

Jane E. Norton
Lieutenant Governor

**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES
ONE CHILD AT A TIME**

The Lieutenant Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption

A Report Submitted to:

The Honorable Bill Owens
Governor, State of Colorado
and the
Colorado Sixty-Fifth General Assembly

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The Lieutenant Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption

Co-Chairs

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Lieutenant Governor

State of Colorado

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Adoptive Parent

Arvada, Colorado

Committee Members

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Adoptee	Honorable John W. Suthers , <i>United States Attorney</i> , District of Colorado
Adoption Expert	Dr. Dixie van de Flier Davis , <i>Executive Director</i> , The Adoption Exchange
Faith-Based Rep.	Alice Spencer , <i>Family Resource Coordinator</i> , Access Behavioral Care
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Mental Health	Dr. Frank Bennett, Ph.D. , <i>Director of Family Services</i> , Aurora Mental Health Center
Large County	Brian Field , <i>Director</i> , Arapahoe County Social Services
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Adoptive Parent	Brenda Chinn , <i>Adoptive Parent</i> , Grand Junction
State Legislator	The Honorable Ted Harvey , <i>State Representative</i> , State of Colorado
County Commissioner	The Honorable David Long , <i>County Commissioner</i> , Weld County
Court/Judicial/Legal	The Honorable David Furman, J.D. , <i>District Court Magistrate</i> , Denver
Private, Non-Profit	Gwen White , <i>Foster Care Program Director</i> , Lutheran Family Services of Colorado
Community/Business	Maren Stewart , <i>Vice President of External Affairs</i> , Children's Hospital
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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ONE CHILD AT A TIME

The Lieutenant Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November of 2002, Lieutenant Governor Jane Norton was asked by Governor Bill Owens to focus on promoting adoption as part of the administration's Strengthening Families initiative. Many adoption advocates responded after hearing the charge. An unofficial working group of adoption experts was assembled to collectively brainstorm ideas on how to improve the permanent placement of waiting children, and the adoption system within the state.

In April of 2003, members of this task force met with Lt. Governor Norton to present their recommendations. It was decided that the task force would continue meeting to determine the appropriate next steps. The result of their work was the approval of a plan to launch the *Lieutenant Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption*, based upon best practices in other states, in November 2003. The Committee met for six months to achieve the following objectives:

Committee Goal: To attain a successful, life-long permanency placement for every "waiting" child in the State of Colorado.

Committee Theme: Strengthening Colorado Families – One Child at a Time

Committee Charges:

- Review pertinent laws, regulations, judicial procedures, and other support systems that impact the state's adoption system and:
 - A. Determine which of these impede the goal of timely adoptions; and
 - B. Issue specific recommendations as to how Colorado can create an adoption-friendly system free of biases, laws, and policies that needlessly complicate or delay the adoption process.
- Provide prospective adoptive families with statewide, centralized assistance regarding the adoption process, both pre and post-adoption.
- Develop a public relations and educational campaign to increase awareness of a child's need for permanency, to recruit permanency families, to dispel adoption "untruths" and to promote adoption.

The Committee met for six months, dividing into sub-groups to study specific needs and make recommendations pertaining to the three charges shown above.

Historical Perspective:

Through the years, organizations have worked with neglected, abused and abandoned children in many different ways. Children have been placed in orphanages, group homes, and other housing facilities. Most children in out-of-home placements are in foster care until they are either re-united with their biological family or adopted. In far too many cases, neither of these happens. Many children simply “age out” of the system and will never have a family of their own.

Overview of the Problem:

There are currently thousands of children in foster care in Colorado, over 700 of whom are classified as “waiting children,” which means that the parental rights have been terminated. They have no permanent home or family they can call their own. In Colorado, foster care is a county-administered, state-supervised system.

Overall, in the United States today, there are more than a half million children in foster care. The majority will remain in care for more than three years and live in at least three different foster homes.¹ Foster care was intended to be short-term, temporary placement until children could return safely to their families or be adopted. For more and more children, however, foster care has become a long-term arrangement. According to the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System (AFCARS) more than one-fourth of children in foster care had been there between two and five years; another 17 percent had been in foster care for more than five years.² Analysis of data from Chapin Hall’s Multi-State Foster Care Data Archive indicates that one out of every five children entering foster care for the first time is under one year old and that the very youngest children stay the longest in foster care.³ Half of the babies who enter foster care before they are 3-months-old, for instance, spend a total of 31 months or longer in placement.⁴

