



# Partners

The Newsletter For Wisconsin's Adoptive & Foster Families



A publication of Adoption Resources of Wisconsin

Winter 2013

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*Partners* is published by Adoption Resources of Wisconsin, dedicated to recruiting families for Wisconsin children in foster care and providing support to foster and adoptive families. The *Partners* Newsletter is written and compiled by members of the Adoption Resources of Wisconsin staff.

Welcome to our new issue of *Partners*! We wanted this issue to give you a peak into our world each day. We are so honored to hear from you, help you, and support you in your lives. Enjoy seeing what we are doing each day!

## Finding Support after Adoption

*We want to thank foster and adoptive mom, Robin Neeson, who graciously agreed to share her family's story with us for this issue of Partners. Robin and her family are like many families out there who find that, after an adoption finalization, resources and support can sometimes be hard to find. Providing that continuing support is one of the core missions of ARW and we are happy to have been here to help Robin, Mark, and their family.*

Almost six years ago, my husband, Mark, and I, along with our two birth children, Tyler, then 13 years old, and Kennedy, nine years old, made a family decision to become a foster family. We became licensed for a specific child, a child who would never be placed in our home, but we have been blessed by so many other children. As foster parents, we found many opportunities to get education and meet other foster families. The support from the social workers, visitation workers, the agency that licensed us, and even the community was very helpful in helping us care for our foster children. Many resources were available to us. However, after we adopted, it did not take us long to realize those same people who were so helpful before, were no longer our resources or support system. We were now on our own to meet the needs and find the resources needed to care for these sometimes high need children.

### Connecting with ARW through Jockey Being Family®

After the adoption of our first child, we received backpacks from Jockey for all of our children. I think it was at this time when we began to learn more about Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW). We were told about the wonderful library of adoption-related videos and books. We later took some continuing education classes hosted by ARW. One of the classes we took talked about anger and emotions that would not only affect the adopted child, but also the adoptive parents. What a relief it was for me to hear many of my emotions and thoughts were very "normal!" Other adoptive families were dealing with the same issues we were.

### Continuing support, involvement, and advocacy

We continued to turn to and be involved with ARW over the years. Two years ago, the children and I attended a "Turn a Life Around" flash mob in Milwaukee, an event co-sponsored by ARW and SERVE Marketing aimed at increasing awareness of the need for more foster parents and encouraging others to become foster parents. Just last year, we needed some serious help with our taxes. We didn't know what paperwork we needed in order to apply for the special needs adoption credit, but ARW knew!

As the Vice-President of the Kenosha County Foster Parent Association, I am privileged to speak with many foster and adoptive families. So many of them have used the

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## Happy New Year!

As we start this New Year, I wondered if I was looking forward with optimism or **hope**. I was recently reading a speech given at a university and it focused on both those ideas. The speaker defined optimism as living if “everything was going to turn out all right” – a rather magical way of thinking.

**Hope**, on the other hand, is a much more practical, but also much harder, concept to live with. I **hope** that we will have a much safer world for our children – but we have lots to do to make that happen. As parents, no matter how old your children are, you **hope** that they do okay. You work hard to give them skills, to give them pride in themselves, to give them the spirit of joy. You teach them the value of education and working hard – but then you rely on **hope** because you don’t know how they will turn out.

Over the last few months, I have been sitting on a state legislative committee reviewing many new potential laws that affect the lives of children, birth parents, foster, and adoptive parents. After all the years at ARW, I have lots of knowledge about laws, but I am humbled each time I sit at meetings and review these laws with all their complex language. How will they affect children? What is the impact on birth families? How will the lives of foster and adoptive families change? How will they impact the work done by the child welfare system and at what cost? It is an incredible balancing act and I **hope** that we, as a committee, and the legislators who ultimately make these decisions will understand that children and adults will have their futures changed by these important decisions.

**Hope** puts the burden on me to work harder, to try to make an impact – but also to understand that I am only one person trying to do my best. So I **hope** that you, too, start the year with **hope** – to be the best parent working for your children, the best social worker helping kids and families. Optimism is nice, but **hope** spurs us forward.



My best to you in this New Year.

Colleen M Ellingson, CEO



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great resources at ARW. Like myself, they have used the library for books and videos, they have taken classes, both in person and over the web, they have called just to speak with someone about the difficulties of adoption. Each of them say what a great resource ARW is and most agree: they wish they would have called sooner! I also know that ARW is working with our legislators in Madison on many issues and aspects of adoption. They are advocates of children, and that means a lot to me.

