



*restoring belonging,
dignity, & hope*

Ampersand Families

MISSION Ampersand Families provides permanency and adoption services to older youth and families who face barriers to equity in child welfare and champions systemic changes that advance belonging, dignity and hope.

VISION Our vision is that every young person whose life has been disrupted by trauma, and subsequent child welfare intervention, will be restored to a safe, permanent family with an urgency that honors the brevity of childhood.

KEEPING THE PROMISE

When a child or teen is removed from his or her parents by child welfare professionals, the community makes an inherent promise: to do everything possible to restore the child as quickly as is safely possible to a loving, permanent family.

Most of the time that promise is fulfilled when the child returns home to his or her parent/s, who have been supported to successfully address the conditions that originally resulted in removal.

In those painful situations when a youth cannot return home, and the court has terminated the parents' legal rights, adoption becomes the only option for achieving permanency.

Healing happens in a relationship with a committed, attuned adult. Each day a child spends without that critical loving relationship further delays urgently needed emotional healing and makes the child's life more complicated and difficult.

EQUITY We strive to take anti-racist action in every aspect of our work and agency operations. We understand that privilege, systemic and historical racism and vast disparities in access impact each of us, the people and communities we serve, and the child welfare field overall. We believe that we are uniquely charged to advance equity in child welfare through our practice and leadership.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT Ampersand Families works throughout the state of Minnesota, on the traditional, ancestral and contemporary lands of the Dakota and Anishinaabe people. Minnesota is home to 11 distinct tribal nations. Doing our work with integrity requires that we honestly name the fact that our state and nation's history includes violent displacement of Indigenous people, seizure of their lands and systemic efforts to destroy their communities, cultures and families. The forcible removal of Native children from their families, tribes, and communities to boarding schools and massive campaigns for adoption into white families for the sole purpose of cultural genocide are the pre-cursors to the disturbing disproportionate representation of Native children in our current child welfare system.

Ampersand Families stands firmly in support of the Indian Child Welfare Act and the protections it affords Indian children, families and nations. We commit to do our work in a way that will honor Native children and families for generations — both forward and back.

Founded in 2008, Ampersand Families is Minnesota's only private agency with a focused mission to provide permanency services to older youth and families who face barriers to equity in child welfare. We believe that excellent work in permanency and adoption must honor youths' right to sustain relationships with people who are important to them, especially their relatives and kin. Ampersand Families' experienced staff strive every day to increase the odds that all children in Minnesota, particularly those older than age 10 and sibling groups, will be restored to a permanent, well-supported family with an urgency that honors the brevity of childhood.

Child-specific recruitment. Intensive work with youth age 10 and older and their siblings, from any Minnesota county or tribe, to find a family, prepare the youth, and support them all into the future.

Consultation, support in system navigation, and help with resource connection to relatives and kin when child protection has become involved with a family.

Services for prospective adoptive parents, including training, home studies, comprehensive matching and transition followed by proactive placement support.

Innovative, non-time-limited, post-placement support to families, including after-hours availability, individualized connections to mind-body practitioners to help youth heal from trauma, family support retreats, opportunities to meet other adoptive families, and access to a buddy family and/or other support volunteers.

Minnesota Heart Gallery & other community outreach, a partnership with more than 100 professional photographers who volunteer to take personality-capturing images of Minnesota's Waiting Children of all ages. The photos are used for recruitment purposes, and every youth receives digital copies of their images.

Leadership to help improve the child welfare system and strengthen families, so that fewer youth face the upheaval of removal, termination of their parents' legal rights, and the struggle to achieve permanency.

Learning from families and young people how to best support adoption and permanency — for a lifetime. We are in constant dialogue with our families to learn what they need to support success. Then, we do our best to make these supports available.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



the youth we serve

We frequently serve youth from demographic groups that are disproportionately over-represented in the child welfare system, especially youth who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and/or who identify as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer). We help prospective parents explore how their own intersecting identities and worldview impact their capacity to positively parent the youth we serve.

the youth we serve also tend to ...

