



BIRTH PARENT NEWSLETTER

Spring 2017

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17th Annual Birth
Mother Dinner Details

FEATURE STORY

Meet Mary:
Growth as a Birth Mother

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PLUS

The latest updates,
encouragement, events,
and more!



Mission:

To honor the sanctity of human life by assisting clients in life-affirming decisions with the love and compassion of Christ.

Vision:

Our vision is to one day reach all abortion-minded and abortion-vulnerable individuals throughout Minnesota with comprehensive pregnancy-related services and the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Values:

We believe that God is the author of life and has a plan for each life, therefore, we do not provide or refer for abortions.

We seek to empower our clients in their decision-making process by offering information about all pregnancy-related options. This includes medically accurate information about abortion, a realistic and thorough examination of parenting and adoption, and access to ultrasound.

We are committed to offering support to those facing unplanned pregnancy or struggling with a past abortion experience without judgment or condemnation.

We are committed to assisting our clients in choosing between adoption and parenting without bias toward either option.

EST. 1973

MINNEAPOLIS
University Campus
2900 University Ave SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414
612.623.8378

SAINT PAUL
Sun Ray Shopping Center
2109 Old Hudson Road
Saint Paul, MN 55119
651.730.4342

RICHFIELD
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Richfield, MN 55423
612.866.7643

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
1515 East 66th Street
Richfield, MN 55423
612.866.7643

ROCHESTER
902 North Broadway
Rochester, MN 55906
507.282.3377

WWW.NLFS.ORG

Dear Birth Parent,

I hope this newsletter finds you well. My name is Rebecca Anfinrud and I am the Post Adoption Social Worker at New Life Family Services.

I came to New Life in July 2013 as a Pregnancy Support Social Worker in our St. Paul office where I counseled women and men facing unplanned pregnancy situations. I helped to provide support, resources, and education, but most importantly, I walked with birth parents through the adoption process!

In 2016, I made the transition to my new role as the Post Adoption Social Worker, and I brought my love and compassion for birth parents with me. I am here to support birth parents, adoptive families, and adopted children at any stage of their post adoption journey.

So far in my time as the Post Adoption Social Worker, I have worked with a number of amazing individuals and families, each having a unique adoption story. I love getting to know each person and learning how adoption has impacted their life. I have seen joy, pain, and resolution throughout the adoption journey and I am excited to continue to support others no matter what stage they are at in this process.

My hope is as you face challenging situations, need support or resources, or simply wants a listening ear regarding your adoption, you will feel comfortable reaching out to me.

As you find yourself looking for post adoption or birth parent support, please, do not hesitate to contact me! I would love to hear from you.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Anfinrud, LSW
Post Adoption Social Worker

P.S. Be sure to RSVP for our Annual Birth Mother Dinner on Friday, May 12th (details on the next page). This is a special evening designed just for you, and I would love to see you there!



STAY IN TOUCH!

Even if you correspond with the adoptive family directly, it is still important to keep current contact information on file with us. We would love to communicate by email, but having a current phone number and address on file is also a good idea. Here's why:

- Sometimes an adoptive family reaches out to us if they can't get ahold of you.
- If you would like to make a change in your relationship with the adoptive family, sometimes it is helpful to talk it through with us or someone else who has been there.
- We can provide you with resources that will be helpful to you on your journey.
- Hearing from you helps us know what direction to go in meeting your needs as we expand our post adoption services.
- We want to keep you in the loop! By keeping your contact information updated we can send you information, newsletters, or invitations to future events.

You can easily update your information:

1. Visit the post adoption area of our website and click on "Update My Information."
2. Email your updated information to adoption@nlfs.org or call (612) 746-5670.

17TH ANNUAL BIRTH MOTHER DINNER

You are invited! Every year, New Life Family Services hosts a Birth Mother Dinner the Friday before Mother's Day to honor those who have made a difficult, loving, and courageous adoption decision.

WHY

This special evening will encourage and uplift you while giving you time to connect with other Birth Mothers who understand what it's like to choose adoption.

THEME

This year's theme is "Growth: The Life-long Journey." We will reflect together on the growth involved in adoption from the initial decision to place your child(ren) for adoption, the courage to follow through with the decision, and the grace to continue on in your journey as you trust another family to raise your birth child(ren).

COST

All birth mothers are welcome to attend regardless of the agency they placed with. Birth Mothers attend for free along with one guest. Additional guests are welcome and asked to pay \$10 each (cash or check at the door).

GUEST SPEAKER

JEN JOAS

New Life Birth Mother & Founder of UrbanHalo

Hear from a birth mother Jen Joas who placed her daughter, Sarah, for adoption 22 years ago. Jen is the creator and owner of UrbanHalo and often partners with New Life to sell her headbands at events and fairs. She will share about navigating an open adoption (which was a fairly new concept at the time of her placement), her reunion with her daughter in 2012, and the life long journey of growth since first choosing adoption.



