

Keeping the Promise:

The Case for Adoption Support and Preservation

THE DONALDSON ADOPTION INSTITUTE



Voice for Adoption
SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN



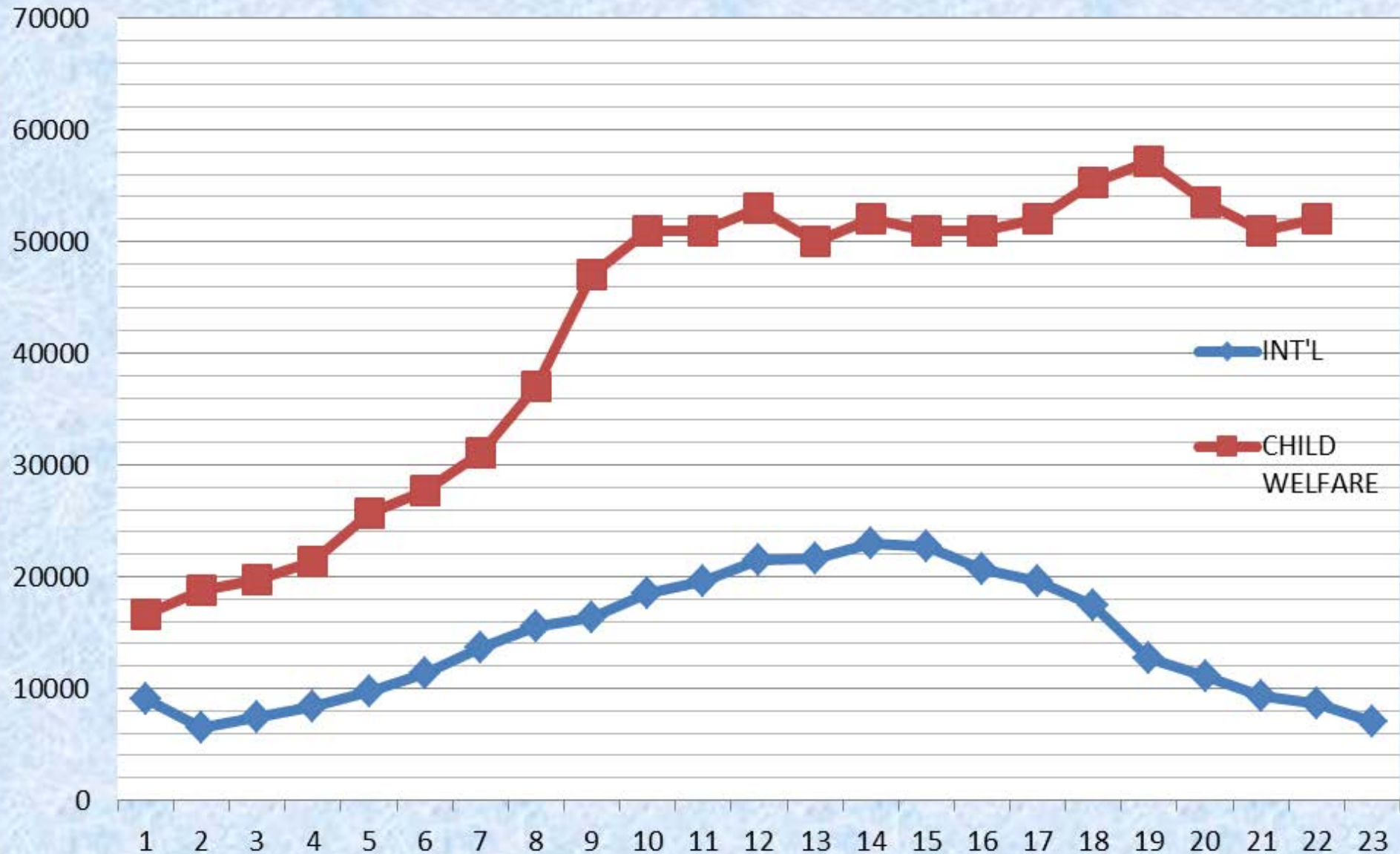
DAVE THOMAS
FOUNDATION
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Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

Adoption in America Today: The Reality and the Need

- 1 in 25 families in the U.S. with children has an adopted child.
- Who are **the children** being adopted today?
- What do we know about **post-adoption needs**?
- What **services** seek to address them?
- What are **consequences of failure** to adequately meet the needs?

