New State Program Helps Adopted Adults Find Parents

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NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Adopted adults in search of parents they never knew can now use a new state program that takes the search out of the courts.

The new program was created by Act 40 of the Louisiana Legislature in 1982 as a "legal avenue by which people can locate one another," said Nancy Miller, adoptions program specialist for the Division of Evaluation and Services.

It sets up a voluntary registry which allows adopted adults in search of biological parents or parents in search of children an opportunity to find each other without going to courts to get the necessary information.

"Formerly, we couldn’t give any information (from sealed adoption records) to people," Ms. Miller said. "They had to ask a court for the records — an expensive way of seeking information which was ultimately left to the discretion of the judge, she said.

The program is so new that Health and Human Resource officials say they haven’t yet received any queries about it.

"It’s just getting started and our forms are being printed now. We hope to begin mailing out about the middle of this month as people request them," Miller said.

Limitations Built In

The registry has certain limitations built in: the adoption must have taken place in Louisiana and the adopted adult must be at least 25 years old, Ms. Miller said.

In addition, if the adopted adult has sisters or brothers who were adopted by the same family but are under the age limit, that person cannot receive any information which may be available about his real parents, according to Ms. Miller.

Both Miller and Gwen Stewart of the Department of Health and Human Resources say a match cannot happen unless both parent and child are registered.

"If the parent doesn’t register as well as the child, our chances of matching are slim to none," Ms. Stewart said.

According to Ms. Miller, the registry works like this:

A person interested in finding his real parents or a parent wanting to locate an adopted child contacts the state Office of Human Development in Baton Rouge.

There he’s given registration forms which ask for as much information as is known about the adoption, as well as an affidavit which must be notarized.

Consider The Consequences

"This affidavit would say where their adoption was finalized," Ms. Miller said.

Most adult adoptees do have a final decree of adoption, she said, but "if they don’t know, we can determine for them if their adoption was finalized in Louisiana."

When all forms are completed and a $25 registration fee is paid, the person is referred to a licensed adoption agency for counseling as mandated by the law which created the registry.

"The sponsors of the legislation felt people should consider the consequences of meeting their parent or child, how it would affect them, their lives" and the other person, said Ms. Miller.

The next step in the roots-tracing process is for the counselor to certify for the central registry that the person has had "a minimum of one hour" of counseling.

If everything’s in order, the central registry then begins a check of its adoption records.

"Every adoption in Louisiana (state and private) goes through this agency... This office has a central index of adoptions dating back to the 1930’s," Ms. Miller said.

Getting Together

Ms. Stewart said if a parent describes where and when a child was born and the child also registers, "then we have the beginnings of what might be a match."

Officials emphasize that matching parent and child hinges on whether both are registered with the department.