



ADOPTION
NETWORK
CLEVELAND

Educate • Support • Advocate

AdoptionNetwork.org

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THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF ADOPTION NETWORK CLEVELAND

EST. 1988

Cover Feature:

Being in the Room

Reflections on our
General Support
and Discussion Meetings
from our participants





FROM THE DIRECTOR
 BETSIE NORRIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends,

Reading this issue of our newsletter fills me with warm feelings. It's so fitting that this compilation of stories, of people, of impact comes as we launch our 30th anniversary year. It reflects a representation of so many lives we've touched.

Many of the people featured are people who have chosen to give back, to become part of our shared vision, of our collective. Our voice. I find it inspiring.

As I travel in my nonprofit organization circles I see how uncommon it is that an organization founder is still here at the helm after 30 years. Thirty years is a long time – and yet it feels like it's gone by so quickly.

Adoption Network Cleveland is here to serve people, yes, but we are also here to change the world – at least our corner of the world. We do this through helping people to heal – individually and collectively. Through understanding, through lending a hand. Through impacting our community, creating ways for people to speak out, through shining a light on policies and systems and how they do (or don't as the case may be) serve the people they are created to help. Through creating a tribe, a collective, a community. Anniversaries are a good opportunity to stop long enough to look back, look forward, and take stock. We've done so much together...changed lives...changed laws...changed systems.

Our General Support and Discussion Meetings were our first program and remain a centerpiece of Adoption Network Cleveland. We've long since lost count, but by my estimation we have held 1,500+ meetings over these 30 years. Please celebrate with us as we absorb some of the impact we have had, together.

In the spirit of truth,
 Betsie

PS. I hope to see you at our annual meeting Friday, November 17th! See page 3 for details.

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THE LATEST NEWS

Join Us!

Adoptee Journeys Retreat

We invite adult adoptees to join us for the day to explore these important topics with leading professionals in the field:

Workshop: Navigating Relationships
Presenter: Dr. Tom Rogat

Being separated from biological parents/family by adoption can have a profound affect on what adoptees believe about themselves and others.

Workshop: Grief & Loss
Presenter: Dr. Zoë Breen Wood

"Aren't you lucky?! ... that you were adopted?" This kind of message ignores the truth that the way to all adoption is through loss.

Date: Saturday, October 14, 2017
Time: Sign In: 9:30 am (Coffee and Pastries)
Retreat: 10:00 am - 5:30 pm (Lunch Included)
Cost: \$50 for Adoption Network Cleveland members
\$60 for non-members
Location: Elmwood Recreation Center
6200 Wisniewski Parkway, Independence
Register: bit.ly/journeysretreat17
Facilitator: Estes Turner
Join now to register at the member price: bit.ly/ancJOINUS.
For questions: contact Traci Onders at traci.onders@adoptionnetwork.org

ALEX AND ANI

We're excited to be the chosen nonprofit for an Alex and Ani Charmed by Charity event!

Date: Thursday, October 19
Time: 6:00 to 9:00 pm
Place: Beachwood Place

15% of all sales will go to Adoption Network Cleveland during the event.

Coming Soon!

Beginning in the of Spring 2018 we will be launching a whole new way of communicating with you. Please make sure we have your email address. Send it to: info@adoptionnetwork.org – include "newsletter list" in the subject line. Thank you!

Annual Meeting

Keynote Presenter:
State Representative Sarah LaTourette,
Assistant Majority Floor Leader
"From Adoption Network Cleveland to the Ohio Statehouse"

State Representative Sarah LaTourette, who formerly worked at Adoption Network Cleveland, will be reflecting on her journey to become a legislator and ways she is using what she learned here in her current leadership position in the Ohio House of Representatives. The evening includes our annual Triad Advocate of the Year Awards, Founder's Award, and our Year in Review.

Date: Friday, November 17, 2017
Time: 5:30 to 7:30 pm
Place: Advance Ohio Building (former PD Bldg)
MCPc Community Room
1801 Superior Avenue, Cleveland
RSVP: to Evan at (216) 482-2312 or email: evan.clark@adoptionnetwork.org
For more information: bit.ly/ancAnnualMeet



A Girl Like Her documentary film is coming to our General Support and Discussion Meetings!

A GIRL LIKE HER reveals the hidden history of unwed women who became pregnant in the 1950s and 60s and were banished to distant relatives or maternity homes to give birth and surrender their children for adoption. (47 mins.)

Film and discussion:

COLUMBUS
Tuesday, October 10, 7:00 to 9:00 pm
2760 Airport Dr., Door B, Ste 125, Columbus

CINCINNATI
Sat., October 21, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm
Hyde Park Branch, Cincinnati Library
2747 Erie Avenue, Cincinnati

GREATER MIAMI VALLEY
Thursday, November 16, 6:30 to 8:30 pm
Wright Memorial Public Library
1776 Far Hills Avenue, Oakwood

The film is coming to northeast Ohio meetings in early 2018!

Young Adult Adoptee Get Together
We're gathering on Saturday, October 21, 6:00 pm
at Dewey's in Lakewood. No RSVP. Just come!
(18516 Detroit Ave. Lakewood, Ohio 44107)
Info: jennifer.ziskvitron@adoptionnetwork.org



COVER STORY

Being in the Room

Several Individuals Reflect on our General Support and Discussion Meetings

Introduction by Linda M. Schellentrager, Communications Manager

In 1993 I was a new adoptive mom when I heard Betsie Norris interviewed on the radio. Instantly, I knew I wanted to be connected to this nonprofit. As I navigated raising a little boy in a whole new world of openness, I found our General Support and Discussion Meetings to be a lifeline. Hearing experiences shared grounded me in our open adoption path.

