

Activism in Adoption

adoption education for the 21st century



Most adoption education is aimed at only at potential adoptive parents as they start their adoption journey, and addresses the transition of bringing a new baby into the home. Where most training ends, Activism in Adoption starts, by covering the entire parenting journey, from the experiences of an expectant mother considering adoption to how to help adult adoptees successfully navigate a reunion relationship with their birth family. It's education for a lifetime, for every member of the adoption constellation, because adoption is a lifetime commitment.

Viewing Activism in Adoption video content is simple: [purchase a 30-day pass, and gain access to our entire catalog.](#) Learn from the people most impacted by adoption - birthparents and adoptees - who share their experiences with nuance and vulnerability so that we can improve outcomes for every member of the adoption constellation.

Rachel Boyer, MSW, LMSW | Raising the Level of Adoption Competence: The Importance of Sharing Knowledge and Stories to Help Shape a New Narrative and Create a World Where Adoptees are Seen and Supported



Rachel Boyer, MSW, LMSW, a social worker and **transracial adoptee** provides her expertise and insight as a transracial adoptee and social worker passionate about trauma-informed and adoption competent social work practice. She discusses how our society views adoption, where the gaps are in adoption storytelling (and why those gaps have persisted), who those gaps are serving, and how we can learn to engage in adoption advocacy at the local, state, and federal level, providing concrete examples and suggestions for how to do so, encouraging everyone to make their voice heard, both to provide diverse perspectives on adoption to our media and lawmakers, but also so that we can all work alongside adult adopted people, who are currently shouldering the bulk of the burden of advocacy.

We asked Rachel, “*why is it important for you to engage in activism related to adoption?*”

Activism in adoption to me means I can channel my experiences, education, and skills to help make a difference. Like many adoptees, my childhood and adolescence are full of encounters, moments, and memories that I wish had been different. Now, as I balance growing and understanding the bigger picture, I can see how these memories can be used to connect with other adoptees and change laws, regulations, and systems to help provide support for future adoptees. Adoption activism has also helped me feel a part of the adoptee community while helping me mature mentally and emotionally. Personally, it is important for me to participate in adoption activism because it is the one place my head and heart align and I see hope for change.

When we listen to the individuals whose lives are most impacted by adoption, when we allow ourselves to sit in uncomfortable spaces, we learn and we grow, we begin to understand the ethics, and sometimes the lack of ethics in adoption, and we become the change-makers - improving outcomes in adoption for our children, for ourselves as adoptive parents and adoption professionals, and for the birthparents who chose to place their children for adoption. **We are Stronger Together.**

Adoption Unfiltered Book Tour (Filmed Live at The Book Stall, Winnetka, Ill)

Sara
Easterly



adoptee

Kelsey Vander
Vliet Ranyard



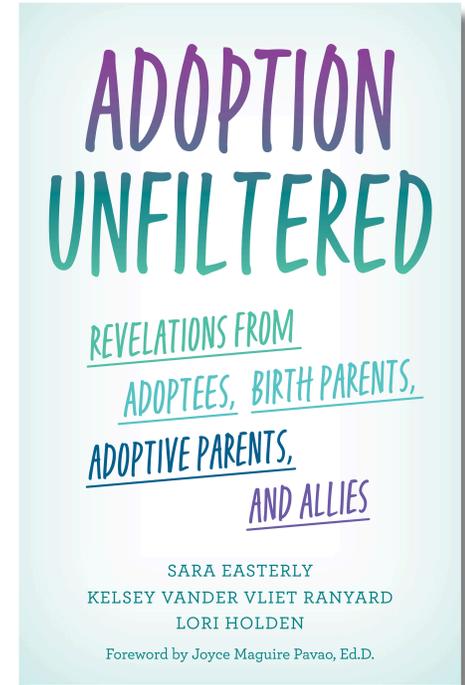
birthmother

Lori
Holden



adoptive mother

Along with Panelists Muthoni Gaciku-Kittredge, *birthmother*, Erika Gonzales, *birthmother*, Kayla Zheng, *adoptee*, and Leslie Molloy, *adoptive mother*.

