

PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

Volume 10, Number 1
December 2004

Children's Services Practice Notes is a publication for child welfare workers produced four times a year by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the Jordan Institute for Families and the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In summarizing recent research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.

Let us hear from you!

To comment about something that appears in this or any other issue of *Children's Services Practice Notes*, please send your comments to:

John McMahan
Jordan Institute for Families
UNC-CH School of Social Work
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550
State Courier: 17-61-04
johnmcmahan@mindspring.com

Newsletter Staff

Lane Cooke, MSW, Advisor
Ray Kirk, PhD, Advisor
John McMahan, MA, Writer

Visit Our Website

To read this or past issues of *Practice Notes* online, go to <www.practicenotes.org>.

References for the articles in this issue can be found at <www.practicenotes.org>

SUPPORTING ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

When it comes to finding adoptive families for children in foster care, North Carolina has a lot to celebrate. In 1990, there were just 126 foster care adoptions in our state (ACF, 2001). In 2000, there were more than 1,500 (NCDSS, 2004a). Thanks to this trend, there are now almost as many children in North Carolina receiving adoption assistance payments (that is, who have been adopted from foster care) as there are in foster care (NCDSS, 2004b).

Our achievement is echoed on a national level, where the annual number of adoptions from foster care increased from 25,644 in 1995 to 51,000 in 2000 (Christian, 2002). What's more, researchers project that nationally the number of children adopted from foster care will continue to grow faster than the foster care population for at least the next 20 years (Wulczyn & Brunner, 2002).

We should be proud. Our society is beginning to embrace the notion that there is a family for every child. More importantly, we are expressing this belief in new laws, policies, funding, and ways of working.

Of course, "our" success depends entirely on the willingness of families to open their homes and hearts to children in foster care. "These families really are miracle workers," says Sandy Cook, executive director of Children's Home Society of North Carolina. A lot of what they accomplish with their children, she says, "is simply through common sense and love."

But Cook and others familiar with adoption also know that for some adoptive families, love and common sense are not enough. To succeed with children adopted from foster care, the majority of whom have

special needs and many of whom are older, families need ongoing support in various forms (Kramer & Houston, 1999). Indeed, there seems to be a strong relationship between supportive services and the health, well-being, and stability of adoptive families (Freundlich & Wright, 2003).

The importance of post-adoption services is reflected in the policy of North Carolina, whose county DSS's are facilitating an increasing number of adoptions (see sidebar). It says clearly that after the adoption, agencies continue to have "a moral obligation and a social responsibility for the welfare" of the children they helped become adopted (NCDSS, 2004c).

This issue of *Practice Notes* seeks to support you and your agency as you work to fulfill this crucial obligation. ♦



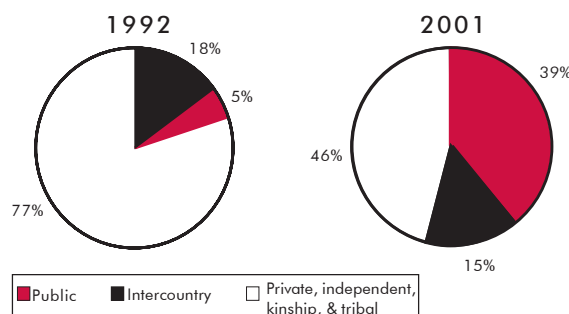
Photo Illustration

If we don't talk to families about continuing needs, we may be setting them up to fail.

PUBLIC AGENCY ADOPTIONS ON THE RISE

In FY 2000–2001, public agency adoptions accounted for approximately two-fifths of all adoptions, up from just 18% in 1992 (USDHHS, 2004). Though positive, this dramatic increase has implications for public agencies in North Carolina, which are responsible for supporting adoptive families.

Percent of All Adoptions in U.S. by Type



WHY FAMILIES NEED POST-ADOPTION SERVICES

“You are totally alone after you sign the papers for adoption.”

— North Carolina adoptive parent

“With all their problems we will probably have many, many more struggles for the rest of our lives.”

— North Carolina adoptive parent

Once upon a time it was not uncommon for child welfare agencies to leave families who adopted children from foster care alone to “figure things out” for themselves.

