



License # 287866

1113 South Boulevard, Oak Park, Illinois 60302  
Ph (708) 524.1433, Fax (708) 524.9691, E-mail [info@adoption-link.org](mailto:info@adoption-link.org)

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## **African American Domestic Infant Program**

### General Information for Adoptive Families

#### **History of Adoption-Link**

Adoption-Link was founded in August 1992 by Margaret Fleming, a clinical social worker and adoptive mother of nine children. Adoption-Link is based upon the philosophy that children of all races, including those children with *special needs*, have a right to a loving and permanent home. Increasingly, prospective adoptive parents from all cultures and backgrounds are turning to minority children in the United States to build families through adoption. This trend has generated a need for educational, supportive, and networking services specific to the needs of these children. Providing these specialized adoption services has been the primary purpose of Adoption-Link,

Chances by Choice also founded by Margaret in 2003, merged with and became a program of Adoption-Link in 2006. "Chances" specializes in providing internationally born HIV exposed children, and the families that support them, the resources to thrive. Adoption-Link is currently placing children for adoption from Haiti. It also has the goal of establishing adoption programs in India, and possibly other countries in the near future. In addition to adoptive programs, Chances has plans to continue assisting HIV+ children through the process of reunification programs, sponsorship, education, job training and humanitarian services.

Adoption-Link began as an adoption consultation service. Initially, a staff of one employee and one volunteer performed services for adoptive families and birthparents through the process of private adoption. Today Adoption-Link is a full-service child welfare agency, licensed in Illinois by the Department of Children and Family Services, #287866, every four years. To date over 750 domestic infants and over 40 HIV positive children have found permanent, loving homes.

The following services are provided by Adoption-Link:

- Orientation interview about the adoption process at no charge
- Home study services to residents of Illinois subject to location
- Review of existing home study if outside of the state
- Addition to waiting list after approval of home study based on date of application
- Guidelines for creating an Adoption Profile
- Continued consultation during the waiting process
- Link with a birth family after disclosure of information
- Communication leading up to birth, surrender and final placement
- Arrangement and paperwork for final placement of child
- Collection of post-placement reports
- Final Court Report prior to finalization

## Here are some questions typically asked about our *domestic* African American Infant Program:

### 1) **What types of children are available?**

The children are mostly newborns, occasionally toddlers or sibling groups, generally African American or bi-racial.

### 2) **How are children matched with families?**

Birth parents have the right to choose their child's adoptive family. We have a waiting list of families. You will be presented to a pregnant woman generally in her mid to last trimester of pregnancy. We will present a number of family files to each birthmother. If she is interested in you, we will call you with her background information. If you choose to go ahead and if the birth mother agrees, we will facilitate a phone call or a meeting between you and the birthparent. A birth parent may also waive their right to choose and in these instances the Agency makes the placement decision based on the child's particular and documented needs i.e. "best interest of the child".

### 3) **Can we pick the gender of the child?**

We generally advise the adoptive family to be open to the gender of the child since most pregnant birthmothers do *not* know, with any degree of accuracy, the gender of their babies.

### 4) **Do you ever have twins?**

Yes, occasionally we do have twins. In the event of multiple births or sibling groups, there is an additional fee.

### 5) **Do you have babies now?**

No, we do not hold babies in a nursery. We work with birth families and link them with our adoptive families who are have current home studies and are on our waiting list. Our babies are placed with families after the birthmother, and sometimes, the birthfather, sign final and irrevocable surrenders 72 hours after the birth of the baby.

### 6) **How long is the wait:**

The wait time, generally, is between 12 and 24 months from time of application.

### 7) **How many children have you placed?**

Since 1992, we have placed more than 850 children.

### 8) **Where do the babies come from?**

The majority of our birthmothers live in the Chicago area.

### 9) **What are the costs?**

The cost is \$15,050 for Illinois families who do not have a home study; \$14,000 for non-Illinois families. Most medical/hospital bills are paid by Public Aid. Some birthmothers request money for legally allowable expenses. You will be informed of a birthmother's specific needs before you accept the referral. Providing such assistance is not a requirement. All families are required to have a complete home study from an accredited, licensed agency and do ten hours of training on adoption. Families adopting a child whose racial background is different from their own are required to complete Bridge Communication Training in transracial adoption. The cost for Chicago area families is \$150 per person and \$125 per person for out-of-state families participating in tele-training. An additional approved course offered in Chicago, Adoption Preparation Training, is \$130 per course. Online training is also an option. Please read our fee schedule and talk to a social worker for more

specific information. Attorney's fees are separate and range from \$1500 to \$2300, including court costs. There are no hidden costs. We also conduct home studies for families in the Chicago area who are adopting domestically and internationally (*from* abroad) from agencies other than Adoption-Link.