- be between the ages of 10 and 18 years old;
- have siblings that they may or may not be living with currently;
- have experienced significant trauma, abuse and/or neglect;
- struggle with attachment and family relationship skills;
- be fearful or mistrusting of adults, and not think that adults keep youth safe;
- have behavioral, developmental, physical and/or mental health challenges as a result of abuse/neglect and/or family separation;
- have been in foster care, group homes, or residential treatment for more than a year;
- have relationships with members of their birth families that they need support to navigate;
- be strong-willed survivors, each deserving of a permanent, safe, loving, and unconditionally committed family.

A different kind of child welfare experience

Ampersand Families is a specialized agency with seasoned, down-to-earth professionals who provide realistic, honest information, training and on-going support to relatives, kin and adoptive families

We recognize that youth who have experienced trauma require a network of well-supported adults in order to heal.



we get results

At any given time there are about 1,500 youth under guardianship of the Minnesota Commissioner of Human Services. Most of those children and youth are awaiting adoption. More than half are older than age 10 and/or part of a sibling group with at least one child over age 10.

Each year since 2008, about 35 young people we serve move into a pre-adoptive home and/or have their adoption finalized. We are very proud that each year we increase the number of youth we help to find permanency with a relative or kin. Combined, our services impact about 500 youth and families annually as we advance access and equity within the child welfare system.

with support

We are proud to be a partner with Minnesota Department of Human Services as a contracted agency providing adoption, permanency and support services to youth and families. We also rely on individual, corporate and foundation contributions to be able to provide the margin of excellence, innovation and leadership that are hallmarks of all of our services.



first, thank you

Thank you for considering older youth adoption or for stepping up as a relative when child protective services has become involved in the lives of people you care about. You are doing a unique and special thing by exploring ways to provide love and support children and teens in this way.

Ampersand Families is proud to work with a wide variety of families. Married, single, straight, gay or lesbian, cis or transgender parents are welcome here. We are not a faith-based organization — believers, non-believers, skeptics and explorers are invited to learn more about us.

It is no secret that youth of color are disproportionately represented in foster care and among those awaiting adoption. Thus, we are especially interested in working with families of color and families who are committed to culturally competent parenting.

We are a safe and competent place for all sorts of families, because all sorts of youth are waiting for the family who will be right for them.

our families

Parents with these traits tend to be most successful in adopting older youth and/or caring for a relative's child:

- Motivated because they understand the cost, to society and to human potential, when youth age out of foster care without positive family relationships and connection to the community.
- Committed to helping youth navigate birth family and other complicated, significant relationships.
- Aware that race and economic class are significant issues that are deeply intertwined with the child welfare system, and that successful families are proactive advocates for social justice.
- Thoughtful regarding the responsibility of becoming a multi-racial family, and only deciding to do so if they are realistically equipped to address the racism and bias that routinely impact the lives of youth of color.
- Realistic with their expectation for what it means to parent a youth who has experienced trauma.
- Part of a network of friends and family committed to supporting the parents and building a relationship with the youth.
- Flexible and proactive in accessing community-based supports and services.
- Regularly use their sense of humor, satire, and irony to stay sane.
- Recognize that their own attachment history, temperament, and communication style are important factors impacting parenting.
- Have interests and activities they hope to share with youth.
- Genuinely enjoy teens.
- Have the ability to keep focused on the goal of providing care to a youth, even when systemic barriers and procedures make the process frustrating.
- Are at a place of stability in order to navigate the transition of adding a child to their family. Generally we recommend at least a year from significant life events or changes such as birth, marriage, divorce, loss of a loved one, major move or job change, before beginning the home study/licensing process.

Families wishing to adopt or provide foster care in Minnesota must:

- Be at least 21 years of age; exceptions may be made for relatives.
- Have sufficient household income to support additional children. Financial assistance is available, but is not intended to cover the actual costs of raising a child.
- Pass an Adam Walsh Background Check including any household member age 13 or older; age 18+ must submit fingerprints.
- Participate in pre-adoption and foster care training (about 25 hours).
- Actively engage in the home study process and demonstrate a readiness to care for children with history of trauma.

