



Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies

Leadership, Voice and Vision for Child Welfare in New York State

**A WHITE PAPER
POST ADOPTION SERVICES
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BRIDGING THE GAP

POST ADOPTION SERVICES

PROBLEM TO BE ADDRESSED

Adoption creates a permanent loving home for children who need families. Families formed through adoption are different than families formed biologically and face different challenges.ⁱ The majority of children adopted today are adopted from foster care (68%)ⁱⁱ and come to their new families having experienced previous traumas and with greatly elevated risk of developmental, health, emotional or behavioral issues. The families who open their hearts and homes to children need to know in advance that support and services will be available throughout their childhood and adolescence so they can proactively navigate these risks. Without adoption competent supports and services these families and children face the very real risk of family disruption, dissolution or placement.ⁱⁱⁱ There are enormous human and financial costs associated with failure to support adoptive families adequately.

New York State has recognized that adoptive children and their families need supports and services. Since 2000, NYS has funded post adoption programs and services provided by a handful of not-for-profit agencies through legislatively added TANF funds. These programs provided critical services and supports to adoptive families and they produced measurable positive outcomes in improving the well being of adoptive children and increasing the number of families who were at risk of placement or dissolution who were able to stay together.^{iv} Funding for these programs has been reduced incrementally over time and now TANF funding has essentially ended. Only two of the programs remain, both in NYC, and the funding for these will expire this year..

The consequences of inconsistent and intermittent access to support and service for New York's adoptive families are dire. All of New York's adoptive families and children have been placed at greater risk. Their well-being will be directly impacted. They will struggle unnecessarily. Many families with great potential to thrive will experience significant dysfunction. Many, regardless of the type of adoption that created their family, will place their child into New York's foster care system concluding that it is the only help available. Other families, feeling that they have exhausted their options and have nowhere to turn for the help they need will legally dissolve their family or worse, seek more informal solutions such as those recently highlighted on NBC News and the TODAY show (See recent Reuters Series on reHoming^v), thereby re-traumatizing children who are already extremely vulnerable.

The initial Federal Child and Family Services Review identified a number of performance issues regarding achievement of permanency outcomes in New York when compared to other states. Following these reviews, New York State's Office of Children and Families has provided leadership in improving permanency outcomes for New York's most vulnerable children and families. Over the last ten years, the number of adoptions has increased, the adoption process has been expedited, and the number of children waiting in foster care for

permanent homes has been reduced. All of this progress is at risk if supports and services are not available to families post adoption. Families who adopt from foster care know that they need support. Foster parents often refuse to adopt because they fear losing the help of the worker assigned to their family. The research indicates that the availability of supports is often a determining factor in whether or not families proceed with their adoption.^{vi} Without the promise of supports, fewer children will be adopted in the future, thus increasing future foster care costs. The number of children without families, in legal limbo waiting for an adoption, will increase significantly. With the promise of supports, the progress begun can continue and grow!

Now is the time for NYS to re-invest in cost effective, routinely funded post adoption services that will help adoptive families across NYS assist their children in navigating issues that are specific to adoption and support them in overcoming the developmental, health, emotional or behavioral issues resulting from previous traumas.

PROPOSAL

The challenges adoptive families face are known. The services and supports that are effective in helping adoptive families are known. In short, New York has the knowledge and capacity to provide the appropriate support and services to adoptive families so they are not only able to stay together, but thrive as healthy families.

Towards this end, a permanent line item in the State budget to provide funding in the amount of \$8 Million is proposed. The funding to be administered by OCFS in 5 year grants to develop a network of post adoption services providers across NYS so as to ensure statewide coverage and availability of adoption competent services throughout the entire state.

Services should include an array of education, support and therapeutic community services to be available to all families and family members involved directly in an adoption including adoptive parents, adoptees and birth families. Families will be able to access these services episodically as their needs dictate.

Eligibility for services is twofold. First, it is established through a relationship to an adoptive child. Second, the service needs must be based in or directly related to an adoption specific issue or challenge. Families who care for children who have exited the foster care system via the KinGAP program should be considered as eligible to receive these services.

Each agency awarded grants will be required to make available or provide access to each of the following Core Service:

- Parent education related to the adoption experience, special needs and adoptive parenting
- Professional Education of community and community providers so as to expand the availability of an adoption -competent knowledge base and core values
- Support groups for adoptive parents, adoptive youth and involved birth parents

- Information and Referral including toll free number available 24/7
- Advocacy and support for school related problems
- Respite Services
- Crisis Intervention
- Mental Health Services ^{vii}

Consideration should be given to development and application of a sliding fee scale for eligible families who have substantial income.

