



belonging
dignity
hope

ampersand
& families

Fiscal Year 2013 Annual Report: July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013

A Look at the Past. A Peek to the Future.

Thank you for your support of Ampersand Families!

Ampersand Families recruits and supports permanent families for older youth and champions practices in adoption and permanency that restore belonging, dignity and hope. How are we accomplishing this mission? Apart from the important direct service work that you will read about, the Board of Directors adopted the organization's first Strategic Plan. The plan is ambitious but the immediacy of youth demands we take bold steps to ensure children are not allowed to age out of the foster care system - and that the promises of the child welfare system are fulfilled. Some steps that have been taken in year one of the plan include: design has begun on a longitudinal study that will quantify outcomes for children who find permanency prior to aging out of foster care; increasing Ampersand Families' local and national presence to strengthen the voices of the children we serve; surveying and overhauling technology systems to more efficiently do the work; developing a comprehensive fundraising plan to better support the work; beginning the alignment of the Board of Directors with the current strategic priorities; and doing it all in fiscally responsible and transparent manner.

As we look ahead our vision is simple, but not easily achieved; every young person whose life has been disrupted by child welfare intervention due to trauma, abuse and neglect will be restored to a safe, permanent family with an urgency that honors the brevity of childhood. We look forward to partnering with our community to achieve this vision.

*Al Willig, Chair
Board of Directors*

From the desks of Jen Braun & Michelle Chalmers, Co-Founders & Co-Executive Officers

Ampersand Families has had an amazing year, and of course we couldn't do it without our equally amazing staff of professionals who work closely together to achieve our mission. Ampersand strives to be the employer of choice for professionals committed to helping develop innovative and effective approaches to achieving and supporting permanency for youth. We think the staff would agree that Ampersand is a healthy workplace that encourages both learning and sharing.

We've had quite a few staff additions and changes this year. Robert Bitzan joined us as our first Director of Advancement, which allows us both more flexibility and enables us to move forward with the goals of Ampersand's recently completed strategic plan. The plan is full of exciting initiatives, including developing the research design for the first-ever longitudinal study on the outcomes of teen adoption, implementing a new respite and family support program, and continuing to grow our local and national outreach activities. Our Director of Advancement has the important role of overseeing public relations, marketing, communications, and fund development, and will help Ampersand Families move forward on integrating all advancement activities essential to the effective execution of our vital mission.

Long-time staff Joe Wild Crea moved into the Program Director position in November, and in December Gail Garner Swenson became our second full-time Permanency Specialist – both positions were required to meet our increasing caseload needs. We are also in the process of hiring another half-time Permanency Specialist to begin July 1, 2013.

We'd like to share with you some thoughts by Gail, who eloquently explains the joys and challenges of the work we do. She views the world through her experience as a guardian ad litem, and is also our resident writing consultant. She wrote this piece four months after she joined Ampersand Families:

I am writing this article at the end of the exact day of my four-month anniversary as a Permanency Specialist with Ampersand Families. I still like to say, even after four months, "Pinch me, I'm at Ampersand!" And after four months, my opinion of

Ampersand Families has not changed: it is an organization envisioned, articulated, and led by two determined and gifted women; my colleagues have set the bar high for the passion and talent they bring to their work; and the kids we serve, well, they are worth all we have to give. This is my dream job; I say this to anyone who asks.

But this job is hard; the dream is sometimes a nightmare. A short email correspondence with my sister will help me explain.

This particular morning I was getting ready to head out for an initial meeting with a child for whom I'd been newly assigned as the Permanency Specialist. At this point, to me this was still a "paper kid"; I had read the file, I knew all there was to know on paper, and I had been anxious for days about our live introduction. As I prepared for my road trip, I needed to lean on one more shoulder and speak the worries I'd already expressed to my colleagues probably too many times. So I reached out to my sister several states away via email:

I'm heading out on the road and won't be home until late tonight. Part of my job is meeting youth who are needing a family. My newest kiddo lives a ways away and I am traveling to our first meeting today. I'm nervous...this kid does not want to hear about adoption. Not sure how I am going to explain who I am – I feel like I am this child's biggest nightmare showing up. I need to find a way to create a sense of hope.

