



# Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections

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ISSUE 48

APAC is a collaborative effort between **Children's Aid Society of Alabama** and the **Alabama Department of Human Resources** to provide education and supportive services to strengthen and empower Alabama's adoptive families.

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## MISSION ADOPTION

Watching a rocket propel through the atmosphere appears effortless. It is easy, in that moment, to forget that it took years of effort to get to that day. Scientists will quickly tell you that a journey into space requires numerous things to come together in order to make it happen: the communication and collaboration of many people - engineers, scientists, technicians - with different skills; meticulous planning and preparation; and most importantly, a destination and recovery plan. In working with adoptive families, I have seen that the journey of adoption requires the same elements: communication and collaboration; planning and preparation; and a destination and recovery plan.

Planning a successful space expedition requires experts in many disciplines to work together and communicate effectively about all aspects of the project. Many will recall the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in January, 1986, when the shuttle broke apart, killing all seven crew members on board. While the investigation into the crash revealed a seal on the rocket booster failed, NASA officials acknowledged it was the lack of communication about temperature concerns that ultimately resulted in this tragedy. People simply not sharing key information had catastrophic results. In the journey of adoption, communication with others is also critical - like listening to experts teach GPS as you prepare to adopt, and receiving background information about a child's traumatic past. As an adoptive parent, effective collaboration with family, therapists, and school personnel can determine the success of your own adoption journey.

Space travel also requires meticulous planning and preparation. In the months leading up to a space mission, astronauts go through rigorous training to prepare for every possible scenario; potential problems are identified and a plan is formulated to

address every single one - just in case. These situations are rehearsed by the astronauts until it becomes second nature. Knowing the plan neutralizes their fear, and it is often said that astronauts do not get frightened in space! Similarly, pre-adoptive parents can best prepare for adoption by learning about children who have experienced trauma and how to best help them. This knowledge is empowering and makes parenting traumatized children less frightening. Just like the prepared astronaut, an adoptive parent who knows the

potential problems and how to address them will not falter on the journey.

Finally, while the goal is to explore space, the ultimate destination of space travel is the return home. Science tells us that for every day in space, an astronaut needs a day on Earth for his/her body to heal and recover from microgravity's effects. Just like the space mission, the ultimate destination for the adoption journey is to bring a child home - at last.

Once home, the traumatized child can begin to recover and to heal. And like the astronaut, recovery does not take place immediately - it takes time for the adopted child to adjust to their new reality. There will be setbacks. Progress can be slow. But over time, healthy relationships that take root with the adopted child will settle their fears and allow them to finally begin moving forward in life.

Space exploration allows a select few to witness what most people never will - seeing the Earth as a spinning ball; staring into the vast expanse of the universe; experiencing weightlessness; and having stars with vibrant colors at your fingertips. The journey of adoption offers its own unique wonder - the ability to change someone's life in ways they never thought possible. The rewards are endless. That is a journey that is definitely worth the risk.

- Robbie Shockey, M.S.  
APAC Family Support Worker



## A note from the Director

In case you haven't figured it out yet, our theme for this newsletter edition is MISSIONS! All articles have capitalized on missions into space. So what does APAC (Alabama Pre and Post Adoption Connections) have to do with space travel? Well, we are merely using space missions as an analogy to adoption journeys. What exactly is a mission? Using my awesome "google" skills, I found these definitions of a mission: (a) a special assignment given to a person or group of people; (b) a strongly felt aim, ambition, or calling; (c) a task that is regarded as a very important duty. Reading further, I came across this: "Did you know? Your own mission in life can be anything you pursue with almost religious enthusiasm. People with a mission – whether it's stopping drunk driving, keeping the town's public areas clean, increasing local recycling, or building a community center – very often succeed in really changing things." Most families who adopt children from foster care do indeed pursue adoption with "religious enthusiasm" and consequently create an amazing capacity to change lives – the one(s) they are adopting as well as their own. I am honored to work amongst these families and professionals that possess such energy and enthusiasm that make a positive difference in this world.