My husband and I are now blessed to have a family with two birth children and three adopted children. Looking back, there is only one thing I would have done differently: I would have called ARW sooner! I would not have waited until I felt overwhelmed by my guilt of not knowing what to do for this child to attend a class. I wouldn't have made what seemed like a million phone calls, trying to figure out how to file the adoption credit on my taxes. I would have



begun using the library sooner. ARW is such a precious resource. I believe most adoptive families can benefit from something ARW has to offer.

## Staying Connected with Social Media

Chances are you're on Facebook. Or Twitter. Maybe even LinkedIn. Perhaps all three and then some! Social media is everywhere – even nonprofits.

A few years ago, ARW made the decision to “go green.” We stopped printing and mailing the *Partners* newsletter, as well as the *ADOPT!* magazine, choosing, instead, to simply publish each issue on our website. Since then, we have published an enormous amount of content on our family of websites and have grown our online presence to include Facebook, Twitter, an e-mail newsletter, and a blog.

Many of you have found us on one or a few of our sites and you know what a powerful tool social media can be. Truthfully, these platforms have become a megaphone for us as we continue to work for children and families. Aside from giving us a place to interact in real time with families, professionals, supporters, and others, we use Facebook to share photos from our events, announce new publications, post upcoming events, and engage directly with our “fans” to help shape our future communications and publications.

Our presence on Twitter – in two profiles, WIAdoption and fosterprntsrock – gives us a wonderful opportunity to watch what's “trending” in the world of foster care and adoption. We can quickly and easily share and pass along resources, publications, and invitations to upcoming trainings or events.

*Under the Umbrella*, ARW's e-mail newsletter, is something of a micro-newsletter. Each week, we focus on a specific topic and share resources from our family of websites and

content collection, as well as materials available for check-out from our free lending library, upcoming trainings, other web-based resources, children available for adoption, and additional news and opportunities.

Our blog is the latest addition to our communications toolbox. We're still working on the content we're posting and how often we post and would love to hear your feedback, ideas, and suggestions. We welcome guest bloggers who would like to write about their experiences or share knowledge on a particular topic.

Keeping in touch with ARW by using social media is the best way to stay up to date on all that we have going on – classes and trainings, family events, conferences, new tip sheets, articles and publications, and so much more. Join the conversation and help us create families and change lives!

### You'll find us here:

- **Facebook** – [www.facebook.com/adoptionresources](http://www.facebook.com/adoptionresources)
- **Twitter** – [www.twitter.com/WIAdoption](http://www.twitter.com/WIAdoption) and [www.twitter.com/fosterprntsrock](http://www.twitter.com/fosterprntsrock)
- Sign up for our **e-mail newsletters** on any of our family of websites ([www.wiadopt.org](http://www.wiadopt.org), [www.wifostercareandadoption.org](http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org), [www.wiadoptinfocenter.org](http://www.wiadoptinfocenter.org) and [www.adoptionresourcesofwi.org](http://www.adoptionresourcesofwi.org))
- **Blog** – [www.creatingfamilieschanginglives.wordpress.com](http://www.creatingfamilieschanginglives.wordpress.com)





## Our Home Our Family

The *Our Home Our Family* curriculum was created through a five-year federal grant (with additional support from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation) Adoption Resources of Wisconsin received in 2005. This grant allowed us to train 110 families, as well as create an extensive research-based curriculum. Of all the grants awarded, ARW's had some of the best results throughout the country while serving families with some of the most intensive needs. Here are just a few of the results families saw after participating in this series:

- 39% Reduction in the number of times children got into fights
- 29% Reduction in the number of times children got into trouble in school
- 27% Reduction in the number of times parents lost their temper
- 49% Reduction in parents being unsure of how to deal with children's behaviors

**"Our daughter has been with us seven years now. Just this week, she gave me a hug for the first time."**

We are very excited to be offering a spring series of Our Home Our Family. This series of workshops is for adoptive and foster parent couples, and includes concepts to help you better understand your children and their issues, learn new skills for parenting, and find better ways to connect with one another. You and your partner will have the opportunity to connect with other adoptive and foster parents who can relate to your family journey.

