

The Issue:

Child Welfare Services

2010
Priority

CHILDREN'S BUREAU, INC POSITION:

We believe that all children have the right to safe, loving, and permanent families—regardless of the family structure or culture. Children's Bureau encourages the provision of adequate support and elimination of any barriers for all families who care for children in need.

CBI Program Impact:

- In 2008, CBI's adoption program served 367 children through funding provided by State contracts and generous private donors.
- 79 youth were served through CBI's Independent Living program, 502 individuals participated in the Foster, Adoption and Kinship Training, and 80 children were served through the Therapeutic Foster Care Program.

We recommend the following policy initiatives:

- 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.
- Allow fair and consistent access to all persons wishing to provide foster care or a permanent home for a child based on their parenting ability and on the best interests of the child.
- 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.
- Support the passage of legislation for the White House conference on Children and Youth.
- Fully implement kinship care program to address issues such as criminal history checks, defines kinship care, and provides supportive and financial resources.
- Modify criminal history checks based on length of time and type of offense to increase pool of available mentors or significant adults.
- 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.
- Implement a plan to provide drivers' education and the possibility of a drivers' license to foster children.
- Offer adequate support, training, and information to all families— including kin— with whom the State place children and who provide permanency for children.
- Implementation of recommendations outlined in the Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services report to ensure fair and equitable services for all children.
- 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.
- Increase assistance programs that aid emancipated foster children in accessing higher education and transitional living programs, including funds to cover a living stipend for foster youth.
- Increase funding, availability and accessibility of post-permanency services for adoptive families and children and families who have been reunified.

Kinship Care Family Overwhelmed With Lack of Support

A young mom has her 3 year old removed due to various reasons, including lack of income for basic needs. The mom's aunt immediately volunteered to take the child in. She was retired and lived on a fixed income. She was a very smart, resourceful person and knew before hand that the financial strain would be overwhelming, so she enrolled in foster care training to be eligible for a stipend. Weekly, she met with her home based counselor in tears about how overwhelmed she was trying to meet ends meet. On top of providing 24/7 care for a high energy, confused and angry 3 years old, she has to juggle foster care training, visits with mom, food pantry runs, appointments with case managers, appointments with doctors, signing up for and picking up financial assistance. She said she loved this little girl so much that not doing it was not an option, but she said she often cried herself to sleep out of sheer exhaustion.

The Need for Child Welfare Services

In a perfect world, the need for a formal child welfare system wouldn't exist. Every child would grow up safe and healthy, without any risk for being harmed. Unfortunately, far too many children experience the more grim reality of being abused or neglected by their caregivers. The best ending to the story for these children would be for their families to receive necessary supports and services to

keep them safe, strong, and healthy. Sadly, however, this isn't always possible. For many children, placements other than their homes must be found to protect their health and well-being. Nearly

496,000 children in the United States were in foster care placements on September 30, 2007¹. This is a slight decline from fiscal year 2006 with 509,000



Over 496,000 children are in foster care in 2007.

Indiana and Practice Reform

Recent legislation has significantly improved the policies and practices guiding child welfare. Indiana Department of Child Services has actively been implementing practice reforms to ensure best practices are being utilized

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when working with a family. Additional caseworkers have been hired to ensure case loads are at the nationally recommended level of 12 active investigations per month and 17 children for ongoing

workers. Practice reforms have focused on creating trust-based relationships with families that engage families in service provision and in creating the plan to be implemented to ensure the children's safety².

Indiana and children in Need of Services

Unfortunately, both State and National child welfare systems continue to face critical shortages of all types of available placements. Efforts to recruit substitute caregivers have achieved some success; however, the continued number of children entering the system presents an ongoing challenge³. Indiana continues to face record numbers of children requiring services. According to the Department of Child Services, there were

14,940 children in the care of the State between June 2008 and June 2009, which is a 18 percent increase from FY 2005⁴. Of these, 37 percent were placed in non-relative foster homes; 10 percent were placed in residential or group home facilities; 21 percent were placed with relatives, or kinship provid-



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ers; 30 percent in own homes; and 2 percent other⁴. We must continue to establish safe, permanent homes for all children. This investment needs to include providing proper support and services for families who generously come forth to care for children in need.

