

Founded in 2015

PRIVATE
INFANT
ADOPTION

ADOPTION
FROM
FOSTER CARE

BIRTH
PARENT
SERVICES



Creating forever families through adoption

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Kent, OH

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18 East Williams Street
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MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR AND STAFF

Dear Friend,

Thank you for considering Open Arms Adoptions to play a part in your adoption journey. We know that this can be a very overwhelming and confusing process for all involved and one of our primary goals is to make everyone in this process feel that their needs are respected, honored, and to the best of our ability, taken care of. We are truly humbled that you are considering us to assist you with your adoption.

There are a lot of adoption agencies available to you, and we all operate under the same laws and rules of the State of Ohio. However, we each have our own unique philosophies and ways of carrying out what we are mandated to do. The best advice that we can give to you is to **ASK QUESTIONS!** Working with an adoption agency to build or grow your family is one of the most important and intimate professional relationships you can ever engage in. What is most important, in the end, is that you feel heard, respected and that your questions are answered...that the agency YOU choose to work with has a philosophy that most closely matches your own. Open Arms Adoptions can offer your family a commitment to be transparent, honest, respectful and responsive to your needs and questions.

Open Arms Adoptions was founded on the belief that each and every child deserves a family to call their own. We believe that women in crisis over an unplanned pregnancy need support, encouragement and the freedom to make the decision that is best for themselves and their child. Likewise, we believe that “good” families of all different constellations and backgrounds deserve to be respected and treated with dignity in their quest to become parents. Hence our Mission Statement:

Open Arms Adoptions’ mission is to provide a loving, stable home to every child in need. We work tirelessly to create an environment that embraces the unique set of circumstances each of our birth parents, prospective adoptive parents and children bring to us. Our goal is to create families who can successfully meet the long term needs of our nation’s unseen children.

As you move through this phase of your adoption process, please do not hesitate to reach out to us to answer any question that you might have. It is our pleasure to help you navigate what is best for you and your family.

Sincerely,

Jackie

Jackie Smigel, *Founder and Director,*
and the Open Arms Adoptions Staff



JACKIE SMIGEL, LSW

*Executive Director,
Open Arms Adoptions*

Jackie has worked in child welfare and adoption for over 30 years. She started her career as a children’s services worker, where she found her passion for adoption. She spent five years providing intensive therapy for adopted children with attachment issues, has done work with infant, special needs and international adoptions. Simultaneously, Jackie also spent several years providing intensive home-based treatment for families, with an emphasis on children from the juvenile justice system. Jackie’s vision of how families and birth mothers deserve to be treated culminated in the creation of Open Arms Adoptions in 2015. Her greatest professional joy is playing a small part in bringing families together, particularly when that allows brothers and sisters to be reunited.



MEET OUR TEAM



**ANNETTE
BALIS**
*administrative
assistant*



**RENEE
BLAKE**
*marketing & events
specialist*



**AMANDA
BOSART**
*adoption
supervisor*



**KAYLA
BOSWORTH**
*training
coordinator*



**MARY JO
CAOQUETTE**
*adoption
assessor*



**ATHENA
CRAMER**
*licensing
specialist*



**SAMANTHA
GOODENOW**
*adoption
navigator*



**KRISTIN
GULD**
*adoption
assessor*



**MICHELLE
LAMBERT**
*development
specialist*



**JEN
KESSEN**
*match
coordinator*



**CASSIE
NOTTURNIANO**
*adoption
assessor*



**LISA
POOR**
*administrative
assistant*



**MARCELLA
REESE**
*adoption
supervisor*



**SAMANTHA
REILLY**
*social media
specialist*



**DAWN
SCHERMA**
*office
manager*



**HANNAH
SPRINGER**
*adoption
assessor*



**KELSIE
VRABLE**
*adoption
assessor*



**DEB
WARD**
*adoption
assessor*



**CHRISTINE
WICKLINE**
*adoption
supervisor*

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► **YOU MAY BE IN EITHER OUR INFANT ADOPTION OR ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE PROGRAMS OR BOTH.** Many of our families opt to be in both our Private Infant Adoption and our Foster Care Adoption programs simultaneously. With the increased wait for infant placements throughout Ohio, some families choose this option to increase their chances of creating their family sooner. Others are interested in adopting both an infant and “older” child from the foster care system, regardless of the order of those adoptions. Still other families have a belief that the child they are supposed to parent will come to them through whatever means it takes. Participating in both programs simultaneously simply provides more options. While families are hoping to be matched with an infant, Open Arms staff is able to search throughout the U.S. for children whose needs your family may be able to meet. The fact that so many of our families do choose to participate in both programs is one of the reasons our infant list remains so fluid.



