding

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second of three parts.)

By JEANNE ETTER
For The Register-Guard

PICTURE YOURSELF in the hospital being told that you have only a short time to live. You are the single parent of a child you love dearly, and you have no relatives who can help.

You would be looking for people who could love and care for your child now that you can't. You would feel the grief and pain of letting your child be adopted because it is the only responsible thing you can do.

Imagine the pain a birth mother feels when she hears, "How could you give up your own flesh and blood?" She is already grieving for the baby she has handed to adoptive parents because she could not raise it herself. Why do people react with such cruelty to birth parents? What can all parents learn from understanding why birth parents are judged so harshly?

Last week, we looked at the coal paid by the adoptive parents for not fitting the mold. Parenting outside of society's expectations can be painful. Often the thoughtless reactions of others undermine desires to be a normal family and make it harder to acknowledge that there are differences.

Birth parents are up against the same expectations of society — that babies will be born and raised with two biological parents — as adults who share with two biological parents.

tion, they also have broken a powerful taboo. The birth mother has committed what seems to be the crime of abandoning a child.

All societies must have taboos against abandoning children. In earlier times, the whole tribe had the responsibility for the care of the child, and the taboo fell equally on all. Later, the village became the responsible unit. Then, the extended biological relatives had the burden of making sure children were cared for. Rapid change after industrialization narrowed the family to a mother and father who alone must take full responsibility for raising the child. Today, fathers may also take little or no responsibility for the child's upbringing without being seen as breaking a taboo.

This narrows the total responsibility of rearing a child from infancy to adulthood to the biological mother. Others may choose to participate and help. Yet, she knows that if they choose not to help, the burden will fall on her. All mothers are affected by the vulnerability they sense in knowing that they could end up doing the job alone. Fathers, grandparents and other relatives deal with the fear that they may be shut out since they are considered non-essential.

With the burden of childrearing now focused almost entirely on the mother, the taboo also intensifies. She is the one considered unnatural if she gives up her child. Society feels free to punish her for having a baby out of marriage even though if she were to be a single parent, she would be expected to establish her own family.

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BIRTH TO THREE

without a good job or way to make a home.

Perhaps this taboo, too, is beginning to ease up as the effect of putting this much pressure on mothers becomes obvious. Birth mothers who choose not to parent and who turn to adoption are speaking out and being heard. Other parents are challenged to move out of their first reactions. It is natural for parents who are fulfilling society's expectations to have an almost automatic negative reaction to those who have broken the taboo they themselves have worked so hard to keep.

Parents may think, "I could never ever give up my child. How could she possibly do such a thing?" Yet, if they were to stand in her shoes, they would understand and would probably make the same decision.

All parents can learn from understanding why others choose not to parent. Every caring, responsible parent has limits. If you were watching yourself and your child go steadily downhill in spite of all the help you could possibly muster, you might need to find another family for your child.

A birth mother doesn't stop being a mother when she hands her baby to the adoptive parents. She won't do the parenting or be the legal mother anymore. If she has any future contact with the child, it will be like a relationship with the whole family. She has made a decision to live with the whole family. She has made a decision to live with the whole family. She has made a decision to live with the whole family.

fit society's present expectations of what parenting is supposed to be.

All parents can gain from learning to support and understand mothers and fathers who will never get to parent their children. They can provide sympathy and listen as they grieve this loss. Friends can acknowledge the depth of love and concern for their children that will always be there. They can encourage the links that allow love to flow back and forth in letters, pictures and visits. If appropriate, the birth grandparents and relatives need to be acknowledged and supported in their loss and encouraged to keep their ties intact.

The love of a mother or father has never fit a single mold. Society needs to have choices available for those who can't parent. If a mother has to feel like a criminal to have an adoptive parent, a relative or the father raise her child, then she does not truly have a choice. Every caring mother or father has the right to feel good about responsible parenting choices.

Next Week: Adoptees grow up with an extra challenge.

Jeanne Etter, M.S., is the executive director and founder of Open Adoption and Family Services, a state-licensed adoption agency in Eugene and Portland. Birth to Three is a non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening families through parent support and education. For more information about Birth to Three, call 464-4401.

Adoptees often feel rootless

Maintaining links with birth family helps children adjust

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the last of three parts.)

By JEANNE ETTER
For The Register-Guard

CHILDREN LEARN about families from everything around them. Family conversations, picture books, school and television all teach even the very young child what a family is supposed to be like.

A child should live with the mother and father he or she was born to. If that is not possible, it is either ignored or treated as strangely different.

Our two previous articles discussed the suffering that adoptive parents and birth parents endure as they operate outside of what is considered normal and acceptable in parenting. Adoptees also face enormous challenges as they grow up in a family that does not fit the norm.

Typically, adopted children will assume that their parents are like everyone else's, even if told that they were adopted. Until they are school-aged, they may cling to the belief that they were born to their adopted mother unless they have real evidence of the birth parents to help them understand.

It may be a great shock to them as they first begin to understand that they previously had another mother and father. Learning that they are different is painful. Adoptees also have to absorb the fact that they have lost a great deal in the process of gaining a new home.

Adoptees are separated from the people they look like, from their heritage, and sometimes from their culture and countries. They may feel that the separation is their fault. They may feel they were unwanted. Not only are they different from other children who live with their "real" parents, but they have lost their chance to feel that they truly belong where they are.

