



CCAI CIRCLE

CCAI now stands for
Cherish Children Adoption International

2024 Edition

**"God loves him
that much!"**

The Noll Family
pages 5-6

IN THIS ISSUE:

[A Message from Josh and Lily • Page 2](#)

[CCAI's 2024 Highlights • Page 3](#)

[Adoption Program Updates • Page 4](#)

[God Loves Him That Much! • Pages 5-6](#)

[NCFA Award • Page 7](#)

[Para Siempre • Pages 8-9](#)

[Hosting Programs • Page 10](#)

[Charity Update • Pages 11-14](#)

[Her Name is Mei-Ling • Pages 15-16](#)

[The Park Community Center • Pages 17-22](#)

A MESSAGE FROM CCAI'S CO- FOUNDERS

2024 has been the most challenging year in CCAI's history.

After 32 years, China has closed its doors to international adoption. What will happen to the children already matched with families? What about those still waiting, desperately in need of medical, educational, and emotional support? And where will CCAI go from here?

While we don't have all the answers, we are committed to continuing our mission for the children and families who depend on us.

As one of only two adoption agencies licensed by the Chinese government to provide humanitarian aid, CCAI has spent nearly three decades bringing hope and healing to orphaned and abandoned children.

Since delivering our first truckload of formula in 1995, we have helped over 50,000 children across eight countries with medical care, education, therapy, and foster support—thanks to the generosity of our families and donors.

Our charity outreach remains strong, and your continued support sustains our mission. CCAI continues to transform the lives of orphaned children.

Together, we bring healing, hope, and home—providing what these vulnerable children need most.



Would you prayerfully consider making a generous year-end donation to support these vital initiatives:

- Orphan Special Education Program
- Fulfill-A-Wish Summer Camp
- Medical Treatment
- Child Care supplies
- Rehabilitation Equipment
- CCAI General Operations
- CCAI Post-Adoption Support

You can donate online [HERE](#) or mail a check to 6920 South Holly Circle, Centennial, CO 80112. **All contributions are 100% tax-deductible.**

Love and joy,

*Your generosity changes lives —
thank you for joining our mission!*

2024 Highlights:

- CCAI now stands for **Cherish Children Adoption International**
- **69** children found their forever families this year
- **620+** lives were touched through CCAI's charity outreach.
- The Colorado Women's Hall of Fame created a documentary about Lily's extraordinary achievements in helping orphans worldwide, called *A Legacy of Love*.
- Josh and Lily were inducted into the National Council For Adoption Hall of Fame
- Our China Heritage Tours are back and growing in popularity
- Our post-adoption support led by The Park Adoption Community Center continues to play a critical role in supporting adoptive families, building adoptee community, and inspiring confidence



Adoption Program Updates

Finding loving families for children around the world!

Colombia

CCAI's largest adoption program is strong, with families submitting dossiers, receiving official referrals, and traveling to Colombia to bring their children home regularly! Colombian children waiting for adoption tend to be older, have special needs, or are part of a sibling group. Hosting prior to adoption is a unique opportunity families may participate in as well, allowing them to connect with their prospective adoptive children before the adoption is complete. If you want to learn more about Colombia adoption, please visit CCAI's [website](#) or contact colombia@ccaifamily.org.

Bulgaria

As CCAI's fastest-growing program, Bulgaria offers both a traditional and Waiting Child path. This program presents an amazing opportunity to be matched to older children, older sibling groups, and younger children with identified medical conditions, such as delayed development, cerebral palsy, etc. We welcome you to visit some of these sweet faces on CCAI's [Child Profiles](#) webpage. Please reach out to bulgaria@ccaifamily.org with questions.

Taiwan

We are excited to see families continue to be matched with and bring home their precious children from Taiwan. We've received new files for precious children recently, so the need for adoptive families remains strong! Please reach out to taiwan@ccaifamily.org or visit CCAI's [website](#) for more information.

Belize

Launched in 2022, the Belize adoption program is unique in that it does not have a mechanism by which agencies can advocate for "waiting children." Therefore, families adopting from Belize will generally already be aware of a particular child they wish to adopt, such as through kinship or prior travel, like a missions trip through a church or community group. To learn more, please feel welcome to contact belize@ccaifamily.org.

