



BRIGHT THINGS

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,
a program of Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, Volume IX, Winter 2020

Stella and the Joy of Clapping by her dads

In our lifetimes, we have experienced great progress in civil rights for same sex couples and, by the time we met in 2009, adoption was a possibility for us and something we knew we wanted to do together. Eight more years and a cross-country move to Massachusetts would pass before we actively began our adoption journey with Bright Futures. It's now 2020, and our 6-month-old, Stella, has just learned to clap. This action is so simple, and at the same time fills us with joy that, at earlier points in our lives, we did not know if we would experience.



We immediately connected with the child-centered and long-term approach of Bright Futures. In the end, we waited only one year, though after meeting one family and potentially matching with a couple others, at times the year felt long. On a Monday in early July, we received a call from Karen that baby Stella had been born the day before. Immediately this alerted us that, after waiting a year without knowing when we would meet our child, things could move very quickly! Four days after that initial call--after meeting Stella's birth mother, making many phone calls to family and friends, and a Target trip that seemed to bring up as many questions as items purchased--we brought Stella home.



Through this adoption process, we have learned and grown together as a couple and, now, as a family. In addition to our family in Massachusetts and around the country, this also includes Stella's birth mother and all of the folks who made sure we had what we needed to bring baby Stella home (two-day shipping came in handy for anything else!). The first few months were mostly a blur of feedings, diaper changes and naps, with visitors and walks sprinkled in. More recently, as we've gotten into a more steady routine, it has been amazing to see her personality emerge. At this moment, as Stella claps in her high chair and eats some of her first bites of real food, we wait to hear about a court date to finalize the adoption. Stella is our beautiful baby, and as her parents we can't wait to see who she grows up to be.

Thank You to All of Our Donors!
20th Anniversary Campaign
Continues through June 30, 2020 (see below)

20th Anniversary Donations

Alan
 Amanda & Chris
 Brian & Matt
 Carole & Tom
 Cynthia & Eric
 David
 Deanna & Rob
 Ellen & Jim
 Helen
 Jeffrey & David
 Jennifer & Jed
 Kathleen & Tim
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Lesia & De'Porres
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 Janet & David
 Jenn & Tony
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 Lacy & Loretta
 Mary Rose & Michael
 Matt & Dave
 Melissa & Jason
 Melody & Sam
 Olga
 Tammy & Carlo



A BIG THANK YOU to Sara for donating her church's collection on the day of her children's Baptism to Bright Futures' Adoption & Permanency Program to help us train and license more families for children in foster care!

There is still time to help! Donations can be mailed to 2352 Main Street, Suite 206, Concord, MA 01742 or made online at brightfuturesadoption.org click on the 'Donate' button

WELCOME TO NEW BRIGHT FUTURES STAFF!

MollyRose Arp-Sandel, LICSW has ten years' experience working with children and families and will be joining our Adoption and Permanency Program. She practices from a social justice perspective and her work is informed by her strong belief in the importance of investment in the caregiver-child relationship and in the early childhood years. Her areas of interest include social-emotional development, infant mental health, anti-racism, and mindfulness. She loves to be in nature, to cook and to eat delicious food, and to spend time with her friends and family.

Desiree Ayala, MSW, LCSW worked at DCF for 6 years, as an Adolescent Social Worker and as a Kinship/Family Resource Social Worker. She currently works full time with family child care providers across the Commonwealth. Her areas of interest and passion include adolescents, kinship care/lifelong connections for foster children, and trauma. She conducts child and family assessments for Bright Futures.

Lauren O'Brien, LCSW obtained her MSW from Boston College in 2017 and has enjoyed engaging with children and adolescents through community based and residential treatment programs since graduating. At Bright Futures she collaborates with systems and families to complete child assessments and pre-adoptive license studies.

Congratulations to Our New Adoptive Families

Allyson & Michael on the arrival of Savannah and Kobe

Amalia & Brian on the arrival of Joseph

Amy on the arrival of Wilenny

Andrea & Luke on the arrival of Isabella

Ben & Darrell on the arrival of Stella

Beth & Yosef on the arrival of Samuel

Christina and Kyle on the arrival of Javier

Cynthia, Eric & Beth on the arrival of Leo

Dan & Chris on the arrival of Hannah

Dania, Matt, Raphael & David on the arrival of Micah

Erika on the arrival of Amya

Janet, David & Glory on the arrival of Anastasia

Jenna, Justin & Maddie on the arrival of Anthony

Meghan & Andrew on the arrival of Lexi and Ben

Paula & Robert on the arrival of Avianna

Rosemary & Andrew on the arrival of Miles



WORDS FROM OUR FAMILIES

Hi Jodi,

12/12/19

Two years ago today we met Randy. I'll forever be grateful for you and for how you pushed to have that meeting before Christmas. That was the day before he turned 15. Because you pushed his social worker Christina, who was in no rush to move things forward, I will get to celebrate a third birthday with Randy tomorrow, when he turns 17. And this will be our 3rd Christmas together. We've made memories and holiday traditions are now something he is familiar with and looks forward to. Things are going great. He's such a good kid and I'm so blessed to have him in my life. I'll send a couple of recent pics, you know me, I love my pictures. I hope all is well with you. Merry Christmas to you and yours, Denise



Karen,

Thank you simply isn't nearly enough to thank you for all your help this year. Our life has so pleasantly changed from 2 adults, living for themselves and their needs, to a focus on family and the important things in life and a focus on a certain 5 year old! Elena was definitely the right match for us, and clearly you thought this match was possible before we did. How you and the Bright Futures team can see matches and things that adoptive parents don't see amazes me!