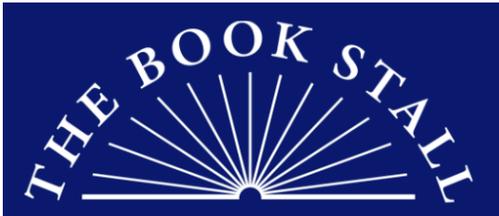


We were honored to be able to host the Chicagoland stop on the Adoption Unfiltered Book Tour. This AiA session was filmed live at that event, and features the authors — adoptee Sara Easterly, birthmother Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyard, and adoptive mother Lori Holden — along with their panelists, Muthoni Gaciku-Kittredge (birthmother), Erika Gonzales (birthmother), Kayla Zheng (adoptee), and Leslie Molloy (adoptive mother). Learn more about what the authors discovered during their research into adoption from each side of the adoption triad — they interviewed dozens of adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, social workers, therapists, and other allies — all of whom shared candidly about their challenges in adoption. While finding common ground in the sometimes-contentious space of adoption may seem like a lofty goal, it reveals the authors' optimistic aim: working together with truth and transparency to move toward healing.



We wanted to 'work across the aisles' in adoption, and show what it's like when adults who have lived this experience are willing to come together and work together to create true, meaningful change.

-Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyard, birthmother



Our thanks to The Book Stall for hosting this event.

811 Elm Street, Winnetka, Illinois 60093 -
847-446-8880



Kirsta Bowman | Advertising Children on Social Media: Ethical Concerns in Rehoming Practices



Kirsta Bowman, an adoptee well-known on social media for her thoughtful and nuanced videos discussing the adoption landscape, joins us to discuss her research into unethical rehoming practices on social media. Unregulated custody transfer, often referred to as 'rehoming', is the practice of adoptive parents transferring legal custody of their child to another individual or family without the involvement of the child welfare, oversight, or other appropriate systems. Photos and biographies of minor children whose adoptive parents want to rehome them can be found in numerous places on social media, advertising them to potential new parents without concern of who they might be.

After Kirsta's talk, we received the following:

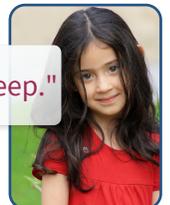
"I'm writing to thank you for the excellent webinar your organization put on a few weeks ago. A contact of mine at the U.S. Department of State shared the invitation with me because the Uniform Law Commission (ULC) recently finalized a model law on this topic called the Uniform Unregulated Child Custody Transfer Act (UUCCTA). The UUCCTA provides states with a uniform regulatory framework to deal with two issues: (1) the unregulated custody transfer of children; and (2) provision of better information and guidance to prospective adoptive parents of children in certain adoptions.

The UUCCTA has already been enacted in Utah and Washington and will likely be enacted in more states in the future. I wanted to write to share some information about this model law with the folks at your organization and any attendees of the Advertising Children on Social Media: Ethical Concerns in Rehoming Practices webinar who may be interested in working to enact this model law in their states."

"Anna is an organized and clean child who keeps her room neat."



"David is stronger than he looks, and loves to do yardwork."



"Cayleigh loves to clean and sweep."

* The comments above are real and taken from a rehoming Facebook group; the photos are stock photos and the names are changed, to protect the children's privacy.

“My jaw was on the floor throughout this entire talk. How is there no oversight for these kids? Who is keeping them safe?

-Activism in Adoption attendee, adoptive father

RELATIONSHIPS

Shanyce Henley & Ron Lundeen | *Birthmothers & Adoptive Fathers*



In the adoption community, the phrase 'adoptive parents' is often code for 'adoptive moms,' and it's rare to hear from fathers at all, either birthfathers or adoptive dads, but a healthy open adoption requires the work to create and maintain it be done by *both* adoptive parents. Communication and understanding between birth mothers and adoptive fathers are critical components in a healthy open adoption relationship. **Shanyce H.** is a **birth mother** and **Ron Lundeen** is an **adoptive father** who talk about their experiences in building their unique family.



