The Challenge of Older Youth Adoptions From Foster Care

By Heather Swope, MSW[1]

The enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) in 1997 marked a shift in focus in child welfare toward more and timelier adoptions of children from public foster care. Under ASFA, a timeline for the termination of parental rights was established to encourage timelier adoptions, and the Adoptions Incentives Program was created to support States in increasing adoption numbers above a baseline. Overall, there has been great improvement following ASFA:

- The rate of children adopted from foster care has increased by approximately 77 percent, from 6.9 percent in FY 1998 to 12.1 percent in FY 2011.[2]
- The average time from removal to termination of parental rights (TPR) has declined by 16 months, from approximately 36 months in FY 1998 to 20 months in FY 2011.
- The average time from removal to adoption has decreased by 14 months, from 48 months in FY 1998 to 34 months in FY 2011.

However, despite these positive trends, the adoption of older children from foster care has remained a consistent challenge. Analysis has historically shown that once a waiting child reaches age 9, they are more likely to continue to wait than to be adopted (see Figure 1 and Maza, 2002 on next page).

[3]Recognizing this challenge, the Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 reauthorized the Adoption Incentives Program and added an additional incentive focusing specifically on the adoption of children ages 9 and older. The amount of the incentive award for this older youth category was then doubled in the reauthorization of the Adoption Incentives Program via the Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. In addition, there have been a number of programmatic initiatives across the country focused on this population.[4] However, the adoption of older youth remains a struggle.

In FY 2011, only 26.1 percent of all adoptions were of children ages 9 and older. This is one of the lowest percentages of older youth adoptions since the enactment of ASFA (the lowest percentage was 25.6 percent in FY 2009). At the same time, 40.6 percent of children waiting for adoption were age 9 or older in FY 2011. It would be expected that, if the emphasis on older youth were successful, more of the waiting older youth would be adopted (hence, closing the gap between these two distributions). However, this gap has actually increased. As Figure 1 illustrates, the percentage of older youth waiting for adoption in FY 2010 exceeds the percentage of older youth adopted in the subsequent year.

"Embracing partnerships that build strong foundations for the adoption of waiting children in the child welfare system!"

Note that Figure 1 represents the by age in the waiting and adopted groups. However, in terms of total numbers, there are approximately twice as many children waiting for adoption in any given year than there are children actually adopted. This difference alone is a topic worthy of further consideration. However, it is also critical that ways be found to give these older youth a greater likelihood of being adopted.

In conclusion, a higher percentage of older youth adoptions would be expected given the overall percentage of older children waiting for adoption, the financial incentive available through the Adoption Incentives Program, and the strong emphasis on finding adoptive homes for this population. Instead, the gap between these two numbers has widened, and the average age of children adopted has become even younger (from 7.0 years old in FY 2003 to 6.4 years old in FY 2011). Older youth adoptions remain a clear challenge, even despite the steps that have been made to change this trajectory.

Note: This analysis is an extension of previous analysis on older youth adoptions conducted by Penelope L. Maza, PhD.

End Notes

[1]The interpretations and conclusions in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect or represent the view of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

[2]The adoption rate is calculated by dividing the total number of public agency adoptions placed by the public agency by the total number of children in foster care on the last day of the preceding fiscal year and multiplying by 100. The adoption rate is used here as opposed to the total number of adoptions because it provides a more accurate way of assessing the adoption trends in light of the recent decline in the total number of children in foster care (see Trends in Foster Care and Adoption on the Children's Bureau web site for additional trend information: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/trends_june2011.pdf).

