



HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU  
LEARNED YOU HAD BEEN ADOPTED?

Are you still dating the guy?

Do you regret  
your choice?

HOW MUCH  
DID IT COST?

Bellis faces questions like these head on to ensure adoption is discussed, understood and supported.

[Look inside to learn how.](#)



The Bellis community celebrated in style at the Gale Mansion in Minneapolis on Oct. 6. Guests toasted the advancements in adoption support and education that have been fueled by hard-working volunteers and generous donors in the past year. The Bellis Ball is our organization's largest fundraiser. We extend a heart-felt "thank you" to the 180 friends of the organization who dressed to the nines and shared their love for adoption!



**A.** Kimberley Craig and Jean Marie Congdon volunteered their talents to offer a "Classic French Meal for Six" for lucky live auction winners. The auction item brought in \$1,300, which will be used to benefit the Stronger Together retreat for birth mothers. They are pictured here with Patrick Craig. **B.** Fiona Quick, Jackie Bateman, Marc Davis and Kris Huson. **C.** Willie and Laureen Harbert. **D.** Ryan Moser, Monica Ramirez, Dave Lee, Jen Huerd, Kristine Moser, Melissa Kittock and Ben Pierce. **E.** Kristine Moser gave a powerful keynote presentation at the Bellis Ball, explaining her journey as an adopted person who sought a relationship with her birth mother while in her early 20s. The photo on the big screen is of her mother, Patty Overson, and birth mother, Amy Rooney, walking arm in arm down the aisle at Kristine's wedding.



Meet Tracy Murphy, new president of the Bellis Board of Directors. She joined our board in the summer of 2015. For 25 years, Tracy was an executive at Target, working in Minneapolis, Toronto and India. In October 2016, she took everything she learned from the corporate world and dove head first into the nonprofit world. After a year of networking and skills-building, she accepted the job of president of Mount Olivet Rolling Acres, which offers care and services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Tracy and her husband Tom Murphy have three kids. Tracy serves as a board member for the Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery and on the finance committee for Children's Home Society of Minnesota. Tom has long served on the board of Gift of Adoption Minnesota.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Tracy Murphy

Wow, what an amazing year for Bellis! I am proud, amazed and frankly, a bit tired.

While our name has changed (and with it has come new opportunities for branding, messaging, connections, funding and outreach), our purpose has stayed the same. We strive to **enlighten society's perceptions of adoption and fill a gap in support services.**

The bottom line is, while adoption is generally accepted and involves much more choice than ever before, language of adoption and meaningful support for adoption has lagged. By addressing this head on, Bellis occupies a unique space in the nonprofit sector. This means we are only as strong as our partnerships. So our board has been focused on building out our team, our reach and our impact. Due to their hard work, it's paying off!

**Volunteers** – We have more than 70 school panel volunteers who go into schools to share their adoption stories with nearly 4,000 students each school year. We have also been blessed with long term, pro bono support in our creative marketing, legal and tax preparation areas. We wanted to extend our volunteer support into event management, database management, donor identification and fundraising innovation. I'm really excited to say we now have an amazing group of seven dedicated volunteers that are covering all the above. The proof is in the amazing Bellis Ball they produced on Oct. 6!

**Community Outreach** – We've started conversations with foster care agencies, human services organizations and other nonprofit leaders/funders. These connections are resulting in frequent and fruitful invitations to collaborate and speak at events, organizations and conferences. We've also launched an Adoption Connection group. It's been a true privilege to hear and honor stories from birth parents, birth grandparents, adopted persons and adoptive parents. I love sharing what we do and learning from others. But the real magic is in how this group supports each other.

We are so gratified that our work is being recognized with grants this year from The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation, the Sauer Family Foundation, the Catholic Community Foundation, the Rooney Family Foundation, Cities 97 Sampler, the Agape Foundation, Leonette M. and Fred T. Lanners Family Foundation, and Great River Energy. This rising tide of support from the funding community is affirmation that we're doing something right and well! Join us!

# EDUCATION

Enlightening society's perceptions of adoption

## 'THEY ASK QUESTIONS WELL BEYOND THEIR YEARS'

By Heidi Boettcher, Facilitator of new Rochester-based speakers' hub

I never thought adoption would be part of my journey. My life was planned in high school. I planned to be married (to my high school sweetheart, of course), have two kids and be settled into a great career by my late twenties.

