



# *Another Way Home* Adoption Services Overview

## WHO WE ARE

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Licensed in Kansas and Missouri, since 2015, Zoe's House has served as a bridge between expectant mothers who want the best for their child and loving adoptive families who have room at their tables. The stories of lives changed become the rewards of our service, and we look forward to continuing our work in private domestic adoption, serving expectant mothers and adoptive families with dignity and the love of Christ.

Even so, we have wondered, "Is there more we can do to further the mission?"

As it turns out, there is.

State foster care systems are at capacity. In some cases, these are children who will eventually be reunited with their biological parents, but in other cases, reunification is not possible. There are children - usually older, sibling groups, or those with special needs - who remain in foster care long after parental rights are terminated. There is literally no place for them to go back to, and sadly, sometimes there is no obvious place for their future.

These children are beautiful to the Lord, and their lives matter. We began to ask, "What if we were to provide another way home? What if we were able to connect these children with loving, Zoe's House families?"

*Another Way Home* will work closely with state agencies to place adoption ready in families who will care for them and give them what every child deserves - a home. Belonging. A place at the table.

# WAITING CHILDREN

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The waiting children in the *Another Way Home* program are foster children who are legally free for adoption. The parents of these children have already had their parental rights terminated, leaving the children in search of their forever home.

The children available are generally age 8+, or a member of a sibling group. In many cases, the children have moderate to high behavioral and/or medical needs due to the trauma and challenges they have faced in their lives. The initial goal for all children who enter foster care is reunification with their biological family. Because of this, infants and toddlers are rarely available for adoption unless they are part of a sibling group that includes older children.

Adoption through the *Another Way Home* program usually takes 9 months to a year depending on how quickly the family moves through the training and home study/family assessment processes. This also depends on how quickly the family is matched with a waiting child.

We look forward to helping you along your adoption journey.

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

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Prospective adoptive applicants must meet the following guidelines to adopt through Zoe's House Adoption Agency:

- Must be 21 years of age or older.
- Couples married for at least one year and singles on a case-by-case basis.
- Couples must be at least 10 years older than the child to be adopted.
- Must be financially able to provide support for their family.
- Must exhibit a stable marriage and family life.
- Must be in good physical and mental health.
- Must exhibit solid and safe parenting practices.
- Must be able to provide a safe and secure home environment.
- Must provide a signed statement of faith.
- Must be a fully devoted follower of Jesus
- Must support traditional Biblical concepts of sexuality and marriage
- Must exhibit a valid motivation to adopt and realistic adoption expectations.
- Must be willing and able to provide all documentation and information in a truthful manner.
- Must provide a Pastor Reference from a pastor who knows the family and their commitment to (1) the Lord and (2) the spiritual disciplines.
- Must be open to a conversation about adopting children of all ethnicities.
- Must be able to provide solid character references and employment history.
- Must reside in the United States.
- Must be high school graduates or have a GED equivalency

# ADOPTION ORIENTATION

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Prior to acceptance of an application, Zoe's House Adoption Agency will provide you with orientation via information packets and an orientation meeting. This information will assist you in making an informed decision and includes the following information:

- Zoe's House Adoption Agency Programs and home study/family assessment services;
- Children available for adoption;
- Eligibility requirements and approximate time frame to adoption;
- Fee information;
- Adoption risk issues (covered in the Client Agreement); and
- Description of adoption policies and procedures including our grievance procedure.

## ANOTHER WAY HOME PROGRAM SERVICES

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The *Another Way Home* Program includes the following services:

- Complete your family's required home study/family assessment;
- Conduct or connect you with state-required education;
- Provide a customized educational program to help you prepare for adoption through foster care;
- Guide you in preparing the documentation required by the state, agencies involved in the process, and the court system;
- Enroll your family in the AdoptKSKids site where you can search for available children;
- Support and advocacy through the process;
- Review of available information on the child with your family;
- Assist you in choosing an attorney who accepts the DCF rate for finalization;
- Provide court, attorney, and other agencies with documents to complete the adoption; and
- Refer you to training, resources, and support groups as well as referrals to local ministries and churches based on need.

