**Records & Reunion**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the history on sealed records?**Adoption records in Washington State were "open" until 1935, and anyone could access records, which were kept in the probate files in the county courthouse. In 1935 a law was passed, providing for the adoptee’s original birth certificate and decree of adoption to be placed into a sealed file at the state level in the Vital Records department. This law was meant to protect all the parties from each other, having both positive and negative effects. In 1976, a Seattle adoptee convinced a judge to agree to the opening of her birth record, if a neutral third party was used to make the contact with the birthmother once she was found. This reunion was successful, and as a result family law judges in King County networked with their peers in other Washington state counties, and gradually most counties had at least one judge who would open adoption records to a trained and licensed "Confidential Intermediary". In 1990, a law was passed allowing Confidential Intermediaries to conduct searches and facilitate reunions in this state. Today, search and reunion are routine matters in Washington.

**What does a Confidential Intermediary do?**

Per RCW 26.33.343 (5), if the confidential intermediary locates the person being sought, a *discreet* and *confidential* inquiry shall be made as to whether or not that person will consent to having his or her present identity disclosed to the petitioner. The identity of the petitioner shall not be disclosed to the party being sought. If the party being sought consents to the disclosure of his or her identity, the confidential intermediary shall obtain the consent in writing and shall include the original of the consent in the report filed with the court. **If the party being sought refuses disclosure of his or her identity, the confidential intermediary shall report the refusal to the court and shall refrain from further and subsequent inquiry without judicial approval.**

**Can I have a copy of my file?**

No, per RCW 26.33.330, adoption records are sealed. However, in July 2014 a new law became effective that allows adoptees to have a copy of their **Original Birth Certificate** (OBC). You may access the link to the Department of Health (DOH) paperwork by going to their website: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/BirthDeathMarriageandDivorce/Adoptions/OriginalPreAdoptionBirthCertificate>

**Why do I have to pay?**

Children’s Home Society of Washington (CHSW) maintains adoption records from 1896 to the present. Many of these files are stored on microfilm and the recovery process is time consuming. Files not stored on microfilm are stored off site and CHSW is charged a fee to access these records.

**What information can I have from my file?**

You may have Non-Identifying information from your file as defined in RCW 26.33.020. Please note that, while this RCW provides a legal definition of Non-Identifying information,

the data available is limited to what was collected and placed in a child’s file during adoptive planning.

**Now that we have the Internet, why isn’t the search process faster?**

It is the policy of Children’s Home Society of Washington to conduct a thorough search so that we know we are contacting the right person. While it is true that some people may be easily found using Internet searches, there is no substitute for accurate, definitive and complete research.

**What if the agency that facilitated the adoption is now closed?**

By law adoption records must be kept for 100 years. When an agency closes, they are required to find another adoption agency that can maintain their records for the required amount of time*.* ***Does Children’s Home Society of Washington maintain any such records?*** Yes, Children’s Home Society of Washington maintains records for the Adoption Center of Washington and Aloha Adoption Services.