This probably was never a good idea. But today, when we talk so much about our concern for the permanency and well-being of children, this practice is indefensible. We simply know too much now about the challenges faced by adoptive children and their families. Here, briefly, are some of the chief reasons North Carolina strongly endorses the provision of post-adoption services.

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

The majority of children in foster care are there because of abuse or neglect. Past trauma, exposure to drugs and alcohol, and separation and loss cause many of these children to have developmental, physical, and mental problems (Berry & Barth, 1990; Lakin, 1992; Smith & Howard, 1994). Moreover, children in foster care are more likely than other children to struggle with chronic health problems, devel-

opmental delays, educational difficulties, mild to moderate mental health problems; and in some cases, severe psychological and behavioral difficulties (Avery & Mont, 1994; Simms, et al., 2000). These problems do not evaporate at the moment of adoption.

OLDER CHILDREN, LONGER FOSTER CARE STAYS

Some children experience extended stays in foster care before they are adopted. For example, in September 1999, children in the U.S. who were waiting to be adopted had been waiting, on average, for slightly more than three years (Freundlich & Wright, 2003). Spending extended periods in foster care can have negative effects on children’s health, well-being, and ability to adapt to a new adoptive family (Freundlich & Wright, 2003).

Research also suggests that the older a child is at time of adoption—especially if the child is over age 10—the more likely it is that the child will have difficulty adjusting to his or her adopted family (Sharma, et al., 1996). In part, this may be because older children come to their adoptive families with specific expectations for how they and their adoptive family should behave (Pinderhughes, 1998).

Psychologist Katharine Leslie says that for some children who spend a long time in foster care, “living in a



Photo illustration

Research suggests adoptive families’ needs for services may actually increase over time.

permanent family can be more stressful than anything else.”

As the overall number of children adopted from foster care continues to rise, so will the numbers of children who are older and/or who have had long stays in foster care.

ADOPTION IS A PROCESS

In adoption circles it is commonly said that adoption is a process, not an event. Elinor Rosenberg provided support for this notion in her 1992 book *The Adoption Life Cycle*. According to Rosenberg, birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees face distinct developmental adoption-related challenges throughout their lives. Although it does not factor in the way abuse, neglect, and foster care can complicate adoption, *The Adoption Life Cycle* makes it easier to understand why struggles between adoptive parents and adopted children often intensify during adolescence, and why adoptive families’ needs for services may actually increase over time (Groze, 1996).

OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT AND DISSOLUTION

Given what we know about the developmental, physical, and mental health needs of many of the chil-

cont. p. 3

Adoptions in North Carolina

Source: NCDSS, 2004a

	SFY 98-99	SFY 99-00	SFY 00-01	SFY 01-02	SFY 02-03	SFY 03-04
Public Agency Adoptions (Foster)	864	1,233	1,574	1,482	1,333	1,372
*International Adoptions	263	282	361	335	259	367
**Total Adoptions	2,838	3,266	3,694	3,557	3,291	3,608
Children with Plan Goal of Adoption	3,113	3,363	3,033	2,975	2,942	2,838
***Children Legally Free for Adoption	919	1,097	1,257	1,358	1,170	1,024

* This number is not a subset of the Public Agency Adoption, but a subset of the Total Adoptions.

** Total Adoptions include Public Agency, Private Agency, Independent, Other Relative, Step-Parent, Foreign, and Other.

*** Children legally Free for Adoption does not necessarily mean that the child is in need of an adoptive family, as many of these children are already in the home where they will be adopted, such as with relatives or foster families.

continued from page 2

dren adopted from foster care, it is not surprising that some of these children are at risk of **out-of-home placement**, usually through placement in either foster care or residential treatment centers. For example, one study that followed 497 children adopted from foster care in New York in 1996 found that 3.3% of the children re-entered foster care at some time after the adoption (Festinger, 2001).

Dissolution (adoption failure after finalization) is also a concern. Although it is uncommon—in their study of children adopted in Illinois between 1976 and 1987, Goerge and colleagues (1997) found a dissolution rate of 3.3%—it is still very much to be avoided, given the trauma it causes children and families (Barth & Berry, 1988).