I was scheduled to meet my new kid after the scheduled weekly therapy session. When I got there, a group of adults were seated with the youth at a round table: the social worker, the therapist, foster mom and dad, and now, me. I was greeted with a quiet hello, but it was evident that the others at the table were trusted adults and it did not take them long to engage this young person in an open, lively chat.

I've already learned that, for Permanency Specialists, these conversations are the time to listen closely to what a child is saying. During these talks we might learn that the foster home has a big dog that sprawls across the kid's bed at night and she hopes her adoptive family will have a dog for her to snuggle as well. We'll find that another kid jumps at any chance to putter in the garage; he secretly thinks about what it would be like to have a dad or mom that lets him turn a wrench on a car engine, or who will teach him how to build a birdhouse. The reality is that even though these kids endured cold and lonely nightmares caused by adults who have failed them, they often still hold tight to their childhood dreams; dreams of belonging in a home with warm people who care about who they are.

That day, however, my fears were not entirely groundless. This young person we had gathered around had moments of poignant despair as the reality of the purpose of our meeting sunk in. But I watched that circle of people, with great care, walk this child from a nightmare into hope. Together, we started dreaming of what the future could hold. As the Permanency Specialist, this meant I was able to make our first plans of what we could do together during my next visit. With each new visit, I hope to learn more, grow trust, and ultimately fulfill the promise we've made to this child to find a permanent place of belonging.

When I got home, I found an email waiting for me from my sister:

What an important (maybe not the best word: substantial, meaningful, powerful) job, really, Gail. You aren't this child's nightmare; that's already happened, probably a long time ago. You are the light at the end of the tunnel.

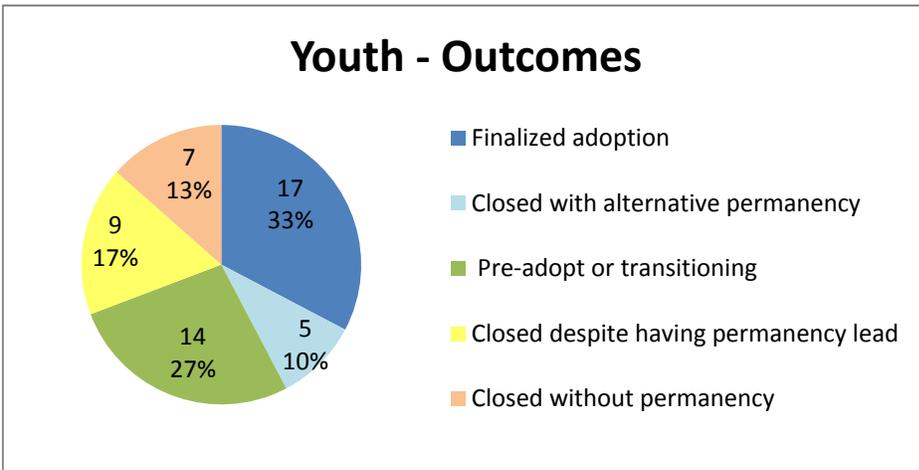
She's right. The reality is that all our Amper-kids have lived a nightmare. As a Permanency Specialist, I can't escape facing that reality, and that will always be hard; wrenching, actually. But I want to join my flame to the bonfire of hope that has been stoked already by so many others at the end of these kids' long dark tunnel: the Ampersand staff, social workers, therapists, foster parents, Ampersand Families' supporters, and of course the amazing parents who open their lives to adopt these teens.

Meanwhile, what do I dream for this child as I search for a family? I dream of finding parents who wake up in the morning, look at each other and say, "Pinch me....that's our kid!"

Program Update: Youth & Family Services

In October 2013, Ampersand Families will celebrate our 5th anniversary, and we thought it might be interesting to look at all of the youth cases that we've been a part of since we opened. This chart describes the outcomes of the 52 youth with whom we've worked whose cases had an official "closing/outcome." Please note: this chart *does not* include the 17 youth for whom we are currently recruiting families, because their cases are still open and there is no outcome yet to record.