Dominican Republic

In CCAI's newest adoption program, children waiting for adoption tend to be school-age, singly and in sibling groups. The DR offers hosting session twice a year, an exciting opportunity to spend some quality time with a child or children prior to starting the adoption process. This program is well-suited to families with flexible schedules (such as remote work / home school) as there's a 4-6 month in-country stay! To learn more, please email dr@ccaifamily.org.

Ukraine

Adoptions from Ukraine have been on hold since the war began in 2022. Please join us in praying for peace in the region so that adoptable children may have a chance to come home.

China

Heartbreakingly, after more than 32 years and 160,000 adoptions worldwide, on September 4, 2024, the US State Department announced that China would no longer process adoptions by foreigners (except in cases of relative adoptions). CCAI strongly supports advocacy efforts for those in-process matched families whose adoptions were abruptly halted by this announcement, and will continue to serve qualified relative adoption cases.

God loves him that much!

BY JAMIE NOLL

A new friend who joined our story near the beginning of this adoption, a friend who has adopted 18 times, said that about our son. God loves him that much! The phrase has become a mantra for our lives. **God really does love each of us THAT much!**

After having a biological child with special needs that put her in and out of the hospital many times during the first year of her life, we learned that other children like her are sometimes abandoned in our hospitals here in the United States of America. We could not imagine our daughter fighting for her life without her loved ones being with her, advocating for her, making her smile, singing to her, praying over her — all of the things that a family does. I knew at the moment we discovered this that we would someday be involved in special needs adoption or foster care.

After looking at four different agencies, my husband chose CCAI because of the founder's honesty during our very first interaction with him. He said that adoption could "make you or break you;" I believe it does both.



Evan in Bulgaria before adoption

A friend in Idaho sent us a video of **a little boy in Bulgaria** who needed a family to move very quickly in order to save his life. She said that he reminded her of our daughter who was born with special needs.

As we proceeded with CCAI, all of our financial needs were met. They were so kind, encouraging and thorough during the whole process. On August 14, 2023, we were "soft matched" with the little boy in the video! We met him for the first time in March of 2024, immediately after my husband and four eldest children returned from a mission trip in Honduras.

During our first meeting with our son, the people in his orphanage told us that our touches were hurting him, agitating him, causing him discomfort. We sat next to him for the visit. We asked to hold him, but we were never allowed to. We were told that the hundreds of daily seizures he had were not able to be controlled. His posture had us confused as to which leg was his left and which was his right. He was so thin, like skin over bones.

We went back to the hotel in his region that day and I sobbed, wondering why I had done this to us. It was my fault we were there in the first place. I was the one who wanted to adopt. My husband, though, was ready to take another step forward.



Evan's new family- The Nolls

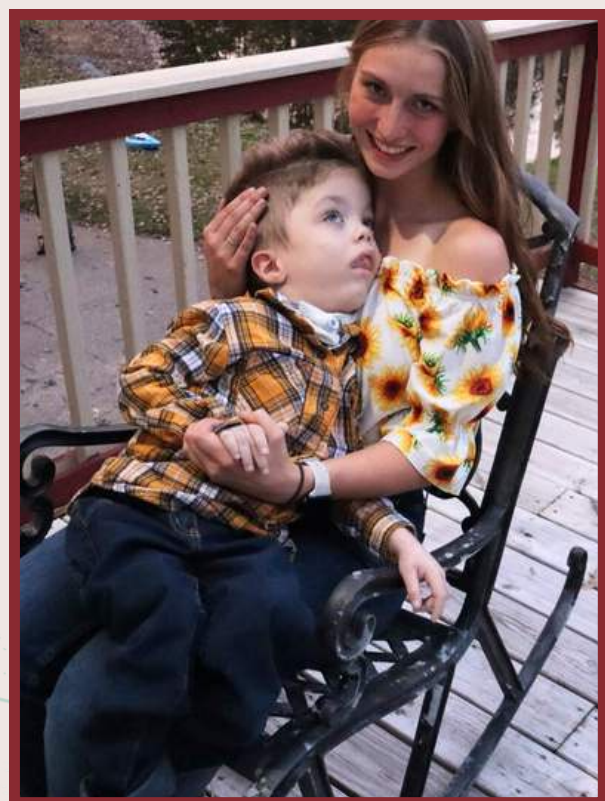
He was like that for the entire journey. Knowing he was on board was all the encouragement I needed to go back the next day. We can do hard things!

We finally brought our son home in July. I remember him lying on the chaise longue at the end of our hotel bed. Our youngest son was very sick at home. I felt guilty for leaving him. But, when I looked into our new son's face, I knew we were doing the right thing.

