



Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections

SPRING 2015

ISSUE 40

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

A Note from the Director	2
Reluctance to Adopt	3
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders	4
The Adoption Homestudy	5
Bradley's Story	6-7
Webinars AFG Groups	8
Group Preparation and Selection	9
Waiting Children	10-11

Bringing Home Bradley

We waited years for Bradley, four years to be exact. We got discouraged and plans changed over time but we were answering a call and knew it would work out eventually. Our daughter, Julie, was four years old when we started our adoption journey. She was all for it and prayed daily for the arrival of "her baby brother" even though I had always pictured a little girl. We had considered going the international route but after years of the ups and downs we decided that we needed to look back into state adoption.

APAC helped us during the transition and having them on our side was so special. The ten-week classes were fine but I did like how it was broken up each week. The paperwork was made so much more manageable because it was on the same topic as what we discussed in class. After we finished the home study process and were approved we were put onto the wait list to be matched.

We waited and waited but we still had not heard anything. I actually started a new job

"We didn't know what to think when we went to meet Bradley for the first time."

We didn't know what to think when we went to meet Bradley for the first time. Julie saw him first. She was eight years old now and

as soon as she saw him she turned to me and said, "Mom, he is exactly how I pictured him! That is exactly how I knew he would look!" He didn't look anything like the second daughter I had imagined but her statement immediately brought tears to my eyes, it still does.



Adjusting was hard for all of us but everyone was determined for Bradley to be part of our family. Trust came slowly with each passing day but eventually it was like he had always been with us. He always had been a part of us.

It has been three years since Bradley became a part of our family. But he has always been a part of our family because God placed him in our heart long before

we knew him. Much in the same way as you love the child as soon as you know you are pregnant, we have loved Bradley since we first started our process. We feel very family-complete.

When Bradley first came to us and he didn't understand we were keeping him, I made a story up about just him and me. I would tell it to him every night. It helped Bradley fantasize what it was going to be like for him today, tomorrow, and forever. Even though the story made me out to be a silly mamma and involves boogers (don't ask), it helped me too. Reciting even in a silly way that I was going to be there forever was very comforting.

I recommend to everyone to make up a "Happily Ever After" story to rehearse to your new Forever Child, and I would be glad to help. Write me: annaejenks@gmail.com.

- Anna Jenks
Adoptive Mother

*See more of Bradley's journey on page 6 —>

A note from the Director

CONSIDERING ADOPTION? Every child deserves a forever family and there are over 250 children in foster care in Alabama that do not have one. How can you help? First of all, you can understand that these children are waiting in foster care not because they want to be and not because they have done anything wrong. They have done nothing to deserve being a victim of abuse or neglect and removed from their home. They are NOT bad kids. They are CHILDREN. Most are desperately attempting to cope in a world that has failed to provide them a safe and loving home. Yes, they most certainly have scars which need healing. You can be a part of their healing by understanding who they are and what they need. SEE them. KNOW them. LOVE them.

How? Whether you are a helping professional, parent, community member, or other, use your awareness to be caring and positively guided in your interactions with them. These children have feelings – strong feelings – about what has happened to them in their short years of life. And yes, they sometimes express these strong feelings in ways we may not understand or know how to help. But we MUST help. Consider a gentle word or kindness. Help others be gentle with these children. Perhaps be a mentor to a child in foster care. Consider being a visiting resource or a foster parent. Consider helping a foster parent in their care of a child. Consider adoption. ALL of us can help. Which way will YOU help?

Considering adoption? This newsletter shares some points to consider if you are. Contact us at 1-866-4AL-KIDS or www.childrensaid.org/apac if you want to discuss your interest or application.

- Deb Finley, M.Ed., MSW, LCSW, PIP
APAC Program Director

This newsletter is dedicated to those considering adoption...

Change a Life Through Adoption

APAC needs your help
recruiting families for
Alabama's "Waiting Children."
If you would be willing to partner
with us, please contact us.

visit our website:
www.childrensaid.org/apac/adoption

1-866-ALKIDS

Save the Date!

for our next
APAC Trained
Therapist Network
workshop with

Heather
Forbes



July 23 - Birmingham

July 24 - Montgomery

Reluctance to Adopt

It should never be a secret...

