INFORMATIONAL PACKET FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

aggieland pregnancy outreach

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The Agency Context

Bringing a child into your home through adoption can be a breathtaking and spiritually exhilarating experience. The staff of Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach is privileged beyond description to be used by God in serving babies, birth families and adoptive families. As an agency licensed by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, APO adheres to and exceeds the standards set by our licensing body. At Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, we believe that adopting through an agency provides the highest level of quality and legal safety for both the prospective adoptive parents and the prospective birthparents. Private adoption, using only the services of an attorney, does not offer counseling and education to all parties involved, nor does it offer long-term support through the years as families navigate adoption relationships. Additionally, adopting outside the agency context has different legal considerations offering a birthparent time to change their mind about adoption even after relinquishing their parental rights.

Eligibility Requirements

APO's goal in the adoption process is to place children in the most loving and stable environment possible. As a Christian ministry, we also desire to point children to Jesus Christ. We do this indirectly by providing them with adoptive parents who share our beliefs, who have a strong faith in Christ. As we share our thoughts to help you determine if you are good candidates for our program, please remember that we are not looking for perfect families. That is a good thing, isn't it, because there are not any perfect families! More than anything, we are looking for big-hearted people who love kids and birth families as well.

Primary Requirements for Adopting Through APO:

- The adoptive couple must be a legally married man and woman for a minimum of three (3) years.
- The adoptive couple must each be professing Christians and plugged in and connected at the same Bible-believing church who share the same basic doctrinal beliefs as APO as outlined in our statement of faith.

Complimentary Characteristics of Adoptive Families

APO does not set concrete standards on the following issues when we screen adoptive applicants. However, applicants need to be mindful that these issues can be very important to birthparents as they are selecting the family for their child.

Age: Birth families vary in the significance they place on the age of adoptive parents, but it is a factor to which they pay attention.

Financial Security: Many birth families are struggling painfully with financial insecurity,

and it is a major motivating factor in considering adoption. It is predictable and understandable that they desire financial security for their child. Let us make every effort to be clear about this: they are not looking for wealth, they are looking for stability.

Fertility and Other Children: Birth families worry about families with intact fertility because they fear their child might play "second fiddle" to the biological children of the adoptive parents. Another factor we frequently observe is that birth families are drawn to families with especially dreary reproductive histories. They appear to reason that such families will be especially enthusiastic about the privilege to parent.

> There are many qualities that we see as valuable in open adoption. Some we deem indispensable, some are crucial, and some are just wonderfully complimentary.

The qualities we consider *indispensable* for participation in our program include:

- Inner strength through faith in Jesus Christ
- Genuine respect for birth families
- Integrity
- Flexibility and ability to improvise
- Non-possessive attitudes toward children
- High tolerance for emotional pain

Each of these variables is necessary for participation in values-based open adoption. If open adoption is attempted by anyone lacking any of these characteristics, there is significant potential for problems.

Other factors we consider *crucial* include:

- Relationship skills
- Unquenchable desire to learn
- Humility (at peace with and honest about imperfections)
- Leadership ability
- Compassion
- Foresight
- Affirming and inclusive personalities

Additional characteristics that we find *complimentary* include:

- Humor
- Gratitude
- Gregariousness
- "Chooseability"

It is important to note that the three lists of qualities speak to *matters of the heart* and have little to do with traditional eligibility requirements. The goal of screening is to discover and admit participants who can bring life to the qualities of open adoption. Screening is a difficult and painfully inexact process, but it dramatically improves the prospects for satisfying outcomes. It is worth the effort, for in striving to find optimal candidates for open adoption; the process truly honors children.

APO's Statement of Faith

As a Christian Ministry, the heart of Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, (APO) is to see children raised in Christian families, whether biological or adoptive families. We want all children to be taught the truth of God's love, especially in their early years.

Our Doctrinal Beliefs:

- There is only one God. He is eternal, sovereign, and omnipotent. Isaiah 44:6
- God is triune in nature – He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet one God. Matthew 28:19, John 14:26
- The Bible is the only inspired Word of God. 2 Timothy 3:16
- Jesus Christ is the only Son of God. He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, was raised from the dead, and will one day come again to reign and judge the world. Philippians 2:6-8, Hebrews 10:12-14
- Salvation is by grace through an individual's personal faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work for our sins. Good work is a result of salvation, but salvation is not a result of good works. Ephesians 2:8-10, Romans 10:9
- Baptism is an act of obedience but is not essential for salvation. Salvation comes by faith alone. Titus 3:5, Galatians 2:16
- All life has intrinsic value. Psalm 139

About the Children and Prospective Birthparents

Because our adoption program is rooted in our pregnancy program, most of the children we are involved with are newborn infants. Since most of the planning is done before birth, we usually do not know the sex of the baby. We anticipate that most of the children will be healthy but hasten to add that there are never any certainties when it comes to health. There are occasions where older children will be available for adoption. The frequency of these occasions is difficult to predict, as are the ages of the children.

The children reflect the characteristics of the region's diverse population. They come from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. We know that adopted children maintain many of the personality traits of their birthparents. It is realistic to expect that a child brought into an adoptive family will grow up to reflect both nature (his/her biology/DNA) and nurture (the environment of the adoptive family).

Although it is difficult to generalize, we want to tell you a little about the expectant families we have been privileged to get to know. Many of the expectant parents we serve range in age from 18 to 35 years old. Some expectant parents are as young as 13 or older than 40. Some of them have taken college classes and have promising futures. Some are poor, and some come from affluent families. Some people might stereotype them as "reckless and uncaring." We regard them as exceptionally responsible and caring. Remarkably, in the "me first" culture in which we live, their character causes them to elevate the needs of their child above their own wishes and desires.

As you no doubt realize, few people working through an untimely pregnancy consider adoption these days. Abortion and single parenting are chosen far more frequently. Less than 1-2% of women choose adoption. Those who choose adoption do not make the choice lightly – it is an excruciating decision even when they are convinced in their hearts that it is the best option.

