



RFK  
COMMUNITY  
ALLIANCE

# BRIGHT THINGS

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,  
a program of RFK Community Alliance, Volume XXIII, Winter 2024

## Celebrating 25 Years: Our Origin Story

by Karen Cheyney

As we enter our 25<sup>th</sup> year of embracing open adoption, fostering hope, and building lifelong connections for children and families, I wanted to share our origin story. Bright Futures Adoption Center was born from loss, hope, optimism, ambition, collaboration and a deep desire to help others.

From when I was a little girl, I always wanted to be a mom. I imagined how many children I would have and what they would look like. I was blessed with a wonderful family in which to grow and thrive and when my high school sweetheart and I got married at age 24, we assumed that we would enjoy being married for a couple of years and then start having children as our parents had done. That was not to be. We experienced infertility and then through IVF several brief pregnancies that ended in miscarriage and then a joyful, healthy twin pregnancy. Unexpectedly, I went into labor at 23.5 weeks and after a lengthy labor our twin girls died at birth. Although this loss was devastating, we had explored adoption when we were going through infertility treatment and quickly turned to adoption as the way to become parents. We adopted a son in 1997 and a daughter in 1998 through an agency in a nearby state and were overjoyed to be parents and have children so close in age.

The experience of adopting our children was eye-opening. I quickly realized that many agencies were not transparent or ethical about their practices and fees, and that adoption agencies in Massachusetts were not educating families about the benefits of open adoption and did not welcome BIPOC families to adopt the children of color in need of placement. One specific experience really stuck with me when we were adopting our daughter. We told our agency in Vermont that we would be excited about and with the support of friends and family would be able to support a little girl of any race. One day they called with a possible situation for us. They shared that an adoption agency in Massachusetts was seeking a family for a Black baby girl who was already born and they did not have any families in Massachusetts waiting for a Black baby girl. We expressed interest and the agency asked us to go straight to the hospital. They handed the baby to us before sharing any background medical or social history about the birth family or child, the fees, or other particulars. We decided not to go forward with the situation due to the unethical nature of this practice and I was left wondering why an adoption agency in a large state like Massachusetts would be calling a small agency in Vermont to identify a family for a child of color. I began to think about how I could create a compassionate, ethical and transparent program that would educate expectant and adoptive parents about open adoption, welcome BIPOC families, and give expectant parents choices about the race of the family that would adopt their child and the contact they would like to have with their child lifelong. (continued on page 6)



BRIGHT FUTURES  
ADOPTION CENTER  
25 YEARS STRONG

**Thank You to All of Our Donors!**  
**Supporting Vulnerable Kids and Families Campaign**  
*Continues through June 30, 2024 (see below)*

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*There is still time to help! Donations can be made at [brightfuturesadoption.org](http://brightfuturesadoption.org), click on the 'Donate' button and choose Bright Futures from the drop down menu, or mail a check made payable to "RFK Community Alliance" to Bright Futures, 971 Main St., Lancaster, MA 01523*

**WELCOME TO NEW BRIGHT FUTURES STAFF!**

**Abby Fuhrman, LCSW**, works part-time completing child and family assessments. Abby received her BSW from Skidmore College and MSW from Simmons University. Abby has been working with children and families for over 10 years in residential, school, in-home, and community-based settings. Abby has found her niche connecting with adolescents and their caregivers. Abby enjoys spending time with her family, making jewelry, and hiking.

**Lily Baker, LCSW**, works part-time completing child and family assessments. Lily obtained her MSW in 2021 and since has been supporting children, adolescents and families in community and residential settings with a focus on trauma informed care. Outside of work, Lily enjoys spending time with her family and friends, being outside and practicing yoga.

**Krysten Feeney, LCSW**, works part-time completing child and family assessments. She received her MSW from Wheelock College in 2017 and has 10 years of social work experience working in therapeutic foster care and nonprofit out-of-school time programming; she currently manages a DMH-funded mental health program in addition to her work at Bright Futures. She is an advocate for mental health awareness and suicide prevention. In addition to being a social worker, Krysten enjoys spending time outside and traveling.

**Myjorie Philippe, LCSW**, works part-time completing child and family assessments. She has been working in the social work field for almost 10 years and has her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in social work. During her free time, she likes to spend time with her husband, 4 children, and has a 5<sup>th</sup> child on the way.

