

# VERMONT Adoption Consortium

## WINTER BULLETIN 2015



*An Everclear Afternoon*

We invite parents and professionals  
to contribute to the quarterly bulletin.

Please e-mail

[Leanne.porter@vermont.gov](mailto:Leanne.porter@vermont.gov)

with possible submissions.

In this issue....

- A note from the VAC Coordinator
- New website and library information
- Maintaining connections after adoption— article by Donna Provin
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Happy December everyone!

November was National Adoption Month. We have a lot to share with you about what went on in November. National Adoption month is a good time to reflect on what it means to be a family formed by adoption. At our Adoption Advocates Committee meeting we had a nice discussion about adoption pride. Adoption does not have to define a child or a family, but it is sure amazing when a child finds his or her forever family and that is something to always celebrate! I am proud of the families who I have known throughout my years here in Vermont. Many of you have weathered difficult times and events and still are the family member that everyone deserves. I am also very proud of the Post Permanence work force here in Vermont. They have been dedicated advocates and supports for families who have come together through adoption or guardianship. These folks have busy caseloads and are committed to families in ways that we should all be proud of. In 2016 the Adoption Advocates Committee for parents will plan a thank you event for Post Permanence. I hope you will get involved. E-mail me [Leanne.porter@vermont.gov](mailto:Leanne.porter@vermont.gov) to be a part of that group, even if it is just through e-mail communication, we NEED your voice.

I would like to acknowledge the Vermont Adoption Consortium Executive Committee:

**Diane Dexter**, representing Project Family

**Ann Clark**, of Adoption Advocates representing private adoption agencies.

**Christina Shuma**, representing the Adoption Registry and Lund.

**Kristi Lenart-Rikert**, representing Post Adoption Services- Easter Seals

**Angela Walters**, Children's Director North East Kingdom Human Services, representing mental health

**Janet Benoit Connor**, representing the Child Welfare Training Partnership

**Lisa Campbell**, Parent representative

**Ruth D'Angelo**, Parent advocacy representative- and Howard Center

And me, **Leanne LaChance Porter** Coordinator.

This is a very dedicated group of women with generous organizations that allow them to put in time to be a part of this important work. I had to include this list when writing about adoption pride because I am especially proud to be a part of this group and this special organization.

Stay in touch and stay warm



VTADOPTION.ORG

We are very excited that our new website is almost ready to be launched. I will send out an e-mail to everyone when the site has changed. It will still be found at [vtadoption.org](http://vtadoption.org). On the new site you will find our short documentary that we filmed during a celebrate adoption teen event. If you would like to watch it sooner you can find it at this link: <https://vimeo.com/146722660>

VTADOPTION.ORG

***I wonder if there is a book about that?***

There just might be. With over 700 books and approximately 50 audio-visual materials, there is a good chance the Vermont Adoption Consortium (VAC) Lending Library might be able to help. Browse the entire collection on the web at: <http://www.vtadoption.org>

Or call ahead to let us know when to expect you (802-223-4744) and come in to browse the shelves to make your choices. (The physical Library is located at the Easter Seals VT offices in Berlin, VT.)

Either way, if you live in Vermont, We are happy to be of service to you.

-Carol MacDougall, Easter Seals



## **Managing and Maintaining Connections after Adoption**

On-going birth family contact post adoption has become more common in recent years. If you're a member of an adoption constellation or are a professional working in the field of adoption, you may already have some thoughts about post adoption birth family contact. I have recently learned more about birth family contact and how it affects all members of the adoption constellation. Birth family contact can range from sharing birthday cards or school pictures-- to ongoing visits with birth family members. On-going birth family contact is not the same thing as co-parenting. The adoptive parents have full responsibility for parenting. Post adoption birth family contact is a complex issue that requires all involved to make a commitment of time and emotional energy. Three commonly voiced concerns are: the child will be confused or de-stabilized by contact with members of the birth family; fear that the child won't be able to love both adoptive and birth family; worry that the child will be confused by parental roles. I have researched the various views of professionals, parents and children on this subject.

