

Advocating for Post-Adoption Support

TOOLS TO PROMOTE PARENT-LED AND
CHILD-DRIVEN SERVICES

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Introduction

Children need families, and families who raise children with special needs sometimes require support to help their children heal and thrive. Unfortunately, far too many jurisdictions have limited post-permanency services—either because programs are underfunded or they are not comprehensive enough to meet families’ diverse needs. This lack of support after permanency has been achieved is short-sighted and can significantly affect children’s and families’ ability to function successfully and can even result in children re-entering the system through adoption breakdown.

NACAC has compiled this advocacy toolkit to help adoptive and guardianship parents, adoption professionals, community providers, legislators and others work toward establishing effective, equitable and universal post-permanency support programs. In this toolkit, you will find:

- *Creating and Sustaining Post-Permanency Support Programs: Parents Can Make a Difference* (page 3) — This advocacy fact sheet has information about the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of comprehensive post-permanency support programs as well as ways to create long-term advocacy efforts that can bolster state and federal support for them.
- *Talking Points about Post-Permanency Supports* (page 11) — We have identified some key talking points about the value and importance of post-permanency programs that advocates can use in their discussions with policymakers, administrators, and the media.
- *Post-Permanency Support Programs: Suggested Reading* (page 16) — This list contains some of the key research into post-permanency services, and the publications are a must-read for advocates seeking to create, defend or improve local programs.
- *By the Numbers: State and Federal Data* (page 18) — These data sources are a great resource for U.S. advocates. Using data to back up your assertions and strengthen your appeals is a great advocacy strategy.
- *NACAC Post-Adoption Support Position Statement* (page 19) and *Model Post-Adoption Services* (page 21) — These two documents demonstrate what NACAC believes should be provided as post-adoption services.
- *Sharing Personal Stories to Achieve Advocacy Goals* (page 22) — Sharing personal stories of adopted persons and adoptive parents is an incredibly powerful advocacy tool. With this fact sheet, advocates can learn how to develop their own stories that explain why formalized support programs matter so much.
- *Adoptive Parent Personal Stories and Quotes* (page 24)— Mixing personal quotes and stories with data and research is an effective advocacy strategy. Advocates can use these quotes and stories—or create their own—to enhance their advocacy materials.
- *What Can Media Outreach Do for You?* (page 29) and *Top Ways to Reach Out to the Media* (page 30) — NACAC has created some basic tools to help advocates harness the

power of the media to increase local understanding and support for post-permanency services.

- *Attachments* — In this toolkit, NACAC has also included:
 - Logic Model Builder for Post Adoption Service Programs
 - MN ASAP Logic Model Template
 - Awareness section of NACAC's *National Adoption Awareness Month Guide*
 - Leadership and Child Welfare Systems: The Role of State Legislators

About NACAC

Founded in 1974, NACAC is dedicated to the belief that each child and youth has the right to a permanent, nurturing, and culturally sensitive family. NACAC's mission is: *NACAC promotes and supports permanent families for children and youth in the United States and Canada who have been in care—especially those in foster care and those with special needs.*

NACAC's work encompasses four key areas—parent capacity building, public policy advocacy, adoption support and education.

This advocacy toolkit was created through the joint efforts of NACAC staff Kim Stevens, Mary Boo, Diane Martin-Hushman, Ginny Blade, and Joe Kroll, and former staffer Janet Jerve.

For more information about the toolkit or NACAC, contact us at 651-644-3036 or info@nacac.org.

Creating and Sustaining Post-Permanency Support Services: Advocacy Can Make A Difference

In recent years, adoptions from foster care have increased significantly. Unfortunately, supportive services for families raising children with special needs have not kept pace. In some areas, post-permanency supports have even been cut or threatened with elimination.

Part I of this fact sheet describes how advocates can respond to proposed reductions in services. Part II outlines how advocates can seek to improve adoption assistance supports in the long term. If your state or province has significant budget troubles but has not yet proposed cuts to adoption assistance, you might want to undertake the strategies under Part II to shore up support in case of future attempts to reduce adoption support.

Part I—Respond to a Proposed Cut

Learn More about the Proposal

If your state or province is proposing cuts to programs that serve children with special needs, you can:

1. Obtain a copy of the proposed changes. If the change is legislative, find out if your legislature has a web site that posts copies of bills, or contact your local representative and ask for information. If the change is administrative, ask the state department of human services or provincial ministry for information in writing. Ask questions about what the proposal means and how it will affect children in your community.
2. Contact other parent leaders such as officers in local parent groups or your state or provincial foster and adoptive parent association. Find out what they know and if other groups are also concerned. Ask foster and adoptive parents to read about the proposed changes and talk about how it will affect children.
3. Gather data on adoption assistance and adoption support programs from the state, provincial, or county agency. How many children receive assistance? What are the differences between adoption assistance rates and group or institutional care payments? What administrative costs are saved when children are adopted?
4. Get on your legislature's e-mail list serve or weekly publication that highlights pending legislation or upcoming committee meetings.
5. Call your elected officials or administrators and ask questions about the bill or proposed change. Set up a meeting to discuss it. If the proposal is legislative, ask which committees will oversee the bill, who chairs those committees, and the timeline for the bill. Find out who is sponsoring the legislation and try to learn why those members of the legislature are supporting the bill. Is it a single bill or part of a larger budget bill?
6. Contact NACAC at 651-644-3036 or info@nacac.org. We may have information to share about the changes, and can connect you with other parents in your area.

Advocacy Tools

When you begin your advocacy journey, the following resources should be helpful:

- A copy of the proposed bill, the draft of the new administrative rule, or anything else in writing about the proposal
- State/provincial laws, policy manuals, and rules pertaining to post-adoption support; in the U.S., your Title IV-E State Plan
- State and federal data to make or support your case (*see page 18*)

Take Action

When you learn of a proposed change, contact local adoption or foster care agencies or support groups as well as the foster, adoptive, and kinship families you know. Ask those you contact to spread the news to others. Provide accurate information about the proposal and timelines for action.

Work with your allies to develop a clear message about the change you seek (do not pass Bill Number XX, restore the cuts to the post-adoption support program, etc.). Provide anyone who will be taking action with you with tips and resources about the message—make sure every message is focused on children and details how the change will harm vulnerable youth.

If the change is legislative, contact members of your legislature immediately. Have all of your allies contact their own representatives. Leaders of the movement can seek meetings with chairs of key committees, but should bring along a constituent (someone who lives in the area the member represents) whenever possible. Communication from a constituent will always be more powerful than a message from another advocate alone.

When you contact legislators, the following can help you choose your strategies:

1. Meetings in the legislator's home district (or riding in Canada) are the most powerful way of connecting with your elected officials.
2. Visits with your legislators at their capitol offices are important.
3. Telephone calls are a good way to discuss issues.
4. Personalized letters show that you took the time to share your concerns.
5. E-mails are less effective since legislators receive hundreds each week.

If you have enough time, think about organizing an event at the capitol. If you can coordinate a family rally on the day a bill is being heard in a particular committee and invite radio, television, and print media, you may be able to create public interest in your issue. See if you can have parents provide testimony at a hearing on the bill.

If the proposed change is an administrative one (coming from the department of human services or ministry rather than the legislature), you may choose different strategies:

1. Ask the department about the rationale behind the change

2. Contact your legislator and those friendly to adoption and foster care and ask them to find out more about the proposal (and to express your concerns about the proposal)
3. Ask NACAC, your legislator, or a local attorney if the change follows federal, state/provincial, and local law. If it doesn't, consider filing a lawsuit and requesting an injunction to stop the change from going forward.
4. Have parents contact administrators and explain why the change is a mistake; have youth who benefitted from adoption and adoption assistance tell their stories.

The media can be very helpful whether the change is legislative or administrative. Contact reporters who have covered adoption or foster care issues and explain the fallout from such a proposal. Write letters to the editor or commentaries to the local newspaper that explain how the proposal will harm children.

Conclusion

When a change is introduced, you typically must act quickly and find as many concerned, like-minded individuals who can band together for advocacy. Together you have the best chance of protecting a threatened program.

Part II—Plan for the Future

Successful advocacy efforts are thoughtfully planned and coordinated, and involve the collaborative efforts of numerous foster and adoptive parents. Sometimes it can take years to make important changes on behalf of children with special needs. Below are ideas for planning a successful long-term campaign.

What's Your Goal?

Before doing anything, you and any allies you already have must decide what you want to see changed and craft your message. Ask the following questions: Are we going to focus on preserving post-adoption support in our state? Are we focused on maintaining monthly payments or concentrating on services to children, or both? Do we want to broadly educate policy makers about the special needs of children in foster care and adoption?

Be sure to frame your problem or your goals from a child's point of view. For example, if the goal to increase mental health services for adoptive families, your message might be:

All children deserve a permanent family. Children who are adopted from the foster care system sometimes have severe mental health problems as a result of their family history or the trauma they experienced in their early lives. Access to mental services will help keep adopted children with their families and allow parents to nurture their children as they seek to heal from their history of abuse and neglect.

Build a Coalition

Once you decide what you want to do, you need to bring others into your team. An essential part of your success will depend on how well you can organize others, and whether your goals align.

Start by contacting other interested stakeholders. Look for organizations that support children, such as adoption agencies, state/provincial, or local foster/adoptive parent associations, child advocacy organizations, adoptive or foster parent support groups, school or community groups, faith-based organizations, state/provincial or local kinship or grandparent groups, children's mental health advocacy groups, and associations supporting children with special needs. Try to think broadly when brainstorming possible partners.

Ask if these groups would be interested in joining your coalition. Ask if they would send out a notice about your goal to parents and colleagues. Often, people will share information with other parents and professionals, even if they are not able to actively support an advocacy effort.

Combining forces increases your power—many organizations listed on a project-specific letterhead are considerably more powerful than one. You may not agree on all aspects of child welfare, but if you focus on certain shared goals, you may achieve them.

Remember to keep your efforts nonpartisan—include in your coalition individuals with different political beliefs and reach out to legislators from all political parties. Adoption from foster care is typically a bipartisan issue, and you are likely to accomplish more if you represent diverse opinions and have different connections.

Don't forget to work with the state department of human services or provincial ministry—the benefits of tapping the resources of the agency can be immeasurable. Even if staff cannot actively advocate, they can provide data and notify you of upcoming proposed legislation. If the agency is actively involved in these or future advocacy efforts, you can help staff by providing parents to tell their stories in support of reform.

Once you bring your partners on board, take time to discuss your goals, redefine them if necessary, or identify new priorities. Be prepared to compromise or expand your goals as long as the outcomes for children will be enhanced.

Coalition members must share in the advocacy workload, so you should form committees or seek volunteers to take on different tasks. Rather than making a general announcement at meeting, talk to people individually and ask how they can best help the cause. Relying on each person's experience or talents will advance the goals of your group. Don't forget to honor and acknowledge the work of all team members—this builds your team and helps keep people engaged for the long haul.

Gather Your Data

Once you know your specific goal, you should collect data to document the scope of the problem. There are four types of information that you may need to gather to complete the picture:

- relevant laws (local, state/provincial, or federal)
- relevant rules and regulations
- demographic information on the children affected by the problem
- testimonials illustrating exactly how the problem affects specific children, youth, and families

Work with your allies to identify the data you need and where you can find it. Below are some of the general questions you might want to answer:

1. Who are the children you plan to help? What are their needs?
2. What is the average age of a foster child or average age at which children get adopted?
3. How many children are in foster care, adoption, and kinship care? How many children are waiting for adoption?
4. What is the average cost per child in foster care in your state/province? (If your state is county run, attempt to get county breakdowns for costs and number of children.)
5. What are the administrative savings when children leave foster care?
6. What services are currently available in the community? Are they adoption competent and accessible? What new services need to be created?

Ask your state/provincial or county agency for this data. It should be public information, and much of it may be accessible online.

Know the Key Players

Once your group has developed its goals, you will need to determine what person, agency, or group can make the changes you need. First ask yourself if you need legislative change or administrative change. In many cases, the answer is administrative change. If you need administrative change, find out which agency actually makes the decisions that affect your problem—is it the department of human services, the children's mental health agency, the local school district, etc.

It is important to understand how the system works in your area. In the U.S., some states have county-administered systems so the critical decisions are made by the head of the county agency or by the board of commissioners. In other states, decisions come from the state agency in charge of child welfare. Before you begin your advocacy effort, be sure you have done your research to identify the right decision makers for your particular problem.

If you are working on a state or provincial law change, familiarize yourself with the key committees to which a child welfare bill may likely be assigned (Health and Human Services Policy or Budget Committees). Do you have allies on the committees? Scan the committee list for legislators you know support child and family issues.

Keep lists or databases of the legislators you need to reach (including name, committee assignments, district, and contact information), particularly those on key committees and in leadership positions. Reach out to parents, youth, and other advocates to find constituents who live in these legislators' districts or ridings. Make sure that your communication comes directly from a constituent whenever possible.

Choose a Strategy

Educating policy makers and the public about foster and adoptive children and their needs is a key part of advocacy. Your first priority should be activities that help you develop and strength relationships with key legislators. Second is raising awareness with the public so you can build allies and sway public opinion.

When you select a strategy, make sure it is:

- appropriate for solving your problem
- adequate to sufficiently address the problem
- effective in helping you achieve your objectives in a reasonable time
- targeted to the right decision makers
- a wise use of time, money and energy
- sensitive to side effects that could generate resistance by special interest groups or cause negative responses or consequences

Below are a number of ideas to raise awareness, primarily with legislators. Consider using National Foster Care Month (May) or National Adoption Month (November) to launch any of the strategies below. Regardless of what strategy you choose, pay attention to the legislative schedule and avoid any crunch times during which attention will be hard to get.

1. Hold Meetings with Legislators

A fairly simply strategy involves scheduling a series of meetings with numerous legislators and their constituents. Simply gather your advocates, identify which advocates are represented by which legislators, and have constituents set up a visit. During the meetings, the advocates can tell their personal stories to explain the importance of adoption for children, the needs for post-adoption support. Perhaps a second person can attend each meeting to explain how the personal story ties to the bigger picture—presenting data on the number of waiting children, the disabilities and challenges facing children who have been abused and neglected, etc.

2. Legislative Open Houses

During a legislative session, it can be difficult to get the attention of a legislator. Consider hosting an open house when your elected officials are not in session. Invite 6 to 12 foster, adoptive, or kinship parents from your district to your home for refreshments and have parents share their family stories with legislators. This setting offers more time to talk about issues, and allows policy makers to see constituents in their district. It gives you an opportunity to really get to know your officials, and when a bill comes up in the future, you

already have an established relationship. Work with others in to coordinate similar open houses state or province wide.

3. Parent Day at the Legislature or Legislative Assembly

Consider organizing a day at the capitol for foster and adoptive parents. You can start with a rally where parents and youth tell their stories, follow by individual parents and youth visiting their representatives. Be sure to have parents schedule meetings with members of the legislature in advance.

4. Creative Visual Displays

Consider colorful displays at the legislature or at the department or ministry of human services to draw attention to the needs of foster and adopted children. Parent groups have collected shoes and teddy bears to represent the number of children in state or provincial care. Others have tied ribbons on trees—one for each waiting child. In Australia, parents at a conference luncheon were asked to write the names of each child who had lived in their homes on separate five-inch cut outs, similar in size to ginger bread cookies. Different paper colors were used to represent foster, adoptive, kinship, and biological children. The paper cut outs were then taped together hand-to-hand and hung throughout the ballroom for an evening event with politicians. Others have used hundreds of life-sized photos of children to draw attention.

If you pair an event such as this with a series of legislative visits (described under 1 above), you create even more attention and have the chance to tell legislators more about the purpose of the display.

5. Harness the Power of the Media

An effective way to increase public awareness of the needs of our children is by tapping into local media outlets. Consider television, radio, or print media depending on your specific goals. If you are coordinating an event with colorful balloons and groups of people, ask for coverage from the local television station that runs *Wednesday's Child* (or otherwise covers children's issues). Try to determine if any of your local news anchors or reporters have a connection to foster care or adoption. Pay attention to which reporters cover foster care or adoption issues. If a proposed rule is being debated, think about scheduling a radio interview with a spokesperson from your group.

When you consider print media, think beyond the traditional mainstream newspapers. Many community newspapers are willing to give you space and (given limited resources) are eager to receive pre-written articles. Search for those serving communities of color, the elderly, or disabled individuals. Ask about submitting an article to e-newsletters as they are becoming more popular.

Send letters to the editors or commentaries in response to articles about foster care or adoption, especially those that get the facts wrong.

6. Use Social Networking to Raise Awareness

To get more individuals engaged in your efforts—and perhaps to interest the media—use new technology to spread your message. For example you can use groups, fan pages, or causes on Facebook to mobilize, organize, inform, and attract supporters to your cause. Be sure to take advantage of Facebook’s key strength—the connections between individuals. Have your members and allies share their message on their walls and ask them to communicate with others by updating their status, posting pictures and stories about your cause, and so on. If you use discussion boards, make sure they are active. If others don’t ask question or post comments, do so yourself.

Another way to share your message and encourage action is to start a blog, especially if you get links from existing blogs in the adoption and foster care communities.

7. Letter Writing Campaigns

Legislators need to hear from their constituents. They have more time and attention outside of a legislative session, so consider sending a personalized letter when it’s not so busy. Follow up with a phone call, and you can establish a relationship with your elected official when she has time to listen to your concerns. Ask others in your group or across your state or province to do the same—share ideas about messaging but keep each letter unique.

If you are in the midst of a legislative session and a bill comes up, you could organize foster and adoptive parents to write letters and make phone calls. The more responses legislators receive, the more likely they will be to respond.

8. Foster Doll Project

This project is based on the simple idea of putting a used doll in the hands of each legislator. Nevada was the first state to try it, but others have taken on the campaign (Alabama, Kansas, and Minnesota). Legislators become the doll’s de facto foster parent for a specified period of time. You can give each doll a name, life story, and placement folder, and drop the dolls off in baby strollers and wagons. Then, volunteers can make regular visits to the legislators to check up on the dolls. During the legislative session you can send letters or cards (on holidays, for example); data on foster care and adoption statistics and rates, number of children in the counties represented by the legislators; and more.

Alabama experienced multi-year payoffs after delivering dolls to legislators—rate increases, positive media coverage, and the respect of some key policy makers.

Conclusion

By banding together and developing in-depth relationships with administrators and policy makers, you greatly increase your chance of achieving positive outcomes for children. Your efforts may stave off cuts in the near term, while also providing you the chance to strengthen and enhance programs down the road.

Talking Points about Post-Permanency Supports

The following are key talking points that can help in post-permanency support program advocacy efforts. If the point is based on research, we have included the citation below. If the talking point is in quotation marks, it is a direct quote from the cited source. Feel free to use these talking points or your own.

