

# Adoption Option Reports

Adoption Option Council of Minnesota

Fall 2011

## Our Stories Set Us Apart

Virtual scrapbook celebrates adoption and helps others understand this choice

What sets a birth parent, adopted person or adoptive parent apart from anyone else in Minnesota? It's our stories. They aren't easy stories. They might seldom be told. But they are some of the most powerful love stories in our state.

To celebrate these stories, the Adoption Option Council of Minnesota has created an online scrapbook called "Minnesota Loves Adoption," as a place for people to share, inspire and learn. The essays, poems, artwork and photos posted on this scrapbook are simply beautiful. We are so grateful!

If your story isn't in the scrapbook yet, we ask:

- What do you love about adoption?
- Have you lived an adoption journey?
- Have you witnessed one in amazement?

We invite you to take some time today to share your story at [minnesotalovesadoption.org](http://minnesotalovesadoption.org). Your story matters and it may very well inspire someone else or help them better understand adoption as a loving choice.

Adoption Option Council of Minnesota has had several opportunities to promote this project in the media, including on KARE 11, the NBC affiliate in the Twin Cities. Visit [adoptionoptionmn.org](http://adoptionoptionmn.org) to view a clip and hear the story of Geri Gruber, a devoted volunteer and active member of AOCM's speakers' panel.

This is the story Geri wrote for the scrapbook:

### A Child Surrounded by Love

I am a birth grandmother. My daughter and her boyfriend were 16 when they realized they were pregnant; juniors in high school. After the initial shock, my heart ached at the challenges that they both faced. As her mother I knew I had to be present for her while in this vulnerable place.

For months we prayed, we cried, we laughed, we had serious discussions, we made pro/con lists pertaining to all the 'what ifs' and unknowns. Through this process my daughter and her boyfriend decided the best thing for their baby was adoption.

I despise the saying 'gave the baby up' for they gave nothing up. Their decision was made from a place of unconditional

**30 STORIES  
30 DAYS**

Adoption Awareness Month  
Share your story. Inspire others.  
[MinnesotaLovesAdoption.org](http://MinnesotaLovesAdoption.org)

In recognition of National Adoption Awareness Month, please help AOCM reach its goal of adding one new story to [minnesotalovesadoption.org](http://minnesotalovesadoption.org) each of the 30 days of November. Visit the online scrapbook to submit your story.

The author of each new story will be entered into a drawing to win a \$100 Archivers gift card!



To stay up-to-date throughout the month, "like" us on Facebook.

love so their little one could have the opportunity to spend these crucial beginning-of-life years in a stable home with both a mother and father present.

They chose the adoptive parents and found the most wonderful couple. This little one will grow up knowing what his birth parents did for him and also know us as family as they decided on an open adoption.

I cannot fully grasp how my daughter has come to terms with all this except by the grace of God. I am in awe of her strength and grateful she had her boyfriend to see her through this challenging time. The courage they both walked with in this journey was amazing. They showed such maturity amidst great fears; constantly trying to keep what was best for their baby in front of them.

We don't know the rest of the journey — but I am grateful beyond measure. This first grandchild of mine is surrounded by so much love.

## The President Reports



Friends of Adoption Option Council of Minnesota:

I want to begin by thanking everyone for their ongoing support of AOCM. While I have only been president for a few months, I have greatly enjoyed being involved with this organization over the last couple of years.

As the organization has continued to change and evolve, we have been able to accomplish a lot. From the creation of an advisory council to rebranding to building the Minnesota Loves Adoption scrapbook site, we continue to find new ways to reach Minnesotans with positive information about adoption and reaffirm the adoption option.

With National Adoption Month upon us, we are continuing to identify creative ways to share adoption stories and further the AOCM mission. A new initiative to gather 30 stories in 30 days will challenge us to tell the adoption story in unique and engaging ways through the many people who have experienced adoption. We encourage you to share what adoption means to you.

Finally, I want to give a special thanks to Christiansen Creative who has truly added to the value of the AOCM brand. We are grateful for your support and look forward to continued partnership.

Best,  
Amanda

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## Board Update

Welcome to the board



Please join me in welcoming our newest board member, Ryan May. With more than 12 years of public relations, marketing and communications leadership, Ryan is a welcome addition to the board. The father of an adopted son who recently turned three, he also has a two-year-old daughter — together they keep he and his wife very busy. In his spare time, Ryan runs a Minnesota public relations blog sharing the most recent news, jobs and events in Minnesota PR — [mnprblog.com](http://mnprblog.com).

As a board member, Ryan will be assisting with outreach to local community organizations to identify speaking opportunities to share the AOCM story. We are excited to have Ryan as a part of the board.