Children enter care for a number of reasons, but predominantly because of abuse and neglect. While the common image is of children having been beaten, bruised or burned, many are removed from their homes because of neglect. Sixty percent of the children who had been in foster care for one year were there because of neglect.⁵ Data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being indicated that 32 percent of children were in foster care as a result of abuse. An additional 8 percent of children in foster care entered for reasons other than abuse and neglect, such as the need for mental health services, domestic violence, or disability.⁶ The longer children remain in foster care, the more likely they will experience multiple placements. More than 20 percent of children in foster care will live in at least three different placement settings; some will live in seven or more.⁷ Multiple moves rupture relationships, interrupt schooling, delay medical care and can derail a child’s development in fundamental ways. Some of these problems likely have roots in the underlying abuse or neglect that led a child to be placed in foster care; nevertheless, long and uncertain periods in foster care also contribute to these poor outcomes.⁸

¹ FOSTER CARE, Voices from the Inside, commissioned by The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, February 18, 2004

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. “Preliminary Estimates for FY 2001” as of March 2003 (8). Available at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb.

³ Wulczyn, Fred and Hislop, Kristen. “Babies in Foster Care: The Numbers Call for Attention.” *Zero to Three*, April/May 2002, pp. 14-15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being: Baseline Report for One-Year-In-Foster Care Sample*. Executive Summary. Washington, D.C: Administration for Children, Youth and Families, October 2003.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Barbell, Kathy and Freundlich, Madelyn. *Foster Care Today*. Washington, DC: Casey Family Programs, 2001, pp.1-3.

⁸ Newton, Rae and Litrownik, Alan. “Children and Youth in Foster Care: Disentangling the Relationship Between Problem Behaviors and Number of Placements.” *Child Abuse & Neglect*, October 2000, Volume 24 Issue 10, pp. 1363-1374.

Critical Timing:

For a child who is waiting for a family, even the smallest delay can seem like a lifetime. Although some of the recommendations in this report require legislative or administrative approval, others can be implemented immediately upon acceptance of this report. For recommendations requiring funding and/or support from the private sector, there needs to be a concerted effort to recruit support as soon as possible.

In the spirit of the Committee’s goal to attain a successful, life-long permanency placement for every “waiting” child in the State of Colorado, and as requested in the three charges to the Committee, the Lieutenant Governor’s Committee to Promote Adoption makes the following 16 recommendations (not listed in any particular order):

- Recommendation 1** *Encourage earlier participation by relatives to avoid a delay in finding a permanent home for a child caused by a potential legal custodian coming forward late in the process, including the day of the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) hearing.*
- Recommendation 2** *Prevent delays in finding a permanent home for a child due to illicit drug use by parents.*
- Recommendation 3** *Expedite Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) appeals in the Court of Appeals.*
- Recommendation 4** *Reduce the length of time to finalize adoptions.*
- Recommendation 5** *Clarify the issue of when a child is legally free for adoption.*
- Recommendation 6** *Create a better flow of completed adoptive home studies between county departments of social services.*
- Recommendation 7** *Assure that the adopted child has appropriate coverage for their health care needs.*
- Recommendation 8** *Improve public perception of adoption.*
- Recommendation 9** *Implement the existing statute regarding continuances of Dependency and Neglect cases with more consistency and thoroughness.*
- Recommendation 10** *Develop a centralized Colorado Adoption Resource and Education (CARE) Center.*
- Recommendation 11** *Review and recommend required worker characteristics and training processes for adoption personnel, both public and private.*
- Recommendation 12** *Standardize home studies and other adoption programs by using the California Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) program as a model⁹*
- Recommendation 13** *Adopt the slogan: Adopt Colorado Kids, Change A Life Forever and promote adoption by encouraging families to inquire about how to adopt.*
- Recommendation 14** *Encourage the interest and involvement of communities of faith to recruit 1000 foster and adoptive families.*
- Recommendation 15** *Monitor the impact of adoption subsidies on the rate of adoption.*
- Recommendation 16** *Provide Internet access and a toll-free phone line with rapid follow-up responses to inquiring families, maintaining contact with them until they are actively engaged in the process of adoption. Modify the current “Change A Life Forever” website to be more user friendly for those in need of information regarding adoptions, post-adoptive services and the adoption process.*

CHARGE 1

Review pertinent laws, regulations, judicial procedures, and other support systems that impact the state's adoption system and:

- A. Determine which of these impede the goal of timely adoptions; and
- B. Issue specific recommendations as to how Colorado can create an adoption-friendly system free of biases, laws, and policies that needlessly complicate or delay the adoption process.

