



National Adoption Center[®]

There are no unwanted children...just unfound families

A Guide to

LGBT Adoption



And Sheldon Makes Three

Just before his 18th birthday, Sheldon got the gift he had been dreaming about for twelve years. He walked into Philadelphia Family Court with the two people who would that day become his official, legal parents.



“We were just slightly nervous,” remembers his dad. “In the back of your mind is always the thought that maybe they’ll figure out some reason we can’t do this.” But all went smoothly, and there was a party afterward for friends. Two months later, members of both parents’ extended families were invited to a “covenanting” ceremony where Doug Brunk and Lloyd Bowman wrote the words that were in their hearts and committed to being Sheldon’s parents forever.

Brunk and Bowman are two of an increasing number of gay men and women who are adopting children who now live in foster care. Their son Sheldon, now 19, was 17 when he came to live with them.

Brunk and Bowman waited almost three years after they were approved as adoptive parents to be “matched” with Sheldon. “I don’t think I have ever been so nervous in my whole life,” remembers Brunk. “Meeting this person who potentially would be part of our lives for the rest of our lives was scary. But Sheldon was cool as a cucumber. He had had a series of disappointments and he was going to manage his expectations. He had more experience than we did.”

But they quickly established a rapport, and three visits later he became a member of the family. Sheldon has been a blessing to the family, say his fathers. He accepts them as his parents and his extended family is important to him. He calls both of his fathers “dad,” and his grandparents “grandma” and “grandpa.”

“We feel made for each other,” says Bowman. “Our sense of humor is the same. It is almost spooky. We click so well.” For their first Fathers Day together, Sheldon, even with his limited funds, bought each dad clothing he had selected for them and a little set of soaps and lotions. Most important, he wrote them a note about how much he appreciates and loves his fathers.

National Adoption Center Launches Initiative for the LGBT Community

The National Adoption Center has always welcomed members of the LGBT community. In fact, one of the first children for whom we helped to create a family was placed with a lesbian in West Virginia. Fifteen years later, the child, then almost 20, told those who attended an anniversary dinner for the Center, "Thank you for finding me a family. Without the National Adoption Center, I wouldn't have one." The room was so quiet you could hear a handkerchief fold.

Since that time, the Center has continued to work with gay men and lesbians interested in adopting children from the foster care system. Now, we are pleased that funding from the Wachovia Foundation is allowing us to roll out an ambitious adoption initiative with the following goals:

- Spread the word to members of the LGBT community about the children who need permanent families and encourage them to consider adoption
- Work with adoption agencies to create friendly environments for LGBT individuals and couples who wish to pursue adoption

We have prepared the following Frequently Asked Questions, which we hope will address some of your concerns. Please contact us with additional questions or for more information: 215-735-9988 or visit our website www.adopt.org We are eager to hear from you.

Who Are the Children Waiting for Adoption?

More than 130,000 children in the United States, including 1600 in the Delaware Valley, wait for permanent families. Most are school-aged or older. Many have emotional or learning challenges; some have physical or mental disabilities. Others are brothers and sisters who need to stay together. More than half of the children come from minority cultures. The majority are boys.

Most children waiting for adoption live in foster or group homes because their parents are unable to care for them. Some of the children have been abused, neglected or abandoned.

Who Can Adopt?

Many different people can be successful parents. You don't have to own your own home or meet a pre-determined income level to be eligible. Your income may come from employment, a pension or disability payments. Both members of a couple may work.

Prospective parents are usually in the 25-50-year-old range, but age requirements can be even more flexible depending on the child's age. Agencies will consider single men and women and married couples. Many welcome lesbians and gay men, both those who are single or in couples. People with disabilities can and do adopt, and their rights are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act. You can be experienced parents with children in your home or be first-time parents.

Are Gay and Lesbian Adoptions Allowed in Pennsylvania? New Jersey? Delaware?