We have found the most effective messages:

- Explain the special needs and circumstances of children adopted from care
- Underline the importance of adoption
- Demonstrate what specific difference supports make in a child's life
- Show that post-permanency supports and services save money compared to keeping children in foster care or having them re-enter out-of-home care when challenges arise

Families face special challenges raising adopted children with special needs

- Currently, 123,000 foster children in the United States [about 30,000 in Canada] are waiting for an adoptive family. Post-permanency support services are a critically important tool to encourage the adoption of these children and youth who have special needs and are effective at keeping them safe and stable in their new families.
- Many foster children waiting for adoption—and the children already adopted from foster care—have special physical, mental health, and developmental needs. Studies show that these children are at heightened risk of moderate to severe health problems, learning disabilities, developmental delays, physical impairments, and mental health difficulties.¹
- “Most children enter foster care because of abuse or neglect. A significant number of these children have physical health, mental health and developmental problems (Berry & Barth 1990; Lakin 1992; Smith & Howard 1994) resulting from past trauma, drug and alcohol exposure, and multiple and unexplained separations and losses. Further, research has repeatedly documented that children in foster care disproportionately affected by a range of developmental challenges, including chronic health programs; developmental delays; educational difficulties that warrant special education intervention; mild to moderate mental health problems; and in some cases, severe psychological and behavioral difficulties (Avery & Mont 1994; Simms, Dubowitz, & Szilagyi 2000).²
- Surveyed adoptive families reported that:
 - 58 percent of their children needed specialized health care,
 - 68 percent had an educational delay,
 - 69 percent exhibited misconduct, and

¹ Bramlett, M.D., Radel, L.F., & Blumberg, S.J. (2007). The health and well-being of adopted children. *Pediatrics*, 119, S54-S60.

² *An Approach to Post-Adoption Services: A White Paper*, p 5.

- 83 percent exhibited some other kind of serious behavioral problem.³
- “Studies on post-adoptive functioning of children adopted from the child welfare system have found a high rate of emotional and behavioral problems (Nelson, 1985; Rosenthal and Groze, 1991, 1992, 1994; Fine, 2000; Howard and Smith, in press). In studies using standardized behavioral measures, approximately 40 percent of such children score in the clinical range many years after their adoptions (Rosenthal and Groze, 1991, 1994; Howard and Smith, in press).”⁴
- Children adopted from foster care face many more challenges than healthy birth children. And parenting children who have endured abuse, neglect, or other traumas—especially those who suffer from mental health problems or never learned to attach to a family—can be very difficult. It is only logical that governments would offer or support programs of equitable, case-specific assistance and support to all families who care for children brought into government custody, yet adoptive families often receive significantly less financial aid and fewer services than foster parents.

Adoption has important benefits for children and youth

- Studies show that children who are adopted from foster care have far better educational and social outcomes than those who remain in foster care.⁵
- Research has demonstrated that youth who are adopted, when compared to youth in foster care, are:
 - more likely to complete high school or the equivalent,
 - more likely to attend and complete college,
 - less likely to become teen parents,
 - less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol,
 - less likely to have mental health problems,
 - less likely to be arrested or incarcerated,
 - more likely to be employed, and
 - more likely to have adequate incomes (with one study showing that individuals adopted from foster care have incomes that are 75 percent higher than young adults who age out of foster care).⁶
- The outcomes for youth who age out of foster care without a family are extremely troubling. These youth are at elevated risks of homelessness, poor educational outcomes, poor health, unemployment, and incarceration.⁷

³ Sedlak, A., & Broadhurst, D. D. (1993). Study of adoption assistance impact and outcomes: Final report. Rockville, MD: Westat.

⁴ *Sustaining Adoptive Families: A Qualitative Study of Public Post-Adoption Services*, Center for Adoption Studies & American Public Human Services Association, DATE, p. 4.

⁵ Triseliotis, J. (2002). “Long-term foster care or adoption? The evidence examined.” *Child and Family Social Work*, 7(1), 23-33.

⁶ Hansen, M.E. (2006). The value of adoption. Washington, DC: American University. Retrieved from <http://www.american.edu/cas/econ/workingpapers/1506.pdf> (May 19, 2008).

⁷ Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Cusick, G.R., Havlicek, J. Perez, A. & Keller, T. (2007). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 21. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University

- Adoptive families provide love and emotional security for their children, the stability of a committed family who will be there for them throughout childhood and into adulthood, a place to call home, and financial support.⁸ Like other parents who provide, on average, \$38,000 in assistance to their children between ages 18 and 34,⁹ adoptive parents continue to provide support for their children as they transition into adulthood—support that is not likely to be available for youth who do not leave foster care for permanent families.

Post-permanency support programs matter to families and children

- Post-permanency services are a vital support to families raising children with often-serious behavioral, emotional, or physical disabilities. With support programs, families are able to remain committed and effective parents as they raise their children who have special needs.
- “There is evidence of a strong relationship between providing support to adoptive families as a matter of course or in the form of preventive services and positive outcomes in terms of the health, well-being, and stability of the family (Groze 1996a; Smith & Howard 1994)”¹⁰
- A number of post-adoption service programs evaluated showed that services resulted in:
 - Improved parenting skills
 - Improved child functioning
 - Increase in adoptions
 - Prevention of adoption disruptions¹¹
- A survey of parents receiving post-permanency supports services¹² revealed that 80% of respondents reported their families were better off having received services. Of these respondents, 30% had child at risk of out-of-home placement. As a result of receiving services, 73% of these children were able to remain at home (33 families).

of Chicago AND Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. K., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A. C., English, D., White, C. R., Hiripi, E., Wiggins, T., & Holmes, K. (2005). *Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

⁸ Brodzinsky, D.M., Schechter, M.D. & Henig, R.M. (1992). *Being adopted: The lifelong search for self*. New York: Doubleday AND Cahn, K. & Johnson, P. (Eds.) (1993). *Children can't wait: Reducing delays in out-of-home care*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America AND The Evan B. Donaldson Institute. (2004). *What's working for children: A policy study of adoption stability and termination*. New York: Author.

⁹ Schoeni, R.F. & Ross, K.E. (2005). Material assistance from families during the transition to adulthood, in R.A. Settersten, Jr., F.F. Furstenberg, Jr., & R.G. Rumbaut (Eds). *On the frontier of adulthood: Theory, research, and public policy* (pp 396–416). Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

¹⁰ *An Approach to Post-Adoption Services: A White Paper*, p 9.

¹¹ “Post-Legal Adoption Services for Children with Special Needs and Their Families; Challenges and Lessons Learned,” Child Welfare Information Gateway, June 2005

¹² Avery, R. (2004). *Strengthening and Preserving Adoptive Families: A Study of TANF-Funded Post Adoption Services*. Available online: <http://nysccc.org/wp-content/uploads/tanfaverypasrpt.pdf>

- “...research has shown that adoptive families’ needs are multidimensional and may arise at each developmental stage for the family and the adopted person. From a program development perspective, the research makes clear the need for flexible programming that permits families to return for services when needed and does not limit the extent to which they may receive services.”¹³
- In a recent survey, 81 percent of pre-adoptive and adoptive parents said that adoption assistance was important to their decision to adopt, and 58 percent said they could not adopt a foster child without this support that helps them meet the child’s special needs. The same study cited inadequate subsidy support as one of the two most critical barriers to adopting from foster care.¹⁴
- “We have found that the recruitment of prospective adoptive parents and the provision of post-adoption support and services are integrally related.... Assurance of the availability of services and support following adoption has been found to play a critical role in many adoptive parents’ decisions to go forward with the adoption of children in foster care — whether children are adopted by their current foster families or new families recruited for them (Freundlich 1997).”¹⁵
- “...adoptive families have a need for an array of education, support and therapeutic community services. And they need to be able to access this array episodically. This mix of services must be provided by service providers and therapists with an adoption-competent knowledgebase and core values, who can see child and family strength amidst complex circumstances and concerning diagnoses.”¹⁶
- “For moral, social, and economic reasons, it is in the public interest to assure that families remain intact and strong. The pendulum has swung and society again recognizes the importance of strong family systems in combating society’s ills. Adoption support and preservation services help build strong foundations for families created by adoption. By developing and implementing these services, families involved in adoption, service providers and policy makers are assuring adopted children of every opportunity to become useful, productive citizens.”¹⁷
- In many surveys, adoptive parents have typically noted the following as the most important services:
 - Support services including support groups and informal contact with other similar families
 - Parenting education
 - Respite care and child care

¹³ “Research on Postadoption Services: Implications for Practice, Program Development, and Policy” in *The Postadoption Experience* p. 295.

¹⁴ Children’s Rights (2006), *Ending the Foster Care Life Sentence: The Critical Need for Adoption Subsidies*

¹⁵ *An Approach to Post-Adoption Services: A White Paper*, p 7.

¹⁶ “Perspectives on the Need for Adoption-Competent Mental Health Services,” Casey Family Services, October 2003, p. 72.

¹⁷ “Adoption Support and Preservation Services: A Public Interest,” Spaulding for Children, revised May 2005

- Counseling
- Services for children, including groups for older children
- Adoption assistance¹⁸

Sustained adoptions save money and improve outcomes for children/youth in foster care

- One study found that each dollar spent on an adoption from foster care saves about three dollars in public and private costs. This analysis showed that each adoption saved from \$90,000 to \$235,000 in public costs, and even more in private costs.¹⁹
- Researchers have calculated that each adoption nets between \$88,000 and \$150,000 in private benefits due to the differences in incomes between young adults who were in long-term foster care and those who were adopted.²⁰ Thus, even small increases in adoption subsidy payments reap long-term rewards for the adopted children and society.

¹⁸ *An Approach to Post-Adoption Services: A White Paper*, p 22.

¹⁹ Hansen, M.E. (2006). The value of adoption.

²⁰ Hansen, M.E. (2006). The value of adoption.

Post-Permanency Support Programs: Suggested Reading

The following articles and research briefs can be very valuable in your advocacy efforts. Read them carefully and look for quotes and other information that can support your cause.

If the item is available on line, we have included the link below.

Background on Post-Adoption Services

- *Adoption Support & Preservation Services: A Public Interest*, The National Consortium for Post Legal Adoption Services, March 1996
www.nrcadoption.org/.../ASAP%20-%20%20A%20Public%20Interest.pdf
- *Adoptive Parent Preparation Project: Phase I – Meeting the Mental Health and Developmental Needs of Adopted Children*, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, by Dr. David Brodzinsky, 2008
www.adoptioninstitute.org/.../2008_02_Parent_Preparation.pdf
- *An Approach to Post-Adoption Services: A White Paper*, Casey Family Services, August 2002
<http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={49ED6A2C-9AE5-4BC6-B9E9-C4904E6B1030}>
- *Creative Strategies for Financing Post-Adoption Services: A White Paper*, Casey Family Services, October 2003
<http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={CE8CE638-3745-4B61-A813-DE2D6961DF84}>
- *Investing in Adoptive Families: What Adoptive Families Tell Us Regarding the Benefits of Adoption Preservation Services*, *Adoption Quarterly* Vol. 8, Issue 3, by Zosky, Howard, Smith, Howard and Shelvin, October 2005
- *Parents and Professionals Identify Post Adoption Service Needs in New York State*, New York State Citizens Coalition for Children Survey Report, February 2010
<http://nysccc.org/adoption/post-adoption-services/postadoptsurvey/>
- *Post-Adoption Services: Emerging Themes, Issues and Interventions*, Casey Family Services, 1996
- *Post-Permanency Services*, Madelyn Freundlich & Lois Wright for Casey Family Programs, 2003
- *Promoting Successful Adoptions: Practice with Troubled Families*, Susan Livingston Smith & Jeanne A. Howard, 1999
- *The Postadoption Experience: Adoptive Families' Service Needs and Service Outcomes*, Child Welfare League of America, 2006

- *A Report to Congress on Barriers & Success Factors in Adoptions from Foster Care: Perspectives of Families and Staff*, Children's Bureau, 2007
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/barriers/>
- *Sustaining Adoptive Families: A Qualitative Study of Public Post-Adoption Services*, American Public Human Services Association and the Center for Adoptive Studies, October 2002
- *The Value of Adoption*, American University Department of Economics Working Paper, by Mary Eschelbach Hansen, December 2006
<http://www.american.edu/cas/econ/workingpapers/1506.pdf>

Research on Particular Post-Adoption Services or Needs

- *Post-Adoption Services: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Children Adopted from Foster Care*, North American Council on Adoptable Children, by Madelyn Freundlich, et al., July 2007
<http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/postadoptpaper.pdf>
- *The Value of Adoption Subsidies: Helping Children Find Permanent Families*, North American Council on Adoptable Children, by Madelyn Freundlich, et al., May 2008
<http://www.nacac.org/adoptionsubsidy/valueofsubsidies.pdf>

Model Programs and Ideas

- *Developing a Parent-to-Parent Support Network*, North American Council on Adoptable Children, by Janet Jerve, April 2009.
<http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/parent2parentnetwork.pdf>
- *Starting and Nurturing Adoptive Parent Groups: A Guide for Leaders*, North American Council on Adoptable Children, by Janet Jerve, October 2002.
<http://www.nacac.org/parentgroups/starting.pdf>
- *Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite in Your Community*, North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA), and the Collaboration to AdoptUsKids, by Janet Jerve, et al., October 2008.
<http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/TakingABreak.pdf>

By the Numbers: State and Federal Data

The following are data tools available from the U.S. federal government. The data and analysis can help you relate the stories you tell and the advocacy messages to the numbers of children/youth in your community. In addition, you may be able to identify those improvements your system is being required to make, and link your advocacy messages to those requirements.

- *AFCARS Toolkit*, National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (2004) Provides an orientation to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and links to key materials related to the collection of quality data that can be used to address policy development and program management issues at State and Federal levels.
http://www.nrccwdt.org/resources/afcars/afcars_toolkit.html
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/afcars/about.htm>
- *How Federal Legislation Impacts Child Welfare Service Delivery*,
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/impacts/step5.cfm>
- *Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS)* The Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) is a comprehensive automated case management tool that supports social workers' foster care and adoptions assistance case management practice.
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/index.htm#sacwis>
- *Child and Family Service Reviews*: The Child and Family Services Reviews are designed to enable the Children's Bureau to ensure that State child welfare agency practice is in conformity with Federal child welfare requirements, to determine what is actually happening to children and families as they are engaged in State child welfare services, and to assist States to enhance their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes. <http://www.nrccwdt.org/resources/cfsr/cfsr.html>
 - State review schedules:
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/general_info/fy07_10.htm
 - *State Program Improvement Plans* States are required to submit Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) when their child welfare services are determined to be out of conformity on any of seven outcomes or seven systemic factors assessed in the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs). Resources that follow provide guidance on developing and implementing PIPs and lessons learned.
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/reform/cfsr/statepips.cfm>
 - *Reports and Results of the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs)* The following reports are available by State: Statewide Assessments, Final Reports(CFSR), Program Improvement Plans, and Individual Key Findings Reports.
http://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm

NACAC Post-Adoption Support Position Statement

Philosophy

NACAC recognizes that adoption creates a dynamic of its own that requires the commitment of families and communities alike. Children and youth adopted from foster care have often experienced abuse, neglect, and abandonment, which may lead to unique post-adoption needs. In addition, throughout an adopted child's life, there are expected developmental stages that may require additional support. For adoptions of these children and youth to succeed, NACAC strongly believes that quality post-adoption services must be available to meet the adoptive families' needs.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Post-adoption services must be available to families—including all members of the adoptive family and the birth parents—whenever they are needed. Preventive and proactive services are more effective and more cost-effective than crisis-oriented services, which are often slow to be approved. Each state and province should develop a system for ensuring that all families who adopt children and youth with special needs—especially children and youth adopted from the foster care system—have access to the services described below. NACAC also urges governments at all levels (federal, state, provincial, territorial, tribal, etc.) to fund post-adoption services in the U.S. and Canada.

Agencies that provide placement services for children and youth have an obligation to assure that adoptive families receive ongoing supportive services either directly or through linkages with other appropriate service providers. Professionals working with individuals touched by adoption have an obligation to avail themselves of ongoing, accredited adoption-competent training.

Services should be provided by people and organizations that are adoption-competent, and should include (but not be limited to) the following:

- contact from the agency or post-adoption service provider at the time of placement to explain the specific child or youth's need for post-placement support and available services that will be helpful to that specific child or youth and family
- complete information about the child or youth's social, medical, and behavioral history, including experiences with the birth family and any previous foster or adoptive families, as well as what the history may mean for the child or youth's future
- information and referral from a single entry point
- support groups for adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees
- support for connections with birth parents and other birth family members and former foster families, whenever possible
- ongoing training and educational resources
- respite care
- case management services
- advocacy and support for school-related problems

- adoption assistance payments (subsidy for children and youth adopted from foster care)
- other financial assistance when needed
- crisis intervention
- mental health services, including therapeutic counseling, in-home and residential services.

When a child or youth is adopted from foster care, he or she should continue to receive the same benefits and services as he or she received in foster care as long as his or her needs have not changed. In fact, additional services should be provided when necessary to meet the child or youth's needs and maintain permanency, even as those needs change over time.

Model Post-Adoption Services

Post-adoption services must be available to families—including all members of the adoptive family and the birth parents—whenever they are needed. Each state and province should develop a system for ensuring that all families who adopt children with special needs—especially children adopted from the foster care system—have access to the services described below.

Services should be provided by people and organizations that are adoption-competent, and should include (but not be limited to) the following:

- Information and referral from a single entry point (including a toll-free number answered 24 hours a day/7 days a week)
- Support groups for adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees
- Support for connections with birth parents and other birth family members and former foster families, whenever possible
- Training on special needs and adoptive parenting
- Educational and information services
- Therapeutic counseling
- Respite care
- Full disclosure of all background information
- Case management services
- Advocacy and support for school-related problems
- Adoption assistance payments (subsidy for children adopted from foster care)
- Other financial assistance when needed
- Crisis intervention
- Mental health services, both in-home and residential

Sharing Personal Stories to Achieve Advocacy Goals

A key component of any advocacy strategy is finding personal stories that demonstrate the importance of the change you seek. Personal stories:

- lend credibility to a problem or solution
- put a human face on a problem or solution
- help others identify with a problem or solution
- engage a reader's heart, stir compassion
- move people to action to solve the problem or contribute to a solution

In post-permanency support program advocacy, the stories should demonstrate how access to effective support programs contributes to keeping children and youth safe and stable in their adoptive families. For example, if the child or youth has an attachment disorder, the story might explore how with the help of a competent attachment therapist the family has been able to help the child better bond with the family, leading toward a brighter future. Or, the story might discuss how the family was able to stay committed and help the child function better in school, at home, or in the community with the support and encouragement of other experienced parent mentors. Be careful to connect the program components to successful outcomes and a reduction in high-cost interventions and disruptions.

Below we describe how to gather personal stories that can help make the strongest advocacy points. Although this is written primarily to help you gather and write others' stories, you can also use it guide you to write up your story.

Before you start interviewing people or gathering personal stories to help you with your advocacy efforts, you need to first answer the what, when, where, why, how and who questions regarding your advocacy work. You should first be able to answer these questions and explain your mission to prospective speakers.

- What is your specific goal? What do you hope to accomplish by delivering your message?
- What type of story will best illustrate the importance of your goal?
- Who are the best people to tell their personal stories?

Gathering information

- Build trust—explain your goals; find common ground; reassure the person that they will have the opportunity review the story before you do anything with it
- Ask permission to record interview, but also take notes
- Listen and allow speakers to talk; ask questions but give plenty of time for the person to answer before jumping in with the next story
- Plan questions in advance, but be prepared to think of new ones as the story unfolds
- Don't push if a person hesitates to reveal a part of the story or becomes emotional; take the time to build the relationship and you may learn more later
- Do follow-up interviews after you have written up a draft to get more information or answer questions

- Explain to the person what you know you don't want them to publicly share and why. Sometimes there are parts of a person's story that are too personal or too complicated; you want to both protect the parent or youth and keep your audience focused on your prime advocacy message.