TRENDS IN U.S. ADOPTIONS 1991 - 2013



Child Risk Factors for Ongoing Challenges

- Prenatal malnutrition/ low birth weight
- Prenatal substance exposure
- Older age at adoption
- Early deprivation & neglect
- Physical, sexual & emotional abuse
- Multiple placements
- Emotional conflicts re: loss & identity
- Genetic vulnerabilities

Parent Risk Factors for Ongoing Challenges

- Marital difficulties; unequal commitment to adoption
- Emotional difficulties in parents
- Unrealistic expectations of child; poor preparation
- Lack of understanding of child's needs & strategies to address
- Inflexible rules/harsh discipline
- Closed communication, particularly about adoption
- Inadequate family support system, including absence or inadequacy of needed services

What Do We Know about Post-Adoption Needs and Outcomes

National Survey of Adoptive Parents: % receiving MH services

<u>Age range</u>	<u>Foster Care</u>	<u>Intercountry</u>	<u>Private</u>
5-17	46%	35%	33%
12-17	57%	53%	43%

Most MH professionals are not adoption-competent nor do they have an understanding of many of the types of challenges these children face.

Top Behavior Problems of Children in Families Served by Adoption Preservation

Defiance	88%
Lying	76%
Verbal aggression	75%
Peer problems	70%
Withdrawal	59%
Tantrums	59%
Physical aggression	56%

Parents need special knowledge, skills, & support to address extraordinary challenges

- Understand child in light of history
- **Realistic expectations**
- Prepared to expect challenges & to know where & when to seek help
- **Ability to empathize with child/ see strengths**
- Parent self-care & management of own reactions in interactions with child
- **Therapeutic parenting skills**
- Reframe help-seeking as a strength

When Can't Find Help

Common Family Dynamics

- Mother takes brunt of child's anger
- Severe power struggles
- Marital tension
- Conflict thru family / sibs
- Isolation
- Running on empty/exhaustion
- Parents feel like failures/hopeless
- Difficulty connecting or empathizing



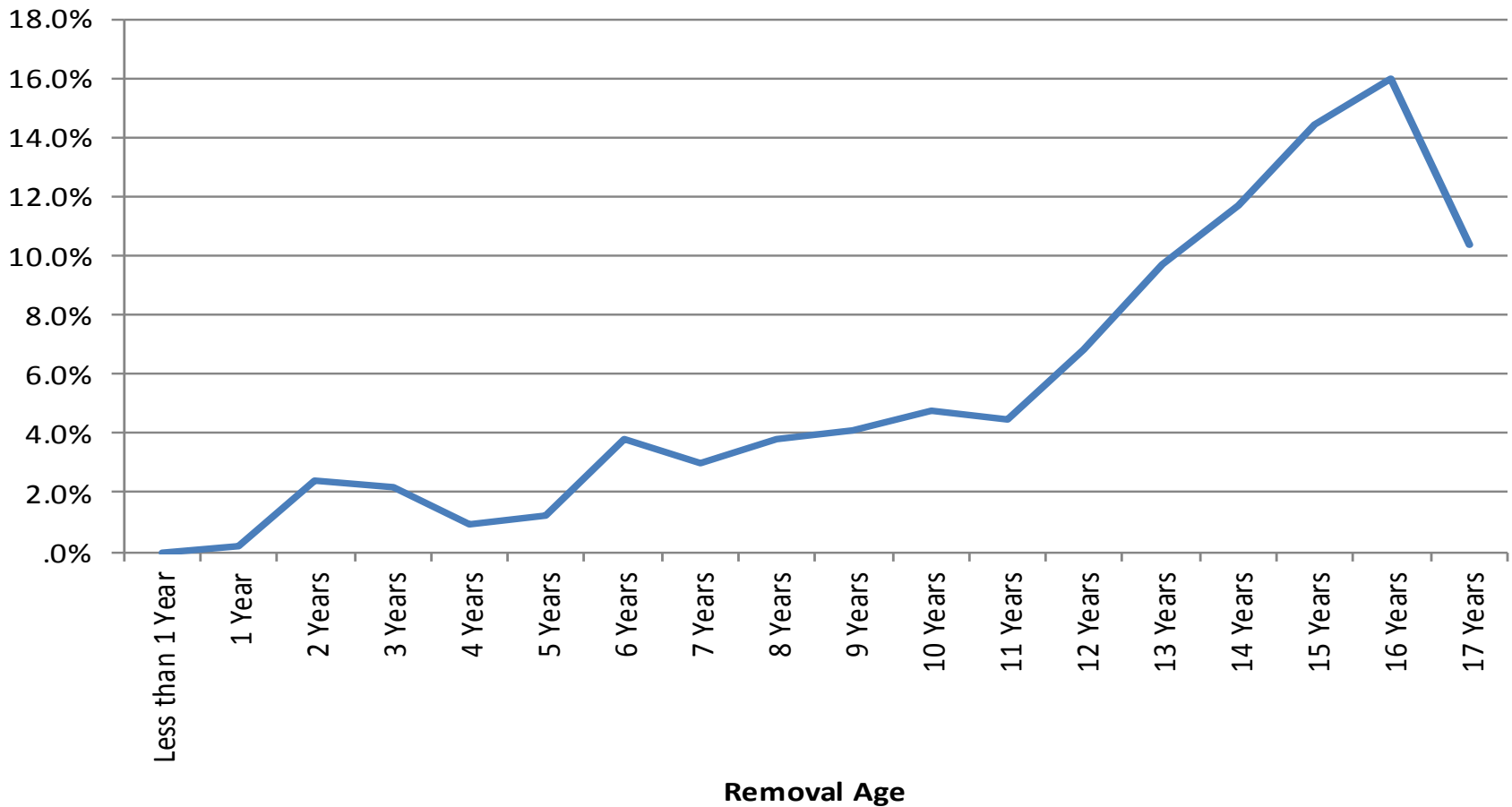
New Research on Post-adoption Instability