Recommendation 1

Encourage earlier participation by relatives to avoid a delay in finding a permanent home for a child caused by a potential legal custodian coming forward late in the process, including the day of the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) hearing.

Why: Permanency for children is delayed when relative options come forward the day of the TPR because another placement hearing is then set for 90 – 120 days, and adoptive possibilities cannot be pursued until relatives are evaluated.

How:

- Emphasize good practice of concurrent planning by adoption workers.
- Statutory change:

Legend:
Text in *italics* – strike.
Text in **BOLD CAPS** – add.

Section 19-3-605

Request for placement with family members (1) following an order of termination of the parent-child relationship, the court shall consider, but shall not be bound by a request that guardianship and legal custody of the child be placed in grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother, or sister of the child. When ordering guardianship of the person and legal custody of the child, the court shall give preference to a grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother, or sister of the child. When such relative has made a request therefore and the court determines that such placement is in the best interests of the child. Such request must be submitted to the court *prior to the commencement of the hearing on petition seeking the termination of the parent-child legal relationship*. **WITHIN 20 DAYS OF THE DATE OF FILING OF THE MOTION SEEKING THE TERMINATION OF THE PARENT-CHILD LEGAL RELATIONSHIP.**

Who: The General Assembly, working with adoption advocates.

Timeline: 2005 Legislative Session.

Status: Pending draft legislative proposal.

Recommendation 2

Prevent delays in finding a permanent home for a child due to illicit drug use by parents.

Why: Rehabilitation of drug abusing parents is extremely difficult and lengthy and can cause significant delays in achieving permanency for children. In addition, drug use and manufacturing can have negative and long-lasting effects on children.

How:

- Change statutory language at the adjudication and termination stages:

Legend:
Text in *italics* – strike.
Text in **BOLD CAPS** – add.

- Section 19-3-102. Neglected or Dependent Child.

(1) A child is neglected or dependent if:

(g) **AT BIRTH THE CHILD TESTS POSITIVE FOR EITHER A SCHEDULE I OR SCHEDULE II CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE, AS DEFINED IN C.R.S.**

(h) **18-18-203 OR C.R.S. 18-18-204.**

- Section 19-3-604. Criteria for termination.

(1) The Court may order a termination of the parent-child relationship upon the finding by clear and convincing evidence of any one of the following:

(b) That the child is adjudicated dependent or neglected and the court finds that no appropriate treatment plan can be devised to address the unfitness of the parent or parents. In making such a determination, the court shall find one of the following as the basis for the unfitness:

(c) **AT BIRTH THE CHILD TESTS POSITIVE FOR EITHER A SCHEDULE I OR SCHEDULE II CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE, AS DEFINED IN C.R.S. 18-18-203 OR C.R.S. 18-18-204.**

Who: The General Assembly, working with adoption advocates.

Timeline: 2005 Legislative Session.

Status: Pending draft legislative proposal.

Recommendation 3

Expedite Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) appeals in the Court of Appeals.

Why: Although the Court of Appeals tries to expedite cases, appeals have taken a year or more, thus delaying permanency for children.

How:

- Support the recommendations of the Appellate Symposium to expedite the appeals process.
- Support the rule changes proposed at that symposium, i.e. Rule 3.4. Appeals from Proceedings in Dependency or Neglect.

Who: Agencies responsible for implementing rules of procedure.

Timeline: Proposed January 1, 2005 implementation date.

Status:

- 1) Rules have been presented for public comment.
- 2) Rules have been redrafted (see Rule 3.4. *Appeals from Proceedings in Dependency or Neglect.*)
- 3) Rules were presented to the Supreme Court on June 9th.
- 4) Rules will go to the Rules Committee with a proposed January 1, 2005 implementation date.

Recommendation 4

Reduce the length of time to finalize adoptions.

Why: Court docket overloads negatively affect the finalization of some adoptions. Wait time needs to be clarified. There is a need to clarify judicial interpretation of the statutes as they now stand.

How:

- 19-5-210(2) Change the Statute to read:

(2) In stepparent, custodial, or kinship adoptions, the court shall hold a hearing on the petition no sooner than six months after the date *of the placement* **THE CHILD BEGINS TO LIVE IN THE POTENTIAL ADOPTIVE HOME** unless for good cause shown that time is extended or shortened by the court.

Legend:
Text in *italics* – strike.
Text in BOLD CAPS – add.

Who: The General Assembly, working with adoption advocates.

Timeline: 2005 Legislative Session.

Status: Pending draft legislative proposal.