Figure 1: Percent of Children Waiting in FY 2010 and Percent of Children Adopted in FY 2011
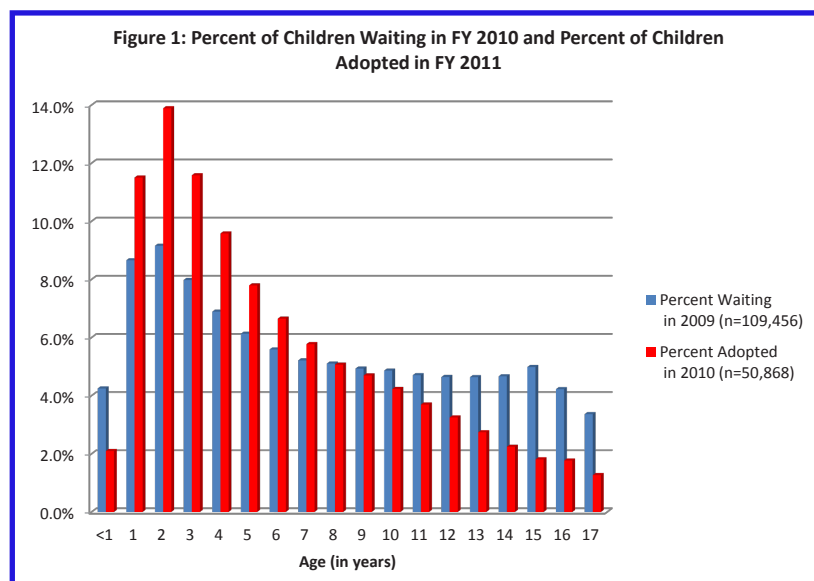
[3]There is no federal definition for a child waiting to be adopted. The definition used in this analysis includes children and youth through age 17 who have a goal of adoption and/or whose parents' parental rights have been terminated. It excludes children 16 years old and older whose parents' parental rights have been terminated and who have a goal of emancipation.

[4]North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2009). It's time to make older child adoption a reality: Because every child and youth deserves a family. Retrieved October 14, 2011, from http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/MakeOlderChildAdoptionReality.pdf. Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. (2011). Never too old: Achieving permanency and sustaining connections for older youth in foster care. Retrieved October 14, 2011, from www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2011_07_21_NeverTooOld.pdf.

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Post Adoption Marriage Education Project

By Rosemary Jackson

In the fall of 2011, Michigan State University (MSU) completed the Strengthening Marriages and the Well Being of Children: Post Adoption Marriage Education Project, funded by a five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau, Adoption Opportunities (grant #90CO1026).

Gary Anderson was Principal Investigator for the grant that was designed to support the relationships of couples who are raising children from the child welfare system.

MSU took a multifaceted approach to supporting couple relationships which included:

- Training for adoptive, foster, and kinship couples who are raising children from the child welfare system.
- Training for pro-fessionals who are likely to encounter adoptive, foster, and kinship couples in their practice.
- Research focused on stress, resilience, and adaptation in couple relationships related to adoption.
- Development of a web site to support adoptive, foster, and kinship parents and the professionals who serve them.

  - Training for couples: MSU provided weekend retreats for over 110 adoptive, foster, and kinship couples, as well as multiple trainings for parents through adoption focused conferences and workshops. Couples attending the retreats were provided with information about strengthening their relationships from the *Building a Home with Heart,* a couples curriculum for adoptive, foster and kinship parents. This curriculum was developed through the grant and is comprised of a Facilitator's Guide and a Couple's Notebook. The 12-module curriculum focuses on helping couples to build friendship and intimacy, to manage stress, to understand emotions, to deal with conflict, to make diffi-

cult decisions, and to build family bonds when raising children from the child welfare system. A free download of the entire curriculum is available at the MSU post adoption web site: www.socialwork.msu.edu/postadopt/Training Highlights.php.

  - Training for professionals: The project has trained over 265 professionals in two-day "train-the-trainer" workshops, and a three-hour continuing education training course using the *Building a Home with Heart* curriculum. This workshop is included in the Adoption Certificate Program offered by MSU. A list of continuing education offerings is available at the MSU continuing education web site: www.social-work.msu.edu/ceu.

    - Research conducted by the MSU School of Social Work: This research was aimed at understanding the strengths and challenges of couples who raise children from the child welfare system. Beginning in 2006, the research team conducted focus groups with adoptive couples and adoption professionals and administered a survey to adoptive couples. The results of this research indicate that adoptive couples want professionals to talk with them about the impact of adoption on their adult relationship, as long as judgments about the quality of their relationship aren't used to negatively impact their ability to adopt. The research also found that couples who adopt go through a period of adjustment where husbands' support their wives' desire to adopt. About half of the couples surveyed moved from adjustment to a level of marital adaptation that included prioritizing time together and accepting mutual influence from each other. These couples were able to achieve a more intimate connection than they experienced in the adjustment phase.