Foster Care and Licensing

Foster care is an integral part of providing permanency for children in need of services. Foster care providers differ in culture, background, and family structure; however, nearly all share the common desire to love, support, and care for children in need. In order to become a foster parent, individuals must undergo a criminal history check and be licensed through a State approved training course. Once licensed, providers are supplied with a daily per diem to assist them in caring for the children in their care. Based on the income of the child's custodial parent, they

may receive Federal Title IV-E assistance.

Often, the child welfare system is forced to either place multiple children in one foster home or in a more costly institutional setting because of a shortage in available placements. To ensure that enough qualified foster homes are available, we must understand and eliminate barriers that exist for providers. One barrier could be the availability of Foster & Kinship Care Training and Licensing courses, which vary based on region. In smaller, rural regions, classes are of-

ten cancelled due to lack of interest. By contrast, waiting lists may exist in larger, urban areas if there aren't enough courses available for those interested in enrolling. The costs associated with becoming licensed could also challenge some potential foster parents. If a qualified family is unable to afford the costs, such as a criminal history check for every member, financial aid should be readily available so they aren't hindered by an inability to pay.

Foster Care and Supportive Services

Once foster parents are licensed, consistent, ongoing support and services are essential to retain them as caregivers. The National Foster Parent Association estimates that 60 percent of foster parents quit within the first year³. Most cite a

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lack of support from case managers and overwhelming stress as the cause³. Without adequate support, a foster care provider may feel burned out or abandoned. With services like continued training, support groups, mentorship, and respite, the ongoing needs of foster fami-

lies 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 harmful³. In addition, providing adequate support for current foster parents is much more cost-efficient than constantly recruiting and training replacements.

Kinship Care and Indiana

Kinship care has been successful in establishing permanency for many children. Studies have consistently demonstrated that foster children placed with relatives have greater stability and better outcomes overall. They are also more likely to maintain relationships with par-

ents and siblings while in the care of relatives. Kinship care can be formal (meaning the arrangement was made by the child welfare system) or informal (arranged privately



Children have better outcomes when placed with relatives or kin.

within a family). Kinship care is becoming increasingly more common. In Indiana alone, there are 49,044 grandparents serving as kinship care providers for children⁵.

Kinship Care and the Need for Supportive Services

When emergency placements occur, relatives often haven't received prior notice or training to prepare them for the special needs of the child. Many relatives will later enroll in training and become licensed foster parents once a child has been placed in their home. Without this license, kinship providers are ineligible for the per diem that licensed foster parents receive to help care for children. For older relatives on fixed incomes, this lack of assistance could limit their ability to properly provide for children in their care.

Many kinship providers report difficulty accessing or navigating necessary services - especially if the placement was made informally. Some challenges they face (especially grandparents or other seniors) are with finding adequate housing, daycare, healthcare coverage, mental health services, or legal assistance⁵. Even in formal ar-



Kinship providers report difficulty in obtaining necessary services to ensure a stable placement.

rangements, these services can be difficult to understand. Every kinship provider should be informed of options and resources immediately when a child is placed in their home. Case managers need to assist all kinship providers with accessing necessary services. In order to properly meet the needs of children, professionals have a responsibility to meet the needs of kin caregivers, as well.

Family Reunification Best Option for Most Children

Reunification with birth parents is the best permanency option for most children. Of the 7,470 children exiting out-of-home care in Indiana in 2008, 58 percent were reunited with their parents⁶. There are several components to a reunification program that increase the ability of children to return home and decrease the likelihood that the child welfare system will need to intervene in the future. Families need to be part of the decision making process through out the duration of the case⁷.

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If a kinship care placement is not available at the time of a child's removal, all efforts need to be made to keep the child in their own community and school to keep the child connected⁸. Birth parents need to have competent legal representation throughout the court process to ensure families can take an active role in proceedings⁸. Families need to have consistent visits and all family members need to receive intensive services to overcome obstacles that led to the

removal of the child from the home⁸. Lastly, if reunification is possible support services in the form of aftercare need to be provided to ensure the family is supported and successful.