TRAINING

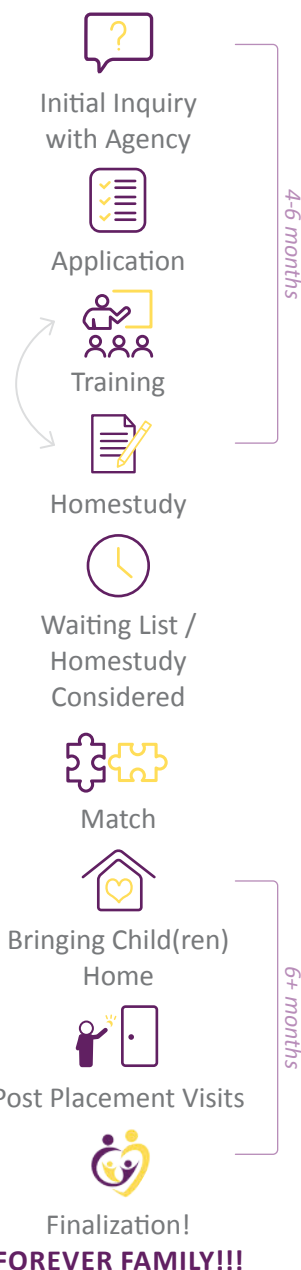
As a full-service adoption agency, Open Arms Adoptions provides our own training programs to our adoptive families. Under the State of Ohio rules, training is required of all individuals who wish to be approved as an adoptive parent and/or licensed foster parents. Open Arms Adoptions’ training program meets the State of Ohio requirements for both. Training must all be completed (by both parents in the case of a two-parent household) before a homestudy can be approved. However, training can take place while you are working on application paperwork and/or during the time that you are working with a adoption assessor on your homestudy process or prior to either. We try to be as flexible as possible with the order in which steps occur.

We firmly believe that ongoing training is essential to preparing for life’s journeys. Therefore, we also offer ongoing training opportunities to our families on issues related, whether directly or indirectly, to the adoption process. Our staff is also well-versed on books and other resources that may be helpful to you in your journey toward becoming an adoptive family.

HOMESTUDY

One of Open Arms Adoptions’ experienced Adoption Assessors will complete your homestudy, which includes reviewing background and medical information, financial statements, references and interviews. Once your homestudy is complete, you will be approved for adoption and/or foster care. This is the opportunity to share who you are and why you are planning to grow your family through adoption. The homestudy is required by the State, and your Adoption Assessor will walk with you through every step of the adoption process.

the Adoption Process





ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE

The need for families to adopt children from the foster care system is, sadly, one of the best-kept secrets in the United States. On any given day, thousands of children are legally free for adoption and are awaiting their “forever family.”

Open Arms Adoptions does not provide traditional foster care. Families are better served seeking services from their local children’s services agency or a different private foster care agency if providing temporary foster care services is your goal.

Our focus is **ALWAYS** on providing permanent placement for children. Of particular importance to us at Open Arms Adoptions is our ability to keep siblings together in adoptive homes or to reunite those who have been separated through the foster care system.

Because we are able to place children from anywhere in the United States... and because each and every state has their own rules and policies around placing children...we do strongly recommend that all of our families become licensed foster families. Even when a placement is made for the purposes of adoption, many states will still require that families be licensed as foster caregivers. However, this is the choice of each individual family and is in no way required of anyone that we work with.

Since we were founded in September 2015, we’ve helped to create forever families by placing over

200
CHILDREN
FROM
FOSTER CARE

from ages 2-15
including more than

40
SIBLING
groups

Open Arms Adoptions can assist you with both your adoption approval and foster care license. Once you have been approved to adopt, our staff will submit your homestudy for consideration for children throughout the United States. Your adoption assessor and other staff members will be available to you for consultation and to review information about children who are available for adoption. Once you are matched with a child or children, your adoption assessor will continue to assist you on your journey by providing post-placement supportive services to your entire family.

