

Post Adoptive Families Focus Group Meeting Summary
4-25-12

- Adoptive Parents from Milwaukee, Rock, Dane, Calumet, and Ozaukee Counties attended this meeting.
- During the licensing process adoptive parents did receive some training pertaining to the challenges encountered by Special Needs Adoptive Parents. While this training was seen as beneficial it is not as helpful as receiving support and consultation during those occasions when children are presenting behavioral or emotional problems.
- Adoptive parents frequently find it difficult to find professionals who can provide them with assistance in developing strategies to address problems related to loss, abandonment, trauma, bonding, anger and sexually inappropriate behavior.
- Initially most special needs adoptive children have lived in county licensed foster homes. Therapeutic relationships developed between these children and county employed professionals are frequently terminated after the child is adopted.
- While Special Needs Adoptive parents are usually provided with written information about resources that may be beneficial to them this information is often misplaced or out of date at the time problems are identified.
- Developing Individual Education Plans with some school districts does not always include a recommendation from adoptive parents as to the best strategy for achieving educational goals. It is not always perceived as a “team process”
- Parent Peer Specialists who have developed constructive relationships with schools in developing effective educational strategies for their children could be a valuable resource to Special Needs Adoptive Parents.
- Parent Peer Specialist who have had success in advocating for the medical needs of children are also perceived as being a potentially valuable resource for adoptive parents.
- Having access to Coordinated Services Teams and Wraparound Services could be beneficial to preventing an adoption from being disrupted, dissolved or displaced.
- Special Needs Adoptive Parents could benefit greatly from the development of the “medical home” model of insurance in that it would expect the provider to address all the needs of children in a coordinated manner. This insurance should be available to children until they reach adulthood.
- The Permanency Roundtable Initiative should include adoptive parents who are struggling to sustain the adoption of their special needs child.
- There was an expressed concern that counties and or the courts have supported adoptive placements with a blood relative who hasn’t had any contact with a child even in those situations where the child has developed an emotional bond with the foster parent.
- There was an opinion expressed that Wisconsin has a high percentage of children returned to foster care after returning home because counties give “too much flexibility” to parents in regard to their achieving treatment goals.
- There was a concern expressed that we occasionally delay achieving a permanent placement because infrequent visits with birth parents are not conducive to evaluating a parents progress toward treatment goals.
- It is very difficult to find respite care for medically needy adoptive children.

Recommendations

1. County Human Services Departments should provide Adoption Resources Centers with a list of local resources that may be beneficial to special needs adoptive parents. This list could include contact information pertaining to resources such as:
 - a. Coordinated Service Team Facilitators.
 - b. Wrap Around Service Program Providers
 - c. Parent Peer Specialist (Medical and Educational)
 - d. Child Psychiatrist
 - e. Individual and Family Counselors
 - f. Respite Care Providers
 - g. Mentoring Programs
 - h. Parenting Classes
 - i. Group Counseling Opportunities
 - j. Volunteer Activities
 - k. Training Opportunities on Specific Topics
 - l. Human Service Agency Contact Person
2. Counties could continue to provide services to special needs children who were placed in a foster home in their county and subsequently adopted. The Medical Home model of insurance could include coverage for these services.
3. In order to enhance the permanency of special needs adoptive placements adoptive parents could be invited to participate in the Permanency Round Table Initiative. (Should we expect Adoptive Parents to participate in a Permanency Round Table initiative if there is a risk of the adoption being disrupted, dissolved or displaced?)
4. If not already done Adoption Resource Agencies could routinely forward information which describes all the resources available in a geographical area to adoptive parents who are experiencing challenges with their children. (This could primarily be a list of web site addresses which could include the County Human Service Departments)
5. Permanency for special needs adoptive children may be enhanced if placing agencies were required to reimburse counties a specific percentage of the cost incurred for meeting the needs of a child whose adoption has been disrupted, dissolved or displaced. This would provide a financial incentive for providing quality training and resource allocation both before placement and after finalization.

SUPPORTING ADOPTIVE PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

DEFINING THE ISSUE

Those human beings who make a decision to become parents for children with special needs are themselves very special individuals. The children who are adopted are frequently traumatized by abuse or neglect and have birth parents who may have been addicted to drugs or who have been afflicted by mental health problems. These children are often angry and have a sense of abandonment. They will need more than just love. Because of their fatalistic attitudes they will test the commitment of those who wish to help or care for them by acting out in a variety of different ways. Like us they will strive to achieve the creation of at least one lifelong committed relationship.

