



Adoption Links Worldwide

Bridging Children and Families

Finding Relatives Proves Successful for Foster Children

Tanea entered the foster care system when she was just ten months old. Fortunately, she had family that stepped in to care for her. When it became necessary to find a permanent home, her maternal uncle, Chinwendu, and his wife, Katie, decided that they would like to adopt her. When deciding to adopt, Chinwendu stated that the decision was about "more than that she's my niece"; they wanted her "to grow up and be happy and healthy". They wanted to give her a "normal environment", with a family that will love and care for her. Chinwendu said, "I don't think anyone else could have cared for Tanea like we do, especially being that we are family."

For the thousands of children in foster care it is important to find biological family who will provide a permanent home. There is a national push toward finding family as it has proven very successful. It is important to give children a sense of identity and understanding of where they come from, something Chinwendu understands. He stated that it will be easier to answer questions that Tanea has, especially as she gets older, about her biological family and why she came into foster care. In their case, Tanea knows her family and is around the same people that she would be if her biological mother would have parented her.

Chinwendu and Katie have also adopted Geni, Tanea's half-sister, and they have a biological son, Emenike. They are just like any other family and all of the children consider each other brothers and sisters. He and Katie

have claimed all of the children as their own and they love each other and look out for each other just like family should.

For anyone adopting from the foster care system, whether it is family or not, he stressed how important it is to be patient and take things "one day at a time". He added to stay focused on the child, and everything will most likely fall into place. Most importantly, Chinwendu shared how great it is to know that you have the ability to make a difference in someone's life, but the biggest reward is "to see them happy...that's what you want for any child."

Because all foster children are not able to return to their biological parents and are in need of adoptive homes; it is important that workers search for and consider other biological family members for a child in foster care. The Adoption Partnership (AP), consisting of three agencies, including Adoption Links Worldwide, collaborates with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to provide adoption services for children in foster care. The goal is to reach permanency for foster children as quickly as possible so they can grow up in a stable, loving environment. In an effort to do this, the AP pro-

vides a service called Family Finding.

Kevin Campbell is a nationally recognized expert on the Family Finding model. He created this model to make family connections for "the loneliest people on earth", otherwise known as children in foster care. This model is a national best practice model which helps children to achieve permanency through increased durable connections with biological family and other adults known to the youth. According to national data children who find placement and permanence with family or known adults do better than their counterparts. They run away less, do better in school and are less likely to be hospitalized for mental health breakdowns (de Sa, Karen, 2005). The AP utilizes aspects of Kevin Campbell's Family Finding model and works hard to help keep, or even create, family connections for children in foster care.

Everyone has a right to know who their family is. Children in care are no exception. The most normative setting for a child to live is in a family, whether they are biologically related or not. Even if a child cannot be placed in an adoptive home with biological family members, openness with family is very important. There are many success stories just like that of Chinwendu and Katie's family, and the AP looks forward to creating more.



Chinwendu and family pose for their first Christmas together.

Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2008

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Upcoming Events:

National Adoption Day

November 15, 2008

Oakview Mall Giving Spree

November 15, 2008

Visit:

www.thegivingspree.com

Fandango

January 23, 2009

Call ALW at (402) 556-2367 for more information!

Letter From the Executive Director: ALW Receives National Angels in Adoption Award!

Dear Families and Supporters,

I'm thrilled to announce that ALW has received the prestigious Angels in Adoption Award from the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. This award is given to those who have demonstrated dedication and commitment nationally and internationally to child welfare.

Needless to say, I'm extremely proud of ALW and all that has been accomplished in our 15 years of serving local families and children around the world. Just a few of our accomplishments include:

- Being the only Nebraska-based agency to earn Hague accreditation, allowing us to lead the state in international adoptions.
- Earning the only Nebraska contract, serving Omaha and the recently added Lincoln program, with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption for their signature program, Wendy's Wonderful Kids.
- Serving over 1300 children, including those from the Nebraska foster care system, children from around the U.S., and those from orphanages abroad, by finding them loving and accepting adoptive families.



Adoption Links Worldwide staff: Beginning in back left and continuing clockwise: Michelle Koepsell, Brenna Poindexter, Bonnie Sarton Mierau, Mandy Pflaster, Brandi McManigal, Cindy Johnson, Nicki Thamm, Cheryl Murray, Susan Lapp, and Lisa Kelly.