Looking at this chart, you'll see that nearly 70% of the 52 youth that we've work with have achieved permanency, or are well on their way. And 9 out of the 16 cases we closed without having achieved permanency were closed by the referring county despite the fact that Ampersand Families believed that there was a strong potential family resource available for the youth. This data demonstrates a reality of the work we do in the child welfare system: The professionals do not always agree on what is best for a particular youth, and in Minnesota, the referring county worker always has the final word. A common scenario that results in a closing over Ampersand Families' objections



is when the county workers assigned to a youth take literally the youth's statement that he or she does not want to be adopted. Almost every youth will say that at some point, and the job of the adults is to help the youth understand that they will never be forced into a family situation that they don't want...but that they deserve the right to know what they are saying "no" to. Statute does require child welfare professionals to continue exhaustive efforts to find an adoptive family for every child/youth who is under state guardianship. Unfortunately, all too often county workers and/or courts decide that it's not in a youth's best interests for a family search to continue and quite simply order cessation of that search. Ampersand Families advocates ferociously in these situations. Often we win. Sometimes, like in the 9 cases above, we don't.

In addition to this direct permanency work with youth, we continue our outreach and partnership with counties in greater Minnesota. We have done extensive consultation in Region 4 South (which includes Pope, Grant, Traverse, Douglas and Stevens counties) to help county staff generate strategies and interventions to move their most entrenched cases of youth in need of permanency. During October 2012, these five central Minnesota counties invited Ampersand Families to assist them by conducting permanency reviews on a total of 22 youth cases. Each of these cases presented unique challenges to their respective counties, and the social workers and social service directors from these counties showed tremendous leadership, commitment and honesty in a frank and open dialogue with us about best practice with regards to these youth. We anticipate our partnership to continue in coming months, and have already been asked back to the region for further consultation.

Since opening, we've supported over 100 individuals in families, which includes teens and young adults. Something that sets us apart is that we don't leave our families behind once the adoption happens. We can't heal years of chaos and trauma overnight, and so we remain unconditionally committed to the families who step forward to parent older youth. Our support is pivotal in helping to maintain adoptions. Further, we've also worked with 23 families that have been brought through the home study and adoption licensing process or are well on their way. Finally, we've provided a personalized, one-on-one orientation on teen adoption to about 50 individuals in the past year alone.

Program Update: Community Outreach & The Minnesota Heart Gallery

Ampersand Families' message has been able to reach over 20,000 community members through the Minnesota Heart Gallery. The Minnesota Heart Gallery is a statewide effort that harnesses the efforts of volunteer professional photographers to take personality-capturing photographs of children and youth who are awaiting adoption. These photos tour publicly in an exhibit, and are also in an online gallery. The Heart Gallery received referrals for free professional photo shoots for 61 waiting children this past year, including 14 sibling groups, representing every corner of the state. We also received referrals to do 6 family sessions – for families who adopted waiting youth who previously had recruitment photos taken through the program. Whenever possible, we have the same photographer who took the youth's original Heart Gallery photo take the family photo. This offers an opportunity not only for a beautiful family portrait, but also for the original photographer to have the satisfaction of seeing the youth with his/her new family. Also, 20 new photographers have offered their services, bringing our total to well over 150 active volunteer photographers. And, over 100 families have used our website to inquire about specific kids or about older child adoption.

Ampersand Families also provided consultation and training statewide and nationally for all manner of professionals on the child welfare spectrum. We've trained hundreds of child welfare workers and community members this past year. A few recent examples include: presenting a workshop and case consultation at the National Court-Appointed Special Advocates(CASA) conference in California (invited presenters, seven years in a row), training on permanency for volunteer attorneys who represent children through the Children's Law Center of Minnesota, presenting on the child welfare system at a University of Minnesota social work class, and developing materials and conducting an in-service regarding youth in the child welfare system who are also on

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for staff at St. Paul Public Schools, as well as special education professionals from multiple school districts in the state.

We are recognized locally and nationally as a practice and thought leader in the field of older child adoption and permanency. Our speaking opportunities and outreach efforts allow us to help others think critically about best practices for teens in need of permanency and have both a regional and national impact.

Program Update: Strategic Plan News, Other Happenings & New Initiatives

Ampersand Families finished our first strategic planning process this past fiscal year. As a result of this, we have developed a three-year plan to guide us through four identified goals.

