



**RFK
COMMUNITY
ALLIANCE**

BRIGHT THINGS

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,
a program of RFK Community Alliance, Volume XXI, Winter 2022

And We Became 4 by Puneeta Arya

Dear Anirudh,
You've been with us for 1.5 years now, but we have waited for you for 20 years. When Priyank and I met in college, fell in love and started talking about making a family, we knew that it should be defined by inclusion and love. Finally, you have given us a chance to do that!



I wanted to experience pregnancy and birthing. I was enamored by that during medical school education and luckily for me, it was a beautiful experience and that is how your elder brother Aarjav arrived. Initially, we went looking for you in India but the legal requirements meant that we would not have you with us until 12-18 months of age. We remembered how precious the first few months are for bonding and attachment and couldn't bear to lose that time with you. So, we started a search in the United States. Two of Aarjav's kindergarten classmates were in adoptive families, and they put us in touch with Karen Cheyney at Bright Futures. One of the things I love about Karen is that she is always focused on what is best for the baby/child. And we instinctively felt that to be the correct ethical position to take. She was able to guide us with empathy and experience.

The world was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and it had disrupted social life, schooling, work, travel etc. We had just moved into the suburbs. When we were in the backyard playing, our phone rang and it was Karen informing us that you were born and that your birth parents were considering an adoption plan for you, and had chosen us! We were thrilled by that news.

We met your birth parents in Lexington Park by the Minuteman statue. They were both born and brought up in the Boston area and you were their first child. They lost their jobs and housing because of the pandemic and were unable to provide for a newborn. It was so nice to meet them both and we connected instantly. Your birth dad is full of life and has grand ideas. He has this twinkle in his eyes whenever he talks about his ideas. Your birth mom has an aura of calmness and quiet strength. It was hard and emotional for her to talk about the adoption, but she wished for you to have "more than I can provide" and for you to "be whatever you want to be, have opportunities to explore the world." We could see that they love you very much.

We spent the next couple of days running around happily collecting baby essentials such as car seats, swaddles, diapers, formula, bottles etc. and Aarjav helped us clean up all these things. He even put your crib together.

When your birth parents were sure of their decision, on September 17th, you came to live with us. You were just 2 weeks old. The moment you came into my arms, Dada and Aarjav gave us both a big hug and just like that I felt complete. WE felt like a complete family. You snuggled into my arms right away and we all came home.

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Thank You to All of Our Donors!

Growing Together Campaign

Continues through June 30, 2022 (see below)

Andrew	Ethan & Cassandra	Lucas & Andrea	Patricia
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There is still time to help! Donations can be made at brightfuturesadoption.org, using the 'Donate' button and designating Bright Futures from the drop down menu, or mailed to 2352 Main Street, Suite 206, Concord, MA 01742

WELCOME TO NEW BRIGHT FUTURES STAFF!

Kristen Lampros, LCSW, is a part-time adoption social worker completing child assessments and pre-adoptive license studies. Kristen received her MSW from Salem State University and has worked with children, adolescents, and families both in the home and community setting. Kristen has a practice interest in attachment and trauma.

Anne Madden, LICSW, is a part-time adoption social worker completing child assessments and pre-adoptive license studies. Annie has worked in child welfare, recovery services, and community mental health for over 15 years, in both direct practice and research/administrative roles.

Tara Poirier, LSWA, is a part-time adoption social worker who has been working with children and families for over 23 years. She worked for over 20 years at the Department of Children and Families and spent several years in the adoption unit there. She also works with children birth to age three in their early childhood development.

WELCOME HOME – CONGRATS TO OUR NEW ADOPTIVE PARENTS!

Angie & Kelly on the arrival of Beckett
Britt & John on the arrival of Madeleine
Carly, Joe & Mike on the arrival of Isabel
Cassie, Mary & Miles on the arrival of Melody
Emily & Courtney on the arrival of Madelyn
H. Kay & Kyle on the arrival of Nyel & Jondel
Jessica, David & Simon on the arrival of JoJo
Jessica, Jon & Harry on the arrival of Arianna
Joshua, Meghan & Greta on the arrival of Cameron
Julie on the arrival of Cera
Julie, Bob & Family on the arrival of Olivia
Kara & Michael on the arrival of Elly & Kylee
Karen & John on the arrival of John
Kyle & John on the arrival of Jay
Nate, Kellyn & Corinne on the arrival of Gia
Ruthie, Chris & Tori on the arrival of Chase
Sarah, Kyle, Joey & Naliah on the arrival of Mason
Sarah & Mark on the arrival of Jaxon
Stephanie & Corey on the arrival of Kye and Jamellah
Tara & Alex on the arrival of Zakiyya