While it is true that there are thousands of children available for adoption, the majority of those children are over the age of 12 years old. **Approximately 10% of available children are under the age of 8.** The children available for adoption come from a variety of backgrounds, but all have experienced significant trauma and loss. The training we provide, the reading we suggest and our support throughout your placement process are all intended to prepare you to help your children heal from their past losses and help them regain the parts of childhood that were lost to them.

Naturally, the families that come to us want to have children placed with them as soon as is reasonably possible. We encourage you to think about some of the “characteristics” of waiting children that can increase your chances of being matched. Perhaps you can’t accommodate all of these things in your family, but the more “open” you can be, the more likely you are to be matched in a reasonable time frame.

♥ Can you accommodate a sibling group? Once you are open to 3 or more children, our ability to match you increases exponentially—especially if you are hoping for “younger” children.

♥ Can you parent a child with an autism diagnosis?

♥ Can you embrace the challenges and joys of parenting a child of a different race?

♥ Can you parent a child who needs special medical care, with provided training, such as an NG Tube, a G-Tube or a Tracheotomy? If this need is only temporary?

♥ Can you expand your definition of family to include welcoming visits with your child’s siblings who are living elsewhere? To enable contact with birth parents who do not pose a risk to you and your family?

It is our most sincere desire to match each and every one of our families with the child or children who are meant to be theirs. Regardless of your answers to the above questions, we are happy to work with you. Please know that this is a process, and the wait may be lengthy depending on the age and openness to children you feel equipped to parent.



KST BY ADOPTION PROGRAM

One of Open Arms’ key initiatives is our KST by Adoption Program (Keeping Siblings Together). Of the thousands of children in foster care, **over two-thirds of them have a brother or sister also in the system.** Sadly, many of these children have been robbed of the opportunity to grow up together and are living in separate foster homes. For these children, their brothers or sisters may have been the only constant in their lives. Certainly, they are the only people who share in their history. The goal of the KST by Adoption program is to reunite brothers and sisters separated in foster care and give them the opportunity to finish growing up together. Since the inception of this program several years ago, we are humbled to have been a part of **REUNITING 82 CHILDREN WITH THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.**



PARTNER REFERENCE

Adoption from Foster Care

The “State” has contracted with Open Arms Adoptions in Ohio for the placement of multiple children over the last three years. I have found them to be professional, ethical, and child and family focused. They have been responsive to the requests of my agency and advocated and supported the families and children they serve. All the children we have matched through their agency have come from traumatic backgrounds and thrived in their adoptive placements. I strongly feel these placements would not have been successful without the training, guidance, and supportive services put in place by Open Arms Adoptions.

- Meredith,
Child and Family Services



adoption from foster care fees

Application Fee	\$300
Homestudy	\$1,700
Fingerprints <i>(outside fee)</i>	<i>approx. \$75 each</i>
Training*	\$400
Annual Search Fee <i>(due at completion of homestudy and annually)</i>	\$1,200
Placement Fee** <i>Waived for sibling groups and children 10+ years old.</i>	\$1,000
Post Placement Supervision <i>(most often covered by county/state)</i>	<i>varies</i>
Adoptive Parent Legal Fees <i>(outside fee, varies by attorney, most often covered by county/state)</i>	<i>approx. \$2,500</i>
TOTAL	<i>approx.</i> \$3,500 to \$10,000

“After living apart in foster care for almost two years, we were able to **REUNITE** our children and create a wonderful, new family. None of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Open Arms and their caring, knowledgeable staff.”

- Shawn and Keisha,
adoptive parents of 3

ADDITIONAL FEES THAT MAY BE APPLICABLE

Expedited Homestudy <i>Reserved for cases where placement of a child is needed immediately.</i>	\$2,300
Long Distance Homestudy	
50-99 miles	\$200
100+ miles	\$350
Post Placement	
50-99 miles	\$750
100+ miles	\$1,000
Large Family Assessment	\$250
Interstate Paperwork	\$1,000

All fees are non-refundable and due at the beginning of each service except where noted.