First, **Ampersand Families must amplify our local and national presence through improving how we communicate our expertise and leadership.** Part of this – and perhaps the most critical part of the entire strategic plan – is our commitment to leading the adoption/permanency field by designing and implementing the *first-ever* longitudinal research assessing long-term outcomes of teen adoption. For years, there has been an important national push to get older kids adopted. We believe it is equally important to evaluate the results of this effort. As such, this past budget year, we partnered with Wilder Research to develop a design for a longitudinal research project to assess the 20-year outcomes of teen adoption. There is no existing primary research on these outcomes and we are confident that this project will be a key part of addressing the significant gap between what the field knows and what it *ought* to know about how our youth and families are doing in the long-term. This trail-blazing research will help us – and everyone involved in adolescent adoption – provide more effective preparation, training and support to families and youth. Stay tuned in the coming budget year to hear the results of this exciting collaboration!

Second, Ampersand Families' commitment to leadership is reflected in the strategic plan's call for the **development of strategies that support the community's efforts to hold public, private and judicial spheres of the child welfare system accountable** for actions that support the best interests of children. Third, Ampersand Families' **board of directors is committed to development and to deepening its alignment with our current strategic direction and needs.** And lastly, Ampersand Families will **strengthen our organizational infrastructure and long-term sustainability.** This goal will be met through actions to diversify funding streams, realign program staff, improve technology and implement a comprehensive communications and marketing plan.

As part of our strategic plan, Ampersand Families is working on several new collaborations and initiatives related to challenging the barriers within the child welfare system that prevent youth from achieving permanency. One example of this is the fact that Ampersand Families was one of four "caller" agencies to The Impact Initiative, an effort sponsored by the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, the Nonprofit Assistance Fund, and 30 of the most creative-thinking private and public sector leaders in the child welfare system to re-imagine how we might better care for older youth who are inadequately served in the existing child protection system in Minnesota. Also, Ampersand Families is partnering with the University Of Minnesota School of Social Work/Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work, and the Arc Greater Twin Cities as one of four metro organizations committed to building bridges between child welfare, education, and disability services providers. Further, Ampersand Families continues to provide training for each new cohort of attorney volunteering for children at the Children's Law Center. Finally, we are also currently collaborating with the University of St. Thomas in a short-term research project this summer to examine some important issues in teen adoption. This research aims to examine what educational, medical, social and emotional changes took place once the youth moved into an adoptive family.

In other exciting news, this coming October, Ampersand Families is thrilled to be hosting a veritable who's who of leaders in the fields of foster care adoption and permanency when The Family Builders Network comes to town on October 14th and 15th for their annual meeting. For people who work in adoption and permanency, having an opportunity to spend two days in a room together with 20 of the national leaders in teen permanency is an unbelievable gift. Ampersand Families has been a proud member of the Family Builders Network for a number of years. This annual Think Tank meeting will include a full afternoon discussion and stakeholders group that will inform the longitudinal research study that Ampersand Families and Wilder Research are designing. Other topics for the group include discussion of current issues and challenges facing the permanency field, including adoption competency training for mental health practitioners, youth permanency funding methodologies and the practice of "re-homing" internationally adopted children which has recently been in the national press.

Ampersand Families is excited to be participating in all of these collaborations; they are all important initiatives for Minnesota's at-risk youth. These are just a few examples of how we champion practices that restore belonging, dignity and hope for "waiting kids" and how we are putting into action the goals developed during our six-month strategic planning process.

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How the books look

Ampersand Families ended fiscal year 2013 with a slight deficit. This is largely due to a gap in hiring new staff and increases in expected earned income. Earned revenue increased overall by 25%, while contributions increased by 19%, strengthening our fiscal stability in those areas. Fundraising expenses are around 15% of our overall budget, while the total for program services was over \$370,000, or 75% of our expenses.

CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash	120,958
Accounts Receivable	69,600
Pledges and Grants Receivable	3,658
Prepaid Expenses	9,803
Property/Equipment	-
TOTAL ASSETS	204,019
CURRENT LIABILITIES	44,753
NET ASSETS	159,266
TOTAL LIABILITIES/ASSETS	204,019
CONTRIBUTIONS	154,683
EARNED INCOME/GOVERNMENT	310,933
OTHER INCOME	3,510
DISPOSAL OF ASSETS	-
TOTAL SUPPORT/REVENUE	469,126
PROGRAM SERVICES	370,057
SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES	
Management	48,226
Fundraising	75,179
	123,405
TOTAL EXPENSES	493,462
Change in Net Assets	(24,336)

*Figures provided by the independent auditing firm of
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