Adoptees often say that they feel they were never born. They say that they feel they were never born. They say that they feel they were never born.

want from jobs or relationships as they grow older.

The problem is worsened as many adoptive parents try lovingly but mistakenly to minimize the differences. They may emphasize the qualities that are alike between themselves and the adopted child. They may act as if the adoption were over once the child came home with them. This makes adoptees afraid to talk about their birth belonging, who they look and act like, how it feels to have lost their family.

What helps is to acknowledge that difference and go on to look at what makes families secure. Children are frightened by the accurate

perception that their survival depends upon committed adults who will not let them down. They may have friends or relatives who have experienced families coming apart from divorce and wonder if it could happen to them. Thinking about the first parents they lost makes them feel vulnerable to the loss of this family.

Prejudging that the adoptee is no different from any other child makes it harder. They have lost their opportunity to be like everyone else, and ignoring it only makes it worse.

What helps most is knowing the truth and keeping every link possible alive. Openness in adoption allows the adoptee to have a connection with the birth family while growing up in a loving, stable home with adoptive parents. Those who have seen pictures or who know their birth parents can more easily grasp that they have two sets of parents. They know it does not fit the idealized picture of a family, but the difference seems natural.

If birth parents visit, the child sees them as they would an aunt or an uncle who visits with the whole family. The children know they are truly the children of their adoptive parents, but they also know they are truly the children of their birth parents.

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they can see that they are loved and were never rejected.

Children don't believe in things they can't see. If you were to tell your child that her grandmother who lives across the country loves her very much, but she never sends a birthday card or Christmas present, your child wouldn't believe in the love. Likewise, adopted children need real evidence that their birth parents love them and always will. They need cards and presents. They need hugs. If they can get them, they need to hear the story of their birth and get their questions answered over and over.

Some adoptees come from abusive homes or from foreign countries, which can make visits impossible. But almost always there is at least one birth relative who thinks often of the child and can provide a link to keep the child and the adoptive family in touch with the child's first family.

Children grow up without biological parents for reasons other than adoption. These parents also can learn from adoption how important it is for children of divorce, death or desertion not to lose any more than they have. Keeping the love and links alive is the most precious gift a parent can give a child who is growing up separated from a birth parent.

At the same time, parents can give children opportunities to grieve and be angry about not having that mother or father where they grew up. It is not easy to grow up with a strong sense of who one is when something as important as one's first mother or father is missing. Growing up outside of society's expectations takes courage. All children and parents will gain if we emphasize the benefits of today's amazing variety of families.

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Jeanne Etter

OPEN ADOPTION

Two Fathers Make Open Adoption Work

By JEANNE ETTER

Adoption isn't a fairy tale where a homeless, unloved child is taken in by the kind-hearted, perfect adoptive parents. Two unusual men certainly know that now. Murray Brewster is the biological father and John Etter the adoptive father of four-year-old Angela Etter.

Murray's daughter was already almost two when he was born in 1980. Murray is a single, black man who is sensitive and concerned. He loves children deeply; so it came as a shock to hear from Angela's mother that his daughter had already been adopted into another family.

If Angela had known her new family in the local closed adoption, Murray would probably never have joined her own child. But Angela was adopted by John and me, and we believed that Angela's first family was important to us.

A unique kind of cooperation has evolved between Angela's two fathers. Murray and I, as well as Angela, have agreed to a natural approach to talking about birth relatives, especially her mother. Angela will always be a part of our lives. We describe our arrangement as an "open adoption" because contact visits, letters and phone calls are maintained between the biological or birth parents on the one hand and the adoptive family on the other. The feelings John and Murray express about sharing Angela provide a fascinating look at an unusual kind of parenting.

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WILLAMETTE VALLEY OBSERVER JUNE 23, 1982 5

OPEN ADOPTION

Two Fathers Make Open Adoption Work



A portrait of The Etter family, including Angela's birth father, Murray.

Murray says, "I told Mary I wished she had tried to contact me. I would have raised my baby myself."

Murray hung up the phone feeling both love and ties to him from the birth family remain.

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Angela came into our lives with a phone call initiated by a mutual friend. It took a month to work out a solution that seemed right for everyone. John assumed that Angela's biological father could not be located. Mary's legal right to visit was written into the adoption and her first visit took place about eight months after Angela joined our family.

Later, John gradually became convinced that Angela's birth father as well as her birth mother was important to her life. In addition to Angela's need to relate to her heritage, there were medical reasons for locating Murray. We might need to know about family disease or about whom to contact in an emergency if she might need a transplant from a biological relative. After a year of thinking, we decided to make a trip to Los Angeles to search for Murray.

It was Mary who had found Murray's sister and had phoned Murray before we started our search. Mary had called us in Eugene and had said that Murray was traveling to California to see Angela. The trip would now be a reunion, and Angela's two fathers could meet for the first time.

Seeing his daughter in the arms of another man who called her "my little girl" was something of a shock to John. He says, "It wasn't really easy at first, but it became easier as a while."

John is glad now that they did try to find Murray when Angela was young. He knew that as adoptees get older, they want to find their birth parents. If we had waited, it might have been too late.

John is used to fielding questions from people who think it is too risky to give rights to birth parents. He likes to use what Lee Campbell, president of Concerned United Birthparents, says. She says social scientists theorize that guilt which comes from taking advantage of others is a common feeling.