Recommendation 5

Clarify the issue of when a child is legally free for adoption.

Why: Although there is a 90-day limitation to annul and adopt (19-5-214), some county attorneys feel the statute is unclear. They also indicate that when there is not a birth father indicated on the birth certificate, any man could come forward at any time and allege he is the birth father. County departments must then complete a paternity test and, if it is positive, adjudicate as to that father, complete a treatment plan, etc. There have been instances of this occurring when children have been in adoptive placements for a long period of time.

How:

- Issuance of an agency letter from the Colorado Department of Human Services to all county Departments of Social Services clarifying the department's interpretation of Statutory Amendment 19-5-214 and Rule Amendment 6.2 of Colorado Rules of Juvenile Procedure:

19-5-214 is amended to read:

- (1) No final decree of adoption shall be attacked by reason of any jurisdictional or procedural defect after the expiration of ninety days following the entry of the final decree; except that, in cases of stepparent adoption, no final decree of adoption shall be attacked by reason of fraud upon the court or fraud upon a party, whether or not there is a jurisdictional or procedural defect, after the expiration of one year following the entry of the final decree of adoption.
- (2) When a final decree of adoption is attacked on any basis at any time, the court shall consider the best interests of the child, taking into account the factors set forth in section 14-10-124, CRS. The court shall sustain the decree unless there is clear and convincing evidence that the decree is not in the best interests of the child.

Rule 6.2 of the Colorado Rules of Juvenile Procedure is amended to read:

- (a) Every decree in adoption shall be in conformance with the Colorado Children's Code, and shall include, but not be limited to:
- (3) A finding that the child is available for adoption; that written consents of all persons, as provided by law, are on file with the court and are valid; that the rights of all parents, whether known or unknown, have been terminated or that such parents have been given notice of a right to a hearing on fitness, pursuant to Section 19-3-102, CRS.

Who: Colorado Department of Human Services.

Timeline: 60 days from finalization of report.

Status: Pending draft rulemaking procedures.

Recommendation 6

Create a better flow of completed adoptive home studies between county departments of social services.

Why: If a family has a completed home study and moves to a different location, or for some other reason is unable to utilize the study within the new county Department of Social Services, it is difficult to move that study to another county department for their possible use. This can cause problems in the availability of adoptive families for waiting children.

How:

- The Colorado Department of Human Services would implement a rule change in Volume VII to promote adoptive study exchange and reciprocity between county Departments of Social Services.

Who: The Colorado Department of Human Services would submit a proposed rule change to the State Board of Human Services for consideration.

Timeline: 60 days from finalization of report.

Status: Standardization of Home Studies is currently being evaluated (see Recommendation 13).

Recommendation 7

Assure that the adopted child has appropriate coverage for their health care needs.

Why: Some children available for adoption have special health care needs that can serve as a barrier to their adoption. Families considering adoption may be reluctant to commit to adopting a child with such special health care needs out of concern for the financial burden of providing health care. Colorado currently provides Medicaid coverage for children in subsidized adoption, but statutory authority for doing so needs clarification.

How: Statutory change: addition of new paragraph.

Legend:

Text in BOLD CAPS – add.

- Section 26-4-301 Optional provisions – optional groups.
The federal government allows the state to select optional groups to receive medical assistance. Pursuant to federal law, any person who is eligible for medical assistance under the optional groups specified in this section shall receive both the mandatory services specified in sections 26-4-202 and 26-4-203 and the optional services specified in sections 26-4-302 and 26-4-303. Subject to the availability of federal financial aid funds, the following are the individuals or groups, which Colorado has selected as optional groups to receive medical assistance pursuant to this article:
(r) **INDIVIDUALS IN ADOPTIONS SUBSIDIZED IN FULL OR IN PART BY A PUBLIC AGENCY.**

Who: The General Assembly, working with adoption advocates.

Timeline: 2005 Legislative Session.

Status: Pending draft legislative proposal.

Recommendation 8

Improve public perception of adoption.

Why: Because adoption hearings are closed to the public, the positive aspects of the finalization hearing are not promoted. National studies have shown that many persons do not adopt because of fears about the adoption process. Opening adoption hearings on an optional basis and promoting them could possibly counter concerns, “untruths” and a negative public perception of the adoption process.

How:

- Establish an annual Colorado Adoption Day in the month of November corresponding with National Adoption Day.
- Invite local news coverage to promote various adoption finalizations and other public awareness events initiated by adoptive parent groups and advocates for permanence.