We knew that flying him home was going to be a challenge. We also knew that God already had all of the right people at the right places at the right times. Another adoptive mom told us that we were just going to have to walk onto those airplanes with the boldness and authority of Christ and bring our boy home.

We did! On July 20, Evan landed on U.S. soil and became a citizen of the United States of America!

Three weeks after we brought him home, he stopped breathing at a playground. He was rushed to a local hospital and given a tracheostomy. Almost immediately afterward, he was able to lay on his back. Prior to that, his posture was so contorted that the back of his head and his tailbone touched. He took on this posture to survive, to breathe. The PICU doctor said he would have died had this happened where he was before. He was brought home only three weeks prior! God's timing!



Cuddles from his big sister!



Evan in his new chair

God gave us three weeks at home together without any medical intervention, without tons of medical appointments, just time to bond as a family. Then, God's grace allowed him to have this tracheostomy. His doctor thinks it will be able to be reversed soon. However, it was what he needed to "reset."

We don't know if he did before, but he smiles now. He has gained over 10 healthy pounds in just a few months. He has lots of new friends — specialists, therapists, and the best ones are kids at church. He can lie on his back and sit in a chair. Before he could only be repositioned from one side to the other.

When he came to us from the orphanage, the only sounds he made were crying and screaming. Now, he verbalizes things through a speaking valve on his trach. He has not had a single seizure since that day at the playground. He is sung to, held, rocked, danced with, and prayed over. He communicates with us. He has even eaten applesauce!

Evan Ralitsev Noll — such a joy to care for! The hardest part of his care is the work we put in to get a smile from him, but once he starts, we get a whole bunch of them.

Evan smiles! God loves HIM that much! Evan smiles! God loves US that much!

CCAI co-founders Lily Nie and Joshua Zhong were inducted into the NCFA Adoption Hall of Fame in Washington, D.C.! This incredible honor recognizes their leadership and dedication to finding loving families for over 13,300 children in the past 32 years.

"We accept this honor on behalf of our amazing board, staff, and adoptive families, as well as the adoptees whose lives have been changed through international adoption," Lily shared.

Josh added, "We are simply God's hands, bringing healing, hope, and homes to as many vulnerable children as possible. We thank our families for trusting us and allowing us to be part of their adoption journey."

Thank you, National Council For Adoption, for inspiring us to continue this life-changing work with renewed passion.





¡Para Siempre!

BY MEGAN BELISLE

We met our (now) daughter in November of 2022 when we hosted her for 4 weeks over the holidays. I will never forget the moment she came through the doors of the international arrivals at the airport with the biggest smile on her face. She greeted me with a huge hug and spent the next several hours telling me all about her life in **Colombia** while we waited on our flight home. She told me about school and her life growing up and asked me several times if she would get to see snow while she was here. I knew immediately that 28 days together was going to fly by.

We spent the next month learning about each other's lives, cultures, and languages. We did fun Christmas activities like seeing lights around town, baking and decorating cookies, and going to the holiday choir concert at the high school. We celebrated the Colombian holiday Día de las Velitas, and much to her surprise, our amazing neighbors even joined in! Several houses around us lined their sidewalks and driveways with candles to match ours and make her feel welcome. She couldn't believe it.

We attempted some traditional Colombian holiday foods like buñuelos and natilla. We drank way too much hot chocolate. We watched her experience the magic of snow for the first time. And we spent most nights staying up entirely too late making up games, laughing together, swapping stories, and coming to love her more and more.

Before we knew it, a month was over and it was time for her to go back to Colombia. The goodbyes were long and sad. Watching her walk through security at the airport was so painful. But what she didn't know is that we had already started the process to bring her back. Saying goodbye only motivated us that much more. We knew so much was out of our hands, but we also knew we would do everything in our power to be reunited with her if she would have us. We worked hard over the next year filling out more paperwork than imaginable, talking with social workers, reading books, taking classes, and trying to prepare our hearts and our home to welcome her back.

Finally, 9 months after saying goodbye, we got to have our first video call with her and ask her if she wanted to be a part of our family. As we hoped, she said, "Sí, para siempre!" Forever!



The Belisle family

Almost a year after that first hug in the airport, we were finally reunited with her in Colombia. There are no words to adequately describe the moment we saw her again. It was joy, relief, love... truly every emotion you could think of rolled into one. We were blessed to spend a month in Colombia with her as a family of 6, and we absolutely fell in love with the country. The people are lovely, the food is delicious, and the scenery is gorgeous. Even after a year, we talk often about our time there and how much we miss it. We all hope to return in the next couple of years.

