

From the Heart. . .

. . . Lifeskills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



One Child at a time—Adopted & Adored Part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 2, 2011)

Have you ever thought about adopting a child? Many Americans have; yet, few actually take the steps. The steps to even begin can be not only expensive but take considerable time; and without guarantees. Yet, if you are one who longs to raise a family, whether from your own womb or adoption, I hope this topic will not only encourage you to try, but to stay the course until you have that previous child in your arms.

For US born adoptions you may have your child in your arms within three months or at least two years, with at least one false start, according to the Adoption Guide 2009-10. For foster adoptions, it could be less than six months or longer than two years. With intercountry adoptions, such as China, less than three months to over four years; Russia, less than three months to over two years; Ethiopia, less than 3 months to over three years.

In 2007, nearly 1.8 million children were adopted in the US. According to the Dept. of Health & Human Services, *Adoption USA (A Chartbook Based on the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents)*, "This group of children is of particular concern to policy makers and the public both due to the government's role in establishing adoptive

parent-child relationships as well as the potential vulnerabilities of some segments of this population.”

Although the number of children amount to only about 2% of the US child population, these numbers are nonetheless quite significant. And the number of intercountry adoptions from 1999 to 2010 total 224,615. The largest number of US adopting parents reside in California, Texas, and New York. The greatest number of children come from Russia and China, then Ethiopia and South Korea.

As of April 1, 2008, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption governs adoptions from about 75 countries, including the United States. The Hague Convention decides which children are eligible for adoption and immigration, to protect children and ensure placements are in the best interests of children.

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, *2011 Numbers & Trends*, persons seeking adoption varies. “Most Americans favor adoption; many have at some point considered adoption. However, relatively few have taken concrete steps toward adopting a child, and fewer still have actually adopted a child.” In 2007, about 30% of Americans considered adopting, but in 2002, only 2% did adopt. “Somewhere between those percentages lies the number of people seeking to adopt—that is, those who have taken concrete steps to adopt a child.”

The National Survey of Family Growth reported in 2002, at the time of the survey, 1.6% of women, including 2% of ever-married women, were seeking to adopt. Hispanic and Black women were more likely to be seeking to adopt than White women. Three-

quarters of women seeking to adopt were having difficulty in getting pregnant or were infertile.

The 2007 Adoption USA survey reported there are three primary ways to adopt in the US. **Foster care adoption:** “Children adopted from foster care are those who, prior to their adoption, were involved with the child protective services system and removed from their families due to their families’ inability or unwillingness to provide appropriate care. Public child welfare agencies oversee such adoptions, although they may contract with private adoption agencies to perform some adoption functions.”

Private domestic adoption: “This group is defined here as children who were adopted privately from within the United States, and who were not part of the foster care system at any time prior to their adoption. Such adoptions may be arranged independently or through private adoption agencies.”

International adoption: “This group includes children who originated from countries other than the United States. Typically, adoptive parents work with private U.S. adoption agencies, which coordinate with adoption agencies and other entities in children’s countries of origin.”

In 2010, our government’s Administration for Children & Families reported there were 408,000 US children in foster care and 107,000 waiting to be adopted. Will you possibly be one of those loving parents giving these precious children a permanent, loving home? In the next article, local, regional, and national sources for adoption will be covered along with benefits and those common barriers to adoption.

Sources: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/statistics/adoption.cfm#gen>
<http://www.theadoptionguide.com/process/articles/how-long-adoption-takes>

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/chartbook/>

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/statistics/adoption.cfm>

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#afcars

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life/wellness coach-consultant, specializing in lifeskills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com.

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Your Child...when things go wrong

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 9, 2011)

With this month's lifeskill, Childcare, the focus is adoption. Yet, life has thrown a curve ball this week and felt there may be others out there who may find comfort as you also journey through some heartache when things go wrong with your precious child. I will pick up on the Childcare adoption topic next week that will offer resources for adoption locally, state, national, and international.

For every parent, no matter the age of your biological or adopted children today, you still hold them in your heart as if they are still your wide-eyed, beautiful babies. So innocent, so dependent on their very life's breath, and the love and care you give them. Deep inside, you have the most wonderful hope for their future and wonderment of the path they will take in their lives.

We all know none of us are perfect parents and bring with us our own unique variety of life's scars. Yet, we still try to be the kind of parent they need in every way. From the first breath your children take, they also start making their voices heard. From their first sweet cries of "I'm hungry, feed me!" to "Can I borrow the car tonight?" they grow up right before our eyes. Then off they go on their own . . . to college, to work, to their own apartment.

