

Fiscal Year 2014 Annual Report July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014

Moving Forward

Thank you for your support of Ampersand Families!

It has been a very rewarding year at Ampersand Families. The good work of our dedicated staff is being rewarded with even more work. As our program continues to grow and permanency is achieved for more and more waiting children, managing our growth becomes an imperative. Our work with families does not end when an adoption is finalized; we continue to support families for as long as they ask. Make an unconditional commitment to a waiting child and we make an unconditional commitment to you.

That level of service and commitment by our staff is commendable and a very big part of whom we are at Ampersand Families. This level of service is not supported by government contracts; it only happens with the help of the community. Fully one-third of our expenses must be covered by philanthropy and therein lay one challenge of growth.

As we look ahead our goal is simple, but not easily achieved and requires resources: 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 you and our community to achieve this goal.

As my board tenure comes to a close, I thank the Ampersand Families community for allowing me to serve this wonderful organization for the past six years. My support of Ampersand Families will go on unconditionally.

*Al Willig, Chair
Board of Directors*

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

As Ampersand Families approaches its sixth birthday, we look back and see a year full of growth. This includes both our services to youth and families, and – to keep up with this increasing work – to our Ampersand staff. We are also fully engaged in the second year of our strategic plan; it has been a compass helping keep our eyes on the future for our work and mission. More about that as you read on.

As you know, our mission is to recruit and support permanent families for older youth, and to champion practices in adoption and permanency that restore belonging, dignity and hope. Healthy communities rely upon engaged citizens, and Ampersand Families plays a critical role in bringing forgotten young people back into the fold of family and community life.

Ampersand Families is committed to bringing about the systemic changes required for older youth to be effectively served by the child welfare system. We refuse to accept excuses or to say it can't be done. Where "waiting kids" are concerned, we will make it happen, even if it means taking on intractable bureaucracy. Because of this, our success is dependent on a rich web of services and educational/ advocacy activities. Our staff is often simultaneously educating parents, policy makers, social workers, guardians ad litem, foster parents, judges, lawyers, and youth in order to help them understand and create the environment in which a successful placement of an older child can occur. It is time and resource intensive, but it is the only way we can effectively increase the rate of successful adoptions. These activities are not bonus. They are fundamental to our work.

With this in mind, we've added a number of front-line positions this past year. In July, Kelsey Hanson joined us as a half-time Permanency Specialist, but quickly moved to full-time when she took on the additional responsibility of coordinating the Minnesota Heart Gallery, and Alyssa Lund reluctantly left us for new adventures out of state. (Stay tuned for more information about Heart Gallery in a moment.) In April, with increasing Youth

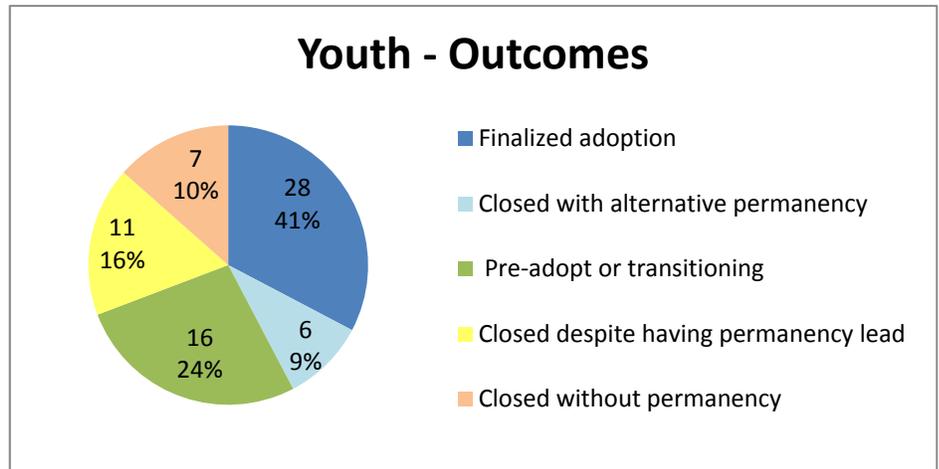
and Family Services work coming in, Kelsey’s position shifted again and she is now working full-time as a Permanency Specialist. The Heart Gallery is currently being coordinated by a temporary employee until we hire a permanent Heart Gallery Coordinator in the next month or so. Finally, in June, we hired yet again, having reached a “tipping point” where we simply could not meet demand with our existing staffing levels: aboard came one full-time and one part-time Permanency Specialist (Aubrey Haddican and Sonya Boyd, respectively). We are now fully staffed in this regard, but we keep a careful eye on workloads and expect to hire again early in the next fiscal year.

Details of our programs from the past year follow.

Program Update: Youth & Family Services

Just a few weeks ago, we found out that our proposal to provide adoption and adoption-related services to children under state guardianship or tribal jurisdiction under contract with the State of Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) had been accepted. Beginning July 1, 2014 we will serve as one of five private agencies working under this, our second, four-year contract.