### Interstate Adoptions

Adoptions that take place in two different states (the birth mother lives in one state while the adopting parents live in another) require some additional procedures. The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) ensures that the laws of both states are observed in adoption, establishes that the movement of children across state lines is legal, and maintains that the child is protected. Proof of Compliance with the ICPC is required at the finalization of the adoption. Zoe's House will work with the state and other agencies to fulfill the requirements of receiving and sending state and may assist in preparing and submitting your ICPC (Interstate Compact) paperwork for the adoptive placement.

### Other Programs

Zoe's House Adoption Agency also provides private domestic infant adoption services, services to expectant/birth parents making an adoption plan for their child/children (living in KS or MO), and domestic home study only services to families residing in KS or MO. Please contact us if you would like more information about these programs.

# PROCESS

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## Step 1: Review Information Packet and Orientation

You will provide some basic information to our agency via an online form, phone or email. We will send you our initial information packet. Once you have reviewed the packet carefully, you will return the acknowledgement to us via email to move forward. Upon receipt, a Zoe's House worker will contact you to schedule your orientation. This will take place either in person or via video chat. During the orientation, we will share about our agency and this program, discuss your family's desire and suitability for this program, and allow you to ask questions.

## Step 2: Pre-Application

If both you and Zoe's House Adoption Agency staff feel this program is a good fit for your family, the next step is the pre-application. To submit the pre-application, all documents listed on the cover letter must be returned to Zoe's House. **Receipt of the pre-application does not guarantee your family will be able to move forward in the adoption process with Zoe's House. Pre-approval is valid for six months from the date of approval after which you will need to reapply to continue the process. Additionally, pre-approval does not make your family eligible to be matched with waiting children, only to move to the next step of the process.**

## Step 3: Adoption Review Committee Review

Upon completion of the steps above, the prospective adoptive family's case will be submitted to the Zoe's House Adoption Review Committee. The committee will review the family's information in consideration of the rigors and challenges of adoption through the foster care system. Zoe's House will notify the prospective adoptive family whether they are approved to move to the home study process.

## Step 4: Application and Education

The next step will be to begin gathering and preparing the application documents required by Zoe's House and the state. They are also used by the social worker to assist in the preparation of your family's home study/family assessment. Zoe's House will supply you with the forms and instructions on how to obtain required criminal and background records checks. (Fee applies) If you already have a current approved home study/family assessment, you may be able to provide a shortened collection of documents during this process. **Note:** If some documents provided to Zoe's House are expired, new copies will be required. We will review the application and notify you of approval/disapproval to begin the next stage within 30 days.

Every prospective adoptive family is required to complete the following adoption education which may be completed during the home study/family assessment process (**Your home study/family assessment will not be approved until all training is completed.**):

- Kansas Residents: 30-hour TIPSS/MAP State Required Training - this free training is generally completed within 10 weeks via weekly 3 hour meetings.
- Attachment-based training program (*Info coming soon*)

If you live outside of Kansas, in most cases, you will complete your state's foster care/adoption training.

## Step 5: Home Study/Adoptive Family Assessment

Zoe's House Adoption Agency provides home study/family assessment services to prospective adoptive families residing in Kansas. The home study/family assessment is an evaluation of the prospective adoptive family required by state and federal regulations and helps clarify their child preferences. A social worker makes at least three visits with you on separate dates with at least one visit occurring in the home. The applicants and all household members will be interviewed together and separately.

After completing the, your social worker will prepare a written assessment as required by the state, including a determination as to whether or not the couple meets the eligibility requirements for their state of residence and Zoe's House. The home study/family assessment helps to ensure a safe, secure, and loving environment for the adopted child.

- **Approval:** A decision to approve your family shall be made within 60 days of the last contact or Zoe's House will supply documentation in the record and to the family to explain the delay. Applicants will be notified in writing within ten (10) working days following the agency's decision to approve.
- **Disapproval:** If a prospective adoptive family cannot adequately prove that they can provide a safe, loving, and financially secure environment or if they have been untruthful in any of their interviews, applications, or forms, they will not be approved. A written statement regarding the disapproval will be placed in the permanent file, and the applicants will be notified in writing within ten (10) working days following the agency's decision to disapprove them as an adoptive family.

The written assessment is placed in your file, and an original signed copy will be provided to you.