She's been home for a year, and we are continually in awe of her. She ran cross country on the high school team this year, she got her first job, we just celebrated her 17th birthday

surrounded by family and the many friends she has made here, she recently graduated to the advanced English learners class at school, she is working toward getting her learners' permit, and on top of all that, she's just a genuinely wonderful kid. This year hasn't been without its challenges of course, but we were prepared for that.

We weren't naive about adoption. We didn't expect it to be beautiful and easy all the time. **Adoption is born from loss, and parenting a child who didn't grow up with you has different challenges. But our lives are better with her in them.** And for better or worse, we are committed to her. We love her immensely and we always will. **Para siempre.**



“

This experience has taught me that family is not always something you are born with, but is built with love, understanding, and mutual effort. Adoption has allowed me to grow up in a safe and loving environment, and for that, I will be forever grateful.

- Colombian Adoptee

”

Host-to-Adopt

Give Hope, Build Families

Why Host? Why Adopt?

A Desperate Need for Families

Thousands of children in Colombia are eligible for adoption, with the majority aged between 12 and 18 years old. Older children, especially those over five, face diminishing chances of being adopted within Colombia.

A Life-Changing Impact

Children without parents often struggle with low self-esteem, emotional difficulties, and challenges in forming meaningful relationships. They are also more susceptible to violence, exploitation, trafficking, and are five times more likely to die by suicide.

A Chance for a Better Future

Hosting provides children a glimpse of safety, security, and love, giving them hope and increasing their chances of finding a forever family.

How Hosting Transforms Lives

Cultural and Educational Enrichment

Hosting allows children to experience new cultures, broadening their worldview and opening doors to new opportunities.

A Loving Family Environment

Hosting introduces a child to the warmth and stability of family life, showing them what it means to be truly cared for.

Pathway to Adoption

The Host-to-Adopt program identifies potential families for international adoption, offering these children a lifeline to a better future.

[**LEARN MORE**](#)

Making a Difference, One Child at a Time

Fulfill-A-Wish Summer Camp: A Life-Changing Journey for LinFen Campers!

Twenty-two children from the LinFen Orphanage had the opportunity of a lifetime to experience life in China outside of their orphanage walls—a rare gift that they will never forget. The memories created during this incredible journey will last a lifetime, thanks to generous donors like you!

Day 1

The children and 12 chaperones embarked on their first-ever bullet train ride to Beijing, traveling at over 300 km/h. Welcomed warmly with a delicious banquet, the campers settled into their hotel, eager for the adventure ahead.



Day 2

The campers explored the Forbidden City and a nearby museum. Guided by an engaging tour guide, the children learned all about the Chinese Ming and Qing dynasty emperors!



Day 3

The picturesque Summer Palace, majestic Temple of Heaven, and iconic local delicacies like Beijing fried paste noodles and roast duck highlighted the day. The campers savored every moment and embraced new flavors.



Day 4

Climbing the Great Wall was a dream come true for the campers. Inspired by the saying, "You can't be a real hero unless you have climbed the Great Wall," they pushed themselves to new heights and proudly declared, "We are heroes now!" It was a moment of triumph they will never forget.



Day 5

A rainy day didn't dampen spirits as the campers visited the Birds Nest and Beijing Zoo. The kids enjoyed lively encounters with elephants, golden monkeys, and penguins.



Life-Changing Medical Procedures for Orphans in LinFen



Abandoned at birth and having used a wheelchair for 18 years, D.H. achieved his dream of walking this summer, thanks to CCAI donors. After receiving prosthetics and rehabilitation, he expressed gratitude, saying, “Thank you for giving me a new life! Goodbye, wheelchair!” As he graduates high school, he looks forward to studying computer science at a technical college in China!



Xiangsi, born with clubfeet and abandoned, faced years of pain. His dream of walking normally seemed impossible until CCAI donors funded his \$15,000 surgery. After recovering at Linfen Hospital, his gait is improving, and he expresses gratitude to donors, eager to return to the orphanage to play soccer with friends.

For 2025, CCAI will continue to bring healing to orphans in China by providing 25 medical beds, rehabilitation equipment, and additional surgeries for children and teens with medical/special needs. We need your help more than ever! Will you make a year-end gift to support these precious children? [DONATE HERE](#)

One-on-One Education Program for Kexin

Kexin is a cheerful girl with a warm smile who lights up every room.

