



Why Support Groups are Important

Many people have heard the old adage “It takes a village to raise a child”. Raising a child requires the support of friends, family, and members of the community. For adoptive families, finding and connecting with other members of the adoption community is especially important. These other individuals know the struggles and triumphs that come with being an adoptive family. They can share insight, provide links to useful resources, and lend support. For these reasons and many others, the presence of adoptive family support groups is so important.

The Importance of Support

Many adult adoptees who were not involved in a group with his or her family have mourned this fact. Almost everyone has said, “When I was growing up, I wish I had known other kids who were adopted just like me. I had no one to empathize with what I was going through. I felt really alone at times.” Our children will face many, many issues regarding their adoption as they grow up, and a group will allow them to interact with other children who have been through similar feelings and issues.

Safety in Numbers

One of the happy surprises of adoptive parenting is the friendship and camaraderie to be found in adoption support groups. While friends and family don't always understand the joys and challenges of raising children whose ethnicity, special needs, or personal histories may set them apart, support groups can provide information, companionship, and enrichment that you won't find elsewhere.

The adoption process and integrating an adopted child into your family certainly has its ups and downs which can leave parents and children feeling exhausted and frustrated. Joining a support groups and talking to other individuals who have gone through similar experiences and feelings can be so helpful. In addition, other adoptive families can be a great source of information for finding useful, adoption sensitive resources in your area.

Friends and family often do not understand what exactly an adoptive family is going through. Having a place to go where other people understand, have gone through similar struggles, and can lend moral support in a safe setting can help tremendously. Support groups provide a space to vent about frustrations, ask questions, and brag about successes. Check out the adoptive parent support groups in your area, including those offered by your

PARCs, and get connected to other adoptive families like yours.

POST ADOPTION RESOURCE CENTER

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What's New with PARC?

NEW Website has been launched!

As of early March, PARC has a new and improved website. In addition to the layout and color being revamped, the site also has several new features. An interactive county map has been added, a “stay-connected” option is now available, and an extensive list of county resources has been uploaded. Be sure to check the website regularly for upcoming events and trainings



NEW Adopted Youth Club

PARC has developed a great new opportunity for adopted youth: PARC Adopted Youth Club! The group has been designed to address some of the tough things that adopted youth deal with in fun and creative ways. Some of the activities youth will be able to participate in include creative writing activities, visual art projects, and games. The group will meet on the second Thursday of every month at the Judson Center's Washtenaw office, located at 3840 Packard Rd. Suite 170, Ann Arbor. The group will be led by two University of Michigan masters of social work students. For more information about the group or to RSVP for the next meeting, please contact Tracy Kapusansky at (734) 794-2988 or at tracy_kapusansky@judsoncenter.org. We hope to see you at our next gathering!



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Summer is coming! What are your plans?

Did you know that the adoption medical subsidy program can provide assistance with certain types of summer programming? Day camps, activities, and overnight camps may be paid for with subsidy monies.

Day Camps, Overnight Camps, and Other Summer Time

Activities: Adoption medical subsidy will pay up to \$500 per child to cover activities that address a condition that the child has been certified for through medical subsidy. For example: A child with autism may attend a camp that builds social skills and interaction.

To arrange for payment: Send a letter to your assigned subsidy worker in Lansing (go to www.Michigan.gov/dhs and click on Adoption Subsidy for a current list of assigned workers), requesting funding for the program you are interested in.

Include camp information, such as location, payment information, licensing, and programming. This can usually be found on the brochure or website.

If possible include a letter from a counselor, principal, or professional, recommending the program.

Keep in contact with your adoption subsidy worker to ensure approval and payment.

Summer Tutoring: Adoption medical subsidy will pay for summer tutoring for children who have a current IEP and are receiving special education services.

In order to receive funding for summer tutoring:

send a letter to your adoption subsidy worker requesting tutoring funds. It will be up to you to locate a tutor. Please contact your subsidy worker to determine the amount to be paid.

Include a copy of your child's current IEP and most recent report card.

A letter from the teacher, counselor, principal, or staff recommending tutoring may be helpful.



