

ANNUAL PICNIC



The Adoption Options Annual Picnic was held on Saturday, September 20, 2008 at Green Acres Park in Burlington, NJ. Families touched by Adoption Options, came together to share stories and reconnect. The day was filled with fun and reminiscing! The children played games, while the adults had some time to sit back and relax. There was great food and good conversation too.

The annual picnic is in its 12th year and continues to be a much anticipated time for our families to reunite with each other and our staff. Enjoy the photos we captured that day!



ADOPTION OPTIONS

IS A PUBLICATION OF LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES OF NEW JERSEY

Do you have a story you would like to share?
Any news or announcements you would like to include in our newsletter?

Would you like to be added to our mailing list?
Let us know.

Call 609.699.4139 or email hkato@lsmnj.org.



Come Learn about ADOPTION OPTIONS' two domestic programs: OPEN INFANT PROGRAM & WAITING CHILD PROGRAM 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM

LSM/NJ's Central Administrative Office
6 Terri Lane, Suite 300, Burlington, NJ 08016

WEDNESDAYS:

December 3, 2008

January 7, 2009

February 4, 2009

March 4, 2009

April 1, 2009

May 6, 2009

Please RSVP to Terry Dingle at 1.800.458.0651.
We also provide homestudy services for those families interested in doing international adoptions.
Free birthparent counseling is also provided.
Our birthparent counselors can be reached at our toll free number: 1.888.325.6621.



ADOPTION OPTIONS

A Program of Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey

FALL 2008

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

LUTHERAN SOCIAL
MINISTRIES of
NEW JERSEY

Services

COMMUNITY OUTREACH
Adoption Options
Assisted Living Program
Community Partnering
Immigration & Refugee Services
Lutheran Counseling Service
Lutheran Disaster Response
Speakers Bureau

COMMUNITY
RESIDENTIAL SERVICES
Lutheran Home for Children
Piscataway Community Residence
Sayreville Community Residence

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT
SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING
Luther Haven
Project Home
Stepping Stones Commons

AFFORDABLE FAMILY HOUSING
Cadwalader Apartments
Elwood Driver Townhomes
Lutheran Social Ministries of Camden
Mott Centre Street Apartments
Peapack-Gladstone
Family Housing
West Hanover Street Apartments

AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING
Birchwood at Old Bridge Senior
Apartments
Circle F Senior Apartments
Luther Arms*
Lutheran Senior Residence at Pennsauken
Mirota Senior Residence
Mt. Olive Manor I & II*
Roosevelt Solar Village*
South Plainfield Senior Residence

SENIOR HEALTHCARE
Lutheran Care at Moorestown

CONTINUING CARE
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY
Crane's Mill

*Professionally managed by Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey

MESSAGE

FROM THE DIRECTOR



National Adoption Month is not only a time of celebration but it is a time for families to reflect upon their unique adoption journey. Part of this journey entails seeking knowledge and awareness in order to make the best informed decisions as a family expands through adoption. Sharing experiences with others who have traveled the path and who have engaged in similar decisions can offer reassurance; and keeping informed about new trends and adoption news is a great way to prepare for the big step forward.

At Adoption Options, a program of Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey, our goal is not only to help create beautiful families but also to provide adoption education to our families in hopes that they gain an understanding of the unique aspects of parenting an adopted child. As service providers, we understand that each phase of the adoption process families are in, whether it's pre or post adoption, we will strive to strengthen families by empowering them through knowledge and training.

In addition to providing the required training for our families who are in our Open Infant Program and our Waiting Child Program, this year we also offered a summer series of workshops. One of those workshops focused on transracial/transcultural adoption. It seems that each year, more and more of our families are par-

enting children across cultural and racial lines. It's an exhilarating voyage, filled with joy and at times challenges—and we were able to help encourage families to embrace the opportunities this type of adoption offers through our workshop. Our families who have decided to adopt children outside their race or culture have felt that their family experience has been enriched through expanding their homes to include the culture and heritage of their adopted child. Incorporating another culture into your home is an exciting process and a necessary one if you choose to do a transracial/transcultural adoption.

For this newsletter, we reached out and spoke to some families who have found their transracial/transcultural adoption to be the most rewarding experience. Read about ways they have incorporated cultural experiences into everyday living – allowing them to grow and blossom as a family.

Observation of National Adoption Month and National Adoption Day (November 15th) remind us to take time to: raise awareness about adoption; share your personal adoption experiences with others; and remind others to consider adoption of a waiting child or newborn.

MaryAnn Sager, Director of Adoption Options



Though adoption practices have changed dramatically since our beginnings in 1948, our focus is still to provide compassionate, caring services for those involved in the adoption process. Today, Adoption Options is a multi-faceted statewide adoption program, serving all people -- regardless of faith, income, race and marital status.

