

Backgrounder

Overview

Headquartered in San Francisco, California, Adoption Connection is the non-profit adoption agency that pioneered the structure of open adoptions within an agency setting in the United States. Although established as a program of Jewish Family and Children's Services (JFCS) of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties, Adoption Connection acts as an autonomous, non-sectarian entity. Since its inception the agency has provided domestic newborn adoption services, and over the years has expanded upon this base with ancillary services to continuously enhance the program.

A small agency with a lot of clout, Adoption Connection was instrumental in shifting adoption away from the closed placement model to the now common open model – where birth and adoptive families choose each other and the level of post-placement contact. This result came about because of the agency's steadfast and vocal advocacy that everyone in the adoption process should be able to make the choice most appropriate for their needs, circumstances and wishes.

Due to the ethical, open nature of its dealings with all parties involved in adoption, Adoption Connection endures as a leader in the field of adoption. The agency's "groundedness" with regard to the true meaning of creating a family, has been, and still remains, the greatest influence on birthparent, adoptive parent and other adoption professionals' decisions to use Adoption Connection.

This focus, in addition, has influenced other developments over the years in the field of adoption, as well as supported the crafting of the new family norm in the U.S. Prior to the new open adoption model, social workers focused on "like with like" placements within a "typical" nuclear family. Adoption Connection played a preeminent role, followed by other adoption providers across the country, in steadily shifting placement practices towards the loving, family environments (no matter how one defines them) that result in making babies happy.

Serving pregnant women and their families anywhere in the United States, Adoption Connection is also licensed to work with adoptive parents in the following Northern California counties: Alameda, Amador, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Marin, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba.

Vision & Mission

Adoption Connection is in the business of making sure babies are happy: This core principle has supported the agency's work, and ongoing efforts to open the adoption process, since its founding by Director Lynne Fingerman (MSW) in 1985.

To democratize and humanize the agency placement process, Ms. Fingerman created a model for Identified Agency Adoption (where the birthmother selects the adoptive parents within the supportive and impartial environment of an agency) – now the national standard. Along with decreasing the shame attached at that time with adoption, Adoption Connection also focused on providing the services and resources that have done away with the secrecy surrounding the placement, thus creating a more positive experience for all parties in the adoption (birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees.).

Revolutionary then, Adoption Connection understood that allowing both sides of the adoption equation (birth parents and adoptive parents) to choose each other ensured that a baby would be placed with people focused on the child's best interests: Rather than just couples fitting a strict definition of the nuclear family or racial profile, this new ability to choose allowed all those who truly wanted to become parents an equal voice. At the same time, birthmothers gained access to a much larger pool of adoptive parents with whom they could place their babies.

While other agencies have duplicated this open model, Adoption Connection stays at the forefront of adoption. From the agency's perspective, no better way exists to effect change in this field than by continuing to build upon the goals of: 1) helping babies get as much love and happiness as possible, 2) ensuring birth parents receive unbiased counseling and accurate information, so they can make the right choices for them, and 3) providing adoptive parents with adoption education and the opportunity to grow their family.

As a result of the institutional acceptance of Adoption Connection's model, these principles, besides influencing the ongoing development of open adoption, in symbiosis, also laid the groundwork for the cultural shift to, and acceptance of, a "greater, all-inclusive family." And, this cultural evolution continues to change the face of families – i.e., to one made up of different races, cultural backgrounds, religious affiliations, sexual orientations and parents related or not to the child

Services Provided – Birth Parents

Adoption Connection's experienced, highly-regarded adoption professionals focus on creating positive outcomes for all parties. In keeping with the founding principles Ms. Fingerman put in place, the agency acts as a means to help connect birthmothers with the services and counseling they need to make the right, informed choice for them – whatever that choice might be. They remain true to this philosophy, even if it means counseling in favor of parenting the child, abortion, or, upon the request of the birthmother, facilitating a closed adoption.

Creating mutually favorable results also means the agency provides other practical (e.g., financial, medical, legal and other appropriate aid) and supportive counseling and education to the birthmother. The form of this support depends on the situation: Prior to the adoption, it can include taking care of the legal, as well as emotional, ties a birthfather has with his child and the mother, as well as mediating the relationship between birth and adoptive parents. And, after finalization, it can also mean being available to provide guidance, counseling and mediation to all parties.

Services Provided – Adoptive Parents

Adoption Connection has always welcomed anyone willing to meet the State of California's prerequisites for becoming adoptive parents. Placements occur (including those involving trans-racial adoptions – a child of one race with a family of another – as well as those with LGBTQ and unmarried couples, and single individuals) when all parties agree there is a fit. To that end, besides the Domestic Open Adoption Program, Adoption Connection, in addition, provides a Stepparent/Domestic Partner Adoption Program and Comprehensive Open Adoption Workshops.

The careful screening process used for adoptive parents ensures they are 100% ready to welcome a baby into their home. As part of this process, mandatory attendance at informational workshops – on open transracial adoption, if applicable, and on birthmother relationships – helps ensure adoptive families using Adoption Connection have the necessary resilience to handle the emotional ups and downs of the adoption journey.

The agency, though, also provides “a la carte” services for those adoptive families actively researching adoption options on their own, or working with other adoption professionals. In this case, Adoption Connection makes available to these families their one-on-one home study services, and other adoption-related functions/workshops, to help them meet the, legal, as well as other educational and practical, requirements of adoption.

Services Provided – Professionals

Besides direct relationships and contact with birth and adoptive families, Adoption Connection provides services for, and collaborates with adoption attorneys, adoption facilitators and other agencies throughout the country in order to complete in-state and out-of-state adoptions.

In addition Adoption Connection has always recognized the vital role that a variety of individuals, outside of those holding professional accreditation and licensing, help play in navigating the adoption journey. The agency relies on their work with women experiencing unplanned pregnancy, as well as adoptive families, as another means to ensure all parties receive accurate, timely, and non-judgmental adoption information and services.

Within the state of California, the agency regularly works in conjunction with attorneys and other non-agency entities handling independent adoptions at the behest of birth parents. Adoption Connection also performs the role of Adoption Service Provider (ASP) in adoptions originating from attorneys representing adoptive parents: In this case Adoption Connection functions as the legally required accredited agency acting as the birthmother's advocate – and which provides unbiased advisement, helps her take care of the paperwork and handles the post-placement requirements.

Adoption Connection facilitates, and has agreements in place to take care of out-of-state adoptions. While birthmothers initiate most of these out-of-state adoption requests, periodically, other professionals also use the agency to ensure requirements are met: These requests occur on behalf of adoptive families finding a birthmother out of state. In this case Adoption Connection can act as a cooperative adoption agency nationwide to find the properly state-licensed agency that will represent the birth parents.

The agency also provides guidance for those professionals working directly with women experiencing unplanned pregnancies – to help them answer their clients' questions about the process of open adoption and their choices. With that goal in mind, Adoption Connection makes available, for free, their workshop “Finding the Words” to the Northern California community of “front-line” adoption caregivers, including medical assistants, social workers, volunteers, therapists, and social services staff.