Fast forward to my early thirties and I have the career part down, but I am newly married to a man I had met three years prior and struggling with infertility! Adoption seemed to be the best way to grow our family. We were initially nervous of the idea of open adoption, in most part due to misinformation and those movies we have all seen where everything in an adoption that could go wrong does.

We ended up adopting two little boys at birth, and thankfully, due to education and experience, we have two amazingly open adoptions. Our boys have always called their biological families their "birthday families," a term our oldest suggested. Their bonds with their birthday families are incredibly strong, and their adoption stories are just natural parts of their lives.

Adoption is our passion, and sharing that passion is so incredibly rewarding!

I am beyond thrilled to be a new classroom facilitator for Bellis in the Rochester area. The face of adoption has changed dramatically over the years, but unfortunately the stigma and misinformation still exist. Sharing our family's story, and help others share theirs, is such an important part of breaking down those misconceptions and changing the way in which people look at adoption.

It is rewarding to walk into a class of young people and witness how they are completely drawn in by the stories our volunteers tell. They ask questions well beyond their years. It is, without a doubt, a moving experience every time our volunteers speak to classes, both for the speakers and the students.

I am very excited for the opportunity to expand our outreach to the Rochester area. Most speaker opportunities in the past have been in the Twin Cities metro area, so expanding our volunteer base here in this region will enable Bellis to reach many more students and dispel the myths associated with adoption on a broader scale. I look forward to growing our Rochester volunteer group and bringing our important message and beautiful adoption stories to this area! Here's to a wonderful 2017–2018 school year!

### Ready to get involved?

Workshops are offered quarterly. This is a great chance to meet others with an adoption story and, together, work to educate and inspire students!

9:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Saturday, Nov. 4, 2017  
Shepherd of the Valley Church in Afton

9:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Saturday, Jan. 27, 2018  
Eden Prairie Library

9:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
Saturday, April 21, 2018  
Maple Grove Library

For location and registration details, visit: [mybellis.eventbrite.com](http://mybellis.eventbrite.com).



Heidi Boettcher and Pam Hulstrand, Bellis Outreach Coordinator

"YOUR STORIES ARE REALLY POWERFUL IN CHANGING PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES ON ADOPTION. THE FACT THAT YOU ALL MADE DECISIONS BASED ON WHAT IS BEST FOR THE CHILDREN INVOLVED WAS SO WONDERFUL AND SUCH A GREAT MESSAGE FOR THE STUDENTS.

The second piece that struck me was that there is adversity in all of your stories but you thoughtfully, intentionally did what you felt was the right thing for you and the children involved.

As a former health teacher, I thought this presentation was important on so many levels. I wish you could speak to every health class in every high school AND do college seminars."

– COLLEEN O'KEEFE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SAUER FAMILY FOUNDATION

## SCHOOL OUTREACH PROGRAM

An increase in new volunteers, new schools and new facilitators put Bellis in a great position for growth again in its outreach to students. In fact, in the last school year 71 volunteers (22 new) were sent out in teams to share their adoption stories, led by a facilitator, with students in 124 classrooms.

What's the spark behind this growth? As Heidi Boettcher explains in her article (opposite page), once you have experienced adoption and have realized that some of the old myths just don't hold up, it feels good to help others see adoption in a new, more accurate light. This advocacy, and the warmth of the community of volunteers, draws individuals from many adoption perspectives and from many professions.

Bellis speaker teams crisscross the metro countless times throughout the school year, from Cambridge to Woodbury, Waconia to Chisago Lakes, and all points in between! Over the past few years, they have also generously spent many days on the road driving to Rochester, Cannon Falls, Mankato and other outstate schools. Knowing great volunteers could easily be found closer to these schools, over the summer in Rochester, Bellis started its first hub of local volunteers and facilitators. We hope to expand into other regions of the state in the years ahead.

# SUPPORT

Filling a gap in support services

## RELIEF, JOY AND STRENGTH FOUND IN CONNECTING WITH OTHERS WHO 'GET IT'

By Kate Gillen, Past President



When Bellis volunteers speak in high school classrooms, we don't just notice the change that is happening with the students, we also notice the conversations between panelists that happen after the bell rings and carry on long after they've reached the school parking lot. No matter what your experience with adoption is, there is power in connecting with others who have similar experiences.