Alyssa's Search & Reunion Story

Jean A. S. Strauss poignantly wrote in her 1994 guide to search and reunion, *Birthright*, "Adoption doesn't end when papers are filed and documents are sealed. Adoption's influence...is lifelong. Ultimately, curiosity about the past, one's heritage and one's roots, can take over." From an early age, adoptee Alyssa often thought about her birth parents and wanted to meet them. Her parents understood her desire to know this information and were very encouraging and supportive. In first grade, she wrote a letter with her school photo enclosed to the Florence Crittenton League. It read: "Dear _____, I wish they changed the law so you could see your birth parents when you are 7 years old. This is what I look like. I like to read *The Box Car Children* and *Baby Sitters Little Sister*, from Alyssa."

This was the beginning of a search and reunion journey that Alyssa would revisit from time to time. Alyssa remembers going to the Lowell Probate Court at age 18 and requesting to view her record. She recalls that it was around Thanksgiving and the clerk appeared to be inexperienced and distracted. She was handed a paper with a name on it that she would later learn was the name given to her by her birth mother. Alyssa was also referred to a lawyer who might be able to assist in obtaining additional information. She paid a small fee, but following several unreturned phone calls, decided to take a break. "It was pretty discouraging," explained Alyssa. Even when her life got busy with college, graduate school, and career opportunities, she never stopped thinking about finding her birth parents. In June 2019, she decided to Google the Florence Crittenton League and was immediately directed to the Bright Futures Adoption Center website, where she learned that she could obtain a Non-Identifying Adoption Information Report and conduct a search. Without hesitation, she mailed in her paperwork and recommenced her search and reunion journey.

Often searching takes time and receiving a response even longer. Sometimes it doesn't go the way that the searcher hopes. However, in Alyssa's case, only a few months passed between Bright Futures contacting Alyssa's birthmother and her responding with eagerness to make contact directly with Alyssa. The first time Alyssa's birth mother reached out to her, she was completely caught off guard. "It was a Friday afternoon, and I was in the middle of making boutonnières for a best friend's wedding, when I glanced at my phone and read the memo line of the email....I knew right away that it was her," Alyssa recalls. However, she held in her excitement as she hadn't yet shared with her closest friends that she had initiated a search. She didn't respond at that moment and focused on her friend's event. That Sunday, she reached out to her birth mother and they spoke by phone.

"The conversation was wonderful...she is a super nice person, easy to talk with," Alyssa shared. Thanksgiving was approaching and, as Alyssa would be traveling home to Massachusetts to visit her family, she also made plans to meet her birthmother who lives only 20 minutes from her childhood home. They met for breakfast at a diner, just the two of them. "I was feeling nervous, mainly because I wanted everything to go well," Alyssa recalled. While they were eating, her birth mother soaked her pancakes with syrup and said, "I had such a sweet tooth with you when I was pregnant." Alyssa was struck by how this was the first time she had ever heard a comment about her pre-birth self. Several days later, on the morning of Thanksgiving, Alyssa met two of her three half-siblings and since then has met the third. She is enjoying these new relationships and the many funny similarities they share. When Covid is less of a threat, Alyssa looks forward to spending more time with them. Alyssa's parents continue to be very supportive and feel that it is wonderful that she is now connected to this previously missing piece of her story.

And We Became 4 (continued from page 1)

Next day, we introduced you to the entire family. Our extended family is in India and they spontaneously organized a video conference. All of our cousins and their children (your cousins) joined in to welcome you. We told them our story. This is the first time someone joined our family through adoption. They were all curious and supportive and excited for us. The celebrations continued over the next many days. We had video calls with friends and cousins around the world, and daily video calls with your grandparents. All of them wanted to be here and hold you but could not do so because of the pandemic.

We had forgotten what a delight and a privilege it is to care for a newborn. You have these tiny hands and small arms that you throw up beside your big head when sleeping. You don't like being swaddled with an arm stuck inside, just like Aarjav, and you prefer being held in our arms instead of being left in a crib to sleep. You are a gentle soul and wake up with a soft whimper when your diaper needs to be changed or you have to be fed, otherwise you sleep soundly. You always have a twinkle in your eyes. I love it when you gaze at me intently and our souls connect. You snuggle warmly, sometimes grunting, sometimes farting! Oh we love everything about you.

It was a big change for Aarjav. Until now, for the first 8 years of his life, he had been the baby in the family, the focus of all attention and suddenly he isn't - you are. His closet has been emptied, his bed has been moved to the other room. He handled these changes admirably and we are so proud of him. He is careful around you and gives you hugs and kisses every morning when he wakes up.