"I would totally recommend this session to anyone considering adoption, especially those with trepidation about what openness looks like. This is the most positive example I have ever seen. "

-MD, Adoption Professional & Social Worker

Bethany Fraser | *Unveiling the Unknown: How DNA Testing is Changing the Adoption Narrative*



Bethany Fraser is an **adoptee** and host of the podcast, *The Adoptee Diaries: Truth, Trust, and Transparency*. A home DNA kit uncovered a surprising secret about her biological origins, genetic heritage, race, and ethnicity, and ultimately led her to connect with her birth family. From the emotional journey of discovery to the practical considerations of DNA testing, Bethany sheds light on the complex issues surrounding adoptee identity and family relationship, and how the power of DNA testing is reshaping the adoption narrative, especially in closed adoptions.



I know now that a piece of my personality comes directly from what I experienced. It's the lies, not having context, that feeling of not being good enough. It's only now that I finally feel like I am able to trust my gut; finally I'm able to say no. Now I trust my judgment about people. Now I make my own decisions and get to embrace life unapologetically.

-Bethany Fraser, transracial adoptee

RELATIONSHIPS

Dr. Gretchen Sisson | *Relinquished: The Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood*



Sociologist **Gretchen Sisson** discusses her new book *Relinquished: The Politics of Adoption and the Privilege of American Motherhood*, and her ten years of research on adoption in the United States. How do relinquishing mothers feel about the support and counseling they received (or didn't) during their pregnancies? How is openness framed for expecting mothers, and how often does the marketing of open adoption align with the reality of open adoption? How do mothers feel about their adoptions over time, and how can their longer-term needs and traumas inform how we support mothers moving forward? Where does our society fail to understand birth mothers, and what do they wish more people understood about their experiences?

“ We don't have a model for what it means for a birth mother to be continually involved in their child's life in the adoptive family in a way that is meaningful and productive for all parties involved. We don't have models for what open adoption is, both for the people who have to live it, but also for people outside it. Even though openness is the norm in adoption, it remains an oddity in our broader cultural idea of adoption, and people who live in an open adoption are constantly having to figure out this relationship on their own in a world that doesn't understand what that looks like.

-Dr. Gretchen Sisson

Vicki Twomey & Jessica Figlio | *Beyond the Early Years: Growing with the Children we Placed*



Nearly all adoption education focuses on adopting a baby, but does not address what happens as they baby grows into a teen, and then an adult. We hear a lot about preparing for openness in the early years of the adoptees life. But what does the relationship look as the adoptee grows up? How do we prepare for a healthy open relationship through those years? Join two seasoned **birthmothers**, **Vicki Twomey** and **Jessica Figlio**, who have each experienced over 20 years of openness in adoption, as they share their stories.



“ I wish I'd been better prepared for the challenges of open adoption before we adopted our daughter. I did and said so many things that, in hindsight, I truly regret, but none of my adoption education included birthmothers and their point of view, and I didn't know any better.

-adoptive mother, Adoption & Parenting Facebook group

RELATIONSHIPS

Katy Finn | *Shifting the Adoption Narrative: The Role and Power of Adoptive Mothers*



While reflecting on her theater piece, *Placing Home*, which centers birthmother stories, **adoptive mother Katy Finn** unpacks the powerful role adoptive mothers can play in shifting the pervasive adoption narrative. Katy talks about her own journey in adoption to underscore why this shift in thinking is so necessary, and addresses how both prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents can take clear action towards empowering birthparents and adoptees to bring their stories to the forefront of the adoption landscape.



