



Adoption Network Cleveland Timeline

Founded as a grassroots organization and originally run only by volunteers, Adoption Network Cleveland has enjoyed tremendous growth and success. Please enjoy this look back at our many achievements since 1988.

1988

- Adoption Network Cleveland founded by Betsie Norris
- Hosted American Adoption Congress Regional Conference in Cleveland “Opening the Door to Truth and Growth” which included national level presenters including Betty Jean Lifton and Reuben Pannor
- Pre-conference publicity led to hundreds of phone calls from area adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents and professionals
- Established Rocky River and Cleveland Heights General Support and Discussion Meetings, Adoption Helpline, and newsletter

1989

- Began legislative involvement aimed at restoring access to original birth certificates for all Ohio-born adoptees, active with Ohio Coalition for Adoption Reform, access to records bill passed the Ohio House but failed in the Senate
- Established adoptee/birth family search program

1990

- Incorporated as a nonprofit organization in the State of Ohio
- Structured ourselves as a membership-based organization
- Formed Board of Directors transitioning from a less formal steering committee

1991

- Co-sponsored Triad Members Together conference
- Offered Adoptive Family Parallel Groups for the first time
- Became a field placement site for graduate-level social work students at the Mandel School at CWRU

1992

- Initiated bill to allow adult adoptee access to Ohio adoption records, HB 628, bill failed in the Ohio House
- Moved office from Betsie Norris’ home to the Shore Cultural Center in Euclid, Ohio

1993

- Doubled the number of Cleveland-area General Support and Discussion Meetings from two to four monthly
- Obtained first foundation grant – \$20,000 from the George Gund Foundation

- Hosted American Adoption Congress International Conference in Cleveland. Over 35 states and 6 countries were represented
- Held our first annual Cleveland area Birthmother's Day Ceremony

1994

- Doubled our membership from 250 to 500 people
- Appeared on CBS' *60 Minutes*
- Continued adoptee access to records campaign with third Ohio House Bill on the issue, bill failed in the Ohio House

1995

- Board of Directors hired Betsie Norris as the first Executive Director following a strategic planning process
- Joined as a member of Greater Cleveland Community Shares

1996

- Legislative success! House Bill 419 signed into law increasing access to “non-identifying” information, creating certification for adoption workers, allowing adult adoptee access to birth certificates prospectively and decreasing time children in foster care who cannot return home wait for permanency
- Restructured our volunteer search program, resulting in a 37% increase in reunions during the first year

1997

- Expanded staff by hiring a part-time Program & Volunteer Coordinator
- Increased Adoption Awareness Month programming, attended by over 200 people

1998

- Celebrated 10th anniversary with first annual benefit dinner
- Expanded Program & Volunteer Coordinator position to full-time
- Added Lorain County General Support and Discussion Meeting to meet demand

1999

- Launched the website www.AdoptionNetwork.org
- Opened Lorain County branch office with staff person
- Coordinated Adoption Conference for Allied Professionals at MetroHealth Medical Center
- Developed a birthmother's retreat
- Developed Speaker's Bureau program

2000

- Launched a new monthly General Support and Discussion Meeting in Summit County
- Developed Weaving Cultures, Nurturing Families for parents considering adopting transracially or transculturally

2001

- Launched monthly International Adoption Support Meeting with Rainbow Center for International Health Services
- Hosted Adoption Awareness Coalition workshop on Reactive Attachment Disorder with 100 attending
- Hosted book signing and dinner with Adam Pertman, author of *Adoption Nation*

2002

- Created and filled new part-time Communications and Fund Development Coordinator position.
- Developed *Raising Adopted Children: The Early Years* programming

2003

- Moved to Loftworks Building at 1667 East 40th Street, Cleveland
- Participated on the Community Vision Council's Strong Families = Successful Children Adoption Task Force planning a multifaceted approach to find permanent homes for a backlog of 1700 Cuyahoga County youth waiting in foster care

2004

- Launched Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids Initiative, a public-private partnership, taking role of lead agency at the request of the Community Vision Council
- Increased office space, hired over 10 new staff and contracted with 15 area adoption agencies
- Awarded Federal Adoption Opportunities Grant to develop Project CONNECT for teens in foster care

2005

- Facilitated the 1,500th member search and reunion
- Staff grew to 25
- Awarded a \$500,000 grant from the Skirball Foundation to be used for matching seed money for an endowment campaign

