

CREATING A BETTER WORLD FOR ALL FAMILIES

The mission of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute is very clear. It is not just to conduct research, provide education programs or formulate policies just for the sake of improving the understanding of adoption issues – though that is an essential starting point. Rather, we focus all of our work on initiatives that accomplish two concrete objectives: tangibly improving the daily lives of everyone touched by adoption, and helping children who need permanent, loving families.

We are pursuing those goals in numerous ways. Here are just a few:

- Conducting critically important studies on adoption-related issues, ranging from infant abandonment (safe havens) and adoption disruption to international adoption and foster care, all designed to change policies, practices and laws so they truly help children and their parents.
- Designing and implementing innovative programs that educate teachers, journalists, practitioners and other professionals about adoption-related issues, in order to improve the treatment of the growing number of families and children touched by adoption every day.
- Changing practices, policies, laws and attitudes with books, articles and commentaries, website content, and informational materials on issues ranging from adoption ethics to Prenatal Alcohol Syndrome, while providing interviews and accurate materials to the media for news stories.
- Conducting training and educational sessions for business executives and their employees to achieve equity in benefits for adoptive families, and to educate everyone concerned about ways to improve the prospects for finding permanent, loving homes for children who need them.

We provide the most direct, meaningful service possible for the tens of millions of Americans for whom adoption is part of everyday reality: improving their lives. The list of ways we do that is growing every day. Our work – and our dreams – are limited only by our resources.



PROGRAMS, PROJECTS AND PROGRESS

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute accomplishes its vital mission through unique programs and projects designed to inform, to educate and, most of all, to change reality on the ground in ways that tangibly improve both people's lives and adoption itself. No other organization is committed to such sweeping, ethics-based, change-the-world work.

Here are just a few examples of our accomplishments and our ongoing initiatives:

- **Birth Parent Project.** The broadest study to date of issues ranging from birth father registries to birth parent roles in adoptions from foster care and abroad, from the realities of pregnant women considering adoption to the relationships of birth and adoptive families after placement. The explicit intent of our research is to inform better laws, establish "best practices" and enhance the lives of everyone involved.
- **Identity in Adoption.** With initial funding from the Kellogg Foundation, this research will identify the factors that contribute to healthy identity formation (which incorporates adoption, race and culture) of adopted people, especially those adopted from other countries. It will include a comprehensive white paper, recommendations on promising practices for practitioners and services for parents.
- **Gay and Lesbian Adoption.** Expanding on our groundbreaking previous work, the Institute is conducting sweeping research for a widely disseminated white paper on the state of knowledge and recommended best practices relating to adoption by gays and lesbians. Our findings and materials will be designed for use by practitioners, prospective parents and established families.
- **Educate the Educators and Educate the Media.** These unique programs are intended to better inform two groups of professionals who have arguably the most profound (and too-often negative) impact on public attitudes toward adoption and everyone it touches, especially children. Our trainings and materials have already proven highly effective, and we plan to grow both programs in the years to come.
- **Much, much more.** The Institute is widely viewed as a leader in many areas – from improving intercountry adoption to providing authoritative information for professionals, journalists, researchers and families. And our work on expediting the adoption of children from foster care, on unsafe infant abandonment, on fetal alcohol syndrome, on two high-impact national surveys, and on our World Trade Center Permanency Project – among other initiatives – has had a demonstrable, positive impact.



JOURNALISTS & ADOPTION: A NEED TO KNOW

Reporting and writing more effectively about adoption-related issues enhances journalists' treatment of a wide range of diverse, nontraditional families in our country today – whether they are headed by stepparents or grandparents, single women or gay partners, or husbands and wives who do not happen to share the same religion or skin color. Improving the understanding of adoption and the people it affects is analogous to raising awareness in areas such as gender, race or religion.

Journalists strive to accomplish many complex goals in their stories. They attempt to provide insights into our culture and the profound ways it is changing; to reflect the diverse experiences of the full spectrum of our country's changing population; to meaningfully touch the hearts and minds of readers, listeners and viewers; to expose society's problems and concerns, while simultaneously depicting its positive aspects; and to serve as a catalyst for improvements in policies, practices, laws and attitudes.

