



SPRING Newsletter 2013

2013 is almost half over, time flies and every day at AWL is busy and fascinating.

In 2012 we placed 42 children into loving homes. Our search and reunion program continues to expand. We have had two interns at AWL this year. Ali just graduated with her MSW from Wheelock after spending 10 months with us. At present Geneva is here at AWL doing her high school senior year internship with us for 2 months. They are both a pleasure to have as part of our team. Karen Strem, our office manager of 8 years, completed her MSW this Spring. She will be moving on to begin her new career. We will miss Karen and are very proud of her accomplishments.

A major accomplishment of 2012 was embarking on a Strategic Plan. As AWL began its second quarter of a century, we were looking to develop a strategic plan to ensure our viability in the future. As part of this, we feel very strongly that adoption should remain part of social services and not-for-profit. We have been experiencing an atmosphere in adoption around the country where there is intense competition for expectant parents. This has been fuelled by for profit entities and expanded via the internet. We needed to examine the landscape of adoption in this country and develop a strategic plan as to how we can continually attract clients, while maintaining the standards we have established in the past 25 years. We need to examine how marketing via the internet and various social media will help or harm the work we do.

Three SOAR 55 (Service Opportunities After Reaching 55) consultants, Cris Goldsmith, Karen Krone, and Karen Maloney met with Nancy and me for a series of introductory and planning meetings from February - May 2012. The Board of Directors approved a Strategic Planning process that would span 9 months (May 2012 – January 2013). Nancy and I identified an essential group of 10 key stakeholders to comprise the Strategic Planning Group Participants. These stakeholders represented birth parents, adoptive parents, adoptees, Board members, agency executives, and adoption experts outside of AWL.

The Strategic Planning Group (SPG) learned the history of AWL and the basic elements of strategic planning at the first meeting. Members of the group then identified Key Future Trends impacting adoption, and discussed the implications for AWL. The Future Trends included demographics, regulatory and adoption processes, competitive landscape, and medical, health, contraception, and access to services.

One session was devoted to the enormous impact of social media on adoption, crystalizing the need for AWL to develop specific strategies to market their unique services utilizing the appropriate social media platforms, and perhaps employ a technology/social and digital media specialist.

Creating a 5 Year Vision for AWL was essential to the strategic planning process. Based on input and feedback from the Strategic Planning Group spanning three months, AWL executives and Board members crafted a Vision statement that was reviewed and approved by the SPG and Board of Directors.

Synthesizing all the data and information generated throughout the process, the SPG developed a list of 5 Year Goals. These Goals created the framework for AWL's 5 Year Strategic Plan.

The five goals identified by the SPG are:

1. Increase AWL's ability to attract expectant/birth parents from MA and the most adoption favorable states.
2. Strengthen the Agency's financial position in order to improve operational capabilities, including staffing.
3. Develop and begin to implement a succession plan for AWL to ensure the future success of the agency.
4. Develop a core competence in digital technology to improve marketing and operational success.
5. Champion and effect adoption friendly legislation in MA.

For each goal strategies, action plans, metrics and a timeline was develop. This was one of the most rewarding and educational endeavors that I have embarked on in my professional career. AWL and I are extremely grateful to our consultants and stakeholders who all volunteered their time, energy and talent to this project.

Thank you, Thank you!

Now we have the task before us to implement these goals. To accomplish this we need your help.

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS. Next steps are to form committees to develop a 5-year financial plan, enhance public relations, marketing and fund raising. If you have a desire to help us in any of these areas, please email acohen@awlonline.org or call 617-964-4357.

Happy Spring.

Best regards,

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS TO WORK WITH US:
DEVELOPMENT OF FINANCIAL PLAN ♦ MARKETING
PUBLIC RELATIONS ♦ FUNDRAISING

A Letter from Nancy

By Nancy Rosenhaus, Associate Director

Adoptions With Love is now 27 years old!



Inside this issue:

<i>From Amy</i>	1
<i>From Nancy</i>	2
<i>Karen's News</i>	3
<i>Geneva's Letter</i>	4
<i>Ali's Letter</i>	5

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This is a great accomplishment given the extreme competition and changing landscape of domestic adoption. Amy and I are constantly juggling the important clinical work of adoption with expectant/birthparents, adoptive families and search requests with young adults along with the day to day operations of a small non-profit agency. Most days there are just not enough hours in the day so work easily spills into the nights and weekends. Adoption is a 24 hour/7 day a week process. Babies do not tell time and they come into the world every day of the week. When we are not doing the important clinical work, we are focusing on advertising and marketing, making connections with attorneys, doctors, social workers and nurses in Massachusetts and around the county. It is important to cultivate new relationships and continue to nurture the relationships that we have developed over 27 years.