Since then, the meetings have expanded to locations around the state and online and have remained one of our strongest programs. There is nothing like being in the room with others who have a connection to adoption or foster care that “get it.” To be in a space with others, even virtually, who understand and support all the emotions is irreplaceable.

Here are several short reflections showing the impact of these meetings on the lives of those we serve. We also asked our meeting facilitators, all volunteers and many of whom have been involved for decades, for their take on the experience.

It’s been an honor to be in the room. Come join us!

A place where I can relate

The General Meetings offered by Adoption Network Cleveland provide a place in which I can relate, seek advice, and ask questions about things that I have experienced as an adoptive parent. They allow me to listen and understand the perspectives of adoptees and birthparents, which help me to be a better parent. The meetings provide a sense of camaraderie and can be a cathartic experience.

Chad Chan, adoptive parent

Hometown: Cleveland, Meeting location: Rocky River

Observing, supporting, unloading

Whether I’m observing, supporting, unloading emotions, or laughing, the General Meetings are always made up of genuine, honest conversations and candid perspectives from the diverse individuals and professionals affected by the adoption and foster community. I’ve met some phenomenal individuals and sincerely look forward to the evenings I get to spend in their company!

Julia Dean, foster care alumni and Adoption Network Cleveland board member

Hometown: Rocky River, Meeting location: Rocky River

Makes me a better social worker

I started to attend Adoption Network Cleveland General Meetings to obtain continuing education credits for my social work license. I had no idea how much I had been missing all these years. Yes, I do receive CEUs, but the experience has made me a much better social worker. I have learned so much hearing from the perspectives of all triad members.

Beth DeGaetano, social worker

Hometown: Lyndurst, Meeting location: throughout northeast Ohio

I feel right at home

The general meetings are my chance to stay connected to other members of the adoption community at large. Even when I haven’t attended in a while, I know I can show up, feel right at home, and get recharged by hearing others’ stories. In many ways, it’s like a family reunion.

Tom Dent, adoptee

Hometown: Lakewood, Meeting location: Rocky River

When we met, it felt like old friends

I learned of my adoption late in life and at first felt alone in the experience. Those initial video chat meetings were a lifeline for me. When I finally got to meet some of the people at the Adoption Gathering last year, it felt like we were already old friends.

Kevin Gladish, adoptee

Hometown: Chicago, Meeting location: Virtual webcam

Other stories help me understand

I can’t begin to express how the meetings have helped me. I am a birthmother who has not been reunited with my daughter. I reached out to her but she is not ready for reunion at this time. Listening to other adoptees talk about their perspective on reunions, or not wanting a reunion, has educated me as to the struggles that my daughter may be experiencing. It is also very helpful to hear adoptive parents give their perspective knowing that all members of the triad share fear, rejection, confusion, and acceptance. I would never have been able to go through this journey without the people in this group.

Elaine, birthmother

Hometown: Lakewood, Meeting location: Rocky River

Sharing and listening

I enjoy sharing my unique story when asked, and listening to others from all sides of the triad. This group is one of the only places I can openly share this part of my personal history.

Rob Haettich, birthfather

Hometown: North Olmsted, Meeting location: Rocky River

I’m encouraged to remain hopeful

I look forward to the monthly meetings for connection to other triad members. I enjoy seeing regular attendees as well as meeting new people. Since I am not in reunion, sometimes meetings are a painful reminder of this. Through others, especially regular members, I am encouraged to remain hopeful. I appreciate that some meetings also offer CEUs towards my professional licenses.

Monica, birthmother, social worker

Hometown: Vermilion, Meeting location: Rocky River

COVER STORY

Having all represented gives each a chance

One Saturday a month, I get to be completely open about my adoption journey in a safe environment with people that absolutely understand, because they live it too. Having all triad perspectives represented gives each a chance to understand all sides of the adoption triangle. Best of all is the support we give each other in the joys and struggles surrounding our adoption stories.

Holly, adoptee and birthmother

Hometown: Dayton, Meeting location: Cincinnati

Their stories helped my healing

After being found by my son, I soon realized that I needed help. I discovered Adoption Network Cleveland and their General Support and Discussion Meetings where I met birthmothers and birthfathers, adoptees and adoptive parents. Their stories had a powerful affect on me and helped with my healing. At these meetings, I learned that the emotional craziness I felt was not unusual. It was, in fact, a very normal reaction to meeting my son. I am grateful for everyone at those meetings.

Jeanne Hood, birthmother

Hometown: Willoughby, Meeting location: Lake County

Their support is clear and palpable

Jeff and Wendy lead one of the best Adoption Network Cleveland General Meetings with their Virtual Support Group. Being able to attend a quality meeting from the comfort of home has helped me to care for myself and others. Their support is real and it is palpable, even though we are connecting by video.

Sue Meek, adoptee

Hometown: Temperance, MI, Meeting location: Virtual Webcam

I have found my people!

I found the meetings to be extremely helpful and personally satisfying. I met others who felt like me, who experienced the same emotions and had the same reactions as me in spite of us having completely different lives and backgrounds. My thought after my first meeting was, "I have found my people!" Talking to others in the triad also helped me to put a new perspective on my feelings and experiences, allowed me to see past the hurt child and consider other points of view.