OCFS should develop metrics as part of the RFP that include activity, performance and outcome measures that can be used to support future funding decisions.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH

Approximately 2% of children in USA are adopted (estimate excludes step parent adoptions).^{viii} Given 2012 population projections there are more than 85,000 adoptive children and youth living in NYS presently. ^{ix}

Trends in adoption have changed significantly over time and these changes have profound implications. Adoptions of newborns, at one time the face of adoption, have become rare, declining almost nine-fold since the early 1970s. International adoptions had increased three fold between 1990 and 2004, but have dropped significantly since. “The most common type of adoption today... is of children placed from the child welfare system—a number that has soared since the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.” ^x

Current estimates indicate that 68% of all adoptions today are children adopted from the public child welfare system in the USA. 15% of children are adopted internationally and 17% of children are adopted privately, mostly as infants. ^{xi}

Adoption continues to be the best alternative “for ensuring the well-being of children who cannot grow up in their original families...”^{xii} The 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents, the first nationally represented survey of all adoptive families shows that adoptive children have generally positive long term outcomes and parents who adopt are highly satisfied with adoption.^{xiii}

When adoptive youth are compared to youth who remained in foster care, Youth who are adopted 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^{xiv}

Adoptive families play an essential and positive role in our society and it is critical that families formed through adoption have every chance to be successful.

NEEDS OF ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

However, adoptive families face unique challenges. Research makes it clear that families formed through adoption are different from families formed biologically. They face distinctly different issues and challenges regardless of the type of adoption. Typical developmental phases, such as adolescence, which is challenging for all families, become further complicated when the range of issues associated with adoption such as loss, rejection, and identity are overlaid. <<Bill can you expand this a bit to hit home what do adopted kids go through re search for identity, attachment problems etc>>These families need supports and services from providers who are expert in the issues common to adoption and the formation of a new family through adoption.^{xv xvi}

In addition to challenges that accompany all adoptions, most children adopted today are adopted from foster care and from institutions abroad. These children have experienced trauma in their lives and as a result, “come to their new families from backgrounds that can lead to elevated risks for developmental, health, emotional and/or behavioral issues. These include an array of adverse prenatal and early-life experiences, including malnutrition before and after birth, inadequate nurture, prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol, physical or sexual abuse, and multiple placements, as well as potential genetic vulnerability. The impact of such experiences poses challenges for these children and their families at various times in the adoptive family life cycle”.^{xvii}

In multiple studies, adoptive parents report needs for post adoption services (e.g., Children’s Bureau, 2007; Festinger, 2006; Freundlich, Avery, Gerstenzang, & Munson, 2006; Reilly & Platz, 2004).^{xviii} The needs of families who adopt “are multidimensional and may arise at each developmental stage for the family and the adopted person... 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.”^{xix}

When adoptive children are compared to all children, they “... are more likely to have been diagnosed with – and to have moderate or severe symptoms of – depression, ADD/ADHD, or behavior/conduct disorder”^{xx}

When adoptive parents were surveyed, they reported that:

- 58 percent of their children needed specialized health care
- 68 percent had an educational delay,
- 69 percent exhibited misconduct, and
- 83 percent exhibited some other kind of serious behavioral problem.^{xxi}

An emerging body of research supports that adoption competent services and supports have a positive effect on adoptive families. 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 disruptions^{xxii} (and thus re-placement into foster care)

A New York based study looked at adoptive families living in New York who were served by the TANF funded programs and found, “Over 80% of these families served indicated that they were better off after receiving post-adoption services. Furthermore, nearly 30% of them had a child at risk of out of home placement at the time they first called for post-adoption services. Of these families, 73% indicated that the child was able to remain in the home as a result of the help and support they received from the agencies.” (Avery, Cornell April 2004)^{xxiii}

The availability of post-adoption services also has been linked with parents’ greater ability and willingness to adopt children from foster care. The lack of such services was identified by both agency staff and adoptive parents as a barrier to adoption from foster care in McRoy’s study (U.S. Children’s Bureau, 2007), with 43% of parents responding to a survey reporting that this represented a major barrier for them. There are many families who are totally committed to their foster children, but will not adopt them for fear of losing essential services. Providing incentives for adoption, rather than for keeping children in foster care so they can retain the support they need, is an important policy issue and an investment in lowering future costs for residential care in the foster care, juvenile justice, and/or mental health systems.