"I felt like adoption was the most loving decision I could make, but I didn't know if I could do it. I was falling in love with this little baby growing inside of me, could I really just let her go?"

FRIDAY, MAY 12, 2017

6:00 P.M. Registration
6:30 P.M. Dinner & Program

CALVARY CHURCH

2120 Lexington Ave. N.
Roseville, MN 55113

RSVP: www.nlfs.org

**Growth:
The Lifelong Journey**

MARY'S STORY

A BIRTH MOTHER'S JOURNEY IN OPENNESS

19 and Pregnant

My adoption story begins back in 1999. I was a 19 year old girl, just starting to experience independence, challenges, and life. I had just graduated high school and was living on my own for the first time, reckless and carefree. Then suddenly I was hit with the raw reality of the choices I was making. I found myself staring down at a pregnancy test. A positive pregnancy test! This is when my life changed forever.

At that very moment, my head and heart filled with so many emotions. Excitement. Anger. Fright. Confusion. Love.

What were my parents going to say? How were my friends going to react? How was I going to raise a child when I could barely raise myself? These questions were the first challenges I would face.

I called my Mom the next day. To my surprise, she said, "We will get through this one day at a time." I remember those words so clearly. My friends were very supportive, but some of those friendships would soon be tested.

A Loving Choice

I spent the next several weeks questioning my ability to parent and raise a child in the best possible environment, with the best possible influences, and the best possible outcome. I could not see how this would be possible with my current lifestyle, which, selfishly, I wasn't ready to give up. However, I was able to make a very selfless decision to place my child for adoption, to give my child the life she deserved.

By the time I was five months pregnant, I had made the decision to place this sweet baby for adoption. I knew this would be the best choice for us, but ultimately for her!

Saying Goodbye

On May 26th, 2000 a beautiful little girl entered this world. She was the most beautiful human I had ever seen. The emotions of my decision and what was about to happen took a tight hold on me.

I decided to spend three days in the hospital with her. This was the time my family and friends needed to say "goodbye." Most importantly, this was the time I needed to hold my baby girl, to start processing the emotions and reality of my decision, and to begin healing the great loss I would soon feel. On the third day, I hugged my baby girl so tight then walked out of the hospital empty handed. At that moment, Sarah Elizabeth began her life with her family!



Mary gave birth to her daughter, Sarah, on May 26th, 2000.

Communication with Sarah and her family started through New Life Family Services. Letters and photos were shared on a monthly basis. Opening the mailbox to an envelope of pictures made Sarah's childhood fly by and allowed me to watch her grow from afar. I still hold these pictures near to my heart as I often look back and think about the 'little' milestones I experienced through this communication.

Challenging Times

The days, months, and years following Sarah's birth were filled with challenges. I continued to make poor life decisions. I moved 953 miles away from my home and was still trying to find myself. During this time, my relation-

ship with Sarah's parents, Dave and Susan, was challenged. I pulled away and I sensed they had too.

“I continued to make poor life decisions and my relationship with the adoptive parents was challenged. I pulled away and I sensed they had too.”

I spent days and nights trying to sort through my feelings and my decisions. Should I back away? Would my involvement in her life complicate things for her? Was I a good enough role model or influence? Over several years, I worked hard to gain Dave and Susan's trust and respect. I struggled internally with how to better myself, which would then better the relationship I had with Dave and Susan and others in my life. I knew that in order to maintain this gift we had, I would need to make some serious changes in my life. I re-evaluated friendships, started a new job, and set goals for myself. The changes I made in my life would begin to change our relationship forever.

Growth & Openness

Our time spent together went from between one and three visits per year to five or more visits. These visits included Sarah and I spending time alone together. We planned to take a road trip together, which opened the front door to Sarah's home. I was finally able to see, in person, where she lived and where she grew up. The decision to grow our openness just happened naturally over time. It happened because of the growth in my life and the love we have for each other.



Mary with her birth daughter, Sarah.

The time I spent alone with Sarah made every tear and every sleepless night worth it. I spent time with her at soccer games, the zoo, and school talent shows. Her friends would say hi to me and acknowledge our relationship. I was also invited to meet her extended family at her Confirmation. Sarah and her parents even sat next to me at my Mom's funeral. Before I know it, Sarah will be graduating from high school.

Six years ago, I was faced with another unexpected pregnancy. I knew that I would not be able to emotionally handle another adoption plan, so I made the decision to parent. Telling Dave and Susan proved to be a bit harder than I thought. They were family and the decision to parent would need to be explained to the little girl that I had not been able to parent. Dave, Susan, and I talked about my decision to parent and how they would talk to Sarah about this. Once again, the mutual love and respect shined through! Dave and Susan were very supportive. I had explained to them that this decision was made based on 11 years of progression and growth in my life.



