Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to visit San Francisco, California with my family. Like any enthusiastic tourist, I gathered recommendations from friends as to which sights to visit there. A close friend suggested I visit Muir Woods, a National Park just north of San Francisco. I had no idea what a truly enlightening experience it would be.

Muir Woods National Park is a forest with paved walking trails and is home to a variety of trees, flowers and wildlife. The most stunning attraction is the giant redwood trees that tower over the forest. Redwoods are the tallest living things on earth, and the tallest tree in Muir Woods stands over 250 feet tall—equivalent to a 25-story building! The trees are so wide that it would take 30-40 people holding hands to encircle the entire tree. Amazingly, most of the Redwoods there are anywhere from 500 to 800 years old.

So just how do these trees grow so tall and survive hundreds of years in the forest? Surprisingly, the roots of the redwoods are very shallow—only 6 to 12 feet deep. And yet, those roots support a tree that approaches the height equivalent to a football field! How is this possible? The roots of the redwood trees grow outward over 60 feet instead of deep underground. The roots extend and interlock with the roots of other redwood trees nearby and they form a strong bond. This vast underground root system ensures a firm foundation and source of strength for all the redwoods. The roots of older redwood trees hold on to the roots of new redwood trees beginning to grow. The strength is shared and propels the younger trees to soaring heights. In essence they survive because they support each other.

As I made my way out of the forest that day, I realized the valuable lesson we can learn from the redwoods: we are better together and it is important to rely on each other for support, especially when we experience difficulties. It is important to have people in our lives who will help us stand tall and not be shaken. Never underestimate the power of connecting with others as a source of strength.

- Robbie Shockey, M.S.
  Family Support Worker III
The theme of this newsletter is strengthening families. Most of the articles highlight the importance of a foundation of strong supports to create and maintain a healthy adoptive family. Support comes in many ways and we encourage adoptive families to explore and utilize a variety of supports. Each adoptive family needs its own individual connections and supports to celebrate the good times and to lean on during uncharted territory or difficult times. If you need help in exploring additional support options, please let us help you in your quest. Keep in mind the ongoing support services available through APAC such as: talking with staff for information and support, monthly adoptive family groups, closed Adoptive Parent Facebook group, connections with experienced adoptive parents for mentoring support, adoptive family counseling, family networking events and respite, lending libraries, webinar trainings, onsite trainings, and camp! Whether you are an adoptive, foster, or kinship family, or a family exploring the possibility of adopting, APAC staff are here to support, strengthen, and empower you.

APAC was recently showcased on a national webinar hosted by AdoptUSKids, as a model adoption support service program for other states to follow. Supports are needed and deserved for families adopting children and youth from our state’s foster care system, and Alabama provides this through the Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections program of Children’s Aid Society.

Connect with us. Call the regional APAC office nearest to you, call the statewide toll-free number (866-803-2722), or check out APAC section of the Children’s Aid Society website (www.childrensaid.org/apac).

- Debra Hawk Finley, MEd, MSW, LCSW, PIP
  APAC Program Director

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National Adoption Month

Don’t forget, November is National Adoption Month! This is a collective, national effort dedicated to celebrating adoption and raising awareness of the many foster children waiting for permanent and loving families.

Over the course of the month of November, APAC among other organizations and agencies will be hosting awareness and celebration events across the state. These events will provide opportunities to meet other adoptive families and celebrate together, as well as opportunities to learn more about the many foster children who are still waiting on their forever families.

Stay tuned to your mailboxes and inboxes for information about events in your area!

Find us on social media:
Twitter@childrensaidorg  |  Facebook/childrensaid  |  Instagram/childrensaid
The Resilience Behind Relationships

Dr. Bruce Perry is a pioneer in the field of understanding and treating the effects of trauma on child development. His work permeates all areas of child welfare within the United States and beyond. He has become specifically interested in what factors minimize the negative effects of “adverse childhood experiences” (ACE) which could include child abuse, neglect, natural disasters, or any other possible traumatic experiences. Interestingly, his current research shows that the primary factor in how children are resilient is more closely related to “relational health” than the ACEs themselves. This means that the more healthy relationships that children have, the better off they will be in their healing from trauma, regardless of the severity, duration, and frequency. We so often lose track of our primary need to connect to others, thus missing out on all of the healing benefits that come along.

