Post-Adoption Facilitates Reconnections

Dear Friends of CSI,

Child Saving Institute (CSI) has remained focused on children since its inception in 1892. Today, we proudly offer an array of “wrap-around” services that are available from infancy through young adulthood, including foster care, foster to adoption, therapy, independent living skills, parenting skills, and more.

The one service we offer for adult only clients (ages 21 and older) is post-adoption services. Though post-adoption services is not advertised, it offers an important service providing family medical history to an adoptee or facilitating initial contacts between adoptees and birth parents.

This delicate work is performed by Evell Thomas, adoption permanency specialist and donor relations coordinator. Evell has worked for CSI for 35 years as of Oct. 1! In that time, she has facilitated hundreds, perhaps even more than 1,000, adoptions. She finds great joy in the process of reconnecting adoptees and birth parents in this fundamentally important relationship.

In this edition of CSI Insider, you will read a story about a wonderful post-adoption connection that Evell helped facilitate in the last year. It’s a beautiful story filled with coincidence and mutual affection. I hope you enjoy this story along with everything the fall newsletter has to offer.

As ever, I am grateful for your commitment to CSI’s kids!

Thank you!

See you soon,

Peg Harriott
President & Chief Executive Officer
The Child Saving Institute (CSI) Guild Board will host its annual fundraising luncheon, PurseOnalities, Wednesday, Oct. 2, from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Hilton Downtown, 1001 Cass St. Themed “Hometown Heroes,” the funds raised by the event will positively affect children and families who have experienced abuse, neglect, and trauma.

The event features a silent auction of extraordinary purse packages and the opportunity to shop some of Omaha’s most popular boutiques, with a portion of their sales donated back to CSI. Boutique shopping begins at 10:30 a.m. The silent auction begins at 11 a.m. with the luncheon and program beginning at 11:45 a.m. Individual tickets start at $75 and table sponsorships start at $1,500.

Event Chairs are Seirra Burt, Sara DeMers, Gina McDevitt, and Carissa Schrager. Honorary Chair is community philanthropist Beth Schrager. The luncheon will feature speaker and author Patrick Friman, Ph.D., vice president of outpatient behavioral health services and clinical professor in the University of Nebraska School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics. He has published three books including “Good Night, Sweet Dreams, I Love You: Now Get into Bed and Go to Sleep – How Tired Parents Can Solve Their Children’s Bedtime Problems” and “Adolescence & Other Temporary Mental Disorders: Why ‘Crazy’ Teen Behavior is More Normal Than You Think and How You Can Deal with it without Losing Your Mind!”

Dr. Friman’s work has concentrated on the gap between primary medical care for children and referral based clinical child psychological and psychiatric care.

The CSI Guild Board is grateful to event sponsors Borsheims and Oriental Trading Company. For additional information or to make a reservation, visit bit.ly/PurseOnalities or contact Grace Peterson at 402.504.3634 or gpeterson@childsaving.org.
Post-Adoption Services
Reunite Birth Mother & Son

Dori Bush of Lincoln frequently thought about the son she had placed for adoption many years ago.

As an unmarried college student, Dori withdrew in January 1966 when she learned she was pregnant. She moved to a home for unwed mothers in Colorado, where she delivered the baby she named James. Both she and the baby returned to Nebraska where James was placed with an adoptive family through a now out-of-business adoption agency. At that time, Dori understood that adoption meant she would not have contact with her son or his family.

“It was the right decision,” Dori said. “I knew I couldn’t give this child the life he deserved.”

She had hopes for him – the same as any parent has for their children – that he would be happy and loved and that he would have the opportunity to fulfill his dreams and use his strengths.

Years passed; Dori married and raised two sons, but she never forgot about James.

“In mid-June 2018, I came across my daily planner from 1966,” Dori said. “I decided it was time … to search for him. It’s nearly 52 years later. I hadn’t before because I didn’t want to intrude on this man’s life.”

The search was a bit complicated because of the out-of-state birth and the out-of-business adoption agency. Dori tried finding information through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which referred her to the Department of Vital Records (VR). VR could not locate information. But DHHS employee Olivia Briggs had also emailed people who work in post-adoption services across the state asking if anyone could help Dori.

