

ADOPTION NETWORK CLEVELAND

# YEAR IN REVIEW

# 2024



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# LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER



**BETSI  
NORRIS**

Executive Director

## Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on this past year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the incredible work we have accomplished together. At Adoption Network Cleveland, we remain steadfast in our mission to support, advocate for, and empower individuals and families across the adoption constellation. Each person's journey is unique, and we are honored to walk alongside them as they seek healing, connection, and self-discovery. This year, we are proud to report that the total number of individuals served across all program areas grew to **2,052**, a remarkable **50% increase from 1,369 last year**. This expansion reflects not only the increasing demand for our services but also the deepening impact of our advocacy, education, and direct support programs.

Whether helping individuals reunite with family members through our **Search & DNA Assistance** Program, providing guidance through our **Helpline**, or driving policy change through our **Lobby Day** event, we are continually expanding our support for the adoption and foster care community.

Within our **Family & Youth** program, we saw exceptional growth, serving **749 individuals**—a **65.3% increase** from last year. Youth participation rose to **350**, marking a **212.5% increase**, and we supported **399** adults, an impressive **166% rise**. These figures highlight the essential role our Family & Youth program plays in equipping youth, parents, and caregivers with life-changing resources to navigate the complexities of adoption with confidence.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of our volunteers, donors, and community partners. Together, we have created meaningful change in the lives of those we serve. As we look ahead to 2025, we are excited to continue expanding our services, advocating for systemic change, and fostering a community where every voice in the adoption constellation is heard and valued.

Thank you for standing with us and being part of this incredible journey. Together, we are creating brighter futures for all.

**In the spirit of truth,**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Betsie".

**2,000+**

individuals impacted by services

**110**

dedicated and valued volunteers

**2,730**

hours of service



## MISSION

We connect and empower individuals, organizations, and communities impacted by adoption, kinship, and foster care, and we provide a source of healing for those in need.

## VISION

An inclusive community supporting all people impacted by adoption, kinship, and foster care.

## VALUES

**Inclusiveness:** We draw strength from that which unites by embracing all people, honoring diversity and accepting differences.

**Collaboration:** We choose to be a catalyst for outstanding practices by fostering relationships internally and externally among individuals, organizations, and communities.

**Courage:** We stand for our mission and an individual's right to self-determination even at the risk of compromising mainstream acceptance.

**Trust:** We promote a sense of security and hope through honesty, authenticity, and openness.

This year, we proudly served **350 adult adoptees, birth parents, and individuals with DNA discoveries.**

We assisted over **194 adoptees and birth family members** in their search for reconnection after separation, directly completing **51 search cases.**

Our monthly virtual support groups provided a safe and supportive space for **40 birth mothers**, with a cumulative attendance of 144, and for **44 individuals** navigating the complexities of DNA discoveries, with a cumulative attendance of 101. These groups offered guidance at every stage of their journeys—before, during, and after.

A core group of **over 200 individuals** connected to adoption attended our monthly **General Discussion Meetings**, which had a total cumulative attendance of **533.** After piloting monthly **in-person meetings** throughout the year, in addition to all those we hold on Zoom, we decided to transition to quarterly, topic-based in-person meetings moving forward.

We also responded to **172 Helpline inquiries**, assisting adult adoptees, birth families, and adoptive families by providing guidance, emotional validation, and accurate information to address their unique challenges.

In 2024, we welcomed **JJ Rett**, a certified coach, to our **Life Coaching program.** JJ brings both expertise and a personal connection to adoption, helping clients navigate obstacles and achieve their goals with compassion and insight.



# ADULT ADOPTEES, BIRTH PARENTS & DNA DISCOVERIES

Russ Lang Photography



People served

**350**



Helpline calls

**172**



Attendees

**778**

In 2024, staff members attended the **Untangling Our Roots Conference** in Denver and the **Concerned United Birthparents Retreat** in Kansas City. These trips strengthened our networking efforts, increased our visibility in the national landscape, and set the stage for our conference in March 2025. Post-pandemic, reestablishing face-to-face connections with both established and emerging national leaders has been essential to maintaining our leadership and advancing our advocacy efforts.