We do all of this keeping in mind that adoption is a "lifelong partnership". That is the beauty of Adoptions With Love! We are still here for all of you whether you are newly looking into the adoption process, in process of receiving your "dreamed" of baby, or going about the wonderful business of being parents. The day to day wonders of babies, elementary school, picnics, middle school dances, soccer, baseball, wrestling, theater, parent teacher conferences, high school meetings, drivers ed, or even college tours and applications! Or maybe you are a young adult exploring the idea of receiving more information about your birthparents and possibly connecting with them.

A meaningful way you can **HELP** is to promote us on social media. We are learning to be more savvy on social media and recognize that this is just as valuable to our existence as a financial donation.

You can "LIKE" us on facebook:

www.facebook.com/adoptionswithlove



I challenge you to help us get 500 LIKE's

Getting our presence in the social media world is worth a great deal to our small but mighty agency. This would be amazing for a small agency as ours. Maybe it is something you and your son or daughter can do together and ask your extended family members to go to our facebook page and do the same. Thank you for taking the time to do it. This will be awesome for Adoptions With Love!

So much work goes into keeping Adoptions With Love a vibrant thriving non-profit adoption agency that has to compete in the national scope of adoptions. Our clinical work is most important; helping birthparents anticipate and cope with the grief of placing a baby and trusting that you will provide the wonderful life that they believe you will give them. And helping adoptive parents manage the risk and rewards of the process. Equally important is the vast day to day functions that keeps Adoptions With Love the premier domestic adoption agency in Massachusetts.

It is not enough to just "feel" proud of this remarkable adoption agency that has been important in your family's life, it is very important to demonstrate how you feel.

You can do this by making a donation in the envelope provided or on our website **DONATE** button.



Karen's 8 Years at AWL



Just a little over 8 years ago I came to work at Adoptions With Love as the new Office Manager. I was excited as I had never worked in the adoption field before. Little did I know what lay ahead! I enjoyed my position doing my daily tasks and especially loved talking with birthparents on the phone. I have worked in other areas of human services in the past and have always liked that one to one connection with people. About 4 years ago, I decided that I wanted to be able to work more closely with clients and that is when I entered the Masters in Social Work program at Salem State University. This part time program allowed me to continue to work full time, raise my sons, and pursue a degree that I had always wanted.

I was very fortunate to be able to do one of my field placements at Adoptions With Love. In this new capacity as an intern I was exposed to many new skills. Under the supervision of Nancy and Amy I participated in birthparent counseling with some local women and found the experience enlightening. I feel very lucky to have been able to spend time with these women and help them navigate through one of the most difficult times in their lives. I will always be amazed at their courage and selflessness.



The other part of the internship that was really fulfilling for me was working with adoptive families. As the office manager I had engaged in many phone conversations over the years, but as an intern I had the chance to get to know families on a more intimate level. Spending time with them during Home Studies, pre-adoptive groups, and post placements gave me the opportunity to really get to know them. Hearing their stories of infertility was difficult, but seeing the joy on their faces when they are holding their new baby is incredible. I truly feel blessed to be part of something so wonderful and I am always so impressed that the right baby seems to go to the right family somehow!

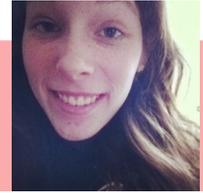
I just finished my second field placement at Children's Hospital in Boston. Although this was an entirely different experience as a Social Worker, I once again learned a great deal and am amazed by the resiliency I have seen in both children and their families.

My hope is to somehow combine these two experiences to lead me into my next job in social work. In the meantime, I will continue to stay connected by doing some consulting work with Adoptions With Love as I look for my next social work position. I will continue to look for your friendly faces in the office!

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WE CHALLENGE YOU TO HELP US GET 500 "LIKES" FROM YOU !

We love receiving all the beautiful pictures and updates:
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 246 Walnut Street Suite 103 Newton, MA 02460
 Please always put your return address on correspondence





Letter from Geneva about Search & Reunion

Every adoption is different, even different for my two brothers and me. And every single search and reunion is going to have a different outcome as well. Some good, some bad, but no one can plan the exact outcome of what may or may not happen. To some, this may be a scary thought, especially for those who may be considering contacting their birth parents.