## Scholarships a Path to Future Success

Scholarships provide another way we can support and reaffirm the loving choice of birthparents in Minnesota. This year, we have awarded four scholarships totaling \$5,000 to students. If you would like more information about AOCM's scholarship program, visit [adoptionoptionmn.org](http://adoptionoptionmn.org).

To Phyllis Ellefson & Adoption Option Council,

**Thank you so much** for helping me to pursue my educational dreams. This scholarship and the grant will help me more than you know! I greatly appreciate you having a program like this for people like me who have chosen adoption for their child. Even though it was tough at times, my boyfriend and I know we did what is best for our baby girl. We look forward to watching her grow and we are excited to have a life-long relationship with her and her adoptive family. I am now entering into my second year at the College of St. Scholastica. I am majoring in occupational therapy and minoring in psychology. Thank you again for this amazing gift and opportunity.

Sincerely,  
Tess Jasken

## Grants Reaffirm Loving Choice

Birthparent grants provide a way to reaffirm the adoption option and show support for this loving choice. Having provided more than 1,000 birthparents with financial assistance, we continue to give grants for medical, education and rent expenses. During the last fiscal year, we gave 18 grants to Minnesota women between the ages of 18 and 41.

**“There are no unwanted children,  
just unbound families.”**

The National Adoption Center

## This is Love

I know you love me  
You loved me from the start  
I know that you want the best for me  
I know this because you made a plan for me  
A plan so I would grow up with my mom and dad  
A mom and dad you knew would love me as much  
as you do  
I know it tore your heart apart to make this plan  
for me  
I know it hurt when you put me first  
I know that you feel the pain of empty arms  
I know that my pictures are spread across your  
walls to try and fill the hole  
Your love was bigger than the pain  
It would have been so easy for you to hold me  
tight and never let me go  
But you were too strong for that  
You knew what your love would do  
You knew the pain would heal  
You knew I needed my mom and dad  
And you knew they needed me  
You knew I would be loved  
And that when love is shared it grows  
I know that love  
I feel it every day  
Every time my mom picks me up and holds me  
Every time my dad laughs at some little thing I do  
When they wake me up to squeeze me in  
the morning  
And when they put me down in bed for night  
I know that I am loved

This is love  
You died inside when you showed your love  
You sacrificed your world for me  
I will always remember what you gave  
You gave me life  
You gave me my parents  
You gave me love

This is love

“My child, this is my love for you! From your  
birth mother.” — Sandra

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## New Volunteer to Support ITK Campaign



AOCM’s award-winning “In the Know” (ITK) adoption awareness campaign will now be under the direction of talented new volunteer, Kate Gillen. Kate is currently a senior communications specialist at William Mitchell College of Law. Prior to her current role, she held various communication and public relation roles at the Target Corporation, and also at a nonprofit organization called People Serving People.

After creating an open adoption plan for her son, Michael, in 2001, Kate became passionate about being an advocate for adoption. She has volunteered for Children’s Home Society and Family Services for nearly 10 years providing counseling to prospective birthmothers and sharing her adoption story on educational panels for adoptive families, birthparents, students, and others within the community. In addition to her new role as ITK coordinator, Kate has also begun sharing her adoption story through AOCM’s speakers’ panel.

ITK is an online-based campaign designed to help facilitate presentations and educated discussions about adoption. While it is not a counseling tool, it does help people explore the realities of adoption planning, understand ways to support a friend through the adoption process, and realize the social importance of adoption. To implement ITK at your local school, youth group or community organization, contact Kate at [info@adoptionoptionmn.org](mailto:info@adoptionoptionmn.org).

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## Interested in Volunteering With AOCM

We are always looking for volunteers to help share positive information about the adoption option and communicate the mission of AOCM. Volunteer opportunities include:

- Speaker coordinator — Develop comprehensive listing of AOCM speakers, their stories and availability; help promote AOCM speakers to community and corporate groups.
- Mailing list assistance — Help manage and maintain AOCM’s mailing list to ensure we can continue to support and affirm the adoption option.

For more information visit [adoptionoptionmn.org](http://adoptionoptionmn.org) or contact Jenny Eldredge at [jenny@adoptionoptionmn.org](mailto:jenny@adoptionoptionmn.org).