- Statutory change:

19-5-210(5) is amended to read:

(4) All hearings with reference to adoption shall be closed to the public and, in the discretion of the court, to any child who is the subject of adoption and who is under twelve years of age, but the court may interview the child whenever it deems proper. **UPON THE MOTION OF ANY PARTY OR UPON THE COURT’S OWN MOTION, THE COURT MAY ORDER THAT AN ADOPTION HEARING BE OPENED TO THE PUBLIC IF THE COURT FINDS THAT OPENING THE HEARING IS IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD OR CHILDREN WHO ARE THE SUBJECT OF THE ADOPTION HEARING, AND THAT THE POTENTIAL ADOPTIVE PARENTS HAVE CONSENTED.**

Legend:

Text in BOLD CAPS – add.

Who: The Colorado Governor, upon a yearly resolution initiated by recommendation of the Lt. Governor, Departments of Social Services, adoption professionals, adoptive parent volunteers, media, and the General Assembly working with adoption advocates.

Timeline: November 2004 (2005 Legislative Session for statute changes).

Status: Pending draft legislative proposal.

Recommendation 9

Implement the existing statute regarding continuances of Dependency and Neglect cases with more consistency and thoroughness.

Why: Continuances of Dependency and Neglect cases slow down permanency for children. In some situations attorneys have pressed for continuances even though clients have disappeared. This is already addressed in statute, but it needs to be implemented consistently.

How:

- Work with the Office of Judiciary to clarify this issue in the state’s judicial districts.
- Educate judges on the implementation of the statute.

Who: State Court Administrator’s Office and Court Improvement Committee of the Supreme Court.

Timeline: 60 days from finalization of report.

CHARGE 2

Provide prospective adoptive families with statewide, centralized assistance regarding the adoption process, both pre and post-adoption.

Recommendation 10

Develop a centralized Colorado Adoption Resource and Education (CARE) Center.

Why:

Pre-Adoption

The process of adopting foster children in a state-supervised, county-administered system can be overwhelming for potential adoptive families. Despite numerous and ongoing recruitment campaigns, many prospective adoptive families still do not understand foster adoption. Prospective parents should be educated about all aspects of adopting “waiting” children, including the joy and enrichment that adoption brings. They should know where to go and what to do to be successful in adopting, and they must understand the unconditional commitment necessary. They must also have assurances that they will receive help throughout the process.

Families who adopt foster children should have the same support and assistance as families who pay for private adoptions. Everyone going through the process of adopting Colorado’s “waiting” children deserves to be represented and informed every step of the way. Potential adoptive families must not be allowed to “slip through the cracks” for lack of follow up and support. As counties face increasing budget constraints, the resources available for adoption recruiting and support at the county level have diminished.

Post-Adoption

When an adoption is finalized, families often lose resources (e.g. respite care, social worker support and counseling) which were available prior to the adoption. They may need assistance locating medical, educational, mental health and other support services, including respite or other out-of-home care.

The best recruiters for new adoptive families are adoptive families with positive experiences who felt supported all the way through the adoption process and post-adoption period. When families do not receive appropriate post-adoption support, the children may spend a great deal of time, even years, in out-of-home placements. Such adoption experiences are very expensive for both the family and the state and make recruitment of families more difficult.

How: Develop or recruit an organization or organizations to provide the following services to supplement and augment services provided by existing agencies:

Pre-Adoption

- Assist potential adoptive families with the application process.
- Help eliminate some of the “mysteries” and “myths” surrounding the adoption process for potential adoptive parents.
- Provide assistance in completing all necessary paperwork, assuring that classes and orientations are available.
- Provide a pre-screening process for potential adoptive families prior to the application process, so that counties can maximize time and effort with families that will eventually adopt.
- Serve as a resource for all counties’ Children’s Services departments and adoption personnel.
- Follow up with all inquiries from recruiting campaigns until prospective applicants either adopt or opt out.
- Be an advocate and agent for potential adoptive families throughout the adoption process.

Post-Adoption

- Develop and coordinate support groups for adoptive families.
- Assist the family in finding therapeutic, medical and other resources.
- Provide a “buddy” or “mentoring” family for the new adoptive family.
- Maintain a complete list of respite care providers.
- Provide a 24-hour help line.
- Provide monthly workshops and other resources, such as an extensive library, including videotapes and audiotapes.
- Provide or coordinate training for medical, legal, educational and mental health professionals in the special needs and unique aspects of growing up adopted in our society.

