The Responsibilities of Agencies in Open Adoption Planning

Dawn's Desk - update from Spring 1991

I had the pleasure of attending the 3rd National Conference on Open Adoption in Traverse City, MI in 1991. After three intensive, exciting, exhausting days, I returned to Vermont.

The conference was attended by over 150 adoption professionals from throughout the country. It was my attendance at this conference that helped me clarify the responsibilities involved in open adoption with regards to agency participation….I am thankfully still learning in 2015.

Before I begin to talk about the responsibilities of agencies, I should first define Open Adoption. For a number of years I have struggled with finding a definition of Open Adoption that I felt comfortable with. One outcome of the conference was that I now have one—thanks to Randolph Severson, Ph.D., and a speaker at the conference. Directly quoting from Randolph, “Openness means that everyone involved in the process, whether adoptive or birth families, are open to meeting and talking with each other both prior to and subsequent to the placement. How much communication and contact there will be is impossible to say. But in an open adoption, there is the assumption that there will be as much as possible within the limits of courage, compassion and common sense.” Randolph goes on to say, “Courage will tell you ought to meet rather than to give in to your fears of the unknown. Your compassion will tell you that once having met you ought to stay in touch because nothing is worse than to meet and then to hear nothing. That’s when you check the mail daily. That’s when your heart is in your throat every time the phone rings. In the end you feel even more rejected, even more abandoned, and even more alone when there is no contact. An adoptive parent with common sense will realize and honor the child’s need to have a picture of the birth parents and to talk to them occasionally to hear from those mysterious strangers those occasional words of love. Birth parents, with the continued on page 10
Meet Our Professional Team

Friends in Adoption (FIA), a not-for-profit adoption agency, is a network of dedicated, experienced, compassionate and friendly adoption professionals. Our focus is compassionate adoption. Although our administrative office is located in Vermont, we are able to provide free and confidential adoption services for pregnant women/couples anywhere in the United States. We recognize that adoption is a life-long process based on trust, honesty and mutual responsibility, and we promote open adoption and provide lifelong support to each member in the adoption circle — placing each child at the center of what we do. WE ARE FRIENDS IN ADOPTION.

Who We Are: FRIENDS IN ADOPTION (FIA) is a non-profit, pro-choice, licensed agency with a focus on helping people make informed decisions concerning adoption. FIA is committed to open adoption, inclusiveness, and providing lifelong support to all members of the adoption circle. FIA employs a network of dedicated, experienced and caring adoption professionals. Although our administrative offices are located in Vermont and New York, we are able to provide free and confidential adoption services for pregnant women/couples anywhere in the United States.

Mission Statement: Our mission is to keep the central focus on the needs of each child and to provide compassionate adoption services for the unique individuals involved in the adoption process.

What We Do:

- FIA provides free services to pregnant women/couples considering adoption.
- FIA works with women and men who are considering placing their already born child with adoptive families.
- FIA assists prospective adoptive families with the home study, approval process, and all aspects of pre-adoptive preparation.
- FIA presents adoption-related workshops for professionals who may be in contact with expectant and/or adoptive parents.
- FIA is committed to pressure-free, ethical standards of practice.
Meet Our New Case Managers from the Poultney, VT office

Deena, Brianna and Brandi are a welcomed addition to the Friends in Adoption staff. Even though coming from different and unique backgrounds, they bring so much to adoption. FIA is proud to have them on their team.

Deena
— Case Manager working with expectant women and adoptive families when a match is made

I earned my Liberal Arts and Psychology Masters; heavily focused on archetypal studies, personal mythology and entheogens. I've been a professional singer/songwriter and musician for 35 years. I have one son. I'm the birth grandmother of a lovely, talented, amazing 12 year old girl who lives in California with her dads. I like to hike, travel and go to live music events.

Before FIA, I worked independently for 15 years; running music programs for kids, teens and adults, co-facilitating shamantic based camps and retreats for kids, teens and women. I've worked extensively with at-risk youth. My favorite part of working as one of the fabulous staff at FIA so far has been connecting people with people.

Brianna
— Case Manager working with pre adoptive families

After graduating from College I moved from MA to VT where I spent 2 years as a preschool teacher. Although I love working with children, I missed being an advocate for women and families and was so excited to find a home at Friends in Adoption. I love everything about being the Case Manager for Adoptive Families, and my favorite part by far is calling a family with a potential situation. I am big into music. I play several instruments, sing, will see any live show and have begun dabbling in concert sound production alongside my partner who owns a sound company. I am obsessed with Pinterest and will give just about anything a shot from a DIY project, to holiday decorations, large remodeling projects to cooking something new (and usually rather interesting) for dinner.