That email reached Evell Thomas, the post-adoption specialist at Child Saving Institute (CSI). Evell replied and Dori had a place to start.

“I talked to Evell July 11 and told her my story,” Dori said. “Evell said she might be able to locate my ‘closed’ file at another agency, but that it might take a few days.”

Evell called her the next day.

“She said ‘I’m looking at your file right now,’” Dori said. “I began to cry, of course. Fifty-two years is a long time to wonder about something and then to know that answers were as close as my phone was overwhelming!”

Her first question about her son: “Is he alive?”

Jamie Christensen meets birth mother Dori Bush at CSI
Evell affirmed, “He is alive.” Though Evell could not yet share with Dori, she had already located him in North Carolina.

Evell then sent a letter to Jamie Christensen, whose adoptive parents had unknowingly also named him James but nicknamed him Jamie, to ask if he was open to communicating with his birth mother. Jamie emailed Evell within a few days to say he was glad to hear from her and would happily welcome contact from his birth mother.

“I was excited when I got the letter from Child Saving Institute!” Jamie said in an email. “It was out of the blue, but a moment that I will never forget!

“Through the wonders of modern technology, the process went smoothly and comfortably,” Jamie said. “After a bit of phone tag, I got in touch with Evell, which was a wonderful experience, in that she really cared about bringing us together.”

During the next couple of weeks, Dori and Jamie exchanged several letters through Evell, telling each other about themselves and their lives. Dori signed hers “with warmest and most sincere affection.” Jamie shared with Evell that he had a copy of the original birth certificate from Colorado (a recent change in Colorado law allows adoptees born in the state to obtain their original birth certificate) and subsequently tried to reach out to Dori in May 2016 via Facebook Messenger. Unfortunately, Jamie did not receive a response from Dori, who never received the message because they were not “Facebook friends.” Dori, however, noted that in May 2016, she was writing her story about having placed Jamie for adoption to submit to Guideposts magazine. They were thinking about each other at the same time!

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Jamie told Evell that he would soon be visiting his parents in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, just a three-hour drive from Omaha. By that time, Dori and Jamie had begun the process to establish full and open contact, so Evell asked Jamie if he would be interested in meeting Dori in person while he was in the area. He replied, “Yes!”

When Evell asked Dori if she would like to meet Jamie in person, she cried with joy. “Absolutely!”

Evell coordinated the visit for Aug. 16, at CSI’s main campus, 4545 Dodge St., in Omaha.

“Through the wonders of modern technology, the process went smoothly and comfortably,” Jamie said. “After a bit of phone tag, I got in touch with Evell, which was a wonderful experience, in that she really cared about bringing us together.”
“This happened in record time,” Evell said. “The process of introduction to meeting usually takes a lot longer than it did in this case.”

Evell asked Dori to arrive 15 minutes early for the appointment to settle in the meeting room. Dori looked forward to the meeting with Jamie and his adoptive mother, Barb.

“I walked to the door and a car turned into the parking lot,” she said. “I couldn’t look. I knew it was them.”

Just a few minutes later, Evell brought them together.

“It was wonderful!” Dori said.

“It was a wonderful experience!” Jamie said. “My mom and I drove down to Omaha, which was important to me as my mother is so supportive in many ways.”

They talked for more than an hour. Both brought photos of their families to share. “The first thing I noticed was her [Dori’s] smile when I entered the room,” Jamie said. “The way that we look at life is one of the many similarities that I have noticed.”

Dori gave Barb a thank you card, which said “thank you for doing the job I couldn’t do.” Barb expressed her gratitude for Dori’s selfless decision. “It was perfect,” Jamie said. “My mother was always upfront and honest about my being adopted. She...[always] answered my questions...so the fact that I would share...[this experience] was meant to be. Dori got to meet my mother and share moments from my childhood...we would not have been able to do [that] had she [Barb] not been there ... [they share] a kindredship as mothers. I love my mother, and now I have a special bond with Dori that we are beginning to explore.”

At the close of the meeting, Evell took photos of Dori, Jamie, and Barb. As they prepared to leave, Jamie gave Dori one last hug.

“I’m hoping this isn’t breaking a boundary, but I just want to say I love you,” he said.