As a matter of course, journalists try to accomplish all of these goals in a thoughtful, informed manner – not only to achieve the highest possible level of accuracy, but also to ensure that their stories do not promote negative stereotypes or inadvertently offend people by unwittingly using language, stereotypes or references that disparage individuals or groups simply because of their race, gender, ethnicity, religion, marital status or other aspects of who they are.

As a result of adoption's history of secrecy, however, most journalists (like other Americans) have learned relatively little about the institution or its participants. And that lack of knowledge can prevent them from identifying important or interesting stories; can deprive them of the ability to accurately depict the lives and concerns of adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents; can undermine their ability to connect meaningfully with the tens of millions of news consumers in the adoption community nationwide; and can cause them to unintentionally make factual errors, misleading statements and/or uninformed comments.

The Journalist Training Project of the Adoption Nation Education Initiative, a division of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, is designed to change this reality.



JOURNALISTS & ADOPTION: JUST THE FACTS

Journalists strive to reflect the lives of their readers, viewers and listeners, and to reach a greater proportion of their potential audience, but many members of the adoption community think their experiences are inadequately or poorly portrayed.

WHY JOURNALISTS?

They seek accuracy and affect lives

- ▶ Almost one-third of Americans say their main source of information about adoption is the news media, yet journalists rarely receive any education on the subject.
- ▶ Adoption has long been shrouded in secrecy, so people lack an understanding of it and too often draw inaccurate or negative conclusions from news accounts about aberrational events.
- ▶ Journalists' primary goal and commitment is accuracy, but lack of knowledge sometimes causes inadvertent errors, misleading statements, or a lack of perspective or context.
- ▶ Journalists have a major impact on public policy, as evidenced by changes in adoption-related laws and practices in states where reporting altered misconceptions and ill-conceived policies.
- ▶ Reporting that is inaccurate or incomplete can stigmatize children and families, especially with references and stereotypes akin to ones no longer acceptable in areas such as gender and race.
- ▶ Imprecise, irrelevant or gratuitous language in news stories, features and obituaries routinely conveys the message that adoption and adoptive families are second-rate or pathological.
- ▶ Child advocates agree more-balanced, informed reporting on foster care – and the children in the system – would help more boys and girls get permanent homes and promote positive change.
- ▶ Corrosive misperceptions derive from news accounts that lack context; 80 percent of Americans, for example, fear birth parents will return to “reclaim” their children – in fact, a rare occurrence.

WHY ADOPTION?

Adoption prevalence and impact are pervasive

- ▶ Adoption is becoming an increasingly routine way to form and expand families; indeed, an estimated 100 million Americans now have adoption in their immediate families.
- ▶ Almost 2/3 of Americans have a relative or close friend who is part of the adoption community.
- ▶ Nearly 40 percent of adult Americans have seriously considered adopting a child at some point.
- ▶ Approximately 6 million Americans of all ages were adopted, about 1.5 million of them children.
- ▶ About 120,000 children are adopted each year; a growing percentage of them come from foster care or from other countries, with a major impact on American society.
- ▶ Of nearly 600,000 children in foster care, 131,000 are legally free for adoption but are often left in the public system because of inaccurate public perceptions.
- ▶ Adoption is altering the way Americans view family formation, the balance between nurture and nature, “blood ties,” inheritance, and an array of other social, legal and personal issues.
- ▶ Adoption-related issues provide a valuable prism for understanding the profound changes occurring in the full spectrum of U.S. families (such as step, single-parent and biracial families).

Sources: Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute website (www.adoptioninstitute.org); 2002 National Adoption Attitudes Survey sponsored by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption in cooperation with the Adoption Institute; “Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America,” Basic Books 2000.



JOURNALISTS & ADOPTION: GUIDELINES & STYLEBOOK ENTRIES

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, drawing on its own research as well as that of others in the adoption field, has compiled guidelines and suggestions that journalists can utilize and that news media organizations can consider for inclusion in their stylebooks.