There are a range of factors that motivate them to choose adoption. Many expectant mothers believe in the importance of fathers and are drawn to adoption to make sure their child has a stable man in the child's life. Some are already single parents and find the prospect of additional responsibilities overwhelming. Sadly, there is often a financial dimension to the decision. Many expectant parents we serve lack the resources to provide the quality of care they believe their children deserve. Others, after searching their souls, decide, "they just aren't ready for parenting."

Whatever the reasons for the decision, it is clear to us that adoption is an expression of their sacrificial love for the child. One birth mom put it this way,

"I didn't give my baby away – I gave a family to my child."

The Adoption Process

The process for prospective adoptive parents consists of the following phases:

Information Gathering
Adoption Education
Application & Intake
Home Study
Profile Preparation
Waiting
Matching
Placement
Finalization
Post Adoption Services

We believe the process moves through these phases in a very sensible and natural way. The following paragraphs detail the process.

Information Gathering

Adoption is a much more complicated subject than most people realize. As couples approach the prospect of adoption, there are many questions to answer and decisions to make. Are we ready for adoption? Can we accept that parenting an adopted child may not be the same as parenting a biological child? What form of adoption do we prefer? International, special needs, infant, closed, open? Where do we begin?

Good decision-making requires useful information gathering, so the agency's first concern is to give you as much information as early and as inexpensively as possible. We know that you cannot afford to put a lot of time and effort and money into a prospect that does not really fit your style and your goals. You have started this process by reading this packet!

Education

The next step is to attend an Informational meeting. This meeting is attended by all the families who have expressed interest in the program and who feel they meet the basic eligibility requirements. It is a one-hour overview of the philosophy, policies, and practices of the agency. There is no charge for this meeting. This meeting is typically offered virtually.

Interested families will then attend the Pre-Application Adoption Education Class. This two-day in-person seminar addresses many aspects of adoption. It explores the evolution of adoption, positive adoption language, explanation of modern adoption, excellence in adoptive relationships, tax issues, and legal implications in adoption. We address basic parenting issues such as safety in the home, attachment, bonding, and discipline. A panel of adoptive parents and birthparents come to share their experiences and answer questions.

It is our sincere hope that after absorbing all this information, families will be able to make sound decisions about pursuing adoption.

Application & Intake

Families interested in pursuing adoption through Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, Inc. will then submit an Application Questionnaire.

Because our goal is to serve the prospective birthparents to the best of our ability, we admit potential adoptive families who we believe are the most suitable candidates for the expectant parents. It is a tremendous challenge to do this in an efficient, thorough, and equitable manner, but we believe it is our most responsible course of action. We are committed to this standard of practice.

After submitting the Application Questionnaire, the next step includes a touch-base phone call. During this conversation, we will address any questions, verify next steps and confirm understanding of all pertinent information.

If the couple meets the criteria of our program and are considered a match, the agency caseworker will send the required documents via email. Then they will begin the process of submitting paperwork before a Home Study is scheduled. Once all paperwork and required documents are received, the couple will be contacted to schedule the Home Study. This is a preliminary acceptance. The evaluation will continue with the upcoming Home Study.

Home Study

A Home Study is required by law for all adoptions. The Home Study assesses the physical home and the family members in it. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission requires us to gather background information for the Home Study such as criminal and child abuse background checks, documentation of financial stability, documentation about the health of each family member, information about the physical home, references, etc.

After the prospective adoptive family has gathered all the necessary documentation, the agency case worker will schedule a time to begin the Home Study interviews. He or she will meet with prospective adoptive parents individually and jointly. He or she will also spend time with any other children that live in the home. The interviews will cover such topics as:

- Motivation
- Marriage
- Family Life
- Parenting Style
- Attitudes toward Adoption
- Home Environment

Once we have gathered all the information, the Home Study document will be prepared, and agency caseworker will then make a formal approval or non-approval decision. Note that the agency reserves the right to rescind the "Approval for Placement" status at any time for any cause.

Home studies are performed by APO staff if prospective adoptive families live within 200 miles of Bryan/College Station. At times, our staff can travel farther. (The standard IRS mileage rate is charged for out-of-town visits.) Otherwise, the adoptive family will be assigned to a contract worker in their area to obtain a Home Study.

Preparation, Support and Waiting

Preparation of Online Family Bio and Profile Book

Once we have approved a family for placement, they are eligible to be chosen. In the open adoption system, the expectant parents choose the adoptive family. The expectant parents, not the adoption agency, determine which family will be the most appropriate for their child. They are first introduced to prospective adoptive families by viewing an online bio and a physical copy of a "Profile Books" that our waiting to adopt families have created. The Profile Book contains

information about the couple including their story, their home, their interests, their family and friends and a letter to prospective birth parent(s). Additional information including their tastes and preferences, personality characteristics and thoughts on open adoption can also be provided.

APO staff will instruct you on how to create compelling, heartfelt, and visually engaging adoptive family profile books, which are key in the adoption matching process. More information is given at the Pre-Application Seminar.

Support Groups

Our Adoptive Family Support Group meets twelve times per year. It is an ideal time to meet as a group and learn from each other. ***A schedule of the support group meetings for the current and/or coming year will be provided at the pre-application meeting.***

****Waiting families are required to attend quarterly support groups.***
**** Matched and placed families are required to attend monthly support groups. In some cases, an in-person support group may not be scheduled for a particular month if the agency caseworker conducts individual visits with matched or placed families. If this occurs, the caseworker will inform families in advance.***

Despite the pleasure of getting to know other families in a support group, this time of waiting is usually the most difficult because families no longer have a sense of making progress toward their goal. Families often feel less "plugged in" to information as to how things are going. It is common for families to have ambivalent feelings when they learn that an expectant parent has chosen a different family. They are happy for the family but also wonder why they were not chosen. It is important for all of us to work together to make the time of waiting meaningful and constructive.