Living with her foster mom and friends from the Yingtan Orphanage, Kexin loves her One-on-One education program, especially art, where her creativity shines. She dreams of becoming an artist and enjoys learning English, often proudly sharing new words with her friends.

Thanks to CCAI’s support, Kexin and her peers thrive in special One-on-One education programs that help them grow and reach their potential!



Sponsoring Campers in Ukraine

CCAI was honored to sponsor an unforgettable winter camp experience for Ukrainian orphans this January by partnering with Frontier Horizon. The children enjoyed many activities, including snow tubing, dancing, carriage rides, karaoke, and swimming. Joy and laughter echoed through the winter air, creating cherished memories for each child.



Most importantly, the winter camp provided a respite from the harsh realities of war, offering solace to the children. Many of the kids come from the central and eastern parts of Ukraine and often bear witness to the unsettling sounds of artillery, air raids, and public alerts. This escape allowed the children to immerse themselves in the simple joys of childhood, momentarily free from the daily challenges of war.



Lives Changed

10,200+

Families

Have trusted CCAI to fulfill their family dreams

13,337

Children

Have found their forever families

50,000+

Orphans

Impacted by the Children's Charity Fund

7,300+

Adoptees

Have engaged in The Park's lifelong adoptee and family support programming

2024 Charity Projects

	Province	Orphanage	Donation	Project
CHINA Total: \$125,724.20	HeNan	ZhengZhou LOCC	\$14,164.31	Staff salary and birthday cakes
	HuNan	ZhuZhou	\$1,085.69	Foster Care sponsorship
	JiangXi	ShangRao	\$11,048.00	One-on One Education and Summer Camp
		YingTan	\$8498.58	One-on One Education and children's supplies
		JiuJiang	\$16,997.17	One-on One Education and Summer Camp
	ShanXi	LinFen	\$34,812.18	Medical treatments and Summer Camp
	ChongQing	FuLing	\$4,664.25	Older children education
	Beijing	Charity Office	\$34,454.02	Staff salaries and Charity office rent
COLOMBIA Total: \$9,168.00	La Casa De La Madre el Nino		\$3,200.00	Camp and Christmas dinner over the holidays
			\$1,000.00	Television at Imagina for older kids
			\$1,133.00	Psychological support for children
			\$2,000.00	Blankets and bedding
			\$1,475.00	English lessons for older children
			\$360.00	Birthday lunch for older children
UKRAINE Total: \$6,000.00			\$6,000.00	Winter camp for Ukraine orphans

\$140,892.20 TOTAL DONATIONS FOR 2024!

Donate now and change a life!



Her Name is Mei Ling

BY CASSIE LEUTZ

Though our adoption process officially took 982 days, it was decades in the making. As 10 or 11-year-olds, Kenny and I each decided that adoption was the path for our futures. Though we wouldn't meet for another 15 years, the moment we had the "adoption talk" was the moment I knew we'd get married.

Fast forward to National Adoption Month in 2021. Just two weeks after we'd moved into our house in Colorado, we found ourselves finally filling out the initial application with CCAI. We had every intention of joining the China program— I spoke Mandarin and had lived in rural China for a year, so it gave us the best shot at preserving our child's language and culture.

About halfway through our home study in January 2022, we had a gut feeling that something needed to change. After a tear-filled night and little sleep, we emailed and asked to speak to Kimberly about the Taiwan program. It was a daunting switch as the **Taiwan** program has a much different process than China did, but looking back, it was the greatest decision we've ever made.

The Taiwan program process is much different than the China program, and after 14 incredibly challenging months, we received an email from Kimberly with a picture of the cutest 4-year-old girl we'd ever seen. We got right to work on the lengthy match application and spent the next few months crossing our fingers and toes.

Then, on June 21, 2023, we received another email from Kimberly that said, "Might we be able to chat today? I have news." I rushed to meet Kenny in his work parking lot, and we heard the words that would change our lives forever, "**Cathwel has chosen you to parent. Her name is Mei-Ling.**"

It was nearly a year of hurry up and wait, completing our home study paperwork and dossier, and filing seemingly endless paperwork with USCIS. The monthly Skypes and updates from Cathwel kept us going— I will never forget the first time we heard Mei-Ling call us Mama and Baba while we ate mooncakes together on our first call. Outside of those moments, it felt like we were never going to make it to the end of this crazy process.