### **Adoption Professionals Have Their Say**

One of the strongest, most outspoken supporters of birth family contact may be Dr. Joyce Maguire Pavao. In Pavao's book "The Family of Adoption" she maintains that all children should have a solid understanding of who their birth family members are and what that child's adoption story is. Pavao states in the book, "I believe there is no such thing as termination in the relationship between children and their birth families. By creating a ritual based on the pretense that the relationship has ended, the child's internal reality is at odds with the external one." Pavao also maintains that, "the greatest gift that one can give children is to tell their truths and to help them make sense of these truths, especially when they are complicated and harsh."

Adam Pertman, speaks out as an adoptive father and a professional, "The more secure adoptive parents grow, the more concretely they internalize the understanding that their children aren't confused about who their "real" parents: the people who hug them, help them with their homework, tuck them into bed. And the more confident adoptive parents become, the less intimidated they are by the notion that their kids might also be able to love other people, like grandfathers or aunts or birth parents, without it posing a threat to their own relationships."

Lois Melina, Ph. D. is the author of numerous articles and books on adoption. Melina maintains that an open adoption works best when there is good communication, respect, clearly defined roles, and a shared commitment to meeting the child's needs.

A British study conducted in 1999 found that post adoption birth family contact can be helpful for all members of the adoption constellation in three main areas: post adoption birth family contact promotes the child's ability to develop a healthy sense of identity; it can reduce the child's feelings of rejection and abandonment; and helps the child integrate with the adoptive family and provides permission to attach to them. Other possible benefits include: the ability to help the child resolve any feelings of grief about the past with truth, rather than fantasy; and post adoption birth family contact allows the ongoing exchange of important medical information.

### **Birth family members often want to know if the children are safe, loved, and happy.**

Birth parents may especially wonder how their child is doing during holidays or special times in the child's life, such as when the child enters or graduates from school. Birth parents struggle with grief over the loss of their children and some question if they made the right choice. Maintaining a connection with the adoptive family and child can help answer those questions as well as helping the birth parent cope with their feelings regarding the adoption.

Social media websites like Facebook and other sites have revolutionized post adoption contact and have significantly increased the ability of all members of the adoption constellation to find one another online. Due to the nature of electronic communication, there is often no knowledge on the part of the adoptive parent and no time for careful consideration (by anyone) regarding the complexities, issues or emotional upheaval that all members of the adoption constellation may face with this type of contact. While there is currently no way of policing this type of contact, open discussions with children can help maintain safety and appropriate boundaries.

### **Adopted Children Have Their Say**

Jonathan, an adopted teen said that he looks forward to birth family meetings, which provide him with a greater sense of comfort and reassurance in his daily life. “I know that my birth mom still cares about me and that she is safe. I have a more calm life when I know that my brothers and sisters are fine.” Basilia, an adopted teen, agreed with Jonathan about the positive effects of birth family meetings. She states, “Being able to see my birth parents has made my life easier. And it’s not just about them; it’s about my brothers too. My brothers and I shouldn’t have to give up seeing each other. Seeing them makes me feel great.” Antionette, an adult who was adopted at the age of ten states that as a child she didn’t want to have visits with her birth mother and that a child should have the right to refuse birth family contact if that is what she or he wants. Antionette went on to say that she would’ve liked to have contact with her birth siblings. In addition, Antionette strongly believes that adoptive people should be able to access information about themselves without opening themselves up to on-going contact with birth family members.

### **Adoptive Parents Have Their Say**

There can be challenges in maintaining a connection as adoptive mom, Connie states, “On more than one occasion, I have had to be the “bad cop” insisting that visits happen in a public place; that there were no overnight visits; that I or another chaperone had to be there; and that long waits (for the children) were not acceptable.” Some adoptive parents would like more contact from birth parents. Adoptive mom, Roxanne, shared, “my son just wants his birth mother to acknowledge his birthday and is hurt when she doesn’t. A birthday card from her would be very comforting to him.” Adoptive mom, Bobbi Jo, who has maintained contact with her children’s birth parents for several years, provided a summary of her successful philosophy, “our feeling is that the past cannot be changed and the future should be focused on showing love and support for the children. The birth family’s support helps bring closure to the past. It subtly tells the children that it’s okay for them to move on and embrace their new future.”