- ▶ As with race or gender, the fact that a person was adopted should be mentioned only if it is relevant to a story; if the reason for its inclusion is not implicitly clear, it should be explicitly stated.
- ▶ A child's parents should be referred to simply as his or her mother and father unless there is a pertinent reason to identify that they adopted, in which case the reason should be implicitly clear.
- ▶ The people who created the child are the "birth" or "biological" parents and not the "real" or "natural" parents. The adoptive parents and their children are both real and natural.
- ▶ A woman is not a "birth mother," and a man is not a "birth father," until their child has been placed with adoptive parents. Until then, they are either expectant parents or parents considering adoption.
- ▶ Words that imply motive or knowledge of circumstances, or are stigmatizing, should be avoided. That applies to all sides of the so-called adoption "triad." For instance:
 - It is generally inaccurate to describe children available for adoption as "orphans" or "unwanted," and is invariably better to say they are "placed" (not "given up" or "put up") for adoption. Adoption, and words referring to it, should never be used negatively or pejoratively;
 - It is incorrect to assume infertility is the sole reason for adoption or that it applies to everyone who adopts. It is also inaccurate, as well as stigmatizing, to depict adoption as a lesser means of family formation or to say adoptive parents could not have "their own" children.
 - Research shows that more than 90 percent of birth mothers want some level of contact or knowledge about the children they relinquished, that they were rarely if ever legally assured of anonymity, and that they almost never attempt to "reclaim" their children.
- ▶ Stories should not refer to children in foster care or an orphanage as "unadoptable," both because that is inaccurate and because it undermines prospects for finding them permanent homes. News consumers can make broad inferences from specific examples, so such language also can lead to assumptions that a given case is representative of a broader reality – which is not necessarily true.
- ▶ Adoptive mothers and fathers should not be described or depicted as selfless or saintly; usually, they just want to be parents, and adoption happens to be the way they chose to do so. Portraying foster or adoptive parents as heroes (or villains) conveys the message that only extraordinary people adopt, which lessens the prospects for finding families for children who need them.

Sources: Accurate Adoption Reporting, Institute for Adoption Information, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, "Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America" (Basic Books, 2000)



ACCURATE AND SENSITIVE ADOPTION LANGUAGE

Sensitivity to adoption issues is important for children touched by adoption, but it also yields positive results for those raised by stepparents, divorced parents, foster parents, single parents, grandparents, biracial parents, gay or lesbian parents, and within all the diverse kinds of “nontraditional” families proliferating in America today.

USE THESE POSITIVE TERMS	NOT	INSENSITIVE, INACCURATE TERMS
Birth or biological parents*		“Natural” or “real” parents
Biological or birth children		“Natural” or “real” children
My/your/our child**		My/your/our adopted child
Adopted adult/person		Adopted child (referring to an adult)
Chose to parent the child		“Kept” the child
International or intercountry adoption		Foreign adoption
Made an adoption plan or placed for/chose adoption		Adopted out, surrendered or put up for adoption
Was adopted		Is adopted
No substitute; no child is illegitimate		Illegitimate child
Sponsor-a-highway/book/whatever		Adopt-a-highway/book/whatever

* A woman is not a “birth mother,” and a man is not a “birth father,” until their child has been placed with adoptive parents. Until then, they are either expectant parents or parents considering adoption.

** Adoptive parents are sometimes asked questions like: “Do you wish you could have had children of your own?” In fact, our children are “our own” regardless of how they come into our families.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ADAM PERTMAN

Adam Pertman is the Executive Director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, a national nonprofit that is the pre-eminent research, policy and education organization in its field. Pertman is also the author of the groundbreaking *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America*, which has been reviewed as “the most important book ever written on the subject.” In addition, he is the author of many chapters and articles on adoption- and family-related issues in books, scholarly journals and mass-market publications.

Pertman was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for his writing about adoption in *The Boston Globe*. His other honors include the 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Florida Adoption Council, the Angel in Adoption award from the U.S. Congress’ adoption caucus; the Special Friend of Children Award from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; the Dave Thomas Center for Adoption Law’s first award for “the nation’s greatest contributor to public understanding about adoption and permanency placement issues;” the Friend of Children Award from the ODS Adoption Community of New England; the Century Foundation’s prestigious Leonard Silk Journalism Award; the President’s Award from the African American Cultural Council of Virginia; the Year 2000 Journalism Award from Holt International Children’s Services; and the American Adoption Congress’ first award for the journalist who most informed the nation on adoption issues and “for his eloquent witnessing of contemporary adoption.”