If you live outside of Kansas, you will need to complete either a state home study/family assessment or a private adoption home study that follows the regulations of your state. You or your worker will provide a copy of this study/assessment and supporting documents to Zoe's House. We recommend as your first step that you contact your local children's division office to ask if they will release your study if you wish to pursue the adoption of a child outside of your state. We will work with you and your agency throughout the process.

## Step 6: View Waiting Children

Zoe's House Adoption Agency will assist your family in registering with the AdoptKids site. From there you may view available children. In addition, your information will be available for other agencies and workers searching for a suitable match for children in their care. The profiles of children are written within specific federal privacy guidelines and include few details. Families are encouraged to only request information on children they are seriously considering.

## Step 7: Review Child Profile

Once you have requested more information on a particular child(ren), the child's supervising worker will review your family's information and if they feel you may be a good fit, they will send the Child Profile. This profile includes brief information regarding needs, services, and behaviors as well as medical and mental diagnoses. Due to privacy laws, there will be very little if anything about the child's trauma history. Zoe's House will review this information with you.

## **Step 8: Best Interest Staffing (BIS)**

At this step in the process, all members of the child's case team and potential adoptive families will meet to determine the family that is the best fit for the child. During this staffing, the children's needs and the family's strengths and ability to meet those needs will be discussed. You will also learn about continued contact with other important relationships. The committee will make a recommendation. If the family is not selected, you can continue to inquire about other children. In Kansas, children 14 and up participate in the Best Interest Staffing (BIS).

Adoption through foster care involves a number of agencies and caseworkers whose goal is to place children with a family that can best meet their needs and will provide a permanent loving home. Each case team includes:

- a worker with Children and Family Services;
- a worker at their Case Management Provider Agency (CMP) which is the agency contracted with the state to place a child and to oversee their foster placements;
- a guardian ad litem who represents the child's best interests before the court; and
- a worker from our agency who assists your family through the process.

## **Step 9: Family Selected/File Review**

Once you are selected, you will schedule a time to read the child/children's full file(s). Each agency providing this information works a bit differently. Some may send electronically, others will set a time for you to visit their office to view the paper file. Families have the opportunity to take notes and request to review the information as many times as needed. If you do not feel you can meet the child's needs, you can continue to inquire about other children.

## **Step 10: Meet the Child/Transition Period**

If you decide to continue with the adoption after reading the file, a time will be arranged for you to meet. A transition plan will be developed and regular visits and contact with the child/children will begin. These may include phone calls, facetime calls, texts, day visits, and overnight visits. During this time you will also want to choose an adoption attorney. If you choose an attorney who accepts the DCF rate, there will be no court or finalization costs. Zoe's House can help guide you through this process.

## **Step 11: Adoption Placement Agreement (APA)**

If you feel you can meet the child's needs, you will set up a time to negotiate a subsidy with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Once that is completed, you will sign the Adoption Placement Agreement (APA) the day the child is placed in your home.

## **Step 12: Post Placement and Finalization**

During the post-placement timeframe, a worker will visit and continue to assess the placement to ensure it is in the best interest of the child. This is generally a six (6) month process. At the end of that time, the responsible agency will request consent from DCF which takes up to 30 days to issue. Once received, your attorney can help you complete the finalization and order new birth certificates and social security cards.

# RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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## Adoptive Parent Responsibilities

- Fully disclose background information necessary to fully assess your family and meet state and federal guidelines. This includes information on prior criminal history, medical history, counseling, substance abuse, child maltreatment, etc;
- Fully disclose any major events in your family as long as your file is active with Zoe's House (application through finalization.) This includes pregnancy/birth of a child, other foster placement or potential placement, match or potential match, death of a family member, a household member moving in or out, etc;
- Provide documentation in a timely manner;
- Keep Zoe's House Adoption Agency fully informed throughout their process; and
- Understand the laws in the family's home state and the state in which the baby/child is born/from. All aspects of adoption, no matter what state or county you choose to adopt from, are regulated by state and federal laws. It is important to consult your local agency or adoption attorney regarding the laws governing your specific adoption.

