

VERMONT ADOPTION CONSORTIUM

SUMMER/FALL NEWSLETTER 2017



In this issue....

- Stories from families
- Save the Date for our November 3rd Conference
- An article by Deborah Gray
- A back to school activity for adoptive and guardianship families
- New additions for the VAC Library
- And so much more!

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Vermont Adoption Consortium (VAC) please consider joining us for the September 19th VAC meeting from 1:00-4:00 at Lund in Burlington - for more information contact Catherine Harris at (802) 241-0901 or catherine.harris@vermont.gov

**We never outgrow the need
for family!**

**Take time to celebrate and
appreciate your family.**

Join us November 3rd for the Thriving Families Conference and the signing of the 2017 Adoption Month Proclamation



Welcome to The Consortium's Summer/Fall 2017 Newsletter

As summer winds down and fall is just around the corner please try to take advantage of Vermont's short but so very sweet warm weather! I encourage you to spend time outside with your family laughing and playing together. During November—Adoption Month—you will have the opportunity to learn how important this is in building and strengthening the bonds of attachment between you and your child. Deborah Gray is presenting our keynote “Having Fun Again: Thriving Families” at The Consortium's Conference on November 3rd at the DoubleTree in Burlington. Deborah is the author of many books including “Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma” and you can find an article by her on page 6 of this newsletter.

I hope to see you at the conference—it will be a great opportunity to work on our parenting skills and to join together in celebrating Adoption Month!

Catherine Harris



We are looking for pictures of adoptive and guardianship families working, playing, and celebrating together!

Please consider submitting pictures of your family to be used in future VAC Newsletters – they can be forwarded electronically to:

vtadoption@vermont.gov

Thanks!!

The **Vermont Adoption Consortium** invites you to contribute to strengthening and building the adoption/guardianship communities of Vermont by joining a committee! While you are welcome to join any of our standing committees we are currently seeking members for our newly formed Library Committee—please consider assisting in revitalizing the VAC Library to ensure that it continues to be a valuable resource to adoptive and guardianship families; and those that support them.

The Committees are:

- ◆ Conference Planning and Training
- ◆ Outreach
- ◆ Diversity and Adoption
- ◆ Library

If you would like more information or are ready to join please contact:

Catherine Harris at 802-241-0901

or

Catherine.harris@vermont.gov



From the Hersom family:

September 25, 2017 will be the 2 year anniversary of 'Our Forever'. Daisy was adopted into our family after being in foster care in our home for 2 years. We are a unique situation due to the fact that we finalized her adoption at the same time we finalized our divorce. However, we co-parent her and our biological son with lots of patience, humor, and respect for one another. Together we embrace the every day challenges while appreciating the blessing of having this beautiful young lady as a member of our family.

PUT IT IN YOUR CALENDAR—

Upcoming events you shouldn't miss:



Vermont Kin as Parents Annual Conference—September 13, 2017—
"Understanding Trauma with Hope and Resilience" with Dr. Joelle van Lent.



tonit@lundvt.org

Lund's Annual Adoption Picnic—September 24th from 11-3 at the Essex Fairgrounds. For information please contact Toni Yadow at (802) 864-7467 or



The Vermont Adoption Consortium Conference—November 3rd at the DoubleTree Hotel, Burlington. Watch our website for more information <https://www.vtadoption.org>

Join us November 3rd for the Thriving Families Conference and the signing of the 2017 Adoption Month Proclamation

The Unsung Hero of our Story

The biological children of foster parents are the unsung heroes of the foster care system. They don't hear the words of praise nearly as often as parents do, but in many ways their lives are affected by the arrival of a new child to the family as much if not more and their influence can be even greater.

When our now adopted 6 year old son first came to us, he was 4 years old and in foster care. We had one remaining biological son at home who was 16 at the time. Dan went from being the youngest in the family to being an older brother. He had just recently begun enjoying the benefits of being the only child at home which was to continue for two years. It was his turn for things to be about him, but all that changed. Now the family schedule had to work around the needs of a child with trauma who would be unexpectedly triggered at random times.

We knew having older siblings would help when Colby came to live with us, but we could never have imagined how vital they would be to his development and journey to security and wholeness. Each of Colby's new siblings plays a crucial and unique role in his life. Dan, now 18, stands at 6'8" tall. He is Colby's great protector. When Dan is nearby Colby truly feels safe--perhaps for the first time in his life. What a remarkable gift! Dan is his role model for how to behave and speak at home. He is his hero on the basketball court. On many occasions Colby will match his clothing to be a pint sized version of big brother Dan.