Fantastic information and speaker!! Thank you for creating this type of content.
-Adoptive Parent

Cathy Crossno | *Navigating Adoption Relationships from a Birthmom Perspective*



Birthmom Cathy Crossno tells the story of how she came to place her daughter for adoption, and how she was able to build a strong relationship with both her daughter and her daughter's adoptive parents. Cathy acknowledges the complexities of relationships within the adoption triad, while highlighting ways to honor birthparents in closed adoption and finding positive ways to navigate open adoption relationships. The discussion includes information for birthparents on how they can advocate for their wants and wishes and will give the audience the tools to help adopted children build a strong sense of self-identity.



I love that a birth father would like to be a part of the story and I don't see how it would look any different than a birth mother, right? A birth father is still grieving, a birth father is still trying to figure out where they fall into place, and so again, I think with open honesty and love, just like a birth mom, a birth father can fall right into the same relationship with that child.

- Cathy Crossno, birthmom

Hope O Baker & Nam Holtz | *Improving Experiences for Expectant Moms Considering Adoption*



Hope O Baker, birthmom and author of critically acclaimed memoir, *Finding Hope: A Birthmother's Journey into the Light* and **Nam Holtz, LMSW**, adult adoptee and award-winning documentary filmmaker, *Found in Korea*, discuss how we can improve outcomes for expectant moms considering adoption. When we improve experiences for the expectant mom, we reduce trauma for the child, set the foundation for better relationships and improve outcomes for all members of the triad.



Someday, you are going to have to tell your child the circumstances surrounding their adoption. Are you going to be able to tell them that you did everything you could to make sure their adoption was ethical? That you made sure that their birth mother had access to the resources she needed to heal?

- Hope O Baker, birthmom



On Your Feet Foundation has been an incredible resource for having honest conversations about adoption from those that personally live a daily adoption reality. Whether hearing from all members of the adoption triad or adoption professionals, I always feel encouraged when I participate in their trainings. There's a lot of work we can do to continue growing in openness and support of birth families, adoptive families, and adoptees. OYFF is laying the groundwork for growth, asking the hard questions, and providing a space for people to learn how we can help these populations thrive.

-KG, Adoption Professional, LMSW

I am so excited that birth moms are finally getting a strong voice. We are so much more than a stereotype or a statistic.

-LF, birthmom

RESILIENCE

Cordan James | *Making a Comback: Learning Skills to Navigate and Overcome Traumatic Experiences*



Cordan James, the Executive Director of Fathering Together, is a social entrepreneur, whose work focuses on education and empowerment. A resilient transracial **adoptee**, he rose from adversity to become a leading motivational speaker and youth/family mentor. Stemming from his experiences in the Foster Care System, he uses his insights to guide similar families through their unique struggles with evidence based approaches. His life's work is rooted in mentoring, advocacy, and leaving the world a little better than he found it.



I think probably the first step is to realize you don't know what you're doing. We're all trying to figure this out. So just lend yourself some mercy and some grace.

-Cordan James, *adoptee*

Hope O Baker : *Finding Hope and Light*

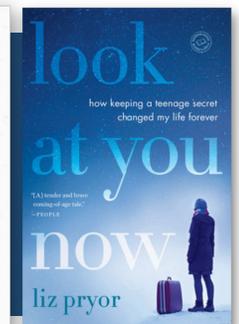


Speaker, **birthmother**, and author of birthmother memoir, *Finding Hope: A Birthmother's Journey into the Light*, **Hope O Baker** talks about building resilience and learning to thrive despite the circumstances life throws you. In conversation with moderator, advice columnist, and **birthmother Liz Pryor**, author of birthmother memoir *Look at You Now: How Keeping a Teenage Secret Changed My Life*, this session gives an unvarnished and nuanced look at adoption from a birthmother perspective, giving adoptive parents, adoptees, and adoption professionals the opportunity to better understand the birthmom experience.



I feel like all of us have our own unique stories of challenge, and pain, and difficulty, and no matter how often we wonder, “why do things happen in my life the way they do,” it’s really important to remember that it’s not so much what happens to us in our lives as how we choose to get through it.

