Honoring the Legacy of The Donaldson Adoption Institute
Dear Donors, Partners and Friends,

After more than twenty years of providing leadership to improve the lives of children and strengthen families, the Donaldson Adoption Institute (DAI) will be winding down our operation. We are very proud of the contributions we have made in providing groundbreaking research, world-class education, and passionate advocacy—all in service of shedding much needed light and understanding on the topics that matter most to those closest to adoption and foster care. Unfortunately, DAI’s board and leadership concluded that the challenge of raising sufficient funding to run and grow the organization was no longer feasible and thus, we have made the difficult decision to close. An archive of DAI’s work will remain online and accessible however, our active engagement in adoption reform will come to an end on December 31, 2017 while the DAI board of directors pursues dissolution of the organization.

In 1996, the Institute was established by the Board of Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children (now Spence-Chapin), which identified the need for an independent and objective adoption research, education, and advocacy organization that addressed the needs of birth parents, adopted people, adoptive parents, the people who love them, and the professionals that serve them. The organization was originally named in honor of Evan B. Donaldson, a passionate and committed member of the Spence-Chapin Board of Directors for nearly 20 years, serving as its president from 1986 until her death in 1994. To reflect the commitment and generosity of the entire Donaldson family, the organization became the Donaldson Adoption Institute in 2012.

Since our inception, DAI has played a vital role in driving adoption reform, addressing critical issues such as the importance of access to original birth certificates and the need for quality post adoption services. We have also created practicums for parents and professionals on issues related to adoption preparation, openness in adoption, and identity development, to name a few. We have authored and co-authored dozens of position statements, commentaries, and testimonies pertaining to legislative issues ranging from adoptee rights to LGBTQ equality. We have seen our ideas and recommendations acted upon by public and private child welfare agencies, educators, legislatures and courts across the country.

Everything we have done and every action we have taken has been made possible by the steadfast support from all of our generous donors, the heart of our precious community, and the hard work of our staff, board, and volunteers who have dedicated their valuable time and talents to advance DAI’s work. Because of all of you we have created unforgettable memories at our signature annual fundraising event “Taste of Spring” and provided opportunities for transformational conversations and connections at our most recent National “Let’s Adopt Reform” Town Hall tour.

Most importantly, to all who have contributed to DAI over the years, we thank you. We are grateful we have been able to tackle the toughest issues and provide leadership on a topic that has so often been left out of the national discourse. We truly could not have made the impact we made without your generosity. If you have recently made a donation to DAI, you will receive your usual acknowledgement letter for tax purposes and as always, the DAI board of directors will ensure any remaining contributions are put to the most effective, mission-related work upon dissolution.

While the work to reform adoption and foster care is not nearly complete, we take pride in the contributions DAI has made; we know the legacy of our work will live on and we are grateful to each and every individual for being a part of our extended family.

Sincerely,

April Dinwoodie
Chief Executive

Susan Notkin
Board Chair

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Introduction

DAI is so very proud of the contributions we have been able to make throughout our 20-plus year history. It would be impossible to give proper attention to every transformational effort made by the many individuals that have been connected to our organization. On the following pages you will find a collective of our most recent work, key milestones and accomplishments all of which have been built from a strong base of research, education and advocacy over our full history.
DAI’s center of gravity has always been research. We have conducted original research to fill gaps in current knowledge and to inform best practices in the field in order to improve reality on the ground for the millions of people connected to the adoption and foster care experience. Since our inception our research reports have been cumulatively downloaded over 400,000 times.

2017 Highlights

1. In March, DAI released phase two of our options counseling research entitled “Understanding Options Counseling Experiences in Adoption-A Qualitative Analysis of Birth Parents and Professionals”. The objective of this work was to understand the decision-making experiences of women who relinquished their parental rights to adoption, as well as the context in which options surrounding crisis pregnancies are discussed with expectant parents by adoption professionals. 30 birth mothers and 20 adoption professionals were interviewed for the qualitative portion of the study. Findings revealed a variety of key areas that would benefit from shifts in practice and policy in order to ensure ethics and comprehensive supports. Phase one of our comprehensive options counseling research, “Understanding Options Counseling Experience in Adoption-A Quantitative Analysis of Birth Parents and Professionals” was released in November, 2016.

2. In March, DAI hosted an event to disseminate key research findings from both the quantitative and qualitative options counseling research studies and facilitate a panel discussion about the experiences of birth parents. Women, Adoption and Family-Reclaiming our Narrative was held at the Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work in New York and included a presentation of our two-phase research study on options counseling followed by a panel discussion about needed shifts in this critical area of adoption practice.
Key Moments in DAI History

1. In September of 2015, DAI completed a first-of-its-kind, national survey of public opinion on the landscape of adoption in the 21st century. This groundbreaking research has helped us gain a modern understanding of how the American public, including the adoption and foster care communities, perceive and respond to adoption, foster care adoption and the policies surrounding both. J. Walter Thompson’s Research In Kind fielded the research. Key findings from this research include majority support for equality in adoption as well as stricter regulations in adoption and foster. Results also revealed a general lack of fact-based understanding of the adoption experience combined with continued public misperceptions that often result in stigma and stereotype that have consequences on service delivery.