Families are welcome to contact the agency "just to stay in touch." Many families will journal online and add pictures to their Profile Book during this time. This gives them a sense of action in what otherwise is a passive portion of the process. It is a challenge for families to establish and maintain an effective state of readiness. On the one hand, we advise people to presume they will not be chosen for years and to live their usual lifestyle. On the other hand, we recommend people be ready to go to the hospital with an hour's notice.

Matching

The waiting phase ends when a prospective adoptive family receives "the call" notifying them they have been selected for a possible placement and to assist the couple in walking through the emotional dynamics of an anticipated placement. Usually, this call is made by an agency representative.

The next step is meeting with the expectant parent(s). This meeting can take place at any convenient location. Under usual circumstances an APO staff member is there to serve as "ice breaker" and to make sure pertinent issues are covered.

Families go into the meeting with trepidation and come out relaxed and relieved. After the meeting, we individually ask the prospective adoptive parents and the expectant parents to give prayer and consideration to the latest information. If both parties feel a peace about the situation, they are considered "matched." If either party does not feel peace about proceeding, the expectant parent(s) will look through available Profile Books again.

Some expectant parents will want to meet more than one prospective adoptive family before they make their final decision. This often creates some anxiety for all the prospective adoptive couples who meet those expectant parents. They know that only one couple will be chosen. Profile Books might not provide all the information the expectant parents need to feel comfortable about a placement decision. We know there is more to "match making" than common interests between parties. Some call it "chemistry." We believe the Holy Spirit is the best matchmaker and can make bells and whistles go off within expectant parents to confirm their decision.

Placement

After the baby's birth, there are diverse ways to discharge them from the hospital. At times, the mother chooses to sign her Affidavit of Voluntary Relinquishment 48 hours after the baby's birth while she and the baby are still at the hospital. If that occurs, the baby is released to the adoptive family directly from the hospital. There is minor risk in this adoption scenario if both the birth mother and the birth father have relinquished their parental rights.

At other times, the mother may need more time to contemplate her decision. She might take the baby home, or she may release the baby to the adoptive family in a legal risk scenario if the family is willing to accept this risk. This is a precious, yet precarious time for the family. **It is during this time, prior to the birthparents' signing of the relinquishment papers, that the adoptive family is at the greatest emotional risk.** The birthparents may change their minds for any reason and request the baby's return. **This is more than a theoretical possibility. It happens!**

Once a birth mother signs the Affidavit of Voluntary Relinquishment, and the birth father has signed his corresponding document, their parental rights are terminated. A six-month supervisory period of the adopting family follows. During this time, the adoptive family will send monthly written reports to the agency, attend monthly support group meetings, and the agency will visit the family's home at least once. Presuming all is well after the six-month period; the family may proceed with the finalization process through the courts.

- For families whose adopted child is under the age of 2 and does not have any special needs, the agency will have a minimum of 5 face-to-face meetings with the child and adoptive family during the first six (6) months. At least one of the contacts will occur in the adoptive home face-to-face with the entire prospective family.
- For families whose adopted child has special needs, or is over the age of 2 years, the agency will have monthly face-to-face contacts with the adoptive

family during the first six (6) months. Two of these contacts will be in the adoptive home with all family members present.

- After the first six (6) months of placement, the agency will have at least quarterly face-to-face contacts in the adoptive home with the entire adoptive family present until the adoption decree is entered.
- For adoptive families living more than 200 miles away from Bryan/College Station, the adoptive family may be asked to contract with another agency or use an APO approved contract worker to provide the post-placement supervision.
- In addition, adoptive families will submit monthly written post-placement reports to Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach until the adoption decree is entered.

The agency will provide ongoing counseling services to the adoptive family during the supervisory period and thereafter, as needed.

Issues addressed in support group meetings include, but are not limited to:

A. Bonding
B. Understanding birthparent grief
C. Facilitating relationships with birth family
D. Transracial or transcultural issues
E. Adoption issues of the adoptive parents, child or sibling
F. Trauma Informed Care

Finalization

At the end of the six-month supervisory period, the agency prepares the necessary paperwork to begin the finalization process and sends these documents to the adoptive family's attorney. The adoptive family will contract independently with the attorney of their choice who reserves a court date. The adoptive family will join the attorney in the courtroom and stand before the judge to declare their desire to become the legal parents of the child. Most families enjoy taking pictures during the court appearance and having a time of celebration afterwards. When the court enters the Order of Adoption, it notifies the state, which issues a revised birth certificate. The adoption is complete.

The fees for this attorney are paid directly to the attorney's office by the adoptive family at the time of the finalization. APO does have a close working relationship with some experienced attorneys in the Brazos Valley whose fees have been declared to us up front. The APO attorney who handles the birthparent termination of rights is available to APO families for their finalization. This is highly recommended for an effective and timely finalization.

Post Adoption Services

Our program has enduring obligations to the people we serve. We enjoy offering these services because, among other factors, it is the right thing to do. Importantly,

we learn about what to expect for the future by gathering feedback from the past. To be sure that fees do not deter our extended adoptive family from returning for assistance, these services are offered free of charge.

Even though the adoption is complete, we hope our relationship with you will continue and you will remain in touch. To begin with, we need your feedback so we can continually improve our program. Through this extraordinary experience, you got to know us well, and you can help us make our program better. Furthermore, as the people who are living through the open adoption experience, you have much to teach us as your family grows and as you encounter a variety of situations. We also need your continuing interest and support. Sometimes we come across puzzling circumstances, and we would like to call our alumni for advice. Often, we ask our veterans to help us in the never-ending project of describing the program to the public.

We think we can be helpful to you too. If ever you run into a confounding situation related to adoption, we are a good place to look for information. We can do some troubleshooting if necessary. We can keep you abreast of future adoption seminars around the country and emerging literature in the adoption community.

In times past, adoption was considered a one-time event. Now we recognize that it is a lifelong experience, and the need to stay current never ends. Many people once considered adopting a game to be won or lost. Social workers and participants had a wary, almost adversarial relationship. Happily, those days are gone. We are in this process together for the long haul, and that is the way we like it.