He watches how Dan relates to us as parents and often now self-corrects to change his words to match those that Dan uses. He models Dan's bantering with his siblings and is learning that there

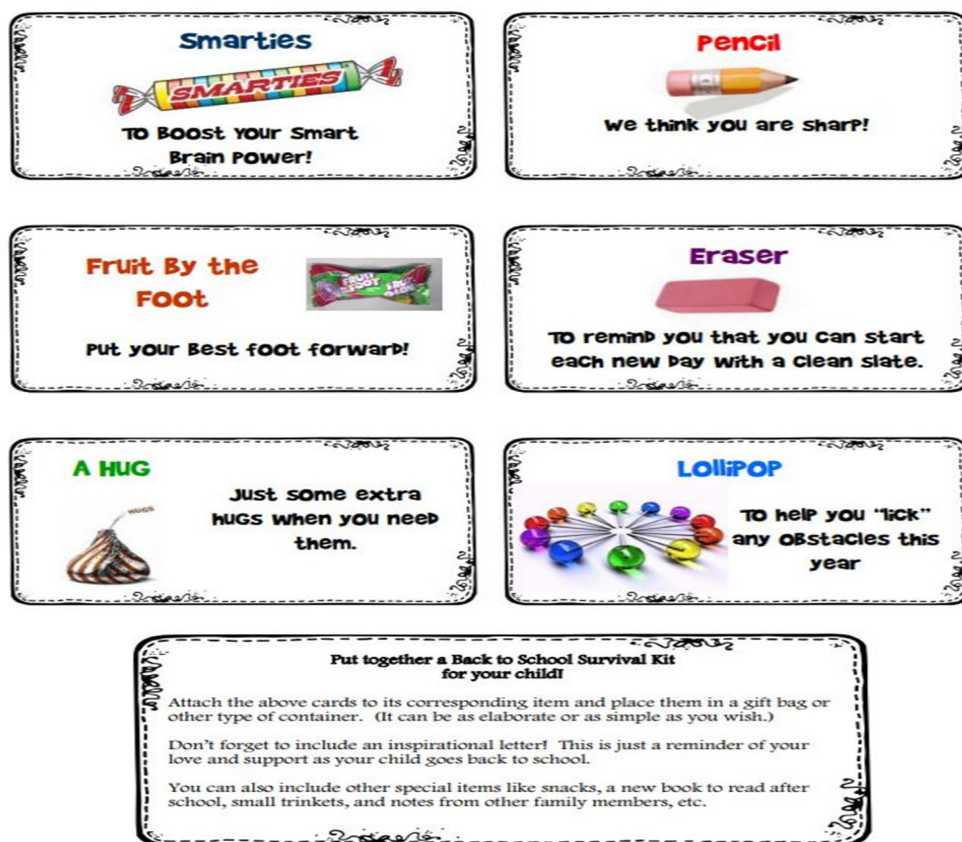


can be a difference between playing and meanness. He finds a sense of identity in being one of the boys. He often says with pride "that's what a Kish boy does" when he carries lots of bags of groceries at one time or hammers in a nail.

Dan goes off to college this Fall, but their relationship will continue. Colby will never forget the two years they were home together or that his big brother changed how he sees the world.

It's that time again — time for our kids to load up their backpacks, refocus and head back to school. Going from the freedom of summer to the structure of being a full-time student can be a hard transition for all parents and children, but it can be particularly daunting for children and parents in adoption/guardianship families; especially if the family/child is new to the school.

When I was asked to submit a piece of writing about going back to school for the newsletter, one of my first thoughts was a back to school survival kit. I researched the idea and found an array of survival kits for students and teachers to help ease the transition and provide support and encouragement for the coming year. Below is one back to school student survival kit that parents can access for free from the website, <https://tipjunkie.com/back-to-school-survival-kit/>.



Article by Pam Montgomery,
Post Permanency
Support Provider, NKHS

But what would the survival kit for a child of adoption or guardianship contain? How can parents help their children prepare for the possible adjustments, questions about who they are, or where they came from? With that in mind I would like to offer a back to school survival kit for the parents who are working so hard to ensure that their children are safe and nurtured—both at school and home.