Cheryl Murray and her son Reid together with Congressman Lee Terry at the Angels in Adoption Ceremony in Washington D.C.

These highlights only represent a portion of our advocacy work. The true mission of the agency shines through when a birth mother, uncertain of the race of her unborn child, can choose an adoptive family, confident they will embrace her and her baby without judgment. The mission is fulfilled when an 11 year old boy finally finds a family willing to fight for him rather than with him. And our mission is upheld when parents make a commitment to invest in the emotional journey of therapy to enhance or preserve the family they cherish.

With great pride, I traveled to Capitol Hill, in Washington D.C. on September 15th to receive the Angels in Adoption award. The two-day event was complete with a pinning ceremony, opportunities to visit with congressmen, and an extraordinary Gala. Senator Hillary Clinton was the keynote speaker and national Angels included CBS for their work with their annual special, "A Home for the Holidays."

This honor would not have been possible without ALW's talented staff, committed board and loyal supporters. I look forward to many more years of advocating for children and participating in the miracle of adoption.

Respectfully,

Cheryl Murray
Executive Director

To learn more about the Angels in Adoption award log onto www.ccaainstitute.org.

Board of Directors

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Guild Steering Committee Prepares for Exciting Year

The Adoption Links Worldwide's Forever Families Guild is off to a great start this year. Leading the way for the group is an enthusiastic and capable steering committee. This team of 25 women offer ideas and lend support for the many guild projects.

This year's guild schedule of activities is full! First, artist Katherine Krug and guild volunteers will create mosaic art pieces in October and November with children from ALW's

Wendy's Wonderful Kids program. Second, Fandango: ForeEver Families will be held on January 23, 2009. This golf-themed event will feature a dinner, silent and live auctions and will be at the Embassy Suites, LaVista. Next, the summer of 2009 will be the time for ALW's SPLASH! This event, in its second year, offers mothers and daughters a great day of swimming, crafting, and socializing. A fall festival is being planned for October, 2009. This new event will include a patron party as well

as a day of fall family activities. The guild also sponsors Fostering Friendships, a program for families to provide gifts and support to children in the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program. Additionally, the guild supports ALW by coordinating mailings and assisting with community awareness.

To join or learn more about the Forever Families Guild, call ALW's special events coordinator, Sue Lapp, at (402) 670-3245.

Committee Members:	Dawn Dinsdale	Victoria Halgren	Jen Jepson	Gabby Mormino	Terri Wasmoen
Sandra Davidson, Chairman	Donna Erker	Joan Hellbusch	Amy Knuth	Colleen Schmidt	Diane Whitted
Beth Asbjornson-McCashland	Karen German	Sarah Hinsley	Cathy Koley	Kristie Stienike	Heidi Wilke
Pat Brannon	Jill Goldstein	Shelley Homa	Catherine Mahoney		
Brenda Christensen	Kris Gudenrath	Teresa Hunzeker	Anne Medlock		

ALW Seeking Families for Infant Adoption Program

If you have recently sought information regarding domestic adoption in Nebraska, you have learned about the "typical" domestic adoption process. The standard process includes agencies providing pregnancy counseling to birth parents in Nebraska. When a birth mother chooses to place their child for adoption, she has the option of choosing from a variety of families that reside in Nebraska. The average wait for placement in these programs is typically fairly long.

The Infant Program at ALW has been described as "progressive" for a number of reasons. The goal of this program is to provide birth parents of all races with

the same number of adoptive family profiles to look at as their Caucasian counterparts. Birth mothers of color often do not receive the same options as their Caucasian counterparts. ALW prides itself in cultivating networking relationships with agencies from around the country that desperately need families to provide birth parents with options.

Families that come into this program must be open to any race, to either gender and to an ongoing rela-

tionship with the child's birth parents.



Shiloh was placed with her forever family, Paul and Tiffany Leaders, on February 20, 2008.