The agency will make diligent efforts to inform the adoptive family about developing genetic conditions, terminal illness, or death of a birth parent when this information comes to the attention of the agency.

The agency also appreciates hearing from the adoptive families as with open relationships; adoptive families often have more contact with the birthparents than we do. The agency always welcomes updates!

The Typical Process of Adopting through APO

Adoptive Couple Tasks:	Agency Tasks:
1. Initial call for information	1. Answer questions- Send to website for information packet
2. Fill out "Fact Sheet" which tells us you are interested in our program	2. Send confirmation upon receipt send notice of Informational Meeting
3. Couple confirms and attends Informational Meeting	3. Conduct Informational Meeting
4. Return Pre-Application Adoption Education Class registration form	4. Receive registration form and email invoice for the seminar
5. Prepay to confirm attendance	5. Receive and confirm payment

6. Attend Pre-Application Adoption Education class	6. Conduct Pre-Application Adoption Education
7. Email intent to begin application process	7. Send link and instructions to questionnaires and public checklist
8. Complete questionnaires and public checklist	8. Schedule intake interview via phone call with couple after all documents received
9. Complete intake interview via phone call with agency	9. Send required Home Study supporting documents via email
10. Upload supporting documents for Home Study within 90 days of agency sending forms	10. Collect supporting document and schedule interviews for Home Study
11. Home Study visit completed	11. Home Study completed and final decision of approval into APO's adoption program
12. Prepare Online Family Bio and Profile Book and submit for approval	12. Edit, approve, and publish
13. Become an APO waiting family attend quarterly support group meetings	13. Serve as a family advocate by providing support through meetings and ongoing contact
14. Be prayerful and very patient	14. Notify family when they have been chosen by prospective birth family
15. Match meeting with prospective birth family – affirm compatibility or disengage	15. Facilitate match meeting
16. Begin relationship with prospective birth family	16. Provide support in navigating new relationship
17. Hospital Experience	17. Notify adoptive family of birth and coordinate adoption plan at the hospital
18. Bring the baby into your home	18. Provide adoption supervision and meet legal requirements for at least 6 months.
19. Arrange court date with attorney for finalization	19. Recommend to court that adoption be finalized
20. Attend court finalization	20. Testify on behalf of the adoptive

	family and child

Identified Adoption

An Identified Adoption occurs when an adoptive couple identifies or establishes a relationship with a prospective birthparent and then brings that relationship to APO. Either the adoptive couple or the expectant parent may initiate the relationship with APO.

In assisting with an Identified Adoption, APO desires to maintain the same elevated level of excellence in counseling, preparation, and follow-up for all parties involved.

> Prospective adoptive couples are required to go through all the steps listed in the "Typical Process of Adopting Through APO" above. However, the order of the steps might be altered. The couple will attend our Informational Meeting (or view a video) AND attend our 2-day Pre-Application Adoption Education Seminar along with all other steps noted. Because the 2-day seminar is only held a few times per year, the couple might receive the baby into their home before they can attend it. Nonetheless, we feel this seminar is so valuable that we require attendance before the adoption can be finalized.
>
> For the prospective birthparent(s), we will provide the same counseling we would to any other prospective birthparent in our program. Any financial or material assistance the expectant parent needs will be provided by the agency. Those expenses will then be passed on to the adoptive family. (More information about fees and pass-through expenses is found later in this packet.)

If, for any reason, the expectant parent identified by the prospective adoptive couple decides against adoption after APO has agreed to assist with the Identified Adoption, APO does not guarantee that the prospective adoptive couple will automatically be accepted as a traditional waiting-to-adopt family through APO. Accepting these families into our program will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

An Explanation of Adoption Fees

We want to take a moment to share our perspective on the important subject of adoption fees. APO's fees are low relative to the average adoption fees in the country. We wish we could provide adoption services at no charge. To some, it seems as if the cost of an adoption equates with the value of a child. Please know there is no monetary value that anyone can place on the life of another. It is for this reason we wish we could separate the discussion of fees from the process of bringing a child into a home.

It must be understood that adoption fees do not "pay for a baby." Just as fees paid to doctors and hospitals for labor and delivery do not "pay for a baby," adoption fees simply cover the costs of providing services to prospective birth families and adoptive families to facilitate the adoption process.

We are often asked, "Why does it cost so much to adopt a baby?!" While providing any kind of social service, there are certain basic costs involved: rent, utilities, office equipment, consumable office supplies, insurance, legal fees, licensing fees, staff salaries, continuing education, etc. Additionally, we offer benevolence to our clients in need to ensure their health and safety.

We are grateful for tax laws that allow for an adoption tax **credit** of up to $17,670 (2026). That being the case, the adoption costs would be exceptionally low for qualifying families meeting the IRS requirements for the tax credit. The adopting family would merely experience a cost shift from the IRS to the adoption agency. Go to http://www.irs.gov and search for Adoption Tax Credit for the most current information. Please consult your accountant for clarification.

Even with all of that said, we feel it is important for you to understand some of the other factors that have some bearings on the expense of adoption.

Non-Profit Organizations

We are convinced that the most appropriate context for the provision of adoption services is the non-profit agency. Non-profit means our services are non-commercial. The agency has no owner except for the community at large. The staff receive reasonable salaries. The staff is not motivated by the prospect of profit.

Financial and Community Accountability

We are accountable to God first, our board of directors next, and to communities in general. We seek to honor God in all aspects and operations and have chosen to become accountable to sources outside of our own organization. APO is a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). We undergo an annual audit by an independent auditor. This audit is reviewed by our own board of directors and ECFA. Additionally, APO's information can be found on the Guide Star website at http://www.guidestar.org/organizations/74-2893803/aggieland-pregnancyoutreach.aspx as another means of staying transparent in our operations.

