

## **Post-Adoption Services Prevent Disruption**

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### **Dear Editor:**

Elizabeth Hamilton's article, "Adoption Rate Quadruples" on July 17, 2000, presented an admirable summary of the situation facing children waiting for homes in Connecticut. In light of the emphasis on increasing the number of children placed in adoptive homes, deeper public understanding of all the issues surrounding adoption is critical. One issue in particular needs far more attention: the lack of sufficient support for families following adoption.

While the number of adoptions is rising quickly and dramatically in Connecticut and around the country, the figures may be deceiving. Most professionals agree that a disturbingly high number of adopted children, especially those previously in foster care, are not able to stay with their new families. Unable to withstand these children's oftensevere emotional and psychological problems--problems for which their families are often ill prepared--the adoptions disrupt.

There are almost no data to provide a true picture of the disruption rate for adoptions of children with special needs. What we do know is that professionals in the field of child welfare are concerned. There is wide agreement that the rate of adoption disruption is rising in direct proportion to the increase in the rate at which children are moved from the foster care system into adoption. Moreover, there is shared concern that when a child leaves an adoptive home and returns to foster care, he or she appears on state records as a new case, without a full history of placements. Not surprisingly, the child's journey out of foster care into an adoptive home and then back to foster care adds to his or her emotional burdens. Yet currently there is no way to accurately track or document that child's experience regardless of its impact.

The article made reference to the state's "beefing up" its post-adoption services. Casey Family Services applauds that effort. We are pleased to have played a role in building the state's capacity to develop and offer supportive services for families following the legalization of adoption.

At the same time, it is crucial that we all understand the dynamics of adoption much better than we do today, and that we respond appropriately in order to strengthen and preserve adoptive families. As the direct services arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the largest private foundation working to improve the quality of life for children, families and neighborhoods in Hartford and across the nation, Casey Family Services believes that every child needs and deserves a nurturing, stable and caring family. We know that children do well when their families do well.

Parents who make the decision to open their homes to a child in need deserve more than a pat on the back. They deserve to be fully informed about their child's condition and fully prepared to meet his/her needs. Following adoption, the family deserves ongoing supports and services, including training, information, referrals, counseling, support groups and more.

In nearly 25 years of assisting vulnerable children and families, we have come to recognize that adoption is a lifelong process. Adoptive parents need not feel alone and helpless when their children exhibit even deep-seated problems. There are many agencies that can help.

We urge the state to continue to improve its tracking of children and expand its pre- and post-adoptive services. These steps will go a long way toward ensuring that children who have endured too much pain and uncertainty already can say, as one nine-year-old boy recently put it, "I'm part of this family now, and we're never going to break."

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