In your survival kit you will not find chocolate (sorry) or any other tangible prize, but you will find some online resources

to provide you with some ideas about school transitions, questions and concerns. There is a one million dollar bill to cut

out to remind you of how valuable you are, (sorry, it's not redeemable for goods or services) and a big THANK YOU for all that you do.

**Back-to-School Tips
for Adoptive Parents:**

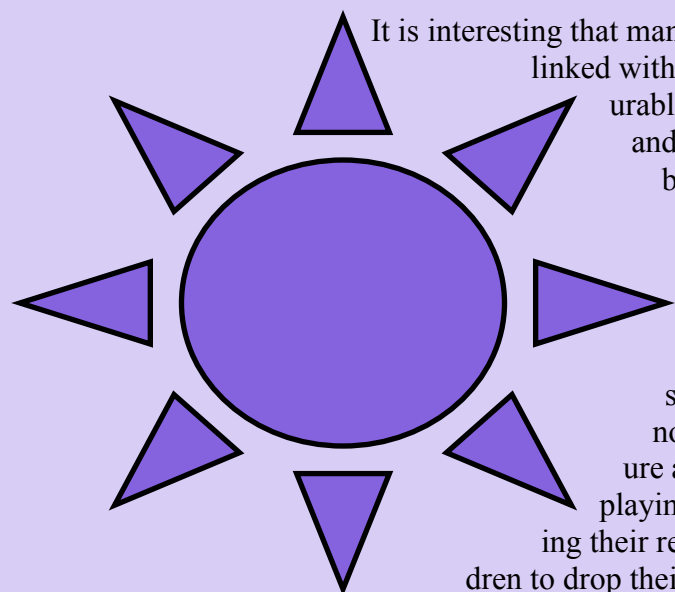


<http://www.rainbowkids.com/adoption-stories/back-to-school-tips-for-adoptive-parents-1771>

Adoption Awareness in School Assignments: A Guide for Parents and Educators http://www.adoptionpolicy.org/Adoption_Awareness_Schools.pdf

Back to school: a guide to making schools and school assignments more adoption-friendly. https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/NCFA_ADOPTION_ADVOCATE_NO27.pdf

Pleasure, Pressures, Play and Attachments



It is interesting that many elements truly important to human survival are strongly linked with pleasure. For example, eating and sharing food are pleasurable. And bonds between parents and children and brothers and sisters thrive with ample amounts of pleasure and fun in being together.

When things start to get tense in homes, often parents decide to talk more and play less. After all, the problems seem serious! But children who are already feeling shamed rarely respond better to *more* discussion of what is not going well. Instead, they tend to gravitate more to pleasure and fun. The fun parent, who starts spending some time playing every day, is much more likely to succeed in transforming their relationship than the more somber parent. Play causes children to drop their defenses and parents to drop their worries—a great combination.

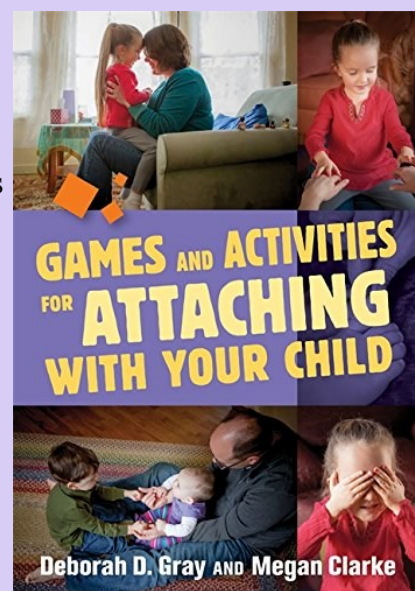
Playing with children may feel like a frill—something to be omitted due to the serious nature of daily life. *Instead, it is a gift that parents and children share.* It is not only wired into children to enjoy play with parents, but it is a necessary part of their development. And, it is a great balance, offsetting the day-to-day pressures that parents carry. It can feel so freeing to step outside of the busyness of life to enjoy the timeless, free-flowing experiences of playing with our children.

In play children naturally have one or more of the following: skin-to-skin contact with parents, eye contact, and a connection to the parent's body rhythms—and vice versa. Play increases children's excitement levels—and their parents' at the same time! All of these are rich in building attachments. Play causes pleasure for both parents and children. And, play teaches a back-and-forth, volley of enjoyment, ideas, and turns that keep both play partners happy and interested.

