



# EDUCATING, EQUIPPING, AND EMPOWERING THE ADOPTION COMMUNITY



ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2021 MAY 1, 2020-APRIL 30, 2021



*I always appreciate your ability to be supportive of agencies who are finding things difficult, but also to find the positive side of things.*

*-Wide Horizons for Children, Waltham, MA*

*The NCFA team's feedback [proposed regulations affecting intercountry adoption] is incredibly helpful, well-thought-out, and detailed. Imagine the progress for waiting children if these issues are addressed! Thank you for representing agencies so capably and zealously.*

*-Nightlight Christian Adoptions, Santa Ana, CA*

Throughout the pandemic, when many adoption agencies faced financial challenges, NCFA staff worked to help them navigate loan and grant opportunities like the Paycheck Protection Program. Our development team hosted a free webinar for agencies, "Now What? How to Launch and Grow a Successful Fundraising Program in Challenging Times."

NCFAs 100+ member agencies operate in more than 350 locations throughout the U.S.



# EQUIPPING ADOPTION PROFESSIONALS

*First and foremost, NCFAs is the hub of the wheel for adoption professionals nationwide, equipping more than 1,500 adoption professionals each year to better serve families, children, expectant and birth parents. Our services for member adoption agencies include:*

- » Year-round training opportunities and continuing education
- » Access to research products — like our recently-completed Foster Care Recruitment & Retention Project — that ensure services are based on reliable data
- » An open line to NCFAs staff who can help navigate their most challenging questions
- » Representation before federal policymakers and international governments to ensure the needs and concerns of the adoption community have a voice
- » Referrals from prospective adoptive parents, expectant parents, and others seeking credible agencies that adhere to the highest standards

*NCFA member agencies  
work in over 60 countries  
around the world.*

# RESTORING INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

*One problem NCFA has committed its resources and staff to solving is the steady decline in intercountry adoptions over the past decade and a half. This is not merely a problem of numbers, but of increasing costs and burdensome regulations that frustrate and demotivate hopeful adoptive parents.*

Bureaucrats in Washington blame the pandemic for the collapse of intercountry adoption to the U.S., but the data tell a different story. At the peak of international adoption in 2004, American parents adopted more than 22,000 children from other countries, which fell to 2,971 in 2019 and 1,622 in 2020. But even prior to the pandemic, we saw adoption agencies working in intercountry adoption closing their doors in record numbers under heavy regulatory burdens from the U.S. Department of State.

In consultation with our members and in response to their needs, NCFA's professional staff work hard to keep those pathways open. Sometimes that means letting our community tell their story, like last winter, when we mobilized adoption professionals and families who both have adopted and are waiting to do so, to urge Congressional letters of support toward allowing adoption travel to China to re-open for waiting children and families.



*“This was a huge win, and we appreciate your taking on the U.S. Department of State on behalf of those who have believed the federal government was significantly overstepping their authority and changing the rules without going through any process. May this lead to greater transparency and cooperation between DOS and everyone connected with the intercountry adoption community.” —Heidi Bruegel Cox, General Counsel, Gladney Center for Adoption*

At other times, we gather feedback and then take the lead. In late 2020, the U.S. Department of State released a long list of proposed rules that would constitute substantial changes to how agencies facilitating intercountry adoptions are accredited and authorized. NCFCA staff went to work reviewing the proposed rules, analyzing them in-depth and communicating with our members about how proposed changes would affect them.

From that, we provided the State Department with a 40-page report detailing our findings, including our position that some of their proposals placed an unnecessarily heavy financial and time burden on our member agencies, harming their ability to place more children in safe, stable families. We also rallied our members to submit more than 100 public comments on the rule changes, an essential step in the regulatory process to assess how changes might affect those directly involved. We look forward to amendments to the Department’s proposal based on our analysis.

When appropriate, NCFCA pursues legal action to help alleviate extreme and unnecessary regulatory burdens faced by families who have chosen intercountry adoption. One such regulation passed in 2018 banned what are known as “soft referrals” from agencies to families. This means that until families have completed their home studies and children have been deemed officially available for adoption, no family can be matched with or make a commitment to a specific child.

The problem with this, NCFCA asserted, is that the commitment of the match to a specific child is often the very thing that motivates a family to begin to pursue the lengthy and expensive process of international adoption — particularly among the highly vulnerable cohort of potential adoptees who suffer from serious disabilities. NCFCA argued that by circumventing the rulemaking process



*“We can’t imagine our lives without him.”*

and issuing a ban on “soft referrals,” the Department’s actions eroded trust, created confusion and frustration, and impeded the prospect of adoption for a significant number of waiting children.