2006

- Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids Initiative finds adoptive homes for 332 youth, who were slated to otherwise age-out of foster care, in three years, doubling the goal of 165
- Advocated successfully for Senate Bill 238, giving adoption triad members full access to non-identifying information and allowing foster alumni to be adopted if they choose
- Moved into the Prospect Park Building at 4614 Prospect Ave., Cleveland
- Received Anisfield-Wolf Award for outstanding nonprofit organization
- Awarded Outstanding Youth Advocate Award from the North American Council on Adoptable Children

2007

- As 3-year pilot of the Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids Initiative wound down, incorporated programs including Child Centered Recruitment, Adoption Navigation, mentoring, groups for youth in foster care and more into of the core base of Adoption Network Cleveland programs

- Chosen as new investee by Cleveland Social Venture Partners
- Betsie Norris named “Woman of Note” by *Crain's Cleveland Business*

2008

- Played key role in passing Ohio House Bill 7 to promote Child Centered Recruitment and decrease barriers to public child welfare adoption, adoptee access to records portion of bill failed
- Launched *Creating Futures 20th Anniversary Campaign* to initiate an endowment and build organizational capacity
- Launched new array of adoptive family services, with funding from United Way

2009

- Received a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Adoption Excellence Award
- Hosted and co-sponsored National Adoption Conference with American Adoption Congress
- Began consulting role with a private agency in Maryland to replicate our Child Centered Recruitment program in the District of Columbia

2010

- Led effort to organize a community forum with Rep. Marcia Fudge on foster care and adoption with Partners for Forever Families, an Adoption Opportunities Grant in partnership with the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services
- Recruited 20 churches, salons and barbershops to become Ambassadors to recruit adoptive families as part of Partners for Forever Families
- Assisted at the Ohio Supreme Court Summit on Children about adopting children and youth from permanent custody
- Completed challenge grant from the Skirball Foundation to establish endowment fund

2011

- Launched consulting role with the State of Michigan to replicate our Adoption Navigator program as part of their statewide foster youth placement program
- Authored an article accepted for publication on Child Centered Recruitment in the *Protecting Children Journal*, a professional publication of the American Humane Society called "Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids: Securing Adoptive Placements for Older Youth in Cuyahoga County's Public Child Welfare System"
- Co-hosted a two-day child welfare legal symposium called Permanency Solutions with Partners for Forever Families, Cuyahoga Department of Children and Family Services and Capital University Law School
- Executive Director, Betsie Norris received U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Adoption Excellence Award* in the category of increased adoptions for older children

2012

- Completed the transition of Child Centered Recruitment to the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
- Established a Transracial Adoptive Family Group

- Launched Adoption 201: Adopting Infants Domestically as a follow up to Adoption 101: Where Do I Begin?
- Received the *2012 Drenda Lakin Memorial Award for Continuing Services to Adoptive Families* from Voice for Adoption in Washington, DC.
- Executive Director Betsie Norris received a *Champion Award* from the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy
- Established Adoption Equity Ohio in preparation for adoptee access to records legislation to be introduced, identified bill sponsors

2013

- Companion bills introduced in the Ohio House and Senate supporting adult adoptee access to their original birth certificates. Launched and supported a campaign to advocate for House Bill 61 (Pelanda/Antonio) and Senate Bill 23 (Beagle/Burke): *ROAR! 2013 – Restore Ohio Adoptees Rights*
- Senate Bill 23 passed and signed into law on December 19th giving 400,000 adult adoptees adopted between 1964 and 1996 access to their original birth certificates. This law represents the culmination of over 24 years of advocacy by Adoption Network Cleveland. Watch the [video](#) highlights
- Commemorated our 25th anniversary with this success
- Supported other Ohio pending legislation, including the Transfer of School Records for Children in Foster Care, Foster Care Reform, and the Adoption Tax Credit
- Hosted 76 participants from Ohio, Michigan and Illinois who attended the Inaugural Weaving Cultures Family Camp for transracial adoptive families
- Partnered to co-sponsor a two-day Permanency Symposium for court, legal and social work child welfare professionals—the culminating event of the 5-year Partners for Forever Families Initiative, supported by a federal Adoption Opportunities Grant
- Co-sponsored and hosted American Adoption Congress International Conference
- Named *Member Organization of the Year* from Greater Cleveland Community Shares
- Executive Director Betsie Norris named *Executive Director of the Year, Community Pillar Award* from Medical Mutual and Smart Business