Kristina Musil, adoptee

Hometown: Vienna, Austria, Meeting location: Virtual Webcam and Rocky River (once).

What a lifeline this has been

As an out-of-town, Ohio-born adoptee, I regularly participate in the General Meeting experience by virtual webcam. The

Talking to others in the triad helped me to put a new perspective on my feelings and experiences.

meetings provide the opportunity for support, relationship building, and maintaining connections to others in other states whose lives have also been affected by adoption. What a lifeline this has been to help me navigate my search and reunion journey!

Barbara R., adoptee

Hometown: Buffalo, NY, Meeting location: Virtual Webcam

I have such gratitude for this group

The meetings are a place where I know that I can share my journey with others who can relate to the ups and downs that come with reunion. The different perspectives and shared experiences also bring insight when I'm struggling to understand my own feelings. I have such gratitude for this group and always look forward to the next meeting.

Dave Samerdak, adoptee

Hometown: Cuyahoga Falls, Meeting location: Summit County

I felt such strength from this incredible group

I went to my first Adoption Network Cleveland General Support and Discussion Meeting in spring 2015. Soon after the adoption records in Ohio were opened, my then 30-year-old daughter located her birthmother. I had always told her I would be supportive of this search, yet I found myself in somewhat of a crisis when the reunion became a reality! I was confused – I very much wanted to meet this incredible woman who made it possible for us to be parents, but was also terrified! The folks at my first meeting listened to my concerns and offered their support. I felt such strength from this wonderful group of birth and adoptive parents and adult adoptees that I have returned frequently because reunion is definitely a process.

Sue, adoptive mother

Hometown: Avon Lake, Meeting location: Rocky River

Supporting one another is so important

I am very grateful for these meetings as an adoptee. Not only do you get the chance to meet very interesting, kind and brave individuals, you also hear some eye-opening and diverse stories. You receive news updates about laws, events, and opportunities to be involved. After every meeting you feel more connected with people with whom you share a common bond and interest. My after-hours job now makes it difficult for me to attend meetings at this time. I miss that chance to connect with people I consider my friends. I will eventually go back or attend other adoption-related events because supporting one another is so important on a personal level and for our cause.

Paige Adams Strickland, adoptee

Hometown: Cincinnati, Meeting location: Miami Valley and Cincinnati



These meetings are a blessing

General Support and Discussion Meetings saved me in my search and kept me sane through my initial meeting with my birth family. My reunion story has continued to have many ups and downs and I honestly do not think I could make it without my meetings. I have met my closest friends and so many other wonderful people. These meetings are blessings.

Kay Williams, adoptee

Hometown: Cleveland Heights, Meeting locations: Heights and Lake County

FIND OUT MORE about our General Support and Discussion Meetings by going to our website.

Here is a short link to find the page:

bit.ly/ANCgenmeet

Program Coordinator:

Traci Onders (216) 482-2323

traci.onders@adoptionnetwork.org



Our Facilitators Share Some Memorable Meeting Moments

CINCINNATI Co-Facilitator: Steve Kelley (adoptee)

A powerful meeting/moment/memory was when it looked like no one was going to show up. Just then a birthmother walked in. We introduced ourselves and told our connections to adoption and then spent the next two hours sharing thoughts, laughs, tears, and ultimately, a better understanding of each other's view on adoption. It was probably the most impactful two hours you could spend with a complete stranger!

COLUMBUS Co-Facilitator: Marni Hall (adoptee)

I joined after the records were opened in 2015. I had so much to process. I was adopted in February 1967 at two weeks old in a private Columbus adoption. The general meetings validated my existence. They let me know it was normal to want to know my biology – that it was not a criticism of my parents and how they raised me. I learn so much from listening to other members of the adoption triad.

COLUMBUS Co-Facilitator: Mindy Podkin (adoptee)

My reunion has been a difficult journey, but our meetings have formed a community. None of us are in the exact same place but we have all had such similar struggles with loss, identity, and relationships. I take great comfort in the time spent with our “tribe” here in Columbus.

COLUMBUS Co-Facilitator: Sheree Gordon (adoptee)

A great memory for me is when, about a year ago, after asking her many times, my birthmother finally joined me at a meeting. At that group my birthmother and I shared some things that we never shared with each other before. That meeting brought a lot of healing between us.

HEIGHTS Co-Facilitator: Estes Turner (adoptee)

Perhaps my favorite meeting memory came from when my birthmom and birth sister attended a meeting with me in the late '90s. We were sitting side by side, when one of the people in attendance suddenly said, “Look at the three of them, they’re all sitting exactly the same; legs crossed the same way and arms folded the same!” I had never felt so validated in my life. I looked like and acted like someone; I belonged.

HEIGHTS Co-Facilitator: Dottie Klemm (social worker)

My most memorable meeting personally was when I was unexpectedly reunited with a person who I had placed for adoption. She was about 10-years-old at the time of her adoption by her foster parents, and well into adulthood when she came to the meeting. I did not recognize her, but during introductions we both recognized each other's names. I was thrilled.

LAKE COUNTY Co-Facilitator: Brian Campolieti (adoptee)

To me, the General Meetings are a safe place where you know you're accepted no matter what obstacles you're currently facing. It's also an environment where stories help you understand that you are not alone and, although we may be at different points, none of us are ever alone in this journey. A powerful moment happens every time I walk in those doors and sit in that chair at a meeting – it still amazes me. Every single time!