It is not shameful...

Being reluctant to adopt can be a very useful attitude in the process of considering adoption. Often, a partner may be very disinclined to share their reluctance. Many times their reluctance is avoided, ignored, and in some cases construed in a way that may seem like they are anti-adoption. But let us consider some very critical aspects of reluctance.

AboutParenting.com has identified several factors that legitimately influence reluctance. Finances and the consideration of the family's ability to provide for a dependent person is a realistic aspect to consider. It has been suggested that some men will associate fathering with their own experiences of being fathered, either positive or negative. Some partners may grapple with the notion of assuming "someone else's failed responsibility." It is important to factor in that parenting may produce stress on the partnership and realistically consider the impact that adoption will have on other children in the home. An honest opportunity to educate oneself on these factors will only contribute effectively to the decision making process.

Experiences with infertility may lead to a couple to consider adoption. Sometimes one or the other partner may not have reconciled with the inability to conceive, but does not want to "hurt" or disclose their ambivalence to their partner. Needless to say, this absence of communication is not healthy for the relationship, particularly when a partner has unresolved feelings about their fertility journey. Patience and empathy are fundamental to addressing this situation. In her book, *An Empty Lap*, Jill Smolowe suggests that some may classify adoption as "giving up the dream" of having children. Different folks process the idea of not having biological children differently, but nevertheless, this reality may remain an emotional barrier to unconditional acceptance, love, and provision for an adopted child in the family.



Adoption may be an effort to resolve marital instability. A couple may subconsciously view adopting a child as a solution to fill a void in the existing family system. This is a phenomenon that is not often directly acknowledged, but can be an undercurrent. Thorough attention to strengths and weaknesses within the marriage is a useful exercise in preparation for adoption. Children are precious additions to a family, not a vehicle for change.

Lifeway.com has an article by Jamie Ivy titled, "What should you do if your spouse is reluctant to adopt?" This is a helpful perspective, but the key is noticing your partner's hesitancy. The signals of reluctance may be very subtler. Often these signals are ignored because the partner intently seeking adoption does not want anything to interfere with his/her desires. Or the reluctant partner may feel ashamed of their hesitancy. The willingness to recognize and acknowledge your partner's reluctance will only benefit both partners in the decision making process and lead to a favorable environment for the couple and the child. This is especially important for children who are most familiar with dysfunctional families.

The bottom line is that reluctance is NOT about deliberate hurt. Reluctance is a mandate for education, communication, and partner support. The decision to adopt must be a decision made within the partnership, because, after all, parenting is a partnership.

- Kathy Icardi Hummel, LCSW, PIP
APAC Clinical Coordinator

Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections presents

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Exploring the Spectrum and the Impact on Foster & Adoptive Families

with Parent Support Specialist, Kari Fletcher



Kari Fletcher, a Parent Support Specialist for the Adoption Support Network, performed trainings in Huntsville, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile over the past two months on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Kari Fletcher is a parent herself of two children with FASD, and has spent the past 15 years researching and specializing in this disorder. Oftentimes, parents of children with FASD become frustrated and discouraged when their children do not respond to their parenting strategies, and professionals do not know how to support them properly.

Fletcher encourages parents and professionals to understand the reasons behind the learning and behavioral challenges so they, together, can “try differently.” Her training included five main focuses, all of which were very informative and educational for professionals and parents alike. Topics included the core concepts of FASD, prevalence and comparison of alcohol and other drugs used during pregnancy, a neurological perspective on the effects of alcohol, intervention strategies and secondary disabilities, and family support. Attendees learned that exposure to alcohol as a fetus has shown to be more dangerous than exposure to other drugs, like cocaine and heroin. However, the use of alcohol during pregnancy is rather common. This exposure causes size reduction, distortions, and malformations in the brain resulting in permanent brain damage. This brain damage can lead to a range of difficult behaviors, including rage behaviors and sensory processing disorder. Attendees also learned that FASD often comes with secondary disabilities such as mental health problems, dependent living, disrupted school experience, etc. However, when professionals support the whole family, and families support the child in a way that is appropriate for children with FASD, these children can learn to thrive.