2. In the Fall of 2013 Reuters released a chilling investigation exposing the practice of unregulated child custody transfers of adopted children, commonly termed ‘rehoming’. In the wake of this piece, DAI released the second phase of a comprehensive paper on the internet and adoption entitled “Untangling the Web II: A Research Based Roadmap for Reform”. This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the most-comprehensive study conducted to date on the impact of the Internet—and, in particular, of social media—on adoption as an institution, as a process and as a reality for the millions of people connected to this experience. This report was preceded by our study entitled “Untangling the Web: The Internet’s Transformative Impact on Adoption”, which provided an initial examination on the topic.

3. In 2009, DAI released “Beyond Culture Camp-Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption”. At the time, this report was the broadest and most extensive examination of adult adoptee identity to date and was based on the direct input of adults who had been adopted. From 1971 until the publication of this study, parents in this country had adopted nearly a half-million children from other countries, the vast majority of them from orphanages throughout Asia, South America and Africa. This seminal work sought to better understand identity development in adopted persons, particularly for those transracially and/or transculturally adopted. One of the key findings in the study was that although activities like ‘culture camps’ are meaningful, they alone are not enough to ensure transracially adopted persons develop a healthy and affirming sense of self.

4. DAI released “Finding Families for African American Children—The Role of Race and Law in Adoption from Foster Care” in 2008. To date, this report is our most frequently downloaded publication. The report focuses on domestic transracial adoption and assesses its use as a policy and practice approach in meeting the needs of African American children in foster care who cannot be safely reunited with their parents or placed with kin. Given changing policies at the time the paper was authored, the overarching goal of the report was to bring law in line with sound adoption practice that addresses the relevant issues in selecting families for children and in preparing parents to successfully care for them.
Over the years, it has become clear that one of the greatest impediments to meaningful reform in adoption and foster care are the societal misperceptions and general lack of knowledge surrounding this experience. Through education, DAI’s work has brought about understanding for society as well as the systems that serve families in order to shift perceptions and create meaningful change.

2017 Highlights

1. In November of 2016, DAI released our comprehensive, interactive educational curriculum entitled *Openness in Adoption-What a Concept!*. A narrator guides the user through three learning modules: Exploring, Experiencing and Living Openness in Adoption. Video and audio clips highlighting real life experiences and exercises as well as a user's guide are included allowing participants opportunities to put their knowledge to practice. A documentary film that follows several families who have experienced open adoption concludes the curriculum along with a discussion guide. Since the curriculum was launched, 244 individuals have signed up for this educational experience.

2. News coverage and access to timely information drive awareness and impact our ability to influence needed change in adoption and foster care. Because of this, DAI monitored and shared key developments in adoption and foster care policy, research, and resources featured in the news to keep practitioners, advocates, and those connected to adoption educated and informed. In the Fall of 2017 DAI created a News Digest which summarizes key national news stories and also provided an analysis. In 2017, DAI was mentioned in the news or included in adoption related publications almost two dozen times. Articles ranged from DAI commentary on the hit television program *This is Us* to an AP story that referenced DAI’s advocacy alongside adoptee rights organizations for adopted persons right to their Original Birth Certificate.

3. DAI’s blog served to highlight elements of DAI’s work and our commentary on critical issues and current events in adoption and foster care. We frequently featured guest bloggers that shared their personal and/or professional connections to adoption. The blog was a powerful way to educate society and influence perceptions through sharp, concise and informative pieces. Throughout 2017 DAI posted more than two dozen original posts that were authored either by DAI or guest authors.
**Key Moments in DAI History**

1. In the Spring of 2016 DAI was invited to join the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) in New York along with Fostering Change for Children on a new initiative spearheaded by ACS to educate and train child welfare and legal professionals about openness in adoption. The initiative was kicked off with a half-day event featuring a panel discussion as well as a presentation including DAI’s research and highlighting our openness curriculum.

2. Beginning in November of 2015 through December of 2016, DAI embarked on our year-long Let’s Adopt Reform (LAR) initiative to ignite a national conversation about adoption and foster care adoption in the 21st century. LAR was comprised of a National Town Hall Tour which visited four major US cities and included discussion topics and panel questions inspired by our public opinion research. Each Town Hall opened with a thought-provoking presentation from DAI followed by a moderated panel discussion of experts. Questions were posed to the panel from the live audience as well as virtually via social media. In addition to the Town Hall events, the Let’s Adopt Reform initiative included our public opinion research, professionals qualitative focus groups, our Adoption Experience gallery and an open letter that outlined DAI’s key beliefs. LAR concluded in December of 2016 with the release of our landmark report “Adoption in America Today—The Good, The Bad and a Path to Reform”. The report encompasses years of DAI’s research and synthesizes the information gained from our LAR initiative.

3. DAI has engaged in a variety of efforts that seek to educate the systems that frequently come into contact with families that are connected to adoption and foster care yet don’t always have the tools to respond in realistic and affirmative ways to today’s families. These include schools, medical and mental health professionals and court systems. In 2006, DAI authored a paper entitled “Adoption in the Schools—A Lot to Learn” which analyzes challenges faced by kids and families in the school system and outlines practice changes for schools to enhance their knowledge and better respond to kids and parents that are connected to adoption and foster care. In 2013, DAI issued a report to address a critical need identified by families—more adoption competent mental health practitioners. “A Need to Know—Enhancing Adoption Competence Among Mental Health Professionals” outlines key recommendations to ensure adoption professionals are aware of and able to respond to the unique and often complex experiences of adoption and foster care.
Antiquated regulations and inconsistent laws at the state and federal levels can impede ethical and careful adoption and foster care practices. DAI has made recommendations based on research findings to achieve best practices and advance sound law and policy.

2017 Highlights

1. DAI launched OBC 2020 in May of 2017. The vision for this initiative was to ignite an organized national movement to raise awareness and broadly educate surrounding the importance of unrestricted access to original birth certificates (OBCs) by adopted people. Our hope was that by 2020, every state without OBC access would have an active campaign to restore this right to adopted people. OBC 2020 is rooted in the belief that it is a human right to know your full truth and that all persons have a fundamental right to possess their original birth certificate without restriction.

2. Throughout 2017 DAI worked in collaboration with adoptee rights advocates to oppose legislation in NY which offers a compromised solution that denies equality to adopted persons seeking a copy of their original birth certificate (OBC). DAI collaborated on four separate position statements with local and national child welfare organizations. We additionally signed on to a letter of opposition to the NY bill along with 45 adoptee rights organization and hundreds of individuals who believe that access to a factual birth certificate is a right for everyone not a privilege for some.

3. Also in NY this year, DAI joined the Preserving Family Bonds Coalition in support of the Preserving Family Bonds Act which would grant NY Family Court judges the discretion at a disposition hearing in a termination of parental rights proceeding to order continued visitation and/or contact between children and their birth parents and/or their siblings after a parent’s rights have been terminated when such contact is deemed by the Court to be in the children’s best interests.

4. Marriage equality was achieved on June 26th, 2015 when the United States Supreme Court issued their opinion in Obergefell, et al. v. Hodges, et al., ultimately declaring that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage. Although this was a vital step towards equality, members of the LGBTQ community continue to face discrimination. Throughout 2017, a variety of states continued to introduce legislation dubbed ‘conscience’ bills which propose legalized discrimination under the guise of religious freedom. In May of this year DAI joined with leading child welfare and family-focused organizations to release a position statement affirming that LGBTQ parents are as well suited to raise children as their heterosexual counterparts and that LGBTQ youth and families deserve equal treatment under the law.
Key Moments in DAI History

1. In 2016, DAI partnered with the Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York (AFFCNY) to launch Building Strong Families—Advancing Post Adoption Services, an initiative which provides education and advocacy surrounding the need for post-adoption support. The Building Strong Families website includes information pertaining to relevant news and research in the area of post-adoption services, as well as resources that can help families gain access to existing services. In addition to this practical tool, this initiative also entails an advocacy campaign for quality and accessible post-adoption services that are streamlined and appropriately funded.

2. In March of 2015, DAI was lead amicus on a brief filed with the United States Supreme Court urging consideration of harms to adopted and waiting foster children from bans on same sex marriage. Obergefell, et al. v. Hodges, et al was ultimately decided by the High Court in June of 2015 in favor of marriage equality. In the Spring of 2015 DAI authored a blog post entitled “In Good Conscience” in support of marriage equality and urging child welfare systems to evaluate prospective parents on the basis of their qualifications, not their sexual orientation. The post received multiple citations from national equality organizations and media publications, including the Human Rights Campaign and The Advocate.

3. Beginning in 2015 and continuing to present, DAI has collaborated with advocates and influencers surrounding the issue of citizenship for persons born internationally and adopted by US citizens. In 2000, the United States passed the Child Citizenship Act granting automatic citizenship to any child who was adopted by US citizens however the law only applies to adopted persons who were under the age of 18 when it came into effect. This has left countless adopted persons at risk for deportation or actually deported, most recently with the 2016 deportation of Adam Crapser. DAI continues to advocate for the Adoptee Citizenship Act as a legislative reform for adopted persons who do not fall under the 2000 Child Citizenship Act.

4. In 2014, the DAI collaborated with national leading child welfare organizations on a position statement in response to unregulated child custody transfers (aka rehoming). The statement called for greater protections for adopted children nationwide, through improved policies to prepare families for adoption and increased and coordinated investments in support services after adoption.

Thank You

While our work will end, our hope and passion for adoption reform remains and we will always believe that strong families build strong communities and strong communities make a better world for all of us. Thank you again for supporting DAI’s mission.