# Adoption Option Advisory Committee

We are grateful for the guidance and enthusiasm of the following community leaders, who serve on the Adoption Option Advisory Committee:

Emily Alewine MSW, LGSW, Pregnancy Counseling Services, Lutheran Social Service of MN	Barb McGuire Director of Adoption Services, Children's Home Society & Family Services	Roger Toogood Retired CEO, Children's Home Society & Family Services
Linda Cooper, RN HealthPartners	Amy Mische MSW, LISW, Domestic Adoption Social Worker, Children's Home Society & Family Services	Betsy Trondson Social Worker, Lutheran Social Services
Jody Ollyver DeSmidt Walling, Berg & Debele, P.A.	Kathy O'Sullivan Retired Adoption Social Worker	Rachel Walstad Director of Adoption, Pregnancy & Birth Parent Services, Lutheran Social Service of MN
Emily Drager County Public Health Nurse	Jeff Olsen KARE 11 NEWS	Kassie Westerman MSW, LGSW, Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Kathryn Joo Social Worker, Hennepin County	Paul Plunkett Attorney, Larkin, Hoffman, Daly & Lindgren	
Hal Kaufman My Adoption Advisor		

This group meets about three times a year to share ideas for expanding AOCM's reach in communities. Each member's expertise is invaluable

## Forever Grateful

By St. Edward's parishioner

In 1969, at the age of 16 and a junior in high school, I became pregnant. When I told my boyfriend, he dumped me and fled the state. I was afraid to tell my parents, and didn't want my younger siblings to find out. I knew they would all be disappointed in me and embarrassed about the situation. Had abortion been legal, I would have opted for one. Instead, I told my parents, who sent me away to live in a home for unwed mothers in Chicago. There I gave birth to a baby girl, who I placed for adoption through a Catholic Charities adoption agency, Twenty-some years later, that daughter found me. When we met for the first time, she took my hands in hers and said, "Thank you for not aborting me." My daughter is a wonderful mother of three, a creative woman with a bubbly personality, who is living a happy and productive life. She loves her adoptive parents and is forever grateful to me for giving her life.

## United Way Reminder

A reminder to consider Adoption Option Council of Minnesota during your corporation's United Way campaign. As part of the pledge process, you can choose to make a donation to any qualifying agency of your choice. Adoption Option Council of Minnesota is a qualifying agency. Just complete the pledge form by adding "Adoption Option Council of Minnesota, P.O. Box 75, Elk River, MN 55330." **Thank you!**

## Donate Online — It's Never Been Easier

In case you didn't know, you can now donate to AOCM online. Simply visit **[adoptionoptionmn.org](http://adoptionoptionmn.org)** and click "Donations" in the top right corner. It's quick and easy.

## School Visits Update

### Speakers visits have powerful impact on Minnesota high schools

By Colleen Tronson, AOCM's speakers' panel coordinator

What can make an aloof high school student perch attentively on the edge of her seat in class? If you attend a classroom presentation by AOCM's speakers' panel, you'll understand. And posture isn't the only thing that changes when the students listen so carefully to the stories told by individuals who have personal experiences with adoption.

Minds change, too.

With a mission of changing attitudes about adoption among teens, AOCM sends teams of volunteers into area high schools, engaging students in frank discussions about this often-avoided topic. These encounters help bring a fresh perspective about the positive changes in adoption practices into the classroom. Teachers appreciate the panels for many reasons; one being that the panels are offered free of charge and another being that the students become very engaged in discussions about the issue afterwards.

AOCM's speakers' panel consists of birthparents, adoptive parents and adopted persons who share their personal stories of adoption. Recent presentations brought adoption awareness to more than 350 students, at schools including Armstrong, Cooper, Kennedy, Moundsview, Buffalo, Totino Grace, Como and Roseville High Schools to name a few. For many of these schools AOCM's speakers' panel has become a standard part of each year's curriculum.

The students welcome the opportunity to receive honest, upfront information from "real" people who have lived the adoption experience. As each team member recounts their personal adoption story, the students are encouraged to ask questions and to share their thoughts about adoption. Many students open up and share their personal stories.

AOCM's speakers' panel is excited to continue this program of educating students and teachers about adoption during the 2011-2012 school year.

To arrange a presentation for your school or youth group, or to join our panel, please contact Colleen at [colleen@adoptionoptionmn.org](mailto:colleen@adoptionoptionmn.org).



AOCM's speakers' panel visits Buffalo High School.

Here are some student and teacher comments about the team's presentations:

"I am adopted and I was 'tickled pink' that you guys talked about adoption as love."

"I did not know that adoptive parents had to be so 'investigated' to get a kid."

"I think adoption is a good choice, I would adopt when I get older."

"The people were brave to tell their stories."

# Adoption Trends

As trends change, Adoption Option Council of Minnesota’s mission becomes more critical

By Jenny Eldredge, AOCM executive director

As our organization shifted to a new name and brand this summer, we met with several agencies to share information about the work of Adoption Option Council of Minnesota and learn about current trends in adoption. The chief lesson we learned was this: Things are changing.

Things are changing.