One article references the "boom" that may hit during the adoption journey. It is important to stay focused on the mission, but how do you do this when things seem to be crashing? Having supports of family, insightful friends, and resources like APAC are a staple in the survival kit. Connecting with other adoptive parents is also key. I would encourage all adoptive families to connect through adoptive family groups or private Facebook groups offered by APAC. Another resource is the upcoming AFAPA (Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association) Annual Conference on May 11-13. Hundreds of foster and adoptive parents join together for educational workshops and a relaxing retreat at Shocco Springs. The information gained is so beneficial, and the relationships created can remain supportive for years to come. Check out their website for details – [www.afapa.org](http://www.afapa.org).

Are you on a mission? If so, you are someone who "very often succeeds in really changing things." Thank you.

- Debra Finley Henning, M.Ed., MSW, LICSW, PIP  
APAC Program Director

# YOU CAN CHANGE A LIFE THROUGH...



# Adoption



Currently, there are more than 250 children in Alabama foster care awaiting a loving and caring adoptive home. Many have never felt the warmth and joy that comes from a forever family. Most have been placed in agency custody due to parental neglect or physical abuse. The good news is the lives of these children can be brightened forever by just one person - YOU!

The APAC adoption program of Children's Aid Society, is recruiting families for Alabama's Waiting Children. For more information contact our adoption team!



EMAIL: [APAC@CHILDRENSAID.ORG](mailto:APAC@CHILDRENSAID.ORG)

[WWW.CHILDRENSAID.ORG/APAC](http://WWW.CHILDRENSAID.ORG/APAC)



# CALL 1-866-4AL-KIDS

# A MISSION FOR SIBLINGS

The Twin Study is a recent venture by NASA to explore the effects of long-term gravity on the human body. DNA samples of 50-year-old identical twin astronauts Scott and Mark Kelly were observed and studied for one year while one was on earth and one in orbit. These two brothers had experienced everything together since birth, even dreaming alike for space travel. That deep connection was present on January 8, 2011, when Mark found out that his wife, Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford, had been tragically wounded. More than ever, he needed his brother Scott who was in orbit. It was arranged for them to talk for a brief moment, but it wasn't quite the same. Mark was recorded as saying, "The one person who could have given me the most support was off the planet."

This story stayed with me as I considered children in Foster Care in Alabama waiting for their forever families. I was especially moved when thinking about siblings who have been separated for unforeseen reasons. These siblings are often not able

"Many children who are adopted grow up wondering about their birth siblings."

to count down to the day of their reunion like Scott and Mark Kelly. They don't have special NASA space phones where they can mourn together on difficult days or share happy moments with one another during life's celebrations. They may feel as far away from each other as the earth is to the moon.

It's similar to my twin toddler nephews who never want to be apart!

Early one morning, one of the twins was heard crying in his room while the other was watching



cartoons. When his mom asked him what was wrong, he responded with the saddest of toddler emotion, "My brother's gone!" Although simply in another room, in that brief moment a piece of his heart was aching for his brother.

Furthermore, many children who are adopted grow up wondering about their birth siblings. Our new APAC staff member, Katie Gilliland, shared her adoption story on a recent monthly webinar training. At 19, she began searching for information regarding her birth family. She spoke of being curious about possible siblings and what journey they may have experienced compared to hers.

Unmet and unfulfilled desires exist in children waiting to be adopted, and this can be specifically significant for siblings who are separated. If only they could count down the days, like astronauts on their missions, and have a goal to look forward to of their reunion. We may never know in our lifetime what traveling in deep space for an extended period of time will do to our human bodies, but overwhelming research is available for what happens when children experience trauma and are separated from their family by no fault of their own.

APAC assists in managing the unique recruitment of families for Alabama's waiting children which includes sibling groups with special adoption needs. Consider adoption, and consider sibling connection!