My nephew had an accident on his bicycle resulting in a compound fracture in his leg right below the knee. As with most cases, it wasn’t long before the x-rays showed that he had a complete recovery and that the bones had grown back together. This is so commonplace that we take for granted and usually miss what is really happening behind the scenes. Although it LOOKS like the doctors, the pins, and the casts are making his leg better, none of these actually have the ability to do any healing. They are simply supportive and protective measures intended to create the best possible scenario to allow his leg to heal properly and efficiently. The unsung hero here is actually our body’s natural, built-in restorative capacity that is always at work trying to keep us healthy. The power behind the healing is universal and applies in all areas of our lives including our emotional wellbeing.

As with treating physical ailments, these three steps are vital for maintaining a healthy family system in the face of adversity.

Turn to someone who understands how the system works. Whether you’re struggling with parenting, relationships, or just managing the daily demands of life, turn to formal supports who may have a deeper understanding of what you’re up against, and they can provide the “resetting of the bones” in a way that you couldn’t yourself. Be ok with asking for help.

Put measures in place to stabilize and protect. Supportive relationships are like the pins and casts that provide you with the ability for your own restorative capacity to come forth. When we feel listened to and understood, our spirit gets unleashed and we begin to gain clarity, inspiration and hope. Make an effort to connect with others.

Get out of the way and let the healing take over. When we let go of trying to fix everything ourselves and just have faith in this “behind the scenes” healing mechanism, we will inevitably emerge from the wreckage of our old thinking and begin to see life anew. Sometimes we have to have the humility to realize that we aren’t doing the healing either.

If you feel one of these is missing for you and your family, please know we are here to support you.

- Brock Sellers, LCSW, PIP APAC Training Coordinator
On June 16, 142 adopted children and their siblings joined together at Camp Chandler in Wetumpka for our annual Camp APAC! Passport to Fun was the theme, and throughout the week campers enjoyed excursions of canoeing, kayaking, sail boating, swimming, banana boating, horseback riding, archery, arts and crafts, and a one-of-a-kind rhythmic drumming experience. Our 4 day camping fun began on Tuesday evening with a Sunset Swim Party and Cook Out on Lake Jordan. Cheers and squeals could be heard as campers splashed and played in the lake; others flew through the air off the “Blob”; while some played corn hole, relaxed in an Adirondack chair, or threw the football on the lakeshore. On other evenings campers enjoyed playing team games together, such as tug-of-war and sack racing, and dancing together as neon paint flew through the air at our Paint Party! Amidst the hustle and bustle of activities and events, Camp APAC remained faithful to its mission of not only providing a fun and exciting camping adventure, but also providing a place for children with the common ground of adoption to simply be together. In addition to campers telling us how much fun they had riding on the banana boat or the excitement of getting on a horse for the first time, it brings such joy to our hearts when a camper reports never having met someone else who was adopted until attending camp, or stating that it was nice talking to people who “really understand what you’ve been through.” We here at APAC are truly honored to be able to provide such an experience to the many adoptive families across the State of Alabama every summer.

Stay tuned to your mailboxes and inboxes in January for information on Camp APAC 2016!

- Carla Wilson, LGSW, Northern Region/Camp Coordinator
Helping Families Heal
Effective Strategies for Moving Beyond Trauma

On July 23rd and 24th, nearly 400 people came together in Birmingham and Montgomery to attend a training with Heather T. Forbes, LCSW. She is the owner of the Beyond Consequences Institute and is an internationally published author on the topics of raising children with difficult behaviors, the impact of trauma on development, and adoptive motherhood. Much of her experience and insight on understanding trauma, disruptive behaviors, and adoption-related issues comes from her direct mothering experience of two adopted children. Her signature style is to bridge the gap between scientific research and real-life application to equip parents, educators, and therapists with practical and effective tools.

Ms. Forbes discussed the elements of trauma. She also identified how the effects, as well as the typical demands placed on children, can overwhelm them and often result in resistant and difficult behaviors. As Ms. Forbes stated, “We are born in this place of love. But when things happen, a child moves from love to fear.” When children live in a state of fear, they move into a state of dysregulation and this throws everything “out of whack.” This is the child’s way of saying “I need you.” She explained that children experiencing trauma often experience stress outside their “window of tolerance.” The parent can help regulate the child to bring them back to a calm, focused state. It is within a regulated state that children remember rules/boundaries and can more efficiently handle stress.