COSTS OF FAILURE

Adoption failures have a clear, negative impact on society. In terms of human costs, the emotional toll is huge for the families and the children. The financial costs for society also are steep; from the money it takes to support these children until they reach adulthood to the price of services they will need down the road. From a financial standpoint alone, researchers have found that:

- Each adoption from foster care yields on average a net savings of \$143,000 to state and federal governments (Barth, et al, 2006).

- Successful adoptions produce other public financial benefits in human services and reduced crime, estimated as a total savings of \$302,418 per adoption (Hansen, 2007).
- Costs for residential treatment (for children who cannot remain at home) are very high; average costs of residential care of children with special needs in New York State Child Welfare system are \$100,000.00 to \$140,000 per year, a Juvenile Justice placement is twice that.^{xxiv}
- Numerous studies^{xxv} have estimated the rate at which children who have been adopted are later placed into foster care. Studies consistently report that only a small percentage of completed adoptions dissolve—probably less than 10 percent^{xxvi}. Groze (1996) found in a longitudinal study that 8% of children receiving adoption subsidies in Iowa had been placed out of the home after four years. Goege, et al. (1996) conducted a longitudinal study from 1976 through 1994 that included both public and voluntary agencies in Illinois. They found that disruption and dissolution in adoption over those 8 years was 12%. More recently and closer to home, an Administration for Children Services (ACS) NYC study matched children who were authorized for adoption subsidies to future placements in foster care and found an average of 5 to 6 % of children adopted each year between 1995 and 2000 later returned to foster care.^{xxvii}
- Estimating that 5% of children adopted in a given year will be placed into foster care sometime following their adoption, then 115 of the 2300 children adopted during 2012 from foster care, will be placed into foster care in the future at an approximate annual cost of over eleven million dollars per year.

The estimates above document the enormous costs associated with family disruption, dissolution and/or placement of adoptive families. They do not include the incalculable number of situations where adoptive families are able to avoid separation but experience child and family emotional and behavior issues that left unaddressed generate young adults with unresolved problems that take the form of substance abuse, unemployment, teen pregnancy, and incarceration and the human and financial costs associated with them.

NY can do better. Our families deserve better. There is a covenant that is made between parents and children when adoptions take place – to be a permanent family. But the covenant is also between agencies and families and between state or federal governments and adoptive families whom they help create. In domestic infant and inter-country adoptions, adoption professionals have assisted the families in their adoptions, approved them as meeting certain standards through a home study process, and committed to locating, arranging or providing whatever post-adoption supports the families need. For inter-country adopters, the U.S. Citizens and Immigration Services has reviewed the families' documents, including their home studies, to determine that they are suitable to adopt and has approved all U.S. families adopting from foreign countries.

In adoptions from foster care, the state child welfare authority has removed these children from their original families, cared for them for a period of years (sometimes compounding the harm to them), and ultimately selected the families who adopt them with an agreement

to provide needed supports over the course of childhood. When families struggle to address the developmental consequences of children's early adversity, they should be entitled to receive the types of services that truly meet their needs and sustain them.

Finally, through a number of laws, the federal and New York state governments have aggressively supported adoptions from foster care, even providing financial incentives to states to increase their adoptions...government has a role in creating these families and needs to act just as forcefully to sustain them. Only with federal, state, and local partnerships can we truly fulfill the three-fold mission of child welfare: promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.^{xxviii}

ⁱ "Finding and Using Postadoption Services." *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. (September, 2012).

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Donaldson, Evan B., Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. "KEEPING THE PROMISE: The Critical Need

for Post-Adoption Services to Enable Children and Families to Succeed." (October, 2010).

<http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2010_10_20_KeepingThePromise.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Definitions of disruptions, dissolutions and placement

*Disruption refers to the termination of an adoptive placement prior to finalization of the adoption. this occurs between placement and the finalization before the child legally gains new parents.

**Dissolution refers to an adoption which is legally dissolved. This occurs after finalization of the adoption.

***Placement of a child outside of the home after finalization would be considered a placement and does not indicate either a disruption or a dissolution.

^{iv} Strengthening and Preserving Adoptive Families: A Study of TANF-Funded Post Adoption Services in New York State, Rosemary J. Avery, Ph.D., Cornell University (April 2004).