- Jennifer Hudson  
APAC Communications Coordinator



# BRINGING A CHILD TO THEIR FOREVER HOME

I recently saw the movie *The Martian*, which was originally released in 2015. The story is about astronaut Mark Watney, who was presumed dead after a strong storm on Mars and got left behind by his crew. Watney miraculously survived a serious injury and found himself fighting for his life with little food and few supplies, all alone. The stranded astronaut's survival depended on scientists 50 million miles away working together to bring him back safely.



Though this movie is a fictional one, it reminded me of what happens to children who end up in foster care. Through no fault of their own, a child may find himself or herself in a difficult situation that may involve physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect. That child may wonder if they are going to survive. They might have very few resources and little hope. But somewhere along the way, someone in their life sees their plight and gets them the help they so desperately need. The abuse is

Through no fault of their own, a child may find himself or herself in a difficult situation

halted and over time, hope is restored and healing can begin. Just like the scientists who worked to bring the astronaut home safely, case workers called to protect children work to return a child back to a safe home -- or help them find a new place to call home. It's not easy -- it will cost something. And sometimes, the one being rescued does not cooperate. But just like the stranded astronaut 50 million miles away, every person matters and is worthy of the rescue. We as a society must always remember the utmost importance of giving every child the opportunity to at last find a place to call home.

- Robbie Shockey, M.S.  
APAC Family Support Worker

## HEROES FROM THE HEART

Each year, APAC has the privilege of working with some amazing partners to provide services to Alabama's adoptive and foster families and in searching for and finding forever homes for many waiting children. This work can't be done alone and so for that, we just want to say "Thank you" to these heroes!



Heart Gallery Alabama  
Alabama Department of Human Resources  
Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

# MISSION CONTROL

“Houston, we have a problem.” Not a good feeling from those words! Choosing adoption may pose challenges, risks and/or complicated choices. How we navigate the journey and who we can access for support often determines our mission’s success or failure.

APAC Pre-Adoption Services offers families support with preparation for adoption. With their approved home study, families entered into the next phase of the mission and began submitting inquiries on children they fell in love with. Eventually came the much anticipated contact from DHR about a child. If they did not really hear the content of that conversation, it may be due to the excitement of getting THE call, trust me, they are not alone. It is hard to focus on processing such an exciting call like that. This is the point when APAC Post services begin to offer support and are a true lifeline on the journey.



APAC Post Services are Mission Control! The counseling and family support worker teams are there to walk with families, to clarify information, to ask questions, and to seek answers. They will be a resource to you once the child has a placement visit. As families move forward in the process and the child lands in the home, they will be walking along side them. APAC’s mission is their success.

APAC also offers support with the Adoptive Family Groups (AFG) which are offered throughout the state. These AFG’s provide the opportunity for families and professionals to get together. There are defined topics for the monthly groups, and with each meeting there is fellowship and information. This is support for both parents and children, and the APAC staff make it fun with food and activities. Because navigating the adoption journey is a life long event, the AFG’s have staying power by developing friendships for parents and children as well as offering new ideas.

APAC’s reach is growing with two Facebook Groups, and holding fast with the APAC Library. Our incredibly fun and important Camp APAC is a special time for 4 days in June, where children *boldly go where they may have not gone before* with activities and just hanging out with new friends.

While APAC is Mission Control, the parents are Commanders of the ship. They have decided that they are all in as adoptive parents; they are our heroes! They have risked it all, and have chosen to make a difference in the life of a child. They are on the journey of a lifetime! To these brave adventurers, we say, “Thank you for being who you are and thank you for letting APAC join you on your journey.”

APAC is Alabama’s Pre/Post Adoption Connection and if you find yourself thinking, “Houston, we have a problem,” then reach out for your APAC lifeline; we are here.