Recently, a birth-grandparent (the mother of a birth mother) was overheard saying, "I see my daughter in pain and I want to take it away from her, but I also don't know what to do with my own pain." For those who have experienced an adoption, you know

that sometimes it can feel like you're the only one experiencing the swirl of emotions. At the same time, there can be others who seem to you to "have it worse" and need your love and attention in big ways, leaving limited capacity to tend to your own needs.

These stories are what drove Bellis to offer Adoption Connection, a new opportunity for our volunteers and other members of the adoption community, to have dedicated time to connect with each other and share the ups and downs that can be a struggle to understand. Through these supportive gatherings, we've seen people come together from all walks of life, with varying perspectives on adoption, connect with each other in really big ways. Many have arrived never having talked to another person with a similar experience to their own, many struggle to "name" what they have been feeling.

### ADOPTION CONNECTION

Join us for an evening of adoption connections and conversations. Birth parents, adoptive parents, adopted persons, birth & adoptive grandparents are invited to attend. This is an opportunity to gather in discussion, share stories, and gain new perspectives. We start the meeting as a large group, then break into facilitated small-group discussions.

**6 to 8 p.m., on the last Sunday of every other month (except December)**

**Jan. 28, March 25, May 20**

**City Hill Church, 12901 Roberts Drive, Eden Prairie**

A suggested fee of \$10/individual and \$15/couple will be collected at the door. For location and registration details, visit: [mybellis.eventbrite.com](http://mybellis.eventbrite.com).

## RETREAT OFFERS WEEKEND OF LEARNING, SISTERHOOD, SILLINESS & HEALING

With adoption experiences spanning four and a half decades, 22 women gathered in September for Bellis' fourth annual "Stronger Together" retreat for birth mothers. The weekend celebrated the sisterhood formed when women, some of whom haven't openly shared their story of being a birth mother, come together.

This year's themes were identity, self-care and gratitude. Presentations and discussions included skills-building for navigating relationships within their adoption triad (the child, adoptive parents and birth parents) and beyond (friends, spouses, parents, grandparents, etc.). Digging into these topics was challenging work; so the weekend also included lots of opportunities for long walks on wooded trails, yoga, silly games, home-cooked food and chats on the dock tucked in a beautiful bay.

One retreat participant commented: "For many women, this retreat weekend is only a first (maybe second) step toward their journey of healing... If it wasn't for this, many would have nothing to start that walk to healing and help. So, thank you!"

Registration for the 2018 retreat begins in April. This program is funded in large part from proceeds of a Spring Women's Brunch, hosted in early May, along with the Charles L. Eldredge Sr. Memorial Fund. To receive information and updates, email [info@mybellis.org](mailto:info@mybellis.org), visit [mybellis.org](http://mybellis.org), and follow Bellis on social media.



"THIS RETREAT...

**WOKE ME UP AND GROUNDED ME BACK TO FIND MYSELF AGAIN. I LEAVE WITH TOOLS TO WEAVE ALL PIECES OF MY IDENTITY BACK INTO MY LIFE, A WAY TO BE MORE POSITIVE, AND LOVING AND GIVING MYSELF PERMISSION TO BE OKAY IN MY CURRENT STRUGGLES, AND IN MY STRENGTHS. SERIOUSLY. THANK YOU!"**

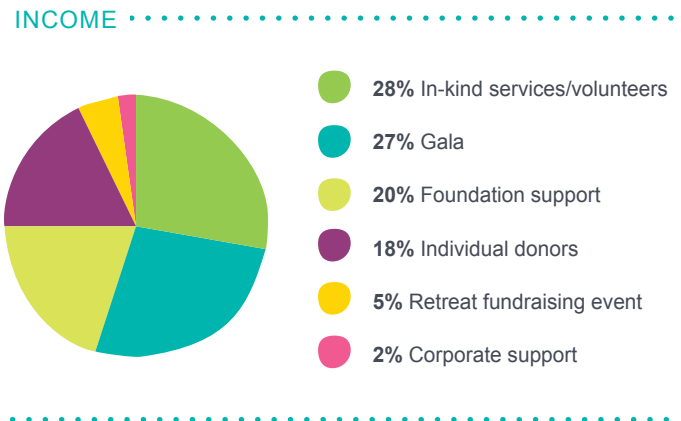
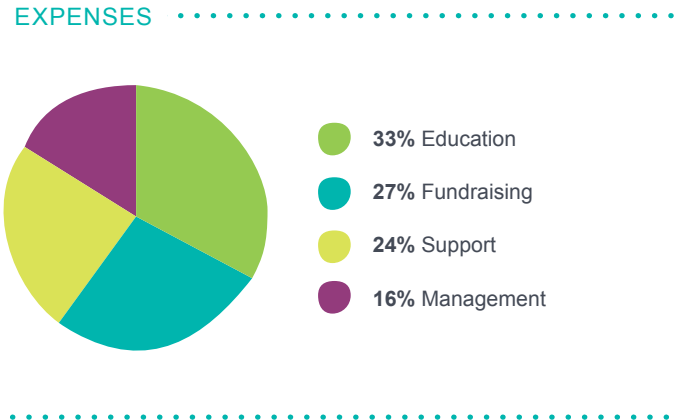
— BIRTH MOTHER WHO ATTENDED THE 2017 STRONGER TOGETHER RETREAT FOR BIRTH MOTHERS