Writing the story

- Discuss with individual how you will need to shape their story to fit your advocacy goals
- Keep the story as brief as possible, definitely under one page
- Quote the person as much as possible; if necessary go back and ask very specific questions that can elicit a quote that is true and powerful
- Include details that will help the audience form pictures in their minds
- Have team members review and edit the story to ensure that it achieves your goals

Be cautious and respectful

- Never use a story or parts of a story without permission
- Only tell the parts of the story that you need the reader to know; be very protective of the individual and don't share anything they might later regret (even if they are willing to share it now)
- Never change a person's story; if the story doesn't fit then seek another one

Adoptive Parent Personal Stories and Quotes

Below you will find a number of quotes and stories that are designed to demonstrate the importance and efficacy of post-permanency support. Use these and your own quotes and stories to bolster your advocacy message.

Quotes

When looking for quotes, seek those that are focused on the child's need and demonstrate an outcome (adoption or improvement of behavior as a result of support). If you are an adoptive parent, make your own quote based on the circumstances of your family. For example, "I wouldn't have been able to adopt three teenagers from foster care without the health care and ongoing support." "The ongoing connection to other experienced adoptive parents and adoption competent therapists helps us understand what Jack needs to recover from his early abuse. Since he started with the therapist, he's doing better in school and feels more secure in our family." "The respite services give Jolyce an opportunity to get away without any sense of blame or punishment when the intensity of being in a family gets overwhelming for her."

The following are quotes from adoptive parents that NACAC has used in its advocacy efforts:

- "Post-adoption services saved our family. I don't know if we all would have survived as a family without the counseling and support we received."
- "[As a result of the post-adoption support] I am less frustrated. I have become more knowledgeable, and that makes things better. [I am] more knowledgeable in areas dealing with adoptive and special needs kids. So I am less frustrated and more able to deal with various systems."
- "If you haven't lived with children who have emotional issues, you can't imagine it. They bring you into their storm. You cannot stay out of it. Fortunately my husband and I are very strong people. We are committed to our children. We're holding on, but sometimes we don't know what we're holding on to."
- "[As a result of the post-adoption support] there have been changes in my kids, especially one of them, in terms of attachment and identity. I am more confident as a parent because of the resources. I am more aware of the help that is out there."
- "I have seen/know of so many adoptions which have been disrupted because there were no supports for parents. Building up supports, contacts and resources is a **MUST** as you prepare to adopt. Pre and post- adoption supports must be integrated to provide comprehensive support for families to ensure their well being and that of the adopted child."
- "... between [experienced parent mentors] and the social worker from the county who handled our adoption, I don't think we would have gotten through it without them. There is no other support. You would feel extremely isolated without this group. I am not sure our family would have survived without this information and support."

- “We could not be doing what we’re doing without [the post-permanency program]. They have been critical to our success. We are so fortunate to have them.”
- “Three years ago, my husband and I adopted seven siblings, all under age eight. They had been through lots of trauma in their early years that resulted in serious problems. The children had diagnoses including severe emotional disturbance, post-traumatic stress disorder, attachment disorder, and anxiety disorder. We adopted in January and by the summer I was in crisis—trying to parent them as they went through fits, head banging, crying, rocking, and night terrors. Parenting these kids was so different than parenting our biological children who had never been traumatized.

We were lucky that we received post-adoption services right away from a therapist who knew the children and understood the mental health effects of trauma. With her help we learned how to parent our children and how to help them heal. These post-adoption services made a world of difference and today our children are thriving. If adoptive parents are supported in this way from the beginning, it will save many, many adoptions like ours.”

Stories

Depending on how you are communicating with decision makers, you can also use stories like the ones below in your advocacy efforts. See “Telling Personal Stories” for more about to find and develop your own stories.

Danielle, Kelsey, JT, Jennifer, & Leah

In 1998, Pam and Tom were drawn to two-and-a-half-year-old Danielle, whom the local paper said needed a home. Soon after Danielle joined the family, her little sister Kelsey moved in too. Both had endured significant abuse. Danielle used to wake up screaming at night, and the only way Pam could help her was to sleep on the floor next to the bed. “Danielle used to beg me to ‘put Band-aids on the windows to keep the bad guys out,’” recalls Pam.

Three years later, the girls’ baby siblings—JT and Jennifer—came into foster care too, and were placed with the family. JT and Jennifer had both endured severe injuries. JT, who has spina bifida and hydrocephalus, was badly burned. Jennifer’s skull was cracked and she had multiple broken bones. Finally, their sister Leah needed a family too, and eventually Pam and Tom had adopted all five children.

“Kelsey is doing very well,” says Pam. “She has ADHD, but she is beautiful and bright.” With Leah, Pam remembers, “She walked in the door and I was her mama. She never looked back—she looked forward. She is nearly seven now and suffers horribly from post-traumatic stress syndrome.”

The twins are thriving. Pam celebrates how well JT has healed: “All of his burn marks are gone. Now he is walking with no crutches and he rides a bicycle. He does a lot of things they said he would never do.”

Unfortunately, Pam worries about Danielle’s mental health. When Pam began to receive numerous calls a month to pick up her daughter from school due to behavior issues, she had to do something. She recently found a special school in a hospital setting that is working better. “I drive 30 miles to get her on the bus, but I know the staff is trained to deal with behavior-disordered children. This year I only got four calls to pick her up,” explains Pam. Danielle has been on a waiting list for mental health services for more than six years.

“I am willing to do whatever it takes to care for my children,” says Pam. “But I know now I can’t do it alone.” The family could use in-home therapy, family therapy, a personal care attendant for Danielle, and short-term respite care. Unfortunately, due to lack of funds, many of these services are not currently available.

Pam says, “Children like Danielle were not born like this. They were robbed of their childhood at a very early age, and we all need to advocate for them. I don’t give up. I have a strong cluster of support and there is no can’t in our vocabulary!”

Serena

Serena and her brother spent three years in foster care before being adopted. “I can’t remember the day I joined my adoptive family, but I can remember a comfort, or peace, just knowing that everything was going to be okay,” recalls Serena.

“When I was five, I was placed in Children’s Hospital in Knoxville. They were doing all these psychological tests and the doctor told my mom that there was no hope for me. The best thing they could do was to put me in a group home,” explains Serena. “But my mom told him she was not going to give up on a five-year-old child.”

Serena had extreme behavior problems. “My room was a war zone. My mom and dad had to put a board up on the window so I wouldn’t throw myself out of it. And there were holes in every wall because I would kick holes in them,” recalls Serena. “I would go into fits for long periods of time for no apparent reason, screaming, raging fits. I know I was angry but I couldn’t ever tell you why.”

At nine, Serena’s family moved to Colorado so she could participate in an out-of-home treatment program they had heard might be able to help her. Because of her participation in the program, Serena had an epiphany. She recalls, “It dawned on me that I had a choice regarding my behavior. And I did. Not overnight or anything, but that was when I started working through my therapy.”

By about fourth grade Serena settled in and things became normal for her. “I think I was 12 or 13 before I could quit seeing the therapist,” adds Serena.

In spite of these challenges—and perhaps because of the support she received—Serena has thrived. She graduated from college in three years, at age 21, with a degree in English secondary education. She is now a special education teacher, helping other children facing difficult challenges.

Malik

When Corvette learned that her three-year-old great-nephew, Malik, was in police custody, she went to offer her help. The police had found Malik wandering around outside, unattended and improperly dressed. Corvette agreed to care for him for 90 days. Unfortunately, Malik's mother could not learn to care for him, so Corvette adopted Malik a few years ago. Corvette also adopted five-year-old Laquon and his four-year-old sister Star.

Malik, Laquon, and Star have a variety of special needs, and Corvette seeks professional assistance when they need it. Corvette explains, "I made sure Laquon and Star received therapy to help them deal with their past and transition into adoption," adds Corvette. Laquon has completed therapy and is doing well at home and in school. When Star was in first grade, the school found a sexually explicit note she had written. Corvette immediately found a new therapist for Star and faces the possibility that Star may have been sexually abused.

Malik has also needed extra support due to ADHD and significant psychological problems. "Malik started acting out at age four. By five, he used to beat himself," recalls Corvette. "For some reason he hallucinates and sees spiders even though there are no spiders. And then there is this person he sees—Flipsy. Flipsy tells him what to do." When Malik starts to see spiders, he panics and loses control. One day Malik saw spiders at school and his reactions were overwhelming. School officials called the police and Corvette, and Malik was admitted to the hospital for 19 days of in-patient treatment. Corvette recalls, "I felt so helpless! Where do I go? What do I do? Everybody I started calling, I couldn't reach. I needed help."

Corvette has a deep, abiding love for her children, but knows love isn't enough to heal their past hurts and meet their special needs. She is grateful for post-adoption services that have covered the costs of medication, therapy, camp, a medical school setting for Malik, training for her, and more.

Corvette says, "I tell everybody—I don't feel sorry for Malik. I have a love for him and because I really love him, I have to help him. I have to do whatever is necessary. Of Laquon and Star, Corvette adds, "God has blessed me with them. They are loving children and I love them to death. I tell them they can tell me anything and I will get the help that we need."

LaShawn, Dezmond, Jakob, & Izrael

Lonnie and her husband Alonzo were treatment foster parents to eight-year-old LaShawn. When she first met LaShawn, Lonnie recalls, she "fell head over heels and wanted him to be her son." They soon learned he had a seven-year-old brother, Dezmond.

"He did a lot of smearing, fire setting, and tantruming," explains Lonnie. "[And the adults in their early life] encouraged a climate where there was fighting, choking, peeing in the closet, and competition between them. Neither one could read or write or knew their ABCs." In spite of the challenges, Lonnie and Alonzo agreed they wanted to keep the brothers together.

Lonnie was determined to get help to meet both boys' significant special needs. They received health care coverage, monthly subsidy payments, college tuition options, counseling, and special tutoring.

The boys birth mother later gave birth to twins, Jakob and Izrael, and Lonnie and Alonzo took them in too. The boys were born three months premature, tested positive for cocaine, and were on heart monitors. "They had significant health issues and many doctors' appointments. They needed early intervention and developmental help. We hardly had time for anything else," remembers Lonnie.

Although LaShawn did not agree to be adopted, Lonnie and Alonzo finalized the adoptions of Dezmond, Jakob, and Izrael. Lonnie knows that she could not have made it this far without the services her family has received.

"It has been harder to get post-adoptive services and training [for the twins]. The twins are adorable yet challenging," Lonnie adds. "I don't leave them with anyone. My mom and my sister can help out once in a while, but I don't leave them with anyone else."

John & Gina

Marsha and her husband became foster parents to four-year-old John and two-year-old Gina, and were able to adopt them two years later.

Everything went pretty smoothly until the children reached adolescence. Marsha recalls, "Gina had a lot of problems—precocious puberty, microcephalism, hypotonic muscles, specific learning disabilities and, eventually, adolescent-onset epilepsy." Doctors kept treating each individual problem without examining them together. Marsha remembers when she and her husband figured out what was going on, "Finally we pulled out a pediatric textbook and said, 'Oh my goodness, at the root cause of every one of these symptoms is the possibility of fetal alcohol exposure.'"

John also displayed symptoms of fetal alcohol exposure. Marsha explains, "John has an inability to anticipate consequences of behaviors, and an inability to learn from mistakes, repeating the same mistakes over and over and wondering why he was getting the same results." She adds, "He has a lot more emotional scars, too, because he was the older of the two in a very deprived home where there was everything from incest to arson."

With her children's new diagnosis and their increasing difficulties, Marsha sought support that would enable her to meet John and Gina's special needs. After a long process, she received retroactive post-adoption support. Marsha explains that the assistance covered costs for services such as counseling that her primary insurance wouldn't fund. The counseling was critical. Marsha says, "Post-adoption services saved our family. I don't know if we all would have survived as a family without the counseling and support we received."

Marsha explains why adoption was so important for her now adult children, "Both of them had the chance for leading normal lives that they never would have had otherwise. Adoption was not a panacea for either child, but it seems to have been the stabilizing force that gave them the foundation from which they could reach their full potential."

What Can Media Outreach Do For You?

IT CAN:

- ❖ **Raise the profile of your issue to the media** — The primary reason for conducting media outreach is to increase awareness of, and foster education about, your issue and its importance. All of other points listed below flow from this one. Without educating the media and cultivating their interest in your issue it is extremely difficult to move forward in either the policy arena or in the court of public opinion. **You can use the media to reach both the broadest possible audience and key opinion leaders and policymakers – it’s an effective platform for your message, and it’s free.**
- ❖ **Raise the profile of your issue to the public** — Public demand is the ultimate driver for much of the legislation that is passed at all levels of government. Politicians do not generally initiate or support costly legislation without constituent support. This support is difficult to muster if there is not a clear recognition of the problem that needs to be solved; furthermore, much of the public’s desire for action comes from the problem definition that is created in the media. **When people read about an issue, or hear it reported on the news, they tend to think about it as prevalent and thus in need of addressing.**
- ❖ **Raise the profile of your issue to policymakers** —Politicians and their staffs follow media coverage—both nationally and in their home states and districts—extremely closely. In every Congressional office, there is a daily or weekly packet or e-mail of press clips that is distributed. These press clips—comprised of news stories, op-eds and editorials from key national, state and local publications—serve the essential function of keeping policymakers attuned to issues of importance. Not only does it inform about them current events (as it does for everyone), it gives them hints about what they may be hearing from constituents about in the near future.
- ❖ **Establish you as an expert in the field** — Often, establishing yourself as a “go to” for information on your issue can be as easy as calling or e-mailing a reporter who covers family/child issues and offering to provide them with information on your issue, pitch them story ideas, etc. If you are helpful, responsive and willing to help a reporter who may not be familiar with this issue, and may have a number of questions, it will pay off.

Top Ways To Reach Out to the Media

1. Submit a Letter to the Editor or an Op-ed to a Local Paper

This is a relatively easy way to get your name and perspective out there, and provides a fairly unfettered forum for doing so. Letters to the editor and op-ed pages both welcome submissions from the general public, on a wide variety of topics. Although the majority of these submissions deal with either a particular news story or topic that the newspaper has recently reported on, the sheer fact that a newspaper hasn't covered an issue is also a good way to address this issue. If you can tell your story, and supplement it with facts and figures from your community in making the case for reform, you can add to potential interest in publishing these pieces.

Newspapers generally have very straightforward guidelines for how to submit letters to the editor and op-eds – from where you should send the piece, to how long it should be. You can generally find this information either on the newspaper's website, in the newspaper itself, or simply by calling the main number at the newspaper and asking to speak to someone about guidelines for submitting a letter to the editor or an op-ed.

2. Call a Reporter

You can initiate contact with a reporter by phone or email, and can introduce yourself and your issue this way. You can become a valuable resource for a reporter, by pitching them story ideas, tracking down information they might request, etc.

When pitching a reporter, writing an op-ed, putting together an event – always think about the most compelling elements, and the bottom line “message” that you want people to walk away with. The best coverage always results from crafting a story that is both personal and universal – you want people to relate to, and empathize with, the issue, but also to present it with a sense of urgency and prevalence. By providing both the human and statistical aspects of an issue- both connecting reporters to residents of their area (like yourself), and providing information about how a particular issue affects the reporter's community, you can achieve this.

3. Hold One-on-One Briefings with Reporters, Editors, Producers and/or Assignment Editors

This is a slightly more formal version of the telephone call listed above, and can and should be undertaken in an informative capacity in the lead-up to an event, the release of a report, etc. Initially, your contact with these individuals is going to be most productive if it is undertaken on a one-on-one basis. That way, you can build a relationship with each individual reporter/producer/editor, learn what type of stories they like to cover, what their deadlines are, when and how they like to receive information, etc. If the reporter/producer does not know very much about these issues, then this can serve as an information session for them.

4. Have Editorial Board Meetings

At each newspaper, there are generally a number of writers who comprise the editorial board – they are responsible for the contents of the newspaper’s editorial page. They write about the issues of the day and current events of national and regional significance. They also meet with individuals and organizations within the community to hear about issues which affect the community and could become the subject of a future editorial.

Editorials are a powerful mechanism for expressing, and validating, the importance of your issue. The underlying theme of any editorial is generally that the issue on which the piece is written is important, is being recognized by the writer (and the newspaper) as such, and that action is needed. Policymakers tend to pay particular attention to editorials, as they hold slightly more significance than news stories do. Editorials are an implicit recognition of the fact that an issue has achieved a level of awareness in the community and that something should be done to remedy the problem.

You can request an editorial board meeting, or a meeting with the editorial writer(s) who cover child welfare/family/intergenerational issues simply by calling or emailing the newspaper. You should always go into an editorial board meeting fully prepared – with stories of individuals within your community impacted by foster care; with statistics about the foster care and child welfare system in your state and how these stack up nationally; with information about where key legislators in the area stand on this issue and information about what the chances for change are. Remember – it is unlikely that an editorial writer will possess a tremendous amount of knowledge on this subject. It is your job to present it in a compelling and informative way; to provide enough information and human interest detail that will make them want to write about this issue.

5. Host Press Conferences/Events

Staging events or press conferences are another way to engage the media and the general public in your issue. They are more labor and cost-intensive than the suggestions listed above, as they generally require an appropriate venue, printing out and disseminating materials, etc. However, if you have a report that you are releasing, or want to convene a discussion of individuals in the community impacted by foster care to inform the public and the media about the challenges they face, an event is a good way to get your message out.



[Logout](#)

My Logic Models	
■ Step One:	Enter Program Information
■ Step Two:	Enter Services, Assumptions, and Resources
■ Step Three:	Search and Select Outcomes
■ Step Four:	Select Indicators
■ Step Five:	Select Tools
■ Step Six:	View Logic Model

[My Logic Models](#) > Enter Program Information

Logic Model Builder for Postadoption Services Programs

■ Step One: Enter Program Information

You are about to begin building a draft logic model. Once you have completed drafting the logic model, you will have the option to download it into Microsoft Word and edit or modify it as necessary.

Start with basic information about your program and the population you serve. This will help set the stage for developing your logic model.

Each of the fields below provides you with a series of statements or questions to help you enter relevant information about your program. Some examples are also provided. **Fields marked with an asterisk (*) are required.**

Note: You may go directly from Step 1 to Steps 3 and 4, before returning to Step 2. This allows you to select outcomes and indicators **before** identifying services and is appropriate if you do not have existing services in place or if you are planning to change existing services.

* Program Name

This is the name that you will use to refer to the logic model for your program.

(Please do not exceed 10 words)

Program Vision (sometimes called Long-Term Impact, Goal)

This is a brief statement about your hope for the future. What do you want for the children and families you serve? A vision statement does not need to be measurable. Your program is not necessarily responsible for single-handedly achieving it. Rather, your program should contribute to its achievement. Examples: "Stronger adoptive families," or "All birth parents have access to adoption-competent support services."

Enter your vision statement below to begin the logic model builder.

(Please do not exceed 150 words)

Other Examples: "All adoptive families can access needed supports," or "Increase availability of postadoption services in our community."

Population Served (sometimes called Consumers, Participants, Target Audience)

This is a description of the population you serve. As specifically as possible, identify the people who will receive your services. [Read more](#) about identifying the target population from the [FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention](#). FRIENDS collaborated with Child Welfare Information Gateway to develop the [Logic Model Builder for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention/Family Support Programs](#).