Pennsylvania permits gay men and lesbians to adopt as singles; joint adoption is still unclear. Second parent adoption is permitted. New Jersey permits adoption by both single gay men and lesbians and joint adoption by a gay or lesbian couple. Second parent adoption is allowed. Delaware permits single parent adoption and does not clearly prohibit joint adoption. Second parent adoption is allowed in some areas.

Does It Take Longer for Gay Men and Lesbians to Adopt?

Agencies that welcome gay men and lesbians can usually effect placements in a time frame that is similar to that for their heterosexual counterparts. However, depending on the attitude of the agency that has custody of the child, the adoption may take longer.

How Should We Present Ourselves to an Agency?

In the past, and perhaps even today, some gay and lesbian individuals or couples will not reveal their sexual orientation to an agency because they fear they will not be approved to adopt. While it is not illegal to omit information, it is not legal to lie when asked a specific question. However, many agencies welcome gay men and lesbians and it is not necessary to withhold this information.

How Many Children are Adopted by Gay Men and Lesbians?

While the number of children adopted by gay men or lesbians is unknown, a study by the Child Welfare League of America estimates that six to 14 million children have a gay or lesbian parent. And editors of the Harvard Law Review, in 1990, indicate that between eight and ten million children are being raised in gay and lesbian households.

Since agencies tend to mirror society, these statistics influence agencies' willingness to consider gay men and lesbians as potential adoptive parents. Most agencies will feel comfortable placing either a girl or boy with lesbians; many will place children of both genders with gay men.

Are There Any Gay or Lesbian Resources We Can Access?

- www.Adoptiononline.com
- Human Rights Campaign website: www.hrc.org
- Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force website: www.plgtf.org
- National Center for Lesbian Rights website: www.nclrights.org
- The Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook by April Martin
- Family Equality Council website: www.familyequality.org
- Gay Parent magazine website: www.gayparentmag.com
- Philadelphia Family Pride website: www.phillyfamilypride.org
- Mountain Meadow website: www.mountainmeadow.org

How Does Foster Care Differ from Adoption?

Foster care is meant to provide a temporary home for a child; generally the plan is for the child to return to his parents when they are able to resume his or her care. If that fails, the child is made available for adoption.

Through a foster-adopt program, foster parents may be able to adopt the child in their care if he or she becomes available. In fact, most adoptions of children living in foster care are by children's foster parents. But you don't have to be a foster parent to adopt.

While some agencies approve a family simultaneously for both foster care and adoption, a foster care homestudy and an adoption homestudy are not always interchangeable. If you are thinking about foster-adoption, it is important to ask how your agency handles this.

Can I Learn More About the Child I Want to Adopt?

Most children's agencies can provide more information about a child than they can include in a newspaper article, in a radio or television feature or through a website description. However, some of the child's information is confidential, and workers may want to share it only with those families they are seriously considering as adoptive parents.

Once you have been selected for a particular child, adoption agencies are required to share with you information that they have, with the exception of identifying information about the birth family. Unfortunately, they do not always have complete information, especially if a child has lived in several foster homes. It is important to ask for whatever is available, including medical reports, results of psychological or educational testing, and information about the child's early development.

How Can I Begin the Adoption Process?

- Call several adoption agencies on the National Adoption Center resource list. Ask the agencies to send you information about their programs
- Connect with a parent support group in your area
- Access www.adopt.org and click on CONNECTING... Bringing Families and Agencies Together
- Select an adoption agency to provide you with a homestudy
- Visit libraries, read books and magazines on adoption and visit online adoption resources
- Contact other adoption resources in addition to the adoption agency with which you will be working to learn about available children

What is a Homestudy?

A homestudy is a series of meetings with a social worker to help prepare you for parenting an adopted child. The process varies from agency to agency; there may be individual and/or joint interviews with both members of a couple or group homestudies with several families at once. Most ask you to provide written information about yourself.

Agencies ask for certain documents: birth certificate, medical report, criminal and child abuse clearance. Personal character references are often required. The homestudy includes at least one visit to your home by an agency social worker not to conduct a white glove inspection, but to be sure that your home will be warm and welcoming for a child. The time it takes to complete a homestudy varies from one agency to another, but families who are interested in children living in foster care are usually given prompt attention.