Play is one of the most important ways that we have to build bonds of attachment to our children. It is also one of the most important ways for children to practice friendship skills. In play, they have to get on the same wave length as the other person. They learn about the back-and forth nature of relationships during games.

So this summer, enjoy these long days. Get outdoors with your children and be playful!

This information is excerpted from *Games and Activities for Attaching with Your Child*, by Deborah D. Gray and Megan Clarke, Jessica Kingsley Press, 2014.



THE VERMONT ADOPTION CONSORTIUM LIBRARY



The Consortium's Lending Library contains an extensive collection covering a broad range of topics and authors all available for loan to parents and professionals in Vermont and New Hampshire. We also have a wonderful assortment of children's story books covering all kinds of subjects.

The library is physically located at the Easterseals Vermont office in Berlin and while you are welcome to come by and browse you can also take a look at the library offerings on line and then check books out via email or a phone call. They will be sent directly to your home!

Checkout the collection online or in person!

Our **online library** can be found at <https://vac.myturn.com>

To check a book out by telephone: Call in your request to (802) 223-4744, please provide your name, address, and phone number – and please spell out your name and address to ensure proper delivery.

To check a book out by email: Email us at vtadoptionconsortium@eastersealsvt.org providing your name, address and phone number.

To browse through the collection in person come to the Easterseals Berlin office: Choose your resource from the shelf – just call ahead to let us know when to expect you (802-223-4744).

We are located at 641 Comstock Rd, Suite 1, Berlin, VT 05602.

Books are checked out for 30 days. If you require further time you just contact the office at (802) 223-4744 or vtadoptionconsortium@eastersealsvt.org.

Recently added books include:

Parenting Adopted Teens: Advice for the Adolescent Years,
by Rachel Staff

White Parents, Black Children: Experiencing Transracial Adoption,
by Darron Smith

I Still Love You: Nine Things Troubled Kids Need from Their Parents,
by Michael Ungar

Somebody Cares: A Guide for Kids Who Have Experienced Neglect,
by Susan Farber Straus

Games and Activities for Attaching with Your Child,
by Deborah Gray

Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma,
by Deborah Gray

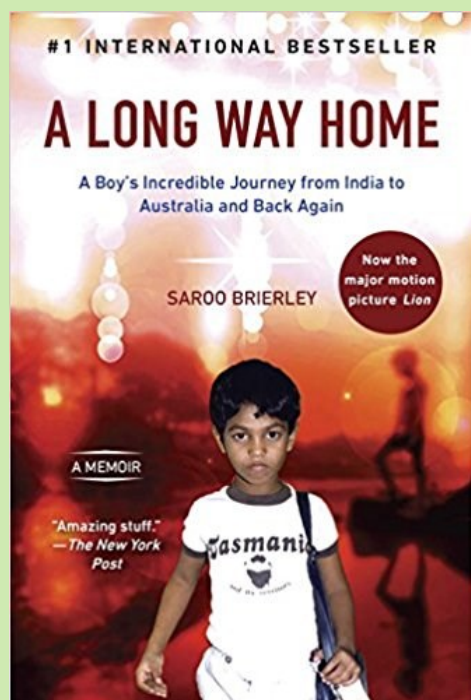
A Long Way Home: A Memoir,
by Saroo Brierley



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BOOK REVIEW: A LONG WAY HOME

BY SAROO BRIERLEY



BOOK REVIEW BY ANN CLARK, LICSW,
ADOPTION ADVOCATES

A LONG WAY HOME, authored by Saroo Brierley, is the book that eventually became the popular movie “Lion”. It is Brierley’s story of living in a very impoverished situation in rural India with his mother and siblings, eventually getting lost in a railroad station, getting on a train by himself at age 5, thinking he was going home, and ending in Calcutta, all the way across India from his home. At age 5, he lives and survives on the streets for a time. He is uneducated, illiterate and unable to recall the name of his hometown but he manages to survive in Calcutta’s rough environment. He is eventually jailed where he is rescued by a member of the Indian Society for Sponsorship and Adoption (ISSA). The woman who rescues him, a Mrs. Sood, very much becomes a surrogate mother in Saroo’s life.