Who: An agency or organization(s), chosen through a competitive selection process through the state. This organization will be designated as the Colorado Adoption Resource and Education (CARE) Center, and will be supported by the Colorado Department of Human Services and Colorado Counties, Inc. as the central organization to provide the above-described services. Volunteer adoptive parents can help staff the CARE Center. Faith-based organizations, private businesses providing service in kind (facilities, supplies, and support resources), private child placement agencies and other adoption organizations can all work with the CARE Center to provide assistance to the counties and to adoptive families.

Potential Funding Sources:

Private Businesses
Government Grants
Foundations/Private Grants
Adoption Incentive Funds
County Contracts (counties voluntarily contracting services from the CARE Center)
Adoptive families who become “members” to support the CARE Center

Timeline: Process to start December 2004.

Recommendation 11

Review and recommend required worker characteristics and training processes for adoption personnel, both public and private.

Why: To assure that caseworkers are properly trained to understand and address the needs of potential adoptive families, both pre and post-adoption, and possess the necessary skills to create comfortable environments for potential adoptive families.

To balance the formalities of the adoption process with the ability to better explain rules and/or regulations and their necessity, and ensure that caseworkers are experienced and well prepared to provide both pre and post-adoption support to adoptive families.

How:

- Have new caseworkers participate in “shadowing” programs with experienced adoption and family workers.
- Have all adoption workers participate in yearly or bi-annual client satisfaction evaluations and/or assessments.
- Recommend specialized cultural competency training to be developed in conjunction with the current mandatory computer based training, new worker core and legal preparation training. This training would more closely address the diversity in families (i.e. kinship, grandparents raising grandchildren, ethnic differences, couples affected by infertility, alternative family structures, etc.), worker sensitivity and biases, and effective communication between workers and families.
- Utilize adoptive families or foster families as support systems and/or mentors for caseworkers and their dealings with new and prospective adoptive families.
- Recommend curriculum development or additional programming for social work students who are pursuing degrees at colleges and universities.
- Encourage local colleges and universities to include brief experience working within Departments of Social Services in internship/field placements for Bachelors in Social Work (B.S.W.), Masters in Social Work (M.S.W.) and PhD students (regardless of specialization).
- Utilize the Colorado Department of Human Services workforce development services, local county Departments of Social Services, adoptive parents, and adoption support agencies (i.e. Adoption Exchange, etc) and review established cultural sensitivity programs.
- Establish a statewide Training Conference (i.e. Child Welfare Annual Conference, Colorado Coalition for Adoptive Families [COCAF]).

Who: County agencies, along with public and private adoption agencies in a collaborative effort to develop shadowing programs. Colleges and Universities working on curriculum development.

Timeline: Six months after finalization of report.

Status: Colorado Department of Human Services personnel are currently working to modify training provided to county caseworkers. Lines of communication with the above-mentioned entities need to be established by other state departments in order to follow through with these recommendations.

Recommendation 12

Standardize home studies and other adoption programs by using the California Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) program as a model.⁹

Why: There needs to be greater uniformity of county adoption services and programs, such as subsidies and home studies, so that they are consistent and interchangeable from county to county. Families who are interested in fostering or adopting must complete a family assessment, but county departments and child placement agencies each follow a different set of rules identifying the content of the assessment. Colorado does not have a standardized home assessment tool.

How:

- By using the best and most proven elements of the SAFE program.
- By implementing a statewide system, using proven methods developed by counties participating in a pilot program of implementation.

Who: County adoption workers and Children's Services Departments, Colorado State Department of Human Services personnel and private agencies.

Timeline: The SAFE Pilot began July 2004 and will end December 2004. In September 2004, the original work group and training participants will convene to discuss preliminary recommendations about utilizing the instrument statewide and to identify the need for additional training. The work group will reconvene in December 2004 to discuss their final recommendations about statewide implementation.

Status: The State contracted with the Consortium for Children in California to conduct a two-day training on May 26, 2004 for the counties and private agencies that participated in the SAFE Pilot. Each of the pilot participants have identified key staff and a supervisor to attend the training. The State has also provided four slots for representatives from the Colorado State Foster Parent Association and the Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families to participate in the training.

CHARGE 3

Develop a public relations and educational campaign to increase awareness of a child's need for permanency, to recruit permanency families, to dispel adoption "untruths" and to promote adoption.

Recommendation 13

Adopt the slogan: *Adopt Colorado Kids, Change A Life Forever* and promote adoption by encouraging families to inquire about how to adopt.

Why: There are more than 700 children in foster care in Colorado who wait for families. This slogan associates the message with pre-existing and parallel state and national campaigns, maximizing the impact.