Brandi
— Case Manager working with expectant women and adoptive families when a match is made

I graduated from college with a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work and a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology. Before FIA, I was a program coordinator for a transitional living facility where I worked with women who were recently incarcerated due to charges related to drugs and alcohol. These women were trying to reintegrate into the community without reoffending as well as working on rebuilding their relationships with their families and friends. I enjoy spending time with my family and playing miniature golf. The favorite part of my job is being able to interact and build relationships with all parties involved in the adoption process.
In August 2014, Brandon’s birth mother Jeanette discovered she was pregnant so she searched online and found the Friends in Adoption website. She began looking at the cover photos of the waiting families’ profiles. When she came to ours, she was immediately struck by the love for one another strongly displayed in the photo. She opened the profile, looked at our pictures and read it from beginning to end. She felt an immediate connection with us because of our love of music (we are both music teachers), our close family ties (Don’s parents live next door), and our home environment. She knew right away that she wanted us to be the parents of her child.

Late that night, Jeanette called FIA to express her interest in us. Because she lives in California, it was too late to contact us that night so the next day, on Brian’s birthday, we got THE call! Little did we know how much that phone call would profoundly and forever transform our lives. A few days later we had a three-way conference call with Jeanette and a social worker from FIA. To say we were all nervous would be an understatement. Would she like us? Would we like her? Would she change her mind? In the end we had nothing to worry about because the conversation flowed beautifully. After 45 minutes we had even forgotten that the social worker was on the call with us!

Our phone conversations continued and eventually progressed to Skype sessions which really brought us closer together. We Skyped first with Jeanette, then with her two sons and even with her parents. We all felt so strong about our relationship that we decided to “match” and take ourselves off the FIA website. We were nervous because Jeanette was only a few months pregnant and the match was going to be a long one. But the Skype sessions really established a consistency in our communication which helped to develop a trusting, thoughtful and solid relationship. Although we were told to be cautiously optimistic we knew deep down that Jeanette was carrying our child.
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What Open Adoption Can Be

Our Adoption Journey:

The more we got to know Jeanette the more we discovered what a remarkably giving and loving person she is. Because her hospital would not allow it, she and a friend searched all over for a clinic that would allow her to Skype the ultra-sound at which we all learned the gender of the baby. “It’s a boy!” We will always remember the excitement of receiving the first sonogram images – wow! Another example of Jeanette’s generosity was her strong desire for us to be in the delivery room and for us to be the first ones to hold the baby.

After the holidays were over, the March 7th due date was fast approaching. Time to get serious about travel plans and preparations to fly out to California! We were anxious at the thought of being 3,000 miles away from our family and friends. (Looking back now, it was the best thing for us because we had time alone together to bond with Brandon and make connections as a family.) We arrived March 5th and spent several days getting to know Jeanette’s family and friends. We were warmed by how supportive and kind they were to us. Finally, on March 9th we received a call from Jeanette’s mother that they were off to the hospital. Once there we found the staff to be very friendly and supportive. At no point were we made to feel like outsiders. Finally after eleven hours Brandon James was born! The joy and celebration in the delivery room is a memory we will cherish always.

Thinking back over the two years of being a waiting family, we remember being discouraged not to have matched with a birth mother. But FIA was there throughout the entire journey reminding us that our “baby was out there.” They were right. This little boy and the loving birth family we now have in California were meant to be. We will be forever grateful to Jeanette for her strength and courage in giving us this gift in the name of love.
THANK YOU.

FIA is grateful for your generosity!

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Russell and Christian  
*In honor of Nina and Ivy*

Jody and Michael  
*In honor of Kandris*

Bonnie  
*In honor of Murray’s 90th birthday*

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Becky and Rudy

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Michael and Kelly

Mark and Nancy

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Marie  
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Michael and Maryann

Michael

William

Katherine

Michael and Mary

John and Susan

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Mary

Timothy and Rosemary

John and Rosana

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Thea-Ellen

James

Richard and Kathleen

Craig

Hernia and Arnold

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Debora and David

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— Mary

— Timothy and Rosemary

— John and Rosana

— United Technologies

— Thea-Ellen

— James

— Richard and Kathleen

— Craig

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— Bonnie  
*In honor of Murray’s 90th birthday*
Welcome Home