**Once licensed as a foster caregiver, the training fee will be reimbursed. Additionally, licensed foster caregivers are paid for training at the rate of \$10/hour.*

*** This fee includes coordination with the county/state, sharing of information, connecting resources, etc... A portion of this fee is refundable.*



PRIVATE INFANT ADOPTION

When we talk about “private” adoption, we are referring to situations where a birth mother, and hopefully birth father, make a voluntary plan to place their baby for adoption. The reasons for this decision are as different as the women we work with.

Most of the women we work with choose the adoptive family themselves. This is an important part of the process for birth mothers—the level of trust required to place her baby with another family is astounding!

Birth mothers are first “introduced” to our waiting families through profile books, created with the help of our marketing specialist. The purpose of these profile books is to let your true selves shine through. Who are you? What do you like to do? Do you have pets? Do you love to travel? It’s important for a birth mother to be able to “see” what her child’s life would be like in your family.



Since September 2015 when we were founded, we’ve helped to create

130+
new
FAMILIES

including,

90
infant
ADOPTIONS

WE GET ASKED ABOUT “OPENNESS” A LOT. Openness means different things to different people and is rarely an either/or situation. At Open Arms Adoptions, we know that different birth mothers and different families will view openness in their own unique ways.

Most birth mothers will want to meet the adoptive family before placement. This is the first step in openness! Openness will almost always involve phone calls and texts before the baby is born. This allows the expectant mother to start to develop a relationship with you and to increase her comfort level with you. This is essential, as you’re asking her to entrust you with her baby. After placement, photos and updates are often exchanged. How often and how that is initiated depends on each individual scenario and will be discussed with all involved parties. In some situations, both the birth mother and the adoptive family may want to have continued visits after the adoption. There is no one “right way” to build an open adoption plan. We work with every birth mother and every family to design a plan that’s most comfortable for them.

It is important for our families to understand that the days of taking a baby home from the hospital and never having contact with the birth mother again are over. Studies and experiential data have shown that a level of openness in an infant adoption ensures a healthier adjustment for all involved. We know that this may sound scary to some of you, and we understand that. It is our goal to assist you with every aspect of this process and to make all involved as comfortable as possible.

➤ **Finally, we strongly encourage all of our families to become licensed as foster caregivers as a part of your homestudy process.** Birth parents cannot sign a permanent surrender regarding their child until at least 72 hours after birth. In many situations, it is not possible for babies to stay in the hospital for that entire 72 hours, requiring a placement with a licensed foster caregiver. If your family is not licensed, this may mean that you will not be able to be considered for placement where this is the case.

MATCHING WITH A LICENSED PARTNER

Open Arms Adoptions has worked to establish a network of reputable, licensed partners throughout the United States. In the event that you are matched, through an attorney or other licensed agency outside the State of Ohio, Open Arms Adoptions is able to assist with all paperwork and documentation to allow you to bring baby home. In keeping with our values and ethics, and abiding by Ohio law, Open Arms Adoptions will not engage in any work with unlicensed adoption "facilitators."

WHAT IS AN Open Adoption?

The term “open adoption” refers to an adoption where the adoptive parents and birth parents share certain information and, in some cases, agree to some type of ongoing contact. The range of openness can include:

- Birth parents providing special mementos (baby blanket, frame, book, letter, etc.) to the adoptive parents to share with the baby.
- Birth parents and adoptive parents exchanging first names and photographs.
- Ongoing communication between birth parents and adoptive parents in the form of letters or photographs.
- Expectant parents and adoptive parents meeting each other, sharing full identifying information and having ongoing contact for years.



BIRTH PARENT SERVICES



➤ **Why birth moms make an adoption plan?**

Women choose to make an adoption plan for many reasons. Some do not feel that they are at the right place in their lives to actively parent or to provide their child with the type of life they would desire for them. Others struggle with addiction issues, mental health disorders or are victims of poverty or violence.

Many of our birth moms (over 50%) have other children already. Of those who do have other children, some are working hard to regain custody of those children and know that the responsibility of another child would decrease the likelihood of reuniting with their current children. Some are working hard to meet the day-to-day demands of parenting in less than ideal circumstances.