-Liz Pryor, *birthmom*



Billy Kaplan, LCSW: *Parenting in SPACE™: Therapeutic Parenting in Difficult Times*



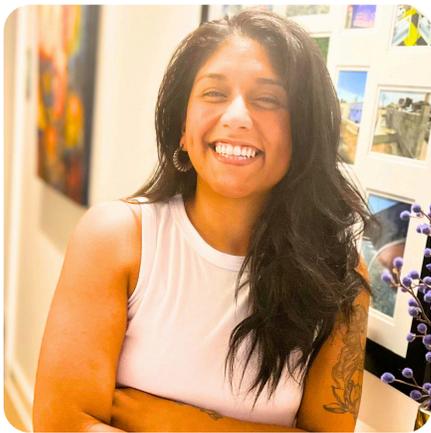
TreeHouse Health's President & Clinical Director **Billy Kaplan, LCSW**, discusses therapeutic parenting, through an attachment-focused, trauma-informed lens. Parents raising adopted kids know that this parenting approach, one that fosters feelings of safety and connectedness, is vitally important for traumatized children, and helping adoptive families is a big focus of Billy Kaplan's work. Parenting in SPACE™ is a new framework, developed by the therapists at TreeHouse health's psychotherapists, gives parents a new set of tools for parenting children who have experienced trauma.



Put on your oxygen mask first. Really. Because to help our kids, we have to help ourselves first. Then take care of our primary partner relationship. Then take care of the kids. If the focus is on the kids the kids won't be better won't get better, they won't feel better, because if you're anxious, your anxiety is going to spread to them.

- Billy Kaplan, LCSW

Clemencia Deleon: *Developing Radical Honesty and Emotional Intelligence*



Clemencia Deleon, a **birthmother** who placed her child in a kinship adoption, unpacks the complexity of kinship adoption, and the importance of honesty and emotional intelligence in navigating this form of adoption. There are a lot of obvious benefits built in to kinship adoption: the adoptee has racial and cultural mirrors, are already part of their adoptive parents' family, and they and one or both of their birthparents are known to them as part of their extended family. But the more difficult aspects of kinship adoption are often glossed over, or ignored entirely. Families are complicated, and full of history, and that history can impact the adoption dynamic in unexpected and difficult ways.



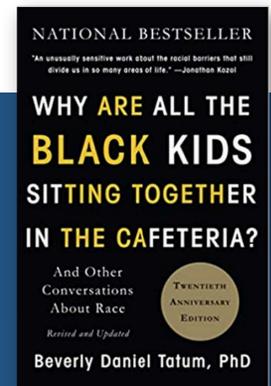
In order for there to be any real, authentic openness, there has to be radical honesty — honesty with yourself and honesty with the child — honesty about who you are, and why you chose adoption.

-Clemencia Deleon, birthmother

Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum: *Race and Adoption*



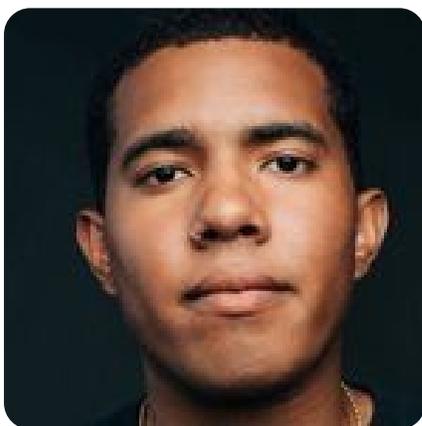
Along with panelists **Shanyce Henley**, a birthmom, and **Kevin Hofmann**, author and adult adoptee, **Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum**, president emerita of Spelman College and author of the best-selling book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*, guides us in a discussion that explores what it really means to be a parent of a transracial adoptee. From acknowledging that birthparents often have fears when placing their child in a family of a different race or culture to helping adoptive parents unpack the impact of race on their children, it is an important topic for the entire triad.