Nate and Sue
Luca and Andre
Kevin and O.P.
Rick and Tara
Michael and Penelope
Robert and Shawn
Ryan and Sonja
Jason and Adam
Cameron and Ilyse
Tom and Santiago
Kristina and Chuck
Deborah
Aaron and Corvette
John and Chris
Don and Brian
Emily and Kenneth
Russell and Alysia
Rachel and Eli
Chris and Amy
Ben and Anne
James and Alexa
Bonnie and Stephen
Adam and Candace
Greg and Jen
Dave and Michelle
Carson and Steve
Nancy and Lee
Jordan and Robert
Collin
Alexander
Jasper
Carly
Christopher
Ava
Molly
Xavier
Calev
Violet
Charlotte
Teddy
Levi
Henry
Brandon
Amos
Sophia
Amara
Emmett
Peter
Alaina
Chloe
Silas
Matthew
Cecilia
Maeve
Zachary
Jackson

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with the same wisdom in their heart, will recognize the need to provide that picture and will communicate in a way that does not overwhelm the child or intrude too much on the parent/s. Common sense will also be enough to realize adoption is not dual parenting.”

Now, on to responsibility – I walked away from the conference with some very strong feelings. The first being, until we have a perfect society, there will always be a population of expectant women/couples who are contemplating adoption for their children. The responsibility of ethical agencies is to see that we educate the pregnant women/couples contacting us to all of their options regarding their pregnancy.

In talking to one of our case managers, she stated that she insists the pregnant woman/couple write down how it would look if they chose to parent and how it would look if they chose adoption and how they would feel if they chose to have an abortion. Then she discusses each scenario with her/them – without bias or judgment. It is the responsibility of the agencies to help those they are working with look at all the resources available to help her/them make an informed decision. I have often heard prospective adoptive families say that they would never be able to parent a baby from a woman/couple who wasn’t at peace about their decision to make an adoption plan. Only with thorough, unbiased counseling can agencies be assured that women and couples considering adoption know and understand the lifelong implications of their decisions.

For those folks contacting agencies wanting to adopt, it is the responsibility of the agencies to NOT say that adoption is a cure for infertility, but rather that adoption is an exciting, challenging way to become a family but uniquely different from a biological family. It is the responsibility of the agency to EDUCATE the prospective adopting family to the lifelong implications of what it means to become a family through Compassionate Adoption.

I firmly believe everyone entering into the adoption process brings with them a unique set of needs. It is the responsibility of the agency to recognize and address those unique needs on an individual basis through the home study process. To say that every adoption will mirror the previous one is surely an inaccurate statement. The common denominator that adoptions possess is that everyone involved in the adoption planning cares deeply and deeply for the child being placed. With this established, a compassionately planned adoption may then be put into action. The agency provides the “tools” to help create the plan that will best meet the needs of all the parties involved. In some states, legally binding post adoption agreements regarding how often visits will occur, how frequently letters and pictures will be exchanged or Dropbox will be updated will allow all parties to be clear regarding what the landscape may look like after placement. In states where the laws are not legally accommodating any post adoption agreements become agreements of trust. Ultimately, it is the bond that is established between the birth and adoptive families and their mutual love of the child, based on TRUST and HONESTY that keeps the adoption cohesive.

Agencies have the responsibility of providing lifelong resources, education and support to those touched by adoption.

Your feedback is welcomed on this piece.

Thank you.

— DJ
When a woman (or couple) faces an unplanned pregnancy, she may not be sure what to do. Some will think about adoption, but may need more information. Please consider referring to Friends in Adoption (FIA), a licensed, not-for-profit, domestic agency. We help people make informed decisions. FIA respects a woman's right to explore all of her legal options, and will treat each woman/couple with kindness and respect while offering information.

What Makes FIA Unique?
FIA’s four defining points are promotion of empowerment, inclusiveness, open adoption and provision of lifelong support. FIA adheres to the best practices in adoption, and has for more than 30 years. Please visit www.friendsinadoption.org for more information!

FIA’S Professional Services
FIA employs a network of dedicated, experienced and caring adoption professionals. We believe it is important to offer local and in person support so we can provide adequate support before, during, and after the adoption process. We also make certain that pregnant women get free, independent legal counsel. Women and couples who work with FIA have the best of both agency and private adoption. Our mission is to keep the central focus on the needs of each child and to provide compassionate adoption services for the unique individuals involved in the adoption process.
MEET OUR Waiting Families

To view our complete, up-to-date list of awesome families, please visit friendsinadoption.org/families