### **10) Who is eligible to adopt?**

You must be at least 21 years of age and if married, be married for at least one year. **A couple's ages, when added together, must not exceed 100 years and a single parent must not be older than 50 years of age.**

Adoption-Link accepts applications from non-traditional families, e.g. families with biological children, unmarried and gay/lesbian couples, etc. The Agency does not discriminate on the basis of race, culture or national origin. The following are some criteria for concern regarding pre-adoptive families seeking to apply or be home studied:

1. Unacceptable degree of racism
2. Confirmed criminal/child abuse record
3. High degree of parental self-absorption
4. Serious physical/mental health issues
5. Poor relationships between partners
6. Living conditions/environment/location not conducive to well being of a child
7. Failure to disclose important information that could affect the well-being of a child
8. Lack of personal boundaries/poor judgment in relationships with staff persons and/or birth parents
9. Coping inappropriately with the stress, disappointment, and/or uncertainty of the adoption process

NOTE: Any of the above, with the exception of #2, may be amendable with counseling, 12 step programs, or education interventions and by themselves do not automatically disqualify a family from the adoption process. Each case must be thoroughly reviewed with the Director and perhaps the staff as a whole. In addition, an approved home study does not guarantee placement of a child. If any of the above criteria are evident at any point – from the application through finalization – Adoption-Link has the right to terminate the adoptive process.

### **11) What about the baby's health?**

Adoption-Link gets health information from the birthparent(s). In addition, a hospital routinely does a toxicology screen on a newborn. This information becomes available about two days after the birth. The results of this "tox screen" only tell us if the mother used drugs recently. Birthmothers are generally tested for HIV and hepatitis in the hospital before delivery. High-risk babies may also be tested for HIV prior to the signing of the birthparent(s) surrenders. All adoptive families receive the baby's hospital records when they take custody.

### **12) Do we need a home study?**

Yes, either from Adoption-Link, or if you are from out-of-state, from an agency in your area.

### **13) Can we meet with the staff?**

Once you have received and reviewed our information packet and find you are interested in learning more about Adoption-Link, you may call the office (708-524-1433) and speak in depth about the adoption process and/or make an appointment to come to our office. You can also view our website at [www.adoption-link.org](http://www.adoption-link.org) or contact the agency via email, [info@adoption-link.org](mailto:info@adoption-link.org). References are available.

**14) What is your position on open adoption?**

Adoption-Link is supportive of the degree of openness you and your particular birthmother are comfortable with. This option may range from totally closed to varying degrees of openness.

**15) How do you locate your birthmothers?**

Birthmothers are located through hospital social workers, newspapers and magazine ads, the Yellow Pages, attorneys, word-of-mouth, etc.

**16) When can birthmother sign surrenders?**

According to Illinois law, a birth mother can sign final adoption surrenders 72 hours or more after the baby's birth. Once signed, these surrenders are irrevocable. There is no grace period in Illinois when the birthmother can change her mind.

**17) What about the birthfather?**

The birthfather can sign surrenders at any time during the pregnancy but has the right to change his mind during the 72 hour waiting period after birth. If the birthfather is identified with a current address, every effort is made to contact him about the pregnancy and inform him of his rights. If the birthmother states she does not know the father or is unwilling to identify him, his rights are then terminated by the courts approximately 75 days after placement. We always register the birthmother and child with the Putative Father Registry.

**18) How old is the baby when I receive him/her?**

Usually the baby is three to five days old. Adoption-Link recommends that families wait until adoption surrenders have been signed before traveling to Chicago and/or seeing the baby.

**19) Is the birth family given counseling before, during and after the birth of the baby?**

Yes, our staff of masters' level social workers is available throughout the process of decision-making, birthing, relinquishment and post-placement. Counseling is required and documented during the surrender process.

**20) When do we go to court?**

You will go to court with your adoption attorney after the birthparent(s) have signed final adoption surrenders. You will then receive the "interim court order" giving you temporary legal custody. The adoption will be finalized about six months after placement. If you live in the Chicago area, your social worker will visit your home several times during this period before recommending finalization. Out-of-state families will be visited by their home agency worker who needs to provide Adoption-Link with three post-placement reports. Whether you live in Illinois or out-of-state, all legal work can be completed in Illinois. You will only need to go to court *once*, right after the birth. The final judgment order document for adoption will be sent to you by your Illinois attorney. The baby's new birth certificate will also be mailed to you several months after the judgment order.

**21) What about confidentiality?**

Adoption-Link provides the birth family and the adoptive family a statement of their rights and responsibilities in the state of Illinois. The adoptive family gives permission to Adoption-Link for their non-identifying information to be shared with families who are choosing adoptive parents. This is usually done in the Adoptive Family Profile. The birth mother and when available the birthfather, gives permission for their non-identifying information to be shared in the Medical-Social Information Packet and Medical Records from the hospital at the time of birth. Both parties may agree to disclose identifying information in the event of an open adoption. Identification of parties would be made available to Adoption Court in the state of Illinois as required by law. **No identifying information may be disclosed to either party or to any outside party without a written release of information unless otherwise required by IL law or court order.**

**22) What do we do to get started?**

Contact Adoption-Link by email for an application packet of the necessary forms. To open a file with us you need to sign and return our application form and the \$150 application fee. Upon acceptance of your application to the program, \$700 is due. The educational requirements need to be scheduled and the home study process started. Call or email for more details.