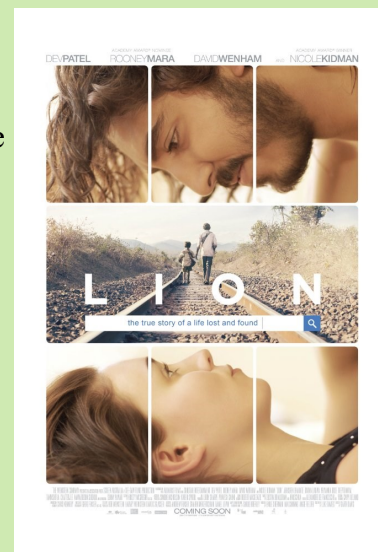
Mrs. Sood’s attempts to locate Saroo’s family but he quite cannot remember the name of the town where his family lives so he is eventually placed for adoption with a very loving and nurturing couple in Tasmania. Saroo attaches well to his new family and leads a life filled with education and wonderful recreational opportunities. He is happy but clings to the last memories of his hometown and family in India, and always wondered if he’d ever find them again. After an exhaustive google map search, he is able to determine where his family had lived in India, and amazingly, twenty-five years later, he returns to India to find his birth family. He did his search with the full support and love of his adoptive family.

In India, he finds his mother and two of his siblings and their families. He is sad to learn that his older brother whom he worshiped had died at a young age from hopping trains.

This book and the movie are very much the story of a person who has been adopted putting the pieces of his life together. He is very clear that his adoptive family is his primary family but he forms a wonderful bond with his birth family and helps his mother move to better housing. Saroo maintains an ongoing relationship with his birth family and feels a sense of completeness and identity.

This book and the movie are excellent vehicles to help adolescents gain mastery over their adoption. The book is written on the young adult level and is an easy read for an adolescent to read alone or with a parent.

As I read the book, I could not help but think of the children that I helped place for adoption from the International Mission of Hope in India who were found abandoned in nursing homes in India and never will be able to meet their birth families. I also thought of the adopted children from China whose recorded history begins with being abandoned and found by authorities. Again, these children will never have the experience that Saroo had in terms of a reunion with his birth family. In those instances, the culture of the country of origin becomes “the family” for the adoptive person but is never the same as a reunion.



THE SUPPORT GROUP BECAME MY “LIFELINE”

Lynn Granger

It's hard to believe it was 19 years ago when I saw a notice in our local paper about a support group for grandparents raising their grandchildren. The group met weekly at a local church and childcare was provided. My first thought was “Great!” I had so many questions! But that was immediately followed by the thought—**EVERY** week??

I had been involved in my grandson's life from his birth in 1996, but now had him on a semi-permanent basis as my daughter was trying to get her life together. I was teaching middle school full time, caring for my two year old grandson and overwhelmed by everything going on with my daughter. I decided to attend one meeting. If it was helpful I would go occasionally but definitely not every week. (Nineteen years later I am still going to meetings regularly.)



The support group was my **LIFELINE** especially in the early years. My grandson and I were adjusting to a different life, dealing with many challenges around parental visits, court proceedings, threats, police and attorneys, and so much more. I truly would never have been able to survive had it not been for the people in the support group.

Over the years, the group became an “extended family” helping each other out. We were there not only for the meetings; we cared about each other. Group members truly understood what each was going through. Our stories were the same though the details were different. When we took the children we lost a social life and connections with others. We had to plan ahead to get together with friends, which included finding babysitters—not easy to do. For me, the group also helped satisfy my need for adult interaction.

One of the greatest benefits of the group was the childcare that was provided. It served many purposes, primarily allowing us to attend the meetings. It also became safe place for the children. Unlike being in school, they didn't hear questions like “Why aren't you living with your parents?” Over the years many of the children became close, which enriched their lives. Even today, as young adults, some of them are close friends and get together often, which is so delightful to see. They are part of the group's “extended family”. (continued on next page)

THE SUPPORT GROUP BECAME MY “LIFELINE” (continued)

I was so grateful to have been with people who truly understood the challenges I was facing, could help me move forward, and even laugh once in a while. The group was my LIFELINE!!

Note: I continue to attend the Grandparents As Parent Support Group in Milton regularly. The group members are good friends. As new families join, we can answer questions, give them ideas and support, and help them know that they are not alone and will make it through the challenges. I truly would not have been able to get through the last 19 years without it and would encourage any grandparent or relative raising a child to at least try a support group in their area!!

VERMONT SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FAMILIES

The following Support Groups are provided by the Vermont Adoption Consortium in collaboration with Post permanence Services (From Lund, Easterseals, NFI or NKHS). Some groups are also co-sponsored by community partners or are community based support groups.