Excited about the adventure, they begin making some life-altering choices about what they are going to do with their lives—who they date, what career they pursue, and who they decide to marry or not. Along the way, they may experiment with some unhealthy and heartrending behaviors—a little too much alcohol; maybe some marijuana and other mind-altering substances; maybe some casual sex or one night stands now and again; then maybe an abortion or miscarriage. And as parents, you really don't hear about these experiments and tragic events until they are either seemingly over them or have tumbled over the edge into an addictive life they can't seem to climb out of.

When you get that first or second phone call from them or the police, you think you can weather these ups and downs in your children's lives. You work hard at getting the help you need from family, friends, counselors, even the courts. Yet, when things mount up from a molehill to a mountain, you just can't seem to see the other side much anymore. You wonder if your child is actually going to survive, and the same for you.

Along the journey, you see some progress in your children's choices and behavior. And hope rises up again and you continue on believing, trusting, even supporting them in ways to encourage their progress. Then with one more phone call, it seems like everything they did to set the right course has fallen apart with one more wrong choice. At that point as your heart feels like it is going to explode, do you just give up and disconnect from the very child you raised and adore?

Even if that thought of disconnect is tempting, there eventually comes a small still voice that says, "Your love for your child is forever." Again, I reach for the hope that doesn't disappoint. Letting the grief have its course, I once again choose to hope again

and believe my child will do the right thing to restore what has been lost. With humility, honesty, hard work, and God's mercy for us all, my children will live the life they were meant to have. This morning is a new day with new mercies. May this renewed hope be so for you as well.

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One Child at a time—Adopted & Adored Part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 16, 2011)

When entering the world of adoption, it often feels like you are landing on an unknown, even possibly uncharted, island. Your first steps introduce you to all kinds of emotional, procedural, and financial flora and fauna never seen before. And the critters you run into may or may not be friendly. Yet, your desire and commitment to adopt provides you with the courage, preparation, and patience to investigate this new plot of land you just put your feet on.

After checking out your recommended resources and filling in the appropriate forms, the adventure begins; and so does climbing over the many barriers to adoption for the child, adopting family, and agency. Those barriers will be discussed in the next article and resources for overcoming many of them. For now, let's gain a closer perspective from those who serve their pregnant clients who don't know what to do with an unplanned pregnancy and may want to consider adoption.

Diana Anzollitto, LMSW, Executive Director, for the Hill Country Pregnancy Care Center in Boerne, Texas (www.lifesprecious.org), offers us that perspective. I first asked Diana "What main reasons are given when the center gets a phone call from someone? And what client age range is predominant?" She offered, "The main reason

that many people call the HCPCC is because a woman believes that she may be pregnant. Some may be considering abortion but we do not perform abortions nor refer to agencies that do perform abortion. We do encourage all women to come into the HCPCC so that they may confirm their pregnancy through a pregnancy test and sometimes with a sonogram. We also encourage women to consider adoption or “providing parents for their baby” before making any decision about their situation. People will also call the HCPCC for testing for sexually transmitted diseases.”

I then asked what services does HCPCC provide on their behalf? In addition, what other issues/challenges surface impacting your clients' circumstances (i.e. family, biological father, finances, addictions)? “Our services are all free and confidential and consist of Pregnancy tests, STD testing, limited obstetric ultrasound, parenting classes, education of pregnancy, education about abortion and abortion alternatives. We also provide referral services for Adoption and Maternity Housing, Women’s Shelters and Emergency Housing, Medical Care, Parenting Classes, Job Training and Mentoring, Food and Material Needs, Local Churches. We services clients from Comfort, Blanco, Bandera, Hondo, Fredericksburg, Kerrville, San Antonio and other small towns in the Texas Hill Country.”

Diana then mentioned ways the center helps people get connected to adoption resources. “We always investigate Maternity Homes and Adoption Agencies before we begin utilizing them as referral sources for our clients. There are a number of good quality agencies which we have developed a relationship with over the past 25 years. We are able to call them while the client is at the Center for an immediate connection.

And we also have pamphlets of these adoption agencies for clients who chose not to call while at the Center.

Many individuals and families know very little about how maternity homes and adoption agencies work these days. They are often surprised because of older stereotypes. That is why one of our focuses here at the HCPCC is to educate the community through the schools, community groups and churches about this. We have a very good video presentation called Teen Pregnancy: Decisions, Options and Choices which we can bring out to any group.”