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An Adoptive Parent's Perspective: Why Post-Adoption Support Groups Are Vital

Those who have adopted children are in a unique parenting situation. That seems to be the case whether you adopted your child from the foster care system or whether you adopted your relative. There are common issues that apply to any adoption and there are other issues that are more likely to be present when adopting a child with a disrupted past or traumatic beginning.

My life experiences, including being an adoptive parent, have given me multiple views about parent/child relationships and how feelings about those relationships develop over time. I have been a child of divorce, a stepchild, a step sibling, a stepmother, a foster mother, and an adoptive mother. My stepson is nineteen, my birth son eleven, and my adoptive son is four. Prior to my son's adoption, we had a 3 month old girl placed with us as a foster child. Six months later, we had her fifteen year old mom placed in our home. They remained with us for two years. At that point mom was put in another placement and her daughter was placed with her maternal grandmother. A year later, mother and daughter were reunited. I still have contact with them. Mom is twenty-two and her daughter (who calls me "Nana") is seven.

My adopted son came to us directly from the hospital at nine days old. Parental rights were terminated and his adoption was finalized at one - year of age. He has had several visits (supervised by me) with his birth mother this past year, and has occasional contact with his birth father's side of the family. This contact was initiated by me. I feel very strongly about keeping open lines of communication for my son's wellbeing.

As they say on Facebook: "It's complicated." People and relationships are constantly evolving. Feelings and personalities are bumping into each other. We move toward and away but somehow remain connected for the sake of the children we love.

This is why we need post adoption support. In this tangle of relationships and "care-taking" are many issues that can only be understood by those who have walked the same path. There is a lot of stress that comes with the territory of adopting from foster care. I have dealt with many of these issues myself. We deal with changes that happen within our families when a new member is added, unmet expectations and special needs. Meeting those needs can cause marital stress and feelings of hopelessness. It is hard work with sometimes little reward.

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So what about us? As parents of these kids, we have to take care of ourselves so we can take care of them. Being in the company of other people who understand what we are going through is crucial. We need to vent about what feels unfair and impossible. We need someone to share the good things that “regular” parents take for granted. We need help, we need understanding, we need feedback, and we need ideas. We need to talk with others who have walked a mile in our shoes about what works and what doesn't. We need guidance so that we can guide and sometimes we just need someone to listen when our guidance fails, because sometimes it will. We need to talk about our own losses (“the perfect family” which doesn't exist) so we can help our kids deal with their losses. For many of them, the pain of loss is profound.

“It takes a village to raise a child.” I can't recall who said that but truer words have never been uttered. The problem is that the “village” is shrinking. The family, friends, and neighbors that historically supported struggling parents are often lacking which is often more true for struggling adoptive parents. So we need to create our own support and use every resource to get our kids to responsible adulthood. Even when we fail; we need to share how hard we tried with those who understand. Adoptive parent support groups can provide that very valuable resource.

So get involved. Go to a support group meeting and bring another adoptive parent with you. Reach out to those in your community who can benefit from a safe place to talk about their struggles and their triumphs with other adoptive parents. Take it from someone who knows, we can all use a little support.

S.Teninty
Adoptive Mother
Support Group Advocate



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Welcome Back to Thomas Green!

After a short hiatus from the Judson Center Post Adoption Resource Center (PARC) Region 6, Thomas Green has joined the PARC Region 5 Team. Thomas has been serving families for over 25 years. His passion, experience and belief in family resilience enable Thomas to engage families in various stages of development. His education includes a Bachelor's degree in Family Life Education, as well as a Master's Degree in Psychology. Thomas is convinced that healthy family relationships involve knowledge and practice. "I am committed to family and will use all of my resources to support the mission of the Post Adoption Resource Center in Region 5."



A "Goodbye" from
Jennifer Moore, Region
5 PARC Worker

This newsletter sadly marks my last with the Judson Center PARC program. I have enjoyed being part of the PARC program as it was built from the ground up. This is challenging but very rewarding work. It has been wonderful to be a part of the experienced teams of Regions 5 and 6, the State of Michigan, and the many resources among the state. After working with pre-adoptive families for ten years, and processing adoptions, it was rewarding to be part of what happens after finalization.