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‘Different than we expected’

Adoptive parents Whitney and Ryan and birth parent Stephanie share how openness, resilience and a focus on their son helped them build a meaningful relationship – even during a global pandemic.

Written by Leah Lusk, Counselor
Interviews by Suzie Williams, Exec. Director

In August 2020, adoptive parents Whitney and Ryan left the hospital with a new baby and an agreed-upon plan: They would meet up with birth mother Stephanie in exactly one month, and would plan to see each other monthly.

It was Stephanie’s idea to give the new family a month to connect, Whitney says. But in those first couple of weeks, as Whitney and Ryan posted photos of newborn Charlie to an online photo album for Stephanie and read what Stephanie had written about her desire to be in her son’s life, they felt pulled to get together sooner.

“We were putting pictures in [the album], but also just feeling like, ‘Hey, you’ve carried this baby around inside of you for nine months, you’ve had five days in the hospital with him. Surely you’re thinking and wondering about him.’ Just, you know, really feeling like what that must be like for her.”

Whitney and Ryan reached out via text, and they met up when Charlie was three weeks old.



AN ADOPTION CONSTELLATION IS FORMED.
Adoptive parent Whitney, birth parent Stephanie holding adoptee Charlie and adoptive parent Ryan, (l-r). Learn more about the Adoption Constellation on page 8.

“When we got together it was really different than what we had expected but I think that was a really crucial moment in realizing you can’t plan, you just have to kind of go with the flow,” Whitney says. “When you have rigid ideas about what your visit is going to be like or what the relationship is going to be like, it doesn’t work.”

They met pretty much weekly for the next five months, while Whitney and Ryan were both on leave from work. They now have a standing bi-weekly visit and are in one another's COVID bubbles. Such frequent visits helped them build familiarity, and took pressure off of each individual meeting.

"I think that if there's a lot of time in between, it's easy to overthink or analyze or maybe project 'What is this person feeling?'" Whitney says. "A big part of the development of getting to know each other was these frequent meetings."

Meeting early and often reinforced to Stephanie that Whitney and Ryan wanted her to be an integral part of Charlie's life – and theirs.

"It's completely different than what I expected," Stephanie says. "I figured open adoption was cards in the mail and letters here and there. I was thinking that the relationship would be centered around Charlie, but they embraced and welcomed me as much as Charlie. When I first went into this I was expecting it to be different – not so much hands on. My expectations blew out the window. From the very beginning, it's just been great."

'Stay open'

Whitney and Ryan acknowledge they went into their open adoption with their own expectations – based on stories they'd heard about other open adoptions. But what they've learned from their experience and getting to know other adoptive families is that every open adoption relationship is completely unique.



Adoptee Charlie has story time with birth parent Stephanie and adoptive parent Ryan, (r-l).

"Stay open to what's happening and how it develops," Ryan says. "These open adoption relationships will grow and change and become what they are. You can't control and direct them, you have to keep building them up."

And just like any relationship, you'll have your differences.

"The biggest thing is just that Stephanie has a different pace," Ryan says. "She likes to take more time to get ready to go places, whereas we're low maintenance [in physical appearance]."

Stephanie says there haven't been many obstacles in their relationship, but that they did have a difference of opinion early on. She was happy with the way it was handled and felt her perspective was considered. Most of all, she recognizes that Whitney and Ryan are always focused on what's best for Charlie.

"I feel that they will always keep his best interests at heart," Stephanie says. "Even if it's something I think should be different, I know that they're still ultimately thinking about Charlie."



Adoptee Charlie out on a stroll with birth parent Stephanie and adoptive parent Whitney.

'Room for all of us'

While Whitney and Ryan emphasize that Charlie's story is not theirs to tell, their love for him has been at the center of every choice they've made. Their early decision to connect with Stephanie was spurred by the recognition that he's her son and theirs – and that both will always be true.

"There's not a limited amount of love that Charlie can have or that we can give," Whitney says. "He has room for all of us in his life. To me the biggest part is the idea of, 'Is this going to benefit Charlie?'"

"For me it's thinking about Charlie's life and his relationships with the people in his life," Ryan says. "People related to him, his family, whether by blood or bond. These relationships are really important to his development now and later on. It's my job to maintain a line of communication and access to all those people in his life, especially Stephanie."

When Whitney and Ryan are asked what they see as Stephanie's unique role in Charlie's life, they each respond: "Stephanie is his mom."

"Charlie's still my son and I want what's best for him," Stephanie says. "I know that Whitney and Ryan will provide nothing less than what's best for him too."

Stephanie says she hopes to continue to show up and be there as a consistent presence in their lives.

Whitney and Ryan recognize that Stephanie sacrifices a lot to make it to visits and video chats and maintain such frequent communication.

Stephanie says the relationship has helped her be more punctual and more consistent about things like charging her phone, which is often more difficult because she's unhoused.

"I've done more adulting, I guess," she says. "This relationship has helped me get back on track. I hope I can be there to guide him and help out whenever Whitney and Ryan need it. Every time I come around, Charlie gets the biggest smile on his face."



Adoptee Charlie with birth parent Stephanie.

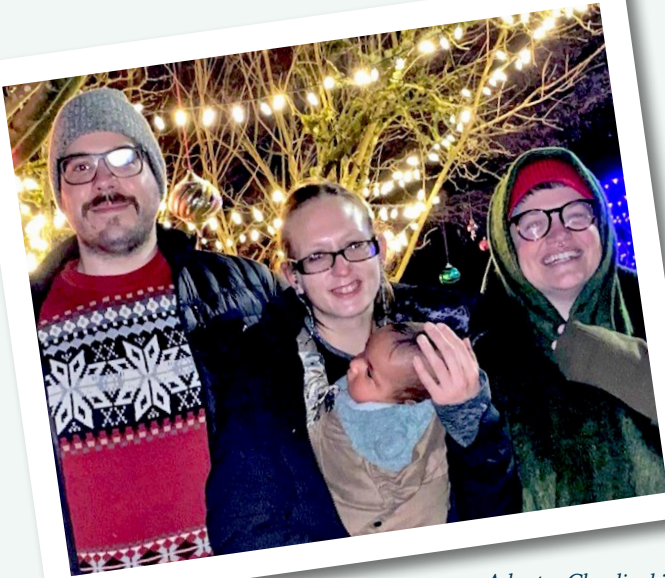
'A hard year'

Charlie's big smile and the importance of Stephanie in all their lives made it a natural choice for Whitney and Ryan to include her in their pandemic bubble.

Happy Mothers' Day



“With COVID we’ve had to limit who we see, where we go, that kind of thing,” Whitney says. “In the first year of a baby’s life, there are so many people that want to come and see him, and everyone wants you to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas with them. You can’t spend it with everyone, so we’ve really prioritized Stephanie and make space for her.”



Adoptee Charlie, birth parent Stephanie and adoptive parents Ryan and Whitney take in their neighborhood holiday lights.

The open adoption relationship is a new and different challenge to navigate in any year, and COVID of course added complications – as well as unique opportunities for connection and tough conversations.

COVID meant that most of those early, frequent meetings with Stephanie happened outdoors in parks, which ended up being a good thing, Ryan says.

“It felt more low-key, like, ‘Hey, we’re going to this area and just hang out for a couple hours.’ It wasn’t a big event with a lot of planning or figuring stuff out. And we could easily change plans at the spur of the moment. That constancy helped build our relationship.”

Other relationships weren’t as easy, and Whitney and Ryan had to make many tough decisions about which people to see and how.

“Like for many people, it’s been very difficult with our families,” Ryan says. “Not everybody is on the same page. We’ve had to navigate the line between safety and making Charlie available. The safest thing would be to say, ‘Nope, sorry, nobody can see him.’ But that’s not good for Charlie, and it’s not good for the other people.”

Stephanie acknowledges COVID has made things tough for her too. She even had a COVID scare a few months ago, so they

skipped their regular visit while she quarantined. And COVID hasn’t been the only challenge this year, Whitney acknowledges.

“There’s having a baby who doesn’t always want to sleep – being a first-time parent comes with a lot of struggles,” she says. “Also getting to know Stephanie and building a relationship with someone that you’re going to be connected to forever. It’s like fast-forwarding into an arranged marriage. Though it has been nice to reflect on this last year and see all the things we’ve done together despite some really big limitations.”

‘Doing our own weird thing’

One of the things they’ve done is found ways to establish their own traditions and celebrate their relationship and one another, on holidays and in their everyday lives.

“Many people have elaborate ideas about how they want their life to look,” Whitney says. “Like, with a holiday we have X, Y and Z traditions and it’s not Christmas if we don’t do these things. Our main goal is just to spend time with each other and maybe we get to bake cookies, or maybe that doesn’t work out, and it’s okay either way.”

For instance, on Easter this year, they went to Stephanie’s mom’s house so she could meet Charlie, then got Subway sandwiches and went to a park near where Stephanie was staying.

“There was a gigantic family there having a cookout and playing baseball,” Ryan says. “It was nice to feel like they were doing their thing to celebrate their family and love and we were doing our thing. By just doing our own weird thing we were like, this is what works for us.”

Stephanie’s mom was initially reluctant to meet Charlie, which made Easter all the more meaningful.

“It took me a little bit to get my mom to come around,”



Adoptee Charlie gets an Easter hug from birth sibling Emily surrounded by adoptive parent Whitney, friend Cody and birth grandmother Katie, (l-r).

Stephanie says. “I think she was also expecting only letters and pictures with an open adoption. She was apprehensive about trying to start a relationship thinking that maybe they wouldn’t follow through.”

After that visit, Stephanie says her mom seems more open and willing – and that talking with Whitney and Ryan was helpful. Stephanie’s mom attended Charlie’s first birthday party this past summer – a gathering that brought people together from all different parts of Charlie’s family: Whitney’s brothers, Ryan’s family and Stephanie’s family, including Charlie’s sister.

“It was a super special day,” Whitney said. “We held the party outdoors, the weather was nice, everything just flowed.”

Other plans haven’t worked out: Whitney and Ryan had rented a local theater so they could get all the families together over Christmas last year, but that was canceled because of the pandemic.

“There’s been a lot less opportunity to say, ‘Hey, let’s have a long holiday where everyone just hangs out together in front of the fire,’ ” Ryan says.

Mother’s Day was particularly special for moms Stephanie and Whitney, who went to the state capitol building to have a photographer take photos of them with Charlie.

