

POST-ADOPTION SERVICES: A CRITICAL FACET IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

Adoption creates a permanent loving home for children who need families

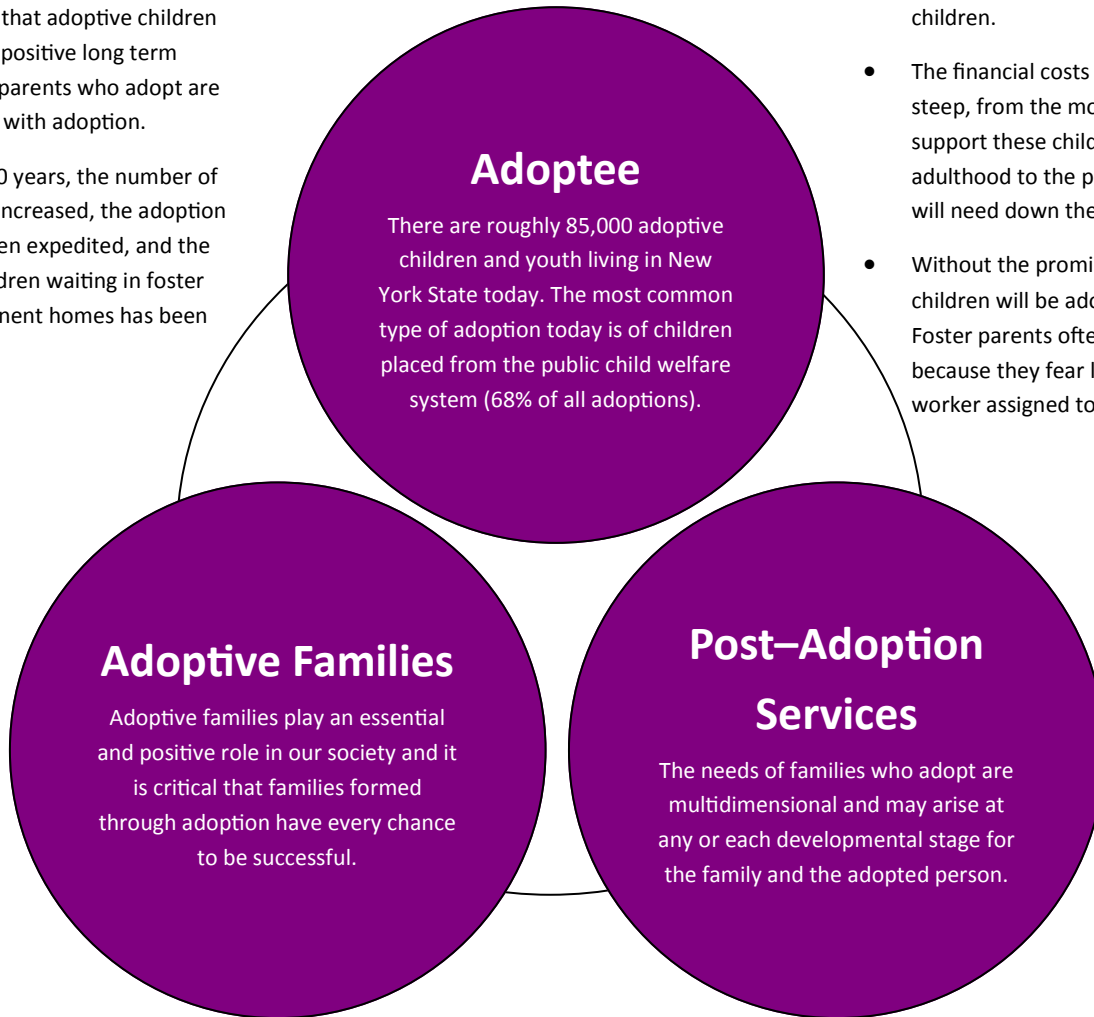
- The 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents, the first nationally represented survey of all adoptive families shows that adoptive children have generally positive long term outcomes and parents who adopt are highly satisfied with adoption.
- Over the last 10 years, the number of adoptions has increased, the adoption process has been expedited, and the number of children waiting in foster care for permanent homes has been reduced.

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.

There are enormous human and financial costs associated with failure to support adoptive families adequately

- 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.
- Without the promise of supports, fewer children will be adopted in the future. Foster parents often refuse to adopt because they fear losing the help of the worker assigned to their family.

Adoption continues to be the best alternative for ensuring the well-being of children who cannot grow up in their original families.



Adoptive 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.

Families formed through adoption are different than families formed biologically and face different challenges

- 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.
- The majority of children adopted today are adopted from the foster care system (68%) and come to their new families having experienced previous traumas and with greatly elevated risk of developmental, health, emotional or behavioral issues. The impact of such experiences poses challenges for these children and their families at various times in the adoptive family life cycle .

Post-adoption supports are critical

- The families who open their hearts and homes to children need to know in advance that support and services will be available throughout their children's lives so they can proactively navigate certain risks.
- Without adoption competent supports and services these families and children face the very real risk of family disruption, dissolution, placement, or re-homing.
- Research indicates that the availability of supports is often a determining factor in whether or not families proceed with their adoption. With the promise of supports, the adoption process can continue to prosper.

Now is the time for NYS to re-invest in cost effective 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.

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Background

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. 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. Funding for these programs has been reduced incrementally over time and now TANF funding has all but disappeared, only two of the programs remain and both serve NYC families only.

Proposal

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 New York State funding in the amount of \$10 million a year 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 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

Consideration should be given to development and application of a sliding fee scale for eligible families who have substantial income. OCFS is to develop metrics as part of the RFP that include activity, performance and outcome measures that can be used to support future funding decisions.

Research

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.
- 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.^I

When adoptive parents were surveyed, they reported that:

- 58% of their children needed specialized healthcare
- 68% had an educational delay
- 69% exhibited misconduct,
- 83% exhibited some other kind of serious behavioral problem^{II}

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^{III}

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

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

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