## WELCOME HOME – CONGRATS TO OUR NEW ADOPTIVE PARENTS!

Adam and Clyant on the arrival of Chance  
Angela on the arrival of Destyny  
Annie and Todd on the arrival of Maddox  
Bailey and Patrick on the arrival of Ruby  
Beth and Christine on the arrival of Skyler  
Danyelle, John, Siroun and Thalia on the arrival of Aubrey  
Guru and John on the arrival of Anaya  
Jaclynn, Jose and Gavin on the arrival of Mason  
Jen, Chris and Zoe on the arrival of Louis  
Katie, Matt and Sienna on the arrival of Zachary  
Kim, James and Maggie on the arrival of Elizabeth  
Kristin and Brooke on the arrival of Yoshi  
Kumi on the arrival of Giovanni  
Lauren and Leandro on the arrival of Timmy  
Linda and Bob on the arrival of Aiden  
Meghan and Kevin on the arrival of Avery  
Melinda, Keith and Declan on the arrival of Grace  
Priya and Raj on the arrival of Angel  
Rachel, Felix, Aiden and Nate on the arrival of Mialani  
Rachel and Nate on the arrival of Lilliana and Asa  
Sean and Kevin on the arrival of Rosahlia and Joelyana  
Shawna and Dan on the arrival of Zoey  
S and S on the arrival of Dynasty  
Tiffani and Roberto on the arrival of Aurora  
Tracy on the arrival of Jasmine and Evalynn



## “I Want to Meet You Every Day”

A foster care adoption story by H. Kay



Before we got married, we had discussed that we both knew we wanted children and that my preference was to adopt. As a kid, I had grown up in a community with a number of international adoptees, including my cousin, and for as long as I can remember, I was interested. As an adult, with a decade plus of domestic nonprofit work experience, I saw just how many kids needed supportive, stable, permanent homes, and I knew we had that, plus a lot of love to give. Thankfully, out of love for and trust in me, Kyle was on board to have two kids – no matter how they came to us. After doing some reading (“Adopting in America”) and speaking with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE), we decided to get certified as pre-adoptive foster parents and joined Bright Futures’ Virtual MAPP training in summer of 2020.

The training really pushed us to broaden our idea of who would be a good match for our family. After learning just how disproportionately overrepresented sibling groups and kids of color are in foster care, we did some serious reflecting on if and how we could effectively care for multiple kids impacted by trauma and what we would need to do to support cultural connections if we adopted transracially. The other piece we had to come to terms with was legal risk – or our willingness to foster kids whose parents’ rights had not yet been terminated and for whom adoption was the plan but was not yet guaranteed. We wanted to foster-to-adopt young children, ideally who had not yet started Kindergarten, and learned that young children often are at legal risk. These were some of the toughest conversations Kyle and I had ever had over the course of our 10-year relationship; it felt like we were both setting the course for the rest of our lives and leaving ourselves open to a tremendous amount of uncertainty. By early January 2021, we had submitted our profile and preferences and started waiting for matches.

In mid-April, on a chilly day at a playground, we met our match – two young brothers of Puerto Rican descent, ages 2 & 3.5. Having been in care for about two years and living in separate homes for the last 6 months, they were delighted to see each other and were a little skeptical of us. Less than 2 weeks and 3 visits later, they were living in our house. To say becoming insta-parents to two young kids was a big transition is a complete understatement, but little-by-little we figured it out, built a roster of helping professionals, and established a family routine that was in keeping with our active lifestyle. Outdoor time and physical exercise seemed to suit them, too. We spent countless hours exploring the playgrounds of Greater Boston, taking our dog for walks in the woods together, and teaching them to scooter and ride bikes.

With each passing month and developmental milestone, both the large (potty-training, Kindergarten!) and the small (getting through a swim lesson without crying), we fell more in love with each other and couldn’t imagine a future where we weren’t together. Our older son even started to tell us, “I want to meet you every day.” Yet, as the months and eventually years ticked by, the legal situation and the boys’ permanency plan looked more uncertain. Our hearts sank every time one of the boys asked a question like, “Will I still live with you when I learn to drive?” or “Will I wake up with you every day?” and we had to say, “We hope so,” and couldn’t provide more certainty. While we were supporting open communication and relationships with their birth parents and wanted the boys to know their biological family and heritage, we could not imagine the impact of yet another transition. We were worried for ourselves, too, and spent many sleepless nights playing out “what if” scenarios.

Thankfully, in Spring of 2023, almost exactly 2 years after the boys joined our family, Open Adoption Agreements were signed, and in June, their adoption was finalized. We could move forward as a family – a family that included connections to extended biological relatives. This assurance of permanency and of togetherness brought visible relief to the boys. We could finally say for certain that they would in fact “meet us every day.”



## Maintaining Connections through Bright Futures Annual Events

Every year we like to share photos from our family engagement events, including the Annual Summer Picnic and the Mid-Winter Social. The picnic is designed to help birth families, adoptive families and children build and maintain healthy connections and both events help our families and children build their adoption community. It is essential for adopted children to connect with other adopted children and to feel whole and valued by others who share their experience.

