



2009 Annual PICNIC



The Annual Adoption Options Picnic was held on Saturday, September 19, 2009 at Green Acres Park in Burlington, NJ. It was a beautiful, early autumn day filled with laughter, great food and a children's entertainer, who sang songs, painted faces and played games which included a colorful parachute. This annual event is a time to celebrate all those touched by adoption. The families who attended were in different phases of their adoption journey; some early in the process and waiting to expand their family, families who have recently finalized their child's adoption, and others who fondly remember their adoption process and are now chasing their children around the park.

Besides a day filled with fun and relaxation, it is a day giving way to opportunities of supportive interaction and discussion for our adoptive parents. Not only can adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents benefit from formal education sessions delivered by social workers, they can also learn valuable lessons from each other

in empathic, heartfelt conversations. Parents benefit from hearing about the experiences of others who have been faced with and successfully dealt with issues unique to adoptive parenting—discussions on how to survive the wait of a child placement to how to handle unique school situations that an adoptive child might some day face.

Watching families chat and share stories at the picnic and hearing their comments afterwards, reaffirms the many benefits adoptive families receive while networking with one another. Many families shared that it was very helpful and encouraging to hear stories and advice from other families and at the same time felt supported by others.

The annual picnic is in its 13th year and continues to be a much anticipated time for our families to reunite with each other and our staff. We hope you can join us next year.

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:

January 6, 2010 • February 3, 2010
March 3, 2010 • April 7, 2010
May 5, 2010 • June 2, 2010
July 7, 2010 • August 4, 2010
September 1, 2010 • October 6, 2010
November 3, 2010 • December 1, 2010

Please RSVP to MaryAnn Sager at 609.699.4111.

We also provide homestudy services for those families interested in doing independent adoptions. Free birthparent counseling is also provided. Our birthparent counselors can be reached at our toll free number: 1.888.325.6621.

Legacy of an ADOPTED CHILD

Once there were two women who never knew each other.
One you do not remember, the other you call Mother.
Two different lives shaped to make you one.
One became your guiding star, the other became your sun.
The first one gave you life, and the second taught you to live it.
The first gave you a need for love. The second was there to give it.
One gave you a nationality. The other gave you a name.
One gave you a talent. The other gave you aim.
One gave you emotions. The other calmed your fears.
One saw your first sweet smile. The other dried your tears.
One sought for you a home that she could not provide.
The other prayed for a child and her hope was not denied.
And now you ask me, through your tears,
the age-old question unanswered through the years.
Heredity or environment, which are you a product of?
Neither, my darling. Neither. Just two different kinds of Love.

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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 or receive our quarterly eblast?

Send your contact information to hkato@lsmnj.org or call 609.699.4139



LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES of NEW JERSEY

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ADOPTION OPTIONS

A Program of Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey

WINTER 2010

LUTHERAN SOCIAL
MINISTRIES of
NEW JERSEY

Services

COMMUNITY OUTREACH
Adoption Options
Assisted Living Program
Community Partnering
Immigration & Refugee Services
Lutheran Disaster Response
Lutherans Feeding Friends
New Visions Homeless Day Shelter
Speakers Bureau

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

**HOUSING DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT**
Lutheran Social Ministries of Camden

SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING
Luther Haven
Project Home
Stepping Stones Commons

AFFORDABLE FAMILY HOUSING
Cadwalader Apartments
Elwood Driver Townhomes
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



The practice of adoption is not new. It dates back to ancient times and has since been evolving and changing through time. Adoption does not remain in a vacuum unaffected by societal changes. It is touched by our economy, politics, changes in law and newly developing research. As adoption is impacted by these outside factors and changes result, a family's expectation of the kind of adoption they initially envisioned, as well as their expectation on how their adoption will proceed, is sometimes altered.