LAKE COUNTY Co-Facilitator: Carol Hayward (birthmother)

My favorite memories are when my son's adoptive father attended and another moment is when I heard an adoptive mother for the first time talk about what she went through to adopt her son. I saw adoptive parents differently after that.

MIAMI VALLEY Co-Facilitator: Lynn Grubb (adoptee, kinship adoptive parent)

I like the meetings because I feel it is healing to both hear and share stories. My favorite moment is anytime somebody comes to a meeting and feels supported because we understand them.



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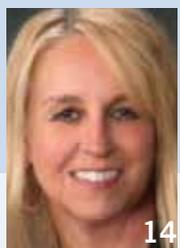
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16

Meet our General Support and Discussion Meeting Facilitators:

CINCINNATI: Steve Kelley (1), Rose Curtin

COLUMBUS: Marni Hall (2), Mindy Podkin (3), Sheree Gordon (4)

HEIGHTS: Estes Turner (5), Dottie Klemm (6)

LAKE COUNTY: Brian Campolieti (7), Carol Hayward (8)

MIAMI VALLEY: Becky Drinnen (9), Lynn Grubb (10)

ROCKY RIVER: Linda Bellini (11), Jim Deskins (12)

SUMMIT COUNTY: Kim Donato (13), Denice Leddy (14)

VIRTUAL: Jeff Costello (15), Wendy Barkett (16)

Our thanks to these loyal volunteers!

MIAMI VALLEY Co-Facilitator: Becky Drinnen (adoptee)

I see the healing and the validation that occurs during General Meetings – and I realize just how much of a difference it makes to sit in a room with others who understand. A powerful memory from a meeting was when an adoptive mother attended with her son. Her insight into just how important it was for her son to find his birthmother was incredible.

ROCKY RIVER Co-Facilitator: Linda Bellini (social worker)

The greatest take away I learned over the years, both as a social worker and an adoptive aunt, is that no matter what the connection to adoption and no matter where people are in the journey of adoption, it is better to walk with others who understand. I can't think of a single meeting that was not powerful in some way. It is a privilege to me since my retirement to continue in this role as a volunteer.

ROCKY RIVER Co-Facilitator: Jim Deskins (birthfather)

One of the most powerful stories that inspired me over many years at our meeting was following a prospective adoptive parent couple. For years, the woman's voice would crack during introductions, "I am a prospective adoptive mom. Still just a prospective mom." The first meeting they attended after bringing their son home, the room lit up and clapped as the woman introduced her adoption triad status as "adoptive mom."

SUMMIT COUNTY Co-Facilitator: Kim Donato (adoptee)

For some it's the first time they've spoken about their experience, and it can be so powerful. We were having a particularly somber meeting surrounding rejection/loss and an attendee lightened the mood with an off-the-wall statement. The entire meeting roared in laughter; it was

exactly what we needed. I think shows the immense amount of trust the attendees have in each other that they can share the hardest emotions, and still keep it all in perspective.

SUMMIT COUNTY Co-Facilitator: Denice Leddy (adoptee)

I am an adoptee who is reunited with one parent. The General Meetings for me are a powerful experience. Every single meeting, and I mean every single meeting, I learn something and am moved by something someone shares at every meeting. I am honored to be in the room.

VIRTUAL WEBCAM Co-Facilitator: Jeff Costello (adoptee)

The General Meetings were like a lifeline for me early in my reunion. Looking back, I don't think my reunion would be as good as it is without all of the support and guidance that I received. Facilitating the virtual meeting is my way of paying it forward. There have been many powerful moments, but the one that comes to mind actually occurred at the first meeting I attended. During introductions and as we began to talk, I was amazed that even though our stories were all different, there were striking commonalities in many of our lived adoption experiences.

VIRTUAL WEBCAM Co-Facilitator: Wendy Barkett (adoptee)

I like to think that as facilitators we are able to help others, if at the very least, by having a place for out of town Ohio adoptees to share and speak virtually. I hope we are helping others in some small way. Powerful moments are helping triad members see and understand another perspective. When we are able to slow their thoughts down to see what may be going on, it is helpful. My favorite time is when someone understands, I mean really hears, that any rejection is not personal. It's simply the other's personal opinion based upon their lessons learned in life.

To read the full reflections, go to our blog at adoptionnetwork.org/blog



EVENTS



Octavia Spencer traveled to Lakewood to support a book signing event with author **Barbara Raymond** in August. The event drew over 200 people to meet Barbara, the Lakewood author of the acclaimed book *The Baby Thief*, and the award-winning actress. The book reveals the true story of Georgia Tann who, from the 1920s to the 1950s, stole babies and children from women, falsified their records, and then placed them for adoption with wealthy families. Octavia optioned the book and is potentially producing it for an upcoming movie. Betsie Norris co-hosted the event with Octavia to shed light on our work of truth and honesty in adoption practices and opening access to records for adult adoptees.

STAFF UPDATE

We warmly welcome two new staff members this quarter:



DONIKEA AUSTIN is our Program Coordinator – Youth Services where she works collaboratively with youth to identify their needs while implementing avenues of support, advocacy, and education to further permanency and healing.