**"This is the kind of program that gives families the kind of help that really is helpful. The people involved have been there, done that and know the struggles we are facing. The strategies are practical and doable."**

**With the support of Jockey International, we are offering this series starting in February.**

**Kick-off Saturday**

February 23, 2013

9am-2pm

Breakfast & lunch included

**Thursdays,**

February 28-March 21 and

April 4- April 18

6-9pm

Adoption Resources of Wisconsin  
6682 W. Greenfield Ave, Suite 310  
Milwaukee, WI 53214

**Online registration:**

<http://ohofspring2013.eventbrite.com/>

**Or call**

414-475-1246

**Fee: \$55 per couple**

Includes nine modules with a workbook for each person. Scholarships are available upon request.



**"This program was worth its weight in gold. It should be a must for all families."**

**-Past Our Home Our Family participant**

# The Year Ahead

Providing post-placement services for families is one of the largest programs we have here at ARW – and one of the most important and in-demand. Hosting trainings and conferences is just one piece of our post-placement services puzzle, and, in recent years, we've begun offering most of our trainings with the option of attending via webinar. Many families have told us that they appreciate being able to take a class and learn a new skill from the comfort of their home or office – no matter what city or county they live in across Wisconsin.

Throughout the year, we offer a variety of trainings on topics specific for foster and adoptive parents. We also offer a handful of trainings and classes for professionals working in child welfare, as well as a number of conferences. In fact, one of our annual conferences even involves children who have been adopted and their families participating in various activities. ARW's conferences are held in various locations throughout the state to help reach and support as many families as possible.

While we don't quite have our entire year planned yet, we wanted to provide you with this list of upcoming trainings, as well as some save the date notices for conferences later in 2013. You'll also see dates for our two key fundraising events that go a long way to support the programs and services we provide here at ARW. You can find more information about trainings, conferences, and other events throughout the year on our family of websites, our Facebook page, our Twitter feeds, or by signing up to receive our email newsletter. We hope you'll save this list and take advantage of as many offerings as you're able!

## **February 12th – 6–8pm Introduction to Life Books**

<http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAdopt/Temp/Lifebooks.pdf>

## **February 23rd – 9am–12pm Life Book Workshop**

<http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAdopt/Temp/LifebookWorkshop.pdf>

## **March 6th – 6–8pm Caring for Children Effected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders**

<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/Portals/fcarc/Temp/FASD.pdf>

## **March 15th – 7pm ARW Benefit Concert Featuring the South End Blues Band**

<http://benefitconcert2013.eventbrite.com/>

## **March 23rd – 9am-4pm ARW Family Portrait Day (Two Locations!)**

<http://portraitdayarw2013.eventbrite.com/>

<http://portraitdaywestern2013.eventbrite.com/>

## **April 9th – 6–8pm Single Parenting: Self Care and Building a Support Network**

<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/Portals/fcarc/Temp/SingleParents.pdf>

**April 13th – 9am-12pm WISE UP! the World about Adoption** (Bishop O'Connor Center, Madison) This event includes parents and children together.

## **May 13th – 6–8pm Ask the Doctor**

**June 15th – Jockey Being Family Conference** (Rogers Memorial, Oconomowoc) This is a half day conference including parents and children.

**August 15th – 5th Annual Homes for Kids Golf Outing**, Sheboygan Falls

**September 29th – Pumpkin Farm Outing** (Swan's Pumpkin Farm, Franksville)

**November 14th – 18th Annual Adoption Month Gala Celebration**

**November 2013 – A Place in My Heart Conference** (Wilderness Glacier Canyon Lodge, Wisconsin Dells) This full-day conference is for parents only and features a nationally-recognized speaker. Lunch is included in the registration fee.

### **What people are saying about ARW's trainings and conferences:**

"We have been attending this conference for five years and we always learn something beneficial and useful."



"Our eyes were opened to the worthwhile conference types that you offer. We would love to participate in the future."

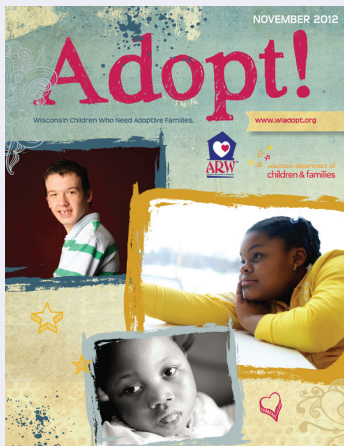
"Best training I have ever received."

"Great training on a needed topic."