Christmas 2016 with Eric, Henry, and Sarah.

Sarah has become a wonderful big sister to my son, Henry. The two have a special bond which I hope grows over the years. But most importantly, Sarah has a place in our family. My fiancé, Eric, and I have shared many special moments with Sarah and her parents. Eric has always been supportive of my relationship with Sarah and the growth I have experienced as a birth mother. He met Sarah when she was 14 years old and accepted her, and our story, as though he had always been a part of it. It would only be fitting for Sarah to stand with us at our upcoming wedding! I am so blessed to have her by my side on our special day.

Making the decision to place Sarah for adoption was the hardest decision I have ever made. It was not made in haste, nor out of selfishness. The decision to place a child for adoption is the most selfless decision anyone can make. I made that decision for Sarah... and Sarah alone. And every time I see her and spend time with her, that decision is solidified in the love and respect we have for each other. •

“The decision to place Sarah for adoption was the hardest decision I have ever made. It was not made in haste, nor out of selfishness.”

POST ADOPTION SERVICES

At New Life Family Services, we realize that adoption is a lifelong journey and different adoption related needs arise throughout the years.

New Life Family Services is committed to offering you as much support as possible to assist you in seeking answers to your questions, searching for the child you placed for adoption, reconnecting after you have lost contact, or exploring opportunities for new levels of openness.

Here are some of the many services we can offer:

- Passing correspondence between birth family and adoptive family
- Coordination of in-person contact
- Ongoing assistance with an adoptive relationship
- Obtaining information from your file
- Search and reunion services
- Resources and support

To learn more about any of these services, contact our Post Adoption Department at (612) 746-5670 or adoption@nlfs.org.

TAKE OUR SURVEY

Here at New Life we are exploring more options to support birth parents throughout their adoption journey.

We have created a quick survey to help us figure out how you would like to be supported. We would love to have your input!

By completing this survey you will have the option to be entered into a drawing for one of three \$25 Target gift cards.

Simply follow the link to take the survey.

www.surveymonkey.com/r/NLFS-birthparents

DO YOU SHOP AMAZON.COM?

When you sign up for Amazon Smile, and select New Life Family Services as your non-profit of choice, a portion of your Amazon purchases will benefit New Life.



DEALING WITH GRIEF

A birth parent's unique grief

by Jennifer Patrick, MSW, LICSW, Director of Adoption at New Life

Grief is a topic most people do not like to talk about. Those who are grieving may have a hard time expressing their grief and often times others do not know how to respond to it.

If you have studied or experienced any type of grief, you have probably heard there are stages of grief, the most famous of which are Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages have been applied to almost all types of grief, and can be useful for seeing how someone is moving through grief, or where they may be stuck. They are also helpful for seeing that grief is not a one or two step process.

Although Kubler-Ross' model for explaining the grief process is helpful and important to use in understanding grief, the grief that birth parents experience is unique. It is what researchers call ambiguous loss, a term coined by Dr. Pauline Boss in the late 1990s.

With ambiguous loss, there is often no closure. Those who experience ambiguous loss, such as birth parents, have to move forward and either learn to accept the loss, or live with the ambiguity. An ambiguous loss can also be difficult because it is either not recognized by others, or others do not know how to recognize it.

Moving through an ambiguous loss often looks different for the person grieving as they learn to live with a new normal. The grief of a birth parent is often quiet or misunderstood and can be triggered by life events, such as the birth of another child, loss of a relationship, difficulty getting pregnant or other milestones in the birth parent or child's life.

For many people, it is important to have one or more rituals to recognize or honor the loss – for birth parents this can be a one-time ritual such as an entrustment ceremony at the placement or an annual event such as the Birth Mother Dinner, a retreat, or a special outing on your child's birthday.

With Mother's Day and Father's Day approaching, it may be a good time for you to revisit where you are in your own process of grief.

What rituals do you participate in and how do they help? Do you need additional support (from New Life, from a therapist, a program, etc)?

At New Life, we care about your lifelong journey as a birth parent and want to help you along the way. Utilize the resources on the following page, or contact our post-adoption social worker for more tailored options.

I hope to see you at our Annual Birth Mother Dinner!