The Leutz family in the Colorado Rockies

On April Fool's Day, we received an email that felt like a trick— we actually had court dates and would be traveling to Taiwan to finally meet Mei-Ling! Exactly one month later (to the hour!), we were on a plane to Taipei.

When we first met Mei-Ling, we were all a little shy and unsure, but within an hour, we were playing and giggling together, and I couldn't imagine a world where we didn't find each other.

The next day, the three of us, along with Franky, the government social worker, and the translator, headed to the court building, where I was repeatedly told the advice I had first heard a few weeks earlier, "Cassie, it is incredibly important that you speak to the judge in Mandarin." I was terrified and overwhelmed— we had the incredible opportunity to speak directly to the judge about how important it was that she come home ASAP, and the weight of that moment was not lost on me.

We walked into the courtroom and sat around an oval desk, and after the other members of our team spoke to the judge, we were asked to share why we were prepared to adopt Mei-Ling. We spoke of our experience as an ESL Teacher and a Pharmacist, our backgrounds working with people who have experienced trauma, and how we had specifically prepared for Mei-Ling. At least...that's what I think we talked about. The second I started talking about how long we had been working toward this, I started sobbing and couldn't stop. Our sweet little girl, who had been a total Baba's girl up to this point, gave me her stuffed bunny and rubbed my leg, and the government social worker later told me, "crying was a good look."

A day later, we were on a plane back to the U.S. with no real idea of when we would see our sweet little girl again.

Throughout the entire adoption process, we had been doing what seemingly every family in the Taiwan program does— constantly, furiously comparing dates. That meant we were absolutely shocked when we had pickup dates on the calendar just 3 weeks after court. We would later learn that the judge had issued our first ruling the day after our court date— a completely unheard-of bit of luck.

On June 30, we flew back to Taiwan, and on July 5, we were a family forever.

We soaked up our time together in Taiwan, and our little animal lover made sure we met every dog in the greater Taipei area. On July 11, we flew back to the U.S., and after a year of waiting, she finally got to meet her four-legged best friend.

Within hours of landing, we were playing in the backyard, splashing in her kiddie pool while tears streamed down my face. I couldn't believe that she was really here, really home. It seemed impossible, but what everyone had told me was true— once you're home, it'll all be a blur.

The past few months home have been full of learning about each other and adjusting to life together, but also SO much joy. It seems like each and every week we say, "Wow, this week she made so much progress!" and every week it's true. Seeing her grow into her bubbly, confident, hilarious, extroverted, musical, animal-loving self has been nothing short of magical. **I find myself wondering all the time how this crazy, demanding, excruciating process ended with us bringing home the sweetest, most incredible girl!**

China Heritage Tours!

2024

12 trips

235 travelers

73 families

99 Adoptees



"I can't say enough good things about this tour, and China in general. I am telling everyone I know that whatever you think you may know about China, you have no idea. So advanced, clean, safe, and still yet ancient and mysterious. It was truly the trip of a lifetime!"



THE PARK
ADOPTION COMMUNITY CENTER

"This was a great investment of time, energy, and resources. It was helpful for my daughter to see and experience China. Everything was well done, the guides were great, we saw and experienced so much for a good value. Very well done - thank you!!"

2025 Tour Packages

GRAND TOURS

Spring 2025

March 23 - April 2, 2025

Booking Deadline: December 31, 2024

Summer I 2025

June 15 - June 25, 2025

Booking Deadline: March 31, 2025

Summer II 2025

July 3 - July 13, 2025

Booking Deadline: April 18, 2025

Winter 2025

December 21 - December 31, 2025

Booking Deadline: September 30, 2025

Not seeing anything that fits your schedule? Travel your way with a custom dream itinerary!

CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE OR VISIT
[HTTPS://THEPARKCOMMUNITY.ORG/HERITAGE-TOURS/](https://theparkcommunity.org/heritage-tours/)

PROVINCE TOURS

Hunan Province

March 26 - April 2, 2025

Booking Deadline: January 10, 2025

Henan Province

June 26 - July 3, 2025

Booking Deadline: April 11, 2025

Jiangxi Province

November 23 - November 30, 2025

Booking Deadline: August 31, 2025

Guangxi Province

November 23 - November 30, 2025

Booking Deadline: August 31, 2025

Guangdong Province

December 21 - December 29, 2025

Booking Deadline: October 10, 2025



THE PARK

ADOPTION COMMUNITY CENTER

The Park Adoption Community Center had an exciting 2024! We kicked off the year with our annual Chinese New Year Celebration, followed by the Lantern Festival, monthly Mahjong nights, Adopteen Chapter events, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and more!