“The rhodies were in full bloom, we dressed up, the baby was so cute with a white collared shirt and suspenders,” Whitney says. “Stephanie looked beautiful, and Ryan even jumped in there for a minute, even though it was for Mother’s Day. It’s so great to have those beautiful photos documenting that day. I hope it’s something we continue to do every year. We’re building our traditions.”

Stephanie says Whitney and Ryan have gone above and beyond to make her feel special – with things like a cake

on her birthday and a slice of pepperoni pizza just because.

She’s not the only one for whom this relationship has come with pleasant surprises.

“The biggest surprise was how much love I have for Charlie,” Ryan says. “My capacity for love grew because of him, and not just my love for him, but I want everyone possible to love him too. That’s a new and really positive thing that I’d not anticipated.” ■



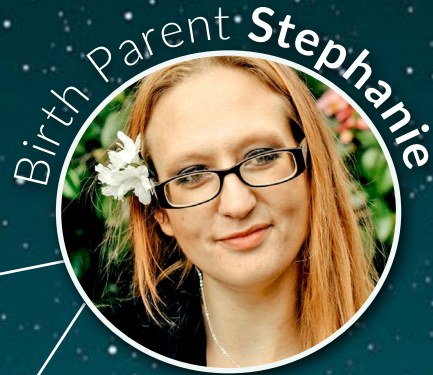
Adoptee Charlie celebrates his first birthday with birth parent Stephanie.

Sharing time together



WHAT MAKES A **CONSTELLATION**?

An Adoption Constellation is everyone touched by the adoption process: birth parents, adoptee, adoptive parents, extended family, adoption professionals and community.



"... Kids are not your possession, rather you're like a guide to let them grow into who they are ... this really works well when you're thinking about open adoption relationships." – WHITNEY

*"Getting to know Whitney and Ryan has been a great experience. I really like our relationship and how the adoption's going."
– STEPHANIE*

"We've learned that whatever you're trying to plan, it's not going to work out that way. There are things you're not going to see coming, so you need to have your values lead the way." – RYAN

THE YEAR IN REVIEW.



Change in Leadership

After 29 years with OA&FS, Shari Levine retired in May 2021. Shari brought heartfelt determination and innovation to her work and was a powerful force for change. Her drive to advance compassionate child-centered open adoptions was unwavering. We are grateful for her many years of leadership and wish her the best in her retirement.

Our new Executive Director, Suzie Williams, worked alongside Shari for the past 27 years, first as Counselor, then Program Manager. Her investment in the agency's future runs deep, and she is poised to lead the organization forward from a strong foundation.

Rethinking Our Business Model

In June, the board approved an effort to seek new revenue streams with the intention of reducing reliance on adoptive parent fees. Grant funding will support and expand the vital no-fee services that are a cornerstone of our mission, such as free all-options pregnancy counseling and ongoing post-placement guidance. It also invites more people into our community to support our work and honor the impact it has on individuals, children, and families.

To assist us in these endeavors, we're contracting with a non-profit grants consultancy, [A to Be Partners](#). New revenue streams will allow us to think big about how we advance our mission and pursue diversity, equity and inclusion in adoption.

2020-21 Agency Highlights

Anti-Racist Work at OA&FS

2020-21 Fundraising Appeal Supports Anti-Racism Work. We continue prioritizing the essential work of integrating an anti-racist lens into our program, services and organizational culture. A direct mail piece was sent in November 2020 and a new page on our website features [stories and videos of OA&FS transracial adoptees](#). Thanks to the support of our community, this campaign contributed greatly to our overall donation total of \$27,000. In addition to supporting our general program, these funds have also enabled us to make the following progress toward our diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

Our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Goals

- **DEI Training for Staff.** We've participated in three agency-wide staff trainings with local consultant and social worker Shawna Adams, who has been a valuable guide. Individual employees have also sought out additional learning opportunities and workshops. As a staff, we meet monthly to share a space for learning and discussion as we further our individual growth and understanding of racism through listening to the voices and stories of BIPOC, (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), individuals.
- **Collaborate with Organizations to Support BIPOC in Adoption.** A companion goal to staff trainings was to establish relationships with adoption organizations that specialize in serving BIPOC communities. In an effort to offer more choice to expectant parents seeking an adoptive family of color, we have a partnership with [PACT: An Adoption Alliance](#), whose mission is to support the needs of adoptive children of color. We also began monthly networking meetings with PACT and [The Cradle](#) to explore ways we can collaborate, learn from one another, and effect change. Exploration of future community collaborations will continue.
- **Increase Diversity of Staff and Board.** We hired [HR consultant Perry Adams](#), who specializes in DEI, to thoroughly evaluate our hiring practices and personnel policies, and to make recommendations to create a more inclusive organizational culture. This work is ongoing.
- **Promote Diverse Resources and Educational Opportunities.** Our presence on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Tumblr](#) gives us the opportunity to share BIPOC perspectives, learning opportunities and resources with our community. We created an intranet site of DEI resources for our staff.

DEI Goals, Continued

- **Access to Educational Support.** In addition to bolstering our client support and education regarding the intersection of race and adoption, we joined [PACT's Transracial Adoption Education Program](#) so our clients can access their educational support. We also became a member organization of PACT's community of adoption professionals and adoption constellation members devoted to better supporting adopted children of color.
- **Update Website and Materials.** The work of reviewing our website and agency materials is underway with the goal to launch a new website in the coming year. We will bring in BIPOC perspectives as we revamp our materials with the goal of inclusivity and representation.
- **Anti-Racism Road Map.** As a staff, we created a road map that guides our anti-racism work and aspirations. With full staff participation in ongoing committee work, we identified four pillars for growth: self, internal organizational culture, client services, and community collaborations. Each committee will continue to identify and work toward measurable goals within these pillars.

