

# LifeNOTES

## The Oft Overlooked Opportunity

Every day, children whose parents feel they aren't equipped to raise them are adopted by caring parents into loving homes. Adoption can sometimes be the best solution to an unplanned pregnancy. Adoptions can also bring unimaginable joy into the lives of couples who might not be able to have children of their own. Adoption is also good for children who, if not adopted, might not be given the care they need or worse, might be aborted.

Since no federal agency has collected statistics on adoption since 1975, it is hard to know how many occur each year. During the 1990s, all adoptions, including adoptions by relatives, averaged about 120,000 per year<sup>1</sup>. This means that around 120,000 children and about that many couples are blessed each year through the process of adoption.

### A Life-Giving Choice

In a nation where more than a million children are aborted annually, adoption is an option that is often overlooked by women who are facing a crisis pregnancy. Unfortunately, many women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant decide to have an abortion before even considering the possibility of placing their child in a loving home.

A great many factors can influence a woman's decision about her pregnancy, but it appears that a strong preference for avoiding adoption exists. There seems to be a negative attitude in our society toward birthmothers who choose adoption. This attitude must change. Birthmothers who choose adoption should be given the respect and support they deserve. Letting someone else care for your child if you are unable isn't a sign of weakness but one of strength, love, and compassion. It is important that women in crisis pregnancies realize that letting their child be adopted does not make them less of a mother. It shows a selfless and motherly attitude since the women who opt for adoption are thinking about their children's best interest, not their own. However, statistics show that only a small percentage (around 2%) of unmarried, pregnant women choose adoption for their child. These statistics are even more unsettling when we consider that 30 to 40 couples wait for every available newborn<sup>2</sup>.

Right to Life of Michigan hopes to change these numbers by increasing access to information and resources related to adoption. Women need to know that there are options available to them. Some women feel that they aren't ready for a child so they decide to abort, while other women work two to three jobs so they can raise enough funds to support their children. Fortunately, keeping the child and abortion are not the only answers to an unexpected pregnancy.

### The Various Options for Adoption

One of the most beautiful aspects of adoption is that it allows the birth parents various options from which to choose. Most women do not know that the Michigan adoption law allows them choices in the adoption process. Many agencies and adoptive parents are willing to work with the various

needs of the birth parents. A child's birth parents might not be comfortable with adoption unless they are able to have contact with their child. Other birth parents wouldn't be comfortable unless the adoption was confidential. Different kinds of adoption can accommodate most circumstances. The following are different types of adoption from which birth mothers can choose.

- i Confidential Adoption - In a confidential adoption, privacy is ensured for both the birth parent(s) and the adoptive parents. If adoptees wish to meet their birth parent(s) when they become an adult, and the birth parent(s) also want to meet, arrangements may be made through Mutual Consent Adoption Registries.
- i Semi-Open Adoption - In a semi-open adoption, the birth parent(s) may be allowed to select the adoptive parent(s) for their child. This includes possibly meeting the adoptive couple. There may be an exchange of pictures, gifts and a non-identifying letter(s) through the first year or longer.
- i Open Adoption - Open adoption includes sharing identifying information including names and addresses, and the potential for ongoing contact between birth families and adoptive families.
- i Identified Adoption - If the birth parent(s) knows of someone who wishes to adopt their child, the adoptive couple may be referred to the proper agency to help with the adoption plan.
- i Pre-Adoptive Foster Care - If the birth parent(s) is reasonably certain about the placement of the child into a particular adoptive home, the child may be placed there through a pre-adoptive foster care arrangement. This assures that the child can be placed into the adoptive home directly after birth so the child can bond with the new adoptive parent(s) while the adoption proceedings are finalized.
- i Temporary Foster Care - If the birth parent(s) is unsure about releasing the child for adoption, the child may be placed into temporary foster care until the legal waiting period is complete. Many birth parents choose this option to allow themselves time to consider their decision. If they change their minds and decide to parent, this option spares potential adoptive parents undue grief.