# ADVOCACY & PUBLIC POLICY

In 2024, we continued our efforts to improve Ohio's adoption, foster care, and child welfare systems. Our **Public Policy Committee** focused on promoting **ethical and equitable adoption practices**, advocating for **truth and transparency in adoption and donor conception**, and strengthening **sibling connections**. We remain dedicated to shaping policies that benefit adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive families.

## LOBBY DAY 2024

\* We successfully orchestrated our annual **Lobby Day**, where **27 volunteers** met in person with legislators and staff at **63 key offices** to address critical child welfare and adoption issues, furthering our mission for adoption reform.

\* We also celebrated a legislative milestone as the **ACEs Study Commission (HB352)** passed in the Ohio House. This bill, designed to understand and mitigate the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on children, families, and communities, now awaits a hearing in the Senate.

27

Volunteers met in Columbus



63

Meetings with Policymakers



# EDUCATION & COMMUNITY OUTREACH



In 2024, our **Monday Evening Speaker Series** flourished, offering over **20 presentations** with a total **attendance of 705**, including international participants. The series featured authors, therapists, activists, and thought leaders, fostering valuable insights and meaningful discussions. Some highlighted presentations include authors **Dr. LaShawnDa Pittman** and **Dr. Gretchen Sisson**, each discussing their recent book - *Relinquished: The Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood* (Sisson) and *Grandmothering While Black* (Pittman).

Other special events included a screening of **Somebody's Daughter**, a new film by **Zara Phillips**, and a panel on adoption trends with the **Maltz Museum**. Through these sessions, we built strong relationships with speakers and creators, enhancing the diversity and impact of our programming.

**23**

Monday Evening Speakers

**705**

Cumulative attendance

## OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

We were able to take part in an opportunity to have an **Encore Fellow through BVU**. We deployed our Fellow primarily in organizational outreach to increase our post-pandemic visibility in the community and build new partnerships. This resulted in building relationships with entities such as CMSD's **Say Yes to Education**, libraries, and **Cleveland Recreation Centers**.

We were also successful in recruiting an intern through the **iFoster TAY (Transition Age Youth) Americorps** program. Russ Lang has been with us since May 1 and plans to re-enroll for a second year. Russ is also focused on outreach along with other projects.

# FAMILIES & YOUTH



\* Our **Family Ties Gathering** served **388 individuals** this year, consistently drawing **30+ attendees** each month, and fostering strong connections and engagements, with teens forming lasting friendships that extend beyond our events.

\* Additionally, we offered educational sessions on topics such as **Black haircare** and **supporting children in school**, addressing the diverse needs of families and fostering both community and learning.

## FAMILY PROGRAMS

People served

# 749



\* We enhanced support for transracial adoptive families by merging our support group with **Transracial Journeys**, co-facilitated by staff member Janelle Poskocil, a transracial adoptive parent, and April Dinwoodie, a transracial adoptee.

\* Additionally, our collaboration with **NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)** supports a monthly peer-led group for families and loved ones of children who are experiencing behavioral or mental health symptoms.

## PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

in Family Programs

Transracial Journeys

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

Fostering Hope, Trauma-Based Yoga



In partnership with **OhioKAN**, Adoption Network Cleveland handled **345 Navigator calls**, connecting kinship and adoptive families with appropriate resources. Additionally, we provided **mediation services to 30 individuals**, fostering confidential and cooperative solutions. These efforts demonstrate our dedication to supporting families as they navigate complex situations.

\* The **Family Resilience Fund** provided over **\$100,000** in assistance, supporting **84 families** (329 individuals) with essentials like rent, utility payments to prevent disconnection, and groceries. This short-term emergency support helps families achieve **greater stability and lower stressors** in the family system to support healing.

\* In collaboration with the **Goods Bank of North East Ohio**, we supplied essential household items and clothing to **seven families**, enhancing their daily living conditions and stability.



