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ADOPTION ✓ **FACES** supports adoptive families

By DENISE FRANKLIN
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THE PHONE rings. The caller identifies herself as single and wanting to adopt a child. Is it possible? Is it legal? How does she start? Are there others like her? Whom can she talk to?

Another call. The woman explains that she and her husband are waiting for their adopted child to arrive. But there's no one to talk to, she complains. Pregnant women meet other pregnant women in birthing classes; she has no one who can identify with her anticipation, her anxieties.

June Davies often gets these types of calls. Davies, an adoptive parent of 2-year-old Lindsay from Korea, has for the past two years run a support service called FACES: Families Adopting Children: Education and Support. She also gives a class on Prepared Adoptive Parenting; a new session starts Wednesday at Dominican Hospital.

According to Davies, an average day of calls might include:

- An infertile couple wondering how to get started in the adoption process;
- a woman pregnant after adopting and wondering how to cope with two babies less than a year apart;
- a birth mother wanting to talk;
- a frantic parent worried about gonorrhea in baby's eyes;
- questions about applying for citizenship for a foreign-born adopted child;
- frustration over helping a child deal with anger or sadness toward the birth mother for "giving them up."

When Lindsay arrived at age 3 months on Aug. 11, 1987, Davies was told about FACES by the adoption agency, Children's Home Society. "I learned that there were other families in the group who had adopted Korean children," said Davies. "I called for information about the community's reaction to these children and about their own family's reaction."

Davies worried about prejudice after she and her husband Griff took a workshop for adoptive parents from Children's Home Society. The workshop took place in San Jose where, Davies said, there exists a large Asian community and much prejudice toward Asians.

Marilyn Norberg, who began FACES in 1985, put Davies in

touch with others who had adopted Korean children. "The other families gave glowing reports," Davies recalled. "The children were great. People who saw them thought they were adorable. None of the people locally have had problems with prejudice. They get more curiosity questions."

As she waited for Lindsay to arrive, Davies received support in other ways. "I had questions about what they would tell you about the birth parents, about the child's condition, about how long they had to wait. It seemed like I was ordering something that was too good to be true. It was too hard thinking it was going to happen to me. It isn't like a pregnancy where, in nine months, you are going to have a baby. The waiting period is a real uncertain time."

Linda Davis agreed that support is critical as adoptive parents wait for their children. She and her husband, the Rev. Matthew Davis, have adopted Christina, 3, from Guatemala, and Phillip, 6 months, from Peru.

"FACES is a mixture of people who already adopted and people who are going to adopt. It does make you believe it will happen, because two or three years of waiting can be a long

DEBRA ALEXANDER and Alex Morgan had many uncertainties after they were told they'd been accepted for adoption. Their fears were eased and their questions answered through Davies' class and the support group.

"I was very threatened by the idea of open adoption where you know or meet the parents and they want some contact in the future," said Alexander. "I was afraid they would want the baby back or they would complicate our lives."

"We realized and learned that it is very important for the children later on to know their roots. They aren't looking for new parents; they just want to know their roots. It is nice also to know others had the same fears and how they dealt with them."

Olivia Morgan arrived June 27 to a mixed-race family. She and her mother are black; dad is white.

"We hadn't thought about how to handle other people's questions or rude comments," said Alexander. "One of the typically insulting things you are asked is, 'What do you know



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Debra Alexander and Alex Morgan, with Olivia, joined FACES to meet other adoptive families.

about their real mother?" This is insulting because you are their real mother.

"It really isn't anybody's business. If the child chooses to tell the background later on, that's OK. If they insist, you have to make the judgment whether this is a concerned, caring person or is it just curiosity. And you have to make the judgment whether this information will hurt the child."

When Olivia first arrived, Alexander said she freely gave information about her child's background, but now she's changed her mind. "Now I just say, 'I don't think that is important.'"

PARENTS ALSO join the support group so that they and their children can be around other adoptive families. This is particularly important to families of mixed races.

"The other thing we didn't think of was how helpful it would be to be in contact with other adoptive parents," said Alexander. "I'm not a group joiner usually. When I was going through the frustrating waiting period, I contacted other parents

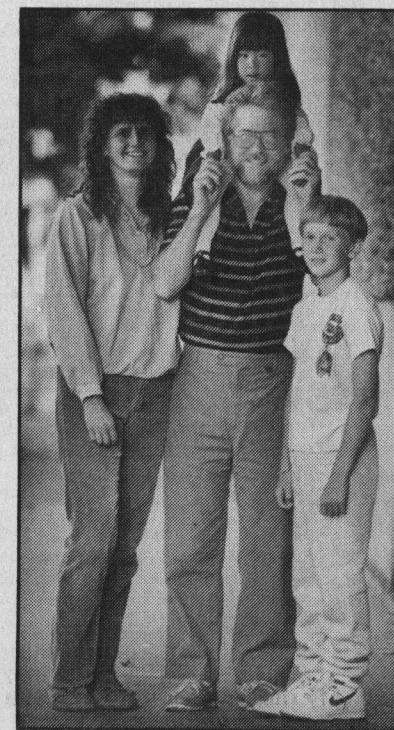
who had adopted minority children and talked to them ...

The mothers said their children also benefit from attending the support group events.

"We went to a picnic to meet other people and I've gotten together with other mothers since then ... It is also good for kids to meet other friends whose families are made of people of different colors to see that this is normal," said Alexander.

Davies said Lindsay has gotten as much out of the group's activities as she, he husband and their biological son Talfan. "I joined the support group so that Lindsay would see that she wasn't the only one, that there were other children who looked like her."

June Davies will conduct the class "Prepared Adoptive Parenting" for expectant adoptive parents beginning Wednesday through Dominican Hospital's PEP program. For more information, call 462-7709. For details on the FACES support group, which meets quarterly and has informal get-togethers, call Davies at 423-3870.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

June, Griff and Talfan Davies, from left, welcomed Lindsay into their home two years ago.