- Taylor Bandler, B.A., MSW
APAC Student Intern

APAC Resource Library

For more information:
1-800-489-1886
apaclibrary@childrensaid.org
www.childrensaid.org/apaclibrary

ALABAMA PRE/POST ADOPTION CONNECTIONS (APAC)
ADOPTION SUPPORT NETWORK
(ALABAMA)

 Check out our new
Adoption Support GROUP on FACEBOOK!

Login to your Facebook account and search for
"APAC Adoption Support Network" or find info on our website
www.childrensaid.org/apac

The Adoption Homestudy

APAC Helps Parents Navigate Through the Process



The home study process can be an overwhelming and confusing one for many potential foster/adoptive parents. As a social worker who has been assessing homes for over ten years, I would like to share with you a few tips and answers to common questions about the home study process.

Paperwork, appointments, meetings and classes, oh my! These are probably some of the most time-consuming and overwhelming parts of the home study process. Time management and organization will be key. Delays in submitting profiles, assignments, documentation, etc. will only delay your home study, thereby delaying the prospect of a child being matched with your family. Every piece of paper has a purpose and every class is important.

“Why all the questions?” Believe it or not, there is absolutely a reason behind every single question you will be asked — some more than once. Please be honest. Please tell me everything, even if it seems insignificant to you. I don’t expect anyone to be perfect. If there is something negative in your past, the sooner it is revealed and addressed, the better.

“I have a stable, loving home to offer a child. Why does this process have to be so tedious?” Picture in your mind your own child, a niece or nephew — any child that is very special to you. Imagine that you are responsible for interviewing a stranger to raise this child. What would you want to know about this person and their family? How long would it take you to feel comfortable with them? What questions would you have about this person and their background? I am not only responsible, but liable in many ways, for ensuring that your home is safe — both physically and emotionally. Most potential foster/adoptive parents have well-meaning intentions, yet sometimes there are underlying issues that can be triggered by parenting a special needs child. I have to pry into every aspect of your life to make sure a placement will result in permanency for a child.

Lastly, but most importantly, thank you. Please know how much I appreciate your willingness to allow me into all areas of your life in order to give a child a forever family. Thank you in advance for opening your heart, making a commitment to this process and to changing the life of a child.

- Leah Lucas, LCSW PIP
APAC Pre-Adoptive Homestudy Contractor

...continued from cover story, "Bringing Home Bradley"



www.childrensaid.org/apac

1-866-4AL-KIDS

Check out our Children's Aid Society blog for more stories just like Bradley's!

www.childrensaidblog.org

A very special thank you to **Amy Dummier Photography** for capturing our series of APAC Forever Home Gallery photos and helping us tell their story!



If it weren't for
Bradley.....

Bradley is the biggest handful I have ever had. He is constantly handling everything, going through the family things, fiddling with the light switches, cables, buttons, touch pads, knobs. Feeling out the breakables, the precious-ables, the heirlooms.

Bradley is the biggest handful I have ever had. The walls were once a calm pale blue, now they are peppered with grey hand and footprints, Hot Wheel tire tracks and drip stains. A mixture of unknown sources decorate the house.

Bradley is the biggest handful I have ever had. Our quiet home has been replaced by whoops and hollers, screams, singing, yelling, ear piercing objections. The bold interjections, abrupt crudeness, and other organic loquacious fillers are like a stereo that cannot be turned off.

Bradley is the biggest handful I have ever had. The laundry is endless, the accidents and mishaps are constant, the "oops" are unwanted discoveries around every corner.

If it weren't for **Bradley**, I would be able to have everything in its place. I would still be sitting at home missing the son I knew I had, placing each knickknack in its proper place after dusting or polishing. I'd see the pictures of my daughter and like a recorder playing in my mind, hear her beg for a baby brother.

If it weren't for **Bradley**, I would have no need to paint the walls; I would have more time devoted to looking into the guest room and picture what it would look like with baseball wallpaper - I was able to see it even through my misty eyes. If it weren't for Bradley, I could still hear the clock tick, telling me time is slipping away from meeting my son. I could imagine what his voice would sound like calling me Momma, hearing him call me when he is scared. Hearing him say he "yubes Momma."

It took a long time to type this. Because of **Bradley**, I don't have time like I used to. But because of Bradley, I have a difficult time illustrating just what it is like to have adopted. It is so deep, and so wide and poured out in such abundance, a flood of perfection and completeness that my hands just can't contain. My hands are now full; my hands now are complete and blessed. After a year, it is still hard to take it all in. I feel washed with completeness that our family is finally together. Because of Bradley, I do not have the days when I longed for my son.



APAC Training Webinars

are now archived
in our APAC Resource Library!

You can easily access the archive of our APAC recorded webinars by visiting

www.childrensaidthe.org/apaclibrary

Patrons accessing the library service for the first time will need to sign up for secured access to the online library. Then login and search for "webinars" to see a list of available webinars. Once the webinars are selected and reserved, an email will be sent with a link to watch the webinars online.

And, Foster Parents who access the online webinars can receive a participation certificate to use in exchange for credit hours!

For more information, contact our library by calling **1-800-489-1886** or sending an email to: apaclibrary@childrensaidthe.org

Adoptive Family Groups

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

Northern Region

Calhoun County-2nd Thursday
6:30-8pm @ Greenbrier Church of Christ, Anniston

Cullman County-1st Monday
6:00-7:30pm @ Antioch Baptist Church, Cullman

DeKalb County-4th Tuesday
6:00—7:30pm @ Rainsville Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Etowah County-3rd Thursday
6-7:30pm @ Christ Central United Methodist, Rainbow City

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

Jefferson County Multi-Cultural-2nd Tuesday
6:30-8pm @ Children's Aid Society, Birmingham

Jefferson County West-4th Thursday
6:30-8pm @ Pleasant Hill United Methodist, Bessemer

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

Shelby County-1st Tuesday
6:30-8pm @ First United Methodist, Alabaster

Southern Region

Autauga/Elmore County-4th Tuesday
6-7:30pm @ Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville

Barbour County- Meets Quarterly
Time and Location TBA

Henry County-1st Tuesday
6-7:30pm @ Headland First Baptist, Headland

Houston County-1st Monday
6:00-7:30 @ First United Methodist, Dothan

Geneva County-1st Monday
6:30-8pm @ First Baptist Church, Slocomb

Lee County-1st Thursday
6-7:30pm @ The Big House Foundation, Opelika

Montgomery County-3rd Thursday
6-7:30pm @ Frazer United Methodist, Montgomery

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

Mobile County-4th Friday
6-7:30pm @ Regency Church of Christ, Mobile

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

Group Preparation and Selection

APAC Trains and Prepares Parents for Adoption

In 2007 I began teaching GPS (Group Preparation and Selection) classes to prospective foster and adoptive parents. I never realized how much this experience would impact me. In child welfare social work, sometimes it is difficult to see immediate benefits of our work. Teaching prospective foster/adoption families in GPS, however, provided me with such an amazing opportunity to see positive outcomes.



I have been able to meet families as they begin their adoption journey and see it through to the end. I can't express the joy and happiness I feel when I receive a high school graduation invitation from a family who I taught GPS. If I have ever had thoughts that I may not have sufficient time to continue this teaching, all it takes is to see posts on Facebook or get an email from one of my families about their child and I am motivated to keep teaching.

Although I am a GPS co-leader, the families teach me. I continue to be in awe of the love and commitment our families have for our waiting children. These families are determined to give a forever home to the children others have given up on. Our waiting children are victims of circumstances in which they had no control. I am overcome with emotion when I see another one of my families' pictures from their "gotcha day." I am so thankful that they are called to parent these children. I am even more grateful that I get to be a part of the journey!

- Maggie Davenport, LCSW PIP
APAC Pre-Adoptive GPS Training Contractor

APAC Webinars

Free Online Training for Parents and Professionals

Upcoming Live Webinar Events:

April: Mitigating the Effects of Sexual Trauma

May: Adoptive Parent Roundtable

June: Post Adoption Depression

July: Working with Adolescents

FREE CEU INCLUDED

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!