Whatever the reason, none of these women make the adoption decision lightly and all grieve over the loss of the child they are placing.

Open Arms Adoptions works with women who are experiencing significant crisis over an unplanned pregnancy. This is where the work begins on ALL infant adoptions.

Working with women in crisis over an unplanned pregnancy, and hopefully her partner, too, is a complicated and delicate process. Our staff has on average over 15 years of experience working with all parties involved in an adoption. We have the utmost respect for birth parents making one of the most difficult decisions of their lives! There's a lot that goes into this work...here are just a few of the things that are important to us as we walk through this journey with these courageous women:

- ♥ *Each and every expectant mom that comes to us, regardless of her situation in life, deserves our respect, our help and for us to keep our commitments to her.*
- ♥ *We encourage each woman we work with to be as healthy as she is capable of being during her pregnancy.*
- ♥ *Every birth mom we work with deserves the right to create her own adoption plan – no two people are alike; therefore, no two adoption plans are identical.*

LIVING EXPENSES

Under Ohio law, birth mothers are eligible to receive up to \$3,000 in living expenses. These living expenses can be provided to a birth mother throughout the course of her pregnancy and up to 60 days after the baby's birth. If a birth mother needs assistance with medical expenses, there is no "cap" on that, and adoptive parents cover those expenses.

A few thoughts on Open Arms Adoptions' philosophies on birth parent living expenses....

First and foremost, Open Arms will NEVER leave a birth mother's needs unmet if it is in our power to assist her.

Our first course of action, always, is to ensure that a birth mother has medical coverage—whether that be through Medicaid or private insurance. If a birth mother is not already on Medicaid, we work with an agency who assists us in accessing Medicaid coverage and attempt to secure coverage for her and her baby. If a birth mother is covered under private insurance, adoptive parents can be asked to cover deductibles and co-pays for her.

We will always ensure that our birth mothers have an activated and working cell phone. For safety reasons, as well as, to allow for good communication between her and the agency and between her and the adoptive family. This may fall under "living expenses" depending on the birth mother's situation.

Open Arms Adoptions firmly believes that, as much as possible, the availability of "living expenses" should NOT be a primary consideration for women considering adoption. We want to be respectful of the fact that we are working with very vulnerable women who are in one of the biggest crises of their lives. We do not want to complicate that with money, as much as we are able to avoid doing so.

For this reason, **our birth mothers are never "guaranteed" \$3,000** as they are with other agencies. Our commitment to our birth mothers is to help them in every way that they need to the best of our ability—there is a subtle but distinct difference.

Our hope is that the assistance we provide will be "sustainable" for our birth moms. Our goal is to leave every client we work with a little better than when we met them.

CASE MANAGEMENT

ALL of our birth mothers that will accept our help are provided with case management services throughout their pregnancy. Our staff will assist them in accessing community resources/programs, etc., that will be available to them long after we are involved.

➤ *How old are the birth moms who place an infant for adoption?*

The women we've worked with who have followed through with an adoption plan fall into the following age brackets:

18%
14-20 years old

59%
20-30 years old

20%
30-40 years old

3%
40+ years old

➤ *What does it mean to be matched?*

When you are "matched" with an expectant mom, this means that she has selected YOU to parent her child. While this is certainly VERY exciting, it's important to remember that the process isn't over. In Ohio, birth parents cannot sign a permanent surrender until at least 72 hours after a child has been born and can change their mind any time up until then. This is likely to be the longest 72 hours of your life... hers, too. Most of our "matches" are successful placements. However, all agencies have times when those matches fall through. If that happens, we will support you in every way we can and, when you are ready, start again with the process of finding your child.





private infant adoption fees

Application Fee	\$300
Homestudy	\$1,700
Fingerprints <i>(outside fee)</i>	<i>approx. \$75 each</i>
Training*	\$400
Program Fee <i>(due at completion of homestudy)</i>	\$3,500
Infant Placement** <i>(50% due at match, 50% due at placement)</i>	\$18,000
OR Identified Infant Placement <i>(matches on their own with birth parent)</i>	OR \$15,000
OR Placement with Another Licensed/Accredited Agency	OR \$2,500
Birth Mother Living Expenses <i>(per Ohio Law)</i>	up to \$3,000
Birth Mother Medical Expenses	dependent on birth mother's coverage
Medicaid Enrollment for Infant	\$250
OR Medicaid Enrollment for Mother and Infant	OR \$800
Post Placement Supervision <i>(for first 8 months)</i>	\$2,500
Adoptive Parent Legal Fees <i>(outside fee, varies by attorney)</i>	<i>approx. \$2,500</i>
TOTAL	<i>approx.</i> \$26,500 to \$33,000