How [COVID-19](#) Impacted Our Operations

Services Continue Remotely and In-Person. Since transitioning to remote services in March 2020, we have successfully continued all agency operations. From pregnancy options counseling to homestudy interviews, virtual platforms have been an effective way to meet most of our clients and have expanded our accessibility and reach. In-person meetings continue as needed, including for adoption planning and placements. We look forward to the time we can transition back to delivering more in-person services.

Gatherings and Retreats Stay Online. All group meetings and gatherings have also remained virtual, which has increased access and ease of attending. These include Adoption Information Meetings, the [Pre-Adoption Seminar](#) and [Waiting Family Pool Parties](#). This will continue into the foreseeable future. Additionally, we've shifted from having one annual birth parent retreat to hosting quarterly birth parent gatherings virtually. Our clients share that these online platforms have been a much-needed opportunity to connect during these times of social isolation.

Community Education and Connections

Webinars Advance Community Education. To continue service provider trainings during COVID, we produced webinars, which have become a welcomed and popular format for many of our community partners. We crafted customized trainings for Oregon

and Washington child welfare workers, hospital social workers and staff, and a host of other helping professions. For example:

- We created a three-part webinar series for [Oregon Health Authority's Reproductive Health Program](#). They're contracting with OA&FS to develop more webinar trainings for their staff.
- ARMS (Affiliates Risk Management Services, Inc.), which oversees the training for [Planned Parenthood](#), tapped us to create training webinars on open adoption and all-options counseling. These were presented through their Center of Affiliate Learning (CAL) and made available to Planned Parenthood locations nationwide, along with our brochures. We're very excited about the long-term potential of this working relationship!
- We also offered customized trainings to regional Planned Parenthood offices at their request.

Outreach Promotional Emails. We stayed in touch with service providers via fall and spring outreach promotional emails. These highlighted our trainings, client services and OA&FS materials for the individuals they serve.

Coalition of Oregon Adoption Agencies. In May, Suzie Williams was elected president of the [Coalition of Oregon Adoption Agencies](#) (COAA).

OA&FS 35th Anniversary

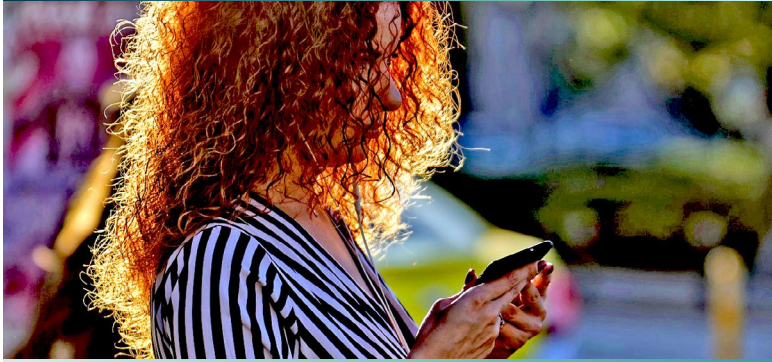
Amplifying Adoption Constellation Voices. To celebrate our 35th anniversary in 2020, we solicited video diaries from various OA&FS adoption constellation members and produced them into [educational videos](#). Production of the series continued into 2021 with a focus on BIPOC OA&FS adoptee voices featuring [Nathan](#) and [Cameron](#).

Narrative Inquiry of Birth/Adoptive Fathers' Experiences of Open Adoption

OA&FS birth fathers and adoptive fathers were invited to participate in a research inquiry. This research project was fielded by Phil Weglarz, an adoptive father and PhD candidate at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. The project seeks to better understand birth fathers' and adoptive fathers' unique, differing, and intersecting perspectives about adoption, parenting, and families. Said Phil, "Your organization's website stands out as one that includes and promotes the presence and voices of birth fathers. Kudos! It would be wonderful to have fathers from your community represented." ■

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE MISSION.

EXPECTANT PARENT SERVICES



214

Expectant parents contacted OA&FS for initial pregnancy options counseling.

74

Expectant parents engaged in ongoing counseling services.

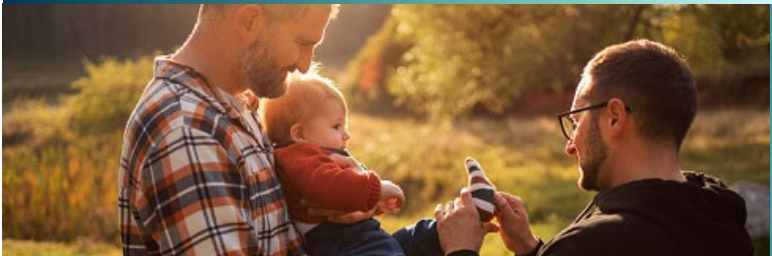
4

Average weeks birth parents received counseling prior to adoption planning.

27

Registrations for our four virtual birth parent gatherings.

ADOPTIVE PARENT SERVICES



25

Adoption Information Meetings held.

294

People that attended an Adoption Information Meeting.