The Agency Context

People entering our program enter a larger system. The agency context brings the advantages of respectability, continuity and stability, birthparent preparation, broader connections, and supervision. APO is licensed to provide adoption services by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). As such, our adoption practices are audited annually by the HHSC to ensure compliance with state regulations. With these advantages comes the responsibility of overhead expenses. Our most recent compliance report from the state:
https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Search_Texas_Child_Care/ppFacilityDetails.asp?ptype= RC&fid=282914

Method of Setting Fees

Many agencies set their adoption fees by taking their annual expenses of general overhead, expenses for birthparents who choose adoption, expenses for expectant parents who choose to parent, and other non-adoption related program expenses and dividing that total by the number of anticipated adoption placements. This is a collective sharing of costs by adoptive families for all agency expenditures.

At APO, we have chosen a different method for setting our fees. The adoptive family will pay the costs most related to their own adoption. We do not factor in the costs of our other programs that benefit the welfare of children. Those other costs are financed through charitable support. *Because some adoption scenarios incur greater expenses than others, we have chosen to itemize the expenses, so the fees paid by each adoptive family reflect the costs most directly linked to their corresponding birthmother.*

Charitable Support

Our pregnancy support program is underwritten by individuals in and around the Brazos Valley, by alumni adoptive parents, and alumni birthparents of APO. We also seek grant money from other organizations.

The desired outcome of our support services is to see healthy babies born and to see them raised by stable, mature Christian parents (whether that is by the biological parents or by adoptive parents.) We in no way want to pressure a woman to place her child for adoption. Charitable community support helps us avoid financial pitfalls that might cause us to feel the pressure of having a certain number of placements to keep the agency afloat.

We do not accept charitable donations from families waiting to adopt a child. **Once an adoption is finalized, we welcome contributions from our alumni!**

Birthparent Preparation and Education

We feel that educating and preparing prospective *birth parents* for adoption is the highest service we offer to *adoptive families*. As we guide prospective birth families in exploring their own values and as we point them to Jesus Christ, we also teach them the truths about adoption and do our best to dispel myths. Expectant parents who are more prepared are more likely to make decisions they will stand by.

- **Expectant parents services through APO:**

  Counseling Services:

  - We will meet with expectant parents one on one to provide guidance as they work through pregnancy and parenting-related issues.
  - We will help find a professional counselor, if they are in need, to help with problems that might not be related to pregnancy.

Medical Care:

- We will guide what type of medical insurance coverage they have.
- If they do not have medical insurance, we will help them apply for Medicaid.

Support Groups:

- At times we offer Support Group meetings when at least 2 or 3 express interests in a group setting.
- Even if they do not wish to participate in group discussions, we encourage they can still find great strength from meeting others who are in similar circumstances and from hearing what helped them through their difficult times.

Housing:
If they need housing, APO can assist in finding safe and affordable housing.

Transportation:
If they have no source of transportation, APO can assist in getting expectant parents to appointments for social services, medical exams, and counseling.

Comprehensive Prenatal Care Education:
Our class provides expectant mothers with essential information on prenatal health, nutrition, and wellness, including guidance on managing common pregnancy symptoms, understanding fetal development, and preparing for labor and delivery.

Parenting Skills and Newborn Care:
Participants will learn practical parenting skills such as infant care techniques, breastfeeding support, and effective parenting strategies to foster a nurturing and healthy environment for their newborn. The class also covers important topics like child safety, developmental milestones, and resources for ongoing support.

Adoption:

- We provide counseling and literature about adoption to teach how adoption plans work. Our desire is to help make an informed choice as they plan for their child's future.
- If they want to make an adoption plan for their child, we will guide them through the entire adoption process. APO offers "Open Adoption" which allows them to choose the adoptive family that seems right to them. They will view the profile books of our adoptive families. They may meet some of the families before making a final decision. They may choose to maintain contact with your child and the adoptive family through the years if they want.
- Expectant parents are not legally obligated to follow through with an adoption plan just because they make one. They are not bound by any law until they decide to sign legal papers which terminate their parental rights. Texas state law will not allow them to sign those papers (called "Termination of Parental Rights") until the baby is at least 48

hours old.

- After the child has been placed with the adoptive family, APO remains part of their support system. Birthparents are encouraged to attend support group as often as they want, and to come for individual counseling as they walk through the next phase of the adoption process.
- In Texas, open adoptions, which allow for continued contact between the birth parents and the adopted child, are not legally enforceable by law. This means that any agreement made regarding open adoption is based on mutual trust and cannot be legally mandated or upheld in court.

Teen & Young Adult Parents:

Our teen and young adult parenting programs include The Mama Club (for teen parents), The Mama Club 2.0 (for ages 20-25), The Real Men (up to age 25), and Parent Academy (for teens attending local area high school). We offer a safe, fun community for mentorship, pregnancy, parenting, life skills classes, material assistance, and social services. These are offered both in-house and in local high schools.

Fees:

All services are free of charge for all clients whether they choose to parent their baby or place their baby in an adoptive home. Repayment will not be required even from clients who planned adoption but eventually chose not to relinquish their child.

Commitment to Excellence

This is not an average program. We want to be on the leading edge of progress in adoption. Most of the participants in the program revel in this commitment and add to it. If we are to offer a state-of-the-art program, there are expenses related to research and continuing education that must be covered.

Public Awareness Expenses

Times change dramatically in the world of adoption. There is ferocious pressure on women to either abort or to be a single parent to their child. APO must be proactive and bring the positive message of adoption to the public. This dimension of the agency's work brings added financial challenges.

Transparency

The hallmark of our program is candor, and we want this quality to shine through every aspect of the process. Certainly, this applies to our handling of money. If you have questions, ask. If you have suggestions, offer them. We believe that the participants of our constituency will enhance the efficiency and quality of our services.

