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Dear Friends:

Adoption has a profound effect on many lives. It thrives on hope and commitment, yet often originates from pain and loss. At different times, adoption can create a void or fill a void. At all times, however, adoption means family, and by definition family means connection. In the positive spirit of family and connections, this *National Adoption Awareness Month Guide* is designed to help you share with others how adoption is significant in your life during November, National Adoption Awareness Month.

Adoptive parents might want to celebrate Adoption Month by gathering with other adoptive families for an event, or having a quiet or festive family observance at home. Children adopted transracially or transculturally may want to dedicate a day to connecting with their heritage through birth and adoption. For an adoption professional, Adoption Month may mean finding new ways to raise awareness about children who need adoptive homes—to educate and connect with members of their community.

The goal of this *Guide* is to offer ideas for expressing—through celebration, awareness raising, or both—how you are connected to adoption, and how others might want to connect with adoption and waiting children too. Please reproduce or adapt whatever information will help make your observance a success. And whether your efforts send a positive adoption message to 50,000 people across your state or province, or really impress one neighbor, take pride in your Adoption Month campaign. Never doubt that you can be a powerful voice for adoption in your community and an influential force in your children's lives.

Best Wishes,

Wilbert Talley
President, NACAC

“
*Ah! what would
the world be to us
If the children
were no more?
We should dread
the desert behind us
Worse than the
dark before.*

—Henry
Wadsworth
Longfellow

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NACAC is:

a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting adoptive parents, informing adoption professionals, and helping children find permanent, loving families. NACAC publishes materials, conducts training, and provides support related to:

- adoption subsidies
- adoption support and preservation
- adoptive and foster parent recruitment
- child welfare system reform
- concurrent planning
- parent group development
- transracial/transcultural parenting

NACAC also holds an annual conference and promotes adoption awareness. For more information about NACAC's services to parents and professionals in the U.S. and Canada, please call us at 651-644-3036 or visit our web site at www.nacac.org.

Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of the *National Adoption Awareness Month Guide* from the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC). Though formalized, time-specific adoption awareness campaigns originated more than 20 years ago, each passing year brings new ideas and increased planning. Whether you are an individual touched by adoption, a parent group leader, a child welfare worker, or a seasoned program administrator, we have published this *Guide* to supply suggestions and ideas—the seeds to help you cultivate meaningful Adoption Month activities.



History of Adoption Month

In May 1976, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis issued the first state Adoption Week proclamation, and President Gerald Ford then officially proclaimed the week in a letter to the NACAC conference held later that year. As years went on, Adoption Week came to be observed in November during the week of Thanksgiving.

In 1986, NACAC helped coordinate a national “Calling Out” event. That year groups across North America braved late November weather and simultaneously assembled on state and provincial capitol steps to read statements about waiting children, and call out the names of children in their state or province who needed homes. Two years later, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed National Adoption Week, and in 1991 and 1992 President George H. Bush also issued proclamations.

In 1990, NACAC decided to expand opportunities for raising awareness, and began advertising Adoption Week as National Adoption Awareness Month (November). The idea quickly caught on, and President Bill Clinton issued Adoption Month proclamations every November during his eight years in office. As President George W. Bush campaigned for office in 2000, he spoke highly of adoptive families, and we expect to see continued support for Adoption Month.

Accept the Challenge

Throughout its history, Adoption Month/Adoption Week has inspired various messengers to use diverse strategies. Professionals, parent groups, and families fill the month with festivity using buttons and posters,

recognition dinners, matching parties, candlelight services, conferences and lectures, and media stories. In the *Guide*, we organize activities by their purposes into four chapters: awareness, recruitment, education, and celebration.

Our goal in producing the *Guide* is to help you launch your own Adoption Month projects. Whether you are planning something for your family or for your entire state or province, determine your purpose and tailor your approach. For organizations seeking community support for adoptive families, raising awareness may be the primary goal. Others may see the number of waiting children and make a recruitment campaign their top priority. November is also a great time educate the public, teachers, or parents and professionals about adoption. Parent groups or agencies might simply want to use the month to celebrate their families, appreciating a job well done.

Of course, campaigners recognize that the purposes of Adoption Month activities are part of a continuum, rather than distinct categories. A lecture series that addresses adoption is educational to its attendees, but if it gets covered on the evening news, it doubles as an awareness raising tool. If the public hears positive adoption messages, community support for adoption grows and adoptive families feel valued. When these families celebrate their successes, they share their experience with friends and relatives, and indirectly encourage others to adopt as well.

No matter how you choose to celebrate Adoption Month, you have the power to change lives. We hope you will join with other advocates this November and in coming years to heighten adoption awareness by whatever means work best in your community.

Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.

—John F. Kennedy

How to Use This Guide

Whatever your goal, the *Guide* can supply ideas for you to borrow, modify, and make your own. It is divided into chapters and sections so you can read just what is useful for you. The Table of Contents on the previous pages can help you navigate.

Inside each chapter, we use several symbols to mark different types of sidebars, which contain special materials to help you create successful Adoption Month programs. For those short on time or resources we offer:



Take & Use columns with ready-to-use items—such as an Adoption Month Proclamation and media story ideas—that you can modify to suit your needs.

Step by Step sections with complete, easy-to-follow directions so you can rapidly develop your own materials or programs.



Quick & Easy ideas that require little time, money, or planning to implement. These items are especially geared towards adoptive parents and families.

For those interested in delving deeper into topics and gathering more advanced knowledge, we offer:



In Depth profiles of those who have implemented the approaches, including their first-hand impressions about making those ideas into a reality.

Resources lists, suggesting organizations, web sites, and materials to turn to for more information about a particular topic.



At the back of the *Guide*, a comprehensive index of all the sidebars can help you find what you need [see page 96].



Step by Step

Goal Setting and Event Planning

When planning an Adoption Month event, start by answering these questions with your co-planners (your children, other relatives, colleagues, support group members, Adoption Month committee members, etc.):

What are the current needs in your area?

- Do adoptive families and adoption professionals feel appreciated?
- Is new adoption legislation needed or pending?
- Is adoption perceived positively and presented frequently in the community?
- Do adoptive families (parents or children) share any similar concerns, frequently ask the same questions, or need similar kinds of support? What questions are they hesitant to ask that could be addressed?
- Are more families needed for waiting children? Are a particular group of children or a particular group of families especially your focus?

What have you done before?

- Did the approach meet your needs?
- How was it successful?
- What needed improvement?
- Can the approach be enhanced?

What resources are available?

- What funds are available?
- Who can help to implement the plan?
- Are other partners available to share responsibilities and costs?

How much time do you have to plan?

After answering these questions and selecting an approach, the real planning begins. Regardless of the magnitude of your gathering, you will need to make certain decisions to successfully execute any event:

- **Where will the event be?** Consider cost, parking, public transportation, accessibility, availability, and capacity.
- **What will the program consist of?** Consider length, audience interests, variety, audiovisual needs, and speaker costs and availability.
- **Who will attend?** Consider families, children, professionals, media, community partners, and members of the adoption community beyond those you normally reach.
- **What timing works best for the audience?** Consider who is excluded if you schedule during daytime, evening, weekend, holidays, religious observances, and previously planned events.
- **How will the event be publicized?** Consider invitations, press releases, advertising, flyers, media outlets, and electronic modes of communication.
- **How can resources be maximized?** Consider seeking donations or discounts, using personal connections, and locating partners who want to work together.
- **What else is needed for a successful event?** Consider refreshments, child care, prizes, and printed materials.