


Supporting Families, Supporting Success

By Kim Phagan-Hansel



When Tiffany Moro brought her newborn sons home from the hospital, she had plenty of friends and family members to call for guidance or help when she needed it. From ways to survive sleepless nights to how to swaddle an infant correctly, advice was readily available.

But when Moro and her husband, Dominique, adopted 11-month-old Isabella from Korea last March, the questions and concerns were different. Few people in Moro's circle of family and friends had personal experience with adoption to provide much-needed advice during some trying times.

"The first few months when Isabella was here were very hard," Moro said. "She was very, very quiet and very reserved. It was an adjustment period."

Not only was Isabella adapting to her new surroundings, but just days after her arrival, she underwent open heart surgery. With developmental delays and a few other minor setbacks, Moro was concerned about how Isabella was adjusting to her family and life in America.

Though the Moros had adopted through Americans for International Aid and Adoption (AIAA), their homestudy process and follow-up was facilitated by Harmony Adoptions, a

CHINA ADOPTEE, Isabella, joined her forever family in 2010 with the help of Harmony Adoptions.



THE MORO FAMILY has successfully added Isabella to their fold with the help and support of Tennessee-based Harmony Adoptions.

Tennessee-based agency with a special focus on post-adoption support for domestic and international adoptions. So, when Moro had concerns about Isabella, she simply made a call to the agency that helped bring the family together in the first place.

“Pam [Frye, Harmony’s adoption services director] helped us to realize that it was a very normal part of the adoption process,” Moro said. “She was there for me, kind of like a close friend.”

In 1996, Pam Wolf founded Harmony Adoptions after adopting her own daughter from China. After working with homeless citizens for a number of years, Wolf had seen the damage of poorly prepared adoptive parents and she wanted to provide a better outcome for children.

In 2001, she wrote a grant for an infant adoption awareness training program and in 2004 she received a grant for adoption support and preservation. While most of Harmony Adoptions’ work is with adoptions through the domestic foster care system, they offer homestudy services to people adopting internationally and their door is always open to adoptive families in need.

“The face of adoption has changed,” Wolf said. “Previously issues were generally not as intense.”

One of the keys to successful adoptions comes in the preparation before the adoptions, said Michael Yates, Harmony’s project director for adoption support and preservation.

As Harmony’s program began expanding, more often Yates and Wolf heard statements like, “we didn’t know” from families who were in crisis. So, the agency set to work developing an adoption preparation curriculum. With four group sessions and four individual sessions, the process is set up to really give pre-adoptive families an idea of what it means to adopt a child.

With growing numbers of special needs and older child adoptions, the need for family support and guidance has grown over the years.

“If we can do better work on the preparation, we can keep these families from the crisis levels,” Yates said. “The most successful adoptive families have taken seriously the process of self-examination of why they feel called to do this.”

While the preparation work is critical, the follow up after the adoption is complete is equally as important. For Wolf, letting families know that Harmony Adoptions is there when they need help is one of the most important aspects of her work.

“There’s a delicate balance in letting families fly and be free,” Wolf said. “Some families will never need us, but there’s a whole lot of families who will.”

Providing families with a listening ear, a helping hand and a little advice is all many of them need to successfully parent their children. But the key for Wolf is letting families know that they are there and available whenever there is a need.

“These families have to have a community and a place where they are understood,” Wolf said.

For Peggy and Robert Heller, Harmony Adoptions was there when they needed them — before and after their two adoptions from China. As their homestudy agency, Harmony Adoptions provided pre-adoption classes to the Hellers where they learned about attachment issues, grief and loss and other adoption-related issues.

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— Pam Wolf, executive director of Harmony Adoptions



“I really believe pre-education is so important,” Peggy Heller said. “It makes a difference on how you handle it (problems) on the back end.”

After the Hellers brought their daughter Faith home from China a few years ago, the family had difficulty adjusting to the changes of a little one in the house after raising three grown biological children. In addition to their own adjustment, Faith struggled at times to adapting to her new life as well, often screaming for hours at night.

“Faith did have a very, very hard time — there was a mix of things going on and one thing was grief,” Peggy Heller said. “It was a tough road and it was a hard adjustment.”

But even in the families’ darkest moments, Peggy Heller said she often found strength in knowing she could reach out to Harmony Adoptions at any time if she really needed assistance.

“Even if I didn’t call her, I knew she was available,” Peggy Heller said. “Sometimes you feel like you’re in this little world by yourself and no one can help you.



SISTERS Faith and Klaire joined the Heller family with the help of Harmony Adoptions.

After a while the Hellers adjusted to their new life with Faith and then felt called to adopt another child from China. While looking through an adoption listing they stumbled across Klaire’s picture, a special needs child who had already had open heart surgery in China. Once again, as they prepared for their journey, Harmony Adoptions was there to help guide the process, support the family and provide resources when needed.

“I feel 100 percent confident that if there was anything I need they’d be on it,” Peggy Heller said. “Agencies have the responsibility to call and ask some very specific questions and not just one time.”

Now that Klaire has been home almost four months, Heller’s girls, both 5, have adjusted to their new family and are doing well. But Peggy Heller credits the support she has received from Harmony Adoptions for making their story a positive one.

“Just knowing they’re available and they have resources available if I need them is comforting,” Peggy Heller said.

For both Peggy Heller and Tiffany Moro, that’s all they needed — someone to listen and provide some insight into their children’s transitions into their homes. And Moro says she is thankful for all that Harmony Adoptions has provided to her family and today her daughter is a healthy, happy almost 2-year-old.

“I know that I can always go to Pam,” Moro said. “I would definitely go to Harmony. I definitely feel they would help me.”