RECOMMENDED ADOPTION RESOURCES

Articles, books, websites, and more



LOCAL RESOURCES

MN ADOPT HELP Line

MN ADOPT provides services to support all members of adoption relationships. The HELP phone line is an excellent resource for birth parents and adoptive parents who are looking for resources including therapists who understand adoption.

www.mnadopt.org • 612-746-5137

BELLIS (formerly known as Adoption Option)

Bellis offers scholarships for higher education to applicants who have made an adoption plan and wish to pursue secondary and higher education. They now offer “drop in” groups as well. Visit their website for more information.

www.mybellis.org

NATIONAL RESOURCES

BRAVELOVE

New Life is proud to be a partner agency of BraveLove, a non-profit pro-adoption movement that seeks to change the perception of adoption through honest, informative, and hopeful communication that conveys the heroism and bravery of birth moms. Read BraveLove’s blog for encouragement in your own journey.

www.bravelove.org

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ADOPTION

The National Council for Adoption’s mission is to meet the diverse needs of children, birth parents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and all those touched by adoption through global advocacy, education, research, legislative action, and collaboration. The National Council for Adoption provides a resource list for birth parents to connect with other birth parents on a national level.

www.adoptioncouncil.org

ADOPTION RESEARCH

THE DONALDSON ADOPTION INSTITUTE (DAI)

The Donaldson Adoption Institute recently launched an initiative called “Let’s Adopt Reform” aimed at raising awareness about adoption, inspiring solidarity within the adoption community and advocating for evidence-based policy changes. Join the conversation and track their efforts online.

www.adoptioninstitute.org

RECOMMEND A RESOURCE

Do you have a favorite book or resource that has helped you in your adoption journey? Share your favorite adoption resource with us and we will include a few of your favorite resources in our next newsletter. Email your resources to adoption@nlfs.org.

ADOPTION STUDY RESULTS

The Donaldson Adoption Institute in conjunction with researchers at University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work recently revealed their findings from research conducted over the past year. Research was aimed at better understanding the experiences of women who relinquished their parental rights to adoption and the professionals who work with them.

For those of you who participated in the study, here are the key results.

In the first phase of research, they concluded:

- More than two-thirds of first/birth mothers reported that they seriously considered other options besides adoption, most commonly to parent their child.
- The majority of first/birth mothers who participated in this study also reported limited to no access to information about parenting.
- The lack of emotional and social support that first/birth mothers felt they needed to successfully parent was one of the deciding factors in their decision to relinquish their parental rights to adoption.
- Approximately four of every five first/birth mothers in this study cited financial concerns as one of the reasons they chose to relinquish their parental rights to adoption.

In the second qualitative phase of research, they conducted in-depth

interviews with 28 first/birth mothers and 20 adoption professionals providing insight into experiences that have been rarely studied and therefore misunderstood.

View the full results from the study at www.adoptioninstitute.org.



and its programs



First Care Pregnancy Center

Our four pregnancy center locations offer free pregnancy testing, ultrasounds, STD testing, decision making counseling, and parenting education classes.

Learn More:

www.firstcaremn.com



Conquerors

The Conquerors program provides support for women who have had at least one abortion and are struggling with the pain of that experience. The program provides a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere where one can receive support while gaining freedom from the issues their past abortions may be causing.

Learn more:

www.conquerorsafterabortion.org



Administrative Office
1515 East 66th Street
Richfield, MN 55423
(612) 866-7643
www.nlfs.org

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Birth Mother Dinner

Friday, May 12

Calvary Church, Roseville, MN

Growth: The Lifelong Journey

Registration at 6:00 p.m.

Dinner & Program at 6:30 p.m.

More details at www.nlfs.org.



Walk & Run for Life

Rochester: Saturday, June 3rd

Metro: Saturday, June 10th

This family-friendly event includes a 5k Fun Run, Kid's Race, 2 mile walk, and an optional lunch. It's a great way to support New Life and adoption!



Gala & Silent Auction

Rochester: Thursday, October 26

Metro: Friday, October 27

Registration at 6:00 p.m.

Dinner & Program at 7:00 p.m.



SHARE YOUR STORY

Ready to share your adoption story with others?

Our Adoption Unit is looking for birth parents who are willing to share their adoption stories. Your story is unique and may be just the encouragement another person needs. If you are interested in sharing your adoption story, consider one of the following:

- 1. Adoption Related Events:** Share your adoption story on a panel, in school classrooms, at special events, or one-on-one with someone considering an adoption plan.
- 2. Written/Published Stories:** Participate in our annual Storytelling Day! Sessions are now being scheduled on Sunday, July 30th for a photography session (this time could include the adoptive family and/or your birth child). Photos from this session may be used along with your story in newsletters, online articles, brochures, event materials, etc.

Interested? Contact the Post Adoption Department at 612-746-5670 or adoption@nlfs.org.

POST ADOPTION CONTACT

Rebecca Anfinrud
anfinrud.rebecca@nlfs.org
(612) 746-5670

CONNECT WITH US:

