
Information Packet



A Step Ahead
ADOPTION

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Considering Adoption?

...Here's What You Need to Know!

If you would like to consider adopting a child in the US through private, domestic adoption, here are a few tips to make your adoption search successful.

Our professional contacts --

A Step Ahead Adoption Services (ASA) has developed relationships with over 40 different adoption agencies and attorneys throughout the US. As a result, it is fairly common for our clients to adopt in 1 year or less.

Race & Gender --

The more open you are on gender and race, the more birth parent cases you can review. We do accept clients who are race and/or gender specific, but realize that often diminishes the many options that could be available to your family. If you are race & gender specific, you may have a much longer wait!

Cost of Adoption --

The median cost of an adoption placement through the providers, with whom we work, is ranging in the \$30-\$40K range. We can get a case below \$30K, but we want to be straightforward about the possible case costs for a placement of a newborn or infant.

Where Would We Go for an Adoption?

Most of the providers with whom we work are located in these states: FL, GA, AL, NC, SC, TX, KS, OK, AZ, AR, CO, NV, CA and WA. If you research the adoption laws in these states, you'll learn that they tend to be considered "adoption friendly" states for adoptive parents.

Adoption Communication --

We are always asked about the level of "openness" for adoptive parents. We don't have a policy on adoption communication, but choose to educate you on the differences between closed, semi-open and open adoption. Again, the more options you provide us, the more choices you may have on a case we can present.

The ASA Service Package --

Our service package is in 3 phases:

- (1) adoption preparation, home study education, profile development assistance, and education;
- (2) once "approved & waiting" we network our clients with the various adoption providers in the US; unlike other consulting services, you do not have to formally apply to agencies and attorneys to show your profile. Our unique relationships allow you a courtesy showing to birth parents desiring to make an adoption plan.
- (3) placement-to-finalization, you enter this last phase once you have adopted and we stay with you through the post placement time of your adoption. Unlike our competitors, we stay with you through finalization.



Meet the Founder of

...A Step Ahead Adoption Services



- *Request online training, workshops, speakers*
 - *Establish working relationships with adoption providers*
 - *Family referrals*
 - *Receive “cases” from all adoption providers (agencies & attorneys)*
 - *Hold Personal Adoption Consultations (PACs) with prospective families*
 - *Teach CO required adoption education*
 - *Give documentation to adoption providers*
-

Diane is the owner/president of A Step Ahead. Our adoption education, support, guidance and referral service was founded in 1999 as Step-by-Step Adoption Consultants, Inc. With the Hogan family’s relocation from North Carolina to Colorado in 2003, it was decided to rebrand the company as A Step Ahead Adoption Services ...a move to allow for more diversity of support for adoptive families!

Our service package includes the original core business plan, but we have now expanded our services to include education for the post-adoptive family, family resources & outreach, as well as regional support groups.

Professionally, Diane holds BS and MA degrees in education. Prior to working in adoption, Diane spent 20 years in public education (classroom teacher, district administrator, and state administrator) in Ohio, Florida and North Carolina. Diane also has worked as a freelance textbook editor and writer, publishing a text/workbook in 2000. Her full time job is as the mother of two children (now young adults) who were brought home through open, domestic adoption.

dianehogan@astepaheadadoption.com



Meet the Consultants of ...A Step Ahead Adoption Services



Cindy Lanphier

Cindy Lanphier is a senior adoption consultant with A Step Ahead Adoption Consultants. Cindy immersed herself in to the world of adoption when she started researching the process of adoption. She quickly became an advocate for adoption education and networking during her experience. She served on the Board of SPAFA, a local adoption support group, for several years and believes everyone needs to arm themselves with education when adopting a child. Cindy holds a B.S. degree in Health Education; Corporate Wellness from Penn State University. Cindy and Mike have been married for almost 20 years and have an adopted daughter who is in middle school. The Lanphiers live in Waxhaw, NC, and are in the Eastern Time Zone.



Shannon Murphy Johnson

Shannon Murphy Johnson is a senior consultant who resides in Kansas along with her husband of 30 years, Kenneth. Together they parent four beautiful children, two of whom were brought home through adoption. Shannon comes to ASA after working the world of professional Figure Skating as a young figure skater and an elite skating coach. Among Shannon's many strengths is the passion she brings to her work, coupled with her knowledge of adoption first and foremost as an adoptee and then as an adoptive parent. Shannon is in the Central Time Zone.



Teri Heidemann

Teri Heidemann, a senior consultant with 12 years working with ASA, has a BS degree in Business. Before becoming a mother of two, she was an account executive in radio sales for 12 years. For six years, she worked as a preschool teacher and as a part-time assistant director at a weekday preschool. Teri is now a full-time mom and a senior adoption consultant. As an adult, Teri discovered she was adopted as well. This information serves Teri and her clients well as she has a view of adoption not only as a parent, but also as an adoptee. As a mother of two children (one biological daughter and one adopted son), Teri and her husband, Marc, parent from their home in North Carolina. Teri resides in the Eastern Time Zone.



Amanda Duraes

Amanda is from Denver, Colorado. Amanda and Dave have been married for 10 years and used ASA's services for the adoption of their son, Luke. Through her experience with adoption Amanda developed a great passion and enjoys advocating for everyone in the adoption triad. She serves as our educator and workshop trainer in Colorado. Amanda holds a B.S. Degree in Business Information Systems and has experience in employee benefits and in real estate. Amanda is located in the Mountain Time Zone and eager to work with client families all over the US.



Heather Coddington

Heather Coddington has a BS degree in elementary education and French from Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania. For several years she worked as an elementary media specialist, followed by 8 years as a public children's librarian and director of a small public library. Heather's life long love of working with children naturally translated into a desire to help create families through the miracle of adoption. During their own adoption journey, Heather discovered a local adoption support group, and her passion for adoption was born. After bringing home their daughter through the help of an ASA consultant, Heather became very active with the adoption support group, encouraging others in their adoption journeys. This eventually brought Heather back to ASA to join her love of working with children with her love of adoption. Heather currently lives with her husband and two children in Orlando, Florida and is in the Eastern Time Zone.



Lora Holt

My name is Lora Holt. I am 33 years old. I am from South Dakota. I've been married to my sweet husband Gene for 11 years. We have been blessed with 2 beautiful children via adoption - Ryan (5) and Zane (1). By trade, I am a registered nurse/drug alcohol counselor, but am currently a stay at home mom with my busy kiddos. I am very passionate about adoption and feel privileged to be a part of A Step Ahead's adoption team.



Meet the Consultants of ...A Step Ahead Adoption Services



Merry Burns

Merry Burns is originally from San Diego and now resides in Omaha, Nebraska. Merry and Michael have been married for 11 years and used ASA's services during the adoption of their son, Nolan. Through her professional experience as a Recruiter and her passion for adoption Merry is excited to bring families together. Merry received a B.S. Degree in Elementary Education with a minor in Special Education. Merry is located in the Central Time Zone and eager to work with client families all over the US.



Checklist

.....of Domestic Adoption Services

As a “client” you can expect:

- ✓ You will be given a personal adoption consultant. You can expect to receive from 60-100 hours of adoption consulting, education, guidance, referral and support throughout your adoption journey. Your adoption consultant is available to you M-F on her office hours and 24/7 when you go to take placement of your child.
- ✓ A Finance Coach will assist you with all financial preparation you may need for your adoption. This time is for you to have a review of your existing finances and assistance in locating funds for your adoption.
- ✓ One hour of birthparent consulting -- (we have two consultants who are birthparents and have placed children for adoption). This time is scheduled prior to your meeting a birthparent or having a phone interview. Our clients say they learn a tremendous amount from these consultants.
- ✓ One hour of legal consulting -- (we have two attorneys who are available to every client). This time is scheduled when you receive your agency contract or your placement agreement.
- ✓ A one hour conversation with an adult adoptee who was placed through domestic adoption. We call this the “Adoptee Perspective” consultation. Our families schedule this during their post-placement to review such items as developmental milestones, special needs issues that may arise or questions about necessary therapeutic interventions for their children.
- ✓ Six hours of webinar classes you can take throughout the time you are with our service.
- ✓ eAdopt – Your educational portal! You will be assigned reading material based on each phase of your adoption journey. No additional software is required as this is an internet-based system. Your eAdopt account will provide you with over 80 documents on adoption and parenting topics.



10 Steps for Joining

1. Choose a browser
(*Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Safari* – Internet Explorer does not work well with our forms)
2. Complete our online application: www.asteaheadadoption.com
3. Click *Forms*
4. Click on *Application Form* (it takes 20-30 minutes to complete)
5. Look for our *confirmation email*. Once your application is complete, we receive a message that your family is in the “queue” and we will confirm with an email or a phone call.
6. Sign & date the *Authorization Release Form* (page 10)
7. Sign & date the *Fee Service Agreement Form* (page 11)
8. Send both forms to the home office in Colorado through email, fax or US Mail (contact points below)
9. Arrange payment by credit card either on our website through Pay Pal or over the phone with Diane Hogan **OR** Send a personal check to the NC office payable to:
A Step Ahead Adoption Services
1822-6 S. Glenburnie Rd., Suite 355
New Bern, NC 28562
10. When all “steps” above are completed you will be assigned your personal adoption consultant as we guide your heart every step of your journey!



Our Full-Service Adoption

...Planning Guide

At A Step Ahead Adoption Services, we know planning for adoption is a life-changing event. Being able to educate you, support you, and guide you through the entire process is our passion. We truly enjoy helping others realize their dreams of becoming a family. To assist you on this journey, we offer the following “STEPS,” starting from the very earliest stages of adoption planning and taking you through the parenting stages toward adoption advocacy.

S . . . Support

Like a child’s first steps, this phase will introduce you to the many options available in the greater adoption community. We are with you from the planning stages through placement and finalization, supporting you as you go. Information related to adoption terminology, adoption practices, laws, finances, and parenting education is provided to you and available to you during the entire process.

Personal Adoption Consultation (PAC)-- An initial meeting or telephone conversation with prospective parents. Together we discuss your desires and interests, review the family profile form, and review the services available. During this meeting, your consultant will help you decide which path—domestic or international—you should follow to bring home your child. Meetings, arranged during business hours with one of our adoption consultants, will occur based on a mutually agreeable time and location. We ask for a \$50 fee for this optional 1-hour session.

Confidential Application -- Your confidential family application is completed online through our website. We review your profile and create your personalized Pre-adoption Plan within a one to two week period.

Application Fee or Inclusive Fee – You will be given immediate access to your first 20-minute class on the adoption process. This class is “password protected” and only available to those client families who take their first adoption “steps” and enroll with ASA.



Our Full-Service Adoption

...Planning Guide

T . . . Thinking and Teaching

During this phase, you will find education, emotional support, guidance, and information to be your constant companion. Here are the services you can expect:

Referral Assistance -- You will have unlimited phone access to your ASA consulting during her office hours Monday-Friday. Additionally, your consultant is available to you 24/7 when you travel to take placement of your child.

Profile Preparation -- Paperwork is a necessary part of fulfilling your dreams of adoption domestically (within the US). In a domestic adoption, you may need assistance in writing a "Dear Birthparent" letter, designing your family portfolio, or planning an independent (private) adoption. We have several profile development services we can recommend if you prefer to use a service vs. doing it yourself.

Profile Assistance - Paperwork is a necessary part of fulfilling your dreams of family through adoption. In a domestic adoption, you may need assistance in writing your Dear Birthmother letter, designing your family's profile, or planning an independent adoption. We have several profile services we recommend and have electronic and hard copy profile examples to share with you.

E . . . Education

Continuing Education -- As you move through the steps of discernment to process, your consultant can provide you with an individual education plan for your specific type of adoption. Books, handouts, videos, tapes, and workshops will help provide extra information to keep you knowledgeable about all facets of adoption (pre to post).

Adoptee Perspective Consultation – many times our client families express concern about the impact of adoption on the child. You have a unique opportunity with ASA to set up a 1-hour call with an adult adoptee who has grown up in an open adoption.

Birthmother Communication Education --An additional service for pre-adoptive domestic families includes the opportunity to speak with a birthmother who has placed at least one child. ASA has a birthmother on call who has placed a child for adoption and can counsel you before that first intimidating phone call with your potential birthmother. This birthmother will provide you with insight about what birthparents look for in an adoptive family. The birthmother consultant will be happy to review profile.

Medical Information Assistance -- If you receive a case of a child or children, who have a need for medical evaluation, A Step Ahead has a list of medical professionals who can assist you with invaluable information. Travel Recommendations – If you choose to adopt from another state or another country, A Step Ahead can help provide tips and referrals for affordable travel.



Our Full-Service Adoption

...Planning Guide

P . . . Welcome to Parenthood

In this step, you receive help to graduate from the process of adoption to the parenting phase. In this last step, you receive:

Celebration -- When you become family, your life as family is only just beginning. With your permission, A Step Ahead wants to record your event with photos, videos, and stories. After all this hard work, it is time to CELEBRATE!

Post-Adoption Education -- You will find that your life as the parent is only just beginning. You will face a dozen or more questions – where do you turn. A Step Ahead, of course! Parenting techniques, reference material, and counseling referrals are all available.

Finalization/Re-adoption Assistance -- Even though your child is home, you still may find some paperwork is incomplete. To assist you with your finalization efforts (domestic adoption) or to complete the readopting process (international adoption), A Step Ahead will be happy to guide your family by helping with attorney referrals, legal document processing, and financial planning.

Information Sessions and Workshops

We value educating prospective adoptive families to be wise adoption consumers. There are so many avenues from which to choose, we try to simplify that process for you by delivering consistent educational opportunities. In the past, ASA hosted forums on Adoption 101, Getting Started in Adoption, Discovering Developmental Milestones, How to Talk with Family and Friends about Adoption, Bonding and Attachment, Parenting 101 and Parenting Survival Tips. As a client family, all of our information sessions and workshops are part of your personal service.

Additionally, clients are given an eAdopt account. This is a software product that we have purchased that allows you to stay right on top of your education, paperwork, and process of your adoption journey. Through your eAdopt account, you will have direct communication to/from your personal adoption consultant, as well as being able to receive group postings or messages appropriate for the adoptive family's journey.

New in 2016, every client will have access to our video tutorial library. All clients will be given a password to access this online library of 1-4 minute videos. These videos will touch on various aspects of adoption and parenting.

Our goals with all our workshops and information sessions are to help you become more educated about adoption trend and to show you the importance of adoption advocacy. Once you have your baby in your arms, we hope you will be as passionate about adoption as we are. We hope you see why we want to guide your heart through this journey, and why we want you to be A Step Ahead.



Authorization to Release

...Obtain Information

I/We (CLIENTS) authorize you to give A Step Ahead Adoption Services (COMPANY) and its consultants all information you have as to my/our adoption. This authorization includes, but is not limited to, the release of information in connection with any pre-, current and post-adoption paperwork, medical information and placement information. I/We understand that this information obtained will be used to help evaluate and facilitate my/our adoption with your agency. Furthermore, we release A Step Ahead Adoption Services from any unintentional wrongdoing in regards to my/our adoption.

Signature of Adoptive Parent (CLIENT)

Date

Signature of Adoptive Parent (CLIENT)

Date



Fee Service Agreement

...Full Service Adoption Plan

I/We (aka CLIENT/S) accept the Fee Service Agreement of \$3,700 adoption services fee for adoption planning education, referral, and support services (\$400 application fee + \$3300 adoption services flat fee) offered by A Step Ahead Adoption Services and its consultants (aka COMPANY). A Step Ahead Adoption Services agrees to provide the above-listed services, pre-adoption through post-placement. This service agreement is a 1-year commitment between the CLIENT and the COMPANY.

By signing this form, we agree to the total fee service and realize the funds we invest are NON-REFUNDABLE*. Further, we release A Step Ahead Adoption Services (COMPANY) from any unintentional wrongdoing in regards to my/our adoption plan.