Addison County

Support Group for Adoptive and Guardianship Families held the 4th Tuesday of the month. 5:30-7:00 pm. Please contact Donna Provin for more information and for the location at (802) 343-0565 or email donnap@lundvt.org

Brattleboro

Support Group for Adoptive and Guardianship Parents the second Monday of the month, 6:30-8:30 pm. Please contact Danna Bare, M Ed, for more information and for the current location (802) 258-0308

Chittenden County

Chittenden County Circle of Parents Support Group for Adoptive and Guardianship Families
This group is held the LAST Tuesday of every month from 5:00-6:30pm in South Burlington. Pre-registration is required. For more information or to RSVP, contact Katherine Boise, BSW, M.Ed at Lund at (802) 864-7467.

Franklin County

1st Thursday of every month at the Senior Center, 75 Messenger Street, St. Albans from 5:30-7:30 pm. Dinner and childcare provided at no cost. Please contact Nina Kempf-Miller (802) 495-6187 or Monica Darrah (802) 495-6535 to RSVP or for more information.

Morrisville

2nd Thursday of the month, the Morrisville DCF office - 9:00—11:00 am. For information contact Karen Langdell, Easterseals of Vermont, (802) 730-6667

Shaftsbury

3rd Thursday of the month from 7 - 9 pm at the Shaftsbury Methodist Church. For more information contact: Amy Prentiss-Rogers at (802) 343-6310 or Jill C. Bouton at (802) 223-4744

Springfield

Learning Circle for Foster and Adoptive Parents meets the third Wednesday of each month from 6 to 8 pm at the Springfield Family Center—conference room, 365 Summer St, Springfield, VT 05156. Please call Danna Bare for more information (802) 258-0308

Upper Valley

Kinship Care Support Group meets the first Thursday of each month, 12:00-1:30 pm, 2458 Christian Street, Wilder, VT (next to Dothan Brook School on Route 5). For more information contact: Judith Bush, ACSW (802) 356-9393 x 2 or jbush@together.net

Other support groups of interest:

Montpelier

Families of Color, open to all families. Play, eat and discuss issues of adoption, race and multiculturalism. Bring snacks and games to share, and dress for the weather. Third Sundays, 3–5 p.m. Unitarian Church, 130 Main Street, Montpelier.

Alyson, 439-6096 or alyson.mahony@gmail.com

Milton

Grandparents as Parents Support Group meets the first Monday of the month from 6:30-8:00 pm at New Life Christian Church. Childcare is provided. For more information call (802) 893-3838.

POST PERMANENCE SERVICES FOR FAMILIES



Families formed by adoption or guardianship may need support and those needs usually change over time as children and families grow and change. Post Permanency Services address the normal issues adoptive and guardianship families face as well as more significant issues that can arise when raising a child who has experienced a traumatic start in life.

Supports offered include:

- ◆ In-home adjusted parent education, identifying strengths and challenges and developing plans that foster growth
- ◆ Consultation to treatment teams and advocacy, providing education supports within schools and collaborating with treatment teams
- ◆ Referrals to community resources
- ◆ General adoption/guardianship information
- ◆ Kinship placement support



These services are provided by a Post Permanence Service Provider meeting with the family and working with them to assess and determine what services are needed.

Together a plan will be made and goals set for these services. To support the family in meeting their goals the Post Permanence provider will be meeting with the family monthly in their home as well as attending any meetings that the family identifies—such as treatment team meetings and school meetings.



On the next page you will find one family's story and the impact Post Permanence Services has had in their lives.

Post Permanence Services are available to adoptive and guardianship families. For information regarding services in your area please contact:

NEWPORT, ST. JOHNSBURY AHS Districts
NKHS Northeast Kingdom Human Services

P.O. Box 724, Newport, VT 05855
 Karen Hack, Supervisor, (802) 334-6744 x2140
khack@nkhs.net

ST ALBANS AHS District
NFI, Northeast Family Institute
 12 Fairfield Hill Road, St. Albans, VT 05478
 Kriss Lococo, Regional Manager, (802) 524-1700
Kristenlococo@nafi.com

BARRE, BENNINGTON, BURLINGTON, HARTFORD, MORRISVILLE, RUTLAND AHS Districts

EASTERSEALS
 641 Comstock Road, Suite 1, Berlin, VT 05602
 Lynn Bessette, Program Manager (802) 279-4241
lbessette@eastersealsvt.org

