

Inside the institute

FALL 2004

Since its establishment in 1996, the **Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute** has been a pre-eminent, independent voice for improving adoption for everyone it touches – particularly children – through innovative programs, educational initiatives, research and analysis, and advocacy for better practices, policies and laws.

High-impact work and new faces ...

A Message from The Executive Director

It has been quite a year for the Adoption Institute – one in which we have pursued innovative, high-impact projects; have emerged, strong and thriving, from tough financial times; and have brought on three talented new staff members to better accomplish our vital goal: **improving the lives of everyone touched by adoption, especially children.**

But more on all of that in a moment. First, I'd like to welcome you to the inaugural issue of *Inside the Institute*, a newsletter designed to provide you with a greater understanding of who we are, what we do, and why our work is so unique and important. Our plan is to publish twice a year for starters, and to grow from there with more frequency, content and features. We will also continue to publish our monthly e-newsletter, in which we examine current news, research, policy and legal issues. To sign up for our e-newsletter, please visit our award-winning website, www.adoptioninstitute.org.

Keep an eye on our website in the coming months, because it's about to undergo an overhaul. In its comprehensiveness, of course, it will still be **an indispensable tool for professionals, journalists, policymakers, parents and anyone else who wants independent, reliable information**, but it also will include more content and become easier to navigate.

Overseeing our website renovation is **Hollee McGinnis**, who joined us as **Policy and Operations Director** in July. Hollee is a highly regarded researcher and educator who founded AKA (a terrific educational organization for adopted adults like herself), and she has quickly proven herself to be an indispensable asset. Her projects include our e-newsletter; our new report on adoption disruption, which provides vital information for helping to keep families intact; and a just-begun, comprehensive study designed to improve policies and practices relating to international adoption.

I'm proud to announce that two luminaries in the adoption field also are joining our senior staff this month: **Susan Livingston Smith, as Program and Project Director; and Jeanne Howard, as Policy and Research Director.** Susan and Jeanne have spent decades conducting some of the most important work in adoption today, most recently as co-directors of the prestigious Center for Adoption Research at Illinois State University. Susan's first initiative with us will be a groundbreaking report on birth parents, while Jeanne will shepherd a new research project relating to the growing but under-examined trend of adoption by gays and lesbians.

Our staff growth, especially with such high-level personnel, sends two clear messages. First and foremost, it means we are going to do even more and better work to improve the lives

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Programs and Projects

We design our initiatives to accomplish two concrete objectives: improve the lives of everyone touched by adoption, and help children who need permanent, loving families. You can learn more, on our website, about the many ways we pursue those goals. But here are some examples of our accomplishments and our plans:

Critically important research to change policies, laws and practices. Our most recent report, released in November, is a comprehensive study on how best to find and maintain stable, permanent families for the hundreds of thousands of children in foster care. The report, "What's Working for Children," found generally good news: The vast majority of adoptions from foster care remain intact. At the same time, we offered a critical assessment of remaining problems, and offered concrete recommendations to improve both future outcomes and the lives of the tens of thousands of families formed annually with children from foster care.

"What's Working for Children" was published soon after a high-profile report by the Alan Guttmacher Institute for which the Adoption Institute assessed the national training curriculum of the multimillion-dollar, federal Infant Adoption Awareness Act. And that, in turn, came on the heels of two other Institute projects that received wide attention (covered by hundreds of media outlets) and that had significant impact on policymakers and practitioners; one examined the problem of unsafe infant abandonment and the other examined practices relating to the understudied phenomenon of adoption by gays and lesbians.

Making a positive difference in people's lives is our aim, and we've hit the target with these projects as well as in others relating to adoption ethics, the Hague treaty on international adoption, the effects of fetal alcohol exposure, and our initiative to help children who lost parents on 9/11. And we expect similar success with upcoming major projects, which include (to name a few) intercountry adoption, identity in adoption, and issues relating to birth parents.

Innovative education programs to help children and families. Earlier this year, Executive Director Adam Pertman became probably the first person to conduct a training on adoption issues in a newsroom. He did that at the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, and more such trainings are being planned; they're part of our one-of-a-kind Educate the Media program, the intent of which is to replace often-negative and stereotypical coverage with research-based stories that inform the public and thereby improve attitudes and practices. In a similar vein, the Adoption Institute under Pertman – who was a Pulitzer-nominated journalist before writing his groundbreaking book *Adoption Nation* – has become a primary source for reliable information in the media, and has been quoted hundreds of times on a wide variety of adoption-related topics.

Our Educating the Educators program, like its sibling initiative for journalists, is designed to alter reality (in a positive, thoughtful way) for children whose lives include adoption and for the millions of members of their families. This is a young program for the Institute, but one we consider critically important – and therefore intend to expand. Already, Pertman has conducted several trainings for teachers and other school personnel, with more planned in coming months. We have produced valuable materials that help educators shape their lesson plans, use sensitive language, and use other tools that make all the kids in their classes understand that their families are on an equal footing, whether they're headed by single mothers, divorced fathers, or adoptive parents.



A Major Honor for Our Work

Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana (center) presented an **Angel of Adoption award to the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute** at a ceremony in September in Washington, D.C., in honor of our long record of achievements for families and children. Receiving the award on behalf of the Institute were Board President Sandra Kresch and Executive Director Adam Pertman. Senator Hillary Clinton of New York nominated the Institute "in recognition of the organization's unique role in improving the lives of the millions of Americans affected by adoption." Landrieu is a co-chair and founder of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, which presents the prestigious Angel in Adoption awards annually.