Adoptive parents have the ultimate responsibility for parenting and protecting the children involved, they have to ensure that visits are carried out in a safe, respectful way for all concerned. This can change for the child throughout time. As children’s developmental needs change, the level of contact may need to shift. In addition, sometimes, changes in the birth or adoptive family may necessitate a change in the type or frequency of contact. If the adoptive family has decided that on-going contact is right for the child, boundaries and guidelines must be established, in writing if possible. Adoptive and birth families should agree on clear ground rules for communication. The plan should specify frequency and the type of contact that will occur.

If you are part of an adoptive family and you are unsure about how to proceed with establishing or maintaining birth family contact you can seek support from a post permanence service provider, your adoption social worker or an adoption sensitive mental health counselor. VTadoption.org has details.

Vermont recently enacted a new law about Enforceable Post-Adoption Contact Agreements. For more information about who is eligible for this and how to proceed with negotiating this agreement, please contact the Vermont Adoption Registry.

Families in Vermont can also use the Vermont Adoption Registry to facilitate ongoing contact for adoptees to seek out information. In addition to managing information disclosures for adult adoptees, biological siblings to adoptees and birth parents, the Vermont Adoption Registry also manages Post-Adoption Correspondence between Birth and Adoptive families with minor children. This may be a helpful service to all adoptive families who want to maintain contact with the biological family of the adopted child without needing to disclose direct contact information to the biological family. The Vermont Adoption Registry can send correspondence from either party without disclosing the mailing address (State letterhead is used in correspondence).

**For further reading:**

[Adoption Nation](#) by Adam Pertman

[Family of Adoption](#) by Dr. Joyce Maguie Pavao

General guide on open adoptions: [www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/openadoption](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/openadoption)

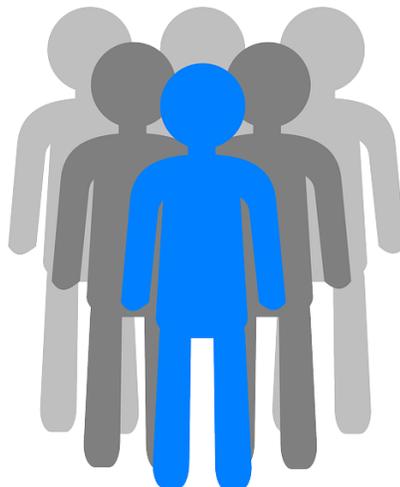
On social media and birth family contact:

<http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/091712p22.shtml>

I Information on how adoption affects birth parents: <http://www.adopting.org/impact.html>

Article by Donna Provin,

Post Permanence Service Provider with Lund



## Vermont sets a record on National Adoption Day

On the night of November 20, 2015, 36 children in Vermont went to sleep knowing that they were finally with their forever families. All those children were safe in the knowledge that they would never again have to wonder where they belonged. They were home. National Adoption Day saw the finalization of a record breaking 36 adoptions at four court houses across Vermont.

Many of these adoptions came together through the work of Project Family, Lund's award winning collaboration with the Department of Children and Families, which finds families for older children living in foster care.

Families invited grandparents, friends, aunts, uncles, teachers, relatives from out of town, so many people who love and support the newly adopted child and their parents. It was a party all around. "I'm here to see the judge," said one little girl, dressed in a Princess Elsa dress, as she came into the court house. "Where is she? I'm ready."

The Honorable Judge Susan Fowler presided over the courtroom at the Chittenden County Probate Court in Burlington again this year granting adoption decrees with swing music playing in the background, flowers on the table and plenty of opportunities to pose for pictures. "Such a great day," she said. "What a way to end the week!"

*Wanda Audette*

*Project Family*



# Presidential Proclamation

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH, 2015

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BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA A PROCLAMATION

All young people deserve a safe place to live, and with each passing year, more children know the warmth and comfort of a loving family thanks to adoptive parents. People who adopt do so for a variety of reasons, but they are united in the kindness and devotion they show toward children -- the people who need it most. During National Adoption Month, we recognize the selflessness of adoptive families, and we thank them for opening their hearts and their doors to young people in need of a safe, stable place to call home.