Ms. Forbes emphasizes that relationships are the agent to change and encourages parents to ask two questions when they want their children’s behavior to change: 1) What is driving my child’s behavior? 2) What can I do right now to improve my relationship with my child? These two questions operate from a different fundamental assumption about where behaviors come from and what they mean. They are simply an outgrowth of how the child is feeling and thinking in the moment. As Ms. Forbes believes, “It isn’t about ‘fixing’ your child; it’s about creating emotional space and understanding.”

- Kendra L. Alley, MS, LPC
APAC Counselor

Change a Life Through Adoption
visit our website:
www.childrensaid.org/apac/adoption

Upcoming Orientations: Birmingham and Dothan

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

1-866-ALKIDS
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 today!
For more details contact our library

www.childrensaid.org/apaclibrary
1-800-489-1886

BENT BUT NOT BROKEN: BUILDING RESILIENT ADOPTIVE FAMILIES - This is an informative and entertaining presentation on building resilience into adoptive family life. Resilience, according to Webster's New World Dictionary, is the ability to recover strength and spirit quickly after stress and crisis. Adoptive families need this ability in today's stressful world as they successfully cope with adoption's developmental challenges. Dee Paddock uses the latest research and literature on emotional resilience and gives you her “ten essential lessons from the trenches” on recognizing, creating, and nurturing resilience in adoptive families.

STRENGTHENING FAMILY RESILIENCE - Provides a framework for preventive and interventional work with families that are distressed or at risk due to divorce, death, illness, poverty, etc.

KEEPING HEALTHY SIBLINGS HEALTHY WHEN ONE CHILD IS ACTING OUT - Healthy siblings seldom receive enough attention and support when another child acts out. How do parents and children cope with this dilemma? What are healthy children's needs in time of crisis?

LIVING WITH AN ANGRY CHILD - Adopted children who struggle with unresolved loss and/or poor attachment often exhibit acute episodes of rage and chronic or intermittent patterns of passive-aggressive non-compliance. Understandably, such behaviors can and do trigger angry responses, sometimes rage, in parents and siblings. This workshop will analyze anger and offer techniques for avoiding continual battles, managing healthier anger resolution, de-escalating rage episodes, and establishing a healthy, joyful family environment.

SHATTERED DREAMS - When the adopted child brings severe stress to the family, parents need help in sorting out what is going on. What are the needs of the child, siblings, and parents? This recorded workshop will discuss how to help parents evaluate conflicting needs of family members and how to let go of their dream - their expectations of this child and their adoption.

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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!
Building Your Support System

Why do cellular phone companies have call centers? Why do people experiencing grief get together for meetings? Why did the aforementioned Redwood trees need the roots of the trees around them? The answer to all of these questions is simple - SUPPORT. As foster/adoptive parents, it is very important that you have support.

Having a strong support system can help a parent in several ways. Support networks can allow for the sharing of experiences as well as the brainstorming of solutions. They can improve one's ties to the community. Support networks can encourage, empower, and uplift parents when they experience challenges or become discouraged.

It is important to include both professionals and foster/adoptive families within your support group. Having the support of other foster/adoptive families can bring about a sense of normalcy. Many of these families may be multicultural, multiracial, or even just larger than average. Other foster/adoptive families may have gone through similar experiences as your family. The way they handled or overcame these experiences can be beneficial.

Professionals can provide education and support. Several professional agencies, including APAC, are available to provide support. Through these agencies, you can receive information on services such as counseling, mentoring, and professional trainings. Agencies may also host events that allow foster/adoptive families to come together. For instance, APAC has support groups, known as Adoptive Family Groups, throughout Alabama that meet once a month. Professionals can be of significant importance during times of crisis.

It is important to establish a support system early on. You may want to create a phone list of the people in your support system, to have readily available. You may also want to use the internet or sign up to be notified when agencies are having social events. Just like the Redwood trees, we are better together!

