NEW YEAR, NEW DIRECTIONS

December 2016

Although 2017 is still a month away, here at The Cradle 2016 ended for us on September 30th with the closing of the books on another fiscal year. This is always a time for us to take stock of what we accomplished, and look ahead to our plans and goals for the new fiscal year.

It is also a time to acknowledge, with gratitude, the integral role that our families, donors, clients, volunteers and friends played over the past year. You are the reason The Cradle continues the life-changing work of building and strengthening families, year after year.

We are pleased to share with you some highlights from fiscal 2016, as well as the progress of timely initiatives that are enabling The Cradle to serve exponentially more children and families.

Family Building

The Cradle has been building strong, nurturing families since 1923. This practice continues today through the care of infants in our onsite Nursery, options counseling for pregnant women, and the thorough preparation of adoptive parents, as this Cradle mom attests:

*The Cradle always emphasizes that the child comes first before all else. They didn’t simply ‘pass us through’ because we paid the required fees for service. They have a very deliberate and rigorous process for training parents. We were also pleased with the counseling that they offer to expectant mothers. The Cradle really wants to make sure that adoption is the best choice for everyone.*

Family Building activities in FY2016:

- 961 women contacted The Cradle for guidance regarding an unintended pregnancy
- 81 babies received loving, attentive care in The Cradle Nursery
- 65 babies went home with Cradle families through our domestic adoption program
- Cradle counselors completed 73 home studies for families preparing to adopt

Ivy was the last baby placed in fiscal 2016. Following a two-month stay in the Nursery, she went home with her mom and dad on September 26.

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Family Strengthening

If you take a look at the blue banner along the bottom of the first page, you’ll find The Cradle’s mission statement. While the child-focused mission of the organization remains foremost, the wording was updated in 2016 to reflect an expansion of our reach and impact.

A new strategic direction The Cradle has embarked upon significantly increases the number of individuals who have access to high quality programs and services that strengthen families, including therapeutic counseling, support for diverse families, and foster parent education online.

CLAS is Here to Help

Counseling appointments with therapists in The Cradle’s Center for Lifelong Adoption Support (CLAS) increased by 65% from 2014 to 2015 and by another 40% in 2016 (1,217 total). This is a clear indication of the growing need for adoption-competent counseling services for individuals and families. As a result, The Cradle added several post adoption therapists to our practice in 2016. It is our clients, however, who most eloquently express the benefits of these services:

“Our counselor has been amazing for our daughter and has helped her through identity issues, adoption issues, as well as her anxiety and depression. She knows adoption from the inside and is able to help our daughter navigate all of it.”

Visit www.cradle.org/CLAS to learn more or call 847.733.3225 to schedule an appointment.

Adoption Learning Partners Branches Out

A recent addition to The Cradle’s Adoption Learning Partners (ALP) online training is a new platform to deliver mobile-first, just-in-time learning for foster parents. During more than a year of foster market study and organization-wide strategic planning, The Cradle recognized that providing more online classes and webcasts for foster parents, in an easily-accessible format, is something that we could deliver and have a significant impact.

There are over 400,000 children in foster care in the U.S. today. Most have sustained extensive abuse, neglect or trauma. Their caregivers need training that is not only evidence-based and trauma-informed, but also current, engaging and geared to adult learners. The most widely used core curriculum today, however, is based on the needs of children 20 years ago and has not been updated since 2003. By using existing technologies in new ways to improve the quality, integrity, and consistency of foster parent training delivery, ALP’s goal is to increase the retention of strong foster families and improve the health and well-being of our most vulnerable children.

ALP piloted the new training platform this fall with 40 foster parents in Michigan, adapting three courses from its “Tough Starts” series into 31 micro-learning segments of five minutes each. Participants reported back that both the smaller chunks of learning, and the fact that you can access the modules on your phone, are great features that are well appreciated.

Our plan is to roll out the new foster parent training modules throughout Michigan and in other states in 2017. We will report on these developments in future newsletters.

Until then, you’ll find more exciting news on the opposite page!

Our Children Educates and Empowers Parents

Of the 65 babies placed in 2016, 28 were African American or multiracial (43%). Eleven of those 28 babies were placed with Caucasian families and 9 were placed with families in which one parent is white. The Our Children program was created to address concerns raised by our families – such as how to talk to their kids about race and racism – and to provide them with resources and support.

