



CATAWBA COUNTY

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CATAWBA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES CAN HELP ADOPTEES, BIRTH PARENTS FIND EACH OTHER

HICKORY, N.C. – Family Builders, the adoption service of Catawba County Social Services, can now help adult adoptees, birth parents and their close relatives find each other.

Not all counties in North Carolina offer this service, which is called Confidential Intermediary Services. Sybil Good, a social work supervisor, explained that until recently all adoption records were sealed under North Carolina state law. In 2008, a new law took effect that allowed the release of certain records to adult adoptees and birth parents, if both parties agreed.

More recently, the list of relatives who can request this service was expanded. You may now request Confidential Intermediary Services if you are:

- An adult adoptee age 18 and older whose adoption was through any North Carolina Social Services department.
- A biological parent of an adoptee.
- An adult biological sibling of an adult adoptee.
- An adult half-sibling of an adult adoptee.
- An adult family member of a deceased biological parent.
- An adult family member of a deceased adoptee.

There is a fee for this service. However, it may be free to persons who meet certain income guidelines. The service does not apply to adoptions that were arranged by private agencies. In that case, the person wishing to search should contact the agency that arranged the adoption.

Under the CI service, the person wishing to search for a relative contacts Family Builders. The staff will conduct an in-house record review. An Internet-based search will also be conducted. If the person can be found, Family Builders will contact that person and attempt to obtain current non-identifying health and background information. The agency will also ask if the person is willing to meet with the relative seeking them.

If both parties agree, Family Builders will facilitate the meeting. The agency will help ensure that any psychological and social issues are addressed. The parties may be referred to counseling services if needed.

The reunification of an adoptee with his or her birth parent is often a “euphoric moment,” Good said. However, learning about long-lost relatives can sometimes raise complicated feelings. If the search finds that the birth parent is deceased, Family Builders will try to obtain a death certificate.

Since the passage of this law, Catawba County Social Services has performed searches for about 25 people. It is most often the adoptee who initiates the process. However, birth parents are often interested in a meeting. Many say they have often thought of the child they gave up for adoption.

Those who search for lost relatives often say they are searching for a missing piece of themselves. Others start searching because they have a question about their medical history.

Historically, keeping adoption records secret was begun to protect adoptive parents, Good said. However, research has found that reuniting an adoptee with his or her birth parents does not hurt the relationship between the adoptee and adoptive parents.

Good said that Catawba County was an early advocate for a change in the state law. Although the searches are now legal, the state does not provide funding for them. As a result, many counties do not offer this service. Catawba County’s Family Builders is one of the few agencies that will conduct a search when the adoption was arranged by any North Carolina Social Services department.

Good also noted that any county’s Social Services department should be able to provide non-identifying information contained in its original adoption records at no cost to the adoptee.

For more information about Confidential Intermediary Services at Family Builders of Catawba County, call 828-465-8901.

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