2014

- Participated in the creation of a documentary film by Jean Strauss – *An Adoptee ROARed in Ohio: The Betsie Norris Story* – on Executive Director’s 24-year crusade to give all Ohio-born adoptees access to their original birth certificates which debuted at the Cleveland International Film Festival
- Partnered with the Cleveland International Film Festival on documentary film *A Simple Piece of Paper*
- Supported the passage of HB 213 creating the opportunity for children in foster care to participate in normal childhood activities, and limiting the use of Planned Permanent Living Arrangements (long-term foster care)
- Influenced best practices to allow youth in foster care who are 16 years old and up into their Juvenile Court review hearings. Implemented by Judge Kristin W. Sweeney
- Expanded our General Support and Discussion Meetings into the Dayton area
- Partnered with the Junior League of Cleveland for the life skills program designed for youth in foster care – *Cooking With Cuyahoga’s Kids*

- Received *Parent Group of the Year Award* from the National Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)
- Executive Director Betsie Norris received *Advocate of the Year Award* from the Ohio Adoption Planning Group

2015

- On March 20th SB 23 fully enacted allowing all adoptees from the previously closed records era to access their original birth certificates. Celebrated in Columbus with three events over two days with hundreds of Ohio-born adoptees, many of whom traveled across the country to attend.
- General Support and Discussion meetings expanded to eight locations throughout the state, including Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Cincinnati. Additionally, added a monthly webcam meeting
- Participated in hundreds of local, state and national media stories about the Ohio adoption records law
- Partnered on the creation of a documentary film by Jean Strauss with the Ohio Department of Health entitled *Walking Through Ohio's Adoption Records Laws*
- Reached out to Ohio's 133 legislators about adoption and foster care issues through our Annual Lobby Day
- Executive Director Betsie Norris received the *Eleanor R. Gerson Leadership in Social Justice Award* from Greater Cleveland Community Shares, the *Women who Excel Award's Progressive Entrepreneur Winner* from Smart Business, and the *Virginia Colson Award for Service to Families and Children* from the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA)

2016

- Held Adoption Gathering Conference on the first anniversary of SB 23 creating access to Ohio's adoption records
- Invited by St. Luke's Foundation to become certified in Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support – implemented this model in our family-serving programs
- Supported House Bill 50 (Foster Care supports to age 21) which was signed into law
- Participated in reformulating, then supported, House Bill 63, to prevent Unregulated Transfer of Child Custody “Rehoming”
- Participated in the National Conference of State Legislators convening in Chicago in a session on Access to Records – organized and moderated a panel presentation attended by representatives from 15 states

2017

- Hosted a book signing with Academy Award winning actress Octavia Spencer to promote *The Baby Thief* by Cleveland author and former board member Barbara Raymond
- Served as a Community Partner at The City Club of Cleveland, with April Dinwoodie of the Donaldson Adoption Institute presenting
- Executive Director presented as the invited keynote speaker at the Adoption Knowledge Affiliates (AKA) annual conference in Austin, Texas. Keynote entitled *The Tides are Turning – Adoptee Access to Records*

- Executive Director Betsie Norris participated in a League of Women Voters panel moderated by The Plain Dealer journalist Phillip Morris at the Lakewood Library for a program: *What is the future for foster care in Greater Cleveland?*
- Leveraged resources to maintain programs during a shift in a large portion of our funding. Awarded VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funding which in large part picked up where previous Cuyahoga County funding left off

2018

- Reframed our mentoring program to strengthen families and mentor youth in adoptive and kinship families, age 10 to 18, who would benefit from having an additional supportive, caring adult in their lives as they work through their pre-teen and teen years.
- Launched two new programs: Mediation services for foster, kinship and adoptive families and Reconnections services for foster care alumni.
- Explored our scope, name and brand. Out of this process, added *The Ohio Family Connection* to our name and created four service hubs: Family, Adult Adoptee and Birthparent, Foster Youth and Foster Alumni, and Professional and Stakeholder – each served with the underpinnings of advocacy, education and support
- Advocated for Ohio House Bill 448 (LaTourette/Boyd) to promote sibling rights in foster care and adoption
- Celebrated 30th anniversary