“The folks at Open Arms Adoptions are fantastic! You can see their passion for what they do

at every turn throughout the process. Our dream of becoming parents came true and we couldn't have done it without the wonderful people at OAA.

- Nick & Michelle

ADDITIONAL FEES THAT MAY BE APPLICABLE

Expedited Homestudy <i>Reserved for cases where placement of a child is needed immediately.</i>	\$2,300
Long Distance Homestudy	
50-99 miles	\$200
100+ miles	\$350
Post Placement	
50-99 miles	\$750
100+ miles	\$1,000
Post Placement beyond 8 months	\$300 per month
Large Family Assessment	\$250
Indian Child Welfare Act Search	\$200
Interstate Paperwork	\$1,000

All fees are non-refundable and due at the beginning of each service except where noted.

*Once licensed as a foster caregiver, the training fee will be reimbursed. Additionally, licensed foster caregivers are paid for training at the rate of \$10/hour.

** This fee includes case management, submission of state paperwork, managing Medicaid process, attorney fees for permanent surrender and birth parent counseling as necessary. A portion of this fee is refundable in the event that placement does not occur.



SPECIAL NEEDS ADOPTION

Open Arms Adoptions is seeking families that are willing and able to be trained to adopt and take care of these most precious children. Infants and children with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and other serious and severe medical conditions need permanent, loving, and patient families, like yours.

When you adopt with Open Arms Adoptions, you are never alone! Your dedicated adoption assessor will be with you every step of the way. Your adoption assessor will assist you in connecting to local resources and any financial assistance they may be eligible for. We will also be providing training on navigating care systems, advocating in education, and finding financial resources.

According to the U.S. Maternal and Child health bureau, children with different needs are defined as “those who have or are at increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally.”

***Approximately 4.3% of children
in the United States have
a disability, physical or cognitive,
according to the Census Bureau.***

Thousands of children are available for adoption in the U.S. that have physical and developmental disabilities. They need families like yours that can provide consistent care, love, patience, and understanding.

Some of these children may have short life expectancies, others may need care through adulthood. It is a special and unique challenge to open one's family to children with these needs, but it is not without its own rewards.



STEP-PARENT, OTHER-PARENT ADOPTION

Open Arms Adoptions is happy to assist you in making the special relationship between your child and a step-parent or other-parent in a same-sex marriage legally binding for your family. Many Ohio county Probate Courts have Adoption Assessors to complete the homestudy required for step-parent and other-parent adoptions. However, some do not. Still others have such long waiting lists that families opt to have a private agency complete the homestudy for them. If you desire to make your family relationship formal, please contact us for an application.

INFANT ADOPTION WAITING LIST



If you are LGBTQ+ and seeking to adopt, Open Arms Adoptions can help make that happen. Our assessors are sensitive to the different needs and issues that those in the LGBTQ+ community face. The fact is your sexual orientation is NOT and never should be a disqualifying factor or a barrier keeping you from having the family you want. If you desire to adopt or formalize your family's relationship in a same-sex marriage, please contact us for an application.

Once your homestudy has been approved, we will begin working with you on designing your profile ~ both digital and physical. As we've mentioned before, this profile is how prospective birth parents are initially introduced to you and your family.

Some things to start working on while you wait for your homestudy to be completed:

- We are going to need high resolution photos for your profile~low quality, grainy or blurry photos won't translate well to the website or printed profile book.
- Avoid photos with alcohol or in bathing suits when possible.
- If you have a supportive friend/family network, it's important to see them (as long as they are OK with their photos being used), but remember, this is about YOU.
- Fur babies are welcome~our birth parents love to see if you have pets.
- While professional photos are nice for the feature photo, we also recommend candid as well~it's good to see your family having fun and doing the things you love to do.