WHAT FAMILIES WANT

Although exactly what a family needs depends on the child's characteristics (developmental age and stage, strengths and needs, etc.), family composition (number of children and parents), and other circumstances (e.g., family's financial situation), there is a general consensus on what is useful to these families. The following list, which comes from Freundlich and Wright (2003), reflects this consensus:

- Support groups, informal contact with other adoptive families, and help lines.
- Accessible information about services, supports, and resources.
- Parenting education, including practical help with children's needs.
- Respite care and babysitting for other children in the family.
- Counseling, including assistance with children's attachment issues; guidance in responding to their adopted children's emotional, behavioral, and developmental issues; assistance in dealing with

the impact of adoption on their birth children; and help with life planning for their children.

- Crisis intervention services.
- Advocacy services, including help negotiating the educational and mental health systems.
- Educational assessment, special education services, and tutoring.
- Counseling services for their children, including group services for older children.
- Specialized children's services, including mental health services, outpatient drug and alcohol treatment, physical therapy, and special medical equipment.
- Adoption assistance (subsidies) and medical coverage.

WHAT FAMILIES GET

Most families who adopt children from foster care in North Carolina receive some kind of financial assistance. Yet some adoptive families still have unmet support needs (NCDSS, 2004e).

There is tremendous variability across the country in terms of the supportive services that are available to adoptive families (Christian, 2002). The same is true within North Carolina. A handful of county DSS's have dedicated post-adoption support workers. Others receive help from private agencies who work under contract with the NC Division of Social Services. Still others offer very little in the way of post-adoptive services.

This variability explains the fact that 23% of those who responded to a recent survey of adoptive parents in North Carolina said they had trouble receiving respite or therapeutic services and 20% reported difficulty finding support groups (NCDSS, 2004e).

WHAT WORKS

There have been few empirical studies of the outcomes produced by post-adoption services. Most of these have methodological flaws (e.g., small

POST-ADOPTION SERVICES: POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Support for families after finalization is often provided in the hopes of achieving the following outcomes:

- **Preventing Dissolution and Out-of-Home Placement.** Services after the final decree of adoption are needed to promote the well-being of families and minimize the possibility that adoptions will fail (Barth & Berry, 1988).
- **Promoting Family Well-being.** There is evidence of a strong relationship between providing post-adoption support and the health, well-being, and stability of families (Groze, 1996; Smith & Howard, 1994), especially when counseling and other mental health services are provided (Winkler et al., 1988).
- **Recruiting Adoptive Parents.** Knowing support will be available after the adoption plays a critical role in many prospective adoptive parents' decisions to go forward with the adoption (Freundlich, 1997).

Source: Casey Family Services, 2002

sample size) that make it difficult to know what really works (Barth, et al., 2001). Yet new studies continue to appear that suggest post-adoption support does make a difference. For example, a recently published study out of New York reported that post-adoption services had a significant positive impact on families' happiness and ability to stay together (Avery, 2004).

This shortcoming in the literature puts agencies in a tough spot: they do not have the luxury of delaying action until researchers know more. Children continue to be adopted from foster care each day, and there is no doubt some of their families need support.

While practitioners and agencies should be careful not to overestimate the impact their interventions will have (Barth, 2001), they must continue to do everything they can to support families after adoptions are final. The following articles suggest ways to enhance your efforts in this area. ♦

ASSESSING POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT IN YOUR AGENCY

As we have mentioned, North Carolina's 100 county departments of social services are in different places when it comes to providing post-adoption support. A small number have dedicated post-adoption support workers. Others receive help from private agencies. Still others offer very little in the way of post-adoptive services.

You may find it useful to assess your agency's performance in this area, regardless of where it falls on this continuum. To make this task a little easier, we have developed a series of questions (see sidebar) intended to help you understand what you do well and where you might improve.

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES

As you conduct this self-assessment, be on the lookout for these obstacles:

Lack of awareness that there is a need for and a mandate to provide these services. As we hope this issue and North Carolina's policy make clear, the need is there and county DSS's must help address it.