Here are a few examples:

- Many birth parents and adoptive parents now find each other without the help of an agency providing adoption and pregnancy counseling services. Often, they connect online through resources where prospective parents can pay a fee to be listed. But they may also meet each other through family and friends. Once they meet, they can still work with a full-service agency to receive counseling and services necessary to finalize the adoption plan.
- More birth fathers are involved in the adoption planning process today.
- The language of “unwed” mothers is gone. Married, unmarried and coupled persons represent birth parents and adoptive parents.
- Pressure to parent, even in less-than-adequate situations, continues to be substantial — at home,

school, work and from human service agencies. The inner-city culture, in particular, views adoption as “giving away” and a worse choice than terminating the pregnancy.

- Pregnancy counseling centers are working hard to create an innovative online presence, as birth parents now gravitate to Internet-based resources for information.

I was honored to attend these meetings with Roger Toogood, a longtime AOCM supporter and a pioneer in modern adoption through his work as the former CEO of Children’s Home Society & Family Services. We met with:

- Catholic Charities/Seton Services in St. Paul
- Minnesota Department of Health’s Positive Alternatives grant program personnel
- Tapestry Pregnancy and Family Resource Center in Minneapolis
- Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota in Minneapolis

As AOCM works to advocate for adoption, we are grateful for the partnerships we share with these organizations and many others to make sure AOCM’s work is relevant in an always-changing environment.

After these meetings, we felt an even greater sense of urgency to AOCM’s mission. Thank you, our individual and foundation supporters, who make it possible for AOCM to bring adoption awareness to Minnesota!

## Remembering Special People In Our Lives

A donation to Adoption Option is a wonderful way to memorialize or honor someone special.

Following is a list of people who were remembered with a donation:

In Memory of Maura Bremer  
by Charles & Marion Eldredge

In Memory of Jack Collins  
by John & Bonnie Collins

In Memory of Patrick Fitzgerald  
by Coke (Veronica) Fitzgerald

In Honor of Mary & Bob Hamel  
by Daniel & Shelia Broughton

In Memory of Bob Hamel  
by James & Margaret McGie

In Memory of Emery Johns  
In Memory of Henrietta Rauenhurst  
In Memory of Dennis Wuebker  
by Barbara & Thomas Lynch

In Memory of Pat Salovich MacNeil &  
Joan Ekberg for Mother’s Day  
by Floyd & Mary Lou Stewart

In Memory of Margaret Mankey  
by Harold Hoppmann &  
Margaret Mankey

In Honor of Valissa Milanovich  
by Louis & Rebecca Milanovich

In Memory of Sarah E. Brown Pascale  
by John & Marcia Brown

In Honor of Peter Alexander Raih  
by Thomas & Mollie Raih

In Memory of Tuovi Santi  
by Rosemary Zlimen

In Memory of Dick Sheehan  
by Judy & Don (Joyce) Kauth

In Memory of Paul & Mary Webber  
by Mary & Bob Zieper

## To Our Donors:

Our thanks go out to all of you for your generosity.

We couldn't continue to uphold adoption and support our grant and scholarship programs without you.

Adams, John & Julie	Dietrick, Roberta & William	Johnson, Hal M. & Catherine	Radde, Jacqueline & Robert
Annunciation Respect Life	Dietz, Ruth	Johnson, Jay	Ragen, Mary & Patrick
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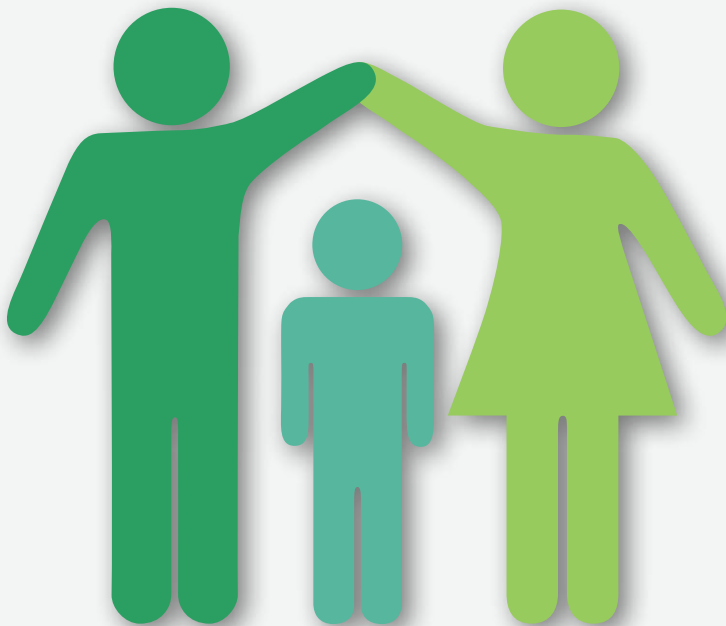
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## Adoption Option Reports



AOCM's mission is to foster a positive attitude toward adoption, to assure accurate and fair consideration of adoption planning, and to provide financial assistance to birth parents who choose adoption.