This research studied New York State families who received services from the TANF funded post adoption programs. It found "Over 80% of these families served indicated that they were better off after receiving post-adoption services. Furthermore, nearly 30% of them had a child at risk of out of home placement at the time they first called for post-adoption services. Of these families, 73% indicated that the child was able to remain in the home as a result of the help and support they received from the agencies (Avery, Cornell April 2004)

^v <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/adoption/#article/part1>

<http://investigations.nbcnews.com/news/2013/09/10/20407919-adopted-girl-says-new-mom-slept-naked-with-her?lite>

<http://www.nbcnews.com/video/nightly-news/52966445/#52966445>

^{vi} Freundlich, M., Farrow, F., and McCarthy, P. "Strengthening Families and Communities:

An Approach to Post-Adoption Services." *Annie E. Casey Foundation*. (2002)

^{vii} The list of core services is supported in literature and the experiences of NYS TANF funded programs. See Freundlich, M. & Wright, L. (2003). *Post Permanency Services*. Washington, D.C.: Casey Family Programs

^{viii} Vandivere, S., Malm, K., and McKlindon, A. "National Council for Adoption." *Adoption*

Advocate No. 22: ADOPTION USA: Summary and Highlights of a Chartbook on the National Survey of Adoptive Parents. <<https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/adoption-advocate-no22.html>>.

ix Estimate of 85,000 adopted children living in NYS uses the 2012 population estimates from US Census of 19,570,261 total population times the percentage of those who are under 18 year old of 21.8% times 2% equaling 85,326 adopted children under 18.

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>

x The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *KEEPING THE PROMISE: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services to Enable Children and Families to Succeed* Policy & Practice Perspective (October 2010)
http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2010_10_20_KeepingThePromise.pdf

xi The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *KEEPING THE PROMISE: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services to Enable Children and Families to Succeed* Policy & Practice Perspective (October 2010)
http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2010_10_20_KeepingThePromise.pdf

xii The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *KEEPING THE PROMISE: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services to Enable Children and Families to Succeed* Policy & Practice Perspective, October 2010
http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2010_10_20_KeepingThePromise.pdf

xiii Vandivere, S., Malm, K., and McKlindon, A. ADOPTION USA: SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS OF A CHARTBOOK ON THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS. Adoption Advocate, NO. 22 (MARCH 2010)
<https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/adoption-advocate-no22.html>

xiv Hansen, M.E. (2006). The Value of Adoption. Washington, DC: American University. Retrieved from <http://www.american.edu/cas/econ/workingpapers/1506.pdf>

xv Finding and Using Post Adoption Services, CWIG (September 2012). Factsheet for Families.
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.pdf
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoptbulletin/f_postadoptbulletin.pdf

xvi Finding and Using Post Adoption Services, CWIG (September 2012). Factsheet for Families.
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.pdf

xvii Donaldson, Evan B. (p.9)

xviii Finding and Using Post Adoption Services, CWIG (September 2012) Factsheet for Families.
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoption.pdf
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_postadoptbulletin/f_postadoptbulletin.pdf

xix “Research on Post Adoption Services: Implications for Practice, Program Development, and Policy” in The Post Adoption Experience (p. 295)

xx Vandivere, S., Malm, K., and McKlindon, A. ADOPTION USA: SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS OF A CHARTBOOK ON THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS, Adoption Advocate, NO. 22 (MARCH 2010)
<https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/adoption-advocate-no22.html>

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

^{xxii} "Post Legal Adoption Services for Children with Special Needs and Their Families; Challenges and Lessons Learned," Child Welfare Information Gateway (June 2005)

^{xxiii} Avery, Rosemary J. Strengthening and Preserving Adoptive Families: A Study of TANF-Funded Post Adoption Services in New York State, Cornell University (April 2004)

^{xxiv} OCFS sets rates for each voluntary agency individually. The OCFS Rate Chart shows rates of 300 – 400 dollars per day for children who have special needs and are hard to serve.
<http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/Rates/FosterCare/Rates/1112%20RATE%20CHART%20%28Foster%20Care%29%20July%201%202011%20-%20June%2030%202012.pdf>

^{xxv} These studies routinely underestimate the phenomenon of adoptive children later being placed into foster care because of limitations in research design related to legal protections provided to adoptive children and their parents.

^{xxvi} Adoption Disruption and Dissolution, CWIGateway, Number and Trends (June 2012)

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_disrup.pdf

^{xxvii} The ACS study was only able to match children who were later placed in foster care within NYC. The data does not include any of the children who were adopted in NYC but then placed in foster care elsewhere in New York State or in any other state so it represents an undercounting.
ACS memo from Synia Wong to Bill McLaughlin 9/13/2013

^{xxviii} The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *KEEPING THE PROMISE: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services to Enable Children and Families to Succeed* Policy & Practice Perspective, October 2010
http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2010_10_20_KeepingThePromise.pdf