## FAMILY RESILIENCE FUND

Funding for FY24

# \$100,000+

\* To better serve prospective parents, we made **Adoption 101: Where Do I Begin?** free of charge and adjusted offerings based on demand to ensure accessible and responsive educational resources.

\* These workshops, alongside our strategic partnerships, allow us to tailor support to the specific needs of families, enhancing the effectiveness of our programs and ensuring that resources are directed where most needed.



## PROSPECTIVE PARENTS

Educational Workshops

People served

# 30

Workshops

# 4

# FUNDRAISING



Russ Lang Photography

**THIS YEAR, ADOPTION NETWORK CLEVELAND ACHIEVED SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES THANKS TO OUR COMMUNITY'S GENEROSITY AND THE DEDICATION OF OUR VOLUNTEERS.**

Successfully supported our **\$1,009,697** operational budget for programs and services through a mix of individual, foundation, and corporate gifts (**\$532,001**); state government grants (**\$359,375**); program revenue (**\$16,571**); endowment distributions (**\$64,791**); investment of reserve funds (**\$13,504**); and interest revenue (**\$23,455**).

# BOARD & STAFF



**Back Row:** Kelsey Reilly, Russ Lang, Julius Jackson, Ty Cliffel, Janelle Poskocil, Betsie Norris, Alyssa Lombardo, Savannah Johns

**Front Row:** Cheryl Carter, Karen Wyman, Abby Shaw, Chandra Peoples, Tammy Willet

**Back Row:** Eamon Larkin, Kim Dyckes, Amy Zlotnik, Joe Brennan, Jeffrey Rohrs, Tracy Miller, Lindsay Domingo

**Front Row:** Edie Sweeterman, Lindsey Huling, John Zaranec, Tammara Humbert, Christine Zanoni, Andrea Kushnick Rubin

**Not Pictured:** Glenn Cook, Corinne Gist, Dario Miodic, Will Peseski, Jarrett Pratt, Kirsten Simonton, Tom Sohlberg



# LOOKING FORWARD

As we look to the future, Adoption Network Cleveland is poised to build on our successes with several exciting projects as well as ongoing advocacy efforts aimed at enhancing and expanding our impact within the adoption community.

## FUTURE PROJECTS

In March 2025, we are excited to host the **Journeys of Discovery Conference**, marking the tenth anniversary of Ohio's adoptee access to records law. This event promises to draw experts and participants from across the country, offering a platform for discussion, learning, and networking that will highlight the latest developments and best practices in adoption spaces. A special thank you to our sponsors, **The Woodruff Foundation** and **Kathy and Don Sokolik**, for making this milestone celebration of access and transparency possible while laying the groundwork for future initiatives to support adoptees and their families.

In September 2025, we invite all of you to take part in our **Over the Edge fundraising event**, where participants will rappel down a building in the heart of Cleveland, raising support for Adoption Network Cleveland's mission. We hope you'll join us for this thrilling experience, financially support your favorite team, or come cheer on the brave souls going 'over the edge' for a cause close to all our hearts!

## ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

This year's advocacy will focus on a legislative agenda centered on critical issues impacting children, families, and adoptees in Ohio. We aim to push two key bills forward by the end of this year: **House Bill 352**, establishing an Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Commission, and **House Bill 164/Senate Bill 188**, creating a Foster-to-College Scholarship Program.

Looking ahead to the 136th Ohio General Assembly, we will prioritize: **fostering sibling connections** by establishing sibling rights; **ensuring equitable practices regarding original birth certificates**—such as providing unrestricted access for post-1996 Ohio adoptees and creating a



process for the state to amend original birth certificates to reflect paternity; and **limiting adoption advertising to licensed entities**. Additionally, we are committed to advocating for a future pathway for donor-conceived individuals to access both **identifying and medical information** about their genetic parents.

Through partnerships with local and national organizations, volunteers, and advocates, we are pushing for legislative reforms that address the unique needs of our community. With ongoing community support from donors, volunteers, and partners, we are building a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone impacted by adoption.

# GET INVOLVED WITH ADOPTION NETWORK CLEVELAND



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