

Nationwide hunt launched for people linked to the New York Foundling

NEW YORK - One of America's oldest and largest child welfare agencies - founded by the Sisters of Charity in 1869 - is searching for people connected to the organization as it organizes a "homecoming" for all those linked with the New York Foundling.

The nationwide search for "former foundlings" is an effort to bring together as many people as possible to celebrate the organization's 140th anniversary in 2009.

"This homecoming is more than merely a plan to unite people physically in one place - although that is an important part of it," said Bill Baccaglini, the Foundling's executive director. "We are also creating an online community, where people who have been connected personally or through their families to the Foundling over the years can join with others and share their common experiences."

Founded as a home for abandoned children, the New York Foundling has been saving children, preserving families and building communities since 1869, Mr. Baccaglini said.

The agency currently helps children, youths and adults in need through advocacy and preventive and in-care services that help each individual reach his or her potential, touching the lives of more than 13,000 people annually in the New York City area and in Puerto Rico, he said.

Thousands of adoptees, former foster children and those who cared for them, divided by generations and scattered across the country, will have an opportunity to come together as the Foundling organizes a weekend event in New York Oct. 9-12.

The Foundling has launched its 140th year of service by asking that everyone with a story of connection to the agency shares those pieces of their lives at www.nyfoundling.org/, he said.

The goal is to build a “virtual family room” – an online network of connections where history will come alive through the stories of people the Foundling has helped and a place where they can forge new relationships with others who share the same past, Mr. Baccaglioni said.

From its early days, when desperate mothers left their babies in bassinets outside the front door of what was then called the Foundling Asylum, to the era of the “orphan trains,” when children traveled by train to the future homes of their adoptive families, the New York Foundling has evolved into a major child welfare provider with a diverse range of services and a guiding motto of “Abandon No One,” he said.

The Foundling is also inviting doctors and nurses trained through its programs, volunteers, the relatives of foundlings, and anyone else with a New York Foundling story to share them on the Web site, Mr. Baccaglioni said.