- Kathy King, LCSW, PIP  
APAC Family Support Worker /  
CAS Adoption Support Specialist

## APAC Resource Library is now online!

Visit our website or drop by our local APAC office to browse the vast collection of resources, or call our library directly to reserve items by phone.

### Request free online access!

For more details contact our library

[www.childrensaid.org/apaclibrary](http://www.childrensaid.org/apaclibrary)

**1-800-489-1886**

### RECOMMENDED LIBRARY RESOURCES:

#### The Connected Child

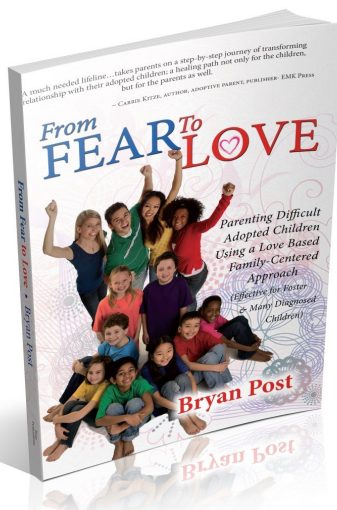
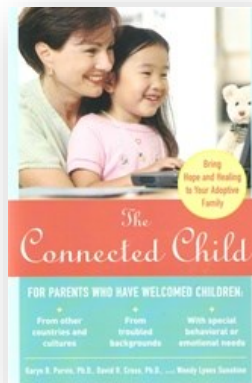
by Karyn B. Purvis

#### Driven to Distraction

by Edward Hallowell

#### The Boy Who was Raised as a Dog

by Bruce Perry



#### Playful Interaction

TCU Institute DVD

**\*Most Popular\***

#### From Fear to Love

by Bryan Post

## APAC Webinars

Free Online Training for  
Parents and Professionals

We Equip You Where You Are!

No need to leave your home or office! If you have internet access, you can join our live webinars and receive Social Work, Counseling, and Foster Parent continuing education credits!

### Upcoming Live Webinar Events:

**April** - Lying, Cheating, and Stealing in Foster and Adopted Children

**May** - The Effects of Transitions and Trauma on Child Development

**June** - All Children, All Families: Supporting LGBTQ Youth and Families

For further details and registration information, go to  
**[www.childrensaid.org/apac](http://www.childrensaid.org/apac)**

# counselors corner

## THE SONIC BOOM—WHAT'S NEXT?



I had the pleasure of talking to one of my co-workers about his experience viewing the lift-off of Apollo 11. He was just nine years old when his family went on vacation in Daytona Beach, Florida. They decided to drive over to Cape Canaveral to watch the rocket launch. He remembers viewing the massive rocket and all the smoke surrounding it as it prepared to launch into space. His most vivid memory is the thunderous **sonic boom** that he heard as he was viewing the rocket rise up into the air. He said "it sounded like bombs going off."

This reminded me of what many parents go through with their newly adopted children. Things will go well for a while. Then, suddenly, there comes the likening of a sonic BOOM! We often refer to the period before that boom as the "honeymoon period." Things are going along smoothly, and you are starting to feel like a cohesive family. You may feel a sense of peace within your new family. The adopted child may be doing everything in their power to make sure that you want to keep them. Then, when least expected, your adopted

child reveals something to you or displays a specific behavior that makes you question if all the time you've spent beforehand was even reality... the BOOM has occurred!

Your child may now feel comfortable describing past abuse to you. They may regress several years, wanting the love and affection that they may have missed as a toddler with unstable upbringing. They may finally accept you as mom and dad, wanting to be rocked or held. Or they may test boundaries, trying to see if you'll be dedicated or if you will just send them back, as they've dealt with rejection their entire lives. Many of these children don't understand what the concept of "forever" really means.

This can be very alarming to some parents and may even make you question what you did wrong. The reassuring point is that you've probably done nothing wrong. This is an all too common theme in adoptive homes. Most of all, you CAN and WILL get through this. You also don't have to do it alone – APAC is here to help you every step of the way.