EVAN CLARK is our new Special Projects Coordinator. In her role, Evan manages volunteers, assists with communications, coordinates the organization's membership program, and supports the Executive Director.

We say a fond farewell to **KATHRYN MAHON** and wish her all the best in her new endeavors.

Thank you to everyone who supported Adoption Network Cleveland's Inaugural Mini-Golf Outing on Saturday, July 29 at Sweeties Golf and B.A. Sweetie Candy Company! We had 30 golfing teams and more than 160 people in attendance, and raised \$6,500 for our programs and services – a great start for the event's first year!

Thank you! Event Sponsors and Corporate Partners:



Special Events Sub Committee:
 Denise Sanelli Barone – Chair
 Anita Miller – Vice Chair
 Marissa Brydle
 Lisa Buescher
 Mimi Datta
 Tony Harris
 Jessica McCamon
 Karen Ostanek

Summer Events Intern:
 Julia Taylor

Event Ambassadors:
 Celina Barone
 Matt Polefko
 Mature Business Professionals at Medical Mutual

Event Volunteers:
 John Bundy
 Brian Campolieti
 Jacob Carroll
 Jeanine Carroll
 Morgan Craig
 Jacquise Harper
 Gary Hunter
 Fatimah Satterwhite
 Shirley Schellentrager
 Joan Thomsen



Auction and Food Donors:
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 Amazon Family Entertainment Center
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 Artist for a Day
 Big Fun
 COSI
 Einstein Bagels – Rocky River
 Farkas Pastry Shoppe
 Five Below
 Fun 'N' Stuff
 Hands on Pottery Studio
 Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams
 Lake County Captains
 Learning Express Toys – Strongsville
 Memphis Kiddie Park
 Ohio City Burrito
 Petitti Garden Centers
 Pinwheel Kids Boutique
 Playground World
 Presti's Bakery
 Pro Football Hall of Fame
 Rinky Dink Family Fun Center
 Rudy's Strudel
 Scene 75 Entertainment Center
 SkyZone Westlake
 Snow Sisters - Party Entertainment
 The Beach Waterpark
 Whole Foods – Rocky River

KUDOS

Mini-Golf: **Julia Taylor** for helping plan and launch the event; **Natalie Taylor** for providing tables, chairs, and logistical support; **Jeanine and Jacob Carroll** for serving coffee; **Shirley Schellentrager** for helping with set up and bringing coffee; **Joan Thomsen** for helping with registration; **Morgan Craig** for helping with clean-up, and to all who attended.

Book Signing event with Barbara Raymond: **Chad Chan, Joan Thomsen, and Carol Gay** for volunteering; **Tonya Strong** of John Carroll University for helping to make media connections; **Jacob Chabowski** of JCU for photography; **Julie Hutchison** and **Bobby Breitenstein**, owners of the Root Café; and **Octavia Spencer** for traveling to Cleveland to support the event; and to all who attended.

Annual Cookout: Independence Police Officer, **Bryan Vitron** and K-9 Officer, **Argo**; Parma Police Officer **Nick Schuld** and K-9 Officer **Coney** for the dog demonstration; to **Sharonda Kane Jackson** and **Julius Jackson** for cooking; to **Julia Taylor** for photography; and to **Morgan Craig** for set-up and clean-up, and to all who attended.

Loretta Taus, Eric Pettet, Traci Onders and **Dave Liberatore** for participating in the Rocky River General Support and Discussion Meeting panel: Expectations in Search & Reunion; and to **Dottie Klemm** for facilitating.

Sophie Zhu and **Andrew Chaplick** volunteering this summer in the program department.

Mike Holley, Martha Byrd and **Jon Schuster** for graciously sharing their reunion story with the public on WKYC, and in the *Akron Beacon Journal* and *The Norfolk Daily News* to promote the efforts, support, and guidance of Adoption Network Cleveland and our Search and Reunion Program.

Dr. Zoë Breen Wood for being a new volunteer with our Program Committee.

Dr. Jay Berk, Becky Bernstein, Ayanna Abi-Kyles, Andrea Ginter, Holli Ritzenthaler, Dan Gisser and **Krysia Orlowksi** for their participation in our focus group exploring addressing needs of the children and families with whom we work.

Linda Bellini and **Shirley Schellentrager** for proofreading.

Karen Gillooly for sharing her story with *Fostering Families Today*.

Darlene Davis, Maple Heights Teen Librarian, for collaboration and support of *Get Real* groups.

CCDCFS

In Recognition ...

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services

Laura Fox, Nikisha David, and Patrina Hollowell-Martin for referring teens to our *Get Real* Groups.

Beverly Torres, Andrea Ginter, and Jackie McCray for their continued collaboration and support.

Chris Malcolm, Joe Jackson, Bev Torres, Earvin Thomas and **David Gray** for inviting us to speak at their department meetings about our programs and services.

Sisters ... Finding Each Other

By Robyn Hewitt, birth sibling, member of Adoption Network Cleveland

In June 2015, when I was 45 years old, I found out that I had two siblings I did not know about. My father called to say that a woman had contacted him claiming to be his biological child.

Apparently, when he was in the process of divorcing his first wife, she became pregnant with a child they placed for adoption. During this same conversation it was revealed that my mom had told my dad before they got married that she too had placed a child for adoption when she was in high school. Pause.

Wait now, what? – my mom had a child in high school?

My dad was calling me to express his concern that the recent opening of birth records in Ohio would cause someone to “knock on my mother’s door,” which could be upsetting to my mom as she was suffering from Alzheimer’s.