It is impossible for us to predict how long it will take your family to be "matched" once you are on the website. Birth parents make the decision as to who will parent their child, and that is a very personal decision.

adoption tax credit & grant

Adoptions that are finalized in the United States MAY qualify for a federal adoption tax credit of **up to \$14,890 per child**, which begins to phase out for families with a modified adjusted gross income above \$223,410. For more information, please visit: www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607

In 2023, the State of Ohio discontinued the state adoption tax credit. There is now an Ohio Adoption Grant Program that enables families to apply for a one-time grant of **up to \$20,000** at finalization. For more information, please visit: <https://fosterandadopt.jfs.ohio.gov/adoption/grant>

additional services

Homestudy for Step-Parent/Other-Parent Adoption	\$1,000
Transfer Fee to OAA from another agency	\$700
Transfer Fee to another agency within one year of homestudy	\$750
Homestudy Update	\$750
Homestudy Amendment	\$300

SUMMARY OF POLICIES



Open Arms Adoptions is a licensed adoption agency, facilitating domestic adoptions by Ohio families. Open Arms Adoptions is not religiously affiliated, and complies with all applicable rules governing adoptive placements established by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the State of Ohio and the local Courts. Open Arms Adoptions also provides comprehensive local services to Ohio adoptive families working through other licensed adoption agencies both within and outside of the State of Ohio.

Open Arms Adoptions shall serve applicants seeking a domestic adoption who reside in any county within the State of Ohio. Services are uniformly available for all applicants. A state hearing is available if any adoptive applicant believes that an adoptive placement was denied, delayed or will be denied, solely based on the geographical location of the family. When an approved adoptive family requests a review because the family believes an adoptive placement was denied or will be denied solely on the basis of geographic location, the agency shall provide the family with notices and copies of all materials related to requesting a state hearing. Families living out-of-state may be eligible to adopt through our infant program, but must be working with a licensed adoption agency in the state in which they reside.

APPLICATION PROCESS

All applicants choosing to work with Open Arms Adoptions have the option of being approved for an adoptive placement only or to be certified as a foster home in addition to being approved as an adoptive home. Open Arms Adoptions only utilizes foster homes in an effort to facilitate a permanent placement for children. For that reason, this agency will assist with foster-to-adopt placements if it is determined to be in the best interest of the child in question.

Open Arms Adoptions is not able to accept an incomplete application. If an incomplete application is received, the applicant will have the opportunity to

remedy the issue. Incomplete applications will result in the denial of the application to adopt. A person seeking to adopt a minor who knowingly makes false statements on the application or during the homestudy process, or who knowingly submits false documentation, is guilty of the offense of falsification under section 2921.13 of the Ohio Revised Code. If Open Arms Adoptions determines that falsification has occurred, the agency will follow all procedures in Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-33-13, including notification of the county prosecutor.

ELIGIBILITY & REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

The following documentation is required of all Open Arms Adoptions' applicants:

- Autobiography from all applicants
- Copies of Driver's License and Social Security Card
- Documentation of current marital status
- Financial statement (on ODJFS form)
- Proof of income for the household for the tax year preceding application
- Proof of income for a two month time period (not older than 6 months prior to approval of homestudy)
- At least one utility bill for each utility necessary to operate the household (not older than 6 months prior to approval of the homestudy)
- Proof of Ohio Residency (if applicable)
- Criminal Records Check—BCII and FBI
- Certain convictions of any adult household member (even if the record has been sealed or expunged) will result in immediate denial of the application.
- Child Abuse Report
- Medical Report (on ODJFS form) for all household members
- Five letters of reference
- Photos of the applicants as well as photos of all household members and the home
- Fire Inspection Report
- Well water test, if applicable
- Vet records for all pets kept in the home

** Please note this list is not inclusive for all applicants and a number of these documents will not be able to be secured by the applicant without working with agency personnel.*

PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

Training to adoptive families occurs both pre-placement as well as pre-finalization. Training materials are provided to all families in written format in addition to classes taught by Open Arms Adoptions, videos, etc. All families are expected to continue to educate themselves on adoption related issues and other needs specific to the child(ren) they are matched with. Topics covered in training presented by Open Arms Adoptions includes, but is not limited to:

- Legal rights and responsibilities of adoptive parents, including the “reasonable and prudent parenting standard” outlined in ORC 5103.162.
- Open Arms Adoptions’ policies and procedures
- ODJFS requirements for approving adoptive parents
- The adoption process (agency policies and procedures; role of the agency; pre-service training, homestudy process and adoption fees; matching and placement; post-placement services; adoption subsidies; legalization; openness)
- Child development (normal child development; predictable stages of development; impact of early separation; impact of abuse/neglect; identity and control issues in adolescence)
- Attachment and Separation (supporting a grieving child; developing empathy for the child’s past; promoting attachment; dealing with the unattached child)
- Dealing with behavioral challenges (why behaviors occur; typical behaviors; creative parenting/discipline)
- Cultural issues (defining culture; understanding how one’s own culture impacts parenting; understanding how one’s own culture impacts the adopted child; impact of cultural issues on adoption issues post-placement; use of cultural knowledge to aid in attachment, development, and identity formation; impact of cross cultural placements on all triad members/extended family; diversity; racism; overview of the Multi-ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994...and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A minimum of 3 hours of cultural training is required, and cannot be waived.
- Caring for children who have been sexually abused (dynamics of sexual abuse; impact on children; therapeutic parenting methods)
- Adoption related issues (permanency issues for children, permanency issues for families, talking about adoption;

birth family and ongoing contact with significant others; adoption and extended family; adoption issues at school; community resources; advocating for the family and child)

- Openness issues in adoption
- Effects of Caregiving on Children’s Families
- Prevention, recognition and management of communicable diseases
- Community health and social services available to children and their families
- The substance of ORC 2151:72, which deals with the information to be shared with a prospective adoptive parent before a child who has been adjudicated a delinquent child for the commission of certain violent crimes is placed with a prospective adoptive parent.

COMPLETION OF THE HOMESTUDY

Once the homestudy has been completed, all families will be notified in writing of the approval or denial of their application to adopt. If the application is approved, notification will include the number and general characteristics of the child(ren) the family is approved to adopt. If the family is not approved, specific reasons will be stated in the written notification as well as information regarding steps the family may take to appeal that decision.

All approved homestudies will be valid for two years. At that time, the homestudy must be updated as per Ohio rules or it will be allowed to expire. Adoptive families are expected to keep Open Arms Adoptions informed as to changes within their family (significant income change, change in household members, change in marital status, significant change in medical status of any household member) as certain events will require an amendment to the initial homestudy to be completed. Additionally, all household members must advise Open Arms Adoptions within 24 hours of any arrest or conviction.



FINAL THOUGHTS

We hope that this has helped you learn more about our agency, our philosophies and our commitment to all those in the adoption process. We believe strongly in providing our clients with the “personal touch.” We invite you to call or email with additional questions or to discuss your personal situation. We’re happy to provide you with honest and real answers without any “sugar coating” or “marketing techniques.” We are always honest and transparent. Our goal is to assist you in making the best decision for your family, regardless of what that decision is. Best of luck to you, and we hope to hear from you!

► ► ► If you are ready to complete an application or would like to set up a call with Jackie Smigel, executive director, please contact Sam Goodenow at:

(330) 697-4751 / info@openarmsadopt.com

After talking with several different agencies, it was clear that we wanted to work with (Jackie) through our adoption process...Jackie was there for us every step of the way and we couldn't have done it without her.

- Tom & Cindy

(OAA) always gives us a straight answer. (They) never make things seem worse than they really are, nor do (they) make things seem better than they really are. Because of this, it is really easy to trust (them).

- Tom & Dorothy

Open Arms has walked us through this process of adoption. They stood right beside us the entire time and were so informative, helpful and understanding. So much so that after adopting our sibling group of three, we're starting the process of adding to our family again! Jackie and the entire office are truly amazing!

- Becky and Eric, adoptive parents of 4

“We are so grateful for Open Arms! When we began this journey, we didn't know how much we would need them. From the very beginning they treated us with the utmost respect and care.

Possibly the best thing about this agency is their care for the kids' wellbeing above all else. If you want people who will guide, listen, support, and provide an ethical adoption process, this is your place!”

- Jake and Maddie,
adoptive parents of 3