The latest statistics indicate a downward trend of families pursuing international adoption. Within the past few years, we are seeing that country programs are either closing or slowing down. Figures for the 2008 fiscal year, released by the State Department, showed 17,438 adoptions were from abroad, which is certainly down from 19,613 in 2007. The all-time peak for international adoptions was 22,884 in 2004. For many families, who at one time considered doing an international adoption, their initial plans changed when they were faced with increasing waiting times, costs and paperwork as well as the increased risks that a country program would close before they were able to complete their adoption.

With the increased difficulties involved with international adoption, many families found their way to consider domestic adoption. As they proceeded on this journey, they were reassured by the easier paperwork process, as well as, the opportunity to obtain more background and medical information on domestic children than children born outside the US. They were also experiencing, on average, a shorter time frame of completing an adoption and lower costs. In a 2007 survey conducted by Adoptive Families, the average cost of a domestic adoption is under \$20,000, considerably less than that of the average international adoption.

Just within the last 20 years, changes within domestic adoptions have also occurred. Secretive adoption practices have given way to a process of openness and honesty. No longer are children just assigned to families by adoption agency professionals, who offer little background information to share with the child as he or she grows up. More and more adopting parents are meeting or

have a relationship with the birth family. Birthparents are now empowered to choose which family will adopt their child. At Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey (LSM/NJ), birthparents have access to free pregnancy options counseling to help them make a loving plan for their children. Adopting parents are embraced by the birth families who chose them freely and willingly. Adopted children have more information and answers to their many questions and the opportunity of sharing a relationship with their birth families.

Our families at LSM/NJ will often say that their initial concerns about an open adoption have been replaced by gratitude for the opportunity to know their child's birth family, to hear their adoption story and to acquire information first hand. We invite you to read about a first hand account of one adoptive mother's story of her changing expectations regarding open adoption.

Some societal changes lead to positive outcomes, while other changing trends can have devastating consequences. Our faltering economy will cause increased human need and at the same time limit state spending for service programs. Programs that depend upon charitable donations will be impacted. We are beginning to see the effects on child welfare and adoption services, and finding adoptive and foster families for waiting children. At LSM/NJ we try to make adoptions possible for all families in keeping our fees reasonable and offer adoption programs with little or no costs to our families. In this issue we give suggestions on how to afford an adoption.

In closing, I would like to extend a heartfelt 'thank you' to everyone who has generously donated to the Adoption Options program. Your continued support enables us to provide supportive services, such as free birth parent counseling, pre and post adoption education, and other services for adoptive parents.

MaryAnn Sager

Discovering NEW PATHWAYS to our DESTINATIONS

CHANGING COURSE FROM A SEMI-OPEN ADOPTION TO AN OPEN ADOPTION

When first meeting a prospective adoptive family, the staff at Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey (LSM/NJ) spends time exploring the family's initial expectation on how they believe their adoption will proceed. We reassure our families, who start out their journeys with limited information, that we don't expect them to have all the answers to their many adoption questions and not be surprised if they find that their initial expectations change as they gather more information. Through time, a family will eventually gain an understanding and comfort level of the kind of adoption which would be best suited for them.

During the adoption process, families learn about the newest trends in adoption, obtain education about adoption issues and learn about the children available for adoption. Often times, with new information, initial expectations are altered and new adoption options arise. So was the case for Jaime. Her adoption journey took a new path when she received a call from LSM/NJ asking if she would be interested in pursuing an open adoption with a birth mother residing in New Jersey. The call came only 2 weeks after her homestudy was completed and she was told that she would need to travel to New Jersey. At the time, Jaime was working with a licensed adoption agency in the state in which she resided which facilitates semi-open adoptions. During her homestudy process, Jaime had expectations of an adoption in which her birth mother would learn some basic information about her, such as her first name and city in which she lived and she would learn similar basic information about her birthmother.