# FINANCIALS

In our current fiscal year, which began July 1, Bellis has an operating budget of \$153,268.

Some highlights include:

- In-kind services and volunteers time: By including this value in the annual budget, we are in alignment with Nonprofits Assistance Fund's suggested best practice for calculating true program costs.
- Operating reserves: In the current fiscal year, the board budgeted for a surplus of \$18,314. This is because our major fundraising event, the fall gala, was held in October 2017. Proceeds from this event are typically used over two fiscal years.
- Earned income: Currently, Bellis has very little earned income. Retreat attendees pay a \$55 registration fee and Adoption Connection participants pay a nominal fee at the door.



**With your support, Bellis will do 5 key activities in the next year:**

- 1 Spend at least 70 days in Minnesota classrooms talking about adoption, in the Twin Cities, Rochester and beyond.
- 2 Offer quarterly training workshops for new volunteers.
- 3 Cultivate new partnerships with corporate, nonprofit and faith-based organizations.
- 4 Nurture connections with our friends in the foster care community to create a culture where adoption from foster care is more widely embraced.
- 5 Host one of the only birth mother retreats in the country and offer bi-monthly meetings for anyone with an adoption experience.

## SPREADING OUR REACH

In the past year, Bellis has had the pleasure and privilege of working with the following organizations to educate new audiences about Bellis and to dialog on the topic of adoption.

- Adoption Social Workers Best Practices Conference. *Hosted table.*
- Church of the Annunciation, Respect Life group. *Presentation.*
- Every Child, Every Church. *Hosted table.*
- HandsOn Twin Cities. *Volunteer recruitment partnership.*
- History Theatre's production of "The Orphan Train." *Presentation.*
- KARE 11. *Live interview.*
- Minnesota Department of Health's Positive Alternatives All Grantee Fall Meeting. *Presentation.*
- Minnesota State Birthright Conference. *Hosted table.*
- Target Adoption Network. *Presentation.*
- Target Government Affairs Team. *Presentation, while this group kitted welcome bags for retreat.*
- University of St. Thomas Law School Lex Vitae student group. *Presentation.*
- WCCO Radio. *Interview.*
- West Metro's Parochial Middle School Health Fair. *Presentation.*
- Wonderlust Production's "In My Heart: The Adoption Play Project" at Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis. *Presentation.*

And coming soon...University of Northwestern in St. Paul. *Presentation.*

### About Bellis

Founded in 1983, Bellis is a volunteer-driven, multi-service nonprofit with no political or religious agenda. It brings adoption education into schools and communities. Bellis also provides peer-based support, including a healing weekend retreat for birth mothers and Adoption Connection gatherings for anyone with an adoption experience. The organization was formerly known as Adoption Option Council of Minnesota.

To learn more about investing in the work of Bellis, as a donor or volunteer, connect at:

Bellis, P.O. Box 75,  
Elk River, MN 55330

952-944-0866  
info@mybellis.org  
mybellis.org

Federal tax ID:  
41-1444119



Bellis Board of Directors  
From left: Lis Moriarty, Jackie Bateman, Cory Ober, Vice President Kristine Moser, John Overson, Past President Kate Gillen, President Tracy Murphy, Aimee Rumpza, and Executive Director Jenny Eldredge.