(Please do not exceed 350 words)

Examples: "All children living in adoptive families in our community," or "Families adopting children from foster care," or "Birth parents who have made an adoption plan for their child."

Population Needs (sometimes called Problem Statement, Needs to be Addressed)

What are the participants' needs that this program intends to address? Describe the social problem(s) faced by your participants that your services will help to solve. [Read more](#) about identifying the target population from the [FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention](#).

(Please not exceed 350 words)

Example: "We serve all adoptive families in (x) region. Families may at times need access to adoption-competent professionals and services to help maintain healthy family relationships and ensure continued permanency for children who were adopted."

Sample Logic Model — MN ASAP
A Post-Adoption Program with regional peer support, an information clearinghouse, and training

Inputs

Staff
 11 Parent Liaisons
 (Parent Liaisons are regional, except 1 statewide for the Native American community and one metro for African American community)
 1 Parent Group Coordinator
 1 Support Network Manager
 1 Training Coordinator
 1 Clearinghouse Coordinator
 Administrative Support

Activities

Parent Liaisons: provide phone support and resources for parents; provide referrals to resources; Crisis intervention or referrals as needed and case advocacy

Family support groups
 - provide support to parents and children
 - in some cases, Parent Liaison duties may include: facilitation, and coordinating: travel reimbursement, child care, and training of new support group leaders
 - Recruitment of support group leaders
 - Provide speakers as requested

1-on-1 supports: Buddy program and Mentoring program

Training of adoptive parents
 - TIPS (shorter, one-time trainings)
 - LABS (in-depth series of trainings)
 - Conferences

Training of professionals (sometimes attend LABS/TIPS)
 - provide regional conferences (5 to 8 per year)
 - statewide conference every 2 yrs.
 - Providing speaker at Task Force (monthly meeting of state adoption workers)
 - Provide trainers at other statewide conferences (e.g. Educate MN, legal services, ECFE)

Identify gaps in services (resources to families (based on contacts with regional liaisons, information gathered at training, calls to clearinghouse, or discussions with professionals)

Provide warm-line: info/referral

Provide Information Clearinghouse Website and Newsletter

Outputs

of contacts with parents
 # of contacts with social workers (public and private) initial & qtrly.
 #of referrals given

of groups/frequency of meeting
 # of children/other family participating
 speaker topics
 # of parent group facilitators
 # of parents trained as facilitators
 # of new groups started

of matched pairs
 Types of support provided

of parents participating
 # of trainings held/location

of professionals participating

of parents who call-in or are sent information from the clearinghouse
 topics presented
 # of newsletter recipients

Short-term outcomes
 (0-18 months)

Parents feel supported by each other
 Parents learn/share parenting skills
 Parents learn coping skills
 Parents are able to use humor with other parents/ parents get a break
 Parents feel that the groups are worth their time
 Parents form connections with other families
 Parents have contacts/support from other parents between meetings
 Parents are able to access additional respite care resources
 Parents feel a sense of belonging
 Parents feel they are respected and valued
 Parents feel a sense of ownership of the group

Parents learn more about behaviors and mental health of youth
 Parents learn parenting strategies
 Parents feel that they can cope better

Professionals learn specific strategies to serve adoptive families
 Professionals are better able to serve adoptive families
 Increased cultural competency of providers

Better communication among agencies about services provided and gaps

Long-term outcomes
 (1 1/2 to 5 years)

Improved family attachment and functioning for adoptive families
 - increased family stability
 - fewer adoption disruptions
 - increased family "claiming"
 - adoptive children in school and stable

Improved quality of life for adoptive families
 - less stress
 - less violence/threats
 - better interactions between parents and children
 - marriage surviving
 - other family relationships maintained
 - adoptive children are not running away from home
 - emotional security
 - celebrating and finding strengths in each child
 - family ability to have fun
 - established family rituals and traditions that include the adoptive child

Improved system of care to serve adoptive families

**Reduced isolation - adopt. families
 Increased knowledge of and access to effective resources**



The primary purpose of Adoption Month is to raise awareness about adoption, adoptive families, and children who need adoptive homes. If done well, awareness-raising efforts represent adoptive families in a positive manner, enhance an organization's public profile, and make the plight of waiting children a community responsibility. In this chapter, we discuss tactics to help you enlist the media, government, and businesses in your campaign to build public awareness about adoption.



Awareness

Media

Millions turn to newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet on a daily basis, primed to learn more about what is happening in the world around them. With an engaged audience already at their disposal, each of these venues is an excellent option for spreading the word about adoption. Media coverage reaches a broad spectrum of the general public, including neighbors and relatives of adoptive families, potential donors or contributors, and future adoptive families.

As an opportunity to reach new audiences and a precursor to recruitment, media coverage should include clear, accurate adoption messages. Well-crafted news and feature pieces help to dispel myths and correct misperceptions about who can adopt and what adoption is like. A broad public understanding also improves the lives of adoptive parents, birth families, and adoptees as colleagues and peers become more knowledgeable and supportive.



*Whoever controls
the media—the
images—controls
the culture.*

—Allen
Ginsberg

Getting Started

Before you contact any media organization, lay the groundwork for success. As you begin working with media organizations:

- ☞ **Reflect upon, then focus your approach.** To ensure that your point is conveyed effectively, consider your message and determine your purpose in seeking media attention. Relationship building is an essential but time-consuming element of obtaining positive media coverage, so invest your time wisely. Is the message best presented on television, heard on the radio, or read in print [see page 13]? Is it news or a feature story or both [see pages 14–15]? Answering these questions can guide you to the right media personnel from the start.
- ☞ **Target particular stations and publications to seek coverage.** Who would be most interested in and do the best job covering your story? What types of stories do particular media organizations in your area typically cover? Do they have staff in certain departments who can cover your event or issue? A media directory, usually available for purchase through press clubs (check the phone book), can help you locate media organizations and personnel. Then, to maximize your chances of being covered, thoughtfully select organizations and research how they make content decisions.
- ☞ **Establish personal contact with media personnel.** Start with a phone call introducing yourself, your organization, and your cause. Next, send a written information

packet, possibly including a press release [see page 16], your group brochure, newsletter, photos, an adoption fact sheet, and statistics [see page 65]. Then follow up with another phone call after the written materials have arrived or as the date on which you want media coverage approaches.

- ☞ **Address your material to a specific person.** Unfortunately, correspondence addressed only to “editor” may not get much attention. Instead, call the organization and ask for the name and title of the person you wish to contact. If you are not able to talk with the right person on the telephone, send written materials to a specific editor or other content manager. If possible, identify the person who determines content within particular departments (such as regional news, family, lifestyles, community, etc.) and might be especially interested in your story.
- ☞ **Find creative ways to build media connections ahead of time.** Leading up to Adoption Month, get media personnel to think about adoption issues. For instance, invite editors, reporters, and other story planners to a media luncheon—food is nearly always a good lure. During the luncheon, adoption experts can present an overview of the issues and media representatives can gather information for future stories.
- ☞ **Explore electronic communications options.** The Middleberg/Ross Media in Cyberspace Studies found that nearly 75 percent of managing editors of newspapers and magazines surveyed in 1999 go online at least once a day. The editors

use the Internet to e-mail, contact sources, research stories, and communicate with readers. The popularity of electronic communication provides an additional opportunity for you to connect—people who take days or weeks to return a phone call often respond to e-mail almost immediately. And, since most newspapers, radio stations, and television stations have an Internet site, you can quickly research organizations and contact people. When reporters or editors cover your story, ask if they can also post the story online and include links to your (or other) informative adoption web sites [see “Internet Sites” on page 67].

☞ **Plan to follow up.** Place calls the day before or morning of the event to remind media contacts what will take place, where and when it will be, and whom they can talk to while there. Always be prepared to supply complete information—even if you already sent it—just before and after the event takes place. Once the article is published or the program airs, send thank you notes to both the editor and reporter. Also indicate your willingness to be a future source and suggest additional stories or angles to pursue.

☞ **Consider forming a recruitment partnership with supportive media organizations.** Once you have established a relationship with particular reporters, editors, stations, or publications, they may be willing to make a greater commitment to adoption causes. The foundation you build by working together on news or feature stories could develop into an ongoing recruitment collaboration—perhaps the organization can air or print advertisements, public service announcements, or a recurring waiting child feature [see “Advertising” on page 41 and “Waiting Child Features” on page 53].

Selecting Your Medium

Knowing the advantages of particular mediums can help you focus your relationship-building energy to maximize your results.

Print

From powerful institutions like the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, to small weekly

or monthly neighborhood publications, newspapers reach millions of readers every day. Unlike television or radio, print media allows you to create your own content for publication. For example, you do not need advanced video editing equipment or a high-tech recording system to write a letter to the editor.

Large papers that have more staff reporters are better able to cover news events. With departments that typically correspond to the sections of the paper, you can attempt to connect to one of several reporters or editors who might be interested. You can also send a letter to the editor or persuade the editorial board to run a piece of its own. Some of the smallest papers, on the other hand, will be more receptive to feature articles and lengthy letters to the editor, though they are less well-equipped to respond to breaking news. Some smaller papers may even publish feature or news material that you submit.

Print media can also help you to target a particular audience. In many cities, specialized newspapers serve African American, Latino, Native American, or Asian American constituents. Magazines are also an option—because they need to market themselves to advertisers, most can provide specific information about the demographics of their readers.



Quick & Easy

Media Possibilities

- Write a letter to a talk show or fictional program, thanking producers for covering adoption issues or encouraging them to do so.
- Call in to a radio show about vulnerable children, mental health services, health care reform, special education, or welfare. Remind the public how adoptive families are touched by these issues.
- Send a poem or piece of artwork created by an adopted child to a magazine or newspaper, asking for it to be published.
- Encourage families who came together through adoption to share their story with the media—better yet, volunteer your family.
- Invite a media personality to your next support group meeting or adoption orientation class.
- Add media organizations to your support group or agency mailing list and keep them updated about your activities.

Television

Television presents infinite possibilities for raising awareness during Adoption Month. News, feature stories, even fictional programming can include adoption messages. News stories can appear on nightly local broadcasts—most areas have several network affiliates. Many stations also broadcast morning or midday shows that include feature stories, special guests, or expert interviews. News magazine shows offer an additional opportunity for in-depth coverage.

Besides the network affiliates, low- or no-cost cable access channels and public television stations are also excellent options. They have a smaller audience, but they are actively seeking programming and will likely be happy to air Adoption Month programming. Consider Spanish-speaking stations as well.

Television is best suited to events that include visual appeal. For example, if you hope to get television coverage of your event on the steps of the capitol building, you should plan to include a symbolic representation of waiting children or a performance by a child or children's group rather than just a series of speakers [see "Conducting Symbolic Campaigns" on page 24].

Radio

Radio is another good way to publicize Adoption Month activities and promote awareness about children who need permanent families. You may be able to schedule a short radio call-in show or interview piece, a longer feature, or a series of feature stories on adoption. Contact a station that conducts interviews and records features—public radio stations or those on the AM dial for instance—then offer several ideas. Suggest that a series of several adoption-related spots can be created from a single taped interview, and name yourself or your organization as a resource. Music radio stations are also a viable option—especially those that specialize their broadcasts to reach particular audiences that match your interest (middle-aged women, families with children, or particular racial and ethnic groups, for example). Many have morning talk shows with loyal listeners. Others are accustomed to promoting particular causes and might be willing to discuss adoption regularly.

Disseminating News

At times, controversial adoption cases—Internet baby selling, birth parents who want children back years later, and deaths of foster and adopted children—seem to be the only stories getting covered. While bad news travels fast, with a strategic approach you can interest reporters in publicizing positive adoption messages as well.

First, make certain your news item is newsworthy. Reporters need a "news peg"—an event, research finding, statistical report, or other timely item to announce—to cover your story as news. If your story lacks a news peg, it is a feature, not news, and will be more effective as a human-interest piece.

Well-written press releases can frame most Adoption Month happenings as news. Events, legislation, speakers, trainings, and statistics can all elicit the interest of editors and reporters. To get your news covered:

- ☞ **Provide advance notice about your topic.** Respect the tight deadlines under which every reporter, writer, and editor works. Editors are typically swamped with information; if they know about a subject well ahead of time, chances are greater that they will study and use it.
- ☞ **Send a press release to the news director or editor.** When composing press releases, lead off with your main points. Use an explanatory heading and answer key questions (who? what? when? where? why?) in the first paragraph. Next, support your point with relevant statistics and verified facts, with sources noted [see "Child Welfare Statistics" on page 65]. In the following paragraphs develop the story by supplying background on waiting children, dispelling myths about adoption, explaining steps in the adoption process, or highlighting successes in addressing the problem [see "Writing a Standard Press Release" on page 16].
- ☞ **Stay clearly focused and keep the materials you send brief.** Generally speaking, press releases are one to two pages long.
- ☞ **Assemble a media packet or press kit.** Make covering your event easy. Supply another copy of the press release at the event along with a folder of additional material. Gather resources to reduce the reporters' research responsibilities. List additional contact people reporters can turn to for expert opinions. If your event includes a

It is better to be making the news than taking it; to be an actor than a critic.

—Winston Churchill

speaker, offer camera-ready photos for publishing in the newspaper or on the Internet.

☞ **Consider hosting a press conference.** If you have breaking news, a press conference can bring together staff from several media outlets for a single presentation. Press conferences also provide visuals and audiotape that give a story added appeal. However, press conferences should not be used unless stories are time-sensitive and truly newsworthy—you waste valuable time and money if nobody shows up.

☞ **Find a unique angle.** When national or international adoption news breaks, large media organizations will cover the story. Other organizations will also be interested, but will desire a new twist on what has already been reported. Be prepared to meet their individual requests. Provide “exclusive” information about a specific child or family in your area to set a local story apart. If the national story is negative, turn it around by demonstrating that agencies, parent groups, or support organizations in your area are effectively addressing the problem.

☞ **Connect the story to larger issues.** Reporters will want to link adoption stories to other social questions. Pat O’Brien, founder and director of You Gotta Believe!, a New York agency that specializes in finding homes for teenagers, connects his message to homelessness. His presentations mention that the Coalition for the Homeless found 60 percent of those in city shelters had spent time in foster care. Poverty, substance abuse, learning disabilities, health care, attachment issues, racism, and alternative family structures are a few societal concerns that intersect with adoption.

Promoting Features

Real adoptive families and personal stories are more interesting than panels of professionals or lists of statistics. Feature stories can stand on their own or illustrate a breaking news item. A personal touch and a greater depth of coverage make feature or human interest stories an excellent way to highlight families during Adoption Month. To get your feature published or on the air:

☞ **Pitch several ideas to your media contact.**

The station or publication may not be interested in your first story—perhaps they feel it has already been covered by their organization or a competitor. A subsequent suggestion—even your third or fourth idea—may be the one that sticks.



Take & Use

News and Feature Story Ideas

Suggest these ideas to reporters and columnists for news articles or feature stories:

- a kick-off event for Adoption Month or a new recruitment campaign;
- the top 10 myths about becoming an adoptive or foster parent;
- the continuum of options available to those volunteering to help waiting children: provide respite care, become foster parents, become therapeutic foster parents, become a foster-adoptive family, or adopt;
- a family who went from having no children to adopting three or more children;
- an adult adoptee who found a family during his or her teen years;
- the affect of adoption on other children in the family;
- a family going through the licensing process;
- an educational seminar or speaker offering support to foster/adoptive families;
- the need for families to work with medically fragile infants—possibly with an interview of a family who works with at-risk infants;
- the profile of a single, therapeutic-level foster mom;
- members of a large adoptive family rearranging their lives and home to adopt many children;
- a successful reunification with birth parents and the family’s ongoing relationship with the foster parents;
- a personal look at a child who will be affected by recent or pending child welfare legislation;
- interviews with generations of families who have been providing care;
- the friendships a group of foster/adoptive parents and their children have developed through their parent support group;
- adoption success stories occurring around Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and high-school graduation day;
- symbolic displays celebrating adoption or visually reminding the public of children who wait (artwork, candles, flowers, balloons, calendars, etc.);
- a profile of a child waiting for adoptive placement; and
- availability of subsidies for adopted children.

Adapted from materials by Brenda Goldsmith, Devereux La Hacienda, and Cheryl Pilon, Aid to Adoption of Special Kids (AASK) of Arizona.

Awareness



Step by Step

Writing a Standard Press Release

[Organization's name]
Address
City, State/Province, Zip/Postal code]

FOR RELEASE: [Date]

CONTACT: [Name, phone number]

Photographs and interviews with families who have or are in the process of adopting waiting children are available upon request.

Calling Out Ceremony Will Draw Attention to Children Who Need Families

During a Calling Out ceremony at [place, time] on [day of the week], November [date], [an adopted child/your group representative, etc.] will read names of some of the children in foster care who need adoptive families and light a candle in honor of every child who is waiting for a permanent home. "These are real children," says [group representative name, title], "who desperately need families of their own. Because the public is so often unaware of these kids and their needs, we would like to draw special attention to waiting children during National Adoption Awareness Month in the hope that we can unite many of these boys and girls with permanent, adoptive parents."

In [state/province], approximately [number] children live in some type of foster care setting. Many have spent most of their lives in this "temporary" situation, and have moved within the child welfare system more times than they care to remember. [A number or percentage] will never return to their birth families. [A number or percentage of those] are legally free for adoption.

These waiting children come from a variety of backgrounds. Some have physical or mental disabilities; some are part of a sibling group; many are of African American or Native American or Latino heritage; and many are older children or adolescents. Advocates from organizations such as [your group name] are working hard to prove that there is no such thing as an unadoptable child.

This Calling Out for Those Who Wait is part of National Adoption Awareness Month, and is just one of many special November events planned throughout the country to focus attention on adoption.

Those who are thinking about adoption should know that, according to [name], adoption has changed significantly over the last 30 years. "You don't have to be married, childless, under 40, rich, or own a house to adopt," [the representative] says. "You do have to provide a stable, loving home, and be able to help your child work through issues raised by his or her past."

[Organization name] provides specific information about waiting children and the adoption process in [state/province]. To learn more, contact [name, address, and/or phone number].

###

Adapted from "Sending Effective Press Releases" by John Hewitt, the Writer's Resource Center, 2001.

Prominently display contact information for your organization as well as the the person who will work with the media.

Set a release date for the information or write "For Immediate Release."

Mention photos at the top of the first page, but only if you have high quality images that add to your story. Never tape or paperclip photos—if damaged they cannot be published.

Include a succinct, enticing title.

The first paragraph includes the most important information—what, when, where, and who.

A quote by a dignitary or organizational representative adds credibility to your release.

Use standard 8 1/2" by 11" paper, an easy-to-read font, and 1 1/2" to 2" margins.

Unless speed is essential, mail your press release rather than faxing it.

Fold your press release so that the headline and date are visible as soon as the editor opens the envelope.

If the release continues onto a second page, include a page number, a two- or three-word description of the story, the contact person's information, and the release date at the top of each page.

Write paragraphs in news style, using short words and sentences.

Never use exclamation points.

Consult either the *AP Stylebook* or the *Chicago Manual of Style* to learn the general guidelines for abbreviating words, writing numbers, and capitalizing names.

Repeat contact information in the text of the final paragraph.

End with three centered number signs.

