

ADOPTION, FOSTER CARE AND KINSHIP CARE

Vision Statement

All children in Indiana deserve to grow up in a family, whether birth, adoptive, foster, or kinship, that provides a safe, nurturing, and permanent home.

THE CHILDREN'S COALITION OF INDIANA WILL ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING:

Advocacy

- ◆ Allow fair and consistent access to all persons wishing to provide out-of-home care or a permanent home for children based on their parenting ability and on the best interests of the child.
- ◆ Offer adequate support, training, and information to all families - including kin - with whom the State place children and who provide permanency for children.
- ◆ Making adoption subsidy decisions and agreements at the time a child is placed in a home.
- ◆ Ensure adequate adoption subsidies are available for all hard to place adoptive children by following federal adoption assistance guidelines; and continued assistance for families currently receiving subsidies.
- ◆ Ensure that quality, professional services are being delivered by all those involved with children in need - including public and private child welfare agencies; foster, kinship, and adoptive parents; child advocates; and the court system.
- ◆ Eliminate any barrier that could hinder quality foster, kinship, and adoptive families from caring for children in need.

Legislative Action

- ◆ Broaden public awareness and recruitment efforts to increase the number of adoptive families and reduce the number of children waiting in foster care for a permanent home.
- ◆ Prohibit any legislation or public policy that would discriminate against families based on cultural characteristics such as ethnicity, race, religion, marital status, gender, income, sexual orientation, age, or physical ability.
- ◆ Implementation of recommendations outlined in the Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services report.
- ◆ Support action to restore eligibility for state adoption subsidy to non-title IV-e eligible adoptive children.
- ◆ Support legislation that would ensure adequate adoption subsidies for all special needs children.

Administrative Action

- ◆ Full implementation of current statutory provisions requiring that foster parents be notified, heard, and provided with an opportunity to make recommendations in Children in Need of Services (CHINS) cases.
- ◆ Fully implement existing statutory standards and training for therapeutic and special needs foster care.
- ◆ Maximize the amount of Federal funds that are available to the State for foster care and adoption assistance and ensure adoption subsidies provide adequate funds to families to meet the needs of children.

Implications of Non-Action

- ◆ Children will linger in out-of-home care and agencies will have more difficulty finding permanent homes for children in need of them.
- ◆ More disruptions if adequate supports are not provided for families who care for special needs children.
- ◆ Increased costs to the State and to Counties for intervention and treatment services for children.
- ◆ Children without permanent homes will face an increased risk for problems in adulthood.

RATIONALE: ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE

Key Statistics:

According to the Department of Child Services, there were 14,927 children in the care of the State as of August 2010, which is an 18% increase from FY 2005. Of these, 37% were placed in non-relative foster homes; 10% were placed in residential or group home facilities; 21% were placed with relatives, or kinship providers; 30% in own homes; and 2% other⁴.

Foster Care:

When children have been abused, neglected, or abandoned and cannot remain with their legal families, alternatives should be readily available to help move children toward permanency. Foster care is an integral part of providing services for children in need. Foster parents differ in culture, background, and family structure; however, nearly all share the common desire to love, support, and care for children. Their responsibility is to provide safe and nurturing homes for children in crisis. Once foster parents are licensed, consistent, ongoing support and services are essential to retain their services. An estimated 60% of all foster parents quit within their first year - most cite a lack of support from case managers and overwhelming stress as causes. With services like continuing training, support groups, mentorship, and respite, the ongoing needs of foster families would be more adequately met. Retaining quality foster care providers is in the best interest of children, as frequent moves or disruptions can be upsetting and harmful. In addition, providing adequate support for current foster parents is much more cost-efficient than constantly recruiting and training replacements.⁵

Kinship Care:

Relatives/kin often provide care for youth involved with the child welfare system. Studies consistently demonstrate that foster children placed with kin have greater stability and better outcomes overall.⁶ They're also more likely to maintain relationships with parents and siblings while in care. Kinship families need supportive services and resources to adequately meet the often challenging needs of children placed with them. Many kinship providers report difficulty accessing or navigating necessary services. Every kinship provider should be informed of options and resources immediately once a child is placed in their home. In order to properly meet the needs of children, professionals have a responsibility to meet the needs of caregivers, as well.

Adoption:

If family reunification is not possible for a child, adoption may then be included in the permanency plan. Families should be evaluated on strengths, parenting skills, and ability to provide for a child's needs - not their culture or household structure. Overwhelmingly, infants and young toddlers are the most attractive to adoptive parents. Meanwhile, special needs children, youth ages 8+, and sibling groups continue to linger in foster care waiting and hoping to be adopted. Too often, potential parents fear these children may have 'problems' that would prohibit them from transitioning smoothly into a new family. For this reason, public involvement shouldn't end when an adoption is finalized.

Several state administrative changes were made in the amount of adoption subsidy and the children who are eligible to receive subsidies, as of January 2009. Since that time, only 1,221 children were adopted out of the child welfare system in 2009, in comparison to 1,773 children the year before⁷. In addition, this change has resulted in currently 387 children who have been adopted from foster care and are now on the State Adoption Subsidy waiting list.⁸ Adequate adoption subsidies must remain available for all special needs adoptive children and continued assistance for families currently receiving subsidies to ensure on-going financial and supportive assistance. Both the child and new family need consistent access to pre- and post- adoption services to ensure lifelong success and stability.

Studies have shown that adoption provides children with stability, positive self-image, family support, and continuity⁹. By contrast, foster youth who reach adulthood without being adopted are more likely to drop out of school, be unemployed, impoverished, rely on public assistance, and become parents at younger ages. The fiscal impact of a foster child lingering in the system is staggering. On average, the cost to provide foster care to one child for 7 years is roughly \$86,100¹⁰. By contrast, the cost

⁴ Indiana Department of Child Services. (2010). *DCS practice indicator report August 2010*.

⁵ Stout, L. (2002). *Supporting & retaining foster & adoptive parents. Permanency Planning Today*.

⁶ AARP. (2005). *A state fact sheet for grandparents raising children*.

⁷ Indiana Department of Child Services. (2009). *Number of Department of Child Services adoptions*.

⁸ North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2010). *Adoption Subsidy Resource Center*. Josh Kroll, Project Director.

⁹ Children's Rights. (2006). *Ending the foster care life sentence: The critical need for adoption subsidies*.

¹⁰ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2006). *Government costs for adoption vs. foster care*.

THE CHILDREN'S COALITION OF INDIANA

of an adoption with 8 years of subsidies is \$65,100 per child¹⁰. The total difference nationally, applied to the 51,000 children adopted in FY 2004, would generate over \$1.5 billion in savings¹⁰.