ALW is currently seeking families for this program. Statistically, the average wait between completing the adoptive family profile and placement is six months. If you are interested in learning more about this program, please contact Brandi McManigal, MS, PLMHP at (402) 556-2367 or email at brandi@alww.org



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Nebraska's Safe Haven Law Not Working as Intended: Parents Leave Teenagers in Care of Hospitals

Nebraska became the last state in the nation to pass a "safe haven" law in February of 2008. The laws were intended to prevent infant abandonment and death; however, Nebraska's version of the law has an unusual twist: a parent can give up a minor of any age, including unruly teenagers rather than only infants. On July 18, 2008, LB 157 took effect. The entire bill reads: "No person shall be prosecuted for any crime based solely upon the act of leaving a child in the custody of an employee on duty at a hospital licensed by the State of Nebraska. The hospital shall promptly contact appropriate authorities to take custody of the child."

Other states clearly set a much lower age limit for children to be left under safe haven laws-the oldest is one year old in North Dakota. Nebraska defines a child as anyone up to 19 years of age. State senators have argued that the broad language in the bill was intentional because several senators felt that safe haven protection needed to be extended to all children. Unfortunately, this legislation has opened the door for *any* adult to abandon *any* minor from *any* state for *any* reason.

"Unfortunately, this legislation has opened the door for *any* adult to abandon *any* minor from *any* state for *any* reason."

Supporters of safe haven laws report that safe havens save lives by encouraging parents to surrender their newborns safely instead of aborting, killing, or abandoning the child. Opponents of safe haven laws report that safe havens do not work because they do not address the cause of the problem. Children that are left in safe havens are stripped of their genetic, medical, and social histories and are denied the right to know their birth parents. Furthermore, even when safe haven is an option, girls and women in crisis continue to abandon their babies.

The adoption community worked closely with legislators to propose a safe haven bill that was amenable, appropriate and safe for children. LB 157 was not presented to the adoption community prior to being signed into law and is not supported by most private adoption agencies in the state. Parents facing unplanned pregnancies and new parents that are struggling with parenting are encouraged to seek support from the many services offered in Nebraska. Pregnancy counseling is a free and unbiased service provided by local

private non-profit agencies. United Way 211 is also an option for assistance locally.

On September 13, 2008, two children were abandoned under the safe haven law. An 11 year old boy was dropped off by his adoptive mother at Immanuel Hospital in Omaha due to behavior problems and a 15 year old boy was dropped off by his aunt at Bryan LGH Hospital West in Lincoln due to his behaviors. On September 20, 2008 a 13 year old girl was dropped off at Immanuel Hospital in Omaha. And most recently, and perhaps the most tragic of all, a father left nine children between the ages of 1 and 17 at Creighton University Medical Center on September 24, 2008. Two unrelated children were also surrendered that same day. All of these children are now in the custody of Health and Human Services.

Cheryl Murray, Executive Director of Adoption Links Worldwide stated that, "ALW supports any legislation that advocates safety and permanence for children; unfortunately, Nebraska's safe haven legislation neither addresses the crisis facing new mothers that are depressed and at risk of killing or abandoning their newborns, nor does it isolate the type of children the law was intended to protect."

Living With Adoption: A Birth Mother's Perspective

Third Thursday of Every Month

6:30 to 7:30 PM

First Christian Church (across from UNO)

No reservations are necessary.

Living with Adoption is a support group for women who have placed a child for adoption. This social support group helps women form connections with other women who understand the grief of placing a child. Topics range from how to navigate open adoption to questions such as, "Can I call myself a mom?"

Questions? Call Brandi McManigal, MS, PLMHP
at (402) 556-2367



Wish List

The ALW staff would like to thank

Amy and Jill for your generous donations!

- Puppets
- Doll families of ethnic varieties sized for a dollhouse
- Therapy Sand Tray
- Therapy Sand Tray Figures (people, animals, houses, vehicles)
- Games: Mourning Game, Totika, Talking Feeling, Doing Game, Life Stories
- Gift certificate to Creative Therapy Store or amazon.com
- Large Rubbermaid storage bins with carrying handles
- Bulletin boards
- Books: *Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children*, *Drawing Together to Manage Anger*, *Getting out of a Stress Mess: A Guide for Kids*, *Paper Dolls and Paper Airplanes: Therapeutic Exercises for Sexually Traumatized Children*, *You've Got Dragons: Getting Rid of Children's Worries*, *Everyone Needs a Rock*

Insecure Attachment Causes Distress in Children

This is the first of several articles that will address the issues with attachment that many children face. Specifically, this article addresses insecure attachments.