BRATTLEBORO, BURLINGTON, MIDDLEBURY, SPRINGFIELD AHS Districts

LUND
 P.O. Box 4009, Burlington, VT 05401
 Melissa Appleton, Supervisor (802) 864-7467
 X2019 C: 782-3311 melissaa@lundvt.org

Appreciation for Post Permanence Services:

Here is what one family wrote to their school team to communicate their son's experience of the world

I was thinking about how to explain to everyone, how my child feels when he's having difficult moments/meltdowns. He has told me on several occasions after he's had a meltdown. I can't control my anger."

I want everyone to really think about this before our school meeting. Think about how my child must feel by putting yourself in his shoes even just for a moment. Imagine having a major trauma in your life at 3 years old; losing your 5 year

old brother & best friend instantly by death, while you were with them; then having your dad walk out on you only 6 months after your brother's death and never seeing him again; being placed in DCF custody; being put into a complete stranger's home at the age of 4; and being told they are safe people and you can trust them, they will take good care of you. Can you imagine possibly reliving these moments over and over every day and you know what happened but don't know how to verbally communicate it.

Thank You!

How would you feel, with all of this going on repeatedly over and over in your head, he's only 8 years old, with all of this trauma, autism, and sensory problems plus whatever else we don't know about, going on in his young life. Would you be able to function as a normal child every day without having any difficulties throughout your day? Would you be able to stay focused on your school work, without needing to be redirected several times while doing 1 single assignment? Would you be able to keep your anger and extreme feelings under control when someone, whether being a peer/adult or something else, startle's you, or upsets you, unintentionally? Or would you go into fight mode to keep yourself safe from harm? Could you get through your day without being physically and verbally out of control, and there being a very high possibility in your hurting someone unintentionally? Then feeling absolutely horrible for what you did and/or said to your peers and adults around you, because you lost complete control over everything around you and of your own body.

I hope everyone takes the time to think about this. Try to feel what he feels every day of his life. Not knowing from one moment to the next if he can make it through what's coming next. Not knowing if you are going to have nightmares all night, reliving everything that has happened to you. Keep all of this in mind when you're thinking about his future and wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of those around him.

*I would like to **thank** the Post Permanency Services staff they are more than that to us, they are family. They have been a wonderful asset to me and my family. As they have many wonderful people to work with, who are a wealth of knowledge and support. Whether it being just to listen to me vent and bounce ideas off from, or to giving me advice, on how to deal with difficult birth family member's, or how to deal with impossible school staff. Giving us awesome contacts to help with these struggles we are having at that point and time in our lives. Thank you all for what you do. I wouldn't know where I'd be today without you.*

**VERMONT
ADOPTION CONSORTIUM**

CONFERENCE

November 3rd, 2017

DoubleTree Hotel, Burlington

**Save the
Date**



**Having Fun
Again:
Thriving Families**

**Keynote:
Deborah Gray**

Author of

Attaching with Love, Hugs, and Joy,

Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents,

Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma,

and co-author of **Games and Activities for Attaching with Your Child**

November 3, 2017

Join us November 3rd for the Thriving Families Conference and the signing of the 2017 Adoption Month Proclamation

It is with great sadness that I share with you that Diane Dexter passed away peacefully on August 3rd surrounded by loving family and friends. Her contributions to advancing permanency practice in Vermont were enormous as she worked as the DCF Adoption Chief from 1993 until her retirement in 2016. Her commitment to the children of Vermont and the families who stepped forward to adopt or provide guardianship remained deep and true throughout her career and she was recognized as a national leader in adoption. Her accomplishments include receiving the Angel in Adoption Awards on three occasions, the National Excellence in Adoption Award, she was recognized by Child Safe for her work in collaboration and planning for foster children, and the Vermont Children's Aid Society honored Diane with a certificate in Excellence in Social Work.

A celebration of her life is being planned for mid-September; if you are interested in receiving more information regarding this celebration please email vtadoption@vermont.gov or call 802-241-0901.

If you would like to offer a memory, photograph, story, or reflection to be shared at the celebration please email it to vtadoption@vermont.gov or mail it to:

Vermont Adoption Consortium
System of Care, Family Services Division
280 State Drive, HC 1 North
Waterbury, Vermont 05671