Your on-going support through the surprises and process have been invaluable, and it is reassuring for Jed and I to know we can call you when we have issues/questions, but it also gives us confidence to identify problems and work through them.

Thank you to Jodi and Lisa for the invaluable lessons and experiences discussed in MAPP class. We were listening and learning and are grateful for such a great pre-adoptive preparation class.

Jennifer & Jed

Have you heard of Sunshine Farm Sanctuary?

Sunshine Farm Sanctuary, located in Bridgewater, MA, is a therapeutic farm for all children in foster care who have experienced trauma. The farm offers animal bonding, horses and healing, arts and craft therapy, agricultural experience, and physical activities. Check it out at sunshinefarmsanctuary.com

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS THROUGH OUR ANNUAL EVENTS

Bright Futures' 2019 Annual Summer Picnic was well attended by birth parents, adoptive parents, their children and birth grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and friends. The sun was out, but it wasn't too hot, making for a perfect afternoon at the beach by the lake. This event gives families the opportunity to talk about adoption with their children and deepen their relationships for the benefit of the children. Adopted children need to grow up knowing all of those who love them and having access to ongoing information about themselves and their families whenever possible. We are happy that this event helps make that possible!



Bright Futures' Mid-Winter Social allows adoptive families to come together and play, exchange information, advice and adoption resources. Children and adoptive parents who met during MAPP training or at the picnic have the opportunity to maintain their connections and this event is another opportunity to talk to children about adoption. This year's Mid-Winter Social drew the biggest crowd yet and fun was had by all! Special thanks to our wonderful alumni adoptive families who donated to this event!



Our Adoption Journey (by Sarah & Stephen)



When we got married, we knew that we were interested in adoption. Both of us assumed that we would have biological kids and adopt later on. But two years into marriage, Stephen said, "You know, if we really want to adopt – why don't we just adopt?" Sarah replied, "Sounds good to me!" And in a conversation not much longer than that, we released any obligation to the "traditional way" and chose together an adventure that was authentic to us and spoke to our souls. Opening up our home and our lives to people with their own preferences and personalities and forging a new family together was right for us. Also, with older kids – you know what you are getting. (Continued on opposite page)



Sibling Connections by Lisa Lovett

It has been my pleasure to be Sarah and Stephen's social worker. We discussed early on their commitment to parenting siblings and their belief that children should not lose their first family. ***Still, I don't think any of us imagined that they would be parenting two girls from a sibling group of twelve!***

Siblings are often separated long before pre-adoptive parents become involved. Sometimes Bright Futures' parents are a part of reunifying children who have been separated in foster care, adopting both or all of them. Sometimes, our pre-adoptive parents take on the responsibility of helping their children preserve these important ties outside of the nuclear family. They face the challenges of building relationships that may cross class, race and privilege lines; the challenges of long drives and tearful goodbyes; and kids who are too busy with soccer practice or homework to want to see their siblings. Still, they persist.

Recently, I needed to sit down and gather information about the siblings of Sarah and Stephen's children. These children were just names and birth dates to me but Sarah and Stephen now know each of them well. They were able to describe each child's strengths and struggles, their placements and their particular relationship to their two children. It is, as Sarah mentions in her piece, an important part of loving their girls. I am so grateful for this family and for all of our families who love and commit to children who need them.

Do you or someone you know want to adopt siblings or help keep siblings connected? Please call Karen at 978-263-5400 for more information about our Adoption and Permanency Program.

Adopting older children has been the best decision we could have made! Our girls moved in with us when they were almost 10 and 4 ½. They had cute habits, asked good questions, played games, wanted things, cried, fought, and laughed. They begged to stop at the side of the road and pick dandelions for us. They were, and still are, very much their own people and we love them tremendously. But our girls had family before us, lots of family.

Our girls have 10 other siblings (yes, that adds up to 12!). Keeping them in contact with each other takes a lot of work, but it's rewarding. Loving their other siblings, who are so much a part of them, is part of loving our girls. In the beginning, our girls would regress after visits. We kept the faith that consistency and predictability would help this, and it has. They know now that they will see their siblings and we will always be there for them afterwards. Visits are much smoother now. Also, we would rather wade through birth family issues now, while we are loving them and helping them navigate and understand, than let them try to integrate that part of their life at the same time as they launch into adulthood.