Concerns about cost. Social worker time is definitely required when adoptive parents ask for support. But in the words of one adoption expert, "It is not about money, it is about support. It is about listening to families when they are having trouble and helping them access services."

Some agencies automatically assume that a commitment to post-adoption support means a huge financial investment. Yet many times all we need to do to support families is to make sure they know the door is open if they need help. The resources described later in this issue, most of which are free, should help your agency provide cost-effective services to those adoptive parents who do need them.

Another resource is the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice, which provides technical assistance to support agencies financing

and implementing post-adoption services. Contact Sarah Greenblatt at <sgreenblatt@caseyfamilyservices.org>.

Lack of expertise. Currently few child welfare workers in North Carolina, even those who specialize in adoptions, receive formal training about post-adoption support. Until training becomes available, agencies should encourage adoption workers to learn as much as they can about this subject on their own. The learning resources in the online version of this issue should help them do this.

Lack of community resources. According to the US Census Bureau (2002), North Carolina is 39.8% rural. In practical terms this means that many communities have very few providers, support groups, and other re-



What does your agency do well? Where can it improve?

sources. As one county DSS child welfare worker put it, "the most we do is refer a family to community resources that MAY be able to help them." Again, the

resources described later in this issue may help you enhance what you have to offer families.

CAPTURING STRENGTHS

We have also developed a short self-assessment individual workers can use to help them understand and multiply the post-adoption support successes they've had in the past. We suspect you'll find this brief questionnaire not only productive, but fun. You can find it in the online version of this issue at <www.practicenotes.org>. ♦

POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT: A SELF-ASSESSMENT

These questions may prove helpful to agencies seeking to assess their ability to provide timely, effective services to families after the final decree of adoption.

- What do we tell prospective adoptive families—and those who go on to adopt—about the likelihood they will need services after finalization?
- In the years following finalization, do we periodically check in with families to encourage them to seek out the support they need?
- When families do ask for help, is our response timely and coordinated?
- When we refer adoptive families to other community resources (e.g., mental health providers) are we confident these providers are accessible to the family (i.e., take Medicaid) and that they understand issues related to foster care and adoption?
- What do we say to each other in our agency about post-adoption support?
 - Is it clear who should respond when adoptive families ask us for help?
 - Do we encourage this person or persons to attend training or pursue self-guided learning about post-adoption support?
 - Do we have written policies and procedures about post-adoption support?
- What percentage of our financial resources (e.g., monies received through the Special Children's Adoption Fund) go to post-adoption support?
- Are we taking full advantage of the free help from outside vendors available to us through the NC Division of Social Services?
- Do we regularly evaluate our strengths and weaknesses when it comes to providing post-adoption support?

REMOVING BARRIERS TO SUPPORTIVE POST-ADOPTION SERVICES

Most child welfare professionals, researchers, and adoptive families agree about the common barriers to the delivery of post-adoption services. Here, based on advice from North Carolina post-adoption professionals, are suggestions for overcoming some of them.

AN OPEN DOOR

Research tells us that for the average adoptive family, the time between finalization and the first request for support is five years (Lenerz, 2000). In some cases this is probably appropriate. For other families this amounts to a harmful delay. Kathy Clayton, a clinical post-adoption worker with Children's Home Society of NC, says she's worked with many adoptive families don't ask for help until they are in full-blown crisis, by which point "there is a part of the parents that has already given up."

Solutions: Help families avoid crisis by:

Setting the tone from day one. Post-adoptive services should really begin with your very first contact with a potential adoptive family. Explain at that time the need for and availability of post-adoptive support. Explore and assess the family's expectations.

Helping parents anticipate their needs. Many professionals we spoke with emphasized that children in foster care today have different and more serious needs than children 15 years ago. Agencies must help families generate realistic expectations regarding the social behavior and educational attainment of the children they are adopting (Barth, 2001), as well as the services they may need.

Normalizing Help-Seeking Behavior. Help parents understand that they and their children will very likely have support needs. Make it clear that the need for short-term residential and treatment services is normal (Barth, 2001).

INFORMATION

One parent told us, "We wanted special therapeutic or educational programs for our son, but we didn't know where to find them. There was no resource directory." Her remarks were echoed by a recent survey in which North Carolina adoptive parents said they needed more information on what services were available and how to access them (NCDSS, 2004e).