Pertman’s commentaries on families and children have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Globe*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Miami Herald* and on National Public Radio, among others. Articles about him and his book have appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines nationwide, including *People*. He has been a guest on many radio and television programs, including “Oprah,” the “Today” show and “Nightline.” As a leading expert on adoption and family issues, Pertman is widely quoted in electronic and print media outlets. He has delivered scores of keynote speeches and other presentations in this country and internationally for organizations including the Child Welfare League of America, the American Adoption Congress, the National Academy of Sciences, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Joint Council on International Children’s Services, and the National Association of Child Advocates.

Before embarking on his current career, Pertman, 53, was a senior journalist with *The Boston Globe* for more than two decades. His jobs included foreign editor, Washington news editor, West Coast bureau chief, diplomatic correspondent, national political correspondent, family and children’s issues reporter, and restaurant reviewer. His assignments included the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Philippine revolution, the Gulf War, the Middle East peace process, the O.J. Simpson trials, and several presidential elections. Pertman is a member of the Council on Contemporary Families, the editorial advisory board of *Adoptive Families* magazine, and the National Adoption Advisory Committee of the Child Welfare League of America. The Adoption Institute’s award-winning website is www.adoptioninstitute.org, and the site for his book is www.adoptionnation.com. Pertman’s email address is apertman@adoptioninstitute.org. He and his wife, Judy Baumwoll, live in Massachusetts with their two children (both adopted): Zachary, 12, and Emilia, 9.



SENIOR STAFF AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

DAVID BRODZINSKY, RESEARCH & PROJECT DIRECTOR, a longtime Professor in the Department of Psychology and Director of the Foster Care Counseling Project at Rutgers University, has written and lectured extensively in the fields of developmental and clinical psychology. He is an internationally known expert, trainer, researcher and speaker on adoption-related issues, and is the co-author or co-editor of such well-respected books as *The Psychology of Adoption, Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self, Psychological Issues in Adoption: Research and Practice*, and *Children's Adjustment to Adoption: Developmental and Clinical Issues*.

JEANNE A. HOWARD, POLICY & RESEARCH DIRECTOR, is a passionate advocate for improved adoption policy, and has focused her scholarly work on adoption throughout her career. Completing her doctoral work at the University of Chicago, she is a full Professor in Social Work at Illinois State University, where she has co-directed the Center for Adoption Studies with Susan Livingston Smith for the past six years. Dr. Howard has contributed to the body of knowledge informing adoption policy and practice throughout her scholarly career beginning with a ground-breaking study on adoption disruption in the late 1980s, through her recent publication, co-authored with Susan Livingston Smith, *After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth*, the largest study conducted to date on the needs of child welfare adoptive families.

HOLLEE A. MCGINNIS, POLICY & OPERATIONS DIRECTOR, is a prominent educator, speaker and community activist on international and transracial adoption, and experiences of adult adopted people. McGinnis received her masters of science from Columbia University School of Social Work where she concentrated in social welfare policy and international social welfare, and completed a post-masters' clinical social work fellowship at the Yale University Child Study Center. She 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. McGinnis has written and spoken extensively on issues of racial and ethnic identity, birth search and reunion, history of Korean intercountry adoption, and parenting adopted children.

SUSAN LIVINGSTON SMITH, PROGRAM & PROJECT DIRECTOR, is a leading scholar in the field of post-adoption services, and has devoted her scholarly and clinical work to using adoption knowledge in the development of adoption services. Smith, a licensed clinical social worker and an Emerita Professor of Social Work from Illinois State University, began her career working in adoption agencies in Tennessee and Illinois before becoming a social work educator. She has published over a dozen articles in leading scholarly journals and produced many scholarly monographs, which have been used around the nation in developing and advocating for services to adoptive families. Smith's pioneering work in the adoption field was recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which awarded her and Dr. Jeanne Howard an Adoption 2002 Excellence Award for applied scholarship and research.

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