- ☞ **Tie adoption into other events or stories.** November includes Thanksgiving, so suggest a story about a child and family who are thankful to be together this year. On Veteran's Day, a young veteran of the system who is waiting for a family might be a good fit. On the biggest shopping day of the year, a toy drive for waiting children could capture an editor's attention.
- ☞ **Make adoption the topic of an in-depth reporting segment.** Most news programs include a topical report in their broadcast. These segments are usually human interest items, rather than late-breaking news. Adoption always grabs attention.
- ☞ **Look beyond the traditional ways to highlight adoption.** Don't stop at news and feature reporters. Contact columnists; they are typically receptive to human-interest stories and are constantly looking for ideas. Perhaps the sports reporter can interview an adopted athlete or the meteorologist can mention that participants at an adoption party will have sunny skies [see "Famous Adoptees and Adoptive Parents" on page 79 and "Adoption Parties" on page 57]. Inspire staff writers to print an editorial on adoption by sending a short letter that clearly explains your organization's position and tells why that position was taken.

Conducting Interviews

As with any Adoption Month project, planning and preparation are essential to successful interviews. Whether you meet with media personnel, ask others to share their stories, or anticipate being contacted for information, the more you know about the interview process, the better off you will be.

Prior to the Interview

Interviews are never mandatory—you can choose whether or not to discuss a subject with media personnel as well as control what information you share. If you need time to get ready, ask the reporter to schedule a time to call back later. Prior to talking with a media representative:

- ☞ **Decide whether to grant the interview.** What does the reporter want to talk about? Are you the appropriate person to

answer questions on this topic? Who does the reporter work for? What is the format of the interview—nightly news or feature story? Will the interview be taped? Will you be on camera live? Where will the interview be conducted? How long will it take? Who else is being interviewed for the same story? What is the reporter's deadline? If you agree to talk with a reporter, negotiate the time, duration, and location of the interview. Choose a spot that makes you comfortable and complements your point of view.

- ☞ **Prepare families for being in the spotlight.** Personal interviews can highlight strengths, offer inspiration, and positively influence public perceptions. Still, before families openly discuss their lives, they should consider that children may be teased, co-workers or teachers may react negatively, and strangers may make unwanted phone calls or visits. Families deserve to make an informed decision.
- ☞ **Outline your main points.** If you grant an interview, prepare three to five points that briefly get your message across—preferably in less than 20 seconds. Ask yourself: What is the issue? What is my involvement? Why is it important? What is the historical perspective?

- ☞ **Gather background information.** Find materials—brochures, statistics or historical background—that are helpful to a reporter, particularly if a topic is complex.

- ☞ **Anticipate tough questions.** List the 10 most difficult questions you might be asked in the interview. Think about how you will transition from these questions to reinforcing your the key points.

- ☞ **Rehearse.** Go over the questions until you feel confident. You might even record your answers. Do not, however, plan to read your answers during the interview.

During the Interview

Responding to interview questions is a skill to be honed over time. As you perfect your technique, remember to:

- ☞ **Get your messages across.** Come to an interview with your messages prepared and find opportunities to get them across without ignoring the reporter's questions. Take initiative. You know what is important to the public—so tell them.

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

—Maya Angelou

Awareness

It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.

—James Thurber

- ☞ **Cite facts.** Reporters love facts and figures that lend credibility to their stories. Accuracy is key; don't exaggerate to make things sound bigger or better than they are.
- ☞ **Be friendly.** It's an interview, not an interrogation. Use anecdotes, humor, and examples to illustrate your points. Establish rapport with the reporter.
- ☞ **Be informative.** Interviews exchange information. You are the source of that information; the reporter represents the public. Do not feel obligated to maintain the social rules of conversation. Once you've answered the question, stop. Beware of the reporter whose silence encourages you to ramble. It's human nature to fill those lulls. Instead, ask, "Have I answered your question?" or remain silent.
- ☞ **Be responsive.** Most reporters are not experts in adoption. You may have to begin at the beginning to help them understand an issue. But remember that reporters are looking for quotable quotes—a punchy response that will fill three lines of newsprint or 20 seconds of air time.
- ☞ **Be confident.** You are the expert. Deliver your message.
- ☞ **Say what you mean.** Avoid overly complex language. "It is clear that much additional work will be required before we have a complete understanding of the issue," should instead be, "We're investigating it."
- ☞ **Don't use jargon.** Avoid terms or acronyms that can't be quoted without explanation. Don't say, "Families have a hard time with ADHD and RAD kids so we offer PRIDE training." Do say, "We prepare families to support children with special emotional and behavioral needs."
- ☞ **Remember your role as spokesperson.** When you are conducting an interview, reporters will not distinguish between personal opinion and that of any organization you are affiliated with—and neither will the public. Answer questions appropriately. If you don't know the group's position on a particular issue, find out; don't speculate.
- ☞ **Don't go off the record.** The comment may not be attributed to you directly, but the reporter often will use the information to confirm a story with other sources. If you don't want something to appear in print, don't say it.
- ☞ **Don't say "No comment" or "I can neither confirm nor deny."** The public views this as, "I know but I won't say." Instead, tell the reporter that you are unable to comment and, if possible, why.
- ☞ **Tell the truth.** It may hurt, but lies are deadly. You will probably get caught, and reporters don't forget sources who mislead them. Give a direct answer when asked a direct question, even if the answer is "No," "I don't know," or "I'm sorry, I can't answer that question."
- ☞ **Don't guess.** Don't assume the reporter will check elsewhere. Chances are good that your misinformation will be printed.
- ☞ **Don't lose your temper.** Sometimes reporters are intentionally rude to elicit a charged response. Respond politely, in control at all times. Don't argue—your angry comments may be reported without mention of the provocation.
- ☞ **Don't answer a question with a question.** The reporter asks, "What do you think about adoption parties?" Don't say, "What do you think about them?" Such responses come across as evasive, pejorative, or hostile.
- ☞ **It's okay to make a mistake.** The tape is rolling and you realize you've made a mistake. Or, more likely, you suddenly find you have no idea what you're saying. Stop. Say, "I'm sorry, I haven't answered your question very well. Let me back up." The reporter usually will prefer your new, crisp response.
- ☞ **Don't comment on others' comments.** Essentially, the reporter is asking you to speak for someone else. Don't do it, especially if you did not hear the individual make the statement. It's possible the person was misquoted.
- ☞ **Avoid reading from prepared statements.** This is especially true when you are on camera. You ought to know what you want to say without a script.
- ☞ **Pause before responding to tough questions.** Avoid such platitudes as, "That's a very good question" or "I'm glad you asked that question." The audience recognizes such obvious stalls. A short pause will give the impression that you wish to make a thoughtful response. Besides, dead time is seldom aired on the news, and silences can't be quoted in print.

☞ **Monitor your delivery.** Especially if the interview is being recorded for television or radio, show confidence. Project your voice and be expressive. Smile when appropriate. Hold your head high. Sit or stand up straight; don't slouch, sway, or rock. Keep your hands at your sides (not in your pockets or crossed over your chest); but don't be afraid to gesture. Make eye contact, and always pay attention so as to avoid embarrassment when a camera catches your eyes wandering.

☞ **Never ask to preview the story.** Reporters generally never let sources review stories, though they often check back for details. Remember, their job is to tell the story accurately—to suggest they can't do so without your input insults their professionalism. Instead, listen carefully during an interview to be aware of when a reporter does not understand something. Remember, misquotes are substantially less likely if you speak briefly and clearly.

After the Interview

Once the interview is over, your work is not quite done. Afterward you may still need to deal with:

☞ **Compliments.** When a story is reported well, let the reporter know with a phone call or letter to the editor. But don't overdo it. If you're too complimentary, reporters may worry that their story wasn't balanced enough.

☞ **Disappointment.** You spend hours preparing for your interview, another hour in front of the camera and you are on the evening news for a grand total of six seconds. Or worse, the entire story is preempted by breaking news. Or you may spend half a day with a newspaper reporter and be quoted only once, or not at all. Stories often are shortened or omitted when other news that the editor considers more timely, exciting, or important appears. During November 2000, for example, Adoption Month events unexpectedly had to compete with the ongoing presidential election for coverage. Don't be disappointed—the time you spent helped establish a good working relationship with the media that will

benefit you in the long run. Chances are good that the story will appear later or that the reporter will be back.

☞ **Headlines.** The story was fine, but the headline was terrible. Remember that reporters usually have nothing to do with headlines. Those are typically written by editors on the copy desk, often under great time and space pressures.

☞ **Criticisms.** News outlets will run corrections, but they don't like them. Don't fuss about minor inaccuracies or differences in viewpoint. However, serious errors and misconceptions should be brought to a reporter's attention. You can write a brief letter to the editor or call the reporter to clear up the inaccuracy. Many reporters either will write a correction or do a follow-up piece that clarifies the information. Avoid going over the reporter's head unless the reporter is completely unresponsive. Then, contact the ombudsman, if the medium has one, to look into how and why errors were made.

*Interview suggestions adapted from "Meet the Media"
by the University of California Irvine's
Communications Office, 2000.*



Step by Step

Answering Interview Questions

This four-step formula—illustrated by the example "Are older children finding homes through adoption?"—can help when answering questions.

First Sentence: Make a statement that answers the reporter's question as briefly as possible. "Yes" or "no" often is sufficient. "Yes, they are."

Second Sentence: Support your answer. "Data show that families in our [state/province] adopted [number] children over age [statistic] last year."

Third Sentence: Transition into your message. "We are working to find and prepare more families through increased outreach and training."

Fourth Sentence: State your message. "Our training conference, held in honor of National Adoption Awareness Month, is one way we support and educate those interested in adopting older children."

Government and the Courts

Local, state, provincial, and federal government entities are key audiences to involve in Adoption Month activities. These officials manage budgets, create policies, make rulings, and control the custody of children. Although they are central figures in children's well-being, they may not always be closely connected to those with a personal passion about adoption—the children and families.

Organizing an event where a mayor, governor, premier, legislator, or other elected official participates will not only deepen his or her connection to the adoption community, it will attract media coverage and focus additional attention on adoption issues. Likewise, when a local or state court conducts a special event for adoption—such as several finalizations on one designated day—media will be interested. Below are some ideas about involving government officials and the court system when planning Adoption Month activities.



Life's most urgent question is: what are you doing for others?

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Issuing Proclamations

Initiate a city-, state-, or province-wide recognition of Adoption Month by inviting your mayor, governor, or premier to issue an Adoption Month proclamation. Use the proclamation to list current needs, celebrate recent achievements, and encourage action. When signed by an elected official, proclamations also serve as a news peg to get adoption issues covered in the media [see “Disseminating News” on page 14].

To have an Adoption Month proclamation issued in your area:

- ☞ **Call officials' offices.** See if mayors, commissioners, governors, premiers, and court justices are willing and available to issue a proclamation. When you call, try their communications and special events staff.
- ☞ **Use your personal connections.** Ask an adoption-friendly legislator or a child welfare lobbyist who has government connections to make the initial contact.
- ☞ **Follow your call with a confirmation letter.** Remind the official that adoption activities are part of local and national efforts. If possible, include past proclamations.
- ☞ **Help draft the proclamation.** Provide relevant facts, such as the number of waiting children and finalized adoptions during the past year. If the person signing the proclamation is responsible for positive legislation or practices, list them. Finally, write down specific objectives to be accomplished during Adoption Month and the coming year.

☞ **Arrange a signing ceremony.** Consult with the official's staff about a place to hold the signing. Higher level officials will be accustomed to hosting events and may have funds, catering, space, and staff to stage the ceremony. Contribute by extending invitations to adoptive families, waiting children, community collaborators, and others concerned about children. Build a program of speakers, activities, or entertainment to engage the audience.

☞ **Publicize the signing.** To spotlight the official's commitment to children, arrange (or help the official's staff arrange) publicity for the signing ceremony. Media personnel are typically interested in such events—make sure families are present so that reporters can capture images of the official with a waiting or adopted child.

☞ **Thank the official for his or her response.** After the event, send handwritten thank you letters to everyone who was involved—the official, his or her office staff, and other volunteers. By building these relationships, you are more likely to get help with future campaigns.

Cooperating with Courts

Family and juvenile court judges hold significant power in determining outcomes for foster and adopted children. Plus, most chose their profession because of a deep commitment to children and families. They are excellent allies to involve in Adoption Month planning.

Adoption Saturday

One option for involving the courts is to organize a special day where as many parents as possible finalize their children's adoptions. The Alliance for Children's Rights—a Los Angeles-based organization that provides free legal services to children living in poverty—has spearheaded a movement to host a National Adoption Day, with mass finalizations taking place in major cities across the country on a single Saturday during Adoption Month.

The Alliance's adoption project began three years ago, when Los Angeles parents were facing three- to nine-year delays to adopt their foster children. Working closely with the Children's Court, the Department of Children and Family Services, and law firms, the adoption project successfully ended many unnecessary delays and finalized children's adoptions within a few months.

Working with law firms, foster care departments, judicial officers, advocates, and communities across the country, the Alliance expanded its efforts and organized the first National Adoption Day on November 18, 2000. National Adoption Day was a huge success, with 10 cities completing more than 1,100 adoptions in a single day.

To involve your city in future Adoption Days, you must secure the cooperation of several key players to make the event a success. First, the juvenile court (or in some cases the probate court) must participate. The court staff, security personnel, and judicial officers need to coordinate efforts to complete hearings on a Saturday. In most cases, the staff time—including judges' services—is voluntary. In Los Angeles, Adoption Day entices judicial officers from the appellate and even supreme court to get involved.

Once the court has agreed to participate, the public child welfare department or agency must arrange to finalize its paperwork in time for the lawyers to complete the legal process. If the participating city decides to recruit attorneys willing to donate their time to finalize adoptions, an area bar association or children's rights group can train lawyers and assist them with the paperwork and confirmation hearings. The Alliance developed an effective process for completing all adoption paperwork in a single Saturday, one month before the confirmation hearing.



Take & Use

Adoption Month Proclamation

Every child deserves a loving, nurturing, and permanent family. Sadly, abused and neglected children in the care of **[county, state, or province's child welfare agency]** are waiting for such a home. These children are not the newborns most people picture when they think of adoption. Generally they are older boys and girls and teenagers who have unique medical, emotional, or physical needs.

Adoption gives them a brighter future, brings great joy to the adoptive parents, and places fewer demands on social services.

WHEREAS, approximately **[number]** children in **[county/state/province]** are waiting for an adoptive family;

WHEREAS, nearly all of these children have special needs because of physical, mental, or emotional disabilities, because they must be placed with other siblings, because they are children of color, or because they are school-aged;

WHEREAS, these children need extra patience and support to help them overcome previous hardships;

WHEREAS, in **[year]**, **[number]** children who have special needs were placed into adoptive families in **[state/province]**;

WHEREAS, families are able and willing to adopt children who have special needs;

WHEREAS, it is important to stress that a disability, low income, or being single does not disqualify individuals from adopting; and

WHEREAS, children waiting for adoptive parents and families who have adopted these children require and deserve community and agency support;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, **[mayor/commissioner/justice/governor/premier]** of the **[city/county/state/province]** of **[name of city/county/state/province]**, do hereby proclaim

**November [year] as
Adoption Awareness Month
in [name of city/county/state/province].**

In honor of this event, I encourage community agencies, religious organizations, businesses, and others to celebrate adoption, honor families that grow through adoption, further an awareness of the changes and issues in adoption, and focus attention on those children who live in the shadow of an uncertain future while they await permanent families.

Signed _____

Date _____

Finally, organize publicity for the day. In Los Angeles, Adoption Days are some of the sole opportunities for the court and children and family services to obtain favorable press. The Alliance, with help from foundations, has assisted the participating cities by providing press kits, teddy bears, t-shirts, and banners.

After three successful Adoption Saturdays in Los Angeles and one National Adoption Day, the Alliance has learned that the following items help make the day a success:

- ☞ **Teddy bears**—Set up teddy bears around the courtroom in places where the children can see them. One judge always starts the hearing by asking the child to pick out a special teddy bear, name it, and keep it as a memento. The judge then has all the other children present also pick their own bear.
- ☞ **Balloons**—Inflate balloons the morning of Adoption Day to decorate courtrooms and waiting areas, making the courthouse look festive. Invite children to take a balloon with them after the hearing.

☞ **Food**—Donuts, lollipops, cookies, and candy are always a hit. Volunteer attorneys, judges, and courthouse staff also appreciate bag lunches.

☞ **Disposable cameras**—Law firms or community partners can donate disposable cameras for the families. On a normal court day, families need a permit to have cameras and video recorders in court, but on Adoption Day permits are unnecessary because no other hearings take place.

☞ **Certificates**—Create a certificate of “family membership” that the judge signs and gives to the family. Families love it when judges read and sign the certificate.

☞ **Pictures**—After each hearing, ask the judge to pose for a picture with the family.

If you wish to participate in the 2001 National Adoption Day on November 17 (or a future Adoption Day), contact the Alliance for Children’s Rights at 213-368-6010 for assistance in developing a strategic plan.



In Depth

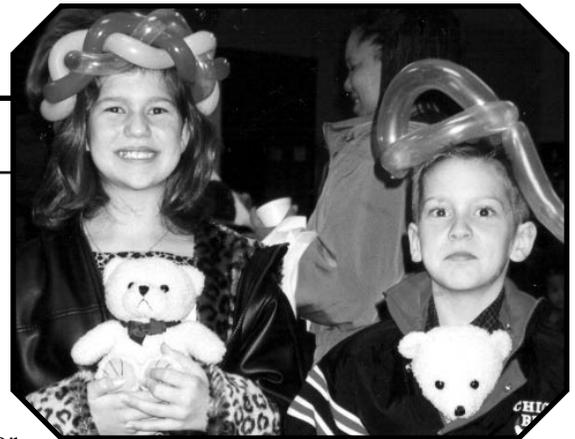
Dallas Joins National Adoption Day

On Saturday, November 18, 2000 the Target: Kids in Court organization participated in National Adoption Day, finalizing 99 adoptions in Dallas, Texas. The event was a collaboration of Kids in Court; Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA); the Dallas branch of Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher, a law firm that had previously participated in adoption-related *pro bono* work in Los Angeles; and the Alliance for Children’s Rights, the Los Angeles-based group spearheading the national project.

According to Evy Ritzen, planning director for Kids in Court, “Usually adoptions are scheduled like any case; there can be an adoption sandwiched between a case of delinquency or anything else. We wanted Adoption Day to be a positive, celebratory experience for all the families and children.”

Lawyers from Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher held a “Paperwork Saturday” several weeks before Adoption Day, for parents to complete necessary forms for adoption finalization. Staff from the firm decorated their offices and had a child-care facility where children were supervised while lawyers gave advice and direction to their parents.

On November 18, more than 100 volunteers decorated the courthouse with balloons, banners, and ribbons; greeted families; handed out disposable cameras; and distributed donated photo frames as a memento of the occasion. Volunteer organizations such as Comfort for Court Kids also donated teddy bears [see newly adopted children with their bears, inset] and the Alliance provided t-shirts to adult and child participants.



While the adoptions were being finalized, a party with cookies, snacks, videos, and coloring tables for children filled the courthouse halls. “It was a great success,” says Ritzen. “We sent out evaluations a few weeks after the event and the families loved it, hands down.”

Presently, Kids in Court and the Alliance are building a pilot program to schedule all adoptions to be finalized on one Saturday during each month. By doing so, says Ritzen, they hope to create a monthly occasion for celebration, then invite all families back in November for a National Adoption Day celebration.