## **The Role of Adoption Agencies**

Private adoption agencies play a vital role in U.S. adoptions. These agencies account for about half of the adoptions in the U.S. every year. Adoption agencies help a birth-mother through her pregnancy, the process of adoption and choosing the family that adopts her child. Most adoption agencies also work with hopeful parents, making sure they are capable of raising a child and assist with post adoption issues. Many agencies also work on a personal level with the pregnant woman and the hopeful couple to make the adoption work for everyone. Not all adoption agencies provide the same services so it is important that birth and adoptive parents ask questions to an adoption agency and request referrals before choosing which agency to work with.

## Special Needs Adoptions

When looking to adopt, many couples are looking for a newborn infant. However, the number of infants who are up for adoption in America is small so some couples opt to adopt children with special needs who are waiting in foster care for a permanent family. These children may fit into one or more of the following categories:

- i Children who may have emotional, learning, physical or mental impairments
- i Children who must be placed in the same home along with their brothers and/or sisters
- i Minority children of all ages
- i Older children over the age of five

Most of these children have experienced trauma in their past including neglect and/or physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. These children need a permanent, stable home so they can grow up in a healthy environment. A special needs adoption might not be the correct fit for every couple looking to adopt but thousands of couples and children have grown and cultivated important parent-child relationships through special needs adoptions.

## U.S. Government Helping the Adoption Process

The rewards of adopting a child are obvious for adopting parents. The joy of a new addition to the family, the chance to love a child who might not otherwise receive equivalent care, and the ability to help a woman who is in a crisis pregnancy are just a few of the many rewards that are reaped through adoption. Though adoption is rewarding, it can be quite costly from a financial point of view. In lieu of this, our national government recently passed the Hope for Children Act. This law will make the adoption process more affordable for adoptive parents, especially couples that adopt from overseas. The Hope for Children Act doubles the amount of refundable tax available to adoptive parents. This new one-time tax credit will permanently give \$10,000 per adopted child to parents who have a gross income of up to \$150,000. This is a change from the old policy which gave a \$5,000 tax credit to adoptive families with a gross income of up to \$75,000 and expired at the end of 2001.

On October 15, 2001, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson announced the release of \$8.6 million in grants to start a new program that will raise awareness about adoption as an option for pregnant women. This money will be used to train health care workers at federally funded health centers and clinics to provide pregnant women with information about adoption when providing counseling and other services. Congress authorized the new training program as part of the Infant Adoption Awareness Act included in the Children's Health Act of 2000. This law requires the HHS to start and put in place programs that will help the staffs at federally funded health centers be able to provide adoption information and referral to pregnant women on an equal basis with other alternatives presented to the women.

These grants are an important step in making sure that every pregnant woman who is considering her alternatives understands the benefits of adoption, HHS Assistant Secretary for Children and Families Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., said. Potential adoptive parents are waiting to welcome children into their homes, and all children deserve a chance to flourish in a loving, permanent family. This program will bring us closer to helping both parents and children.

# Right to Life of Michigan Policy Statement

## Adoption

In the interest of protecting human life and offering women in crisis pregnancy situations viable alternatives to abortion, Right to Life of Michigan fully supports the option of adoption. In supporting this, we realize that adoption will not be the choice of every woman facing a crisis pregnancy, but it is a choice that should be available in her decision making.

While there is a surplus of families waiting several years to adopt a child into their home, there are women today being convinced that abortion or child rearing are their only choices. It is important that women in this crisis situation be presented with the life giving choice of adoption and to be informed of the resources available to them.

In every adoption situation there are three primary parties involved: the child, birth parents and adoptive parents. We recognize and wish to emphasize that the needs and special interests of each of these parties should be given utmost consideration. We also wish to reaffirm and support the secondary parties to adoption: adoption agencies, government institutions, abortion alternative centers, and other supportive organizations.

Our efforts to promote adoption will be directed in three major areas: education, procedural and legal improvements, and enhancing maternal and adoption support services.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Flango, V. and Flango, C. (1994). *The flow of adoption information from the states*.  
Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts.

<sup>2</sup>According to Allan Hazlett, president of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, *Internet adoption has many couples elated, other hurting*,  
Lansing State Journal, 1/24/01

<sup>3</sup>Press Release from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on October 15, 2002. *HHS Awards First-Ever Grants to Promote Adoption Awareness*.

**Produced by: Right to Life of Michigan • PO Box 901 • Grand Rapids MI 49509 • [www.rtl.org](http://www.rtl.org)**