“Most of us, swimming against the tides of trouble the world knows nothing about, need only a bit of praise or encouragement - and we will make the goal.” - Jerome Fleishman

- Kendra L. Alley, MS, LPC
  APAC Family Counselor
The Little Things

Like the redwood trees that were mentioned in a previous article, family members need each other to grow as well. The easiest way to facilitate this growth is to spend time as a family. Like the roots of older redwood trees holding on to the roots of the new redwood trees as they grow, quality time spent between parents and children provides the support that is vital to their growth. The vast interconnected root system of the redwood trees that allows the trees to withstand extreme conditions is created in families through attachments and bonds, which are essential to our growth as humans. Those attachments and bonds form a source of strength for all family members and a firm foundation to withstand life’s storms.

Quality time does not have to be an expensive vacation together. Quality time can be the little moments each day that you spend with your family. Reading books, playing board games, going on walks, or even tossing the ball back and forth are all easy ways to build connections with your children. It can even happen through day-to-day tasks like cooking, folding clothes, or listening to music together. It’s the little things that can intentionally be turned into quality time together.

So remember to take advantage of the moments that you might not even realize are moments. For those are the moments of connections and ones that will create memories for you and your children. “Enjoy the little things in life, for someday you will realize they were the big things.” - Anonymous

- Jill Sexton, M.Ed, LPC
Clinical Coordinator/Family Counselor

“Enjoy the little things in life, for someday you will realize they were the big things.”

LESSONS FROM A REDWOOD TREE

• Stand tall and proud.
• Live in a cool place.
• Support members of your community.
• Keep a thick skin.
• Surround yourself with family.

Source: National Park Service, Muir Woods National Monument, Mill Valley, CA
Adoptive Family Groups

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

APAC’s Adoptive Family Groups (AFGs) are designed to provide education and social interaction for adoptive families. Throughout the state, adoptive families meet once per month in specified counties to network, connect with and be supported by other adoptive families. Although meeting on the same day every month is routine for our AFGs, the agenda, structure, or topic do not have to be!

Across the state, some of our AFGs are adding a twist on their traditional meetings. In Montgomery, the local AFG hosted a book club that reviewed From Fear to Love by Bryan Post. To introduce the foundation of the book, adoptive parents participated in a fun exercise that showed how stress can cause dysregulation and interrupt normal functioning. Over the span of four months, the book was divided into sections, studied, and discussed. APAC’s therapist, Jill Sexton, led the group as parents shared their experiences and gained great insight on parenting using a trauma-informed approach. Throughout the four months, the children’s group practiced Yoga Calm and also learned about stress and ways to manage it.

In Birmingham, the local AFG hosted a “Hot Topics” group. This group identified trending topics such as “The Holidays and Adoption,” “Advocating for Educational Needs of Children,” “Cultural Traditions” and others. Once the group identified their “Hot Topic,” they dove into an in-depth look at the needs a family may face or encounter around that topic. Families would explore different aspects and angles of that topic over the span of several meeting dates, allowing for a thorough discussion amongst families.

Other past “out of the box” AFG activities included family craft nights, combined groups with children and parents, and recipe sharing. If you have any interesting or fresh ideas on ways adoptive families in your area could meet for support at your local AFG, please contact the APAC Family Support Worker for your area.

- Monica Russell, LGSW, Family Support Worker III
- Kai Mumpfield, LCSW, Southern Region Coordinator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFG Location</th>
<th>Meeting Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autauga/Elmore County</td>
<td>4th Tuesday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm</td>
<td>First United Methodist, Millbrook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin County</td>
<td>3rd Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ 3 Circle Church, Fairhope</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calhoun County</td>
<td>2nd Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ Greenbrier Church of Christ, Anniston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cullman County</td>
<td>1st Monday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ First United Methodist, Cullman</td>
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<tr>
<td>DeKalb County</td>
<td>4th Tuesday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ Rainsville Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Rainsville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Etowah County</td>
<td>3rd Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ Christ Central United Methodist, Rainbow City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geneva County</td>
<td>1st Monday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ First Baptist Church, Slocomb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry County</td>
<td>1st Tuesday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ Headland First Baptist, Headland</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Houston County</td>
<td>1st Monday</td>
<td>6-7:30 @ First United Methodist, Dothan (childcare only)</td>
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<td>Jefferson County</td>
<td>1st Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ Huffman United Methodist, Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson County East</td>
<td>1st Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ Children’s Aid Society, Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson County West</td>
<td>4th Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ The Big House Foundation, Opelika</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee County</td>
<td>1st Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ The Big House Foundation, Opelika</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madison County</td>
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<td>Mobile County</td>
<td>4th Friday</td>
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<td>Montgomery County</td>
<td>3rd Thursday</td>
<td>6-7:30pm @ Frazer United Methodist, Montgomery Shelby County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelby County</td>
<td>1st Tuesday</td>
<td>6-30:8pm @ First United Methodist, Alabaster</td>
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</table>