As we know, racism is a huge issue for the children, for the parents, for the family, and sometimes not talked about. For young people growing up in white families, sometimes there is a real sense of distress when the topic of racism has not been easily approached in the family. If the parents are hesitant to even acknowledge racial difference, or talk about it, that puts the child in a very challenging position.

- Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum

Isaac Etter | *When Your Family Doesn't Look Like You*



Transracial adoptee **Isaac Etter** is an activist, racial bias consultant, and social entrepreneur, and the founder of *Identity*, whose mission is to provide trainings and services for adoption agencies that help prepare foster and adoptive parents for transracial adoption and fostering. Joined by moderator and birthmother **Shanyce H.** and adult adoptee **Nam Holtz, LMSW**, explores birth search, Isaac take a deep-dive into the intersection of race and adoption, providing an audience of adult adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoption professionals an unvarnished look at some of the challenges inherent in building a multi-racial family.

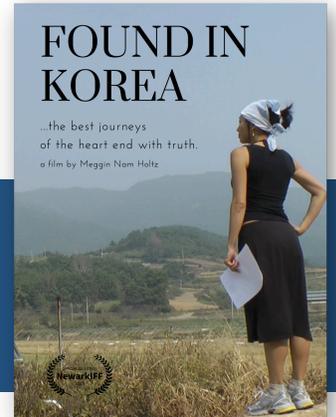
Your children should understand the reality of racism in America, from police brutality to what they may experience at school – all of these things – and you should be creating the opportunity for your child to come to you when they experience those things.

-Isaac Etter, transracial adoptee

Found in Korea: A Conversation with Documentary Filmmaker Nam Holtz, LMSW



Meggin (Nam) Holtz, LMSW, a Korean adoptee, has been involved in adoption advocacy, awareness, and support for a decade. Her award-winning documentary film, *Found In Korea* 한국에서 발견된, about birth search, identity, and adoption was created to serve as a catalyst for conversations about adoption thoughts among youth and adults alike, and serves for the catalyst for this talk, in which she discusses what it is like when transracially adopted people go back to their country of origin, in search of their family and their roots.



“Educate yourself about adoption, period. You know, adoption from all voices: adoptive parent voices, adoptee voices, birthparent voices. I think that acknowledging the paradox of adoption is crucial.

- Nam Holtz, LMSW, transracial adoptee

Torie DiMartile: Racial Identity and Mental Health: Insights from Adoptees of Color

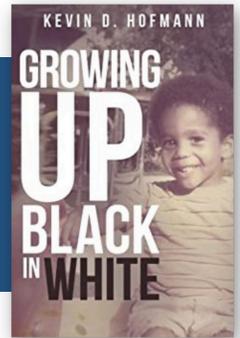


This session explores **Torie DiMartile**'s dissertation research on racial identity and family belonging in the lives of Black adult transracial adoptees. Drawing from interviews with dozens of adoptees, along with her own experience as an adoptee, she'll discuss the challenges many adoptees of color face being raised in white homes, such as intrafamilial racism, racial gaslighting, and colorblindness, and the impact that has on connection with adoptive family, racial identity development, and mental health.

Kevin Hofmann: *Lessons From The Life: Growing up Black in White*



Adoptee and author **Kevin Hofmann** was born into the racially-charged Detroit of 1967 to a white mother and a black father, placed into foster care, and then adopted by a white minister and his wife, the parents of three biological children. Hofmann's talk is based on his memoir, *Growing up Black in White*, which tells his story through the lens of hope and promise, and in his session he shares the choices his family made in order to connect him to the Black community, providing adoptive parents a roadmap to help their children build strong racial identities based on self-respect instead of outside judgment.



“People do not understand the burden of being 'the only one.' It is your job as parents to help your children and those around them manage the diversity. It should be painfully obvious by now but I will state it again: your children shouldn't be the diversity in every circle they are a part of.