"This training really hit home for me. It opened my eyes to realizing I am overwhelmed. Now I can do something about it. Thanks!"

# Recruiting for Wisconsin Children

Over the course of nearly three decades, ARW has grown tremendously in its efforts to provide awareness and recruitment services on behalf of children in Wisconsin. Below is a brief summary of ARW's current recruitment services. We hope this will give you a better understanding of the individual services we provide in the course of our longstanding commitment to Wisconsin children and families.



- **General Recruitment Services** – ARW is an umbrella of information and referral services that supports foster care and adoption in Wisconsin. Our general recruitment efforts may be something as subtle as our magnet hanging on your neighbor's refrigerator to something as large as our many billboards across the state and occasional media coverage on the local news. Furthermore, our general recruitment services can be as personal as our follow-up calls to individuals who have downloaded or requested our informational packets online or via mail to having an in-person conversation. Much of our general recruitment work is focused on increasing the awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families and include an array of services already mentioned above that we provide. In addition, we also provide: recruitment consultation work with individual counties, presentations for families and professionals, social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), agency websites containing videos and other pertinent information, online and mailed publications, billboard and radio spots, etc.
- **Photo Listing Services** – Photo listing services are the foundation of ARW, which was established in 1984 when Wisconsin's Department of Children and Family Services awarded the Wisconsin Adoption Exchange contract to ARW. Photo listing is a recruitment tool available to social workers who are trying to find a forever home for a specific child. Photo listing involves having a child's picture and written description (that may include his or her strengths, interests, past challenges, and needs for a forever home) published on ARW's Gallery of Waiting Children webpage online, in our *Adopt!* Magazine, and featured in other ARW publications (e.g., weekly e-newsletter, Partner's newsletter).
- **Data Mining Services** – Data mining is an intensive review of the referred child's case record that provides comprehensive case information and tools for child welfare and adoption professionals to use in their efforts to locate potential connections for children who do not have a readily identified permanent resource. The end product is designed to serve as an easy-to-read document that historically portrays case history and includes a timeline highlighting significant events in the child's life. It may include identification of possible connections or resources for permanency, including family, and, in other cases, assist the match family and child with events of historical significance to help with adoption preparation and aid in future treatment planning. Currently, data mining is a contracted service that is offered statewide through ARW. Cases must be referred by State Adoption Supervisors.

Recruitment services are the foundation of our work at ARW. They are the services we were first formed to fulfill and we are proud to still be expanding our reach to help find permanence for all Wisconsin kids. For more information about any of the services, please send us an email at [info@wiadopt.org](mailto:info@wiadopt.org) or call to speak with a Resource Specialist at 1-800-762-8063.





## A Day in the Life at ARW

*When the phone rings at Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW), we never quite know what to expect. Could be a basic question about foster care or adoption; it could be someone who has seen a Turn a Life Around billboard and wants more information. Or it could be an in-depth call from a parent who is facing some challenges now that their child's adoption has been finalized. The bulk of those calls and questions are directed to our staff Resource Specialists. They are the front line for individuals and families when it comes to not only phone calls, but also for e-mails and guests who come into our office to talk.*

*We wanted to share with you some first-hand stories from one of our staff Resource Specialists; what she typically encounters on any given day. We also hope this article will give you a better idea of the depth of services we offer for families and other professionals.*

The first order of business is to check for any voicemail messages. I find one message from someone who saw one of the Turn a Life Around billboards that are up across the state. He called in because he'd like more information about how to start the process of becoming a foster parent. This is a pretty common call and a quick one to handle. I call him back, collect his information and arrange to have an informational packet sent to his home. We send out a packet that includes a lot of basic, getting started info, as well as dates and times for the next information session in his area.

Before long, I pick up a call that isn't quite as common. On the other end of the call is a woman who is 16 weeks pregnant and who wants to make an adoption plan. We all know these calls are never easy to make, so I do my best to help the caller feel well taken care of. She shares her story with me and, in return, I give her a list of agency names and phone numbers near her that can help her pursue a domestic infant adoption plan. But I also want to make sure that she is comfortable calling the agencies. So, I also offer some examples of what questions she could ask the agency workers in order to find the right agency to work with. Finally, I offer support group options and invite her to call us back any time if she has questions or concerns – or if she just needs someone to talk to.