Solution: As explained in the following article, the NC Division of Social Services is working with four agencies to establish 24-hour "warm lines" adoptive parents can call for information. Until these resources are up and running, there are still steps agencies can take to help adoptive parents get the information they need. For example, they can create a list of existing resources and distribute it to adoptive parents prior to finalization. Help parents keep this list current by sending them periodic updates through

the mail. Be sure to include on this list the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (800/962-6817; web: www.ecac-parentcenter.org), which serves parents whose children have educational challenges, and the Family Support Network of NC's Central Directory of Resources (800/852-0042; web: www.fsnc.org), which has information on resources to assist children with disabilities and their families, and a lending library.

RESPITE

Foster parents make up at least 64% of those who adopt children from foster care (Freundlich & Wright, 2003). When these families transition to life as adoptive parents, their access to respite care often comes to an end, in large part because of the cost involved.

Solution: North Carolina encourages county departments of social services to develop known and trusted respite resource families who understand the needs of adopted children and their families. These respite resource families may be experienced foster families or other adoptive families. Agencies should also encourage adoptive families to develop their own networks for respite support so they can avoid placing their child for a respite stay with strangers. Respite care is also one of the areas that is covered by the vendor payments North Carolina makes to parents who adopt children from the child welfare system.

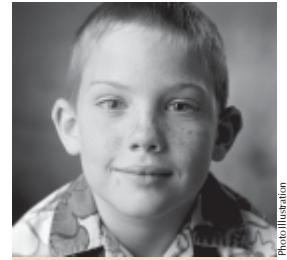
Another resource is the National Respite Locator Service (t: 919/490-5577; web: www.respitelocator.org). The website contains a list of respite providers in North Carolina. Please note that many of these providers have specific target populations and may not be available to serve a family unless it falls into the provider's service categories.

PEER SUPPORT

Adoptive parents often say that their most important resource is other adoptive parents. One adoptive parent we spoke with said regretfully, "I wish they had paired me with an adoptive family in a similar situation. . . . There is nothing like being able to talk to someone who really knows from personal experience what you are going through."

Solution: In the future information about support groups can be found by calling the regional "warm lines" being set up by the Division and its partners (see p. 7). Another referral source is the NC Foster Parents Association, which maintains a database of support groups. If there isn't one near you, they can help you start one. Call 866/623-7248 or send e-mail to ncfpa@uncg.edu.

Some adoptive parents also find support *cont. p. 6*



Adoptive families often struggle with health, mental health, and school personnel who don't understand them.

Photo: Illustration

online, for example at the following site, which features discussions about foster care and adoption in North Carolina: <forums.adoption.com/f493.html>

AFFORDABLE, INFORMED PROVIDERS

“After rushing her 11-year-old, newly adopted child to the hospital because of an unexpected psychotic episode, the intake worker, upon learning that the child was adopted, suggested that our colleague give her child back to the agency. Our colleague, upon learning that the intake worker had a social work degree, suggested that she give that back” (Kinship Center, 2004).

As this story illustrates, adoptive families often struggle with health, mental health, and school personnel who do not understand and are not sensitive to foster care and adoption issues. Working with unqualified mental health

professionals can be not only frustrating, but harmful to families. As one county adoption worker we spoke with explained, “Some therapists will think it is the parents who have issues, that the parents are the cause of the stress in the family system. But in my experience, outside of maybe needing to work on more effective parenting strategies, the root cause of the things these families go through is the abuse and neglect the children have experienced, the time they spent in foster care, and issues connected to the adoption process. These things wreak havoc on families.”

Payment can be another barrier. Mental health providers say that excess paperwork and a payment lag time of six months keep them from accepting Medicaid or insurance.

Solution: Agencies can support adoptive parents in this area by steering them toward qualified therapists, and by periodically sponsoring educational sessions for health, mental health, and school personnel about the impact of foster care adoptions on families. Ideally, these training sessions would be offered by respected providers and in an accepted venue (e.g., at an AHEC). For more discussion of the importance of adoption-competent mental health services—and a list of the traits to look for in a therapist—see “Promising Practices in Adoption-Competent Mental Health Services” online at <http://161.58.194.157/casey_mhpaper.html>.