Jaime's initial expectation of the kind of adoption she would have was based upon not only her adoption agency's orientation but her own personal experience. Jaime's younger sister's adoption was a closed adoption and her younger brother's was a semi-open adoption. When she learned that LSM/NJ was an open adoption agency, she had her concerns. In reflecting back she relates, "Hearing the words 'open adoption' stirred around a lot of questions for me. Initially, a lot of concerns began to flood my head



Jaime and her daughter

since I was not prepared or informed about the open adoption process. I wondered if my daughter's birthmother would decide she wanted to parent and could show up at my house; or, if open adoption meant that my daughter's birthmother would want to be a part in making parenting decisions." However, after some discussion with the staff at LSM/NJ on the benefits of an open adoption Jaime decided to proceed down this new path.

Jaime's Story...

Adoption has always been a natural part of my life. I have a younger brother who is adopted from Japan, and a younger sister who is adopted from Korea. I always knew

I wanted to adopt a child and I finally got to a point in my life where I was ready to begin the adoption journey. I received a call within two weeks from the adoption agency I was working with and was told that through their networking with other agencies, a birthmother in another state had chosen me to parent her daughter who was two weeks old. I was informed that I would have to travel from my hometown to New Jersey, within three days, and there I would meet with the staff at Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey and meet my daughter, who was staying with a foster family after being released from the hospital. I bought some baby girl clothes, packed my bags, booked a plane ticket, and was off to New Jersey. The day I arrived in New Jersey and met with the staff of Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey and met my beautiful daughter. I had a lot of paperwork to review and sign before heading to the hotel with my daughter.

Four days after I met with MaryAnn Sager I brought my daughter to the Lutheran Social Ministries office to meet with her birthmother. I have to admit, I was very nervous. I wondered if she would like me in person, or what she would say to me or ask me, or if she would change her mind about wanting a single person to parent her child. The moment I met her, all my worries faded. My daughter's birthmother welcomed me by saying that I "looked like a natural" holding a baby. We talked about all sorts of things and realized that we had so much in common. She explained to me why she picked me, a single mother, to parent her child and everything that she said was positive and reassuring. I also got to learn a lot about her, a lot of good information that I can and will share with my daughter. I left our initial meeting with an overwhelming feeling of many emotions--reassured, grateful, blessed, and admiration. My fears about open adoption faded away and I suddenly was filled with even more gratitude and admiration for my daughter's birthmother having the strength to make such a selfless decision and providing me with the light of my life. I met with my daughter's birthmother on one more occasion while I was in New Jersey, during a family dinner. She was able to meet several of my family members and once again told me that she was happy that she chose me to parent her daughter. I kept thinking to

myself that I am the one who is supposed to be providing her with reassurance that I am going to be the best mother I can be and give her daughter all the love and happiness that I can, but instead she was the one reassuring me of her decision. We did not have a set outline of what future contact would look like so I was not exactly sure what to expect, but I was not worried or concerned, in fact I looked forward to more contact and learning more about this amazing woman.

When I left New Jersey, returned home, and got adjusted to my new life, I wondered when would be too soon to call, or send pictures, or write a letter. I did not have to wonder for too long because I received a call from my daughter's birthmother and we talked, as though we had known each other for quite some time. She asked about my extended family and I told her all the things going on and how big my daughter was getting and that she was already smiling and cooing. Over the next few months I sent pictures and communicated with my daughter's birthmother through email mostly. Throughout the first year of my daughter's life, I communicated with her birthmother about once every two to three months, and would always talk on holidays, just like I would call my relatives from out of town to give them holiday wishes. During the following year our contact was not as frequent, but I continued to send pictures and updates of how things were going and the new things that my daughter was doing. It was fun exchanging stories about my daughter with her birthmother who then would tell me about the similarities between the daughter that she parents and the daughter I parent. I got a call one day after she had received pictures from Halloween and she excitedly told me that she almost bought her daughter the exact same costume that my daughter wore for Halloween! I could hardly believe it! What a huge coincidence, with all the miles between us and all the costumes! We began to communicate more through text messaging, as it seemed that both of our lives were getting busier, but we still keep in touch, and that is what is important. I want to share all of the wonderful things my daughter is doing and learning with her birthmother and I want to hear about the good things going on in her life as well. I feel the connection we have is very strong and I know that even if we do not talk for several months or even six months, we are always going to be connected, by more than just me parenting the child she gave birth to. My daughter's birthmother is someone I would have been friends with even if I had met her under different circumstances. She is a kind, compassionate