This summer, our China Cultural Camps, Adopteen Camp, and Beyond Adopteen Retreat brought adoptees together to connect and celebrate their heritage!

Our Cultural Camps campers connected with their Chinese heritage through crafts, dance, cooking, and language lessons, and even fit in an exciting trip to the Denver Zoo!

Adopteen brought campers in from 32 states to our camps in Washington, D.C. and Colorado Springs to build important core memories and life-changing friendships.

Finally, Beyond Adopteen Retreat introduced 32 adult adoptees to rarified mountain hot springs, rafting on the Arkansas River, and learning about healthy attachment and relationship strategies in workshops led by fellow adult adoptees.

The Park's adoptee connection programs continue to provide meaningful ways for adoptees to explore their shared identities and build connections with others in the community! Thank you to everyone who joined us this year. Let's do it again next year!

2025

Upcoming Park Events

FEB
8

Lunar New Year Celebration

Joyous Cultural Club - Centennial Covenant Church & Livestream

FEB
22

Lantern Festival

Joyous Cultural Club - CCAI Headquarters

JUN
21

CCAI's 33 Reunion Picnic

CCAI Headquarters

JUN
25-27

Chinese Cultural Camp 3-Day

Age 5-14 - The Park Adoption Community Center

JULY
7-11

Chinese Cultural Camp 5-Day

Age 5-14 - The Park Adoption Community Center

JULY
TBD

Adopteen Camp-Conference

Age 13-21 - Golden, Colorado

AUG
TBD

Beyond Adopteen Retreat

Age 21+ - Location TBD

A Life-Changing Summer



by **Summer Dolatta**

For many of my teenage years, I unconsciously avoided the deeper sense of cultural and natal displacement that came with being a Chinese-American adoptee. During the spring of my senior year of high school, the years of avoidance had reached their climax, forcing me to take a medical leave of absence for the remainder of the year. During this period, I was confronted by what I learned to be my anxious attachment style. I spent my spring break in daily Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) sessions, isolated in the experience of early childhood abandonment. All I hoped for in this period was to make contact with my biological mother. Afterwards, I was certain that finding my birth mother would be the first step to healing this sense of displacement. I registered for Adopteen Washington D.C. hoping it would give some insight into the process of making contact with my biological mother. Spoiler alert: It gave me so much more.

At Adopteen, I was overwhelmed by the tenacity my fellow adoptees retained within themselves. On the first night, my roommate heard my cries outside of our dorm room. The Camp Director, Chloe, The Park's Executive Director, Amy, and my camp counselor, Lian, were all by my bedside within a minute. I confided in them my enduring sense of abandonment and feelings of being "unchosen." In this moment, their words soothed me like the sacred words that I thought only my biological mother could possess. I decided to stay the night.

On the second day, I sat on the American University lawn, furtively searching for early flights home. Amy remained by my side as a safe, steady support despite my insistence of wanting to go home early. I stayed one more night.

The support came from all sides. My camp counselor, Lian, was integral to my transformative experience at Adopteen. Late into the night, she imparted deeply powerful words, profoundly changing my core beliefs about myself. I shared with her the song *Carry You Home* by Alex Warren and likened it to her own actions at Adopteen, "carrying me home" from what felt like an eternally impotent state of being.

In a conversation with another camp counselor, Paige, she reassured me that "adoptees do, in fact, get married" (a reality that I was beginning to challenge), as she was recently engaged (and is now married!). Several other volunteers I met throughout the week—all Adopteen alumni—were also married! My sense of abandonment had made me feel "sick" and alienated, unworthy of lifelong partnership. But Paige helped me recognize that my abandonment as a child is not something to be ashamed of, but an accolade for my unique lived experience. Paige is an embodiment of beauty and grace and is one of the reasons that I embrace my Asian identity today.

What Amy and Art Zhong have created through Adopteen has ineffably transformed lives. My summer spent with Adopteen was a profoundly healing experience that could never be replicated outside of the Adopteen community. Now six months removed from this impactful summer, I cannot understate the profound power of connecting with this unique community.