Moreover, we heard from many families opposing the ban who were willing to share their stories — and for whom a ban on soft referrals, had it been in place at the time they were pursuing adoption, would have had devastating and even fatal consequences for their children.

One family told us about how they were matched before quickly completing the necessary paperwork. After the family traveled to China to complete the adoption and join their family, they began seeking medical treatment for her eye conditions.

*One diagnosis led to more tests and more tests led to a frightening diagnosis. We were shocked to learn that she had a rare, progressive disease. The main arteries to her brain were already more than 90 percent closed, putting her at a very significant risk of suffering a debilitating, and indeed, a fatal stroke. Thankfully, here in the states, there are a few hospitals that offer a life-saving brain surgery for her condition. ...Since that surgery we have watched in delight as her personality and development has blossomed. But had her adoption been delayed in any way, the story would be SO different. Without timely treatment, her condition would have robbed her of all that she loves — riding her pony, swimming, singing, and reading. Had the soft referral ban been in place in the fall of 2015, we would not have been able to proceed with her adoption.*



Another family wrote,

*We weren't planning to adopt from China or to adopt an older child with significant medical needs, but we happened upon a simple, two-minute advocacy video in December 2012 that changed our plans. We inquired about him immediately and were told that he had a diagnosis of Spina Bifida. He was a happy, sweet little boy but his condition was deteriorating... Since we wanted to adopt this particular boy it was a huge help to receive a soft referral – we were able to move quickly to be able to adopt him. Within a year he had undergone surgery to de-tether his spinal cord and treatment to straighten out his leg. By the fall of 2015 he had started school and as of the fall of 2018 is living a normal life as a 3rd grader. It is no exaggeration to say that had he not been able to begin treatment he would have eventually been confined to a bed in the orphanage. We can't imagine our lives without him.*

Armed with stories like these, and with the help of Washington-based law firm Sidley Austin LLP, NCFCA sued the Department of State. The United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia decided in our favor, reversing the ban on soft referrals and ensuring that this important means of recruiting adoptive families can restart.



*Last year, in partnership with friends like Your Adoption Finance Coach and Spence Chapin Services, we presented three new webinars — at no cost to participants— to help prospective adoptive parents understand their adoption options and pursue the right pathway for their families.*

# EDUCATING FOR EVERY ADOPTION JOURNEY

*Early in the spring of 2020, it became clear that NCFAs annual National Adoption Conference, the nation’s largest regular gathering of adoption professionals, could not go forward in person.*

It was equally clear that the adoption social workers and other resource providers who attend the conference count on it; that it is essential for them to improve their practice, better serve families and children, and secure continuing education credits that they need to maintain their social work licensure. Thanks to the support of our donors and partners, NCFAs was able to pivot in a matter of weeks to host the conference fully online, and saw our largest attendance to date, with 475 attendees taking part in eight sessions over two days.

*“I really appreciated walking away from the conference with concrete ideas and interventions I can use in my work with adoptive families and youth.”*

*“It was my first NCFAs conference and I found it informational, inspiring, and affirming. Although I have only been working in the adoption field about 6 months, I have nearly 30 years of personal experience as an adult adoptee. All of the conversations around adoption, the resources, the education and the passion confirm that this is a space I need to continue to work in.”*



» *Adoption Options for Military Members*

» *Adoption Finance 101*

» *Adoption of Children with Special Needs*

Thank you to our  
sponsors who made  
possible the 2020  
Virtual National  
Adoption Conference:  
Commerce Payments  
Spence-Chapin Services to  
Families & Children  
Family Connections  
Nightlight Christian  
Adoptions  
Holt International

Each month, NCFAs flagship publication, the *Adoption Advocate*, offers policymakers, professionals in the field, families, and other friends of adoption fresh insight into current issues around adoption and child welfare. Topics covered last year include:

- » How adoption affects identity formation among teens and adolescents
- » What families who have adopted transracially can do to understand and honor their child's racial and cultural heritage
- » How adoptive parents can protect their own mental health through emotionally challenging situations
- » The unique and important perspectives of birth mothers who have been part of open adoptions

## MEET *Elise!*

To strengthen and expand NCFAs educational offerings, we recently welcomed Elise Lowe as the Adoption Education Manager. In this important role, she coordinates online training courses, webinars, monthly publications, supports the development of digital resources, and works closely with the Conference program team to deliver excellent educational opportunities for adoptive parents and professionals. With years of experience in the field, including as India Program Director for a large international adoption agency and as a post-adoption case manager, Elise is having a significant impact in this role. We look forward to celebrating with her as she anticipates completion of her Master of Social Work (Clinical Concentration) in Spring 2022.