I had always known I was adopted since the day that I understood what adoption meant. I knew that my birth mother loved me very much, but being 17, she was too young and unable to take care of me. This difficult decision she made was very selfless as she did realize that she could not provide for me in the ways she dreamed of. I know that she loves me just by giving me a better life and more opportunities, and for that I am so thankful. In addition I am thankful that she chose such a loving family for me and that both my mother and father have always been so supportive, loving, and all around great parents. Be it allowing me to reconnect or even just asking questions regarding who my birth parents are.

For the first eight years of my life, my parents had been in annual contact with my birth mom, sending letters around my birthday with an update and pictures. She always answered us with heartfelt letters saying how she thought of me everyday and still loved me very much. Around eight or nine years old, the letters stopped, and until I turned 16, the agency nor my mom had heard much of anything from her. Not knowing whether something terrible had happened to her or if she just did not find any reason to contact me anymore, I just did not know what to expect.

After 16 years of wondering just who these people were, if I looked or acted like them; I wanted these questions to be answered. Meeting them is nothing like what I had expected, although what was I to expect? Fortunately, meeting each birth parent went well, but it was afterward that made me wonder if I had made the right decision. They both wanted more from me than I could provide as a teenager. They wanted constant communication and always wanted to know how I was doing and what I was doing, how my parents treated me; personal questions that I felt uncomfortable being asked. Eventually, my birth mother understood that she had been a tad overbearing. For some reason my birth father just did not comprehend how insolent and inappropriate he was being to a 16 year old girl.

Thankfully, I have very loving parents who have always been very supportive of me. They helped me find my birth parents, and helped me decide what I could say. They also wanted to make sure that no one was overstepping any boundary nor asking for too much from me. My parents wanted to make sure that I was safe and comfortable with every step forward that we took. Once I met my birth parents, my parents were there to make sure that there were healthy boundaries for each "party." Overall, they have always been so supportive of me making this decision and have gone above and beyond to ensure my happiness. I never would have been able to do this without them.

In the end, I am glad that I took that step forward in meeting and reaching out to my birth parents. This answered the unanswered questions that I had for a number of years. Although some of the events that occurred after were undesirable, I feel that answering my lifelong questions trumps all the negative things. We can't change the past, and it has not changed me as a person, only made me stronger and more aware. It is common for a teen to be curious about their birth parents, but, it is most important that they are mentally ready for this big decision.

If there is anything that I can recommend and advise for those planning to meet their birth parents, construct boundaries and take your time. Do not be afraid to stick to these limits you have set, even if it is not what your birth parents had hoped for. Make sure you are ready to embark on this unknown journey; although no one can plan for the unexpected, you must be emotionally ready for what may or may not happen. In the end, all this will allow you security and comfort in having made the decision to meet your birth parents.

Goodbye and Good luck to Ali



As a Wheelock College Masters in Social Work (MSW) intern at Adoptions With Love, I have had an amazing year! I have seen families grow and change through adoption. I will never forget the parents and children I got to work with this year. Each one of them has a special place in my heart and I will think of them whenever I work with families in the future.

One of the most exceptional things I got to be a part of this year was the New Parent Groups. AWL offers New Parent Groups for parents who have recently adopted through the agency. For five to seven weeks on Wednesday mornings, parents and babies would come with their strollers, carriers, diaper bags and toys to spend a few hours in the conference room. This group was wonderful, not only because of our adorable little group members, but also because of the shared experiences that new adoptive parents share with one another. In our groups we would talk about anything from feeding and sleeping to birth siblings and transracial adoption. Each week was different and exciting but always filled with families who had grown their families through adoption. In the future, I hope that these groups are able to remain a support for one another and continue to stay in touch.



Another meaningful experience I had while interning at AWL was being with birth mothers right after birth or right before signing the consent for adoption. Birth mothers are making a very emotional and selfless decision to place their baby for adoption. Sitting in the room and talking with birth mothers during this emotional moment has always stayed with me. When I work with adoptees or adoptive parents, I remember what a birth mother went through to make this family possible.

As I go out into the world as a MSW I will take the lessons I learned from Amy, Nancy, Karen and the staff at AWL. Mostly importantly, I will take the lessons about resiliency, compassion and courage that I learned from the adoptive families, the adoptees and the birth parents.

Thank you for welcoming me into your community for the past year!



Our Fantastic Strategic Planning Group worked very hard to improve Adoptions With Love's program and send us into the future .

Thank you so much!!!!



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