*All groups have parent sessions, child groups, and childcare unless otherwise indicated."
Alabama’s Waiting Children

Christina, born December 1996, is a very outgoing and spirited young lady who does not mind expressing her opinion. She is loving and protective of those she cares about. Christina is also nurturing and loves to take care of people and animals. She is hard working and tries to do her best at any task she is given. Christina does not mind being a leader and loves to take control of a situation. She can be very creative and she loves doing arts and crafts.

Christina receives special education services in school. She can do very well in school when she applies herself and stays focused. Christina's favorite subject is math, but she does struggle to do well in that subject. Her favorite sport is running. She loves listening to music and participating in outdoor activities. Christina would do well with parents who are loving, patient and can provide a structured home environment for her.

Wesley, born February 1998, is a considerate and polite young man. He has a great personality and loves to make new friends. Wesley's behaviors can be challenging at times but he is a very sweet and loving child. He has a speech impediment and is sometimes sensitive to someone criticizing his speech. Constant positive reinforcement will help with correcting his behaviors.

Wesley's interests includes listening to music, singing, dancing, playing video games, working on the computer, and playing with Legos. He also enjoys playing and watching sports, mainly football and basketball. He is a big fan of Alabama football.

Wesley does receive special education services at school. He sometimes struggles with his school work due to his short attention span. Wesley needs to improve his social and independent living skills and would do well in a loving and supportive home with a strong male role model as a mentor.

Visit www.heartgalleryalabama.com to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the kids you see here.
Cashmere, "Cassie" born November 1999, is a caring and friendly young lady who can easily make friends. Cassie's favorite subject is math. When she is not in school, she enjoys reading and doing arts and crafts. Cassie is very creative and uses reading and arts and crafts to help her cope with issues that she may be facing. She states that these activities help calm and clear her mind. Cassie also enjoys playing volleyball, singing, and using her artistic talents to paint and draw. Cassie has been described as having a positive attitude and a good outlook on life, with goals established for her future. She is also mature for her age. Cassie wants to be a psychiatrist when she grows up so that she can help other people.

Nehemiah, born December 2010, is non-ambulatory and is wheelchair dependent. He is nonverbal but will sometimes respond with a smile as he is able to hear. He likes to sleep during the day and lay in his crib bed at night looking around. Nehemiah is totally dependent for all of his daily living needs and will require 24 hour supervision as he is currently receiving care in a skilled nursing facility.

Nehemiah reportedly likes the one-on-one attention & relaxation activities he participates in during physical therapy to stimulate his muscles. 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.

Lashay, born September 1999, has a friendly, outgoing personality. She makes good grades and enjoys playing sports. Her favorite subjects are math and science and she would like to try out to be a cheerleader.

Lashay participates in regular church activities. She values a strong support system having experienced multiple loses in her life. She especially enjoys quality time with others and being helpful.

Lashay enjoys listening to all types of music. She is physically healthy and takes medication for ADHD. She is interested in being placed in single parent home, preferably with a single mother.
Connect With APAC

Central Office & Northern Region
Birmingham Area
2141 14th Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35205
P: 205.949.2722
F: 205.933.8152
TF: 866.803.2722

Southern Region
Montgomery Area
500 Interstate Park
Suite 508
Montgomery, AL 36109
P: 334.409.9477
F: 334.409.9474
TF: 866.944.1044

Mobile Area
572 Azalea Road,
Suite 101
Mobile, AL 36609
P: 251.460.2727
F: 251.460.2729
TF: 800.489.1886

Huntsville Area
P: 256.539.5828
F: 256.536.9497
TF: 888.539.5828

Wiregrass Area
P: 334.409.9477
F: 334.409.9474
TF: 866.944.1044

APAC Adoption Services Help Line
866.803.2722

www.childrensaid.org/apac