Court Calendars

You can also encourage your court to set aside specific time on a regular basis to finalize adoptions. Dedicating a certain amount of the court's time exclusively to adoptions ensures that a child will not wait while the system catches up on its backlog. A court that dedicates particular time on its calendar to adoption makes a statement that children are a priority and finalization is important. In California, two counties took different approaches to prioritizing finalizations:

- ☞ Ventura County dedicates every Friday afternoon to adoption proceedings. Judge Colleen White spends a half day processing six to eight adoptions each week. She gives each of the children a stuffed animal when the adoption is completed.
- ☞ In Contra Costa County, adoption matters are heard daily before any other matters. At 8:30 a.m., Judge Lois Haight asks if any adoptions are pending. If so, they are always heard first.

Adapted from "Court Adoption and Permanency Month: Technical Assistance Package" by the Judicial Council of California's Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee, and the Center for Families, Children, and the Courts, 2000.

Generous Jurors

You can involve more than just the family and juvenile courts in foster care and adoption. Since 1997, the Howard County Department of Social Services (DSS) in Columbia, Maryland has worked with citizens called for jury duty to raise funds for foster children. The Generous Jurors project asks those selected to hear trials to donate their stipend—10 dollars per half day of service—to foster youth. Over the last four years, Generous Jurors have donated nearly \$50,000. The program works because:

- ☞ All of the funds pay for items foster children need, never administrative costs. Generous Jurors fund haircuts, tickets to athletic events, summer camps, college scholarships, braces, and an annual holiday party with gifts.
- ☞ The program is mentioned on the phone line jurors call when they are selected for duty. At the courthouse, they see a video about the project before they are given their reimbursement money. A simple form allows them to make the donation.

Counties that attempted to replicate the project but asked for the money back after giving it to jurors were less successful.

- ☞ Once established, the project requires little oversight. Showing the video and distributing donation cards become part of the regular process of working with jurors. Each quarter, funds are transferred to an account at DSS. A unit supervisor approves requests for expenditures, which are submitted by children's caseworkers.

Barbara Law of Howard County DSS has a kit of information about the Generous Jurors to help others replicate its success. To obtain a copy, call 410-872-4200, ext. 258.



Take & Use

Calling Out Script

Opening Statement

[Tens of] thousands of children across **[the United States/Canada]** need permanent, loving adoptive families who can provide extra support to help them overcome previous hardships. Here in **[state/province]**, **[number]** children are legally free for adoption. They are waiting; they are in limbo. Many have a physical or mental disability; many have emotional issues and problems because they have been denied a sense of stability and trust. A great number are African American, Native American, and Latino. Many need to be placed in homes with their brothers and sisters. Many are school-aged, and some are teenagers. They share a common bond: the desire to be someone's son or daughter and to be part of a forever family.

We fervently believe there *is* a family for each waiting child. Our task is to make our waiting children more visible and bring them together with parents. These children are calling out—to be loved, to feel wanted, to share their potential and themselves...to be adopted.

These are some of our children who wait:

[Recite names and ages of waiting children. Include a visual reminder of the children in care through the symbolic use of photos, dolls, balloons, ribbons, etc.]

Closing Statement

Each of these children is calling out, asking us to value them as part of a family and part of their community. Collectively and individually, morally and responsibly, we must listen. Let us answer their call—as parents, as public officials charged with their well-being and protection, as citizens speaking out on their behalf. Children grow better in families, and each of us has a vested interest in protecting our most valuable natural resource.

[Conclude with another activity that is appealing to the eyes or ears such as a talent show by children, a performance by a children's choir, a child reading a poem about adoption, etc.]

Influencing Legislators

Adoptees and adoptive families are affected daily by laws about birth certificates, subsidy rates, and program and staffing budgets. Good laws and policies can make post-adoption support services available, help adoptees reunite with birth parents, or reduce workers' case loads. Legislation in other areas—education, affordable housing, mental health services, child care, etc.—also significantly affect adoptive families. Political action can either be reactive, responding to pending legislation, or proactive, focusing legislative attention on children's issues. Since most legislative bodies are not in session during November, Adoption Month is a good time to build relationships with policymakers or collaborate with other like-minded adoption activists to set legislative agendas.

Conducting Symbolic Campaigns

Adoption advocates representing states, provinces, and counties have found unique ways to raise government officials' awareness about adoption and foster care. Their efforts include symbolic representations—dolls,

hearts, balloons, and photographs—to help make their messages real. Symbolic campaigns help organizations generate excitement and find officials who are willing to champion the cause of adoption. After these campaigns, adoption advocates report that foster care and adoption receive more attention and funding than ever before. Some symbolic campaign possibilities are:

☞ **Calling Out Ceremonies.** Stage a calling out ceremony at a visible government headquarters, such as the capitol building steps. Read names of children within the county, state, or province who are waiting for adoptive homes. Other information, such as a child's age and length of time in care, makes the reading more dramatic [see "Calling Out Script" on page 23]. Visually represent each child—for example with a paper doll, balloon, ribbon, or photograph—to demonstrate how many children are waiting and offer visual appeal for the media. Calling out ceremonies often also include a program of speakers and performances by children. Be certain to invite parents, children, and advocates.



In Depth

Ceremony Calls Out Waiting Children

For Adoption Month 2000, District Eight of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) organized a festive, symbolic calling out ceremony in the rotunda of the state's regional service center in Fort Myers.

The ceremony—organized by a committee of recruitment and retention professionals and other adoption advocates—centered on the district's 50 waiting children, whose photographs were featured on individual cards with their names and ages. The cards were passed out to audience members, who were then invited to read the children's names, one by one, at a microphone. A children's bell choir from an area private school participated in the ceremony, ringing bells after each child's name and age.

Crowd members then attached the cards to a visual display that remained in the rotunda [see display, inset].

In addition to a large gathering of onlookers, last year's event drew media staff and local dignitaries. According to DCF's lead adoptions counselor Victoria Punnett, media attention is the major benefit of the ceremony. "They always come, every year," Punnett says. "Most of the newspapers, TV, and radio stations show up. Sometimes they even follow some adoptive families home from the event to do a personal interest story."

District Eight has held a calling out ceremony every year on the first Friday of Adoption Month for several years,



and always includes waiting children, adoptive parents, adoption professionals, and a keynote speaker. The 2000 event featured a television news personality, himself an adoptee, who spoke about the importance of finding families for waiting children. Several parents also spoke about their personal experiences and the rewards of being an adoptive parent.

The event is also valuable for recruitment, says Deborah Web, DCF's communications officer. "A day after the 2000 event, more than 40 phone calls came to our adoption line from interested potential adoptive parents."



Take & Use

Guided Fantasy Exercise

This exercise can enhance the program at various types of Adoption Month events. Facilitators should pause often, allow time for reflection, be prepared for tears, and help participants process their feelings.

Relax, take a deep breath, and turn on your imagination. All of us here have one thing in common: we have a home to go to tonight. Take a moment to think about that home. Think about the rooms; maybe you have a favorite room. Think about the people who live with you—your partner, friends, children, parents. Maybe you have a pet. Imagine yourself at home.

I want you to listen carefully; I am a person in a position of authority. My job is to move people to live in new homes. Tonight I am going to move you to a new home with a new family.

What are you thinking? If you think you'll run away, know that I will find you and bring you back. That is my job.

Grab a trash bag and hold it in your hands now. The move must take place quickly because your present family can no longer meet your needs. You have 30 minutes to pack a garbage bag. What will you put in? You can only take what will fit. The new family doesn't have room for a pet. You can't take your bike. You can't take all of your stuffed animals. You can't say goodbye to the nice lady next door who gave you a cookie last week. You can't ask why.

We are driving to a new neighborhood. It's much nicer—bigger houses, better cars, more fashionable. The family you are going to live with has more money than the one you came from.

What word best describes your feelings? Do you have questions? You're probably wondering, "Why are you taking me?" "How long will I stay?" "When can I see my family?" and "What will the new people be like?" These are good questions, but I don't have answers.

How about your family? How do they feel about your sudden leaving? What questions might they have?

We are at the street where you will live. We drive up to a big house. We knock on the door. What words describe your feelings? The front door opens. This is your new family—new adults and new children are all standing there smiling. They are excited you've come. They've been waiting a long time to be a mommy or daddy.

How many of you adjust right away to your new home? How many are angry or sad? What will you do if you are angry or sad? Remember, if you are thinking you will leave, I will find you and bring you back because this is my job.

How soon would you like to see the family you left behind? How often? You are strong; you have good coping skills. You've managed to adjust to your new environment. Time goes on. However, you cannot see your left-behind family unless I make the arrangements. Because I've got so many people to move, I haven't had time to do that. You have not seen your family since you left. I do finally arrange for you to visit them in my office, under my supervision.

It is two years later. You've seen your family a few times, but the visits have not been regularly scheduled. But you are doing all right.

One day there is a knock on the door. It's me. I have wonderful news. You are never going home, but it doesn't matter. I've found a new family where you can stay forever.

Now you have time to prepare to move. What will you take with you? How does your current family feel about your leaving? Do you want them to help you leave? I bring you to spend several weekends with your new family.

We are driving to your new house. You wonder if your first family still remembers you. Do they live in the same house? You do not ask, because I already told you that this new family is wonderful for you. Now with your new family, what words best describe how you are feeling? Do you want to go? Are you ready to go? Most of all, will you ever be the same again?

Close your eyes and think about how this would change you. Thousands of children experience this each year. For some, there are only a few moves like this. Others move dozens of times before finding a permanent family or leaving the system with no family at all.

Discussion Questions:

1. What one word best describes how you are feeling emotionally or physically?
2. What did you put in your garbage bag for the first move?
3. What did you take with you during the second move?
4. Did you want to see the families you left behind?
5. Will your relationship with your new family be easy to establish?
6. Will you have adjustment problems?
7. Would you talk to anyone about your problems? Would you talk to a counselor?
8. What types of behavior would show your anger, sadness, and fear? Would you be destructive or depressed, suffer from nightmares, or hoard food?
9. How do you think these behaviors affect foster and adoptive parents?

☞ **Foster Dolls.** The Foster Care and Adoption Association of Nevada raised awareness by making legislators honorary foster parents. Each legislator received a second-hand doll with information about a fictional child. Many kept and cared for their neglected dolls throughout the 12-week session. Legislators also received weekly letters from the association about foster care and adoption concerns.

☞ **Valentine Hearts.** Each February, the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board prints colored paper hearts that symbolize different situations for foster children:

- red for children waiting for finalization;
- pink for children waiting for adoption;
- white for children without a goal of adoption; and
- clear for children who have aged out.

Each heart lists the child's age upon entering care, age at which their parents' rights were terminated, current age, and number of days waiting for adoption. Hearts are given to the children's legislators and district juvenile judges to be hung on pipe cleaner trees in their offices. A heart tree also goes to the lieutenant governor and a garland is made for the United States' President.

☞ **Bus Journey.** In Wisconsin's Racine County, officials and community leaders took a "Journey Home." They received a photo and description of a child and imagined that child's journey through foster care as they took a bus tour of the places children in the system frequent. Early in their journey, they used the "Guided Fantasy Exercise" [see page 25] to help them identify with children's moves through foster care. Along the way, participants met an abuse investigator, emergency room doctor, foster parent, and adoptive parent. Child welfare professionals shared statistics, explained the need for foster and adoptive parents, and suggested ways community members could help. At the closing ceremony, participants looked again at the child's profile that they were given and learned that some of the children were adopted, others returned safely home, but many were still waiting in foster care.

The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us.

—Dorothy Day

Voting

On the Tuesday following the first Monday of every November, Americans go to the polls. Supporting candidates who champion children's issues is a natural extension of Adoption Month activities—plus a way to build policymakers' awareness of adoption.

Make your vote count for children and help others do the same. If you oppose or support a particular candidate because of his or her policies on children, send postcards or e-mails to friends telling them about it. Leave voter registration cards behind when you visit places where other child-friendly voters go—churches, schools, or support group meetings.

If you are truly committed to making children's issues a priority in an upcoming election, host politicians in a forum or attend a previously scheduled one. Churches, community agencies, children's health groups, child care providers, schools, and other organizations may be willing to join you. Invite candidates to present their positions and take questions and invite media to witness the event [see "Disseminating News" on page 14]. Competing candidates may be willing to attend together or at separate times. Consider having youth ask some or all of the questions.

Advocating for a Cause

Whether or not you have elected child-friendly candidates to office, your work has just begun. When legislation is pending, weigh in on the subject. When it is not, bring adoption-related causes back to the forefront. At times, policy questions that are not about adoption on their surface nonetheless affect adoptive families. When advocating for your position, you can reach the policymaker in one of only three ways:

☞ Place a Telephone Call

Strategy: If you cannot say what you want to say within three minutes, write a letter.

- Make notes and rehearse what to say.
- Identify yourself.
- Use bill numbers when possible.
- Be prepared to leave a short message.
- Time the call shortly before key votes.
- Ask others to make calls as well.
- Don't insist on a call back.

☞ Write a Letter

Strategy: Reach a decision-maker right before he or she votes on an issue.

- Keep your letter to a single page and subject.
- Use bill numbers when possible.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and include your name and address.
- Personalize—use stories and experiences to support your argument.
- Don't count on petitions, mass-produced cards, or form letters. They have value, but not much.
- Ask for a response, such as "How will you vote and why?" or "What information do you need?"
- Don't expect an immediate response.
- Send your letter by regular mail—fax and e-mail letters are less powerful.

☞ Visit a Policymaker

Strategy: Establish a personal relationship of support and friendliness.

- Schedule a specific time for a visit in your office or theirs.
- Establish rapport first, get their support second.
- Know your facts.
- Bring concisely written information to leave behind.
- Talk with the policymaker; don't grill, pressure, belittle, threaten, or intimidate.
- Thank the policymaker for the job he or she is doing and the time spent with you.

Whichever contact method you select to advocate with policymakers, remember that:

- ☞ You're going to be more productive if you see this as a long-term relationship rather than a one-night stand. You don't have to accomplish everything at once.
- ☞ Communications should be short and simple. Limit yourself to one or two issues per visit, letter, or contact.
- ☞ Policymakers are just plain folks. Like you, they want to have a nice day. Make your contact with them as pleasant as you can. Say or write something nice. Never attack when you disagree. Attacks, especially if they become personal, shut doors and make approaching with the next issue much harder.

- ☞ The policymaker's staff members are critical to your effort. Treat them as important people, and they can unlock doors for you. The policymaker often relies on them for advice and direction.

- ☞ Know policymakers who are important to your issue on a first-name basis; even if they disagree with your position, it makes advocacy easier.

- ☞ Policymakers always respond better to concrete experiences than to abstract concepts. Bringing a family is a more effective way to communicate the cause than bringing a program staff person.

- ☞ Always speak or write positively and confidently about your issue, program, or agency. Never cut other programs down.

- ☞ Policymakers appreciate constituents who serve as resources. They can't know everything about every issue; often they look to people they know and trust for guidance and advice. Make sure targeted policymakers are on your mailing list for newsletters and invitations to special events.

- ☞ Anticipate arguments against your program or policy so you can respond to questions. Read newspapers and journals; know what people are saying about your issue. Know other issues that interest the policymaker then engage him or her in discussions about your common interests.



Quick & Easy

Court and Government Options

- Write a letter to one or two of the elected policymakers who represent you. Share a story about how good (or bad) adoption policies have affected your life. Thank the policymaker for working on adoption issues or encourage them to do so.
- Bring stacks of brochures about your agency or support group to courthouses and leave them in waiting areas or at free literature stands.
- Thank the judge who finalized your child's adoption by sending a card and recent family photograph.
- Surf the Internet looking for children's advocacy sites. Add your e-mail address to an action alert listserv so you can get messages about and respond to pressing legislative issues.
- Volunteer to work on the campaign of a pro-child candidate, help with voter registration, or assist at the polls on election day.

Awareness

- ☞ Straightforward answers are the most effective response to difficult, unexpected, or blunt questions.
- ☞ Five letters can win the day. Most policymakers don't get five personal letters on any issue. Put five letters on their desk from constituents who are concerned with an issue and you can win the argument.
- ☞ Electronic communication is important, but doesn't have the impact of personal contact. Higher-level officials receive so many e-mails and faxes that they "bulk" them, counting up totals for and against.
- ☞ Thank you notes are appropriate after visits or following an accomplishment that helped your cause.

*Adapted from "Putting Some Flesh on the Bones:
Twenty Hot Tips for Success as an Advocate for Any Cause"
by Congregations Concerned for Children
Child Advocacy Network, 2001.*

Mobilizing Others

Once you've become active on an issue by educating yourself, extend your knowledge and enthusiasm to others. When elected officials hear a message from just one person, they can pass it off as an isolated special interest. However, after multiple contacts from individuals, families, and organizations who are all concerned about the same issue, policymakers know their votes on particular issues matter to their constituents.

A "Capitol Day" on which adoptive and foster families join together to visit lawmakers and educate them about child welfare issues can effectively mobilize your group. Other times, you may want to use an action alert—a message that mobilizes individuals by asking for a specific action to be taken on current political issues.

Action alerts have been happening on paper, through telephone trees, and via fax machines for a long time. Today, computer networks make sending them cheaper—an e-mail alert can travel far from its origin by being forwarded from friend to friend and list to list without any additional cost to the original sender. Remember, however, that conducting campaigns only by e-mail leaves out a certain percentage of your constituents.

Gathering E-mail Addresses

E-mail is the building block of online activism; nearly everyone with a computer and a modem can get an e-mail address for little or no money. Surprisingly, many organizations do not collect e-mail addresses from their members, activists, or families. To start:

- ☞ Add a space for "e-mail address" to every membership form, petition, and response card you provide to your members or the public. This should go along with phone number and fax number.
- ☞ Ensure that everyone in your organization makes it part of their routine to ask for this information whenever they make contact with someone interested in the organization (on the phone, at meetings, etc.).
- ☞ If your group publishes a newsletter, include a short article in your next edition saying that your group wants to use e-mail communication in the future, and needs readers' e-mail addresses. Provide an e-mail address to which they can send this information.
- ☞ Add a field to your contact database to accommodate this new information. Again, an e-mail address should be considered at least as important as a phone or fax number.
- ☞ Focus your greatest effort on gathering e-mail addresses from those who are most likely to respond to your electronic communications (the people you can count on to write letters, make phone calls, attend meetings, etc.).
- ☞ Publicize your organization's e-mail address. Include it on your business cards, brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, and other publications. E-mail communication is a two-way street.