Adoption in the United States and Indiana

The courts may determine that despite reasonable attempts, family reunification isn't possible for a child in out-of-home care. Once this occurs, parental rights are terminated and the child is eligible for adoption. During FY 2007, 51,000 children were adopted from foster care in the U.S.¹. In 2008, 1,449 children were legally adopted through the public child welfare agency in Indiana⁷. While permanent families were found for these children, recruitment efforts need to be increased further. Far too many children are still

waiting and hoping for a permanent family. On September 30, 2007, 130,000 foster children in the U.S. were free for adoption and waiting for an adoptive home¹. On average children had been waiting 39 months for a permanent family¹. Of the 13,392 children in out-of-home care in 2008, 1,782 were waiting to be adopted⁷.



Importance of Adoption Subsidies

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 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 613 children have been adopted out of the child welfare system between January 2009-

July 2009, in comparison to 999 children the same period the year before⁸. Adequate adoption subsidies must remain available for all hard to place adoptive children and continued assistance for families currently receiving subsidies to ensure ongoing 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.

On September 14, 2009, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded adoption incentive payments to states that increased the number of children adopted from

foster care in fiscal year 2008 over the baseline numbers established through the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008⁹. Indiana was one of eight states that earned more than a million dollars¹⁰.

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Cost Savings of Adoption

Studies have shown that adoption provides children with stability, positive self-image, family support, and continuity¹⁰. 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 ages¹¹. 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 \$86,100.



By contrast, the cost of an adoption with 8 years of subsidies is \$65,100 per child¹². The total difference nationally, applied to the 51,000 children adopted in FY 2004, would generate over \$1.5 billion in savings¹².

Fair and Consistent Access for All Individuals Interested in Providing a Loving Home

Allowing a foster child to become an adult without the love and support of a permanent family is a heartbreaking disservice. Despite an obvious shortage of available adoptive homes, a number of States have passed legislation banning individuals from adopting based on cultural characteristics such as marital status, religion, race, sexual orientation, or income. A ban based on marital status would be especially alarming - in the U.S.,

If the law had allowed only married couples to adopt, more than 15,700 children would have been denied permanent families¹³.

one-third of all adoptions from foster care in 2006 were by unmarried couples or single adults¹². If the law had allowed only married couples to adopt, more than 15,700 children would have been denied permanent families¹³.

In all placement decisions, agencies should be careful to select only those families that would serve the best interests of the child. Families should be evaluated on strengths, parenting skills, safety, and their ability to provide for a child's needs - not their culture

or household structure.

Policies must remain consistent for both foster care and adoption to ensure continuity for children. Children often remain in the care of foster parents for several years and form secure attachments to them. Nearly 60 percent of all U.S. adoptions from foster care were by the child's existing foster parent(s)¹. To allow an individual to foster a child but then to subsequently ban them from adopting would be detrimental to the children placed in their care. Every effort should be made to find appropriate, loving families for all vulnerable children.

Transitional Living Services

While permanency options such as adoption and kinship care are preferred, some children who are reaching the age of 18 do not have that option. Of the 7,470 children who exited the child welfare system during fiscal year 2008 in Indiana, 6 percent were emancipated out of the child wel-

fare system and are supporting themselves as an adult⁶. It is imperative that these children receive independent living skills and transitional living programs to ensure that they can make the transition to adulthood successfully. Many times youth who age out of the system face negative

outcomes, such as poverty, homelessness, and involvement with the Department of Corrections. By providing additional supportive services to pursue higher education, stable employment, affordable housing, etc. these youth can become self-sufficient and successful Hoosiers.



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Mission: We help Indiana children in need.

Vision: To develop a healthy family for every child.

Children's Bureau, Inc is a private non-profit 501(c)3 child and family services agency, licensed by the State of Indiana. Children's Bureau, Inc provides services to families and children who are at risk of abuse and/or neglect, have been a victim of abuse and/or neglect, or have been involved in delinquent behavior. Services are provided in the areas of abuse and/or neglect prevention, family preservation, and placement, which includes foster care, independent living, group homes, and adoption. Children's Bureau makes agency services available and affordable to all families and children, without regard to race, religion, nationality, economic status, sex, or handicap.

Accreditations

Council on Accreditation of Services for Families & Children (COA)

Licensed by the Indiana Department of Child Services

Affiliations

United Way of Central Indiana (Charter Member), United Way of Johnson County, United Way of Madison County, Indiana Youth Services Association, Child Welfare League of America (Founding Member), IARCCA: An Association of Children & Family Services

References and Helpful Links

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