Fee Structure

1. Education Fees	
Information Initial call One-hour group Informational meeting	$0.00
Pre-Application Adoption Education Fee is per couple Includes 12 hours of group meetings Intake phone call	$800.00
2. Home Study Fees	
a) Initial Home Study For Families living outside of Bryan/College Station, the cost of mileage and staff travel expenses will be added to this fee.	$2,300.00
b) Home Study Update (if needed) The Texas Health and Human Services Commission requires that a Home Study be updated every 12 months or when there is a major life change in the family. Mileage staff travel expenses will be charged to those living outside the Bryan/College Station city limit. Many APO families require at least one update.	($500.00)
3. Agency Adoption Fees[1]	
a) Preparation and Education Services Expectant parent Adoption Counseling Educational Literature Professional oversight of agency by Licensed Administrator and Child Placement Manager Public Relations (advertising, cultivating referral sources, promoting adoption in the community, presentations to classes, media work, etc.) Research and Continuing Education Support groups Online Family Bio and Profile Book Review and edits	$9,860.00
b) Agency Overhead Expenses Rent, utilities, insurance, office supplies, copying expense, postage, professional fees	$5,000.00
c) Placement Fees Initial meeting between families [2] Open Adoption Planning (Expectant Family, Adoptive Family and APO Adoption Staff) [2] Hospital activities [2] Arrange legal hearings and paperwork	$5,440.00
d) Post Placement Services Post placement supervision Post placement visits [2] Agency document preparation for the courts Ongoing birth parent counseling Post placement counseling for adoptive parents and adopted child for life Record keeping – adoption records never destroyed	$3,250.00

[1] *Additional $1500 for adoption of multiples (twins, triplets, etc.)* [2] *Additional fees for mileage/travel expenses are charged for staff to travel outside of the Bryan / College Station area.*	
e) Legal Fees for Termination of Birthparent Rights Attorney's time [3] $1,150.00 To prepare termination documents and to appear in court for termination of parental rights of birthmother and birthfather. Court costs/ filing fees $350.00	$1,500.00
[3] *These fees based on voluntary relinquishment of parental rights by both birth mother and birth father. More complicated legal issues could result in higher legal expenses.*	
4. Birthparent Expenses Pass Through Expenses: Medical expenses Housing / Transportation / Living expenses Professional counseling expenses Legal expenses Staff Travel Expenses	**Variable (see next page)**
Total Expected Adoption Expenses to be paid to APO (For those residing in Bryan/College Station excluding Birthparent Pass Through Expenses)	$28,150.00
5. Legal Fees for Finalization of the Adoption **Approximate Cost** This is **NOT** an agency fee. It is a fee assessed by the private attorney that you choose to hire to handle the adoption finalization. Below is an example of a minimal fee you could expect to incur. Court Cost/Filing Fees $ 400.00 Family Attorney fee $1,600.00 Ad Litem Attorney fee $ 350.00	**$2,350.00**
Total Expected Adoption Expenses: **(Agency & Attorney) excluding Birthparent Pass Through Expenses**	**$30,500**

Birthparent Pass Through Expenses

The following expenses **might** be incurred by some prospective birth mothers and will be passed through to the adoptive family. Prospective adoptive parents tell the agency early in the process if they are able and/or willing to accept pass through expenses. The Profile Books of families unable to accept pass-through expenses will not be shown to prospective birth mothers who have known expenses. Additionally, an adoptive couple has the right to decline a "match" if pass through expenses exceed their budget.

Before a match is approved, the agency will inform the prospective adoptive family which pass-through expenses may be expected. The adoptive family may choose not to match with a particular expectant mother if they deem pass-through expenses may exceed their budget. If pass-through expenses exceed greater than 10% of the original estimate, the agency will obtain a written acknowledgement and agreement from the adoptive family. Pass-through expenses exceeding the family's ability to meet them is a reason a family might end the engagement with the expectant mother before a child is placed with them.

Medical Expenses of Prospective Birthmother and Baby • If the prospective birth mother has private insurance, the adoptive family will pay for deductibles, co-pays, and costs of medicines, etc. • If the prospective birth mother has Medicaid, the adoptive family will incur little if any medical expenses. • If the prospective birth mother has no private insurance and does not qualify for Medicaid, the adoptive family will pay for the full medical costs incurred by the prospective birthmother and baby. This is a rare occurrence.	Varies
Housing, Transportation and Living Expenses of Prospective Birthmother Occasionally prospective birthmothers need help with clothing, transportation, housing, or living expenses. The agency seeks community resources to try to meet these needs. If community resources are not available for her, the agency will pay the costs of meeting her needs during pregnancy and for up to 6 weeks after delivery or until released from post-partum care by her doctor. If she follows through with an adoption plan, this cost is passed through to the adoptive family after placement.	Varies
Childcare or Foster Care Childcare or foster care while an expectant mother is hospitalized or unable to care for her other children. This is a rare occurrence. **These expenses are payable after placement. Total due before finalization of adoption.*	Varies

Payment Policies

Education Fees

Education Fees of $800.00 are due prior to Pre-Application Adoption Education Class. This fee is non-refundable.

Home Study Fee

The Home Study fee (plus mileage for those outside the city limits of Bryan/College Station) is payable upon completion of Home Study. This fee is non-refundable.

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission requires that the Home Study be updated every 12 months or when a major life change occurs in the family. The Home Study update fee (plus travel expenses for those living outside the Bryan/College Station city limits), is payable upon completion of the Home Study update. This fee is non-refundable.

If the adoptive family lives a great distance from Bryan/College Station, arrangements can be made for an independent social worker in the family's area to perform their Home Study.

Agency Adoption Fees

One half of the Agency Adoption Fee is due when the adoptive family is matched with the prospective birth family. This fee is non-refundable. However, if the adoptive family does not adopt the child with whom they originally match, this fee is transferable to a future adoption.

The second half is due after the placement of the child(ren) with the adoptive family and must be paid in full before the finalization of the adoption. If a family adopts multiples (twins, triplets, etc.), the additional fee will be applied then.