For further details and registration information, go to
www.childrensaid.org/webinar

Alabama's Waiting Children

Destiney, born June 2001, likes to play volleyball, ride horses, play basketball and read her bible in her spare time. Destiney is hearing impaired and uses sign language for communication and writing notes as a second form of communication. She gets frustrated when she's unable to understand someone and vice versa due to her impairment. She desires a single or two-parent family who knows sign language or who is willing to learn. When she becomes frustrated she has the ability to calm herself down. Destiney can be sweet and humble at times. She takes pride in her appearance and likes to look good and dress well and she is very interested in boys. She resides in a facility for children with hearing impairments and receives special education services. Destiney's favorite subject are reading and English and she desires to become a teacher. She is very affectionate and likes cats and dogs. She has a visiting resource, who does not desire to adopt, that she stays with during holidays and extended weekends due to the facility being closed. Destiney is open to adoption and to meet families but she has some reservations due to her unresolved grief and losses that are being addressed.



Markeshia, born June 2001, is a very smart child with a lot of potential. She enjoys sharing with others the lessons she has learned in life and is not afraid to ask questions. She socializes well with both adults and children, and she is pleasant to be around. Markeshia enjoys sports and is very athletic. She loves to shop and remain in style. Markeshia enjoys watching television and going to the movies. She is also a neat person and enjoys decorating her room. Markeshia is a loveable child and states that she wants to be successful in life. She enjoys attending church and has taken piano lessons in the past. Markeshia would like to maintain some type of contact with her siblings.

Tireyal, was born in March 2001, prematurely with microcephaly, mental retardation and cerebral palsy. Tireyal cannot hear, see or speak and uses a wheelchair for mobility. Tireyal does make noises to communicate and almost seems to be "singing" at times. He likes to rock in his wheelchair and to suck on his fingers. He is very responsive to touch and he laughs when tickled. He attends school and receives special education services. Currently, he lives in a specialized care center where all of his medical and physical needs are met, but he would thrive in a family setting that could give him the love and emotional support we all desire.



Visit www.heartgalleryalabama.com to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the kids you see here.

George “Joey,” born in December 2002, is a loving and caring child. Joey is very bright and is looking for a forever family. Joey has three adopted sisters that he would like to maintain relationships with. Joey enjoys making paper boats and airplanes. He enjoys anything to do with nature, hiking and even collecting bugs. Joey's other interests are doing art work, playing with his toy cars, and of course, playing video games. Joey is an honest young man; he will tell you what he did, why he did it and the consequences for those actions. Joey does well academically and states that his favorite subject is math. He does receive special services in school to help with his academics and behaviors. Joey is receiving reading and math intervention following all new skills taught to reinforce the lessons. Joey has been provided with many positive activities including church and community activities. Joey wants to be accepted and is very pleased when he excels.



Amber, born August 1997, loves to read and play games on the computer. Amber loves to eat out and has very good manners. Amber goes to church and likes to sing. She loves fashion and shopping. She enjoys wearing high heels. She is exploring make-up and dancing. She enjoys playing games on the computer. She is mainstreamed into the regular classroom with Special Education services to interpret the material on her level. She likes to put puzzles together and will work on difficult ones especially with encouragement. She will also help clean but needs guidance and is anxious to learn to cook.



Amy, born June 2001, is a loving child who tries hard to please. She loves to play with baby dolls and Barbies. She is creative, having set up a special play area where she talks and pretends with dollies for hours. She also likes playing outside: swinging, climbing and running. She will dart here and there playing hide and seek. She also likes to play board games. She receives Special Education services at school. She is learning to read and do math. She plays games on the computer and this helps reinforce her learning. One of her teachers is a special friend who takes her on trips, shopping and other new experiences. She loves this special attention. These sisters love being together and Amy just lights up whenever her sister is around. Amber & Amy need love and guidance to help them into adulthood.



Devan, born July 2003, is a thoughtful and kind-hearted boy. He is interested in sports, video games, cars and music. He is very likeable and aims to please others. Devan's favorite color is blue and his favorite restaurant is Taco Bell. He enjoys going to church and interacting with other children. His favorite subject in school is math. Devan does very well in school when he is not distracted by others. He tends to be more successful when he has a structured routine that outlines expectations, consequences and privileges. He is active and likes to be outdoors, playing football and basketball. Devan needs a family that will provide consistent structure, has patience and unconditional love. He has siblings that he would like to maintain communication with if possible. Devan would benefit from a two parent home with or without children.



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APAC Adoption Services Help Line

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