My stepfather, whom my mom married when I was 7 years old, had been taking care of her and my dad believed that he did not know about her first child. I did not feel emotional when learning about my dad’s child, but became very upset in learning about the child my mother placed for adoption. I felt all sorts of emotions. I was angry because my mom was my best friend. We shared everything yet she did not feel she could share her experience with me? I was also sad because I missed out on all the years of knowing this person. I was mystified that she and my grandmother had been able to keep this secret from me my whole life. I felt betrayed.

I immediately wanted to find both siblings. Since my dad’s birth daughter, Lisa, had contacted him, I was able to talk to her right away. We spoke only one time and she is now my friend on Facebook. That is our relationship at this time.

All I knew about my other sibling was that my mother had given birth while she was in high school. I knew that I needed help to find her because information was so limited.

I told my younger half-sister, Meghan, about our mom having a baby in high school. Meghan contacted our step-

Wait now, what?
– my mom had
a child in
high school?



Robyn, right, with Susi

father and he said that contact had actually already been made and to “leave it alone because it didn’t go well.” Regardless of learning this, Meghan and I decided to go forward with a search.

First, I was directed to call Adoption Network Cleveland by Catholic Charities. I literally had no idea where to begin or what information to ask. Traci Onders at Adoption Network helped me identify the details necessary to proceed with a search and recommended that I read *The Girls Who Went Away*. I read the book cover to cover, stunned by what my

mother must have gone through and the pieces started to come together for me. I finally understood all the shame and guilt she and her family felt at that time.

Eventually, during one of my mom’s lucid moments, my sister was able to find out that she had a baby girl. We began searching for a girl with the last name, born in 1962 or ’63 since my mom graduated from high school in ’64. There were four possibilities. According to Traci, one of the girls was born in Cleveland and had been named Wendy at birth.

My stepfather finally mentioned traveling by a maternity home in Cleveland where he knew my mom stayed to have the baby. So it was the Cleveland baby named Wendy. I called to give Traci this information and the next day Traci found my sister, now named Susi. I found a picture of Susi online and the person I was looking at looked exactly like my mom. She also shared a resemblance to both Meghan and me.

Meghan and I sent Susi a letter with help from Traci. After a short time I got a response from Susi saying, “Yes, you found me.” I immediately called her and we spoke on the phone for a long time.

I learned that, yes, she had already met my mom in 1998. My mom had initiated a search to find her daughter and they had a two-year private relationship. They met face-to-face once and spoke on the phone often. Susi had known about me all along, although my mother kept Susi secret. Susi always felt

Continued on page 10

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN GETTING STARTED IN A SEARCH

The decision for adult adoptees or birth family members to search is a very personal choice. Adoption Network Cleveland validates those who are exploring that option and provides support throughout the process for those who decide to move forward. We have successfully assisted in thousands of searches since 1988.

TO GET STARTED:

CALL Traci Onders at (216) 482-2323 to discuss the process, including becoming a member and steps along the way.

JOIN us as a member at the Search Level.

ATTEND (strongly encouraged) at least two General Support and Discussion Meetings. These General Meetings are open to anyone touched by adoption, or related professionals, and are an opportunity to learn from others’

experiences and to prepare emotionally for this journey. bit.ly/ANCgenmeet – Locations: NE Ohio, Columbus, Dayton, or Cincinnati, and online via the Virtual Webcam meeting.

APPLY for your original birth certificate, if you are an Ohio-born adult adoptee, by going to this link: bit.ly/odhadultadoptee. Birthparents can complete a current medical form and contact preference form by going to bit.ly/ODHbparent.

RECOGNIZING MEMBERS WHO HAVE RECENTLY COMPLETED SEARCHES:

Merinda, Beverly, Phil, Charmaine, Arthur, Sheri, John, Gayle, Mary Alice, Paul, John, Erik, Cassandra, and Mary



Shopping Online?

Shop as you normally would and **iGive** will donate .5% to 2% and **Amazon Smile** will donate .5%!

IGIVE: More than 1,750 stores online!

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AMAZON SMILE: Go to smile.amazon.com and select Adoption Network Cleveland from the list of participating organizations. Remember to do all of your Amazon shopping through smile.amazon.com!

For questions, contact Dan Carroll at daniel.carroll@adoptionnetwork.org or (216) 482-2311.

Books and Jewelry Sales – check out many adoption-related books and jewelry items on bit.ly/ANCshopnow or in our office.

Search, *continued*

it was my mother's story to tell, not hers. She decided to end their relationship because she still felt she was being hidden away. At this point my mom must have told my stepfather about Susi for the first time and he must have been upset. So the reason it "didn't go well" was because of his reaction to the news. I don't think he had known about Susi until then.

Susi let me read correspondence that my mom had written. It was surreal to read the letter my mom had written, sharing how she and my stepfather decided they were not ready to tell Meghan and me about Susi. Meghan and I were both very angry because we felt that not only was my mother made to relinquish Susi when she was born, but then had to give her up again.

Susi flew here to visit last December to get to know my sister and me. I wanted to get her something meaningful and decided on the book, *The Girls Who Went Away*, in addition to a few other gifts.

