

## Birth Parent Resources

Facing an unplanned pregnancy can be a confusing and overwhelming time for many women. Volunteers of America has been helping birth mothers for more than 75 years, and supports a woman's choice to place her child for adoption or parent her child. We believe to make an informed decision about her pregnancy, a woman needs to fully understand her options. Below are services we provide to birth parents to help them make a well-informed decision.

**Confidential Counseling:** Through counseling, a trained, licensed social worker presents all options available and a woman can explore alternatives and resources to make the best plan for her child. Adoption is recognized as a positive, loving option, however, we stress that the birth mother makes the final choice. Counseling is also available for the birth father, extended family members and support persons.

**Medical Assistance:** Our staff can help birth mothers obtain a state Medicaid card if she is not medically insured. We're qualified to complete all the paperwork necessary to obtain Medicaid assistance and make referrals for medical care. By knowing the policies and procedures at area hospitals, we can help the birth mother during hospitalization.

**Screening Adoptive Families:** Through extensive paperwork, home visits, reference checks, and in-depth interviews, the staff works with couples who can provide the best physical, financial and emotionally secure environment for every child placed for adoption. We have adoptive homes for children of all racial backgrounds as well as children with special needs.

**Adoptive Couple Profiles:** Once birth parents considering adoption are ready to consider families with whom to place the child, several profiles of prospective adoptive couples will be presented. After reading and discussing the profiles, birth parents decide which family will be the best placement. The expectant mother has the option of then meeting the prospective family in person as well as making a plan for follow-up contact. This follow-up may include pictures and letters as well as in-person visits.

**Licensed Agency:** Our Adoption and Maternity Program has been licensed by the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Licensing as a child placement agency for more than 70 years. We adhere to the regulations determined by the state Licensing Department, which ensures the agency always maintains highest standards in operating procedures. This includes a secure records maintenance system.

**Legal Counsel:** Volunteers of America employs its own attorney to keep the agency informed about changes or additions to the Louisiana Children's Code — the laws governing family services, including adoption. Skilled legal counsel is essential to provide protection and anonymity for all involved in the adoption process. Using a single attorney throughout each legal step in the adoption process ensures confidentiality.

**Buddy System:** Many women considering adoption have questions best answered by other women who have placed children for adoption. Many of our birth mothers stay in touch and volunteer to work with

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pregnant women in the program. This "buddy system" allows women to help each other, develop new friendships and have a strong support network.

**Post-Placement Updates:** Birth families and adoptive families are encouraged to correspond with one another, though this is not required. At minimum, birth parents receive progress reports and photographs of the baby for the first year and an annual birthday letter for the first five years. If more than minimum contact is desired, counselors negotiate a mutual agreement between birth parents and adoptive family. These may include the exchange of gifts, updates over a specific period of time, post-placement visits and/or additional photographs and letters. Most arrangements are made before the child is born. This way, all parties clearly understand the adoption terms at the time of placement.

**Support Group:** We facilitate a support group for birth parents who have placed their children for adoption. The group offers education, therapeutic services and the opportunity to share experiences with others who faced the same decision.