# ADVOCATING FOR PROFESSIONALS AND FAMILIES

*One vital aspect of NCFAs work is our role as the voice of the adoption community in federal policymaking. NCFAs and our fellow advocates in Washington, D.C., are making progress on four pieces of federal legislation that would have a positive impact on the broader adoption community and result in more children receiving a permanent, nurturing family through adoption.*

**Adoption Tax Credit Refundability Act | 25 House cosponsors | 18 Senate cosponsors**

- » provides critical financial resources to hardworking American families who are willing to open their hearts and their homes to a child in need.
- » ensures equitable access to the tax credit for families regardless of income level
- » ensures that families receive the funds in full when they need them, so that finances never stand in the way of a child having the loving family they deserve.

**Adoptee Citizenship Act of 2021 | 43 House cosponsors | 7 Senate cosponsors**

- » secures automatic citizenship for every full and final adoption by a U.S. citizen
- » provides equity to these individuals who should have the same legal rights as any other child of a U.S. citizen



*This year, we made it our task to ensure that each of the 65 freshman members of the 117th Congress acquired an understanding of the unique needs and challenges of the adoption community. We reached out personally to each one, offering resources and recommendations.*

### **Intercountry Adoption Advisory Committee Act | 5 Senate cosponsors**

- » provides the Secretary of State the authority to establish an Intercountry Adoption Advisory Committee to coordinate the development, refinement, and implementation of policy and programs that enhance the intercountry adoption process and ensure that the adoption community has a voice

### **Improving Adoption Outcomes and Affordability Act | 3 House cosponsors**

- » provides funding sources to enhance medical care, adoption-related social services and mental health resources for expectant and birth mothers, and adoptive parents
- » provides vital funding for adoption awareness training and education for medical staff
- » supports the development of referral programs to ethical adoption professionals
- » enables mental health and social services professionals to deliver post-placement supports that strengthen mental, physical and emotional health outcomes.

TAKE *Action* FOR ADOPTION!

Earlier this year, we launched our new Advocacy Center online at [adoptioncouncil.org/advocacy/action-center](https://adoptioncouncil.org/advocacy/action-center). This dynamic tool makes it quick and easy to connect with your members of Congress about adoption related legislation using customized messages, automated phone tools and scripts, and template social media posts. This comprehensive Center even provides information about upcoming elections, links to download ballots and voter registration forms, and helps you connect seamlessly with local media to share your story and make your voice heard.

# THE VOICE OF THE ADOPTION COMMUNITY

*Educating the public, correcting misconceptions, and uplifting adoption: NCFCA is the go-to-source for media nationwide in reporting on adoption. Some of the national outlets seeking our expert voice last year were:*

## **yahoo!news** Simone Biles competing in Tokyo spotlights another important subject: adoption and foster care

*“We are hopeful that with the spotlight on Simone during the Olympics, many more Americans will consider adoption,” said Kristen Hamilton at National Council For Adoption. “Her story is one of many in which adoption into a nurturing and prepared family provided the security and love that a child was waiting for.”*

## **‘You love this country, and it’s taken from you’: Adoption doesn’t guarantee US citizenship**



*International adoption does not guarantee citizenship. The National Council For Adoption and other organizations estimate that 15,000 to 18,000 adults who were adopted as children by U.S. citizens do not have U.S. citizenship.*

## **NBC NEWS** 'Not knowing right now is the hardest thing': This is what it's like trying to adopt a child during a global pandemic

*Due to pandemic protocols, in-home visits, in-person training and other support and services have changed. “Paperwork delays, postponed court dates and travel restrictions have impacted adoptive families across the board,” said Kristen Hamilton at National Council For Adoption.*

## **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL** Families Persist With U.S. Adoptions. Coronavirus Makes It A Challenge.

*While procedures vary by state, agency and family, lockdowns across the country have complicated background checks, home visits and physicals for prospective parents. Caseworkers and families are relying on workarounds such as teaching parenting classes online.*

*“People are finding new systems to make it work,” said Ryan Hanlon, vice president at the National Council For Adoption, “It’s a good outcome, usually—it’s just more challenges to figure out.”*

## **Pandemic sparks more people to hunt for their birthparents, long lost relatives** *The Washington Post*

*But virtual reunions are increasingly common, and can be less fraught than a physical reunion — not just because of the coronavirus, said Charles “Chuck” Johnson, president of the National Council For Adoption. Social distancing makes some people feel safer wading into difficult emotional waters.*

*“The technology has created a new opportunity,” Johnson said. “It’s a rehearsal for future contact. It’s not only the next best thing, but lays the groundwork for a smoother in-person meeting.”*