There is also a lovely story behind your name which honors 3 mothers. We wanted a name for you that is timeless and meaningful. Anirudh means "unstoppable." Your grandmother had originally suggested the name *Anirudh*. Your birth mom had named you Dominic and we kept it to be forever a part of you. And your last name is from me, your Mama. In our times, it is common for the wife and children to take the last name of the husband and father. Aarjav took Dada's last name without much thought or discussion. Later, when we realized how this naming tradition reinforces patriarchy, we decided to name our second child with my last name. We felt that this could be our way of espousing egalitarianism and emancipation. That sounds appropriate, given that *Arya* literally means noble person. And that is how you were named ***Anirudh Dominic Arya***. I hope your name will inspire you. When faced with obstacles, be courageous and creative. When deciding on a course of action, be just and inclusive.

We have been able to visit with your birth parents and birth grandmother regularly and they are so overjoyed to see you every time. We look forward to more celebrations together as an extended family. You bring joy to so many people around you. You, my darling, are someone we are extremely grateful for. Both you and Aarjav have made us stronger and better people and we are happy to be your mama and dada.



Bright Futures' Annual Summer Picnic Returned in 2021! After a pandemic hiatus in 2020, we had a great turn out and a beautiful day for the annual picnic at Hale Reservation. With many folks vaccinated, we were



again able to hold this wonderful event where birth parents, adoptive parents, and children come together to nurture their relationships and make new connections with families who are sharing their life's journey.

Adopting from Foster Care: An Interview

When did you decide to adopt a child from foster care?

We always wanted to be fathers. Ryan is a teacher and Matt is a social worker and we both knew that there was a desperate need for foster and adoptive parents. We didn't feel the need to start with a baby or a toddler and believed that we could help and enjoy parenting an older child. The biggest questions were 'when?' and 'how many?'



When and how did you connect with Bright Futures?

We heard about Bright Futures through Matt's work as a social worker. We met with the Director, Karen Cheyney in November of 2019 and knew that this was an agency that could give us the support we needed to be successful. It was nine months from our first meeting to our children's arrival into our home.

What drew you to your children, Angel & Zavion? What helped you see that you were a good fit for them?

We were poring over profiles of children on the MARE website at the same time our Bright Futures social worker was making calls for us. She contacted us to let us know of a potential match. Sure enough, it was a pair of siblings that had also piqued our interest! Angel was 12 years old and Zavion was 8—perfect ages for us, enough time to make a difference in their lives and old enough to start the father-son activities we were looking forward to sharing with them. What caught our attention most were our common interests, including video games and sports. We felt optimistic that we could find common ground with the boys, and connect in a meaningful way. When we started talking to people about the boys and asking questions, it continued to feel right. It really didn't take long to decide.

What was your first meeting like with the boys and how did you feel afterward?

Of course, we were adopting during COVID which made our experience different. We first met Angel and Zavion in early August 2020 through a video call. This was awkward for both us and the boys, but in retrospect, we really got a sense of their personalities. Zavion had a lot to say then and he is still a talkative boy. Angel was more cautious and quiet but we understood how much was at stake for him and how strange it must be for a 12-year-old to meet potential parents on a screen. Our first in-person meeting happened about a week later at a park that was familiar to the boys. We planned a few different activities, like playing soccer, frisbee, and Uno. That meeting was also on Angel's thirteenth birthday, so we brought cake—our first birthday celebration as a family. We were both anxious when we got there, despite having met them virtually. We thought, "What if they don't like us in person? What if they did not want to engage in activities with us for that long?" But with what seemed like a blink of an eye, the first meeting was over. We all had fun getting to know one another, and we felt excited and ready to continue to move forward with becoming a family.

What were Angel & Zavion's challenges when you met them?

Like all kids in foster care, Angel and Zavion had been through a lot of different homes and had many losses. We knew from our work and MAPP classes that it would not be easy. At the time, Angel was having a very hard time at school, including some physical aggression and refusal to do work. We believed that we could figure out how to help him be more successful. We didn't know what Zavion's struggles would be, but it turned out that he had difficulty focusing and learning routines and rules in our home. We were fortunate to get a lot of help from his therapy team, who continued to work with him through the transition.

What have been your biggest parenting successes?