Attachment is a confusing term. Attachment is simply our connection to others. This however can be misunderstood. For example, it is often said, “my child does not have an attachment issue – she is more than attached, she is Velcro®.” This need for proximity may be an indication of attachment issues. Unless it is developmentally appropriate, as in a young child or a child who has been home only a short time, a child should have the ability to be away from her primary caregiver for short periods of time without distress. When a child is properly attached, she believes in her value enough to know that her primary caregiver is coming back; she also believes that she will be okay until that wonderful reunion.

People are born totally helpless. They literally depend on others to meet their needs and keep them alive for their first few years of life. When a person’s needs are met (including needs for safety, stability, love, and touch), their worldview is positive – their view of themselves is also positive. The ability to move into the toddler stage and start to adventure out and test the waters depends strongly upon the safety felt early in life. The desire for children to know everything, try everything, put everything in their mouth is an important part of development. During this time, however, children keep that lifesaver – their primary caregiver, in sight and watch their expression and notice their level of nervousness or relaxation very closely to see if what they themselves are doing is okay. A parent’s positive response helps children feel competent about these adventures and their ability to be separated from their parent, even a little. This is the development of self esteem and self confidence.

When the first few days, months, or years of life are less than optimal (illness, multiple caregivers, separation from birth mother, institutionalization, malnutrition, etc), this self esteem and

self confidence development is stunted. The child does not have a secure base (primary caregiver) to monitor to see whether his explorations are okay. He often does not have anyone from whom he can separate. Because of this he does not know if his explorations are safe or not – he can become tentative and unsure of himself. He does not have the opportunity to develop positive self esteem or self confidence.

These children are then adopted by wonderful families who love them so much and want to take care of them. Moms and dads who want nothing more than for their child to feel comfortable and happy in their home. Parents have probably read about or heard about attachment disorder and worried their child might not want to hug them or spend time with them. They might feel a little smothered by their child and want to go to the bathroom by themselves sometimes, but do not want to complain because they are so relieved their child is attached.

There is certainly good news in this type of attachment issue. This is not an unattached child. This is a child with an anxious attachment. This child does not trust himself enough to make his own decisions or keep himself safe. However, there is also cause for concern.

When children have insecure attachments, negative consequences often follow (depression, anxiety, a lowered ability to cope with stress, and poor relationships with others.)

So, what can parents do to help?

1. Seek help from a professional who understands adoption and attachment issues.
2. Find ways for children to be successful. For every negative or corrective comment made to a child find at least three positive things to say.
3. Encourage children to make some of their own decisions (give children choices where either decision is okay) or figure things out for herself (“Why can’t I eat all the ice cream?” “Oh, honey, why do you think that might not be a good idea?”)
4. Gently expect competence – no lectures, just “I will be so happy when you are able to XXX by yourself. I know that day is coming and you will do wonderfully.”

If you have any questions about attachment or ALW’s therapy program please call Bonnie Sarton Mierau, LCSW.

ALW 2008 Picnic Celebrates Children and Families



On August 1, 2008, families and friends of the ALW community enjoyed an evening of food and fun. Families near and far came to enjoy one another’s company, good food and give their children an opportunity to play together. It was a beautiful evening made for celebration.



5017 Leavenworth Suite 1
Omaha, NE 68106

Phone: (402) 556-2367

Fax: (402) 556-2401

E-mail: alww@alww.org



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newsletter via email or be removed from the mailing list.**

Wendy's Wonderful Kids **Tralan is Waiting for His Forever Family. Is It Yours?**

Tralan, 16, enjoys riding his bike, playing baseball and swimming. He is passionate about designing, drawing, and someday working on cars. He is cooperative, polite and very considerate of others. Tralan is outgoing and has no problems making friends. He enjoys roller-skating and skateboarding with his friends. Music is very important to Tralan and you can often find him downloading songs for his iPod.

Tralan does well in school, especially in smaller groups. He enjoys group interaction and is pleased to contribute. Tralan can be quiet and reserved and always maintains a strong sense of fairness.

Tralan says the most important feature he wants in a family is a dad. He would benefit from a strong male role model and an affectionate family. Tralan needs a family that will help him continue to grow and develop his relationships with his biological family. He wants to belong to a forever family and would do best in a patient and nurturing home.