Staff Travel Expenses:

Related to prospective birthparents:

- If APO counsels a prospective birthparent who resides outside of the Bryan/College Station area, the costs for staff travel, meals, and hotel will be billed to the adoptive family. The billing will be at the current APO rate set for travel and not to exceed the current GSA rate for meals. (GSA=General Services Administration http://www.gsa.gov)
  *This is payable only if placement occurs. *Total due before finalization.*

Related to adoptive families:

- APO staff travel to the adoptive family's home for Home Study visits and post placement visits occurring outside of the Bryan/College Station area will be billed to the adoptive family at the current IRS rate for travel and not to exceed the current GSA rate for meals. Travel expenses could include mileage, meals, hotel costs.
  These expenses are billed and payable after the home visits have occurred.

Payment Policy Differences for Identified Adoptions:

- The matching fee (1/2 of the Agency Adoption Fee) and the Education Fees are due and payable after APO agrees to assist in the Identified Adoption.
  These fees are non-refundable even if placement does not occur.

- All agency costs expended for Staff Travel and Prospective Birthparent Pass Through Expenses as noted above are due and payable after they are incurred.
  These fees are non-refundable even if placement does not occur.
- NOTE: The placement fee (1/2 of the Agency Adoption Fee) is due and payable at the time of placement.

Legal Fees for Finalization:

Finalization of an adoption can take place after the child has been in the adoptive home for at least six months. The adoptive family may finalize in Brazos County or in their home county. If the adoptive family chooses to finalize the adoption outside of Brazos County, the court must transfer the case. At times this can cause some delays in court processing and scheduling of the court date for finalization. The adoptive family contracts directly with the attorney of their choice for the finalization and all legal fees are paid directly to the attorney handling the finalization.

Just to give an estimate of costs: Two attorneys are often used in the finalization phase. One attorney represents the adoptive family and an attorney ad litem represents the interests of the child. If finalizing in Brazos County, the fee for the adoptive family attorney and court costs are usually around $2000.00. The attorney ad litem fee is often $350.

Other Pertinent Information

Adoption Registries

Adoption registries were created for birth parents that want to search for their adult adopted child and for adult adopted people who want to search for their birth families.

The person who wants to search submits their name and any information they have regarding the person for whom they are searching to the Central Adoption Registry. If the person for whom they are searching also submits information requesting a search, the two parties will be matched.

The Texas Department of Health-Bureau of Vital Statistics Central Adoption Registry is part of a voluntary mutual-consent registry system. It enables people who are 18 years or older to list their name on the registry to locate other family members who are also listed. This is the only registry that has the authority to request a search of sealed or confidential records necessary to substantiate a match.

Many adoption agencies in Texas also maintain an adoption registry. For more information, you may contact the Texas Department of Health-Bureau of Vital Statistics, Central Adoption registry in Austin, Texas or visit their website at https://www.dshs.texas.gov/vs/reqproc/adoptionregistry.shtm

Legal Guidelines in Adoption

The Texas Family Code provides the legal guidelines for adoption practices in Texas. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is the licensing body that regulates the activities of child placing agencies (adoption agencies) in Texas. The HHSC has developed a set of minimum standards, based on the Texas Family Code, by which child-placing agencies must comply and formulate their policies.

Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, Inc. has many forms that prospective birth families and adoptive families must read and sign. These forms ensure we have communicated information to you that meets or exceeds our state regulatory bodies' guidelines.

Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, Inc. contracts with an attorney who provides our legal oversight. Our attorney is well versed in adoption law. Our attorney is responsible for the legal proceedings of terminating the birthparents' parental rights. You have the right to hire an additional attorney independent of this agency at your own expense if you wish. However, APO's attorney will maintain full responsibility for the legal proceedings of the termination phase of the adoption.

The adoption can be finalized after the child has been in the adoptive home for at least six (6) months. Before finalization, the agency remains the Managing Conservator of the child, and, by state guidelines, the agency must provide supervision of the child in the home. The family will send monthly written reports on the child's health and development to the agency and attend monthly adoptive parent support group meetings until finalization. Also, during this time, a case worker will make at least one pre-arranged visit to the home after the child has resided with the family for at least five months. Mileage and staff travel expenses will be charged for families residing outside of Bryan/College Station.

Finalization of the adoption can take place after this post-placement supervision is complete. The family may finalize in Brazos County or their home county utilizing an experienced adoption attorney for this service.

Vaccinations

According to the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) guidelines, children must be vaccinated according to the recommendations of the CDC (Centers for Disease Control). APO does NOT allow exemptions for strongly held beliefs against vaccinations. All children, biological or adopted, in the home of our adoptive families must be current on their vaccinations.

Legal Terminology Regarding Birthparents

Relinquishment of Parental Rights:
For the birthmother: She will sign a form called an Affidavit of Voluntary Relinquishment. This form states that she voluntarily relinquishes, or gives up, her rights to the child. This form cannot be signed until the baby is at least forty-eight (48) hours old.

For a birthfather who ***is married*** to the birthmother: He will also sign a form called an Affidavit of Voluntary Relinquishment. This form states that he voluntarily relinquishes, or gives up, his parental rights. This form cannot be signed until the baby is at least forty-eight (48) hours old.

Waiver of Interest:
For a birthfather who is ***not married*** to the birthmother, he will sign a Waiver of Interest. This form states that he is not claiming to be the father of the child, but that he waives, or gives up, any interest he may have in the child. He gives up any parental right to or responsibility for the child. Once he signs this form, his rights to the child are terminated. He may sign this form any time before or after the birth of the child.

Termination of Parental Rights:
If terminating to a licensed adoption agency, the birthparents' rights are terminated as soon as he/she signs either the Affidavit of Voluntary Relinquishment or Affidavit of Waiver of Interest. After a birthmother and birthfather sign the above forms stating that they wish to relinquish their parental rights, those parental rights are thereby "terminated." They no longer have any right to or responsibility for the child. This now enables, or frees, the child to be adopted.

If birthparents sign relinquishment papers using the services of an independent attorney instead of a licensed adoption agency, there is a window of time where the birthparents can "change their minds" and revoke their affidavits.