*Excerpted from "An Activists' Strategy for Effective
On-line Networking" by ONE/Northwest, 2001.*

*The impersonal
hand of govern-
ment can never
replace the
helping hand of
a neighbor.*

— *Hubert H.
Humphrey*

Sending Action Alerts

Once you have built even a small database, begin contacting people regularly via an e-mail list—often referred to as a listserv—about your issues. When developing action alerts:

- ☞ **Establish authenticity.** Bogus action alerts travel as fast as real ones. Don't give alerts a bad name. Include clear information about the sponsoring organization and provide the reader with several ways of tracing you—e-mail address, postal address, web site, phone number, etc. Including contact information makes sense anyway—you want people to join your movement and establish contact with you.
- ☞ **Date it.** Paper mail and faxes get thrown away quickly, but action alerts travel through the Internet forever. Do not count on the message header to convey the date; people who forward Internet messages frequently strip off the header. Give your recommended action a clearly stated date, for example, "Take this action until November 17, 2001." If you anticipate follow-up actions or if this is part of an ongoing campaign, say so.
- ☞ **Clearly mark the beginning and end.** You can't prevent people from modifying your alert as they pass it along. Fortunately this typically only happens accidentally, as extra commentary accumulates at the top and bottom of the forwarded message. Put a bold row of dashes or something similar at the top and bottom so extra material will look extra—be clear what you and your credibility are standing behind.
- ☞ **Ask your reader to take a simple, clearly defined, rationally chosen action.** For example, you might ask people to call their representatives and express a certain view on an issue. In your message, list or provide a way to find that representative's name and number. Explain how to conduct the conversation: what to say and how to answer likely questions. Your purpose is not to impose your thinking but to help others accomplish a task that might otherwise be intimidating. Decide whether to ask for e-mail messages (which can be huge in number but small in effect), written letters (which will be fewer but more effective), or phone calls (which fall in between).

- ☞ **Make it easy to understand.** Begin with a good, clear headline that summarizes the issue and the recommended action. Use plain language, not jargon. Check your spelling. Use short sentences and simple grammar. Solicit comments on a draft before sending it out.
- ☞ **Get your facts straight.** Your message will circle the earth, so double-check. Errors can be disastrous. Even a small mistake makes it easy for opponents to dismiss your alerts—and Internet alerts in general—as rumors. Once you discover a mistake, issuing a correction is impossible; the correction will not get forwarded everywhere that the original message did.



Resources

Legislative Advocacy Web Sites

canada.gc.ca

Link to Canadian government sites, including government officials, departments and agencies, and services for children.

pm.gc.ca

Review news headlines and key initiatives then contact the Prime Minister.

www.parl.gc.ca

Track legislation and contact policymakers via the jointly maintained site of the Senate, House of Commons, and Library of Parliament.

www.whitehouse.gov

Contact the President, Vice President, or other staff.

www.house.gov and
www.senate.gov

Learn about current legislation and contact Congressional representatives.

thomas.loc.gov

Read text of past and current legislation and view records from committee hearings.

www.fec.gov

Obtain forms to become a registered voter from the Federal Elections Commission.

www.dnet.org

Enter your zip code into the League of Women Voters' Democracy Net to find out which candidates and issues will appear on your ballot.

www.cdfactioncouncil.org

See each Congressperson's voting record on children's issues by visiting the Children's Defense Fund.

www.cwla.org

Review action alerts on children's issues from the Child Welfare League of America.

Awareness

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.

— Dr. Seuss

- ☞ **Start a movement, not a panic.** Do not say, “Forward this to everyone you know,” or “Please Act NOW!!!” You’re not trying to address everyone, you’re trying to target a group of people who are inclined to care about the issue. If the issue really is time-critical, then explain why, in sober language. Do not get obsessed with the immediate situation. Your message may help avoid some short-term calamity, but it should also contribute to a long-term process of building a social movement. Maintaining a sense of that larger context will help you and your readers from becoming dispirited in the event that you lose the immediate battle.
- ☞ **Tell the whole story succinctly.** Most people have never heard of your issue and need facts to evaluate it. If your opponents have circulated their arguments, you’ll need to rebut them, and if they have framed the facts in a misleading way, then you’ll need to explain what’s misleading and why. On the other hand, you need to write concisely. Even if you are focused on the actions, good explanations count. After all, one benefit of your action alert—maybe the principal benefit—is that it informs people about the issue. Even if they don’t act today, your readers will be more aware in the future.
- ☞ **Make it easy to read.** Use a simple, clear layout with lots of white space. Break up long paragraphs. Use bullets and headings to avoid visual monotony. If your organization plans to send out action alerts regularly, use a distinctive style so that everyone can recognize your “brand name” instantly.
- ☞ **Never use a chain-letter petition.** A chain-letter petition is an action alert that includes a list of names at the end; it invites people to add their own name to the list, send in the petition if their

name is number 30 or 60, and in any case forward the resulting alert-plus-signature list to everyone they know. This idea sounds great in the abstract, but doesn’t really work. Most of the signatures will never reach their destination, since the chain will fizzle out before reaching the next multiple of 30 in length. What’s worse, a small proportion of the signatures will be received in the legislator’s office over and over, thus annoying the staff and persuading them that they’re dealing with an incompetent movement that can never hold them accountable.

- ☞ **Urge people to inform you of their actions.** If you are calling on people to telephone a legislator’s office, for example, you should provide your e-mail address and invite them to send you a brief message, too. Explain that you’ll count the number of calls your alert has generated, and that this information will be invaluable when you speak with the legislator’s staff members later on. Only do this, though, if your mail server is capable of handling a large volume of messages in a short period. Check this out with your service provider in advance.
- ☞ **Don’t overdo it.** Action alerts might become as unwelcome as direct-mail advertising. Postpone that day by picking your fights and including some useful, thought-provoking information in your message. If you must send out multiple alerts on the same issue, make sure each one is easily distinguishable from the others and provides fresh, useful information. Above all, don’t send unsolicited messages to massive lists of strangers (spam). Send your message only where it belongs.

Adapted from “Designing Effective Action Alerts for the Internet” by Phil Agre, Department of Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 1994-1998. The full article is available online at dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/alerts.html.



Businesses

If you increase their awareness about adoption, business owners and managers in your community may help you to secure financial sponsorship for Adoption Month activities, become ongoing partners in the quest to find adoptive homes for waiting children, or provide better support to the adoptive parents who work for them.



Contributions and Donations

Almost every business has something to contribute to adoption. They can donate materials or services, share specialized knowledge or abilities, or spread adoption messages to their employees and customers. Adoption Month is a great motivation to begin involving businesses and form partnerships that can last all year long.

Businesses to Target

As you think about which businesses to approach first, begin with those you know best. Organizations where adoptive families, their friends, and their relatives work are good starting points. Some banks and companies are willing to finance Adoption

Month projects, but getting businesses to donate supplies or services or distribute materials is almost always easier. Therefore, target organizations that have:

☞ **Goods and services families need.** Try housing organizations, car dealerships, hardware and household goods vendors, toy or art supply stores, clothing retailers, child care providers, and entertainment venues such as sports teams or amusement parks.

☞ **An engaged audience at their disposal.** Think about major corporations with a large number of employees; movie theaters; organizations that hold festivals, fairs, and community events; places with a large amount of foot traffic or frequent mailings; and restaurants or coffee shops.



In Depth

Club Donates Gala Event Proceeds

On November 4, 2000 Sierra Adoption Services was the beneficiary when the Active 20–30 Club of Greater Sacramento—a group of volunteers united around a mission of charitable giving—held its 20th Annual Monte Carlo Night masquerade ball. The event, which took place in a library gallery, featured music, dancing, gambling, and a silent auction [see attendees in costume, inset]. Two news anchors hosted the event and promoted Sierra's work.

According to Dave Phinney, fund development officer at Sierra, the 20–30 Club took an interest in adoption because he was able to make the issue personal and specific to the Sacramento area. Knowing that the

club tended to support children's organizations, during a presentation to its leaders Phinney outlined the history of two local girls. Phinney discussed how the girls moved through the child welfare system and needed adoptive families, touching on the issues that Sierra regularly deals with.

"When you talk about the number of children available for adoption across the country everyone's eyes tend to glaze over," Phinney said of his presentation strategy. "But when you bring it home and talk about children in the area where these people live, they are able to see how they can help and where the funding will be going."



Through Phinney's presentation, Sierra made a key connection with club members and was selected as the beneficiary of Monte Carlo night, one of the group's semi-annual fundraisers.

According to Phinney, the night was an overwhelming success. The mayor and several other community leaders attended, along with media personnel. Sierra received more funding than requested, and the 20–30 Club asked Phinney to submit an application for Sierra to be beneficiary of a future fundraising event. As a result of connections made at the event, some members also made individual donations to Sierra.

Awareness

- ☞ **Expertise to share.** Approach marketers, advertisers, and graphic artists; journalists and film makers; law firms; mental health organizations; college students and professors; and health care groups.

How to Make Your Approach

Shirley Tabb, director of public relations for the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services, has found enormous success in applying the marketing skills she learned selling cars to obtaining businesses' financial support for adoption. She explains, "Everyone is willing to help children. The challenge lies in communicating your needs to the community." To replicate her success:

- ☞ **Identify key decision-makers in organizations with resources you need, then contact them.** Be specific. Tell them what their help will mean for a child, not for you or your organization.
- ☞ **Solicit support in person to get your foot in the door.** Drop by a prospect's business or ask someone who knows the decision-maker

personally to get you an appointment. Or, invite prominent business and civic leaders to an agency open house. Putting off a request is harder in person.

- ☞ **Letters are easily forgotten or discarded among other solicitations and junk mail, so make yours stand out.** Package it so the recipient will be compelled to open it. Put a cuddly teddy bear in a big basket with photos of children. Include your letter, cover it with clear cellophane paper, and hand deliver it to the prospective sponsor. Be creative. The packaging should visually communicate your message—home, family, kids, and hearts themes can pay off. Address your package to the decision-maker and follow up with a phone call.
- ☞ **Always follow up to relate how successful the sponsored activity was.** People like to hear they made a difference.



In Depth

Businesses Sponsor Run for Adoption

To raise awareness about, gather support for, and financially benefit children in the state foster care system, the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) will host its third annual Run for Adoption in November, 2001. Last year, the Intel Corporation—in cooperation with other businesses including the *Albuquerque Journal*, Simmons Radio Group, and KWBZ-Warner Brothers—sponsored the event.

The day consisted of a 15K run, 5K run/walk, and 1K children's event that together enticed more than 300 participants [see runners, inset]. Runners wore t-shirts that featured the sponsors names as well as names of New Mexico children available for adoption. In the first year of the event, each run-

ner also wore a button with the photograph of a waiting child.

Proceeds generated by the event support foster parents and children, but according to Elie Ortiz, marketing manager for New Mexico CYFD, the real benefit of the run is the awareness it generates. "Every major network covered the run," says Ortiz, "*The Albuquerque Journal*—the largest newspaper in New Mexico—ran several ads and stories about the run and adoption, and a radio station did free promotion for the event. There is no way to gauge how much effect the actual event has in itself, but what is important is the number of people reached and the number of times a person receives a message about adoption."



To find a sponsor for the event, Ortiz sent a mailing with information about waiting children and levels of sponsorship to several large businesses in New Mexico. For their contributions, companies were featured in various promotional materials for the run, and Intel, the largest sponsor, had its name associated with the run in all advertisements and listings.

"It's a great thing for these companies," Ortiz notes. "They are eager to be connected with such a great cause."

☞ **Express appreciation to all your supporters.** Send all of your community friends your newsletters and print their names, phone numbers, and short descriptions of their businesses in each publication. Host an annual luncheon or reception where they are honored—it does not need to be a lavish affair. Just get people together so you can publicly recognize their efforts and solidify their commitment. This is also an opportunity to invite others from the community to visit your organization, see how well you treat community partners, and hear how they can join in.

Partnerships

Some organizations will only be able to make a one-time commitment to helping with your adoption causes—and sometimes that is all you want from them. Other organizations may be interested in becoming ongoing sponsors. Maintaining a partnership requires hard work—consistent communication and a clear purpose are central to success.

Maintaining Relationships

Developing a partnership is not easy—though sometimes the challenges aren't obvious immediately. To ensure a healthy collaboration, use relationship-building strategies from the beginning and continue to employ them as the partnership grows:

- ☞ **Form a task force or advisory board.** Once a corporate partner has been secured, individuals who represent every party involved with the collaboration should convene and commit to regular meetings for the partnership's duration. They should be able to motivate others in their organizations and have decision-making power so as to minimize delays.
- ☞ **Develop shared goals and objectives.** Synergy begins when all players hold the same vision of what they can accomplish together. Synergy is defined as working together to produce an effect greater than the sum of individual efforts. A shared vision is a powerful tool that will take you past differences to a solution-focused partnership. Whenever possible, your agreed-upon mission and plans should be put in writing.



Take & Use

Letter to Solicit Businesses' Support

[Date]

Your name
 Your organization's name
 Address
 City, state/province zip/postal code

Contact name
 Title
 Corporation or business name
 Address
 City, state/province zip/postal code]

Dear [Mr./Ms. contact name]:

Michael turned 13 this fall. He and his sisters, Rosalyn and Alisha, have been waiting for a family to adopt them for more than a year. Each day in foster care they wonder if and when they will find a permanent mom or dad. Nationally, [United States/Canadian figure] of these children will never return home, yet many wait years for the security of an adoptive family. This year [organization/group name] is making a special effort to see that children like Michael find permanent homes. We need your help.

During November—National Adoption Awareness Month—we are sponsoring [name or description of event] to increase awareness about adoption and recruit families to adopt children who need homes. To go forward, we need [donatable items such as paper or art supplies, brochure/poster design, printing or mailing services]. By donating these items, you can play an important role in building a new family and changing a child's life. All donations are tax deductible.*

[Your group name] is a nonprofit group composed of adoptive, foster-adoptive, and foster families, adopted persons, birth parents, adoption professionals, and other adoption advocates. We provide support to the adoption community, offer adoption education and advocacy services to the public, and [personalize description of your services or mission].

Thank you for taking time to review the enclosed information. [Name] will contact you within a week to discuss the project in more detail. If you have any questions in the meantime, please call [name] at [phone number].

Sincerely,

[Name
 Title]

Enclosures

*Note: Businesses can only deduct contributions made to registered nonprofit organizations.

Awareness

When love and skill work together, expect a masterpiece.

—John Ruskin

- ☞ **Remember that partners' reputations rise and fall together.** In collaboration, you share the consequences of each other's successes and blunders. Choose your partners carefully, and continually consider the impact of your actions on your partners' individual and institutional reputation. Celebrate together when things go well. Practice forgiveness if mistakes happen, and learn from them. Document what you have learned so you don't have to relearn it.
- ☞ **Develop an image for the partnership.** The partnership should take on a life of its own. The group should create a name, logo, and stationery that includes all the parties involved and reflects the partnership's mission.
- ☞ **Recognize sponsors.** Highlight corporate sponsors in literature and media coverage connected with your partnership. In addition, give a thank you gift that reflects the work of the partnership. Even more than the additional publicity, sponsors appreciate seeing the results of their work.

Adapted from materials by Gail Johnson, executive director of Sierra Adoption Services and Carolyn Smith, executive director of Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange.

Recognizing that the corporate partnership also must benefit from the collaboration is essential, according to Maureen Heffernan, executive director of Family Builders Adoption Network. Her organization receives financial support from Children's Orchard, a national chain of children's clothing stores. Heffernan's advice to others considering a corporate sponsor: "Realize it is a two-way partnership. For it to be successful, you must be as responsive to their needs as you expect them to be to yours." Tracking reportable outcomes—proof that the donation matters—helps keep sponsors satisfied.

Deciding What to Ask For

Once an organization or parent support group forms a relationship with a business, the possibilities for contribution are plentiful. Companies may be willing to:

- ☞ Give money to your organization or fund a special project.

- ☞ Print articles to promote Adoption Month or publish profiles of adoptive families or waiting children in their employee newsletters.
- ☞ Place adoption flyers in employee paycheck envelopes.
- ☞ Sponsor an day during which proceeds are donated to support adoption.
- ☞ Hold an adoption information fair for employees [see "Information Booths" on page 42].
- ☞ Give discounts or free items to adoptive families on a particular day, during November, or all year long.
- ☞ Sponsor an adoption party by donating space, food, materials, or prizes [see "Adoption Parties" on page 57].
- ☞ Give directly to children via scholarship funds, donated goods, or celebratory parties.
- ☞ Use their connections to involve other businesses, obtain media coverage, or lobby politicians.
- ☞ Sponsor a family interested in adopting by donating a minivan, materials to improve their home, or subsidized child or health care.
- ☞ Sponsor a child waiting to be adopted by donating transportation costs for visits; haircuts, clothes, or professional photography for pictures in waiting child books; or fees for music lessons, scouting, and summer camps.
- ☞ Provide specialized services such as web development, graphic design, and program evaluation, either through their own staff or by paying their contractors to help.
- ☞ Post displays or flyers encouraging their employees and customers to adopt or donate money to adoption [see "Displays" on page 39].
- ☞ Include your adoption message whenever they advertise their own messages [see "Advertising" on page 41].
- ☞ Volunteer employees' time to an adoption service project such as hanging posters and flyers in the community, organizing and providing entertainment at a party for waiting or adopted children, collecting suitcases or gifts for foster children, or setting up an academic or career mentoring program for older children.

Adoption Benefits

Almost any business can contribute to adoption by supporting employees who choose to adopt. Adoption and the Workplace—a project of the National Adoption Center, supported by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption—educates employers about supporting adoption. Many companies offer adoption benefits such as information and referral services, adoption-related expense reimbursements, and paid or unpaid leave. If your workplace does not already support adoptive families, the following information can help you pitch the idea to your employer.

Employers who support adoption benefit by:

- ☞ providing equity for all employees, whether they build families through adoption or birth;
- ☞ recognizing that stable families create responsible, productive employees;
- ☞ becoming an industry leader in a pace-setting, family-focused effort; and
- ☞ generating good will among employees and throughout the community.

Employees whose employers offer support benefit by:

- ☞ receiving financial assistance that can make the difference in their ability to adopt;

- ☞ knowing that their employer is supportive of them and their families; and
- ☞ obtaining time off to be with their children before and after an adoption.

The community benefits when:

- ☞ employers take the lead in supporting adoption;
- ☞ employers are committed to family issues; and
- ☞ families adopt waiting children.

Employers who are concerned about costs will be happy to learn that providing adoption benefits is not expensive. On average, less than half of one percent of employees will use the benefits during a year. It costs little to provide this family-friendly benefit.

The National Adoption Center sells both the *Employer's Guide to Adoption Benefits* and an employee's guide titled *Advocating for Adoption Benefits*. To learn more about adoption benefits, or have an information package sent to your employer, contact: Mady Prowler, Adoption Benefits Coordinator, National Adoption Center, 1500 Walnut Street, Suite 701, Philadelphia, PA 19102; 800-862-3678 or 215-735-9988; www.adopt.org.

*Adapted from "Adoption and the Workplace"
by the National Adoption Center.*



Quick & Easy

Involving Businesses

- Bring a dozen buttons with an adoption-related message to a hardware store or pizzeria. Ask the owner to let employees wear the buttons on their uniforms during Adoption Month.
- If your family has a special place (restaurant, bakery, hotel, or entertainment venue) that is a part of your adoption celebrations, write to that business and send a family photo, thanking them for their role in your lives. Businesses often post letters where others will see them.
- Ask an arts and crafts store to host an adoption art contest or to offer scrapbook items for use in lifebooks at a reduced cost.
- Approach a photocopy shop about reproducing your newsletter or an adoption information flyer (and perhaps helping with the graphic design) at reduced rates.
- Talk with the owners of a neighborhood family fun spot (bowling alley, movie theater, skating rink, etc.) about reducing or waiving admission for foster and adoptive families on a particular day in November.

Awareness



Take & Use

Model Adoption Benefits Policy

Policy

To offer assistance to all employees who are building families, **[name of company]** has developed a policy to provide eligible employees with adoption benefits, including financial reimbursement, adoption leave of absences, and resource and referral services.