12

Pre-Adoption Seminars held.

183

Number of people that attended a Pre-Adoption Seminar.

WAITING FAMILIES



58

OA&FS and independent homestudies completed.

37

Families that entered our waiting families pool.

57

Average number of families in pool.

17

Average number of months between pool entry and placement.

285

Number of new and recurring people that attended one of our 14 waiting family gatherings.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE MISSION.

ADOPTIONS



39

Number of infant adoptions completed. Of these ...

51%

were "Last minute" placements – when adoption planning begins at birth.

28

Average age of birth parents.

38

Average age of adoptive parents.

OUTREACH FOR PROFESSIONALS



15

Webinars conducted by OA&FS counselors.

410

Service providers registered for webinars.

20

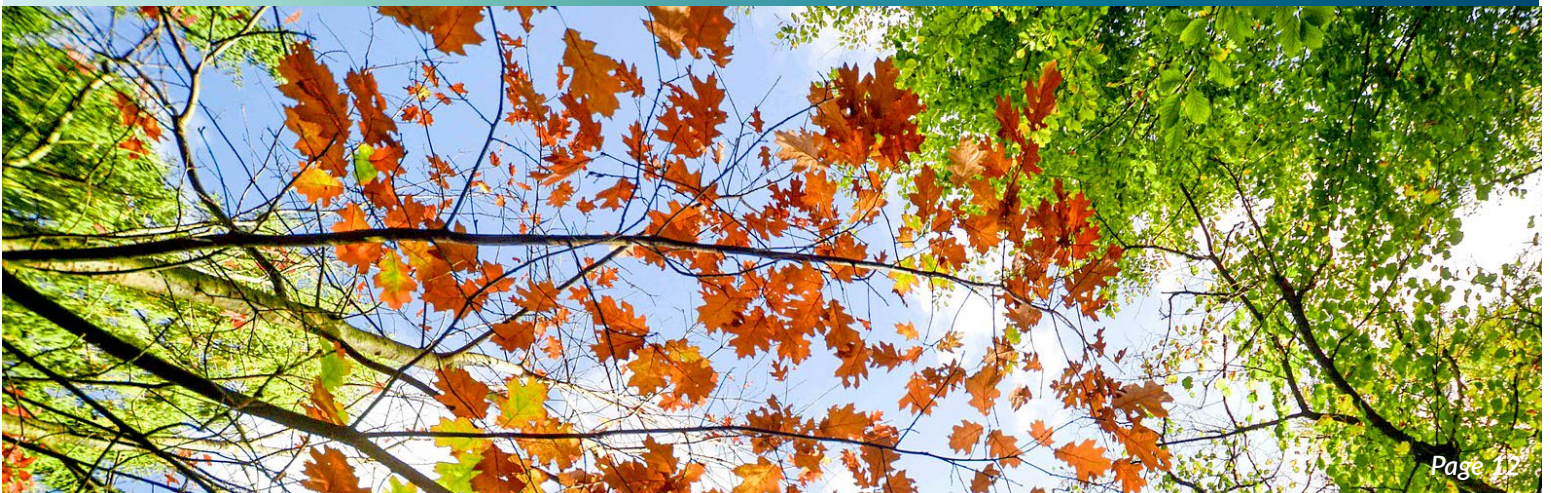
Outreach presentations to individual organizations.

578

Service providers engaged with our trainings.

2600

Service providers received our promotional emails.



WHY DO YOU GIVE TO OA&FS?

We are so appreciative of all of our donors, including adoptive grandparents Eve and Howard. Here are some insights into why and how they support OA&FS.

When did you first hear about OA&FS?

My son and his husband told me about OA&FS and said they'd submitted an application for adoption. We sent pictures and information they requested for their presentation, and were excited to be part of the process. Now that they have a wonderful new baby in their home, we wanted to give to the agency that made it possible.

What attracted you to the agency?

Our sons said OA&FS was welcoming and open to a gay couple adopting a newborn. We were thrilled because we knew they wanted to start a family, and OA&FS sounded like a good fit for them. In addition, the commitment to open adoption was important for our potential grandchild, so they'd know they were loved and cherished by all involved.

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

All of it is valuable and positioned well for the 21st century. My impression of the agency (from a distance) is that OA&FS understands and appreciates that loving families come in all sorts of configurations that other adoption agencies might not welcome.

Why do you choose to donate to OA&FS?

When we got word that we had a grandchild we were over the moon with joy, but we know the process isn't easy, nor is it inexpensive. We wanted to "pay it forward" so other families

would be able to find the child they're meant to have, and so the OA&FS mission can continue.

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

Having our new baby means everything to the parents, the grandparents, the aunts and uncles, the great-aunts and uncles and great-grandparents, and even the cousins who have a new friend. This is the first grandchild on both sides of the family and we joke there may be a competition to see which grandparents can spoil him the most! The important thing is that in our grandchild we can see our next generation, we can see the love our sons bring to their new baby, and we can experience all over again the joy of watching a child grow (without our having to get up for middle of the night feedings!) ■



Adoptee Simon with his adoptive grandmother Eve.