# FINANCIAL REPORT – FISCAL YEAR 2021

## Income

### Category

Contributions and grants	\$704,447
Program revenue (membership, publications, conference, online training)	\$157,758
Rental income	\$74,535
Investment interest	\$895
Total Income, FY21	\$937,635

Last year, NCFA received memorial gifts in honor of the following individuals:  
Dawn Bajak, Harold and Lila Brodsky, Francis Kulwicki, Bill Morgan, Evelyn Spielmann

## Expenses

Category	Actual
Program Services	\$749,420
Management and General	\$91,019
Fundraising	\$53,399
Total Expenses, FY21	\$893,838

**Secure the future of adoption!** In early 2021, NCFA announced the culmination of a longtime organizational goal to create an investment fund that will help sustain our work for the long term. The launch of the Families For All Development Fund was made possible by a generous gift from Dr. Wayne Winston and Mrs. Linda Whitbeck Sharp. Charter Contributors in fiscal year 2021 include: Heidi Bruegel Cox, William Rosen III, Stephen and Peggy Sharp, Catherine L. Sharp, Lisa Sinclair, Pamela Stevenson, Steven Sunday, Gary and Mary Beth Walker.

Pledges and gifts are now being taken for the Fund, and we invite you to discuss with us how you can become a Charter Contributor.



83 CENTS

In fiscal year 2021, NCFA devoted 83 cents of every dollar to delivering services and support to families, member agencies, and others in the adoption community.

# THANKS TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS!

We are grateful for pro bono legal services received from Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP and Sidley Austin LLP that provided essential support for NCFA's advocacy efforts.

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# WHAT'S NEXT FOR NCFA?

NCFA's vision is a world where all children, everywhere, have the chance to grow and thrive in permanent, loving, families. As we move closer to that vision with your help, here's a sample of the ambitious goals in our 2021-2025 Strategic Plan:

- » The largest and most comprehensive known survey of the adoption experience ever produced, as we talk with adoptive parents, adopted individuals, families who have started but not completed the adoption process, and women who have faced unplanned pregnancies. Our findings will set a course for the next decade, helping NCFA and our partners to understand what's most urgently needed in adoption education, advocacy, and support services.
- » New educational resources that help more families launch their adoption journeys and find

the type of adoption that's right for them – and that help the people in their lives, from employers to medical professionals, learn how best to walk with them on these life-changing journeys.

- » An ethics certification for adoption agencies and consultants that ensures families can engage with confidence with a service provider that is guided by the highest standards and operates with their best interests as its north star.
- » Model legislation that secures and strengthens a strong culture of adoption, in order to ensure that all possible pathways to adoption remain open.
- » A new post-adoption hub to help families locate and access services that support their unique needs.

## NEW WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR WORK

**Shop for a cause.** Every little bit adds up! Set NCFA as your Amazon Smile charity and every time you shop on Amazon, and we'll receive .5 percent of your total. Prefer PayPal? Visit their website to set us as your preferred charity and then check the box to round up your purchase whenever you check out.

**Make a gift through your workplace.** Many employers offer payroll deductions or matching gifts to increase the impact of your support. Check with your human resources office to see if these options are offered. NCFA is registered for workplace gifts via United Way, Independent Charities of America (ICA), and the Combined Federal Campaign (ID # 12128).

**Host an online fundraiser.** Friends of adoption like you are the best advocates for our work, especially within your own circles of influence. It's easy to set up your own fundraiser for NCFA via your personal Facebook page or your Instagram stories. Celebrate a birthday, an adoption day, or national commemorations like National Adoption Month with a social media fundraiser.

**Contribute stock or other securities.** Your broker may electronically deliver the gift of shares directly to our account at UBS using the following information: DTC #0221 to National Council For Adoption's account, #TS34816-DK, UBS Financial Services, 200 Park Avenue, 30th Floor, New York, New York 10166.

**Leave a legacy for adoption: Become a member of the NCFA's Lou Stern Legacy Society,** which recognizes those who are helping sustain the future of our work by including us in their estate plans. A legacy gift to NCFA offers tax planning advantages while ensuring that your gift is invested and used in accordance with your wishes.

**Questions about anything you read here?** Contact [Megan Ritter Judt](mailto:Megan.Ritter.Judt@adoptioncouncil.org), Assistant Director of Development, at [\(703\) 299-6633](tel:7032996633) or [mjudt@adoptioncouncil.org](mailto:mjudt@adoptioncouncil.org)



*Passionately committed to the belief that every child deserves to thrive in a nurturing, permanent family, National Council For Adoption's mission is to meet the diverse needs of children, birth parents, adopted individuals, adoptive families, and all those touched by adoption through global advocacy, education, research, legislative action, and collaboration.*

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