Following upon the excellent response to our inaugural “Raising Black Boys” roundtable event in February and “Raising Black Boys” webcast in May, The Cradle hosted “The Color of Education” roundtable on October 6th (below). A diverse group of educators discussed subjects ranging from challenges facing black children in school to how parents can set up their child for academic success. The topic of “Raising Black Girls” will be addressed in 2017. You can find program updates at www.cradle.org/ourchildren.
Season’s Greetings from our family to yours!

You can see in this newsletter how your gifts have helped so many children, women and families.

If you have already made your gift to The Cradle this holiday season, thank you!

If you want to help build and strengthen families, please remember The Cradle in your year-end charitable giving.

Visit www.cradlefoundation.org/donate to make a secure online gift, or use the envelope enclosed. Thank you.
CRADLE BABIES GIVE BACK

Mary Hart Keys Wilheit ‘45

One word stands out in Mary Hart Wilheit’s Nursery record from 1945: “Hungry!” It is written over and over again. “I must have been a very hungry baby,” she said with a laugh during a visit to The Cradle this summer – her first in over 50 years.

Mary Hart had returned once during college in the 1960s, before getting married and settling in Gainesville, Georgia. In 1997 she contacted Post Adoption Services and received a background report, as well as a detailed record of her three-month stay in The Cradle Nursery before going home with Mildred and Jack Keys of Greenville, South Carolina. Her parents had adopted her older brother, John, in 1943, traveling by train both times to pick up their children.

Mildred told Mary Hart about being ushered into a room at The Cradle where the baby would be waiting, nestled in an old-fashioned bassinet. “Adoption has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember,” she says. “I was always told that I was very special.” Growing up in Greenville she had a friend and fellow Girl Scout named Sunny, who was also a Cradle baby.

On this visit, Mary Hart was accompanied by her husband, Philip, along with her daughter, Hart, and son-in-law, Jeff. The two women got teary as Mary Hart shared the story of adopting Hart as a newborn in a private adoption. “After trying for five years to start a family,” she recounted, “Hart dropped out of heaven. She is such a gift.” And five years after welcoming their daughter, Mary Hart and Philip had a biological son, Philip, Jr., who today works with his dad in the family’s packaging business.

The Wilheits are very philanthropic and civically engaged, supporting a number of organizations including The Cradle. When asked why she has chosen to give back, Mary Hart replied, “The Cradle has always been in my heart. I want other babies to have the same opportunities that I did. There’s nothing else like it.”

Joe O’Brien ‘30

“It is my hope that The Cradle will continue to be as kind and helpful to other babies as they were to me,” says Joe O’Brien, who went home from The Cradle in 1930, when the agency was just seven years old. He recently made a very generous gift through his IRA to The Cradle.

Joe credits his parents, Joseph L. and Donna M. O’Brien, for his good fortune in life. “When they entered my life it was one of the greatest events that ever happened to me,” he explains. “They loved me and saw to my development during the most difficult Depression years. They gave me a wonderful childhood and guidance that became the foundation for the rest of my life.

“Because of their unselfishness, I now have my own wonderful family,” he added. Joe and his wife of 62 years, Marge, have five children, 14 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. “I am truly blessed,” he says with obvious pride.

Although he considers his children his “greatest accomplishment,” Joe is also a savvy businessman. In 1975 he established O’Brien Steel Service, headquartered in Peoria, IL. The company remains family owned and operated, and has acquired other Midwest companies in the last several years. Joe takes pride in the exceptional quality and service his company provides. He appreciates that The Cradle does the same.

To show his gratitude for his parents and The Cradle, Joe contributed $100,000 to support our programs. He made the gift through a transfer out of his IRA account, a charitable gift option for those 70.5 years of age and over. In addition, O’Brien Steel was a sponsor of the 2016 Cradle Ball. Thank you, Joe!