- DAI's study of foster-care re-entry and dissolution (data from 8 states and national AFCARS data)
- Best estimation of foster care re-entry rate = 9.5%
Dissolution = 2.2%
- LONGSCAN study: only available research following children adopted from foster care to adulthood

Study of Post-Adoption Instability

FY12 AFCARS data – 14,650 post-adoption placements

Figure 1: Distribution of Re-entry Ages for PAPs



Consider Intersecting Physiological & Socio-emotional Tasks of Adolescence

- Maladaptive physiology from deprivation/trauma
- Puberty; hormonal shifts
- Cognitive advances
- Trauma resolution: search for meaning
- Complex identity challenges/adoption & racial ID
- Heightened need for peer approval > stress/anxiety
- Individuation from family
- Depression & suicide risk higher during teens, esp. older-placed adoptees

Primary Findings on Post-Adoption Instability

- **3½ times more likely to be placed in group homes or residential settings**
- Financial cost: the federal government spends an average of **\$27,236** annually for each child in care covered by federal funding (and much more for those in group homes or residential treatment centers), compared to **\$5,043** for a child receiving adoption assistance covered by federal funding.
- **Diminished chances for permanency**
 - More than three times as likely to be emancipated
 - Less likely to be reunified with their families than other children in care

LONGSCAN STUDY

Challenges Intensify

Extent of post-adoption instability

- Through age 12, adoptions were more stable than youth who were reunified or still in care, but then stability began to decline.
- At age 16, **87% were living with their adoptive families, but 28% had lived away** from their families at some point after adoption.

Escalation of problems in adolescence

- Adopted youth had superior outcomes as young children (stability, behavior, home environment) when compared to those reunified or remaining in care **BUT by age 14, adopted youth were being rated as having significantly more behavior problems.**

Continuum of Needs > Continuum of Services

Matching Needs and Services

- **10%** **Re-enter foster care**
- **10%+** **Leave home in other ways**

Intensive Adoption Preservation Services & Adoption Competent MH Services

- **30%+** **Adoption Competent MH Services**
Respite / Advocacy
-

- **50%** **Support / Education / I & R**

Additional Issues with ICA

- Low level of preparation/ideal
- Fragmented services
- More workers
- Very little post-placement visitation
- Limited ability to communicate directly with and support child
- Minimal: an I&R line to funnel families to needed services

What Services Seek to Address Needs?

Study of States' Post-Adoption Services

❖ *Substantial post-adoption services = 17 states*

- Several services developed across 7 categories: I & R, Education, Support, Therapeutic Interventions, Advocacy, Respite, Residential Treatment
- Some provision for adoption competent counseling services
- Many still have major service gaps (brief service; served only once, only most severe are eligible, etc.)

❖ *Some PAS development = 19 states*

❖ *Nothing but subsidy = 14 states*

Therapeutic Counseling Programs

- Statewide adoption preservation programs (IL, TN, PA, VA, TX)
- County-based: UCLA Ties
- Kinship Center: Wraparound program & mental health clinic serving adopted youth in 3 counties
- Private adoption agencies' PostAdopt programs
- Private post-adoption agencies (CASE)

The Human Toll

- *We were lost, sinking, destroying our family rapidly before these services. We spent thousands upon thousands of dollars, not counting the time involved in seeking help. This was the only place we could find help, information, relief ... an understanding of how these troubled kids work and how to try and cope ... and to still love them. It's so hard to put into words the devastating effects on the family ... the destruction, the financial drain, the breakdown of the marriage and physical health.*

The Solution

- Prepare parents to expect ongoing challenges & to know where to find adoption-competent services
- Identify high-risk children & provide early intervention
- Create a healing environment to address issues at each developmental stage
- Provide education and support to all
- Provide adoption-competent counseling services to those who need this
- Provide intensive services to at-risk children at earliest possible point and ongoing as needed