WITH AMPERSAND FAMILIES, YOU CAN EXPECT:

RESPECT Your calls will be returned. Our staff will be available. Your concerns will be addressed. We will do what we say we will do.

EXPERTISE Our staff members are knowledgeable regarding the child welfare system, the adoption process, and community resources available when families have challenges. If we cannot meet your need directly, we will connect you with an agency or professional who can. We will help you find answers.

HONESTY We present an honest picture of older youth adoption and the child welfare experience. We partner with you to determine the supports and skills you might need in order to commit to this journey. We will not try to scare you away, but will push to make sure you realize what you are getting into (as much as possible).

EDUCATION & SELF-REFLECTION During orientation, training and the home study process, we will help you reflect on your capacity and desire to make an unconditional commitment to an older youth via adoption or to a relative's child until they can safely return to their parents care.

PARTNERSHIP As you move through the process we will get to know each other quite well. It is the relationship we build during this time that will help us work as partners during the matching, transition, and post-placement periods.

ENGAGEMENT We will introduce you to other families with similar experiences, and will provide you opportunities to learn from and teach others. Teens at Ampersand Families also have opportunities to help prepare families by sharing what they know about life as a foster and adopted youth.

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH BIRTH FAMILY AND KIN

Ampersand Families supports the right of youth to retain connections to significant people in their lives, including maternal and paternal birth relatives, and works closely with our families to ensure that they have the skills and commitment to help their child navigate these complex and important relationships. Most youth in the foster care system have on-going relationships with birth families, including parents who have had parental rights terminated by the courts.

Ampersand Families does not provide private or infant adoption services, and therefore does not provide birth parent counseling or the types of search or reunion services that are often part of those types of adoption.

The home study & adoption process at Ampersand Families

Always conscious of the urgent need for families, we generally move families through the process from orientation to placement of a youth within 9 to 12 months. The time frame depends on many factors, including the pace with which a family completes the various components, the characteristics of youth for whom the family would be a good match, the team of workers representing the youth, and other things that may or may not be within Ampersand Families' ability to control. Please understand that we cannot guarantee prospective parents that they will be matched with a youth within a particular time frame, or even that they will be matched at all.

Families can be assured that the agency will be proactive during the entire process and that your worker will be in regular contact with you about the status of your home study and the search/matching process (this section meets the requirements of Minnesota Statutes 259.37).

Personalized one-on-one orientation

~MONTH 1

The first step in exploring working with Ampersand Families as your agency is a 1:1 orientation with one of our staff. If there is more than one parent, then each of you should expect to be part of this meeting. Orientation is an opportunity to learn more about our agency's mission, vision, policies, supportive services, and for our agency to start to get to know your family. You can expect we will provide you recommendations on your next steps prior to officially starting the process with us.

Reflection questions

~MONTHS 1-3

During your 1:1 orientation we will provide you with a large packet of self-reflection questions. The questions give you a chance to think about how you were raised and the things you do or hope to do as a parent. You will be asked to think deeply about your motivations for adopting and/or for caring for a relative's child, and to clarify your hopes and fears about the experience. You may begin completing the self-reflection assignments right away. This is one of the most important parts of the whole process, as your responses will help your Ampersand Families worker start to get to know you and will be the foundation of your written home study. We can be flexible and complete all or part of the self-reflection questions with you verbally if you prefer; please be sure to review the questions so you are prepared to discuss the topics.

Pre-foster care/adoption training

~MONTHS 1-3 (APPROXIMATELY 24 HOURS TOTAL)

Most often, families will attend a two-day (16 hours) training to learn about many important topics including an overview of the child welfare system, strategies for parenting youth with a history of trauma/loss/grief, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, children's mental health, and the role of foster and adoptive parents in supporting a youth's connection to birth family. This training is usually conducted in a variety of locations around the state and you will be together with prospective families from several agencies. There will be additional training required throughout your process, most often tailored to your specific situation.