## Zoe's House Adoption Agency Responsibilities

- Provide professional and caring services to your family;
- Diligently manage your family's case and maintain communication with your family and other agencies involved in the family's process;
- Keep your files confidential except as required by law as specified on *Release of Information* form(s) signed by your family;
- Report suspected abuse or neglect whether it be upon a child or an elderly person as required by state and federal laws;
- Grievance Procedures - Address all concerns, disagreements, and grievances of prospective adoptive applicants and adoptive families. All grievances must be submitted in writing to the Executive Director of Zoe's House Adoption Agency. The Executive Director will be responsible for deciding whether to investigate the complaint and what action will be taken based on the evidence received. Any action taken by the agency will be documented in the agency's files and/or the applicant's file;
- Making a lifetime commitment to each child and adoptive family by providing ongoing post-adoption services and support. When a placement for adoption is in crisis during post-placement supervision, Zoe's House Adoption Agency will make every effort to connect your family to resources with the appropriate skills and professional expertise to assist you in dealing with the problems that have arisen. Zoe's House will act promptly and in accordance with any applicable legal requirements to inform appropriate agencies when the placement may no longer be in the child's best interests or notify the appropriate government agency with the authority to take the action necessary to ensure the child's well-being and safety.

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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## Fees and Estimated Expenses

- Background Checks - these fees are paid by the family. They generally range around \$100-\$150 per couple depending where the couple chooses to be fingerprinted. There may be additional small fees if the couple has lived in other states for the past five (5) years.
- Gathering required documents - there may be fees associated with getting birth or marriage certificates if you are missing any of these.
- Medical reports - fees for completion of medical reports required for the home study/family assessment. Amounts depend on your insurance and doctor.
- Education - the required training for Kansas families is free, except for any travel expenses. Zoe's House requires an additional training to best help prepare the family for the unique challenges they will face in adopting children from foster care. There may be costs associated with this training. Families outside of Kansas will need to check the training rate in their state.
- Attorney fees if you choose an attorney who does not accept the DCF rate.

## Adoption Subsidy

In many cases, an adoption subsidy is available when you adopt through foster care. As a general rule, this subsidy will stay with your child until adulthood. It usually includes Medicaid, at minimum. You will negotiate this before the child is placed permanently in your home. Over the years, you may also renegotiate if your child has more or less need. Information on subsidy can be found at:

- Kansas – [dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/pages/Adoption-Assistance.aspx](https://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/pages/Adoption-Assistance.aspx)
- Missouri – [dss.mo.gov/cd/adoption/Missouri-adoption-subsidy-programs.htm](https://dss.mo.gov/cd/adoption/Missouri-adoption-subsidy-programs.htm)

## Contact with Biological Family

In this program, the children's biological parents have had their rights permanently terminated. However, there may be other significant family members or other individuals significant to the child's life that they will want to maintain contact with. You should be prepared to facilitate that contact and to discuss your ability to do so at the Best Interest Staffing (BIS). It is helpful as a child grows and processes their story for the adoptive family to at least have an openness to relationships for the future.

## Adoption Reunion Registry Resources

- **Kansas:** <https://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/Adoption-Records-and-Search.aspx>
- **Missouri:** <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/adoption/adoption-information-registry.htm>
- **National:** <https://www.adopted.com/>

## Referral to Resources

When Zoe's House Adoption Agency is unable to provide necessary services, you will be referred to medical, legal, psychiatric, psychological, or other professional services. You will not be required to utilize these referrals and/or services. Zoe's House reserves the right to request a second opinion from an independent source.



## Family Photo Book

Each family will create a simple family book to give to the child(ren) you will be adopting during the time they are waiting for official placement in your home. This will include photos of your family, home, neighborhood, etc.

## Risks Inherent in Adoption from Foster Care

- Zoe's House Adoption Agency has no control over the wait for a match with a child or children and we cannot guarantee the placement of a child with you.
- Periodically paperwork requirements may change, out of our control and your family may be required to provide additional paperwork to continue the process.
- Children available for adoption through the foster system have generally experienced moderate to severe trauma from things like neglect, abuse, prenatal substance exposures, not having reliable caregivers, and living under stress. All of these factors can impact physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being. While as much information as is available will be provided by the child's overseeing agency, it may only paint a picture of a portion of the trauma and challenges faced by the child which your family will have the opportunity to help walk them through toward healing.

We/I have read the preceding *Another Way Home* Adoption Services Overview and understand the services offered by Zoe's House Adoption Agency. We wish to apply with Zoe's House Adoption Agency for this program.

Husband: \_\_\_\_\_ Wife: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_