Members of the O’Brien family from Peoria and Chicago attended The Cradle Ball on October 15. Joe is front and center!
Introducing Kim Perez

We are thrilled to announce that Kim Perez joined The Cradle on December 1st as our new President and Chief Executive Officer. Kim, who holds a Master of Social Work degree from Loyola University Chicago, brings to The Cradle a wealth of nonprofit and social service leadership experience. As Vice President of Child and Family Services at Lifelink Corporation, a multi-service agency established over 100 years ago, Kim directed all operations for a division that included Foster Care, International Adoption, Head Start, Healthy Families, Latino Services and other programs serving thousands of children and families in four states. For the past 6 ½ years, Kim was Executive Director of People’s Resource Center, a Wheaton, IL-based grassroots, community-supported organization serving 30,000 people in DuPage County who live in or near poverty.

In addition to her proven management skills, Kim has a strong background in financial planning, fundraising, board engagement and program development. She also has an abiding passion for child welfare and strengthening families – all of which makes her an excellent choice to lead The Cradle as we embark on our expanded strategic direction. We asked Kim to share her thoughts about the organization and what she hopes to accomplish.

What led you to pursue the CEO position at The Cradle?

I wasn’t looking for a job, but when the search firm contacted me I realized it was an amazing opportunity. This position is a culmination of all the work I’ve done thus far. I started my career in child welfare 20 years ago, working in foster care. I did my MSW with the thought of being a family counselor but ended up advancing at Lifelink, first in quality improvement and then as VP. I loved being in a leadership role and discovered how much I enjoy strategic planning. The Cradle is an organization I’ve always known about because of its outstanding reputation. I’m impressed with how connected to the mission people are, and how long many staff members have been here. It says so much about the organization. And, since accepting the CEO position, I have been overwhelmed with people in my professional life sharing their Cradle stories.

How are you approaching your new role?

Coming into an organization that had such an admired leader for so long, I view this as having big shoulders to stand on, as well as an opportunity to build upon The Cradle’s 93-year tradition of excellence. My intention is to sit down with as many staff members as possible to understand what they do, why they do it, what works and what doesn’t. I am here to listen and learn – not just about The Cradle’s history, but its future. I look forward to building relationships with the staff, Board, donors and stakeholders and working together to advance The Cradle’s mission and new initiatives.

Tell us about your family and what you like to do in your free time.

I am a mom first. My son Alex is 10 and in fourth grade. He’s fanatic about sports, so we celebrated hugely when the Cubs won the World Series and went to the parade. Our recently adopted Yorkie mix puppy, a rescue, is named Wrigley. My husband Fabian owns and operates a small IT consulting firm. My parents, sister and her family live in Iowa, where I grew up, and just spent Thanksgiving with us. I love to cook and read but wish I had more time to do them!

Welcoming the Walraths

In August, Cradle founder Florence Walrath’s grandson, Stephen Walrath, and his wife, Mary, attended our Day at the Races event, which they helped sponsor. The following day they came to The Cradle for a tour and paused for a photo alongside the beloved portrait of Florence that hangs in our first floor hallway. They also went out into the courtyard to view the Walrath family bricks.

Steve and Mary, who split their time between Arkansas and Wisconsin, have been generous Cradle donors for many years. They feel a deep affection for the organization that Steve’s grandmother created more than nine decades ago out of her passion to find families for babies in need.

“The Cradle has been a ‘fact of life’ for everyone in my family as long as I can remember,” says Steve. “We have a great sense of pride in the history and accomplishments of The Cradle, especially since my grandmother was the founder and driving force for so many years. For these reasons, and many others, we always like to do our part to support the organization.”
Making the Holidays Brighter for Cradle Birth Families

More than half of birth parent clients who place a baby through The Cradle are already parenting children. Most are single moms and are living at or near the poverty level.

Every year, The Cradle holds a holiday gift drive for families in our Birth Parent Services program. Would you like to help?

We will gratefully accept donations through December 20 to purchase gift cards for our birth families, so that they can make the holidays brighter for their children.

Go to cradle.org/giftdrive. Thank you!

Cradle babies Marie and Teddy attended our 2015 Holiday Party and looked especially adorable in their festive attire. We wish all of our families and friends a joyful holiday season and a healthy, peaceful and prosperous new year.

Happy Holidays from The Cradle!

Photos above, on pg. 1 and pg. 3 by Jill Liebhaber at jookie, a portrait boutique, inc.