The English American
A Night of Comedy
in Los Angeles

March 2005
Lily Tomlin presents a
one-woman show starring
Allison Larkin

*Check our website for the
date and venue*

A Taste of Spring
Wine & Food Benefit
at Christie's in New York

April 14, 2005
Featuring famous chefs
and winemakers

Plus a live auction & music!

the date!

New Senior Staff



SUSAN LIVINGSTON SMITH, Program & Project Director, is a leading scholar in the field of post-adoption who has specialized in developing and improving adoption services. Her book, *Promoting Successful Adoptions: Practice with Troubled Families*, co-authored with Jeanne Howard, is a comprehensive integration of research, theory and practice knowledge for working with troubled adoptive families. A licensed clinical social worker and an Emerita Professor of Social Work from Illinois State University, Smith began her career working in adoption agencies in Tennessee and Illinois before becoming an educator. Smith's pioneering work in the field was recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which awarded her and Dr. Howard an Adoption 2002 Excellence Award for applied scholarship and research.



HOLLEE A. MCGINNIS, Policy & Operations Director, is a prominent educator, speaker and community activist on international and transracial adoptions, and has concentrated her professional work on the lifelong impact of adoption. McGinnis founded the non-profit adult intercountry adoptee organization, Also-Known-As, in New York City to provide post-adoption services for adult adoptees and adoptive families. She received her masters of science from Columbia University School of Social Work, and completed a post-masters clinical social work fellowship at the Yale University Child Study Center. Her published pieces are included in two adoption anthologies, *Parents at Last: Celebrating Adoption and the New Pathways to Parenthood* and *Voices from Another Place*. McGinnis received the Korean World Leaders of Tomorrow award in recognition of her leadership in the area of social services.



JEANNE A. HOWARD, Policy & Research Director, a passionate advocate for improved adoption policy, has focused her scholarly work on adoption throughout her career. She is a full Professor in Social Work at Illinois State University, where she co-directed the Center for Adoption Studies. Dr. Howard has contributed to the development of knowledge to inform policy and practice throughout her career, from a groundbreaking study on adoption disruption in the late 1980s to her recent publication, co-authored with Susan Smith, *After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth*, the largest study conducted to date on the needs of child welfare adoptive families. Dr. Howard's work was recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with the Adoption 2002 Excellence Award for applied scholarship and research.

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of the millions of people for whom adoption is an everyday reality. Second, it means we've not only survived some major belt-tightening during the last recession, but we have (whew!) emerged stronger than ever. It's a good thing, too, because no other organization pursues such an ambitious mission: engaging in research-based advocacy explicitly designed to advance every aspect of adoption policy, practice and attitudes.



Please read through the rest of *Inside the Institute* to learn more about us, the work we've done, and what we've got planned. Then feel free to e-mail us with questions or suggestions, use our research and publications – and support us in any way you can.

Have a wonderful holiday and a joyous, healthy new year. With my heartfelt thanks,

Adam Pertman, Executive Director

In the news

Our projects receive wide coverage in newspapers and in the electronic media, helping to ensure that we reach policy-makers, professionals and the public. Even more often, our research is used as background and is cited by journalists nationwide, while our staff members are regularly interviewed on subjects ranging from foster care to ethical practices, from census reports on adoption to stories that examine “nontraditional” families. Here's a small sampling of the Adoption Institute recent sightings:

Articles in the *Boston Globe* and the *Denver Post* on unsafe infant abandonment.

Stories in the *Wall Street Journal* on international and “open” adoption.

An interview with Pertman (who also has appeared on *Oprah*, *Today* and *Nightline*) on CBS-TV's *Early Show* on misconceptions relating to adoption.

A commentary in the *Christian Science Monitor* (reprinted in this mailing) in which the Institute takes ABC's *20/20* to task for its adoption special.

There are hundreds more, in media outlets that include National Public Radio, websites such as *Child.com*, and in major magazines.

You get the idea. We are improving the quality of information about adoption every day, thereby enhancing knowledge and public perceptions. To find out more, to read some of the stories mentioned above, or to sign up for our free e-newsletter, please visit www.adoptioninstitute.org.



Presidents letter

It would be hard to exaggerate the progress we made in 2004. As a result of the efforts of our extraordinary Executive Director and the commitment of our Board, we have stabilized our financial condition and positioned ourselves

for continued growth. The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute recognized the important impact of our work with a prestigious Angel in Adoption Award, which we celebrated at a reception in Washington, D.C., hosted by Al Hunt of the *Wall Street Journal* and Judy Woodruff of CNN.

We are deeply grateful to two additional friends of the Institute, one old and one new: Spence Chapin Services to Families and Children, which provided our start-up funding and now demonstrates its ongoing commitment with support for another three years; and The Cradle, which has earned our respect for its good works and generosity. We also welcome five new Board members, all of whom bring valuable skills, resources and perspectives.

As we plan for 2005, we thank all our supporters for your past commitment and for remaining part of our family going forward. The Institute is unique in the field of adoption – with tangible, daily impact on policy, practice and perceptions. We are blessed with a committed staff and volunteers who make a difference in the lives of people connected with adoption, but we have much more to do. Please help us accomplish even more next year than we have in the one that's drawing to a close.

Warm wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a happy, healthy new year.

Sandra D. Kresch, President

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