Knowing the HCPCC staff face each any number of very emotional and difficult situations for their clients, I wondered what motivated them to become part of this pregnancy care center? A fellow staff member, Yvonne Gallo, Director of Operations and Outreach at the HCPCC, commented, “What motivated me and continues to keep me as a part of this Center is the desire to see our community stronger, especially when it comes to our youth. This can only happen if we are providing services of prevention to help them toward healthy lifestyles through education and their understanding of the choices available.”

In closing, I asked Diana what she sees for her care center in the years ahead? “In the years ahead I would love to see the HCPCC reaching more of our teens and young adults through our information, education and prevention outreach. The fact that San Antonio is number two among Texas cities for gonorrhea and Chlamydia means, that we have work to do in informing our youth not only about teen pregnancy and their options in that regard, but also about sexually transmitted diseases. I love that we serve individuals and families during a time of crisis and need; and I would also love to

see the HCPCC impacting our community through our preventive educational programs.”

Diana also wishes more young people facing an unexpected pregnancy would come to realize they are not alone and there are caring adults available to work with them and help them through their crisis. “Adoption can be a blessing they may offer to their child and to a couple desiring to provide a family for their child.”

By all means, visit the Hill Country Pregnancy Care Center to learn more about their heart and service to our community and the Texas Hill Country. I offer a variety of resources for adoption below that may help in your journey. The next article will cover those barriers families often face on this unknown island called adoption. The more you research and talk with those helping make adoption possible in your community, the more confident you will become in committing your life to that precious one chosen for you to adopt and adore.

Sources: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/statistics/adoption.cfm#gen>

<http://www.theadoptionguide.com/process/articles/how-long-adoption-takes>

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/chartbook/>

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/statistics/adoption.cfm>

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#afcars

Intercountry adoption, <http://adoption.state.gov/>

Interfaith adoption-Texas,

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/CHILD/default.asp

<http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Application/TARE/Home.aspx/Default>

<http://www.adoptionnetwork.com/adoption.shtml>

<http://texas.adoption.com/>

<http://www.adoptionaffiliates.com/>

<http://adoptuskids.org/>

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One Child at a time—Adopted & Adored Part 3

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 23, 2011)

When you first start out seeking to adopt a child, do you have all kinds of wonderful, positive, confident thoughts about the process? Do you see yourself as a great parent for that child and couldn't possibly be declined or even at some point bow out?

As much enthusiasm as you have in the beginning, potential adoptive parents begin to face any number of barriers along the way. Yet, be of good cheer, there are success experiences as well. First, according to a 2007 US Department of Health & Human Services Congressional survey report on barriers and success factors in adoptions from foster care, there are 28 top barriers adoptive parents have experienced.

A few examples of these top barriers (based on child, family, and agency factors) evidenced during the orientation application period include a change in family commitment (40%), family preparation and expectation issues (20%), change in personal circumstances (20%), and difficulties with adoption process logistics(60%). There were also adoptive parents who discontinued the process prior to completing the

training/home study. The top barriers were adoption process logistics (41%), a change in personal circumstances (33%), and difficulty with agency emotional support (26%).

Adoptive parents also discontinued after approval. Top barriers were adoption process logistics (51%), agency emotional support (42%), and agency communication/responsiveness (49%). Adoptive parents discontinued after disrupted placement, meaning finalization didn't happen. The top barriers for these parents included agency emotional support (71%), family distress at placement/child no longer available (65%), and agency communication/responsiveness (47%). Even when adoption was finalized, although those parents reported much fewer barriers, there were a some top barriers still reported . . . adoption process logistics (68%), agency communication/responsiveness (46%), and agency emotional support (23%).

One of the top barriers specifically for agency case workers was their caseload to the successful completion of the adoption process. "For many caseworkers, this not only included the number of cases carried but also a number and range of responsibilities in areas other than adoption, such as child protection. Both were thought to create delays in the adoption process." Over 60% reported that reducing caseload and hiring more workers was the solution.

Now for the good news. The demographics of successful families who have sustained commitment as adoptive parents vary somewhat. Yet, the majority of parents are either married couples (65%) or single females (29%). The average age for the female was 45 years old, male 46 years old. "The adoptive families had an average income of \$61,991. The average income of the couples was \$72,826; single females

was \$36,922; and single males was \$52,800. More than half of the sample of adoptive parents had completed either a bachelor's or graduate degree."