While Susi was here we took her to see my mom, who was in the hospital. They had a beautiful and emotional reunion. My mom knew what was going on, which was such a blessing. Susi told my mom that her girls had found her and that we were together now. Going forward it was hard to know how to proceed with our relationship. Luckily, Susi and I were able to communicate very well from the beginning and we were able to have, and continue to have, a great relationship – one that I see getting only better.

FUND DEVELOPMENT

Why We Give

By Laureen and Willie Harbert
Adoptive Parents,
Members Adoption Network Cleveland



We have been members of Adoption Network Cleveland since early 2008 as regulars/groupies at the Rocky River General Meeting. In 2012, we relocated to Minneapolis, but we have continued to be connected with the organization. In addition to being members, we make annual donations both directly and through United Way. Our family is committed to giving back to high quality organizations whose missions and work reflect our values, to those from whom we've benefited, and to those where our donations can have an impact. We give to Adoption Network Cleveland for all of these reasons.

- **We give in profound gratitude** for the services, support, and care they provided, and continue to provide, in our own adoption journey.
- **We give in honor of our son** and his birthmother.
- **We give in support of the advocacy** on behalf of truth and openness in adoption.
- **We give on our son's birthday, in our year-end giving, and when needs arise.**
- **We take advantage of the matching gift program** offered by Willie's company, Eaton, to magnify our giving.
- **We give stock donations** which us helps at tax time.
- **We've also encouraged our family and friends to make gifts in our honor** when they've asked for suggestions for birthday, holiday, or other gifts.

For Laureen and Willie's full story, go to our blog on our website: adoptionnetwork.org/blg

Year-End Giving

By Dan Carroll, Development Specialist

The year 2017 has been one of the most challenging, yet rewarding years in our 30-year history. Many of you, from recently connected to eras past, stood up as our funding and future hung in the balance and said, "We know Adoption Network Cleveland has changed so many lives, and we know it has many more left to change for years to come."

As we begin our 30th anniversary year, you have energized us and we are ready to fight on, and we still need your help.

The work YOU have empowered is not finished ...

Adoptees are waiting to find their past.

Youth in foster care are hoping for a loving family.

Birth family members are seeking healing.

Prospective parents are looking for support as they complete their family.

Adoptive, kinship, and foster families are in need of ongoing support.

Professionals who serve this community rely on our resources.

Please – make your donation before December 31. Any gift, from \$30 to \$300 to \$3,000 and beyond will make a difference in the lives of others that will continue to grow for years. For questions or information about ways you can give, contact Dan Carroll, Development Specialist at (216) 482-2311 or daniel.carroll@adoptionnetwork.org

With oversight from our board, the Cleveland Foundation stewards **The Adoption Network Cleveland William N. Skirball Endowment Fund** and ensures that each dollar multiplies over time to generate revenues earmarked for Adoption Network Cleveland. You can contribute through the Cleveland Foundation: <https://www.clevelandfoundation.org/give-now/>

Legacy Circle: Making a planned gift via a bequest, charitable gift annuity, trust or other vehicle ensures a stable future for Adoption Network Cleveland's programs and services. For more information, please contact Betsie Norris at betsie.norris@adoptionnetwork.org. **Legacy Circle members to date: Linda Bellini and Terry Evans, Kim Donato, Margaret Kacerek, Betsie Norris, Murray and Susan Van Epp**

FUND DEVELOPMENT

Thank You to Our Donors

Dan Carroll, Development Specialist (216) 482-2311 daniel.carroll@adoptionnetwork.org.

FAMILY FUNDS

A Family Fund is a fund that is established in honor or in memory of any family or individual, to which friends and family can donate, thereby creating an ongoing and stable source of revenue for Adoption Network Cleveland. A Family Fund can be created by making a minimum gift or pledge of \$5,000 over three years.

THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF OUR CURRENT FAMILY FUNDS AND RECENT DONORS TO THEM (RECENT DONORS IN ITALIC).

BRAD NORRIS MEMORIAL FUND
created by Founder and Executive Director Betsie Norris
BETSIE NORRIS

BUESCHER FAMILY FUND
created by Board Member Lisa A. Buescher and Brendan Buescher
LISA AND BRENDAN BUESCHER

KATTERHEINRICH-CRIST FAMILY FUND
created by Leanne Katterheinrich-Crist

LASHUTKA FAMILY FUND
created by Ken and Luanne Lashutka

DON E. AND KATHLEEN M. SOKOLIK FAMILY FUND
created by Don and Kathleen Sokolik

VAN EPP FAMILY FUND
created by Murray and Susan Van Epp

Corporate/Organizations and Foundations

Champions for Charity, Linchpin Healthcare, LLC, The Helen & Louis Stolier Foundation
Treu-Mart Fund, Case Western Reserve University, PNC Foundation
Cleveland Automobile Club Orphans Outing Fund, Slickdeals LLC
Florence Crittenton Services Fund of the Cleveland Foundation
Target Corporation Employee Engagement Program