Eligibility

Effective **[date]**, all full-time and part-time employees are eligible for adoption benefits immediately upon hire. If an employee and his or her spouse or partner both work at **[name of company]**, only one employee can use the benefit.

To be considered for this benefit adopted children must be under 18. They may be biologically related to either parent, which is known as a kinship adoption. **[You will need to determine a policy on stepchild adoptions.]**

Financial Reimbursement

Eligible adoption-related expenses will be reimbursed to a maximum of **[range is \$2,000 to \$10,000]** per child. Most expenses related to the adoption are reimbursable. These include:

- Agency and placement fees
- Legal, court, and immigration costs
- Birth mother's medical expenses
- Immunization and translation fees
- Temporary foster care costs
- Transportation and lodging
- Child's medical expenses not covered by insurance

Procedure for Reimbursement

Upon placement of the adopted child, employees should obtain an Adoption Assistance Claim Form from the Human Resources department. Itemized receipts for expenses are required for documentation.

Taxation of Benefits

Reimbursements from employers for adoption expenses may be excluded from an employee's federal taxable income. If the employee's modified adjusted gross household income is \$190,000 or less, he or she is eligible for an income tax exclusion of up to \$10,000 for qualifying expenses (beginning in tax year 2002). These expenses include reasonable and necessary adoption fees, court costs, attorney fees, and other related expenses. Beginning in 2003, special needs adopters will not be required to document their expenses in order to claim the tax exclusion. Those with a modified adjusted gross household income of more than \$190,000 are ineligible for the tax exclusion. An employee can consult the IRS at 1-800-TAX-FORM or his or her tax preparer for more information on individual tax returns.

Adoption Leave of Absence

An employee who is the primary caregiver is eligible for up to **[number of weeks]** of **[paid or unpaid]** leave. This time may be used both before and after adoption and will be applied to leave allowed under the Family Medical Leave Act **[refer to Family Medical Leave policy]**. During Family Medical Leave, employees will continue to receive regular benefits that are related to date of hire.

Employees are requested to provide their manager with as much advance information on their need for time off as possible. This will prevent unplanned interruptions in work while allowing employees to take necessary leave.

Adoption Resource and Referral Services

All employees are eligible to use the **[employee assistance vendor or resource and referral service]** for adoption information. Consultants with adoption expertise will be available to provide specific adoption information and materials, community resources, and referrals to adoption agencies.

Coordination with Other Benefits

Upon placement, you may add your child to your medical and group life insurance policies. In addition, qualified employees may enroll in the Dependent Care Assistance Plan. Any additions to your benefits plan must occur within 30 days of placement. You will need completed change forms and a copy of the adoption agreement in order to enroll.

Adapted from "Employer's Guide to Adoption Benefits" by the National Adoption Center.



LEADERSHIP AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

THE ROLE OF STATE LEGISLATORS

NATIONAL
CONFERENCE
of
STATE
LEGISLATURES

October 2008

Many of our key initiatives as a nation have involved confronting challenges that put children at risk. The abolition of child labor, the guarantee of education for children with special needs, and the establishment of the juvenile justice system, for example, were a national recognition that to protect children is to invest in the future. Today, one of the areas of greatest challenge is strengthening and stabilizing services to a population that may be at more risk than any other: children served by state child welfare systems.

State legislators have critical roles to play in supporting greater stability for child welfare agency leadership and determining the policy priorities for state child welfare systems. Legislators support stable leadership when they engage with agency leaders in child welfare system reform efforts, foster a collaborative environment for moving toward reform and hold leaders accountable for achieving system reform goals. They set policy priorities by crafting legislative initiatives, providing oversight and making funding decisions through the budget process. Legislators also are an important channel through which child welfare agency administrators hear from constituents about their priorities, concerns and areas of satisfaction regarding the child welfare system. Legislative involvement in child welfare is as important now as ever, given the costs that states incur when children are not well served.

This report discusses those costs, the importance of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) as a tool for legislators in assessing child welfare system performance, and the role of legislator-agency collaboration in bringing about system improvement through the CFSR process.

Facing the Costs of Abuse and Neglect

Though legislators are responsible for setting the vision and policy agenda across state government, there is perhaps no area in which legislative engagement and oversight are more critical than in child welfare. State child welfare systems are a relatively small part of state governments, but their importance is disproportionate to their size because of the lasting human toll of child abuse and neglect. A 2008 summary of the most current research on the effects of abuse and neglect, prepared by the Child Welfare Information Gateway,¹ makes those clear:

- Abused and neglected children are at least 25 percent more likely to experience problems such as delinquency, teen pregnancy, low academic achievement, drug use and mental health problems.²
- According to a National Institute of Justice study, abused and neglected children were 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behavior as a juvenile, 2.7 times more likely to be arrested for violent and criminal behavior as an adult and 3.1 times more likely to be arrested for one of many forms of violent crime (juvenile or adult).³
- Abused and neglected children are more likely to smoke cigarettes, abuse alcohol or take illicit drugs during their lifetimes.⁴ According to a report from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, as many as two-thirds of people in drug treatment programs reported being abused as children.⁵

Child and Family Services Reviews at a Glance

- Congressionally authorized review of state child welfare systems.
- The first round of on-site reviews was conducted from 2000 to 2004, and the second round runs from 2007–2010; administered by the Central and Regional Offices of the Children’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- States conduct their own Statewide Assessment with support from the federal government and submit it to the Children’s Bureau 60 days before the on-site review.
- Federal and state teams conduct an on-site review of three sites in the state. The teams examine outcomes for a sample of children and families served by the state child welfare agency, including interviewing both children and families engaged in services, and community stakeholders such as court personnel, community agencies, foster families and caseworkers.
- States prepare a Program Improvement Plan to develop or enhance policies, training and practice identified as needing improvement.
- Federal funds are withheld if a state does not successfully complete its Program Improvement Plan.

Child Welfare Outcomes Assessed by the Reviews

- Safety: Children are protected from abuse and neglect and are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- Permanency: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations and continuity in their family relationships and connections.
- Child and family well-being: Families are better able to provide for their children’s needs, and children are provided services that meet their educational, physical health and mental health needs.

How Performance Is Assessed Through the Reviews

- Statewide safety and permanency data indicators are compared with national standards.
- Qualitative information on state performance is collected through reviews of actual case records and interviews with children, families and others in regard to safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.
- State performance is evaluated with regard to how well critical components of the child welfare system function (“systemic factors,” such as the agency’s responsiveness to the community and the training of child welfare staff).
- More information about the reviews is available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm#cfsr.

- Children placed outside their homes because of abuse and neglect have lower cognitive capacity, language development and academic achievement.⁶
- Children who experience rejection or neglect are more likely to develop antisocial traits as they grow up; borderline personality disorders and violent behavior are both associated with having been neglected as a child.⁷
- Children who are abused are more likely to become abusive parents themselves; it is estimated that approximately one-third of abused and neglected children will eventually victimize their own children.⁸

Clearly, abuse and neglect have permanent and damaging effects on children's well-being and prospects for success. But beyond limiting children's chances in life, shortcomings in state child welfare systems have broader economic consequences for state governments, including increased governmental outlays, legal jeopardy and financial penalties.

Governmental Expenditures

The effects of child abuse and neglect noted above result in enormous direct and indirect costs to society. Direct costs include the cost of the child welfare system itself and increased expenditures by the judicial, law enforcement, health and mental health systems.⁹ A 2001 report by Prevent Child Abuse America estimates these costs at \$24 billion per year nationally.¹⁰

Indirect costs, the longer term economic consequences of child abuse and neglect, include those associated with juvenile and adult criminal activity, mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence; loss of productivity due to unemployment and underemployment; the cost of special education services; and increased use of the health care system.¹¹ Prevent Child Abuse America estimated these costs in 2001 at more than \$69 billion per year.¹²

Class Action Lawsuits

A Child Welfare League of America study published in October 2005 identified child welfare class action lawsuits filed in 32 states between 1995 and 2005.¹³ In 30 of the 32 states, child welfare agencies agreed to settle the lawsuits by agreeing to specific terms approved by the courts. At the time the report was published, there were active settlement agreements (or consent decrees) in 21 states; agreements had ended in 11 states.

Once having entered into a settlement agreement, the state is bound by the terms of that agreement for as long as the court deems necessary. The length of time that states are actively engaged in consent decrees depends on the state's response to the reforms required in the agreement.

Not only are these lawsuits expensive and time-consuming, but they take the control of the child welfare system out of the hands of the state child welfare agency and legislature and tie systemic change and reform to court-approved benchmarks. This approach to reform may limit broader reform efforts or systemic reforms deemed necessary by the state.

Financial Penalties

The CFRs are federal reviews of state child welfare systems. These reviews are designed to be a collaborative effort between state and federal governments to assess the quality of services and supports provided to children and families through state

Other Penalties

Child welfare penalties are designed to ensure conformance with federal law for the portion of state child welfare systems funded with federal resources. Other possible child welfare financial penalties include those related to the following:

- IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews (for more information, see http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/im/2001/im0111a1_2007.pdf)
- Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 and Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996 (for more information, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/mepa94/mepachp2.htm>)
- Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) (for more information, see http://www.acf.hhs.gov/j2ee/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/updates_delete.jsp)

child welfare systems. The reviews identify strengths and areas needing improvement in state programs and systems, focusing on outcomes for children and families in the areas of safety, permanency and child and family well-being. Following a review, states develop and implement Program Improvement Plans (PIPs), as needed. The Children's Bureau; Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF); Administration for Children and Families (ACF); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), administers the reviews.¹⁴

Federal funds are withheld based on the number of CFSR outcomes and systemic factors for which a state does not achieve substantial conformity (see the box "Child and Family Services Reviews at a Glance"). These penalties are suspended while a state is implementing the PIP to address the systemic and practice issues associated with not meeting substantial conformity. However, if the Children's Bureau determines that a state failed to submit status reports, or that a State is not making satisfactory progress toward achieving the PIP goals and action steps in a timely manner, then the suspension of penalties ceases and withholding of funds begins (45 Code of Federal Regulations §§1355.36[e][2][i] and [ii]).¹⁵ When a state completes all requirements of the PIP related to an outcome or systemic factor, associated penalties are rescinded.

The first round of CFSRs was completed in 2004, and all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico were required to enter into PIPs. (The second round of reviews is taking place from 2007 through 2010.) To date, the CB has determined that certain states did not successfully complete their round-1 PIPs. As a result, federal funds have been repaid to the federal government by these states in connection with the CFSR process. All 32 States reviewed so far in round 2 of the CFSRs have been assessed penalties for not achieving substantial conformity with national standards; those penalties are on hold while states develop and implement PIPs to address areas of nonconformity.

Assessing Movement Toward Reform Through the CFSRs

Because of these human and financial costs, many legislators view child welfare reform as an urgent human and fiscal priority. The return on investments in the child welfare system (including investments of time, attention and resources) is measured in both a reduction in the costs noted above and, conversely, an increase in positive contributions by healthy citizens (employment, payment of taxes, civic engagement and others).

To bring about systemic reform, state agencies need the involvement and leadership of State legislators. Many legislators are seeking objective assessments of the performance of their state child welfare systems so that they can provide proper oversight. They are working with child welfare agencies to establish long-term, systemwide goals that provide the institutional stability that child welfare systems need to weather the short-term crises that otherwise might lead to ill-advised stop-gap measures. And they are determining how best to allocate scarce resources to have the greatest effect on child outcomes.

In working with state child welfare agencies to bring about reform, legislators can help ensure accountability for results, consistency of focus and the resources needed to fund reform initiatives. To carry out that leadership role, it is critical that they have the best information available. Rather than relying only on media reports, anecdotal evidence or input from constituents, many legislators are aware of the range of resources available for understanding overall child welfare system performance. Some tools—such as state audits, reports from appointed child welfare ombudspersons and investigations by legislative task forces—cannot always provide a holistic view of child welfare systems. For that reason, the CFSRs are a particularly important resource because they offer a broad overview of how state child welfare systems are functioning. Equally important, the CFSRs are conducted in partnership with the state child welfare agency and other key state stakeholders.

The CFSRs are designed to offer an objective assessment of state systems, providing information on the key areas on which states need to focus to improve services to children and families. Several characteristics of the reviews make them important resources for legislators in overseeing child welfare policy and practice:

- **National benchmarks:** The reviews offer a set of national standards against which agency performance is assessed.
- **A framework for reform:** The state is required to develop a PIP to improve conditions for children and families served by its child welfare system. The state must address in its PIP the outcomes, systemic factors, and national standards found to be in nonconformity during the on-site review.
- **Information on the state's progress in improving conditions for children and families:** The state is required to measure and report quarterly on its progress in achieving the goals outlined in its PIP, which must be completed within two years of the plan's approval. This ensures that states focus on achieving improved child and family outcomes, not simply on enhancing policies or procedures.
- **Emphasis on both results and process:** The reviews provide information about both outcomes for children and families and the underlying systemic factors that affect those outcomes.

In fact, the seven CFSR systemic factors provide a framework for understanding the “infrastructure” that is needed to improve outcomes for children and families in the long term. Strengthening those underlying systemic factors is key to changing how states do business with respect to children and families. The CFSRs assess how well these systemic factors are working in each state¹⁶:

- **Statewide information system:** Assesses whether the state is operating a statewide information system that can identify key data on each child who is currently in or has recently left the foster care system.
- **Case review system:** Examines the state's process for ensuring that each child has a written case plan, that the status of each child served is reviewed regularly, that permanency hearings happen in the required time frames, that the state has a process for terminating parental rights and that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers are allowed to participate in hearings held about the child.
- **Quality assurance system:** Assesses whether the state has implemented standards for ensuring the provision of quality child welfare services and has an identifiable quality assurance system for evaluating and reporting on the quality of those services.
- **Staff and provider training:** Checks whether the state has a staff development and training program that ensures both initial training of new staff and ongoing training for experienced staff, and a program for training foster parents, adoptive parents and staff of state-licensed or -approved facilities providing foster care.
- **Service array and resource development:** Looks at whether the state has in place an adequate array of individualized services, throughout the state, for assessing the strengths and needs of children and families and then addressing areas of need. These services should be designed to enable children to remain safely with their parents when possible or to achieve permanency if they are in foster care or pre-adoptive placements.
- **Agency responsiveness to the community:** Checks whether the agency consults with key stakeholders and includes their concerns in its ongoing planning and whether it coordinates its services with those of other federal programs that serve the same population of children and families.

Questions About the Child and Family Services Review Process

Throughout the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process, state legislators can engage with agency leaders regarding review results and the steps required to achieve key goals of the state's Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Legislators can use the following questions, for example, to engage with agency leaders about the overall review process and each review stage:

- **Status of the CFSR**
 - At what point is the state in the CFSR cycle?
 - What type of legislative support does the agency need during the current phase of the CFSR or PIP process?
 - How might legislators get involved in the CFSR or PIP at this stage?
 - With whom should I/my office/other lawmakers coordinate regarding our involvement?
- **Statewide Assessment**
 - What did the state learn through its last Statewide Assessment and PIP? How do those findings compare with the findings of the current Statewide Assessment?
 - How is the agency making information about the Statewide Assessment available to agency staff, stakeholders, the media and the public?
 - How is the agency using the Statewide Assessment to engage others in child welfare reform efforts?
- **Onsite Review/Exit Conference**
 - Which community and professional stakeholders will the agency invite to participate in the onsite review, either by serving as state review team members or by providing input about the state child welfare system?
 - Would legislative involvement in the statewide exit conference be useful?
 - How can legislators best work with state child welfare staff after attending an onsite review exit conference?
- **Final Report**
 - What were the most important findings of the report? If the report is not yet available, what were key preliminary findings?
 - What are the agency's plans for sharing the review findings, if these are available?
- **PIP**
 - What type of legislative support does the agency need during the PIP process?
 - How might the agency periodically update legislators on its PIP progress and the type of legislative support needed?
 - How might legislators get involved in the PIP process?
 - What happens if the state is not successful in achieving the necessary improvements?

- **Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment and retention:** Assesses whether the state has implemented accepted national standards for foster homes and child care institutions, complies with federal requirements for criminal background clearances for these placement options, has a process for recruiting potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the state’s ethnic and racial diversity and has a process in place for using cross-jurisdictional resources that facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

By providing oversight and support to the child welfare agency in strengthening these systemic factors through the state’s PIP, legislators can help to improve the long-term CFSR outcomes for which the agency is responsible (see the box “Child and Family Services Reviews at a Glance”). The focus on building long-term capacity may help stabilize child welfare agencies in a variety of ways, including promoting continuity in agency leadership. In turn, stable leadership helps to further ensure that there is a consistent agenda for state reform efforts over time.

Moving Toward Child Welfare Reform Through Legislature-Agency Engagement

In assessing a state’s progress in its reform efforts, legislators can use the CFSRs to work closely with state child welfare agencies in addressing critical areas of need. To date, most states have gone through two rounds of CFSRs. As a result, today state agencies are more prepared than ever to work with legislators in using the review results to bring about positive change. The following are a few ways that legislators can become involved with the CFSR process.

- Work with the child welfare agency to develop systems for staying apprised of the status of the CFSR and PIP. Legislators, for example, can ask for regular briefings on the initial findings of the CFSR during the Statewide Assessment and following the CFSR on-site review.
- Access the latest data on the CFSRs at the CFSR website, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm#cfsr> (scroll down to “Reports and Results of the First and Second Rounds of the Child and Family Services Reviews”).
- Coordinate with the child welfare agency about the possibility of attending the statewide exit conference, which is held at the conclusion of the CFSR on-site review. At the exit conference, the review team leader provides an overview of the preliminary review findings, discusses next steps in the review process and raises and clarifies review-related issues.
- Participate in developing the PIP. As noted earlier, after each state’s review, the state conducts program improvement planning in consultation with a broad array of stakeholders, who can include legislators or legislative staff.
- Request updates from the state child welfare agency administrator on state progress in making improvements through the PIP. Once the agency has completed its PIP, legislators might ask for a summary of the PIP and updates on PIP progress. While state agencies handle PIP reporting in different ways, one option is to use the ready-made summary format for sharing PIP information available on the Children’s Bureau website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm#cfsr> (scroll down to “Engaging State Legislators in the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews: An Information-Sharing Tool for Child Welfare Agency Administrators”).

Staying Informed About the Child and Family Services Reviews

Some state legislatures have used the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process as the basis of their ongoing reporting on and monitoring of child welfare system performance. In 2007, for example, the Michigan legislature passed a statute requiring the state child welfare agency to report on the progress of the CFSRs on January 1 and July 1 each year to the relevant legislative committees and the state budget director. In 2001, the California legislature enacted the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act, which redefined how the state Department of Social Services holds the 58 county child welfare agencies accountable for results and performance. The system established through the act resembles the CFSRs in many ways.

Focusing on the Long-Term Through Legislative Leadership

In engaging with agencies about the CFSRs to promote child welfare reform, a key role of legislators is to foster continuity in state child welfare systems over time. During periods of transition, legislative engagement can ensure that the goals and strategies of long-term state reform efforts are maintained. When a child dies, legislative engagement helps to ensure the maintenance of a long-term focus on real child welfare reform rather than on short-term solutions, sometimes driven by emotional responses, that do not contribute to overall system change. By supporting a consistent focus on systems change, legislators can help to bring greater stability to agency leadership, while requiring accountability for improving outcomes for children and families.

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