Adoption is a journey, and no path is exactly the same. Thank you for allow me to travel that journey with you. Each of our families has different challenges, struggles and strengths, and I have learned from each family I worked with.

As I go, I leave you with the Irish Proverb: Praise the children, and they will blossom. I wish you all well, and leave you in the capable hands of the Judson Center PARC team.

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Dr. Jim Henry Speaks to PARC Parents about the Effects of Brain Trauma in Children

Special guest Dr. Jim Henry of the Children's Trauma Assessment Center (CTAC) program was the featured speaker during the February "Pizza with PARC" meeting, held in Jackson. Dr. Henry spoke with humor, respect, compassion, and empathy to the parents gathered. It was clear that the parents felt that his remarks were helpful and validated their experiences with their children.

Dr. Henry's remarks are summarized here for those who were not able to be present for his presentation.

THE EARLY EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

Dr. Henry explained that a traumatic event, even very early on in life, imprints on a child's brain and has lasting effects. This means that trauma that occurs during zero to three years of age, when there is no verbal memory, often has more of an impact than trauma that occurs when memories are formed that a child can talk through. The behaviors and reactions caused by the trauma are wired into children's brains so that they have feelings and reactions that they don't understand. They truly do not know why they feel or react the way they do.

BUILDING RESILIENCY

Dr. Henry stated that we help our children build resiliency by helping them to develop and establish self-mastery. Children who are always a victim may feel that they have very little self-control because they think that bad things outside of their control are going to happen to them. They will always expect it, and they may act in a manner that this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Mastery is built over time, but one helpful thing that parents can do is to look for positive ways to discipline including positive reinforcement, praise, reward and to avoid negative reactions as much as possible.

Dr. Henry let the parents know that the biggest change agents in the lives of traumatized children are their parents. He explained that children need someone with whom they feel cared for in order to be able to begin to deal with past traumas. Dr. Henry stated that most of the children he sees who have survived traumatic events believe that these occurrences were their fault. They carry this belief with them and it makes connecting with others very difficult and scary. Often it takes these children a long time to trust their parents. He indicated that once parents learn about the effect trauma has had on their child's brain; they are more open to changing the way they interact with their child.

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According to Dr. Henry, in order to help children build resiliency, a parent must slowly build a relationship of trust and caring with their child. This is not an easy task and parents who embark on this journey need to learn to take care of themselves. They also need to be honest with themselves that this is a long and difficult process that will bring up many emotions in them. Parents will need to be self-reflective and to ask themselves the following question: "How do we deal with it (our children, our family our lives) when it cannot be what we would like or envision?"

Dr. Henry warned that ignoring feelings of pain and loss can lead to increased negativity and bitterness in parents of traumatized children. He said that it is important to realize as adults and parents how little we can control.

Dr. Henry also stated that anger is easier than sadness for both children and parents. It was also noted that children who have experienced trauma are often in survival mode. This makes it hard for them to reciprocate love, or act in a manner that encourages parents to continue to try to build relations. Therefore, parents must find means other than through parenting to get support and to receive validation and encouragement.

SKILLS TO REGULATE

Building resiliency in children requires that adults help them learn skills to regulate their moods, behaviors, and general affect. Dr. Henry shared that after working with many traumatized children and youth and following them into adulthood, he found that the strongest trait among those children who succeeded was the skill to regulate. The key is finding what behavioral methods and means of treatment will help you help your child learn to regulate his/her moods and behavior.

Dr. Henry ended his talk by expressing his admiration and appreciation for the adoptive parents of special needs children. He stated that adoption is a journey that includes tremendous grief but that the journey includes an opportunity to grow every day.

For more information on the CTAC program contact:

Unified Clinics
Western Michigan University
1000 Oakland Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Phone: (269) 387-7073
Fax: (269) 387-7050
Email: chhs-ctac@wmich.edu

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PARC Intern Gina Steffey Leaves....