Human Service Professionals who have worked with children for many years know that it is not the process of adoption that insures permanency for children it is the lifelong committed relationship or the unconditional caring most of us have received from at least one other individual. While this goal is achieved in the vast majority of adoptions there are instances in which adoptive parents seek to have their adopted child placed in an alternative living arrangement. It is our concern for disrupted or broken adoptions that we would like to see addressed.

OBSERVATIONS OF SPECIAL NEEDS ADOPTION PARENTS

The issue of disrupted or broken adoptions was discussed with Adoptive Parents from across the state in April of 2012. While training on a variety of topics pertaining to the challenges inherent in adopting children with special needs is seen as beneficial it is not as helpful as receiving support and consultation during those occasions when children are actually presenting challenges. After the adoption is finalized some parents find it difficult to find providers who can address their needs and often feel abandoned by the adoption agency. Counties need to pay more attention to providing or connecting parents to post adoption resources.

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

1. The vast majority of Special Needs Adoptions in this state are converted county foster care placements. County Human Service Departments should develop an ongoing collaboration with Regional Adoption Resource Centers to share information on resources that could be beneficial to our being able to prevent disrupted adoptions.
2. County Human Service Directors should designate an agency liaison with their regional ARC.
3. The Division of Safety and Permanence, Licensing agencies, Adoption Resource Centers and County Human Service Departments should work together to identify and recruit adoptive parents and or foster parents who are willing to mentor Special Needs Adoption Parents from the time of the licensing process through and beyond the adoption finalization process.

4. These agencies should also work together to identify possible sources of funding to support the ongoing cost of establishing a Special Needs Adoption Mentoring Program and to develop a protocol for reviewing broken or disrupted adoptions.
5. Adoptive Parents who are willing to be mentors should be in ongoing communication with the Human Service Liaison and the Adoption Resource Center liaison to provide each other with ongoing updates on services or resources that could benefit Special Needs Adoption Families.
6. The Training Partnership Programs should be asked to develop a curriculum in consultation with Special Needs Adoption Parents, The Division of Safety and Permanence, Adoption Resource Centers and County Human Services Departments.
7. County Human Service Departments should collaborate with agencies that license adoptive homes for the Department of Children and Families to accomplish the following task:
 - a. Identify the most effective licensing or study process for matching parent's skills to the needs of special needs children.
 - b. Promote training courses which will enhance the ability of adoptive parents to successfully address the behaviors presented by special needs children.
 - c. Recruit Human Service Employees who are also Special Needs Adoptive Parents to mentor perspective adoptive parents during the licensing process and to be a resource after an adoption is finalized.
8. If the Medical Foster Home Initiative is proven to be successfully in meeting the needs of children in alternate care we should seek to have this program expanded to include all special needs adoptive children.

STATUS REPORT ON SPECIAL NEEDS ADOPTION FOCUS GROUP

5-30-12

MEETINGS

4-25-12 Met with Special Needs Adoptive Parents throughout the state to discuss their view on how we can enhance our ability to sustain adoptive placements. There seemed to be a general view that we need to pay more attention to providing assistance to adoptive parents who begin to experience challenges after an adoption is finalized.

5-11-12 Met with the Children and Families Policy Advisory Committee of the Wisconsin County Human Services Association to obtain their support to work in partnership with the Division of Children and Families and Special Needs Adoptive Parents to help prevent disrupted adoptions.

5-22-12 Provided a summary of our meeting with adoptive parents to the WCHSA Board and received approval for the WCHSA President to forward a letter to all of our members encouraging them to meet with Adoption Resource Agency Directors to identify community resources that could be beneficial to adoptive parents who are experiencing challenges.

TASK TO BE COMPLETED

1. Develop a letter explaining our interest in enhancing the permanency of Special Needs Adoptions through a coordinated response from County Human Service Departments, the Department of Children and Families, Regional Adoption Resource Centers and local community resources. The WCHSA President will forward this letter to all Human Service Directors throughout the state.
2. Adoption Resource Agency Directors will be asked to contact Human Service Directors in their regions to: ascertain their willingness to establish a dialogue about local resources for at risk youth; how to best access these services; and identify a Human Service Department contact person should adoptive parents have questions about potential resources. County Directors may wish to invite other private or public providers to the meeting with the Adoption Resource Center Director in order to provide more specific information and address questions.
3. The county administrators involved in our committee could meet with Special Needs Adoptive Parents in their region to obtain their views on how we can enhance the Special Needs Adoption Program and explore their interest in being Parent Peer Specialist to other adoptive parents in their local communities.
4. If the Medical Home Model (Integrated services for youth in substitute care) is established and proven to be more effective and efficient the Department of Health Services should expand this coverage to Special Needs Children who have been adopted.