With Eternal Gratitude for my Transformative Adopteen Experience,
Summer Dolatta, Adopteen Washington D.C. '24 and Adopteen Colorado Springs '24

Welcome to the Adoptee Diaspora: Reflecting on Beyond Adopteen

by Zoe Roane-Hopkins

I'm not usually inclined to go on spontaneous trips half-way across the country to hang out with a bunch of strangers. So naturally, when my younger sister Grace asked me if I wanted to join the Beyond Adopteen trip in Colorado, which, "by the way, is in like two weeks," I waffled for a good while. I pondered my personal history of social awkwardness, and my introverted tendencies. Will people think I'm weird? No, they're not like that, Grace assured me. Am I too old? Also no, you'll be fine. What about—you know what—never mind, yeah, let's do it.

Two weeks later, I found myself standing in a Denver parking lot with a gathering horde of adoptees. I looked around as friends chatted and folks ran around checking everyone in and loading luggage. For the first time in my life, I didn't feel so short. Eventually, everyone was accounted for. We piled into three big white vans (plus a few cars) and headed into the Colorado mountains. As I climbed into the nearest van and took a seat, I felt my phone buzz with a text from Grace, who was one van over:

"You're doing great, sweetie!!"

"Thanks 'Mom'" I replied.

Although Grace had been involved with Adopteen for several years and I'd heard a little bit about her various escapades, this was my first Adopteen trip and I had no idea what to expect. I got to know my van mates and watched out the window as buildings gave way to mountains and pastures. Lively chatter in our van slowly died down as we dozed off, tired from our early-morning travels.

After arriving at Silver Cliff Ranch and getting settled in our cabins, we gathered in the main lodge for icebreakers. This may have been the first time in my life that I actually enjoyed icebreakers. I think the trick is that everyone has to be into it.



The weekend was a blur of adventurous excursions, great snacks, and even better conversation. We went horseback riding, which ended in the pouring rain. We went whitewater rafting, which started in the pouring rain. We explored Buena Vista and ate s'mores around the campfire and sang to the strumming of my travel-sized ukulele. We had classes in dance and mixology, both taught by fellow adoptees. And the rain continued its pathetic efforts to try to diminish the beauty of the weekend.

Every chance I got, I talked to someone new. At dinner, in the van, waiting in line to be assigned horses. A beautiful mosaic of adoptees living in the adoptee diaspora began to emerge as I learned more about my new friends. I noticed that a lot of us are in fields where we are helping people, solving problems, and creating joy. Teachers, social workers, therapists, human resource specialists, nurses, EMTs, engineers, designers, aspiring police officers, yoga instructors and so many more that I have forgotten because I have a terrible memory. Some of them live twenty minutes from my house. Some live across the country. We swapped stories about travels, significant others and pets.

I loved that this Beyond Adopteen experience made space for reflection as well as celebration. On our second night, we gathered for a workshop on attachment style with a therapist, who was an adoptee herself. Afterward, we divided into small groups. Each group was instructed to write down questions on a posterboard to discuss. They could be questions about anything, but most were about our experience as adoptees. We picked questions at random off the posterboard and talked at length.

I had never been in a space like this before, so full of trust and understanding, with just my fellow adoptees. We held space for each other, listened intently, and talked openly about experiences that resonated with all of us.

Heavy thoughts and feelings were allowed to take up space in the most comfortable way. This intimate, casual, and deep conversation felt so important. It wasn't a cathartic release of an emotional dam, but more like a gentle reminder that we are all valid with our experiences and that we are not alone. Juggling grown-up life can often leave little room for personal introspection, and I'm thankful to have had this time with fellow adoptees to step back from life together and reflect.

Our final night was an all-out party. We stayed up late swimming in the geothermally-heated pool, playing games, laughing, and talking about whatever. I bought an Adopteen hat, participated in an impromptu yoga session, and tried not to think about the fact that I had work on Monday. Being with this adoptee community felt so wonderfully different from every other group activity I've participated in. And I realized that's because there's a part of ourselves that we only get to be when we're in community with other adoptees. I'm not sure what to call it, or even how to describe it. Maybe it's the culmination of every internalized experience that we tried to explain to someone but felt dismissed or not fully understood. Or the what if's and whys that we all carry. It's every conflicting feeling swirling inside us. It's the space we occupy between two worlds and the new space we create for ourselves. When we are all together, we recognize that, hey, you got all this inside of you too. I get you. Let's eat some instant ramen.

Thank you to everyone who worked to make Beyond Adopteen possible!

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