The chart to the right is a look at outcomes for all the youth served at Ampersand Families since we opened. This chart describes the permanency outcomes for each of the 68 youth with whom we’ve worked that had an official “closing/outcome.” Please note: this chart *does not* include the 20 youth for whom we are currently recruiting families, or the 2 youth that we have helped through kinship searches – because there is no outcome yet to record.



Looking at this chart, you’ll see that 74% of the 68 youth that we’ve worked with have achieved permanency, or are well on their way. And 11 out of the 18 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 has the final word. As we’ve said in the past, a very common scenario that results in a closing over Ampersand Families’ objections is when the county workers assigned to a youth take too 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 11 scenarios above, we don’t.

We are actively working with 30 families that we have supported through the training, home study and/or adoption licensing process or are well on their way – a 50% increase from this time last year. We’ve also spoken to over 100 families in the past year who have contacted us, interested in adoption of teens. We meet with families one-on-one if they are interested in learning more. These personalized orientations set us apart from other adoption agencies.

Ampersand Families regularly supports more than 80 individuals in families, including teens and young adults. We don’t abandon our families once the adoption is finalized. It seems like an odd thing to announce, but unfortunately sometimes adoptive families don’t get much help once the legal part is done. At Ampersand Families we provide ongoing support for our families, knowing that they are parenting children through the intense process of

healing. Permanency is not an end "product" for youth who have been traumatized, but an ongoing process requiring strong support for the entire family for many years. Years of chaos and trauma cannot be healed overnight and Ampersand Families remains unconditionally committed for as long as we are needed to the families who step forward to parent our waiting youth.

Because we have regular interactions with adoptive parents, we've come to understand a critical gap in post-adoption services: the need for respite care, as well as other more casual supports, such as child care. In response, we are in the midst of recruiting and training licensed respite care families, as well as informal Buddy Families, to be matched with our adoptive families. Both parents and youth invest an incredible amount of emotional work into building a new family, and often have the need for occasional respite support. Respite care provides parents and youth a periodic break from the intense emotions and critical work that may become overwhelming when building a new family. Respite care is a tool that helps ensure that adoption from foster care will be more successful in the long term. No public funding is available for this project – or for many of our post-adoption services. Yet we understand that our support is pivotal in helping to maintain adoptions, and that this service is desperately needed by kids and families. Ampersand Families has always made a commitment of time and support to its families for as long as it's needed after a youth joins the family – and we always will. Many of our fundraising dollars go towards making sure that post-adoption support is available to every one of our families, indefinitely.

Program Update: Community Outreach & The Minnesota Heart Gallery

The Minnesota Heart Gallery continues to be one of most powerful community outreach programs of Ampersand Families, reaching over 52,000 community members, both in-person in the metro area and online via the program's website in the past year. 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.

The demand for Heart Gallery photo sessions is increasing dramatically. For the fiscal year that just ended (June 30, 2014), the Heart Gallery received 129 referrals to provide free professional photo shoots for waiting children, including 11 sibling groups, representing literally every corner of the state. This is a stunning increase of 67% over the previous fiscal year, and about 400% from our first full fiscal year! Also, we welcome the 26 new photographers who have offered their services, an increase of 30% from our previous fiscal year. This brings our total to well over 150 active volunteer photographers.

We reached out to DHS this past spring to see if they would be willing to help underwrite part of the services to kids for the Minnesota Heart Gallery. We're pleased to announce that we were able to add this program to our current adoption contract with DHS this past April. Although this funding does not cover all of the cost of running the Minnesota Heart Gallery, we're very happy about this partnership, which concluded on June 30th. We have responded to the Request for Proposals (RFP) that DHS issued for the Minnesota Heart Gallery for fiscal year 2015 -2017, and will hear in the next month if we received this contract. This was a new RFP, issued for the first time this year, primarily due to the advocacy work of Ampersand Families.

Ampersand Families also provides education, trainings and workshops both locally and nationally to hundreds of child welfare workers each year. Too numerous to list all, a few examples include: presenting at the National Court-Appointed Special Advocates conference in Texas (for the 8th year in a row), providing permanency training to virtually every attorney volunteering at the Children's Law Center in St. Paul since 2008, presenting at a variety of graduate level courses in the Twin Cities, presenting to the Children's Subcommittee of the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators, and training staff at St. Paul Public Schools.

Program Update: Strategic Plan News & Other Happenings

Longitudinal Study

Ampersand Families is busy fulfilling the goals of our strategic plan. First and foremost, the agency recognizes how important it is to develop a research-informed knowledge base to guide and improve child welfare practice. For about 15 years now, there has been an increasingly aggressive national push to get older kids adopted. As you know from our last annual report, we believe the time has come to evaluate the outcomes of older youth adoption, and have sought out private funding to get that ball rolling. Our collaboration with Wilder Research is an important way we are doing this,

and we are excited to announce that by January, this project – the first-ever longitudinal research project focused on the outcomes of teen adoption – will be implementation-ready! There is no existing primary research on the outcomes of teen adoption and we are confident that this project will be critical in bridging 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 in an appropriate and timely manner. DHS has been supportive of this research effort, and many national leaders in the field have provided stakeholder feedback and direction to the project. Some of them are currently working to engage their respective states to participate in the study.