EDUCATION FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Social workers and adoptive parents alike say that we need to do a better job preparing adoptive parents. NC adoptive parents say they would like training in specific disabilities and anger, discipline, social, and emotional issues (NCDSS, 2004e). Others want more exposure to foster and adoptive children during the training they receive.

Solution: Some resources to consider are the classes for adoptive parents offered by Children’s Home Society’s SPAN program (call 800/632-1400), which conducts training on a wide range of relevant topics for a nominal fee (\$10), providing space is available. You may also wish to direct parents to online learning sources, such as the free courses offered at <<http://adoptionlearningpartners.org>>.

Conferences are another resource. The NC Foster Parents Association holds an annual conference for foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. The next will be held April 15–17, 2005 at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel in Research Triangle Park. To learn more, visit <www.ncfpa.org>.

Periodically the NC Division of Social Services also offers conferences for adoptive parents. Its most recent, “Rekindling the Spirit, Celebrating the Family,” held Greensboro on August 13–15, 2004, was attended by more than 300 families. The Division hopes to host future conferences for adoptive families if funds become available. ♦

WHAT DO NC’S ADOPTIVE PARENTS SAY?

The NC Division of Social Services recently surveyed 8,000 adoptive parents in North Carolina. Based on a quantitative analysis of the 1,607 surveys that were returned, most parents who adopt children from foster care in our state seem to feel good about adoption. For example, 88% said that if they had to do it all over, they would adopt their child again, and 86% reported that they would recommend adoption to others. Sixty-eight percent reported that their child was a little or not at all difficult to raise. NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network analyzed the survey.

Parents also commented about their experience. As the following sample from this portion of the surveys suggests, there is room for improvement in post-adoption support in North Carolina. To receive the survey’s final report, contact the NCDSS’s Esther High (919/733-9464; Esther.High@ncmail.net).

Some Felt Supported

- “Both workers visited us frequently to check how the family and the children were adjusting.”
- “They have never failed ... to help us come up with some kind of solution.”

Many Felt Abandoned

- “The moment adoption was finalized I felt like I was on my own without support from DSS.”
- “To DSS these children are nothing. DSS pushes to get them adopted and then forgets them and the person that adopted them.”

Others Were Frustrated

- “DSS refuses to work with us as far as child’s problems go.”
- “Trying to get services in a time of need is extremely frustrating.”

Still Others Described their Challenges

- “The older the children get, the more problems arise.”
- “Both children are diagnosed with attachment disorder and we are fearful they will try to kill us at night.”

Many were unhappy with the support they received from DSS after finalization.

POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT EFFORTS IN NORTH CAROLINA

In July 2004 the NC Division of Social Services took an important step toward developing the infrastructure North Carolina needs to support its adoptive families. At that time it awarded \$1 million to four private providers to create a range of services that will make it easier for county departments of social services and others to support families in the years that follow the finalization of their adoptions. The funding for this effort comes from federal Title IV-B, subpart 2.

Grant recipients were Another Choice for Black Children, Children's Home Society of NC, Martin County Community Action, and Mountain Youth Resources. Each agency received \$100,000 for each region of the state for which it will be responsible. See the sidebar on this page for a listing of the counties covered by each region.

The overall goal of this post-adoption support program is to help families find parenting solutions that work and to help them find quality services in their local community. Each of these agencies is committed to providing families and children with the best support services possible in order to ensure happy and successful adoptions.

When this project is fully implemented, adoption professionals and parents who have adopted children from foster care in North Carolina will have access to:

- A toll-free "warm line" they can call for information and referrals related to post-adoption support
- A post-adoption support group in their region
- A variety of services customized to meet the needs of adoptive families in their region, including crisis intervention and preventive services

Presently these four providers are working to create regional consortiums that will foster strong partnerships with all professionals in the areas of the state they serve.

