

*Former President of the Donaldson Adoption Institute
Steps Down to Launch New Adoption Advocacy Program*

Myriad Strategic Partners National Center on Adoption & Permanency

By Kim Phagan-Hansel

For more than a decade, Adam Pertman has led the country's leading adoption-think tank organization as it created ground-breaking studies and provided input on the ever-changing world of adoption. Pertman stepped down from the Donaldson Adoption Institute a few months ago, but is continuing his adoption advocacy work.

Adoption Today had the opportunity to catch up with Pertman to discuss his work at the Donaldson Adoption Institute in the last 12 years and his new endeavor in creating Myriad Strategic Partners: National Center on Adoption and Permanency.

What are you most proud of in your work at the Donaldson Adoption Institute? It's the impact we've had in so many areas relating to adoption and foster care. Laws and policies have changed, practices have improved and people for whom adoption is part of everyday life have even used some of our work to help themselves and their families. Not all of that was solely our doing, of course, but our research and advocacy have genuinely helped a lot of people, and I think disproportionately so given the small size of our organization.

When you look back at your time with the organization, what accomplishments stand out? Honestly, I think it's the sum total rather than the individual ones that make me feel good about what we've achieved. So I'm thrilled about our specific impact — for instance, on behalf of adopted people, especially on birth records and first/birth parents and adoptive families, and for the LGBT community, and in vital work on



identity, the Internet and transracial adoption — but I think the big accomplishment was in building an organization that could do all of that, and more.

Was it tough to make the decision to leave? Of course it was. The cliché is that the organization someone builds is his or her “baby,” and I certainly feel that way. Leaving was hard on that level. But I also saw that it was time to move on, to see how I could utilize the knowledge and skills I've developed — both as a journalist for 25 years and then as the head of a successful nonprofit — to more-directly provide services that benefit the gamut of children, adults and causes that I still care deeply about.

How do you think the adoption community has evolved since you first started with the Adoption Institute? In a lot of ways. The context is that, during the past decade, international adoption has plummeted, adoptions from foster care have grown and there's greater openness in the process generally. More states also have restored the right of adult adoptees to access their original birth certificates, though the process is still too slow. And all

of those developments — among many others — have led to changes at the institutional, programmatic and community levels — too many to count. It's why we need ethical, thoughtful and well-educated people in the field, so that we navigate this complicated terrain in positive ways — that is, shedding the corrosive elements, working harder to keep families intact, and moving toward more-humane laws, policies and practices that serve all parties better.

You've now started a consultancy called Myriad Strategic Partners, with a division named the National Center on Adoption and Permanency (NCAP). What are you trying to convey with the name “Myriad?” The idea is to convey that the organization offers a wide array of skills and services and — with the help of my NCAP partner, Carol Biddle (former CEO of Kinship Center) — I've been lucky enough to assemble a team of highly talented professionals who embody that concept. On a personal level, I want to see whether I can do some good in the world with the diverse knowledge and expertise I've developed during 25 years as a journalist followed by a decade of leading a successful national nonprofit. Ergo ... Myriad.

How does NCAP & Myriad Strategic Partners fit with the direction you believe adoption is headed today? Myriad Strategic Partners is the umbrella organization; it provides a wide range of services in the nonprofit and business realms, but not relating to adoption issues. NCAP is the part of the consultancy that focuses on the evolving needs and issues relating to

adoption, foster care and child welfare. Our team has about a dozen highly skilled and experienced trainers, educators and presenters. The idea is to provide one trusted destination that can be used throughout the child welfare world — whether by conference planners, agencies that need trainers, government entities that want consulting, or others — so that they don't have to scour the landscape to fill their needs; rather they can come to Myriad and feel confident that they will get top-flight professionals who will deliver information, resources and services that will genuinely help them.

How will your work with NCAP & Myriad Strategic Partners be different from what you were doing at the Adoption Institute? The new Myriad organizations focus on delivering services designed to enable professionals, government entities, agencies, businesses, organizations and individuals to succeed. That's different from the Institute, which is essentially a think tank that conducts research and does

evidence-based advocacy; that's an effective model that I'm very proud of, by the way, and that I hope will continue to have significant impact.

On a broader level, after over a decade of being a thought leader in the world of adoption and child welfare, what do you see as the problems that still need to be addressed or the problems that still need to be resolved? There are too many to list — from the Wild West nature of the Internet, to doing better for older youth in foster care and children languishing in orphanages abroad, to leveling the legal and social playing field for the children and adults we serve — which is why I made my earlier point about the need for ethical, thoughtful leadership in the field. Against that backdrop, I think the biggest need is probably to provide better support to help families succeed. The shorthand is “post-adoption services,” but we're really talking about assistance and education before, during and after placement so that children stay with

their families of origin when possible and so that, when it's not, the new families have the help they need. I frankly think the whole paradigm has to change so that supports and services are embedded in the process, especially since the vast majority of adoptions today, domestically and internationally, are of children who have some level of special needs. I'm happy to say that NCAP is set up to help achieve this goal.

You've come to be well-known to a broader audience as a result of your appearances in the media, as well as your own books, other writings and speaking engagements. Are those things now going to become part of your history, or is a public role part of the work you plan for the future as well? My operating theory has always been that no one can use your skills, experience or work products if they don't know they exist. I hope and believe that Myriad has something unique and important to offer, so I'll do whatever I can to spread the word.



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Kacy is a psychotherapist in New York City who specializes in working with themes of adoption including issues around identity, loss, grief, control, multiculturalism and attachment. Kacy provides a free phone consultation. Call or email for a consultation or for more information about her practice.

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