More than 400,000 children are in foster care across America today, and over 100,000 of these children are waiting for an adoptive home. Last year, over 23,000 youth aged out of the foster care system without having found their forever families. When people adopt, they open up a world of promise and possibility by providing a steady, supportive environment for youth to live in. November 21 marks National Adoption Day, when we unite as families, advocates, and communities -- and as a country -- to raise awareness of the barriers to adoption and recommit ourselves to moving more of our young people into permanent homes.

My Administration is dedicated to supporting adoptive parents and making it easier for families to adopt. Earlier this year, I implemented new Federal Government leave policies aimed at expanding workplace flexibility and helping employees who are balancing the needs of their family, including the birth or adoption of a child, with the demands of their job. I was proud to permanently extend the Adoption Tax Credit, which helps provide necessary financial support to adoptive families to ease the economic burden of the adoption process. And last summer, the Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act went into effect -- a law I signed to enforce our high legal standards for adoption service providers and to protect parents and children of adoptive families around the world.

Families across our country won a victory earlier this year when the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution guarantees marriage equality -- affirming the notion that LGBT couples deserve to be treated equally. This ruling was a victory for same-sex couples who have fought for equality and for children whose parents' marriages will now be recognized as legitimate throughout America. And because of the ruling, more kids in foster care will now have the chance to be welcomed into a loving and supportive family to call their own.

As we come together to give thanks and show our appreciation for the professionals who work tirelessly to ensure the adoption process runs smoothly and efficiently, we celebrate the stories of those who have been permanently and positively affected by adoption. During National Adoption Month, let us embrace the unique place adoptive families have in America, and let us extend our fullest gratitude to all those who have welcomed home a child in need.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 2015 as National Adoption Month. I encourage all Americans to observe this month by answering the call to find a permanent and caring family for every child in need and by supporting the families who care for them.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-eighth day of October, in the year of our Lord two thousand fifteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fortieth.

BARACK OBAMA

Vermont Adoption Consortium

## **Adoption Advocacy Committee**

We are a group of parents interested in promoting adoption awareness in schools, communities and at the state level. Our primary purpose will be to share ideas and resources on how to better advocate for families' needs. We want everyone to be a member so let us know how you can participate:

- \* I'd like to be an active committee member & will attend periodic meetings.
- \* I cannot attend meetings but would like to participate by receiving and sharing information by email.
- \* I'm interested in receiving general updates by emails only.

Email Donald Van Nostrand [dsvannostrand@gmail.com]

## ***Print and share this article with your school...***

November was National Adoption Month, and the Adoption Advocacy Organization wanted to take this opportunity to pass on some of what it means to be an adopted child in school. Educators are in a powerful position to send messages about adoption to both the adopted child and classmates.

Below are a few points we hope you consider:

There are thousands of adopted children enrolled in Vermont Schools each year. Adopted children come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Some children are adopted by grandparents, some arrive through the foster care system, and some are adopted from other states or countries.

Educators may or may not know whether adopted children are in the class. It is okay to assume there are as all children will do well to learn as much about adoption as possible. All family structures should be honored, regardless of how they were formed.

Some school assignments may be hard for adopted children. Examples of challenging assignments might include: family tree, autobiography, baby pictures, birth or young infancy stories, inherited traits, Mother's and Father's Day, mother/father and child events. If these assignments can not be skipped or altered families may do well with advanced notice to assist in adapting some assignment to fit circumstances

When someone is adopted, their mom is a *mom*. The person who gave birth to them is called a "birth mom". Both of them are real moms. Same goes for the dads.

Sometimes kids have different skin colors from their parents. It could be because they are adopted, their parents are of a different race, or they have a step-mom/dad. Regardless, the child is their "real child".

Avoid "adopt-a-project" activities. While it might seem like a great idea to adopt a whale or highway, this can create confusion and insult to adopted children, especially younger ones.

Have school personnel receive the e-news letter from the Vermont Adoption Consortium by sending a request to: [Leanne.porter@vermont.gov](mailto:Leanne.porter@vermont.gov).

For more information about adopted children in Vermont, visit  
[www.vtadoption.org](http://www.vtadoption.org)