Collaborations and Initiatives

Ampersand Families has also taken the lead on several other collaborations and initiatives that are important to our mission and relate to our strategic plan. Ampersand Families currently partners with the University Of Minnesota School of Social Work/Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, St. Catherine University, the 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. This initiative, the Disability and Child Welfare Collaborative (DCWC), was created at Ampersand Families' initiative, to bring together practitioners and researchers from the fields of child welfare, disability, and education in an effort to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities in the child welfare system in Minnesota. The collaboration continues, and the website can be viewed at cascw.umn.edu/community-engagement-2/dcwc/.

Ampersand Families also helped to lead the national Family Builders Network this past October, when we hosted the Family Builders annual conference here in the Twin Cities. Family Builders Network is a national association of leaders in the field of permanency, and we were invited to join the annual think tank conference as an attendee in 2010. In 2012, Ampersand Families was honored to become a member organization. The Network provides collegial support to professionals, most of whom were founders of the “adolescent permanency” field who currently provide consulting and technical assistance. The Network exists to promote the field of permanency planning for children and youth in the foster care system and to work for effective policies which respect the resourcefulness of families and provide permanence for children and youth most in need of service. The list of members is a veritable “who’s who” in the field of teen adoption and permanency.

On a smaller scale, we also collaborated with the University of St. Thomas in a short-term research project last summer/fall to examine some important issues in teen adoption. Researchers conducted interviews with families of ten older youth, as well as analyzed youth’s Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) from both before and after they were adopted. Key themes that this study found were: (a) mis-identification of youth’s disabilities prior to adoption, (b) an increase in mainstreaming into general education settings after adoption, (c) a change in the quality and tone of IEPs after adoption, and (d) an increase in the number and quality of youth’s peer and community connections after adoption.

Other important current collaborations include a formalization of program evaluation for our services for youth, families, and child welfare workers. We’ve been working closely with a professor and student at St. Catherine University to evaluate Ampersand’s services. To that end, our partners at St. Cate’s have been working together with us to design a questionnaire for gathering feedback from those we serve, a system for when and how to implement the evaluation tool, and a plan for how to assess the feedback. This program evaluation will be an ongoing process to ensure we’re providing the highest quality services to the youth and families that we serve, and to the workers with whom we interact. The first round of evaluations has been distributed, and our friends at St. Cate’s are going to help us interpret the results in the near future. An implementation plan is in place to gather feedback in an ongoing manner.

Ampersand Families is excited to be participating in all of these collaborations; they are all important initiatives for Minnesota’s most vulnerable 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 strategic planning process.

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How the books look

Ampersand Families ended fiscal year 2014 with a slight deficit. This is largely due to an increase in youth and family referrals (i.e. direct service work), which necessitated the hiring of new staff. We fully expect increases in earned income over the next few months to make up for this. Total program services make up 81% of our expenses. Our program services line was over \$510,000 this year; this expense grew 38% - as stated above - because of a large increase in our front-line services to youth and families.

Contributions increased a whopping 62%, strengthening our fiscal stability overall. Fundraising expenses are around 12% of our overall budget.

CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash	128,917
Accounts Receivable	23,545
Pledges and Grants Receivable	8,143
Prepaid Expenses	8,237
Property/Equipment	-
TOTAL ASSETS	168,842
CURRENT LIABILITIES	54,804
NET ASSETS	114,038
TOTAL LIABILITIES/ASSETS	168,842
CONTRIBUTIONS	250,121
EARNED INCOME/GOVERNMENT	323,190
OTHER INCOME	8,749
DISPOSAL OF ASSETS	-
TOTAL SUPPORT/REVENUE	582,060
PROGRAM SERVICES	510,388
SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES	
Management	42,963
Fundraising	75,937
	118,900
TOTAL EXPENSES	629,288
Change in Net Assets	(47,228)

*Figures provided by the independent auditing firm of
Carpenter Evert & Associates, Ltd.*

A copy of the final audit is available upon request.

Contributors for Fiscal Year 2014

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In memory of Melvin Stevens
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In honor of:

Susan Braun, *in honor of Jen Braun who has worked tirelessly for this great cause*
 Geraldine Dean, *in honor of Meghan Heffner; keep up the good work!*
 Carol Egan, *dedicated to my blog readers*
 Kathleen Fluegel, *in honor of the amazing Robert Bitzan!*
 Beth Kasinkas, *in honor of Alecia Anderson*
 Patricia Kight, *in honor of Robert Bitzan and his dedication to this cause*
 Donna Laverdiere, *in honor of Trysten*
 Amy Lembke, *in honor of Michelle and Jill and their official Minnesota marriage*
 Elisabeth O'Toole, *in honor of "In On It" readers*
 Julia & Stewart Simon, *in appreciation of the work done by Meghan*
 Gail Garner Swenson, *in gratitude for a most amazing Amper-year.*
 Al & Mary Willig, *in honor of Laura Lassar's 40th birthday*

Please contact us if you see an error in our list. Thanks!