If you feel yourself struggling or at a loss, please feel free to contact an APAC employee. We have several resources to help you get through tough times. You may be interested in our monthly Adoptive Family Groups where you can share your story and get feedback from other families that may have overcome the same obstacles you are facing. You may wish to seek out the counseling services we offer, for your child or for your entire family. You may benefit from watching some of our recorded webinars on specific topics or checking out a book from our extensive library. Whatever your need, please know that APAC is here to guide you with support and services!

- Kendra Alley, M.S., LPC  
APAC Family Counselor

## UPCOMING TRAINING EVENT: SAVE THE DATE!

APAC will be hosting its next Trained Therapist Network Seminar event in July! Details, along with other training opportunities, will be announced on our website:

[www.childrensaid.org/apac](http://www.childrensaid.org/apac)



# APAC LAUNCHES A FACEBOOK GROUP FOR PRE-ADOPTIVE PARENTS

AN ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP  
FOR APAC PRE-ADOPTIVE PARENTS.

- Mission: Adoption -

SPONSORED BY CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF ALABAMA'S APAC ADOPTION SUPPORT PROGRAM

We are excited to announce that earlier this year we launched a new Facebook group especially for APAC Pre-Adoptive families! This group is specifically geared to support families working with the APAC Pre-Adoption Recruitment Team to receive training and preparation. This newsletter

named in tandem with this community group, helped us launch our theme for new group for our APAC Parents, named "Mission: Adoption—An Adoption Support Group for APAC Pre-Adoptive Parents." Because it's all about the mission, and the journey to the destination of becoming an adoptive parent. The closed and private Facebook group is an outlet for parents who are "traveling together" on similar "missions" to connect and be supported together. APAC recruits families from all over the state of Alabama, primarily in our four locations, Huntsville, Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile. Although families may live in different cities, they are on the same journey together moving forward toward their mutual destination of adoption.

The mission of preparation might not be easy and there may be many questions or concerns during this season. But, as it's often said, the journey will just begin at the point of adoption! APAC has a seasoned adoptive parent, Tonya Sauder, in place to support parents and remind them of their "Mission: Adoption." Parents will also support one another, knowing they are not alone; they will grow together as they connect and engage, any time, day or night, through this ever present social community.

"It's like we are  
our own  
special tribe.

- Adoptive Parent

## APAC RENAMES THE FACEBOOK GROUP FOR POST-ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Since October 2015, APAC has hosted a similar closed and private Facebook group for seasoned adoptive parents living in Alabama. With the launch of our new group for Pre-Adoptive parents, our community group followed suit with a fresh new name for the group, "The Adoption Adventure!"

A COMMUNITY GROUP FOR  
ALABAMA ADOPTIVE PARENTS.

- The Adoption Adventure -

Adoptive parents in Alabama can visit our website, or email Tonya Sauder, [tsauder@childrensaid.org](mailto:tsauder@childrensaid.org), for more information on getting connected to our Facebook community support groups.

[www.childrensaid.org/apac](http://www.childrensaid.org/apac)

"I love this group  
because no matter  
how I feel as an  
adoptive parent,  
I know I'm not alone.  
- Adoptive Parent

"This page to me, builds a  
sense of community. We are  
few and our struggles are  
many, many that  
unless another adoptive/  
foster parent - you won't  
understand. The resources  
are great too!  
- Adoptive Parent



# Adoptive Family Groups

*APAC offers support groups that meet throughout the state, providing education and social interaction for adoptive parents and their children.*

## Baldwin County

3rd Thursday  
6-7:30pm @ 3 Circle Church, Fairhope

## DeKalb County

**\*On Hold**

## Etowah County

3rd Thursday  
6-7:30pm @ East Gadsden Baptist Church, Gadsden

## Jefferson County East

1st Thursday  
6-7:30pm @ Huffman United Methodist, Birmingham

## Jefferson County Multi-Cultural

2nd Tuesday  
6:30-8pm @ The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham

## Lee County

2nd Tuesday  
6-7:30pm @ Cornerstone Church, Auburn

## Madison County

2nd Monday  
6-7:30pm @ First United Methodist Church, Huntsville

## Mobile County

4th Friday  
6-7:30pm @ Christ Fellowship Baptist, Mobile

## Morgan County

2nd Thursday  
6-7:30pm @ Central Park Baptist Church, Decatur

## River Region (Autauga, Elmore, Montgomery)

3rd Tuesday  
6:00-7:30 Frazer United Methodist Church, Montgomery

## Shelby and Surrounding

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday  
6:30-8:00 @ The Church at Cahaba Bend, Helena

## Wiregrass Area (Geneva, Henry, Houston)

1st Monday  
6:00-7:30 Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan



*All groups have parent sessions, child groups, and childcare unless otherwise indicated.*

# ALABAMA'S WAITING CHILDREN

**Meagan**, born August 1997, is currently a high school student who enjoys theater set design. Family & Consumer Science is her favorite subject since she gets to cook. She is 18, but will need extra insight due to her maturity level. She needs a forever family that will support her well into adulthood and continue to be a major influence in her life. She is still in school and desires to go further after graduation. Meagan wants to be a therapist when she grows up because she wants to make a difference in other peoples' lives. She will need love, encouragement, and support. She engages well with small children, but those interactions will need supervision. She wants to belong and feel loved by her forever family.



**Montell**, born September 2000, is a loving and active child who loves to draw. His favorite subject is math, and he enjoys helping his friends with math problems. He wants to be a bus driver when he grows up.



Montell needs a structured home with a loving family. His family will need to be patient and understanding in order to help him transition into his new home.

Montell has three siblings who have been adopted and he is anxiously awaiting his own "forever family." He does well when he is the center of attention and enjoys helping around the house, including working in the yard or doing chores. It is expected he would do well in a family where he is an only child or where he is the youngest child.



Visit [www.heartgalleryalabama.com](http://www.heartgalleryalabama.com) to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the kids you see here.

**Nehemiah**, born December 2010, is non-ambulatory and is wheelchair dependent for all positioning and mobility. Nehemiah has continuous feedings via a feeding tube. He is nonverbal but will sometimes respond with a smile as he is able to hear. He likes to sleep during the day. Nehemiah reportedly likes the one-on-one attention & relaxation activities that he participates in during physical and occupational therapy. He will need a non-smoking family due to his use of continuous oxygen. Nehemiah needs a family who will be very patient and nurturing, with a medical background due to his extensive medical needs. His life expectancy is unknown.

Long-term hands on services and assistance is available to assist a family with his long-term care.



**Seth**, born January 2008, likes outdoor activities, especially fishing. He receives special education



services for reading and math. He enjoys math and is a hard worker when he is able to stay on task. Seth likes to watch TV and play video games. He loves technology and enjoys playing on the iPad. He likes books and enjoys listening to others read to him. He also enjoys attending church as he loves the music. He is very proud of the fact that he has been baptized. He would like a forever family who enjoys outdoor activities and fishing. Seth would do best in a two-parent family where he is either the only child or the youngest.

**Daytona**, born March 2004, is a creative young lady. She enjoys school and earns average grades. She has an IEP for speech services. Daytona likes being creative and enjoys artistic things. She likes to draw, color, and write letters to people. Daytona enjoys listening to music and polishing her nails. She enjoys playing softball, her Gameboy, and playing school. She is somewhat shy and she tends to avoid talking and hides her face when in unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations.







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Southern Region  
Montgomery Area

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Suite 508

Montgomery, AL 36109

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P: 251.460.2727

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Huntsville Area

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Wiregrass Area

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APAC Adoption  
Services Help Line

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