“Now I can sign my letters ‘with love,’” she replied.❤️

Jamie Christensen and his adoptive mother Barb Christensen join Jamie’s birth mom Dori Bush at CSI.
CSI Early Childhood Education
Steps Up to Step 4 in Neb.
Dept. of Ed Quality Program

Ninety percent of brain development occurs before age 5. Early learning builds the foundation for skills needed in school, work, and life. Quality child care matters and that’s why Child Saving Institute’s (CSI) Early Childhood Education centers are proud to offer quality rated programs through Step Up to Quality.

CSI offers two early childhood education programs – on the agency’s main campus and on the campus of College of Saint Mary. Each has earned a Step 4 rating out of 5 from the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Step Up to Quality program.

The NDE designed the program to help parents choose high quality care and education for their children to prepare the children for kindergarten and beyond. Step Up to Quality focuses on quality standards around curriculum, learning environments, and interactions; child outcomes; professional development and training; family engagement and partnerships; and program administration.

CSI’s Early Childhood Education Center and Spellman Child Development Center entered the program at Step 3 because both have earned accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

“We are thrilled to have earned Step 4 status with Step Up to Quality,” said Mary Finney-Afrank, director of early childhood education for CSI. “Our lead teachers all have or are working toward degrees in early childhood education and are committed to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for social and emotional growth and learning.”

Step Up to Quality ratings “provides recognition for those early childhood care and education programs that meet identified criteria for quality. It provides parents and the community with information about what to look for and some assurance that accredited programs can offer their children greater opportunity to grow and develop to their highest capacity. Research on early childhood programs consistently demonstrates that high quality programs have greater benefits for children,” according to education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality.

Advancing a step requires an on-site observation and rating review, which centers can request annually. The step rating is valid for two years without review. Once a center reaches Step 5, it is valid for five years.

CSI offers enrollment for children ages 6 weeks to 6 years old. Learn more about the programs at childsaving.org/services/earlychildhood-education-center.
Join Us!

Don’t miss a moment of the fun and philanthropic opportunities we have planned for you in the coming months! Visit our website at childsaving.org or contact Grace Peterson at 402.504.3634 or gpeterson@childsaving.org for more information about these events and how to get involved.

PurseOnalities | Wednesday, October 2
Hilton Omaha, 1001 Cass St. | 10:30 a.m.

Child Saving Institute’s Guild will celebrate “Hometown Heroes” during PurseOnalities 2019. Guests will enjoy boutique shopping and bidding on some of the season’s hottest purses in incredible silent auction packages! Lunch follows featuring a keynote address by Omaha Hometown Hero Patrick Friman, Ph.D., vice president of outpatient behavioral health services and clinical professor in the University of Nebraska School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics. He is also author of “Good Night, Sweet Dreams, I Love You: Now Get Into Bed and Go to Sleep — How Tired Parents Can Solve Their Children’s Bedtime Problems.” Funds raised benefit the kids and families served by Child Saving Institute! Register at childsaving.org or contact Grace at gpeterson@childsaving.org or 402.504.3634.

Substitute Santa | Monday-Wednesday December 9-11
Drop gifts & gift cards at 4545 Dodge St. | 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Please help Child Saving Institute provide a joyful holiday season for hundreds of children and teens in the Omaha community. Donate cash, gifts, or gift cards to the Substitute Santa program serving foster kids, shelter youth, and struggling families. For more information, visit childsaving.org or contact Grace at gpeterson@childsaving.org or 402.504.3634.

Cabaret | Saturday May 9, 2020
Embassy Suites by Hilton Omaha LaVista Hotel and Conference Center
12520 Wesport Pkwy, LaVista, Neb. | 6 p.m.

You’re invited to our fabulously fun and biggest fundraiser for 2020 — Cabaret! Join the Board of Directors, Guild Board, and guests for cocktails, dinner, and loads of laughter with a special guest comedian! Sponsorships are available by contacting Anna Willey at awilley@childsaving.org or 402.504.3663. Table registration will open soon.

Leave a legacy for kids! For information about including Child Saving Institute’s kids in your estate plans, please contact Cali Page, Legacy Giving Coordinator, at cpage@childsaving.org or 402.504.3661.