Individual Donations

Wanda Amstutz, Customers of Baraona's Bakery, Bertha and Clinton Bennett, Beth Borato, Carole and John Brachna, Marissa and Edd Brydle, Kathy Carbone, Jim Chambers, Molly Cissell, Brittany Crawford, Julia Dean, Buffy and Brent DeWitt, Jamie Dingfelder, Robert Ducatman, Stacey Duwe, Karen Eddy, Michael Fleenor, Christopher Fredrickson, Danielle and Jared Gadomski Littleton, George Graham and Michael Fleenor, Camille and Allen Graley, Lauren and Willie Harbert, Tony Harris, Susan Helke, Brian Hirko, Mike Holley, Kristen Jackson, James and Jackie Judd, Patricia and Timothy Kearney, Dr. Peggy Kranyak and Jeff Mertic, Erica Kunath, David Mackay, Megan Marrs, Karen May, Lori and Bob McCarthy, Daniel McClain, Virginia Medina, Chelsea Mills, Paul Moran, Betsie Norris, Kristen Ober, Stephen Petras, Barbara Raymond and Fred Greenman, Sandra Razzaaq, Darnella Robertson, John Schmidt, Dr. Elaine Schulte and Kim Lawrence, Michael Sheridan, Delorean Sims, Judith Stroup, Scott Villani, John Wiedemann, Brenda Wise, Mary Wynn, David and Catherine Yates

In Memory of Janice B. Mueller – Linda Schellentragers mother

Linda Bellini and Terry Evans, Robert and Kay Cirino, Joann Data and Herman Cantrell, Karen Eddy, Camille and Allen Graley, Elaine Hagan, Michele Hribar, Patricia and Timothy Kearney, Barbara and Bob Long, Betsie Norris, Carol and Bruce Oppenheim, Marcia and Jack Reinbolt, Debra and Mark Ruggles, Marlene and Jack Schultz, Kimberly Simpson, Joyce Starr, Rosemary Torok and Val and Sarah Sadid, Elaine Weber

MEMBERSHIP

A Warm Welcome to Our New and Renewing Members

Mary Jo Barron, Monica and Cory Bruaw, Carrie Budimir, Philip and Chad Chan, Beverly Counts, Philip Cox, Arthur Debardeleben, Lisa Duncan, Melissa Garr, Rosemarie Gattozzi, Sheri Gist, Kevin Gladish, Lauren and Willie Harbert, Dr. Peggy Kranyak and Jeff Mertic, Jayne Linn, Pamela Maidens, Dr. JaNice Marshall, Paul Martin, Talia Master and Glen Taksler, Michele Mekkelsen, Shanice Moore, Kristina Musil, Kristen Ober, Ohio Guidestone, Jennifer O'Malley, Colleen Orsburn, Betty Paller, Kathy Pilny, James Rabon, Karen Rosenberg, Michael Salwiesz, Nicole Shefrin, Nancy and Joseph Soos, Judith Stroup, Melissa Tallant, Thomas Teggart, Susan Valerian, Linda Webb, Rona Weiss, Mary Wynn

In Honor of

Lee Ascherman in honor of Sherri Appleton and Marty Resnik
Susan Berger in honor of Claire Shands Waag
Martha Byrd in honor of Mike Holley
Lauren and Willie Harbert in honor of Isaiah and his birthmother for his 7th birthday
Joan and James Hill in honor of Nancy Repaszsky
Michael Lawrence in honor of the Graham-Fleenor family

In Kind

The Mermaid Tale – a belated thank you for a Creating Futures donation
Akron VideoMakers, Sherri Appleton, Linda Bellini, Monica's Flowers
Linda Schellentragers, Tickets for Kids' Charities

The above reflects donations from June 1 to August 31, 2017

ALL DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE AS PROVIDED BY LAW

Join Our Community

Our members help ensure that there is a place where people can be empowered in the adoption process, where families can reconnect, and where youth in foster care can find a place to call home. Together we can change lives and create futures for all those touched by adoption and foster care throughout their journey. We ask you to become a member of Adoption Network Cleveland in order to utilize our programs and services. No one will be turned away for inability to pay. To join, contact evan.clark@adoptionnetwork.org, call (216) 325-1000 or visit our website.



Educate • Support • Advocate
AdoptionNetwork.org



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Cleveland, OH 44103

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Adoption Network Cleveland: Educate • Support • Advocate



Remember the Big Kids!

Annual Gift Card Drive for Teens Impacted by Foster Care

Community and civic group collection drives welcome!

The majority of gifts donated during the holiday season are toys and games for young children, however teens are also in need.

We asked teens impacted by foster care what gift they would most want for special occasions. They were united in the idea that they wanted to have the chance to pick out something for themselves or have the opportunity to pick out a gift for someone else. WE LISTENED.

Through Adoption Network Cleveland's Annual Gift Card Drive, local teens impacted by foster care will get what they are asking for – to be able to shop for themselves.

DEADLINE: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2017 FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON. *(The majority of the cards are distributed during the holiday season. Some are retained to be used for other special occasions like a birthday or graduation.)*

You can either make a donation directly to this program or purchase gift cards directly (preferably in \$25 denominations) and send them to our offices. For more info, contact: daniel.carroll@adoptionnetwork.org.

Annual Holiday Party

Join us for this annual fun event for all ages! Free. Roller skating, basketball, party room and light refreshments.

Date: Saturday, December 2, 2017

Time: noon to 3:00 pm

**Place: MultiPlex Event and Sports Center
18909 South Miles, Warrensville Heights**

**RSVP: Robert.Gibbons@AdoptionNetwork.org
(216) 482-2312**



ADOPTION NETWORK CLEVELAND recognizes adoption as a complex, lifelong and intergenerational journey for all those whose lives are touched by it. Founded in 1988, Adoption Network Cleveland has gained a national reputation but still has a grass-roots approach. Our mission is to connect and empower individuals, organizations and communities impacted by adoption and foster care, and provide a source of healing for those in need.

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