Home study

~MONTHS 3–5

The home study assessment and foster care licensing process officially begins once you submit application paperwork to our agency, and typically takes 3–5 months to complete from that date. You will meet several times with your assigned Ampersand Families worker to discuss self-reflection questions, complete required home safety walkthroughs, meet with any other adult or children in your household, and to hold a family support network meeting with your friends and relatives. The home study is a comprehensive description of you and your family, household routines, values, interests and skills.

Matching process ~MONTHS 6–10

Once completed, your home study assessment is given to workers representing youth in need of permanency and adoption. For relative/kin families, the home study is provided specifically to the workers involved in decision making for the child/sibling group you already know and love. For non-relative/kin families, your home study is shared with workers representing youth for whom your skills and interests seem particularly well-suited. It is an opportunity for the youth's professional team to learn about you and begin to assess whether you might be a good match.

Minnesota relies on 10 Placement Factors as an important part of the process to determine what family might be a good match for a waiting child or teen. Agencies must consider the child/youth's: 1) current functioning and behaviors; 2) medical needs; 3) educational needs; 4) developmental needs; 5) history and past experiences; 6) religious and cultural needs; 7) current connection with a community; 8) interests and talents; 9) relationship to current caregivers, parents, siblings, and relatives; and 10) reasonable preferences.

Getting the match right is a critical part of a successful adoption/relative placement. We follow a comprehensive matching process, insisting that prospective parents get all the information they need to make informed decisions. You will receive many documents about any youth you are considering for adoption/placement and you will meet several adults currently involved with the youth. People like teachers, therapists, and the current foster parent can help you understand what you'll need to know to parent a particular youth.

Because Ampersand Families also provides child-specific recruitment services, we have a number of youth known very well by our staff for whom we are seeking families. Sometimes a youth and a family working with us end up being a good match and sometimes the best match comes from a youth working closely with another agency. Either way, with us you will get a proactive partner through this very critical part of the adoption process.

Thoughtful transition and placement ~MONTHS 8–15

Whether you are a relative or non-relative family, our staff are proactive, helping new parents develop a transition that is as seamless as possible by setting up important connections to community resources before the young person moves home. Timing for transition is based on many things, including how long it takes to set up important supports and the needs or reasonable preferences of the youth.

Move-in day starts the next big phase—and Ampersand Families is there with post-placement support for as long as you need it (see page 6 for more information).

post-placement support

Post-placement support is where Ampersand Families truly stands apart. Whether you adopt a teen from foster care, or step up as a relative when child protection is involved, you are taking on an enormous commitment. We remain steadfast, too, providing free post-placement support for as long as needed.

Now recruiting

Our current array of innovative post-placement support includes:

- Family retreats
- Monthly parent roundtable and an on-line discussion group where parents connect
- Access to after-hours support
- Trauma assessments and individualized consultations with trauma-competent mind-body practitioners who help parents learn new strategies for healing
- Streamlined access to trauma and adoption/foster care competent parent consultants for proactive, individualized support at the time a youth transitions into the home

Buddy families provide monthly respite and other informal supports to adoptive and relative/kin families. Please refer anyone you know who might be interested in learning more about this growing program at Ampersand Families.

Further Information & Disclosures

regarding adoption

Types of adoption

Adoption agencies help place children into adoptive homes through either an agency or a direct adoption. The adoptions in which Ampersand Families takes part are virtually always agency adoptions.

An agency adoption occurs either when a licensed adoption agency is a child's legal guardian or a child's biological parents or legal guardian have signed an agreement with an agency to place their child in an adoptive home. In the case of adoptions from foster care in Minnesota, the commissioner of Human Services is the child's legal guardian and delegates to the county social service department the authority to partner with private agencies such as Ampersand Families to facilitate an adoption process. Biological parents are not legally involved in this type of adoption.