My next calls are to some families who have recently finalized an adoption from child welfare. One of our programs, Home to Stay™, offers these families the chance to receive a custom-built backpack from Jockey Being Family® filled with books, a blanket, music and other treats for every child in the

home. As a Resource Specialist, I make a lot of home visits to deliver those backpacks. We also take along a tote bag from Jockey Being Family and fill it with information about our Post Adoption Resource Center. Visiting the families and having a chance to talk to parents gives us a really great opportunity to remind families that they aren't alone even after they have finalized an adoption. Continuing to provide support and resources after a placement or finalization is one of our largest services here at ARW.

Next, I open an e-mail from an adoptive parent who is concerned about some behaviors she sees in her son. Since the writer included her phone number, and because this can be a sensitive subject, I decide to call her back instead of responding via e-mail. This call turns out to be a long and in-depth conversation. Often, what parents need more than anything is someone to listen. She shares her concerns with me and I offer her some resources that have been helpful to other adoptive parents. A lot of the resources we have available are in the form of tip sheets and library materials. And I take the chance to let her know about our upcoming trainings and conferences that might prove helpful.

Sometimes, our guests don't call or e-mail us – they stop in at the office. A couple comes in wondering about the different types of adoption. It's a pretty common question and we sit down to go through the processes for adopting internationally, domestic adoption and adopting from the child welfare system. A lot of prospective parents have many questions when it comes to looking into adoption and this couple is no different. It's a big decision – and not one that they are prepared to make today. But I send them home with information packets and my card and invite them to call me if they have any questions or need anything further. We find that, in most cases, families will gather information for about a year before they make the next step in the adoption process – and we can be here for as many conversations or visits as a family needs in order to make the best decision for them.

*Of course, we can't ever predict the types of calls or e-mails that we will receive; and no day is ever truly "typical." Every family – every person – is unique and so their questions, concerns and needs will be unique, too. But there are no questions that are too big or too small, too simple or too complicated. If you have any questions, our Resource Specialists are here and ready to help. Call us at 414-475-1246 e-mail us at [info@wiadopt.org](mailto:info@wiadopt.org).*

# Home to Stay – Dream Come True Revisited

We first introduced you to the Robinson family in the summer 2008 issue of *Partners*. Mom Patricia shared her family's story of finding and adopting their son Andrew. For this issue, we revisit the Robinson family, who has since adopted a new son, Zeke. Once again, Patricia writes her family's story.

We have been a foster family for around 17 years and have enjoyed serving God through this ministry that our family has undertaken. In the very beginning, we had not thought much of adopting any children, but just opening up our home and our loving arms for them for the time that they were living with us. Then, Andrew, who was God's little miracle to our family, came along and we fell in love with him and adopted him. After that we were a little more open to the idea of adopting and giving a child a forever and loving home.

We were right in the middle of Andrew's cancer treatment, which he was diagnosed with when he was two years old, when the call came asking us if we would be willing to take Ezekiel into our home. At the time, because of the place in life that we were in, we had a little apprehension about having another child in our house. However, they had said that, because of the way the case was going, it would be a short-term placement and Ezekiel would most likely be going back to one of his many relatives within two weeks. We decided that it was what God would want and what he had called us to do. So, on September 23, 2009 we welcomed Ezekiel into our home. He was – and still is – so cute that, even though we thought he was going home, we couldn't help but fall in love with him.

After a while, Ezekiel's case had not gone as planned and he ended up staying in our house for two-and-a-half years. He spent so much time in our home, that we started to feel like he was just one of the family and we loved him very much. There were so many times when he would do something that just seemed to fit right in with our family. He learned to tell silly knock-knock jokes just like his brothers and make many crazy faces. When the courts made the decision to put Ezekiel up for adoption, we jumped at the chance to adopt him. We loved having Ezekiel in our family and wanted to give him a forever home. We all laugh because the case started off as a placement for just two weeks, but moved into a permanent, amazing, and cute addition to our family. We officially adopted Ezekiel on May 1, 2012, and our family had grown once more to make a total of six children: Josh, 23, Elizabeth, 19, Rachel, 15, Matthew, 12, Andrew, six, and, now, Zeke; all part of an amazing and loving family and in a place that they can call home.



*The Robinsons are example of a Jockey Home to Stay™ family. Before their Home to Stay visit, personalized backpacks were created for all of their kids, containing books, games, blankets and other goodies to help the family further celebrate adoption finalizations. If you have recently completed an adoption from the child welfare system and would like to take part in the Home to Stay program, please contact us at 414-475-1246 or 800-762-8063.*