How Long Will It Take to Adopt?

There is a waiting period for all adoption. The time frame, like the cost, varies with the type of child being adopted. Some children can be adopted quickly, even within a few months, if the prospective family already has a current homestudy. The wait for a baby or toddler is typically between two and seven years.

Can the Biological Parents Take a Child Back?

In order for a child to be adopted, birth parents' legal rights have to be terminated. With most agency adoptions, a child is already legally free for adoption before he or she is placed with an adoptive family. While cases where a parent changes his/her mind (almost always before an adoption is finalized, and usually in private adoptions), are highly publicized, they occur infrequently.

Can I Adopt a Child in a Different State?

Yes. The Adoption and Safe Families Act, passed in 1997, requires state agencies to speed up a child's move from foster care to adoption by establishing time frames for permanency planning and guidelines for when a child must be legally freed for adoption. The law also removes geographic barriers to adoption by requiring that states not delay or deny a placement if an approved family is available outside the state.

Can I Adopt a Child of Another Race?

Yes. In October 1995, the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) became effective. This act and subsequent revisions bar any agency that receives federal funding from discriminating because of race when considering adoption opportunities for children. Another law affecting transracial adoption is the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) that establishes provisions for the placement of Native American children.

How Can I Adopt an Infant?

Depending on several factors, such as your openness to race and disabilities, you have a number of options available for adopting infants or toddlers. They include the following:

- Adoption through a public agency, such as your city's Department of Human Services, or a private agency such as Catholic Social Services or Jewish Family Service
- Independent adoption, most often through an attorney or physician
- Identified adoption where a birth parent selects or has a role in selecting the adoptive parents
- Intercountry adoption where a U.S. citizen adopts a child from another country

Whichever option you choose, you will need to complete the homestudy process. We suggest that you contact a number of agencies to learn about their procedures for approving families for adoption. It is important to obtain fee information in writing from any agency, attorney, intermediary or consultant before starting the process.

What Will It Cost to Adopt?

It is **not** costly to adopt from the foster care system. Often the agency has a sliding fee scale, and frequently there is little or no cost. After the adoption, the children may receive subsidies to cover medical and other necessary expenses, although the family is still likely to incur other costs over the years. Costs of adopting a healthy infant through a private agency or attorney in the United States range from several hundred dollars to \$30,000 or more. Intercountry adoptions are costly as well. Families may pay between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in fees, and that may not include travel and living expenses while in the foreign country.

Is There Financial Assistance to Help Me Adopt?

Under both state and federal assistance, adoptive parents of U.S. children from the foster care system are eligible for a one-time payment of non-recurring adoption expenses. Such expenses include reasonable and necessary adoption fees, court costs, attorney fees and other expenses.

A growing number of companies and government agencies are offering adoption benefits which can include a financial reimbursement for legal and other expenses, agency fees, medical expenses, post-adoption counseling as well as unpaid leave time and help finding resources and referrals. Check with your employer to learn about your company's policies.

Loans and travel assistance may also be available through banks or travel agencies. For information on loans and grants, you may want to contact the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) at 800-470-6665 or www.nacac.org or contact the National Adoption Foundation at www.nafadopt.org

Is There a Tax Credit for People Who Adopt?

Federal legislation provides tax credits for adoptive families of up to \$12,150 per child. To take this credit, complete Form 8839 (qualified adoption expenses), and report the credit on Form 1040 or Form 1040A. Please consult with your tax professional for details and limitations or access www.irs.gov



What Services Are Available Before Adoption?

During preparation for adoption, as you complete your homestudy, an agency social worker counsels you and provides information and support. Sometimes social workers will refer families to special interest groups that support a child's special needs such as United Cerebral Palsy Association or the Association for Retarded Citizens.

They may also provide information on adoptive parent support groups. These may be general or specific to a certain type of child or family; for example, the Committee for Single Adoptive Parents or the Latin American Parents Association. Some groups have written materials.