Definition of full service adoption plan- A Step Ahead Adoptions will provide adoption planning, education, referral, and support services. However, A Step Ahead Adoption are not attorneys and therefore cannot give any legal advice, concerning adoption and any legal questions should be referred to your attorney. A Step Ahead Adoption cannot control the outcome of these cases. Therefore, the results are not guaranteed and there can be several unforeseen circumstances in this process that may result in no adoption being held. Also, failure on your part on providing the detailed information needed in order to evaluate your adoption possibilities, and failure on your part to honestly and completely disclose all the information requested may also result in the adoption not being completed. Step Ahead Adoption does not provide legal services in this contract, and like any contract should be reviewed with your attorney.

This contract is entered into in Colorado and therefore, venue and jurisdiction is proper in Colorado. If either party needs to take legal action to enforce this contract, the prevailing party will be awarded reasonable attorney fees and cost of that action.

At the discretion of the company for special circumstances you may request a partial refund. All requests must be in writing, letter or email and any refund is purely at the discretion of the company.

We agree that all information that we have given is accurate and complete to the best of our knowledge.

ACTIVE MILITARY FAMILIES RECEIVE A 10% DISCOUNT with A Step Ahead Adoption Services.

Signature of Adoptive Parent (CLIENT) Date

Signature of Adoptive Parent (CLIENT) Date

Signature of President (COMPANY) Date



FAQ -- Why Use an Adoption Consultant

What Is An Adoption Consultant?

A qualified Adoption Consultant will provide you with the education, support and guidance that will assist you in making the best decisions for your family throughout the adoption process, from start through finalization. Consultants are your adoption advocates throughout the process. They are well-versed in each state's adoption laws as well as the philosophies and reputations of the adoption agencies that they choose to work with, and will assist you in creating as many opportunities as possible for your family to receive your adoptive match and bring your child home. Many adoption consultants do not just have the professional expertise to fulfill their roles; they often have personal experience in being a member of the adoption triad and can share with you their first-hand experiences in adoption. They can assist you in creating your family profile book, provide financial education regarding various tax credits and grants, and help in explaining the fees and costs for adoption-related services. You can rely on your consultant to answer questions regarding travel advice if you are completing an interstate adoption, discussing adoption-related issues with extended family and friends, and providing a 'shoulder to lean on' in general throughout your adoption journey. (This information is reprinted with the permission of Adoption & Family Support Center, FL)

How Do Your Client Families Achieve an Adoption?

ASA has been in business for 15 years. During that time, we have worked hard to build a relationship with 40+ different adoption providers (agencies and attorneys) who have the legal authority to place a child for adoption. Due to our unique working relationship, these 40+ adoption providers allow our client families to have a profile shown to a prospective birth parent(s) at no legal or financial obligation. If the adoptive client family should be selected by the birth parent(s) and accept the "match," then and only then do they make a financial and legal commitment to that adoption provider. Prior to a "match" our client families are able to wait on their financial or legal commitments and have a greater opportunity to view information from a variety of agencies and attorneys.

What Services Are Provided by an Adoption Consultant?

When a prospective family enrolls with ASA they are assigned a personal adoption consultant. Typically the adoptive family is allowed to select the consultant with whom they would like to work, but if unsure, the company's president will assist the adoptive family with the best choice of a consultant. Your consultant is responsible for guiding you through the adoption process from the point you enter our service plan. If you are completely new to adoption, your consultant begins with home study agency referrals, adoption education and profile development assistance. If you come to us as a "professional referral" from an agency, social worker or attorney, your consultant picks up with your adoption plan at whatever point you enter our services. We stay with your family from that unique beginning point through placement with your adoption provider and finalization.

Our service package includes: adoption home study referral, adoption education & parenting education, personal adoption guidance & support, ancillary adoption services (i.e., legal, financial, child development, birth parent communication), profile design assistance, networking/adoption provider referrals, and post adoption support. We have documented that we spend 60-100 hours per client family with our adoption consulting services.



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FAQ -- Why Use an Adoption Consultant

Do You Advertise and Do Direct Matching with Birth Parents?