North Carolina also furthers post-adoption support efforts in the state by providing the following financial resources:

Adoption Cash Assistance Payments. For each child with spe-

cial needs they adopt, North Carolina families receive monthly adoption assistance payments. The legislature increased these payments in SFY 2003 and SFY 2004. The current monthly rates are \$390 for children age birth-5, \$440 for children age 6-12, and \$490 for children age 13-18.

Adoption Assistance Vendor Payments.

North Carolina also provides the amount of \$2,400 in vendor payments to help adoptive families meet medical and therapeutic needs not covered by Medicaid, and to support the educational and respite needs of children who qualify for such services.

NC's Special Children's Adoption Fund. Created by the legislature in 1997, this program makes payments to public and private adoption agencies for every child they place over and above an agency-specific baseline established by the NC Division of Social Services. Payments are as follows: \$9,000 to agencies for children aged 0-12, \$15,000 for children aged 13-18, and \$15,000 per child for sibling groups of three or more.

Agencies are free to use this money for post-adoptive services. The "catch" with this program is that the money in the fund is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Thus, agencies that place more children for adoption earlier in the year may receive more money than other counties. Usually the fund is depleted by April or May each fiscal year. The amount allocated for the fund for SFY 04-05 is \$3.1 million.

Federal Adoption Incentive Fund. Under this program, each state has an established benchmark—a set number of special needs adoptive placements it must make. Once it reaches this benchmark, the state receives adoption incentive bonuses for ev-



Photo illustration

Many of these services are free to public agencies!

FOUR NEW POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT RESOURCES

Mountain Youth Resources, Tel: 828/586-8958

Serving Regions 1, 2 and 3: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin, and Yancey counties and the Qualla Boundary

Children's Home Society, Tel: 800/ 632-1400

Serving Regions 4 and 5: Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Granville, Guilford, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Stokes, Surry, Union, and Vance counties

Another Choice for Black Children, Tel: 704/394-1124

Serving Regions 6, 7, and 8: Bladen, Brunswick, Chatham, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Greene, Halifax, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Lee, Moore, Nash, New Hanover, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Wake, Warren, Wayne, and Wilson counties

Martin County Community Action, Tel: 252/792-7111

Serving Regions 9 and 10: Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Carteret, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Northampton, Onslow, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrrell, and Washington counties

POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT EFFORTS IN NORTH CAROLINA *continued from page 7*

ery additional child placed for adoption. States decide how best to use the money. North Carolina has received received several payments from this fund recently. For several years this money was sent to agencies for the promotion and strengthening of the adoption program. In 2003 the money was used for a post-adoption conference. This year the money will be used to support the NC Foster Parents Association Conference to be held in April. (To learn more about these conferences, see the bottom of page 6.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the infrastructure-building contract already mentioned, every year the Division contracts with four private agencies to help county DSS's provide post-adoption support to families. Under this contract, a county DSS can refer a family to one of these providers at any time after the final decree and the vendor will provide up to one year of post-adoption services to the family. Services can include crisis management, behavioral strategies, family preservation services, information and community referral, and specialized training. The current providers under this contract (Adoption Plus, Another Choice for Black Children, Children's Home Society of North Carolina, Methodist Home for Children) can assist counties in every part of the state.

According to the Division, the resource these agencies provide is under-utilized. To obtain contact information for these provider agencies, contact the NCDSS's Esther High (919/733-9464; Esther.High@ncmail.net). ♦

KEY POINTS IN THIS ISSUE

- Adoptive families' need for services and supports may continue long after the adoption is finalized.
- In North Carolina, public agencies have an obligation to provide this support.
- Two critical first steps are (1) helping families understand they may need support and (2) telling them you and your agency are committed to ensuring that they receive support if they need it.
- Adoptive parents say some of their most important support needs are for information about the resources available to them, access to support groups and contact with other adoptive parents, respite, and additional education.
- The NC Division of Social Services is striving to help public agencies provide ongoing support to adoptive families.

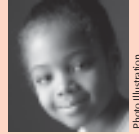


Photo: Illustration

IN THIS ISSUE: POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT IN NORTH CAROLINA

Family & Children's Resource Program
Jordan Institute for Families
UNC-School of Social Work
Campus Box 3550
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550
State Courier # 17-61-04