# THANK YOU, DONORS!

## Individual & Family Gifts

Janet Abramczak	Tim & Paula Davison	Katie Harms	Kristine & Ryan Moser	Steve & Sheila Schumacher
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		Tom & Terri Moriarty	Leah Schmidt	

## Remembering Special People in Our Lives

### In Memory of Cody Carlson

Marion Eldredge

### In Memory of Dunshee

Joseph & Sharon Soderlund

### In Memory of Charles Eldredge

Marion Eldredge

### In Memory of David Giannobile

Ted & Eloise Giannobile

### In Memory of Mary Kennedy Hamel

Mark & Elizabeth Hamel

### In Memory of Robert Hamel

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Bennett

### In Memory of Deidre Hedrick

Marcia Schug

### In Memory of Patricia Kocon

Veronica Fitzgerald

### In Memory of Dr. James & Margaret Mankey

Dr. Harold J. & Margaret Hoppmann

### In Memory of Tricia Maxeiner

Dr. Robert Maxeiner

### In Memory of Maria Struss

Abby Trout

### In Honor of all birth parents

Betsy Trondson

### In Honor of the amazing women I work with!

Miranda Barker

### In Honor of Gwen & Larry

Mary Jo Herrmann

### In Honor of Jeanne, my daughter's birth mom

Mary & William Jechorek

### In Honor of our son and his birth mother, Laura

Willie & Laureen Harbert

### In Honor of my Russian grandson, Max

Dave Copeland

### In Honor of my four adopted kids

Jackie Radde

### In Honor of Pam Hulstrand

Roger W. Toogood

### In Honor of Laura Henriksen

Morgan Crannell

### In Honor of Hal Kaufman

Amy Berman

Constance Berman

Janis Berman

Jessie Berman

Lyle Berman

Matthew & Sue Gann

Kim & Aaron Gelperin

Lillian Goldfarb

Andrea Kaufman & James Jacobson

David Klaiman

Laura & Marty Klapper

Will Roach

Lisa & Doug Rozen

Raleigh & Jay Sawyer

Patti & David Sinykin

Sharon Snyder

Todd & Barb Striker

Kimberly Weiner

### In Honor of Amanda Kinney

Mike & Sue Kinney

### In Honor of Sarah McNally

Kathleen O'Sullivan

### In Honor of Tomiann Miller

Donna Bergin

Victor Gerads

Sandy Gerads Berrini

Judy Miller

### In Honor of Judy Miller & Donna Bergin

Tomiann Miller

### In Honor of Kristine G. Moser

John & Patty Overson

### In Honor of Nicole Mord & Chase

Julia Stalcar

### In Honor of Amy Rooney

Ryan & Kristine Moser

### In Honor of Teresa Shmitka

LeeAnn Huff

### In Honor of Mary Lou Stewart

Steve & Phyllis Ellefson

## Business Community

Allina Health Dollars for Doers

(via employee Barbara LeCuyer)

Ameriprise Financial

Anchor Bank

Atomic Data

Blue Cross Blue Shield

Christiansen Creative

Cities 97 Sampler

Great River Energy

Hedrick Wealth Management Group

Kohl's

Larkin Hoffman

Lutheran Social Service/Children's Home Society

Maguire Agency

Medtronic Foundation

My Adoption Advisor

Overson Financial

Randy's Sanitation

Schmidt's Styled Stems

Spark DJ

Team SPS Gives Back Charitable Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation

Tin Whiskers Brewing Company

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White House Custom Colour

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Agape Foundation

Anonymous Family Fund of the Catholic Community Foundation

Catholic Community Foundation

John and Kathleen Rooney Charitable Fund

Leonette M. and Fred T. Lanners Family Foundation

Sauer Family Foundation

The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation

## Faith Community

Church of the Annunciation

Jacob's Well

Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church

*Note: We strive for accuracy and completeness, but in the event of an omission or error, please call our office.*



# Bellis

P.O. Box 75  
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Non-Profit Org.  
U.S.  
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## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR!

At the Bellis Ball on Oct. 6, Hal Kaufman was named Volunteer of the Year 2017. He is pictured here (center back) with his wife, Julie Berman (center), and their children, Leo and Nate. The boys are standing by their birth mothers, Lolly Saunders (second from left) and Sara Spiess (second from right). Lolly's husband, Dustin Saunders (far left), and Sara's fiancé, Rick Strobel (far right), joined the celebration, too.