No ... we view that as adoption facilitation and that is not part of our service package. Instead, we reach out to the 40+ adoption providers with whom we have built personal and professional relationships. They let us know about prospective birth parent(s) and we then refer the adoptive family to that provider if they wish to submit a profile for consideration.

What Education Do You Provide?

We have partnered with a service, eAdopt, to give our client families a private electronic portal for the most current adoption and parenting information. Currently (2013) we have over 80 documents of valuable educational information we share with each client family. Some states have education requirements. If the adoptive family resides in a state where adoption and parenting education hours are required, we will validate your hours of education, provide a certificate of completion and a print out of the dated, completed topics.

Do You Work With Families From All the US States?

Currently (2013) we cannot work with families who are residents of NJ, NM, NY or IL.

Do You Work with Adoption Providers in all US States?

We have built relationships with adoption providers in the most “adoption friendly” states of the US. That is not to say we won’t work with every state that permits our services, but most of our client families prefer to take placement through agencies/attorneys in states that have adoption regulations favorable to an irrevocable placement.

Do You Require a Specific Level of Adoption Communication?

No we do not have a requirement of closed, semi-open or open. We have a very diverse view of adoption communication. We believe that the adoption communication between an adoptive family and a birth family should be mutually beneficial and often that cannot be defined pre-match. We do educate our adoptive families on their various ways both families communicate with one another pre-birth and post-placement. All of our consultants come with a variety of their own experiences in closed, semi-open and open adoption communication.

Is There a Requirement of Faith, Race or Marital Status?

We work with all types of families from single persons, married couples (traditional and same sex), domestic partnerships and common law couples. We accept all faiths and races.

Our guiding principal is your family is able to successfully complete a home study and provide a stable home with unconditional love for a child/children. We do request you have a brief phone interview with the president of our organization to assess if your priorities match our service abilities. We do request if you are a couple that you have been together at least 1 year (partnership or marriage) before applying to our program.



FAQ -- Why Use an Adoption Consultant

How Do We/I Budget for An Adoption?

Since we are unsure of where and through whom you will adopt, we suggest you plan on a minimum of \$30,000 for an adoption placement. That fee will be paid to the “placing” entity (agency or attorney) from whom you receive your adopted child. Some adoptions are less than \$30K and some more, so planning for your budget to be at least \$30K is helpful.

How Long Do You Work with Your Client Families?

We ask everyone to sign a Fee Service Agreement that binds us to our client families for 1 year from signing on with our services. If the family becomes dissatisfied, they may disengage any time during that year but no refund is offered. At the conclusion of the 1-year mark, if the family is not matched or placed and wishes to continue, there is a \$500 reactivation fee that is valid for an additional two years of service.



Networking -- Domestic Adoption

At A Step Ahead Adoption Services, we use the term “networking” to identify the process of contacting adoption providers (agencies and attorneys) through phone calls, e-mails and fax correspondence. All of the ASA consultants work as a team to help our families realize their dreams of becoming parents through adoption. Because we have worked over the past 12 years to develop long-lasting relationships with adoption professionals, we have a “network” of agencies and attorneys who depend on the quality of services we provide.

If you choose to network instead of signing on with one agency, you are opening the door to broader marketing of your family’s profile. Networking can be a cost-effective process for your family, but it is also an emotional roller coaster. It is your personal adoption consultant’s responsibility to keep you advised of cases, state laws, costs and any nuances to each case. You still have the right to accept or reject these cases – at no cost to your family!

Currently, our database includes approximately 45 adoption providers (agencies & adoption attorneys). This database is constantly updated. If we have difficulty with an adoption provider, they are removed from the referral list. This way you can be assured of the best recommendations on a timely basis. Perhaps “networking” is a good choice for your family ... let us know!

NOTE TO COLORADO FAMILIES

Because of the State’s requirements that a CO Licensed Agency be aware of your choice to network, we will always communicate directly with your CO licensed home study agency. We have built a relationship with three adoption agencies in the State of CO who understand how our services work. Your home study social worker will be apprised at all times of the advocacy and marketing happening on your behalf.