Affidavit of Status:
For a *birthmother* who is not married to the birthfather, she will fill out a form called an Affidavit of Status. On this form, she will declare who she believes to be the father or potential fathers of the child. If she does not know the name or whereabouts of the birthfather, she can designate the birthfather as "unknown."

Designating the father as "unknown":
If a birthmother designates the birthfather as "unknown," the agency will, with all due diligence, search for the birthfather. Included in this search will be a search of the Paternity Registry to determine if any man has registered as a potential father of the child.

Paternity Registry Requirements:
The purpose of the Paternity Registry is to permit a man alleging to be the biological father of a child to assert his parentage, independent of the mother, and to preserve his rights as a parent. If a man wishes to file a notice of intent to claim paternity of a child, he must do so within 30 days of the date of the birth of the child.

For more information, contact the Paternity Registry at:

Paternity Registry
Vital Statistics Unit – 1966
Texas Department of State Health Services
P.O. Box 149347
Austin, Texas 78714-9347
Toll Free #: 1-888-963-7111 Ext. 7782
https://www.dshs.texas.gov/vital-statistics/paternity-information/paternity-registry

Request for Address of Grievance

Qualifying and preparing for adoption can be a complicated and an emotionally draining experience. Although our program strives to empower people to make decisions for themselves, there are still many ways in which our clients depend on workers for support and direction. This dependence means that all participants in our program inevitably experience some degree of vulnerability. As a safeguard against potential mistreatment, we offer a grievance process.

Although it is not always possible for workers to accommodate or concur with the wishes of clients, we believe our clients are entitled to reasonable explanations of decisions made within the program. We believe the people we serve have the right to express their concerns.

If you feel you have, in some manner, been mistreated by someone connected with Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, Inc. or have concerns about policies of the program, it is appropriate for you to bring your concerns to the attention of your adoption worker.

If that does not relieve your concern, you may bring your issue to the attention of the Executive Director by filing a formal complaint.

Submitting a Formal Complaint:

1. Request the Client Complaint and Grievances Form from apo@pregnancyoutreach.org.
2. Complete the Client Complaint and Grievances Form and send it to the Executive Director, Melany Wolfe, at melany@pregnancyoutreach.org.

Once the grievance has been received by APO:

1. The Executive Director will respond to the complaint within 10 business days and mail a copy of the form to the Board of Directors' Secretary.
2. A thorough investigation will be launched which will include in-depth conversations, retrieval of all data involved, and appropriate actions taken dependent on the investigation outcome. Documentation of all steps of resolution will be included.
3. If the grievance is upheld, an action plan is developed to address the issue. This may include disciplinary action for the staff member or volunteer, changes in policies or procedures, or measures to rectify the situation for the client. Clients will be informed of the outcome no later than 60 days after the complaint is filed.
4. All Complaint and Grievances forms will be scanned into the documents section of the client's chart on SAM.
5. If the grievance involves the Executive Director, the client will be directed to mail the Client Complaint and Grievance Form to the APO Board Staff Relations Committee who will follow the same protocol as above.

   APO Board of Directors
   Attn: Staff Relations
   550 Fraternity Row
   College Station, Tx 77845
6. If you have a complaint that is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact the HHS Office of the Ombudsman by calling 1-877-787-8999, selecting a language, and then Option 0, or by making an online submission at https://www.hhs.texas.gov/contact/complaints-appeals/hhs-office-ombudsman.

Summary of Services for Adoptive Families

Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, Inc., provides adoption services to families who meet the agency's screening requirements. The following services are available to couples seeking to build their family through adoption:

- Pre-adoption training through the Information Meeting and Pre-Application Adoption Education Classes
- Home Studies and Home Study updates
- Facilitation of the adoptive family's relationship with the birthparent(s)
- Adoptive Family Support Group meetings are open to:
    - those who are approved by the agency and are awaiting adoptive placement,
    - to those in post-placement supervision, and/or
    - to those whose adoptions have been finalized
- Post adoption services to include:
    - Post-placement supervision
    - Ongoing counseling available to assist with:
        - Attachment
        - Understanding birthparent(s) grief
        - Facilitating relationships with birth family
        - Assisting with adoption issues of the adoptive parents, child or siblings

Clarifications and Covenants

We provide opportunities, not children.
The timetable is completely unclear.
The risk of taking home a child before the termination of parental rights is enormous, beyond description really.
We cannot predict the behavior of birthparents.
We cannot predict how the children will "turn out. "
We cannot predict our own future.
We cannot control the "adoption scene."

Our Covenant with Clients

We will:
Be candid in all things.
Honor client participation in the process.
Stay contemporary.
Handle finances prudently.
Take continuing interest in our families.
We expect:
Candor in all things.

Commitments to the birth families to be honored.
Disappointments handled with dignity and grace.
Constructive feedback.
Continuing interest in the program.
Trust in God's sovereignty.
A wholehearted, two-year commitment to our adoption program.

Now What?

If, after reading APO's Information Packet, you feel you meet APO's basic eligibility requirements, we invite you to attend the next Informational Meeting. We enjoy the opportunity of telling you all about APO. The information meetings will be held approximately one month before a pre-application seminar is scheduled, or as needed. These meetings initiate a new intake process for a group of prospective adoptive families. The next step, the pre-application seminar, typically occurs 1- 2 times per year and more, if needed. Scheduling the pre-application seminar is based solely on our need to increase our existing pool of families waiting to adopt.

Your next step is to complete an information questionnaire that we call a "Fact Sheet." It simply tells us some facts about you. By submitting this form, you tell us that you would like to be notified of the date of our next Informational Meeting.

Proceed to Fact Sheet
https://aggieland.mysamdb.com/SAM/Fm/ProspectiveAdoptiveParentsFactSheet_Edt.aspx

Please send an email to Zena@PregnancyOutreach.org if you have difficulties with the Fact Sheet.

Credits

Much of the information contained in this packet was adapted from
The Nuts and Bolts of Open Adoption
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