Call us to learn more today! 1.888.325.6621
www.lsmnjadoption.org

CREATING UNIQUE EXPERIENCES Through TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS

Every adoption journey is unique. Whether it involves an infant or a waiting child, the circumstances and specific characteristics define each adoption and enrich the lives of everyone included in the process.

Our most recent journey carries us into the lives of Jason and Liz, and allows us to take a closer look at transracial/transcultural adoptions -- a trend that continues to grow.

In March 2008, Jason and Liz welcomed home their adopted son, Ryan. He was just two days old at the time. Jason and Liz decided to adopt after experiencing issues with infertility. "We discussed various options, but decided to pursue adoption because it was the best choice for us," explains Liz.

Liz and Jason were well aware of the fact that transracial adoptions of ethnic infants could accelerate the process. And though they ultimately decided to participate in a transracial adoption, they felt strongly about not making their decision based on timing. "We wanted to make that decision based on our capabilities and what we could offer a child, not our own desire to be parents," includes Liz.

"As we considered the unique challenges of transracial adoption we thought we had the resources to do it successfully. We recognized that a transracial adoption is not always the best choice for a child. The loss of a cultural heritage adds to the loss of being parented by a birth family," explains Liz. "We also considered how a transracial adoption would affect us as a family. We realize that we will first be viewed by others as a transracial adoptive family. While that identity is part of our family, we think it's important that it doesn't define who we are as a family."

Liz and Jason also felt it was significantly important to educate themselves about the issues relating to Ryan and his racial back-

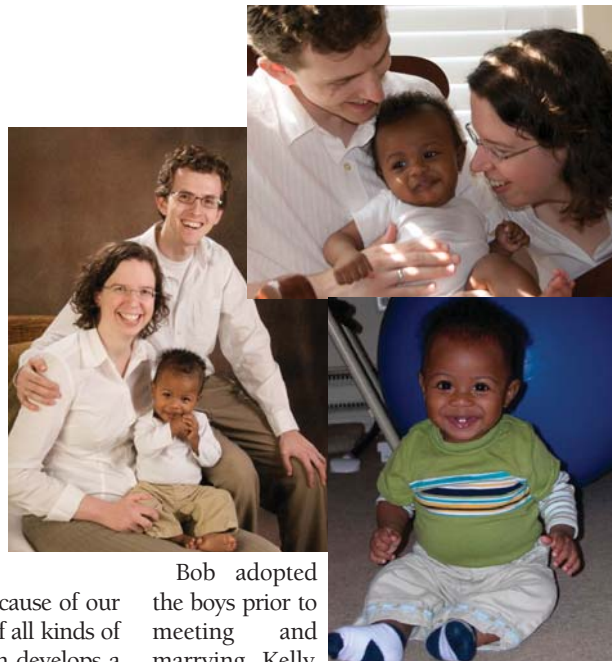
ground. They often refer to internet blogs created by other adoptive parents, including transracial adoptive parents, in order to gather more information.

When asked how they will incorporate Ryan's ethnic background into his life, Liz explains, "We believe that Ryan should grow up in a diverse community not just because of his race, but because of our own beliefs about the importance of all kinds of diversity. Part of ensuring that Ryan develops a strong racial self-identity is that he doesn't view the celebration of his racial background as something that we've brought into our home artificially." She continues, "Instead, we're building on the interests and beliefs that we already have. We want Ryan to value all kinds of differences, and in that, build a positive self-identity."

The couple has also taken steps to ensure that Ryan is exposed to people of different races, providing as much diversity as possible. From the pediatrician and daycare teachers he interacts with to the books he reads and the community he will grow up in. They intend to make every important decision based on their needs as a transracial family.

It is increasingly common for transracial/transcultural adoptive families to incorporate ethnic traditions and cultural heritage into their children's lives. For Bob and Kelly, another Adoption Options family, it was important to expose their two sons to multi-cultural experiences. Not only did they move to an area that was diverse and multi-culturally friendly, but they also provided their boys with a support system of counselors and teachers that gave them the freedom to take the lead and find their own opportunities. Bob explains, "I think it has given them a better sense of who they are."

Bob, a minister and a single parent at the time, adopted Andrew, now age 19, when he was 12 years old. Andrew is part white Caucasian and part Native American. Their second son, Justin, was adopted at age 11. He is African American and is now age 16. Throughout their life together, they have shared experiences that have exposed the boys to various cultures and people of different backgrounds. "The boys have helped me by volunteering at a soup kitchen in Atlantic City before," includes Bob. "I think these types of experiences have made an impact and have opened them up to a bigger world."



Bob adopted the boys prior to meeting and marrying Kelly.

