



The National  
**Crittenton**  
Foundation

BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF POTENTIAL

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April 29, 2102

The National Crittenton Foundation (TNCF) and the Crittenton family of agencies was founded in 1883 based on the social justice principle that women deserved the same opportunity as men to change the trajectory of their lives regardless of their present situation. Women wanting to leave prostitution, violent marriages, those trafficked for sex or forced labor and those immigrant women abandoned by their “husbands” were welcomed in the early “refuge” homes. However, most people who recognize the Crittenton name associate it with the national network of affiliated but independent maternity homes.

Dr. Kate Waller Barrett co-founder of the Crittenton social welfare movement articulated the guiding philosophy as that of “doing all possible to keep mother and child together in the best interest of the mother, child and society and ensuring the ability of the mother to care for herself and her child.” Mothers were required to stay in the home for 6-12 months with their baby after the birth to ensure a healthy start for all and mothers received education and job skills while at the home. This was the unbroken standard from 1883 through the early 1950’s.

Clearly, there is no doubt that the attitude of American society to single and young mothers and their children was and remains a complicated issue rooted in our views on race, gender and class. In the late 1940’s and fifties in response to: shifting social mores; a dramatic increase in middle class young women seeking admission to Crittenton homes; and changes in the field of social work the practices at homes began to change. Although adoption had not traditionally been part of the Crittenton care philosophy, homes began to turn more and more to adoption.

TNCF and the Crittenton agencies that are still in operation today are aware of, saddened by, and regret the experience of mothers “forced or coerced” into placing their children in adoptive homes and the impact on their children many of whom continue to search for their birth parents. These practices were not required, supported or endorsed by any National Crittenton directive and as independent agencies or homes each had the ability to determine its own priorities and operating policies.

This being said, not a week goes by that we don’t hear from someone searching for a family member and we are acutely aware of the pain and damage done by the past practices that we expect will be discussed in this Dan Rather Reports program. Today, at the national and local level we do everything possible to provide information and support to family members searching for each other.

Currently, there are 26 members of the Crittenton family of agencies serving girls, young women and their families in 31 states and the District of Columbia. The agencies of 2012 provide a comprehensive continuum of gender and culturally responsive, trauma informed and strength-based services in a variety of settings. While many still focus on providing services to young mothers, those that come through the doors of Crittenton agencies face a variety of challenges and most are survivors of violence and abuse. Young mothers in Crittenton agencies receive a broad range of services including but not limited to mental health, life skills, education and career development. Today, less than two percent choose adoption for their children and those that do often opt for an open adoption allowing them to stay involved in their child’s life.

Times have changed but the way in which society views young motherhood is still influenced by the same complex mix of factors: race, gender and class. Today, we add to those factors the impact and connection of childhood trauma on the incidence of young parenthood. We have a long way to go in ensuring young parents and their children have the support they need to flourish but we continue in our 129<sup>th</sup> year because Dr. Barrett’s words are as true today as in 1883 – “What hope lies in the potential of a child.” We look forward to watching program and to offering our comments.

Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, President–The National Crittenton Foundation