5. A formal review process should be established to assess failed or disrupted adoptions in order to identify gaps in services, insufficient training, lack of support to adoptive parents or weaknesses in the placement process.
6. Our Special Needs Adoption Focus Group (including interested adoptive parents) could establish a meeting with those professionals who complete adoption studies, who match available youth to adoptive parents and who provide training to Special Needs Adoptive Parents. In so doing we may be able to identify enhancements to the Special Needs Adoption Program
7. The Wisconsin County Human Services Agency Association Board and their Children and Families Policy Advisory Committee should receive summaries of our ongoing progress at the time of their regularly scheduled meetings.

(DRAFT OF LETTER TO HUMAN SERVICE DIRECTORS)

Dear -----

Every County Human Service Department throughout our state has worked with adoptive parents who come to the decision that they can no longer provide ongoing care for their adopted child(ren). While the vast majority of all adoptions are successful the emotional and financial cost of failed adoptions is very significant.

The Wisconsin County Human Service Association has therefore supported the development of an ad hoc committee called the "Special Needs Adoption Focus Group". On April 25th of this year this ad hoc committee met with Special Needs Adoption Parents from throughout the state to seek their advice on perceived weaknesses in our current Special Needs Adoption Program. In general they understand the need for an extensive study as well as training relevant to children with special needs. While they welcomed the end of this preparation time they routinely found it difficult to access needed services when their adopted child began to develop behavioral or emotional problems. It was thought that we may be more effective if we concentrated on helping adoption parents access services after the adoption was finalized and negative behaviors began to escalate.

Members of the Special Needs Adoption Focus Group intend to establish a meeting with Regional Adoption Resource Directors as well as interested Special Needs Adoptive Parents to identify specific needs and to identify how to access local resources. During the next few weeks you too may be contacted by an Adoption Resource Director in your region. If you believe that any of the resources you currently use to address the needs of "at risk youth" may be beneficial to Special Needs Adoptive Parents we urge you to share this information with the Coordinator. Indeed, you may want to introduce the Regional Resource Director to the providers you find to be the most effective. It is our hope that better coordination and collaboration now will enhance the permanency of adoptive placements.

TO: Special Needs Adoption Ad Hoc Group

FROM: Robert Haupt and Ron Hauser

RE: Questions or Topics to Address

1. The study process for licensing adoptive parents is referred to as the SAFE Model. Is this model also used for converted county foster home placements? Should counties consider using this model to license foster homes that would consider adopting their foster children?
2. Are there statistics that demonstrate the number of disrupted special needs adoptions that were county foster homes before becoming an adoptive home?
3. How many credits of training are required of perspective adoptive parents? Do these required courses focus on the types of problems that have caused adoptive placements to be disrupted? (Ability to bond, trauma, loss and abandonment, anger or aggressiveness, delinquent behavior)
4. Do licensing staff determine how perspective and licensed adoptive parents can access local resources such as parent training courses, trauma base care, coordinated services teams, respite care, parent peer specialist or wraparound programs?
5. Can subsidies be specifically designated to be utilized to purchase services or resources which will enhance permanency?
6. Can County Human Service Agencies help adoptive parents access Parent Peer Specialist Programs which may help adoptive parents advocate for the educational and medical needs of their adopted children?
7. Can LSS help adoptive parents access their wraparound programs?
8. Are Human Service Agencies willing to identify a specific resource person who will have extensive knowledge of available resources and help adoption parents and or adoptive staffs access these services?
9. Can Adoption Resource Centers maintain an updated list of County Human Service Contact persons as well as a list of local resources for working with at risk youth?
10. Under what circumstances might perspective adoptive parents be counseled out of adopting?

QUESTIONS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS OF SPECIAL NEEDS YOUTH

1. Did the study process conducted by your licensing agency help you understand the types of special needs some youth have when they are placed in adoptive homes?
2. Were you provided information on the types of challenges that occur with children who have behavior or emotional problems?
3. Were you provided information on strategies that have proven to be the most effective in working with children who exhibit anger or who act inappropriately?
4. Were you provided information on local and regional resources that may be available to you in addressing identified concerns?
5. Have you had the opportunity to work with a Coordinated Services Team in an effort to address the needs of your adoptive child?
6. Would you utilize the services of a Coordinated Services Team?
7. Can you identify ways in which the licensing agency and or your local county human services department could better assist you before and after an adoptive placement?
8. Have you had the opportunity to participate in trainings or workshops pertaining to the impact of loss and trauma on a child's development?
9. Do you believe a parent advocate or parent peer specialist would be of assistance to you in your effort to develop a individual education plan for an adoptive child?
10. Have you had the opportunity to participate in a training session on strength based treatment?

DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS

Problem: Disrupted Adoptions are a failure of the Permanency Planning Initiative

Problem: Disrupted Adoptions frequently become a significant cost to the county

Questions:

- Do Special Needs Adoptive Parents participate in training that helps prepare them for the challenges presented by children who have been traumatized?
- Is there an assessment tool that can help identify the existence of the skills or attributes which contribute to permanent placements of children?
- Can this assessment be used to match a child's needs to the strengths of an adoptive parent?
- Is the Adoption Competency Curriculum used here in Wisconsin?
- Do adoptive parents have access to and knowledge of available wraparound services? (This would include private and public resources)
- Is it anticipated that the Medical Home Model will allow for the purchase of wrap around services for children who have been adopted?
- Do confidentiality statutes allow for sharing of records between an adoptive agency and a county human service department when a disrupted adoption results in placement by the county?
- Can disrupted adoptions be reviewed through the permanency planning round table process?
- Can Adoption Resource Center Coordinators interview local service providers to obtain information about the services provided and the philosophy of intervention?
- Is there an expectation that adoption subsidies be used for purchasing wrap around services?
- After an adoption is finalized are adoptive parents expected to notify the licensing agency in those instances when the adoption is disrupted?
- Can adoption subsidies be transferred to the placing agency when an adoption is disrupted?

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SOUTH EASTERN POST ADOPTION RESOURCE CENTERS

OZAUKEE COUNTY DEPT OF HUMAN SERVICES

1. Our Children's Long Term Support Case Managers can assess whether children with special needs might be eligible for one of our service program. If the referred child is determined to be eligible for services and is determined to be in crisis the child can be placed at the top of our Children's Long Term Support Wait List. The Children's Long Term Support Case Managers review the children's funding programs i.e. (Family Support Program, Community Options Program and Children's Long Term Support Waiver Program) to see if they can find funding to serve the child. These case managers also have knowledge of potential respite care providers for children with special needs as well as a variety of other resources for children with disabilities.
 - a. Howard Mulloy phone no. 262-238-8141 or hmulloy@co.ozaukee.wi.us
 - b. Kate Lapacek phone no. 262-238-8161 or klapacek@co.ozaukee.wi.us

2. The Certified Nursing Assistants assigned to our Personal Care Program and our agency's homemaker may be willing to provide respite care for Special Needs Adoptive Parents. Adoptive Parents would need to choose the most appropriate provider and make their own payment arrangements.
 - a. Michelle Pike at 262-238-8121 or mpike@co.ozaukee.wi.us
 - b. Mary Ferrell at 262-238-7724 or mferrell@co.ozaukee.wi.us

3. Graduate Students who have field placements in our agency may be willing to become mentors to special needs adoption children or provide counseling to Adoptive Parents.

- a. Mike Lappen at 262-238-8155 or mlappen@co.ozaukee.wi.us
 - b. Marian Ballos at 262-238-8219 or mballos@co.ozaukee.wi.us
4. Our Foster Home Coordinator can be contacted to see if any of our licensed foster homes are willing to provide respite care to adoptive parents. This individual also has knowledge of workshops or training courses found to be valuable by foster parents.
- a. Pam Dolley 262-238-8214 or pdolley@co.ozaukee.wi.us
5. Adoptive Parents can be referred to the Project Coordinator of our Coordinated Services Team to discuss the possible benefits of becoming involved in this program. This Coordinator can also set up a meeting with a Parent Peer Specialist who has experience in advocating for the educational and service needs of children with special needs within their schools.
- a. Cheri Farnsworth at 262-376-7774 or cfarnsworth@ozaukee familyservices.org
 - b. Lisa Holtebeck at 262-376-7774 or lholtbeck@ozaukee familyservices.org
6. Our Behavioral Health Manager can be contacted to discuss the possibility of having one of our Mental Health Professionals provide individual or family counseling. This manager can also provide information on our Mental Health Crises Program.
- a. Mike Lappen at 262-238-8155 or mlappen@co.ozaukee.wi.us

7. Our Children and Families Manager and Lead Worker have knowledge of a number of private providers who provide Wrap Around Services, Drug and Alcohol Counseling or Psychological Testing.
 - a. Marian Ballos at 262-238-8219 or mballos@co.ozaukee.wi.us
 - b. Kim Quam at 262-238-8227 or kquam@co.ozaukee.wi.us

Note: All of the above staff can provide information on resources with whom we have contracted to address specific concerns and who have had success in achieving desired outcomes.