Once united as a family, they took a trip to Africa in December 2004. They visited various areas that Bob had lived during his time as a Peace Corp volunteer in the early 1980's. "During our time in Zambia, we stayed in a rather poor section. I had the opportunity to introduce Kelly and the boys to individuals I knew, and showed them other areas of Africa I had visited. I wanted to share with them the experiences that shaped who I am -- my values, and my attitudes," remarked Bob.

A likely result of their exposure to different experiences, Andrew has expressed an interest in joining the National Guard and Justin would like to travel overseas as a foreign exchange student.

Bob and Kelly will continue to expand their family in the coming months as they enter into the adoption process once again. They have decided to adopt two more children, a sibling group between the ages of 5 and 10. "We are open to adopting children of any ethnic background," explains Bob. "We plan to give them the same opportunities and experiences so that they can also take the lead in determining who they are and who they will be."

Although Bob and Kelly's adoption journey is different from that of Jason and Liz, they share a common interest in enriching the lives of their children through exposure to multi-cultural surroundings. Both families have bridged a barrier and accepted a challenging task that has brought them much love and happiness.

In addition to creating unique experiences and loving families, transracial/transcultural adoption also assists in reducing the overwhelming number of minority children in need of loving homes. Those who embark on a transracial adoption -- and embrace it -- can discover a whole new world of possibilities.



Justin, Bob, Andrew and Kelly

Adoption Options is a not-for profit program of Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey, and therefore relies on generous donations in order to continue to provide support services, such as: free birth parent counseling; pre and post-adoption education and counseling; post-placement supervision and counseling; as well as homestudies. Financial contributions also enable us to keep our fees for service lower than most agencies -- some of the lowest in the state of New Jersey.

This month Adoption Options received an incredibly generous donation from a young lady who wanted to give back to our organization. Fifteen years ago the agency delivered Lindsay to her adoptive parents, Patty and Gene. Recently, as they began preparations for Lindsay's 15th birthday Quinceanera celebration, they took a trip down memory lane

A Heart of



GOLD

and reflected on their adoption journey.

As they reminisced, they reviewed copies of Adoption Options newsletters which shared experiences from birthparents and adoptive families and detailed the types of services the agency provides.

Lindsay was moved by the stories and decided to do something to give back to the agency that gave her so much! She chose to make a donation to Adoption Options, in lieu of handing out favors to the attendees at her Quinceanera.

We would like to thank Lindsay for making such a heartfelt decision, as well as the countless others, touched by adoption, whose contributions allow us to continue to meet the needs of our clients across the state.

Happy Birthday Lindsay!!

BIRTHPARENTS HAVE RIGHTS TOO!

If you are a prospective birth parent seeking a loving home for your child, the three most important qualities you need in your adoption attorney are experience, compassion, and trust.

Q: Am I able to choose the parents for my baby?

A: Yes, the birth mother (or birthparents) decides on the adoptive family for her baby. Our counselors will work with you to help you choose the best family for your child and answer any questions you may have about the family.

Q: How do I find out about the adoptive parents?

A: All Prospective adoptive parents prepare a "profile" which includes an autobiography and photographs of themselves and their families. The profile allows you to learn personal information about the prospective adoptive parents including information about their families and friends, their other children, their relationship, their hopes and dreams for a family and much more. You can also speak with the prospective adoptive parents over the telephone as often as you wish or arrange to meet in person.

As a birth parent, we also ask for you to provide background information about yourself to the adoptive family that you select. You will complete paperwork that will provide the prospective adoptive parents with information regarding your family and health history. This directly benefits your child that you place for adoption. The information that you provide has lifelong benefits for your child.

Q: Will I receive any help with living expenses and medical bills?

A: All states have specific laws regulating the payment of a birth mother's expenses and medical bills in connection with an adoption. In some states, the



laws allow prospective adoptive parents to provide the birth mother with reasonable financial assistance that is directly related to her pregnancy and delivery of the child. We can provide necessary resources to you about the financial assistance you may be able to receive.

Q: How much contact will I have with the adoptive parents and my child after I place my child for adoption?

A: Open Adoption lets you decide, along with the adoptive parents of your child, exactly how much contact you will have with them and the child after your adoption placement. Some birth parents enjoy periodic pictures and perhaps a letter or two each year about the child's progress. Many birth parents and adoptive parents maintain contact for years. We will help you select adoptive parents who are willing to provide the contact you desire.

Q: Can I receive counseling regarding my decision to place my child for adoption?

A: We provide counseling at no cost during and after pregnancy. A pregnancy counselor meets one-on-one with you to assist with decision making, parenting resources, adoption planning, and post-adoption counseling. We want to help you prepare for all the decisions and feelings that lie ahead of you.

Whether you decide to parent your child or place your child into an open adoption, we will give you information about all of your options and help you make an informed decision that is best for everyone.

**For more information,
call us at 1.888.325.6621.
We're here to help you...
every step of the way.**