After the Mid-Winter Social on January 27, 2024, we received the below email from one of our adoptive moms together with a photo of her daughter asleep in the backseat of the car:

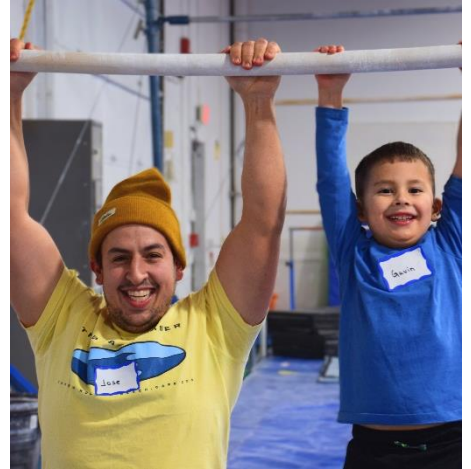
*Dear Karen and Lisa,  
Thought you might like to see (attached) proof of a night well spent. We both had a great time! Thank you for the fun, your comparable-to-none organization, my Bright Futures family, and this kid. All of it, a dream come true. ❤️  
With heartfelt gratitude, K*

When talking with another adoptive parent a few days after the event she said, "We are already planning for next year!"

A third adoptive family wrote,

*Thanks Karen and Carolina for planning such a fun get together yesterday! We had a wonderful time meeting other families and catching up with friends. I had a blast with the other kids on all the equipment. Really appreciate all of your efforts in pulling this together!*

*E & J*



*Bright Futures' Origin Story (continued from page 1):* I started to get excited about the prospect of this new endeavor, but realized I could not do it alone. I approached my college roommate and dear friend, Tammy, who was a social worker, the daughter of an adoptee, and a strong, Black woman about this idea for starting a new kind of adoption agency in Massachusetts. And in the fall of 1999, we co-founded Bright Futures Adoption Center as a domestic infant adoption program. At the time, I recall saying, "If I could help five couples become parents, I would feel that this has been a success." Now many moons, several new programs (including adoption from foster care), many skilled clinicians, and hundreds of children and families later, I am awed and proud of what Bright Futures has become. Most of you reading this newsletter have been part of Bright Futures' story and I am honored to have been a part of your lives. I have deep gratitude to all of you – birth families, adoptive families, colleagues, and supporters - for putting your trust and faith in Bright Futures and making our vision a reality.

## Celebrating National Adoption Day

November 17<sup>th</sup> was National Adoption Day. On that day, Bright Futures' client Gabrielle legally committed to being nine-year-old Avianna's mother, a commitment she had already made in her heart. Avianna moved into Gabrielle's home in August of 2022 and their fifteen months together have been full of joy, exploration, exhaustion, laughter, struggle, and discovery. Legal finalization of an adoption is a cause for celebration, and we are all celebrating with this new family!



Avianna and all the children in foster care have experienced losses that are hard for most of us to imagine. Even in these circumstances, children grow, learn, and find moments of joy. Avianna's strength and beauty was clear to Gabrielle from the moment that they met. Still, we know from science that trauma impacts brain development and that young children like Avianna are hurt and vulnerable. Their brains heal and resilience is built in the context of a relationship with a caregiver who can provide time, energy, community, hope and love. The path of each family is as complex as it is beautiful. We are grateful for adoptive parents, like Gabrielle, who build resilience in the children they love. And we are grateful for children, like Avianna, who have so much to look forward to and so much to give the world. It is for them we do this work.

## Weekend Family Connections -- Expanding Family for Youth

Relational connections help kids heal from trauma. At Bright Futures, this historically is offered to kids through the legal permanence of an adoptive family. However, just last year we expanded how our families can offer healing connections to some of the most vulnerable kids in Massachusetts through our Weekend Family Connections (WFC) Program. In partnership with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) and three residential treatment programs, youth ages 10-18 get connected with a family to spend at least one weekend a month to expand their world and relationships. Since we graduated our first WFC families from a 30-hour MAPP training in December 2023, there is a lot of exciting news to report:



- 8 families proceeded with home study.
- 4 families are matched with kids in various stages of visiting.
- 1 family transitioned to become a pre-adoptive family.
- 2 youth had the opportunity to spend holiday time with their WFC family baking together, playing games, loving family pets, and participating in holiday traditions outside of the residential program and in the intimacy of a family.

Innovative programs like WFC offer kids a brighter future, and we are looking forward to continuing this wonderful partnership to touch the lives of the youth in the program.