April 17 marks my last day working as a PARC intern. With my first year of graduate school under my belt, I must say that working with the PARC team has taught me more than any of my classes. I am so thankful for the hands on experience I have received during my time at the Judson Center including the families I have had the opportunity to meet and talk to, and the PARC staff for taking me under their wing and teaching me the ropes. I look forward to continuing as a professional in the field of social work and I have a new found admiration for all adoptive, foster, and kinship families. Thank you all for the wonderful learning opportunity!



New PARC Intern Joins the Team!

Staci Suliman is a graduate student at Eastern Michigan University. She will be completing an internship here at PARC until August 2013. Staci received a Bachelor's of Science degree in criminal justice and is pursuing her master's degree in social work with a specialty in substance abuse and mental illness. She has experience in case management, working with the homeless and adjudicated youth as well as chemically dependent and mentally ill individuals. She also has experience in facilitating groups and will serve as a great benefit to our adopted youth group in Washtenaw as she was adopted herself!

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Upcoming Events:

Region 5 Task Force Meeting: May 1, 2-4pm, Jackson Salvation Army, RSVP to Tracy Kapusansky at (734) 528-1692 Ext. 23401 or Tracy_Kapusansky@judsoncenter.org

PARC Sponsored Parent Support Groups: Second Thursday of every month, 6-8pm, Washtenaw Judson Center Offices, RSVP to Tracy Kapusansky at (734) 528-1692 Ext. 23401 or Tracy_Kapusansky@judsoncenter.org

Adopted Youth Club: Second Thursday of every month, 6-8pm, Washtenaw Judson Center Offices, RSVP to Tracy Kapusansky at (734) 528-1692 Ext. 23401 or Tracy_Kapusansky@judsoncenter.org

Adoptive Parent Support Group: May 1st, 6:00-8:00 PM, Salvation Army, 806 E Pearl St, Jackson. RSVP to Tracy Kapusansky at (734) 528-1692 Ext. 23401 or Tracy_Kapusansky@judsoncenter.org

“Nurturing the wholehearted parent: Preventing Burnout”: May 11th, 9:00am-12:00pm, Lutheran Child and Family Service of Michigan, 6019 West Side Saginaw Rd, Bay City

“Beyond Consequences” Parent Training: May 3rd training in Battle Creek, May 4th training in Livonia. 9am-3pm. If you've tried using logic, consequences, behavior modification, yelling and isolation with your children, all to find out that none of it worked, or even made things worse, you know what it is like to find yourself beyond your window of tolerance. This parenting training can change all of that. Register online at <http://www.beyondconsequences.com/bc/live/index.html>

Keep an eye on our website, <http://www.parc-judson.org/>, for upcoming events!

Region 6 Task Force Meeting: May 22, 4-5:30pm, Judson Macomb Regional Office. RSVP to Pam Ferguson at 810-732-8510 Ext. 23507 or Pamela_ferguson@judsoncenter.org

Adoptive Family Support Group Meeting: May 22, 6:00-8:00pm, Judson Macomb Regional Office. RSVP of bringing children to Pam Ferguson at 810-732-8510 Ext. 23507 or Pamela_ferguson@judsoncenter.org

“The Adoption Process – Before and After Finalization”: Transitioning children to adoption and post-adoption issues. May 14, 6:30-8:30pm. Macomb County DHS. 21885 Dunham Rd. Clinton Twps. 48036. Seniors Auditorium Door C. RSVP to Pam Ferguson at 810-732-8510 Ext. 23507 or Pamela_ferguson@judsoncenter.org

Adoptive Family Training: June 19th, 6:00-9:00pm. Okemos. “Cross-Cultural Parenting – Beyond Race.” RSVP to Pam Ferguson at 810-732-8510 Ext. 23507 or Pamela_ferguson@judsoncenter.org

Adoptive Family Support Group: June 26th, 5:30-7:30pm. Genesee County Judson Center, PARC Office. RSVP to Pam Ferguson at 810-732-8510 Ext. 23507 or Pamela_ferguson@judsoncenter.org

Adoptive Family Support Group and Training: “Adoption and the Sibling Relationship.” July 24th, 6:00-8:00pm. Judson Center Macomb Regional Office. . RSVP to Pam Ferguson at 810-732-8510 Ext. 23507 or Pamela_ferguson@judsoncenter.org

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