woman who is brave, selfless, and strong. I admire everything about her and consider myself lucky to know her and to be a part of her life and for her to be a part of mine. When my daughter is old enough to understand the adoption process I look forward to the day that she gets to meet her birthmother and her sister. She is going to be so lucky to have even more wonderful people to call family. Without this adoption being an open adoption I know I would have missed out on so much, and I feel grateful for having the opportunity to work with Lutheran Social Ministries, and especially MaryAnn, and being educated about the meaning of open adoption and getting to experience an open adoption first hand. I could not imagine it any other way and if/when I adopt again, I look forward to it being an open adoption, and working with Lutheran Social Ministries and MaryAnn. MaryAnn provided me with the best adoption experience. I ended up having to stay in New Jersey for three weeks while waiting for ICPC (Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children) to clear to be able to return home. MaryAnn gave me her home phone number and told me to call if I needed anything. She made me feel so welcome and answered all of my questions: she made the adoption process one that focuses on the joining of families, celebration, and love. I liked working with a smaller adoption agency where I was more than just one of "many" adopting and then would be forgotten. I send MaryAnn pictures of me and my daughter to show her how big she is getting, and to let her know all the things we are doing. I am so lucky to have my daughter, her birthmother, MaryAnn, and the Lutheran Social Ministries staff to call family. I truly am blessed.

Jaime's story is not unique in that she experienced an adoption journey changing course from her initial expectations. As in many of our life's journeys, new and different pathways are discovered along the way which can lead us to our destinations. For Jaime, what started out with feelings of hesitation and concerns about pursuing an open adoption was replaced by a growing gratitude for the opportunity to know her child's birth mother, to hear her daughter's adoption story and to acquire information first hand.



Jaime, her daughter, & Alicia (the birth mother)

HOW to AFFORD an ADOPTION

ADOPTION TAX CREDITS

Adoptive families can claim a maximum adoption tax credit of \$11,650 for 2008 on their federal income tax returns for qualified adoption expenses. This does begin to phase out for families whose modified adjusted gross incomes exceed \$174,730 and excludes families whose modified adjusted gross incomes exceeds \$214,730. Families should review the IRS qualifications with a tax professional.

More information can be found at:
<http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html>
<http://tax-credit.adoption.com/>

MILITARY ADOPTION BENEFITS

If you are in active duty in the military, you may qualify for up to \$2,000 in reimbursements for adoption related expenses per child. More information can be found at: <http://www.nmfja.org>

EMPLOYER BENEFITS

A great number of employers offer a number of adoption benefits today. These benefits may include direct reimbursement of adoption costs, paid or unpaid leave, and Employee Assistance Programs. More information, including a list of companies offering adoption benefits, can be found at:
http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_benefi.cfm

GRANTS AND LOANS

You may also be eligible for grants or low-interest loans offered by many different organizations and agencies, including religious organizations and some banks. There are usually specific eligibility requirements (religious affiliation, income, special needs adoption, etc) that you must meet when you apply for such assistance. More information can be found at: <http://www.nafadopt.org>, www.familylegacies.us and www.shaohannahshope.org.

CREDIT CARDS, 401Ks, INSURANCE

Borrowing from your retirement fund, credit card, or life insurance can be a quick and easy option. However, it is not without its risks. There are typically high interest rates and fees. These sources should only be used when absolutely necessary.

ADOPTING THE WAITING CHILDREN

Additional financial resources are available to adoptive families wishing to adopt within the nation's foster care system.

ADOPTION SUBSIDIES (Title IV-E)

Subsidies are monthly payments made to adoptive parents of children with special needs. The amount of the subsidy and the Medicaid coverage is dependent on the needs of the child.



Jaime and her daughter