How:

- Identify opportunities for public exposure via speaking events, radio and television and in print news outlets.
- Refer families who inquire about adoption to the CARE Center and/or 800 number.

Who: Existing public and private partnerships. The Colorado Department of Human Services, The Adoption Exchange, Inc. and Health and Human Services Children’s Bureau have existing campaigns to promote adoption, as do many counties and private licensed child placement agencies. This initiative will be integrated into those campaigns to maximize the impact of all.

Timeline: Beginning June 2004 and continuing through 2006.

Recommendation 14

Encourage the interest and involvement of communities of faith to recruit 1000 foster and adoptive families.

Why: Families who adopt children from the foster care system frequently turn to their faith communities for support.

How:

- Encourage one-on-one/minister-to-minister meetings with 500 ministers.
- Refer interested families to adoption information meetings and trainings at churches.
- Connect recruited families with the state response team for mentoring.

Who: Colorado churches in partnership with the David’s Dream collaboration, Colorado Department of Human Services, counties, and licensed private child placement agencies.

Timeline: 2004-2006.

Status: Colorado churches have begun collaboration with Colorado Department of Human Services, counties, existing private, non-profit organizations, and the state response team to carry out this initiative as part of existing recruitment efforts.

Recommendation 15

Monitor the impact of adoption subsidies on the rate of adoption.

Why: National studies showed significant increases in adoptions of children from foster care once subsidies were instituted. The Committee recommends that Colorado determine whether adoption subsidies impact the responsiveness of families that this campaign attempts to recruit.

How:

- Conduct a three-year survey and report results.

Who: Colorado Department of Human Services in consultation with Colorado Counties Inc. and private partners to identify a Colorado institution of higher learning to oversee the survey.

Recommendation 16

Provide Internet access and a toll-free phone line with rapid follow-up responses to inquiring families, maintaining contact with them until they are actively engaged in the process of adoption. Modify the current “Change A Life Forever” website to be more user friendly for those in need of information regarding adoptions, post-adoptive services and the adoption process.

Why: Studies report that families do not typically receive a warm welcome when they connect with a telephone voice message. Families become confused and often feel unwelcome when they initiate calls to various agencies to inquire. When urgent action is suggested through marketing efforts, families expect their offers to be received with an equal sense of importance. The present website is somewhat confusing, difficult to navigate and in places out of date. There is also a need for a constantly maintained website with updated representation of children available for adoption and updated links to other sites.

How:

- Provide rapid response to inquiring families using existing 800 number.
- Initiate second response to inquiring families within 24 hours of first inquiry.
- Maintain contact with the families until they drop out or are actively engaged with an agency in the process of adoption.
- Review all related web sites and establish consistent links to one another and to critical resources (e.g. “How to Adopt in Colorado” book and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse) for ease in navigation.
- Testing of website by various county representatives.
- Redesign and collaboration with web-designer.
- Include capacity for “book shelf” information.
- Tie in with “211” information line.
- Encourage Colorado Department of Human Services and its partner adoption organizations to obtain volunteer personnel to keep their websites current.

Who: Existing public and private partners in adoption service provision. Adoptive parents and other interested parties can volunteer to review websites to ensure that they are up-to-date and user friendly.

Timeline: A toll-free phone line and response team began June 1, 2004, with funding from AdoptUSKids.
Improved website: 60 days from finalization of report.

Status: Colorado Department of Human Services has already begun this initiative in collaboration with private organization partners and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau through its AdoptUSKids campaign.

CONCLUSION

The problems facing children waiting in foster care are multifaceted and complex. Whenever a difficult decision must be made regarding this issue, the answer usually becomes clear if one stops and asks, "What is best for the child?" There are significant roles for everyone, including the Colorado General Assembly, State Agencies, adoption professionals, communities and families. The recommendations in this report, if acted upon, will vastly increase the possibility of attaining a successful, life-long permanency placement for every "waiting" child in the State of Colorado.

The one thing no child should be asked to give up is his or her childhood. The Lieutenant Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption submits these recommendations as an action plan to end the crises facing all children waiting in foster care for a "forever family."

ADDENDUM # A
(SEE RECOMMENDATION #13)

REPORT ON STANDARDIZING THE HOME ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Issue:

Families who are interested in fostering or adopting must complete a family assessment. County departments and child placement agencies each follow a different set of rules outlined in Volume 7 identifying the content of the assessment. Colorado does not have a standardized home assessment tool.