The boys were transitioning from an environment where they had not had much structure and where they had unlimited screen time. We knew that to bond as a family and help the boys with school performance, this had to change. We are not anti-screen parents, in fact, video games are an interest we have in common, but we knew there had to be some limits, so we started slowly working on this. We also wanted the boys to engage in activities that would help them with their physical and mental health. Angel had an interest in Karate. He began attending classes three days per week and we saw him take pride in learning what was being taught to him. He advanced in no time from white belt to purple, three levels up! One day, Angel told Ryan that he used to have a lot of time to get to know all of the newest music and YouTube personalities, but he doesn't anymore, "not since we gave him a life." Zavion started attending Cub Scouts where he quickly made friends within his den. Zavion later told us that he wanted to start back up with soccer. Through his Cub Scouts, we were able to get him in a league with his friends. Zavion tries hard at everything he does and looks at us to make sure we are watching and smiling, which makes us feel special and proud!

What are the biggest ways Bright Futures has helped you in your journey to parenthood?

Bright Futures has been an invaluable resource for us. Our Family Resource Worker knew our goals as parents and understood our strengths and areas where we needed more support. Especially in the beginning, when we were struggling to help the boys with difficult behavior, she would listen and give us suggestions and tools. Even though we were both professionals with child experience, it is very different being hands-on, 24/7 parents. We consider our adoption to have been very successful (we adore our boys!), but there were some low moments. Bright Futures was by our side throughout the whole process always believing in us. We did not have to do it all alone; they were always there when we needed them!

What is a moment for each boy when you could see that they were claiming you as their parents? When did you claim them?

It was a little easier for our youngest, which isn't surprising. Within a month or two, Zavion started using our last name as his own. Then, as time passed, he started calling us "Daddy" and "Dad." He chose "Daddy" for Matt because, in his words, Matt was "sillier" than Ryan. Matt remembers the first time he heard Zavion calling to him in a store, saying "Daddy, Daddy"—that was a really sweet moment. We were told prior to Angel moving in that he does not give affection to anyone nor does he seek affection from others. Boy was that wrong! Within a few months of living in our home, 13-year-old Angel started to wrap his arms around our necks or shoulders while having a conversation with us. Now, Angel has developed a habit of leaving us notes requesting things like what he wants for breakfast the next morning. He signs his little notes "Love, Angel." The first time we got one of these, our hearts melted. There wasn't a real watershed moment for us, it was very gradual, over the past year. At first, it was a weird adjustment having two strangers in the house... Now, it feels like they've always been there.

What are your hopes and dreams for the boys as they grow up?

Our most important hope for the boys is that they feel loved and know that they always have a place in our home and family. As Angel moves further into his teen years, we are making practical plans for things like helping him get his first job and, later, to learn how to drive. Zavion loves school and learning new things, so we hope for him to continue to succeed academically. He is also a very social child with lots of friends, and we would like to see him continue to build a strong and positive peer group now that he knows he won't have to move again anytime soon. We will be very proud if either or both boys decide to go to college, but we will support them in following their interests and growing into healthy and happy young adults. Bringing the boys into our family has been simultaneously the most stressful, most challenging, and yet the most rewarding thing we've ever done. It's hard to remember what life was like before they moved in.

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 MA and NH, 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 <https://www.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

Post Adoption Support Resources:

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 age one year. Contact Adoption Resources at 617-332-2218.

Adoption Journeys: Adoption Journeys offers an array of post adoption services for adoptive families. Visit child-familyservices.org to learn more.

Boston Post Adoption Support: Offers individual and family therapy for all those touched by adoption, child and parent support groups, and search and reunion support. Visit bpar.org to learn more.

Adoption Initiative Conference: The Evolution of Adoption Practice: Activist and Community Perspectives, March 25 to 26, 2022. This conference is aimed at parents and professionals and brings together well-known keynote speakers. Workshop topics include: Adoptees as Immigrants; Adoption as Privilege and Oppression, and What is the Best Interest of the Child? <https://adoptioninitiative.dryfta.com/>

Bright Futures Birth Mother's Day Brunch Saturday, May 7, 2022

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 email kcheyney@rfkcommunity.org or call 978-263-5400.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

BRIGHT FUTURES ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC AUGUST 6, 2022

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

Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) Support meetings from 2 to 5 pm, the third Sunday of the month, September to May, at Plymouth Congregational Church in Framingham, MA. For more information call 508-473-4066 or visit <https://www.cubirthparents.org/boston.php>

Birthmom Buds Annual Birthmother's Day Retreat, late April/early May 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, email birthmombuds@gmail.com or visit birthmombuds.com. Birthmom Buds also offers mentorship programs for those who have placed a child for adoption and for those who are considering adoption.

PACT Family Camp East: August 2-7, 2022 in Pine Mountain, GA. 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 a profound effect on those families who attend and offers a community that these families have not found anywhere else. Visit <https://www.pactadopt.org/home.asp>

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!