There is no one way to adopt or build a family but this unique way of bringing children into our lives has brought us great joy. Last night, our older daughter, now 11, dropped her new earrings down the sink drain and cried. Talking to Stephen on the phone later that night, she said, "Make me happy, Daddy." "Oh honey," he replied, "Only you can make yourself happy." But then he did what parents do and talked to her. He told her three things he liked about her and one funny story and by the end she was laughing and smiling. The laughter, and the tears and the challenges, of our big girl and our five year old, less than two years after becoming parents, is just what we needed and wanted. We look forward to the road ahead.

Tribute to Jodi

In just three years and nine months with Bright Futures, Jodi has left her mark on Bright Futures Adoption Center and has helped to build many successful families. We wanted to take a moment to thank Jodi for all of her hard work and dedication to her families and children and wish her well as she moves into a more part-time role with Bright Futures and begins work in a trauma therapy center. We asked some of Jodi's families to share their reflections on Jodi's impact in their lives:



Jodi is an incredible human being. With hope and grace, she led us through periods of tremendous stress. If not for her, our family wouldn't exist -- and we are forever grateful. She's also hilarious and generous and loving and just super fun to be around! Jodi's new colleagues will be so lucky to have her in their world. We're sending love, hugs, and best wishes for her new chapter! -- B, M & C

Jodi has been a guiding light amidst the winding road of adoption. She has taught us that no matter what challenges this adoption process brings, to keep calm, carry on, and laugh; never forget to laugh. -- K & C

Your willingness to be open, honest and authentic from the moment we met you was a huge factor in our ability to stick with it, even in moments of tragedy and immense frustration. Your willingness to stand up for us, to have the hard conversations, and to point out to us that one door closing could in fact lead to another door opening will always be something we take with us, as we continue on our parenting journey. -- A & D

ADOPTION CALENDAR, EDUCATIONAL & SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

Baby Care for First-Time Prospective Adopters,

Learn the basics of baby care, including feeding, changing, dressing, and bathing in an adoption friendly environment. To register, call 978-440-0422 or email acone@rfkchildren.org

Adoptive Families Together offers monthly parent support groups in numerous communities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, education sessions for those touched by adoption, and an online discussion group which provides a 24-hour support forum, focusing on children with challenging behaviors and complex needs. Visit mspcc.org/aft for more information or call 800-277-5387.

Adoption Learning Partners offers meaningful, timely, web-based educational adoption resources for professionals, parents, adopted individuals, and the families that love them. adoptionlearningpartners.org

Center for Early Relationship Support offers twice monthly support groups for adoptive parents to share their unique experiences of parenting a child through adoption. For parents and babies up to one year old. Contact Adoption Resources at 617-332-2218 or mkahan@adoptionresources.org

Post Adoption Support from Adoption Journeys:

Adoption Journeys offers an array of post adoption services for adoptive families, including the Regional Response Team which offers families joint problem-solving, advocacy, coordination of services and home-based counseling, Parent and Youth Support Groups, and Parent and Young Adult Liaisons who offer families a one-to-one relationship with an experienced adoptive parent, family or young adult adoptee. Visit child-familyservices.org

2020 Rudd Adoption Research Conference, The Future of Adoption: Adopted Adults-Connections Across Generations: April 17, 2020, UMass Amherst, Amherst, MA, 9:00 – 5:00, keynote address by Dr. Gina E. Miranda Samuels, panel discussion, poster presentations and workshops in the afternoon. Visit www.umass.edu/ruddchair/2020-rudd-adoption-conference

Bright Futures Adoption Center's Birth Mother's Day Brunch

Saturday, May 9, 2020, Acton, MA

Come and join other birth mothers who placed their children through Bright Futures or the Florence Crittenton League to share, learn, give and get support, and celebrate your incredible journey of motherhood. Pre-registration required. Please call 978-263-5400 or email kcheyney@rfkchildren.org.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

**BRIGHT FUTURES'
ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC**

AUGUST 8, 2020

Talk to your child's adoptive family or birth family now to arrange to spend time together that day.

Beanstalk Adoption Meet & Greet:

March 15, 2020, 8:30 – 11:00, Jordan's Furniture, Reading, MA. An event for foster children and pre-adoptive families. Visit mareinc.org. Registration required.

Birthmom Buds Annual Birthmother's Day Retreat,

May 15-17, 2020 in Charlotte, NC. This free retreat is a time for birthmothers to come together to celebrate and honor their motherhood and their children. For more information, call 864-205-7387 or visit birthmombuds.com. Birthmom Buds also offers mentorship programs for those who have placed a child for adoption and for those who are pregnant and considering adoption.

PACT Family Camp East: August 10-15,

2020 in Pine Mountain, Georgia. Pact Family Camp East is a six-night/five-day event that brings together families with adopted children of color from across the country to share experiences, learn from experts, and build community. This camp has been held on the west coast for many years, has a profound effect on those families who attend and offers a community that these families have not found anywhere else. Visit www.pactadopt.org

You can contact Bright Futures by calling 978-263-5400 or visiting brightfuturesadoption.org

Friend us on Facebook and get updates about what's happening in the Bright Futures Family!