Adoptee Simon with with adoptive parents Raphi and David and adoptive grandmother Eve.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR **GENEROUS SUPPORT.**

GRANTS

Google Ad Grants

ORGANIZATIONS

Alliance Insurance Group

Amazon Smile

Anonymous–Costco

Employee Giving

Anonymous–Network for Good

Anonymous–Nike

Costco Gift Match

Kennedy Jenks Gift Match

Kroger/Fred Meyer

Microsoft Gift Match

Neill Family Charitable Trust

Nike Gift Match

The Standard Gift Match

HOUSEHOLDS

Janne Ahonen & Janne

Haekkinen

Ann & Jay Arney

Elizabeth Baldo & Ryan Warner

Eric Bergman & Susan Crabtree

Karl Berry

Kaitlyn Berry

Mary Getty Bradley

Payton Brusse

Melissa Busch & Jason Resch

Mary Ellen Bushnell

Janet Battenwieser & Matt

Wiley

Sage Carter

Carol Casciato

Lee Catalano

Chris Chandler & Adam Baker

M-Yin M. Chen

Caitlin Cooper

Alice Dale & Frank Evans

Amy DeGennaro

John Etter

Sarah Felstiner & Scobie

Puchtler

John Flinn & Bill Hollands

Sharon Fridrick & Steven

Shapiro

Garrett Garfield

Jaimie & Paul Gerber

Michelle Greco & Mike Banker

Kelly Hall

Dick Hausken & Ruth

Warbington

John & Jennifer Hein

Lois Heinlein & Tom Mathews

Jan Jamieson

Karen & Tom Jantzen

Scott Huber & Jeffrey Lee

Jennifer & Larry Johnson

Chelsea Kearns & Nick

Patterson

Lisa & Doug Klink

Alison & Julie Kneisl

Lisa Koblenz

Dean Kralios & Scot Partlow

Jeri Krier & Wally Roghair

Yuliya Kuznetsova

Erika Larson

Cynthia Lee

Shari Levine

Katie Lightner

Juan Lombardi

Lori Maas

Merrie & Seth McGaw

George & Mary McInnis

Christy McMannis & Ron

Renchler

Kara Mealy

Dahnesh Medora & Robin

Webster

Kelly & Josh Merrick

Kari Miles

Bry Moehling

Melissa Mullaly

Timothy Panek

Alisha & Tyler Phillips

Sari Prevost

Duc Quan & Brian Richardson

Denise Quigley & Melanie

Duch

Susan Ratzlaff

Leslie Rieder & Matt Granberry

Annie Roberts

Michael & Wendy Russo

Sally Shuey

Alicia Simone

Lynn Skirven

Mark & Diane Spaur

Mathew Spaur

Steve & Julie Stegeman

Kathryn Tashima

Adam Thomas

Marshall Tower

Thomas Valvano

Delphine Veith

Nick Veroske

David White

Chris & Priscilla Williams

Suzie & Evan Williams ■

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020-21

Meet our newest board member Nathan Faust!



"I've been a part of this agency since the literal day I was born as they facilitated the open adoption between my birth parents and adoptive parents. Being adopted is a large part of my identity and I've been an advocate for open adoption for years. Traditional "closed" adoptions don't allow children and birth parents to remain in contact, while open adoptions allow for medical records, personal information, and relationships to be shared.

It's the blessing of my life to grow up knowing all four of my parents and now, 24 years later, I'm very excited to return to Open Adoption & Family Services and continue building our relationship."

VICE-PRESIDENT MELISSA BUSCH

Birth Parent, Parent and Nurse

PRESIDENT SAGE CARTER

Birth Parent, Executive Assistant to Head of School at Oregon Episcopal School

NATHAN FAUST

Adoptee, Undergraduate Admissions Counselor at Loyola Marymount University

GARRETT GARFIELD

Birth Parent, Partner at Holland & Knight Law Firm

SECRETARY MICHELE GRECO

Adoptive Parent, Personal Coach and Consultant

JENNIFER JOHNSON

Adoptive Parent

ALLIE PHILLIPS

Adoptive Parent, Business Owner

MARK SPAUR

Adoptive Parent, Vice President at Kennedy Jenks

STEVE STEGEMAN

Adoptive Parent, CPA at Davis and Graves

SUZIE WILLIAMS

Executive Director at OA&FS

APRIL VANDERKAMP

Adoptee, Registered Nurse

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.

Janna Annest
Justin Armintrout
Andrea Bellows
Carol Browning
Heather Carpenter
Brad Cota
Kelsey Cribbs
Debbie Crisler
Mark Crisler

Tyrone Davis
Michael Delaney
Theodore Flatt
Mallory Iwagoshi
Tabitha Koh
Albert Lirhus
Cirihn Malpocher
Debbi Marshall
Dean Martin

Meaghan McCracken
Kari Miles
Sunny Moore
Cindy Ogasawara
Victoria Petkau
Alisha Phillips
Nathan Price
Kathryn Prive
Rita Rogers

Nickey Sanders
Britt Udy
Carrie Wilton
Anna Young ■



WE APPRECIATE OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS.

We're committed to educating service providers to recognize best practices in all-options pregnancy counseling and open adoption. OA&FS staff conducts outreach presentations and webinars throughout the region year-round. In doing this, we form important relationships that benefit all who receive services from OA&FS. These logos represent the organizations who attended a presentation or webinar with us last fiscal year!





*Adoptee Charlie with
birth parent Stephanie.*



OPEN ADOPTION & FAMILY SERVICES

OPENADOPT.ORG 1-800-772-1115 INFO@OPENADOPT.ORG