- Kevin Hofmann, transracial adoptee

“On Your Feet Foundation has been an incredible resource for having honest conversations about adoption from those that personally live a daily adoption reality. Whether hearing from all members of the adoption triad or adoption professionals, I always feel encouraged when I participate in their trainings. There's a lot of work we can do to continue growing in openness and support of birth families, adoptive families, and adoptees. OYFF is laying the groundwork for growth, asking the hard questions, and providing a space for people to learn how we can help these populations thrive.

-KG, Adoption Professional, LMSW



AFFILIATE PROGRAM

Adoption Education for the Twenty-first Century

EARN MONEY WHILE PROVIDING YOUR FAMILIES WITH THE VERY BEST ADOPTION EDUCATION

Most adoption education is sold course-by-course. At **Activism in Adoption**, families get unlimited access to our full catalog via a 30-Day Pass, allowing them to tailor a bespoke educational experience that best matches their needs. Adoption Education Certificates are available for families who need them, and if they earn six certificates, they'll also receive a badge acknowledging their commitment to ethical, modern adoption education.

When you become an **Activism in Adoption Affiliate**, you receive:

- a unique promo code to share with your clients, families, and community - when they use your code to sign up for a 30-Day Pass, they instantly save \$20
Every time an Affiliate's unique Promo Code is used to sign up for a 30-Day Pass, that **Affiliate receives \$50**, with payment sent out quarterly
- a digital copy of the AiA catalog (updated monthly)
- an AiA Badge signifying your affiliation
- and more, including one complimentary account and customized reporting



*Join us as an **Affiliate** today, and give your families the adoption education they deserve.*

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

On Your Feet is the gold-standard for post-placement care. With 20+ years of experience caring for birthparents, we see the damage caused when members of the adoption constellation hasn't received the education they need, so we launched **Activism in Adoption** in 2020.

Our **AiA** sessions, recorded live on Zoom, are a safe space for *everyone* in the adoption community — including extended family and adoption professionals — to explore preconceived notions, stigmas and stereotypes, sit in vulnerability, and ask hard questions. **When we do this as a community, we become the change-makers in adoption and we improve outcomes for everyone in the constellation.** We do this by...

- **Centering birthparent and adoptee voices**, *when others do not*, because these voices are critical in changing the adoption landscape for the better, and too often, they are left out of adoption education entirely.
- **Covering the entire parenting journey**, *when others do not*, because adoption is more than just bringing a new baby home; you need to hear first-hand experiences about topics like an expectant mother considering adoption, and how to help your adult adoptee navigate a reunion relationship with their birth family.
- **Focusing on three key topics: Race, Relationships, and Resilience**, *when others do not*, because these stories bring nuance and detail that can only come from lived experience.

Most adoption education ends before an adoption is finalized, but where other adoption education programs stop, Activism in Adoption is just getting started.

For more information, contact Heather Janiga | heather@onyourfeetmidwest.org | (224) 858-6933

Activism in Adoption is not just an educational series, but a movement dedicated to privileging the voices of birthparents and adoptees in adoption education in order to improve outcomes for everyone in the adoption constellation.

When you become a session sponsor, you not only help make ethical adoption education available to everyone in the adoption constellation, you are also helping to ensure that birthparents receive the care and support they need to heal and thrive.

SESSION SPONSOR | \$1000



- Choose the session that you or your organization would like to sponsor; you will be the only sponsor for this session
- Logo placement on all promotional materials for the session, as well as on the session title and end slides
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- Social Media acknowledgement on Activism in Adoption during the month that your sponsored session takes place, as well as acknowledgement when the streaming recording is promoted
- Payments may be made via check, credit card (with 3% fee), or Zelle.

For questions, please contact Heather Janiga at heather@onyourfeetmidwest.org

“ On Your Feet Foundation is one of the most proactive groups I've been a part of in the adoption field. Their speaker series made a point to honor all those connected to adoption. As an adoptee, I pay very close attention to how others honor adoptees, like myself, as well as birthparents. On Your Feet Foundation makes sure these two very important voices are heard and that is extremely important to me.

-Kevin Hofmann, author, Growing up Black in White