The top factors that defined successful adoption included parental commitment to child (29.8%), child is not behaving negatively (21.7%), child is showing progress in the adoptive home (16.1%), parent and child bonding (15.5%), parents are prepared for the child's adoption & have realistic child expectations (14.3%).”One parent described success in terms of parental commitment: ‘Raising a kid to maturity where they are self-supporting. And not giving up. And also meeting all their needs no matter what those are. Hanging in there.’ Another parent described unconditional love and acceptance as important for success.” When families were asked if the adoption of their child had been a success, 88% said yes; 11% said they were not sure yet/maybe; 3% said it was not a success.

Along with the child having a good disposition and the agency making a good match, parents who had effective parenting skills, sought extra resources/information, had good training/information, and acknowledged the child's history, considered the adoption successful.

According to Adoption USA 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents “. . . 87% of adopted children have parents who said they would “definitely” make the same decision to adopt their child, knowing everything then that they now know about their child.” The survey also reported that “the majority of adopted children have enriching experiences in their families, and they are more likely to have some of these positive experiences than children in the general population. For example, they are more likely to be read to every day as young children (68 compared with 48 percent in the general

population), sung to or told stories every day as young children (73 compared with 59 percent), or to participate in extracurricular activities as school-age children (85 compared with 81 percent).”

I’ve only touched on the highlights of these two surveys. I encourage you to read them both to gain a comprehensive perspective on adoption, particularly from foster care. You will then be more prepared when you step in to the adoption process. With a clear head and caring heart, may you be blessed with that special child waiting just for you to adopt and adore throughout your lives.

Source:

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/statistics/adoption.cfm>

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/barriers/barriers.pdf

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Childcare – The Webcam Way

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 30, 2011)

For many parents, getting your kids away from the computer and their cell phones are a major task. We all know our kids need a cyber-space timeout now and again to actually be able to talk face to face. Yet, let's look again at some possibilities for a cyber journey together.

I recently came across a website called Earth Cam for Kids, <http://earthcamforkids.com/>. You can virtually travel with your kids with sports, parks, cities, zoos. You name it! Earth Cam is designed for children and kid friendly, fun, and educational. Take your kids to see tigers, search for ghosts, and journey to New York to visit the Statue of Liberty. This is a great way to engage your kids in fun, educational interaction. There is one link, Exploration, that can virtually take you to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. Now isn't that just awesome! Just a hint here to make sure your computer has the programs to view the videos.

You can look inside the clean room at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. Watch the next Mars rover being built. The camera is located in a viewing gallery above the clean room floor. These are just a few examples. So, give it a try.

Your children can also participate in webcam tutoring for that particular subject they may be having difficulty with. You can share in the interaction as well. Check out your child's school for referrals. You can also do a net search yourself and find one like Teach Your Children Well, <http://www.teachyourchildrenwell.ca/WebCam/> or Web Ring, Home Tutoring, <http://www.webring.org/hub/1on1hometutoring>.

The webcam can be a fun tool for interacting with each other, family, and friends. And the conversation is more personal and live. It is also important to talk with your children about webcam etiquette. Knowing what to do and what not to do in front of a camera, and what to do if you experience something uncomfortable are essential elements for any webcam user, young child or adult. According Kids and Media (<http://www.kidsandmedia.co.uk/>) parents need to know these tips to protect their children:

- Think through where you position the webcam. It can be wise to put it in open areas instead of putting it in the children's rooms. This way it's easier to keep an eye on the children's Internet use.
- With teenagers in the house it can be wise to talk about responsible webcam use. Others can abuse personal pictures or video clips made with a webcam. Remember that pictures on the net can have a longer life than young people's relationships.
- Talk with your child about how other people can make recordings of performances in front of the camera. Therefore, one shouldn't do anything in front of a webcam that one doesn't want others to see afterwards.

- Talk to your child about what to do if strangers offer them gifts in exchange for photos, or wish to meet the child.
- An adult should accompany the child if he or she wants to meet anybody in person that they've met online.
- Invite your child to talk with you if he or she should experience anything uncomfortable and scary online.
- It can be a good idea to disconnect the camera when it's not in use. If the child has downloaded and distributed music or films illegally from the net, they've also been involved in filesharing. With filesharing there's a technical chance that others can access the computer and control it, and amongst other things activate the webcam. This way the viewer might see private situations without the person in front of the camera knowing about it. The best thing of course, would be to avoid illegal filesharing altogether, so that all firewalls can be activated. The computer will then be secure from intrusion.

With these tips, you can easily see that the webcam can not only be a great, interactive family tool, but also can be your child and family at risk. So, be sure to protect your kids from unhealthy intrusions into your family's life. You will then be able to thoroughly enjoy webcams with your kids, as you share the adventure exploring our fascinating world around us.

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