Family preparation classes are offered by some agencies and mandated by others. The National Adoption Center has developed an online course for families who are interested in adopting their foster child and for those interested in adoption.

What Services Are Available After Adoption?

After placement, many agencies offer post-adoption services for the family. These can include support groups, individual and family counseling, workshops on parenting topics, or ongoing contact with the family's social worker. If a child was receiving therapy or special schooling before the adoption, it will usually be continued. An employee assistance program at your workplace may also offer referrals for needed services.

The National Adoption Center's website, www.adopt.org, offers educational resources. National and state resource lists are also available.

You may be interested in viewing the Adoption Clubhouse, an online site maintained by the Center for children ages 13-18. See page 13.

Can I Receive Financial Assistance After Adoption?

Most children registered with agencies have already been classified as eligible for financial assistance, also called subsidies. Sources of subsidies may be federal or state funds. Discuss subsidies with your social worker and local department of social services and have a written subsidy agreement prior to adoption. Children also receive medical assistance in the form of a Medicaid card. A child's eligibility for subsidies is based on the child's need, not that of the adopting parents.

How Can I Meet Other Adoptive Families?

Ask your social worker for names of other adoptive parents or for information about an adoptive parent support group in your area. Some agencies will pair a waiting family with a "buddy" family who has already adopted a similar child; others sponsor their own parent groups. Access the Center's social networking site at www.adopt.org and click on Community. Get lists of parent support groups throughout the country from the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC). Contact information is 800-470-6665 or www.nacac.org



If you have not already done so, we encourage you to visit all the National Adoption Center's website resources:

National Adoption Center

www.adopt.org which includes information on

How to Adopt

Links to dozens of photolistings including

Wednesday's Child and *Wendy's Wonderful Kids*

National Adoption Center Social Network

www.adopt.org and click on the Community tab, or

www.nationaladoptioncenter.ning.com

We hope you will be as pleased as we are about the

National Adoption Center's social networking site.

We invite you to join us in building a powerful venue that will benefit everyone interested in any aspect of adoption.

It is a place where members of our online community can discuss problems, search for solutions, add information or be a resource to those interested in becoming adoptive parents, reuniting with birth family members or bringing to light other child welfare related topics. We'd like to get to know you and find new ways to help each other!

Foster Family to Forever Family Online Course

www.adopt.org and use the Online Courses pull-down menu.

To further our mission, we have developed an online family preparation training program for prospective adoptive and foster parents interested in learning about adopting children from foster care.

CONNECTING...

Bringing Families and Agencies Together

www.adopt.org

The Center's new family-to-agency matching service makes the adoption process easier for families and increases the number of families who move on to adopt a child. Through this service, prospective adopters have the ability to be matched with the most appropriate adoption agency. Adopters give star ratings about the service they receive, and agencies are able to update their profiles to include new

Adoption Clubhouse

www.adoptionclubhouse.org

For adopted children ages 13-18. Find homework help, adoption information for teenagers, polls, shared writing and artwork, and a parent section. (This site is monitored by a staff member of the National Adoption Center.)

The National Adoption Center welcomes any donation you can make for these materials. The proceeds will be used to help find families for waiting children. Send your contribution to: National Adoption Center, 1500 Walnut Street, Ste. 701, Philadelphia, PA 19102. You can donate via the website at www.adopt.org by clicking on Donate Now.

We wish you much success with your journey to adoption.

Adoption Center Staff

*The **National Adoption Center** and its affiliate, **Adoption Center of Delaware Valley**, expand adoption opportunities for children living in foster care throughout the United States and are a resource to families and to agencies who seek the permanency of caring homes for children.*



*The **National Adoption Center** is a private, non-profit organization. A copy of our official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999, or 1-717-783-1720 outside of Pennsylvania. Registration does not imply endorsement.*



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adoption center
of delaware valley

1500 Walnut Street, Suite 701 • Philadelphia, PA 19102
215-735-9988 • Fax 215-735-9410 • www.adopt.org • nac@adopt.org

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