Background:

During both the foster care and the subsidized adoption program audits performed by the State Legislative Auditors Office in 2002, it was noted that home assessments were inadequate. Colorado needs a uniform, consistent, structured format for assessing kinship, foster and adoptive homes.

The Colorado Department of Human Services assessed the SAFE (Structured Analysis Family Evaluation) that has been field tested and utilized statewide in California by both public and private agencies.

A workgroup was convened and met March 22 and April 8, 2004. The Committee was comprised of adoptive parents, foster parents, licensed child placement agencies who do both foster and adoption and county department line staff (Denver, Arapahoe, Jefferson, Mesa, Alamosa, Otero). Information about the SAFE Tool was shared at the Adoption Supervisors and Foster Care Coordinators meetings to give many counties the opportunity to participate in the pilot. The group recommended that the State pilot the SAFE Tool and provide training to those participating in the pilot. It was further recommended that the pilot last for six months commencing in July 2004 and end in December 2004 with a check-in with participants at three months. This would provide the State with interim feedback on the instrument.

Current Status:

The State contracted with the Consortium for Children in California to conduct a two-day training on May 26 and 27, 2004 at the Holiday Inn in Lakewood for the counties and private agencies that will be participating in the SAFE-Pilot. Each of the pilot participants identified key staff and a supervisor to attend the training. The State also provided training slots for representatives from the Colorado State Foster Parent Association and the Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families to participate in the training. (Each group was given two slots.)

Participating Counties:	Denver	Elbert	Jefferson	Mesa
Private Agencies Participating	Adoption Alliance	Catholic Charities	Path, Inc.	

Next Steps:

- ◆ The SAFE Pilot began July 2004 and will end December 2004.
- ◆ In September 2004, the original work group and training participants will convene to discuss preliminary recommendations about utilizing the instrument statewide and to identify the need for additional training.
- ◆ In December 2004, the work group will reconvene to discuss their final recommendations about statewide implementation. Given a favorable recommendation the Department will proceed to develop a work plan to implement the SAFE instrument statewide.

SELECTED REFERENCES

1. ***Post-Permanency Services*** By Madelyn Freundlich and Lois Wright, 2003
Casey Family Program Center for Resource Family Support
1808 Eye Street, NW, 5th Floor Washington, D.C., 20006 1(888)295-6727
http://www.caseyfamilyprograms.org/cnc/policy_issues/post_permanency_services.htm
Post-Permanency Services is the most comprehensive overview of what happens to children and youth after they have achieved their permanent plans.
2. ***Healing the Hole in the Heart*** By Steve Christian
National Conference of State Legislators
7700 East First Place Denver, CO 80230
(303)364-7700 www.ncsl.org
Discusses the Utah Program, and summarizes recommendations to state legislators regarding the need for PAS programs.
3. ***Post-Adoption Services: Issues for Legislators*** By Steve Christian
NCSL State Legislative Report – Analysis of State Actions on Important Issues
November 2002, Volume 27, Number 17
National Conference of State Legislators
7700 East First Place , Denver, CO 80230
(303)364-7700 www.ncsl.org
4. ***Strengthening Families and Communities: An Approach to Post-Adoption Services
A White Paper***
Casey Family Services, 2002
5. ***The Compass – A Family Guide to Post Adoption Resources in Colorado***
January 2003, 2nd Edition: The Adoption Exchange, Colorado Department of Human Services Promoting Safe & Stable Families
6. ***Using Federal Programs to Support Interagency Systems of Care for Children with Mental Health Care Needs***
<http://www.bazelon.org/issues/children/publications/mixmatch/mixandmatch.pdf>
This issue brief is produced to help states and localities use existing federal programs in a coordinated manner to finance the widest possible array of services for children of all ages and income groups.
Additional publications on Medicaid and children with serious mental health disorders can be found at:
<http://www.bazelon.org/issues/children/publications/>
7. ***Adoption Services Use, Helpfulness, and Need: A Comparison of Public and Private Agency and Independent Adoptive Families*** By Joan Allen, Richard P. Barth, Devon Brooks
www.childwelfare.com/kids/cysr.htm
This study examined ways in which adoption service providers can better meet the needs of adoptive families.

Working Model

Utah's Post-Adoption Services Model is an outstanding example of a collaborative effort between families, human services, and adoption professionals in developing a PAS program, which was designed to be implemented over a 3-year period. The Utah State Social Services program is summarized in the following documents:

Utah PAS Program Year 1 August 2001—Utah PAS Program Year 1 November 2002

The committee would like to thank the following people for their numerous contributions to the work reflected in this report:

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