Client Non-Discrimination Policy

Ampersand Families provides employment and services to youth and families without discrimination based on race, color, religion, nationality, ethnic background, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, marital status, socio-economic status, status with regard to public assistance, political affiliation, veteran status, other non-visible differences and other protected attributes.

Adoption Law Compliance

The agency complies with all adoption laws applicable in the state of Minnesota, including the Indian Child Welfare Act, Public Law 95-608; the Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act, Minnesota Statutes, sections 260.751 to 260.835; the Heritage Act, Minnesota Statutes, sections 259.29, 260C.193, subdivision 3, and 260C.212 to 260C.215; and the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, Minnesota Statutes, section 260.851.

Civil Action

An action for damages, including punitive damages, may be brought by a birth parent or prospective adoptive parent aggrieved by 1) a violation of subdivision, 2) the failure of an agency to provide services listed in the disclosure form under subdivision 6, or 3) deceptive practices or misrepresentations made by an agency about its services or ability to place a child for adoption.

Attorney Referral

Families wishing to retain the services of an attorney to assist them with the adoption process are free to do so. If requested, Ampersand Families will provide a list of area attorneys known to have experience with adoption.

This section meets requirements of Minnesota Statute 259.37.

Further Disclosures

Adoption and Permanency Services for families funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services

Ampersand Families provides services to prospective parents interested in adopting a Minnesota waiting child or sibling group (after a Termination of Parental Rights has occurred) and to relatives interested in being a resource to a child/sibling group they already know (before or after a Termination of Parental Rights has occurred). Under most circumstances, pre-adoption training, home study, foster care licensing, placement support, and post-placement services are provided at no charge to families. These services are funded in large part by the Public Private Adoption Initiative and Permanency Support Services contracts Ampersand Families have with the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Only in the rarest of occasions has Ampersand Families facilitated a voluntary adoption or adoption services for a child from outside of Minnesota. Therefore fees and charges for birth parent expenses will be established on an individual case basis, in accordance with Minnesota Statute 259.55. Similarly, only in the most unusual situations will a prospective parent pay Ampersand Families for any services. In that rare situation, the current fee schedule is available by contacting Ampersand Families directly.

Purpose of adoption home studies completed under the Public Private Adoption Initiative Contract

Ampersand Families is a contract agency with the Minnesota Department of Human Services. As such, an adoption home study summary (commonly referred to as the home study) completed by us under this contract must be used for the purpose of adopting a child or sibling group who is under the guardianship of the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. In the event that a family decides to pursue another type of adoption and seeks to use the home study summary or home study update for that purpose, the family will be expected to pay Ampersand Families for the total cost of the home study and reimburse all fees already paid to Ampersand Families by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.



you can help

Make a financial contribution Ampersand Families is able to go above and beyond in our work with youth and families and our efforts to improve the child welfare system thanks to generous individual, foundation, and corporate donors. To make a tax-deductible gift, or to learn more about how gifts to Ampersand Families are used, visit www.ampersandfamilies.org.

Consider adopting—or becoming a Buddy Family Invite us to speak at your book club, civic organization, workplace, parent group, place of worship, or anywhere else you are with people who might be interested in learning more about Minnesota's waiting teens. We are always looking for adoptive families and others who might be interested in supporting them. As we grow our Buddy Family and general support programs, we are looking for people who are interested in being matched with an adoptive/relative family to provide regular support each month.

Join our Board of Directors Our organization is led by a board of directors who are professionals from the community, and who volunteer their talents to help keep Ampersand Families strong. If you know someone who has great skills in finance, communications, public policy, or child welfare leadership and who might be interested in board membership, please send them our way. In particular, because we want our board to reflect the people we serve, we are especially seeking candidates who live outside the Twin Cities metro area, are BIPOC, identify as LGBTQ+, and/or who have direct personal experience with adoption, foster, and/or kinship care.

1751 County Road B West, Suite 300
Roseville, Minnesota 55113



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