

VOICE-TRIBUNE



No. 2, 42 pages, 4 sections

Wednesday, April 5, 2000

50 cents

Baptist agency unites children with families

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Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children began in 1869 as a response to the many children who were orphaned during the Civil War. It was founded by a group of Louisville women who stepped forward to establish the Louisville Baptist Orphans Home. The Kentucky Baptist Children's Home in Glendale followed in 1915.

Today, the KBHC is a state-wide agency that serves more than 3,300 children and adults each year through its many programs, including adoption, residential group care, foster care and pregnancy counseling programs.

Adoption services

Modern adoptions are as varied as the families who want to adopt. Two basic options are open and closed adoptions. The decision concerning an open or closed adoption is determined by the wishes of the birth mother as well

as the adoptive parents.

KBHC adoption director Barbara Lee helps both parties decide what kind of adoption is right for them.

An open adoption is one where the birth parents can receive and send photos and letters to the adoptive family and, in some cases, can visit the adopted child.

A closed adoption is one where the birth mother has no direct contact with her child or the adoptive parents after adoption.

"One of the fears adoptive parents have is the birth mother," Lee

said. "We help them to know that the birth mom is just like they are. They are wealthy, poor, educated or not well educated, they have dreams and they work. Birth parents care about their child; it's hard to place your child up for adoption."

Infant vs. special needs

Most adoptive parents prefer to adopt infants, specifically, healthy Caucasian infants, yet the majority of children available for adoption are classified as special-

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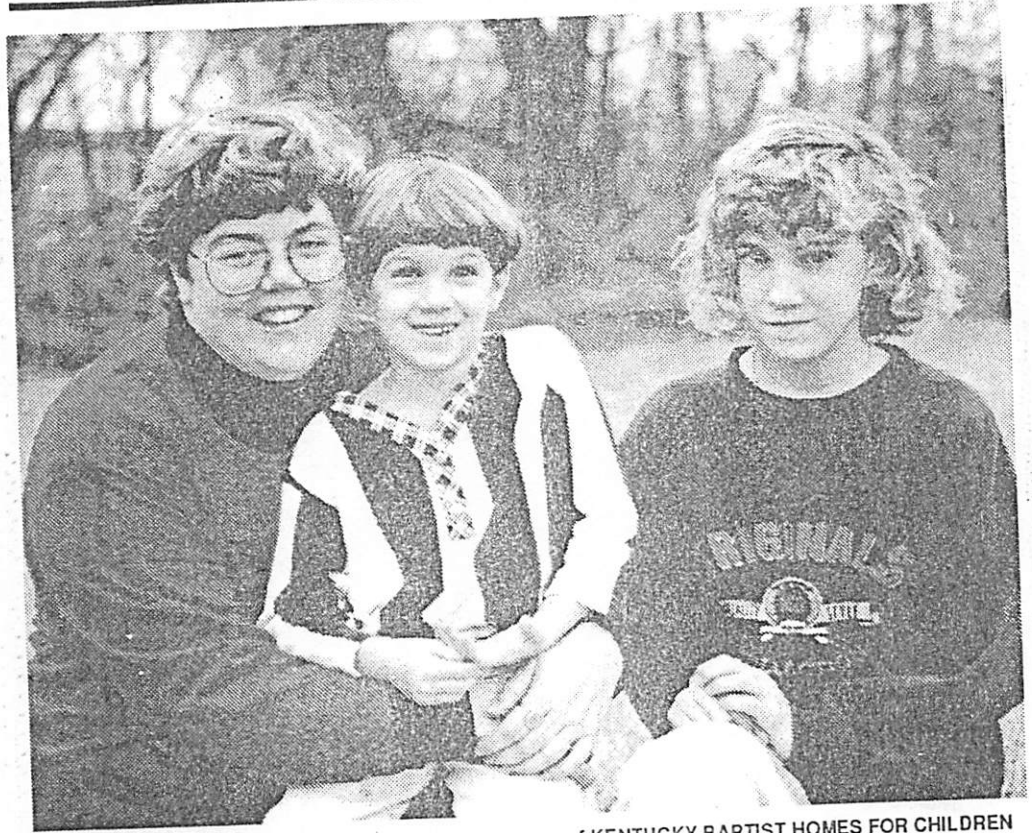


photo courtesy of KENTUCKY BAPTIST HOMES FOR CHILDREN

Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children serves more than 3,000 adults and children each year through its adoption, pregnancy counseling, foster care and residential group care programs.

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special-needs children.

"A misconception that people have is that a child with special needs is a child who has drastic medical needs," she said. "They fall into that category too, but special needs also includes Caucasian children age 10 and up, African-American children age 3 and up and sibling sets of three or more."

In Kentucky, there are an average of 300 special-needs children available for adoption at any time. In contrast, infants available for adoption range from birth to 3.

Many of these special-needs children have been in the system for a while and have experienced many disappointments in their short lives.

"Sometimes they've had multiple foster care moves," Lee said. "Sometimes they've been in foster care, then placed back with their parents and then moved into foster care again. They are children who have more needs than others, and their needs are exhibited in their behaviors."

"A lot of times, adoptive parents are not willing to jump into (adopting) an older child with behavior problems and deal with what needs to be dealt with."

Those who wish to adopt a special-needs child attend a two-week class designed to help them identify and develop their strengths so they can be matched up with a child who can benefit from those strengths.

"We've had families come from London, Paducah and all parts of the state to take the class," Lee said.

Contrary to popular belief, single persons can adopt a child.

"A single person needs to know where their support will come from because it's difficult in this day and age for anybody to parent and when there's only one of you, it's just a little more difficult."

KBHC also is starting an international adoption service that will work with Love International to locate children who are available for adoption overseas.

Before adoption, all prospective parents must complete the required courses, criminal background check, a home study and legal paperwork. Parents must also be at least 21 years old and at least 10 years older than the child they hope to adopt.

"There are a lot of loving kids out there who need loving parents," Lee said. "Don't get discouraged by all the red tape and hoops you have to jump through."

Foster parenting

There is a tremendous need for foster families. KBHC helps individuals and families determine whether foster parenting is right for them.

Lee said that above all, a foster parent must be able to love and let go.

Foster parents receive professional training by KBHC staff, a stipend to help cover expenses, and support from the KBHC agency to help meet the specific needs of each child in foster care.

Foster parents must be at least 24 years old and willing to be trained to meet the special needs of children in foster care.

Pregnancy counseling

Thanks to toll-free phone number, women throughout Kentucky can call KBHC for counseling regarding unplanned pregnancy. KBHC can provide mothers with information about parenting their child or adoption options.

"The young ladies who call us in a crisis pregnancy will have a pregnancy counselor assigned to them. The counselor is not there to talk them into or out of anything; she's there primarily to let them know they have support if they need it in whatever decision they make," Lee said.

KBHC also is trying to organize a volunteer pregnancy counseling program to help cover all parts of the state so that young mothers in crisis will have someone locally they can talk to.

"We're trying to get volunteers and train and educate them about the kinds of questions they'll be asked so the girls will have someone who can get to them quickly and mentor them through their pregnancy and their decision," Lee added.

For more information about KBHC adoption services or pregnancy counseling, call 568-9115 or (800) 928-5242.