## Becoming a Family and Navigating Openness

By Meghan

As we prepared to become adoptive parents, my husband and I spent a lot of time wrapping our heads around what an open adoption meant. What does a “typical” relationship with the birth family look like? How do you evolve as those relationships do? What if they want to see the baby a lot? What if they don’t want to see her at all? There are no definite answers to these questions and I honestly loathed that. I wanted a clear road map so that I could do it right- be a good mom, be a good adoptive parent, be a good partner in this important, long-term relationship we were starting with our child’s birth family. What was I supposed to do with the abstract? I remember as we prepared to adopt being asked to describe our families. My husband talked about his parents, sister, and her family. I, meanwhile, wrote a multi-page essay about my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, and siblings. I do want to defend myself here, I have a BIG and very complicated family. My mom’s parents divorced and remarried, my father died when I was young, and my mom remarried. This left me with 8 living grandparents and 2 great-grandparents when I started college.

Growing up, Family was inclusive. Family meant everyone who loved you and cared about you, related by blood or not. My experiences undoubtedly shaped my perception of what a family looks like. I realized this was how I wanted to define open adoption to myself, those who asked, and most importantly to my child. ***Your family is big. Your family is complicated. Your family is more than the people who live in your house, it is composed of so many people who love you and care about you indefinitely.***



When we met my daughter’s birth parents for the first time, I found them to be incredibly kind, thoughtful, and full of love for their unborn baby. My fears melted away because they wanted the same thing I did for their daughter, for her to know how loved she was.

Since that first day, our mutual love for A has been my frame of reference for our interactions. I wanted a place where our daughter’s birth parents could always access pictures of her and contact us. So, we set up a Facebook page for our daughter and her birth family. On that page we post pictures and updates every week or two, with additional posts for big events (when she rolled over for the first time, when she cut her first tooth, her first plane ride). A’s birth aunt noted on the page that she loves the updates and shares them with A’s cousins. I have also been in touch with A’s birth mother via text, sending her extra information and pictures when she reaches out.

At Thanksgiving, we were able to meet with our daughter’s birth parents, grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousins. Her birth family welcomed us with a genuine warmth and kindness that filled our hearts. We got to see pictures of A’s birth mother as a baby (they look so much alike!). It was also wonderful to get to know our baby’s birth family better and to watch her interact with them.

I feel incredibly lucky to have the relationship we do with our daughter’s birth family. There are times it feels easy, like when we exchanged Christmas cards or when we talked about meeting up at the beach next summer. However, there are also times where I feel unsure. A’s birth parents separated and no longer have a way to contact her birth father. How will our contact with him look in the future and how will I explain it to A? It is then that I go back to what I want for A and what I hope she will come to understand about her family: ***Your family is big and complicated. But most importantly, your family is more than the people who live in your house, it is composed of so many people who love you and care about you indefinitely.***

## ADOPTION CALENDAR, EDUCATIONAL & SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

**Adoptive Families Together** offers monthly parent support groups 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 [www.mspcc.org/aft/](http://www.mspcc.org/aft/) 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](http://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](http://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](http://bpar.org) to learn more.

**NACAC Annual Conference: Families Rising Adoption and Foster Care Conference, July 17-18, 2024:** This conference informs and encourages all members of the adoption and foster care community. The event will offer about 100 workshops from expert speakers covering a wide variety of foster care and adoption topics. [nacac.org/get-training/conference](http://nacac.org/get-training/conference)

**School of Social Work Michigan State University: Making Connections with your Traumatized Child, March 12, 2024:** This two-hour webinar is aimed at parents and will explore the basics of attachment trauma. [MSU School of Social Work Events | Eventbrite](http://MSU School of Social Work Events | Eventbrite)

**SAVE THE DATE!!!**

**BRIGHT FUTURES  
ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC**

**AUGUST 3, 2024**

**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 [cubirthparents.org/boston.php](http://cubirthparents.org/boston.php) CUB also offers a retreat for birth parents, adoptees, adoptive families, relatives, and professionals. Sign up for the retreat usually begins mid-summer with the event usually taking place in October. [concernedunitedbirthparents.org/retreats](http://concernedunitedbirthparents.org/retreats)

**MPower Alliance: Birth Parent Therapeutic Retreat,** San Francisco, CA. No cost for birth parents to attend retreat and MPower Alliance can assist with some travel expenses. The retreat provides a nurturing, safe space for birth mothers/parents to connect, grow, and heal with others who understand their experiences. Other birth parent resources/supports available as well. [mpoweralliance.org/birthmother\\_retreats](http://mpoweralliance.org/birthmother_retreats)

**PACT Family Camp East: August 4- 9, 2024,** will be held at the Wisp Resort in McHenry, MD. This 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. Visit [pactadopt.org/pact-camp](http://pactadopt.org/pact-camp)

### **Bright Futures Birth Mother's Day Brunch Saturday, May 11, 2024**

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](mailto:kcheyney@rfkcommunity.org) or call 978-263-5400.

**You can contact Bright Futures by  
calling 978-263-5400 or visiting  
[brightfuturesadoption.org](http://brightfuturesadoption.org)**

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