(Post Adoption Marriage - page 8)

Practice *Protocols*

Post Adoption

By Janice King, LMSW

The Center's National Post Adoption Summit of 2011 provided an opportunity to discuss the core issues that mark the unique experiences of adoptive families. The Summit re-emphasized the need for an array of adoption support and preservation services that support and preserve the family unit and maximize the child's potential and integration into the family. Those services should be family centered, should recognize underlying adoption issues which may affect the child and family, should build on the family's strengths and should empower parents to make decisions about the best interest of their child and family (NRCA 2012).

During the Summit, the results of the NRCA's Post-adoption Survey (2012), presented the most current look at State efforts to meet the service needs of families across the nation. The survey was adapted from the *Sustaining Adoptive Families: A Qualitative Study of Public Post-Adoption Services,* 2002.

Highlights from the 2012 Post-adoption Survey

State agencies were asked to report on the funding streams for services and the accessibility of services to families in the following areas: information and referral; education programs or materials; support programs (groups, mentors, buddy families); therapeutic interventions; advocacy; respite; residential treatment; and medication and/or search services.

- Most States indicated that services were accessible across all regions of their States.
- Service delivery and the availability of adoption competent professionals may vary across regions.
- Fifty percent of the States indicated that adoption workers were expected to provide post-adoption services.
- Seventy percent of the States reported use of Safe and Stable Families Act funding for post-adoption services.
- Seventy-nine percent of the States reported use of state funds to provide post-adoption services.
- Information and Referral: Ninety-seven percent of the States provide this service with most services provided statewide. Services are described as community resources and delivered via toll free help lines or one-stop community shops. Referrals are accepted from any source including self-referrals. Services are provided by contract agencies and/or

State staff and include access to birth and medical records, and consultative services.
- Educational Programs or Materials: Ninety-four percent of the States provide this service and most services are provided statewide. Components of this service include education of therapists, attorneys, judges and others; provision of training and materials to families at low cost; lending libraries; and support groups that include parent training on adoption issues and adoption subsidy and fetal alcohol syndrome. Services are provided by contract agencies and/or State staff.
- Support Programs (groups, mentors, buddy families, etc.): One hundred percent of the States provide this service with most services provided statewide. Services include support groups, mentors and buddy families. Some States have individuals trained as group leaders and pay a stipend for their services.
- Therapeutic Interventions: Ninety-seven percent of the States provide this service with most services provided statewide. Services include

short-term crisis intervention, call lines, in-home support services for adoptive families, monthly support groups for children, and community mental health services.
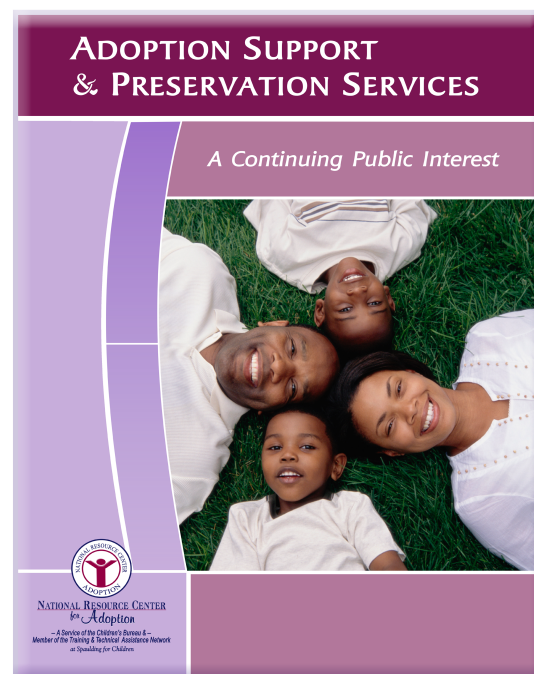
- Advocacy: Ninety-seven percent of the States provide this service with most services provided statewide. Most States describe some form of advocacy services, however, services may be limited.

- Respite: Seventy-six percent of the States provide this service, with most services provided statewide. The description of respite care varies across States. Informal respite care is encouraged, funding for respite is limited, services are time limited (number of days), and funding sources include Title IV-B subpart 2, Medicaid, and Title XIX which includes all adoption subsidy.

- Residential Treatment: Seventy-six percent of the States provide this service. When residential treatment is provided, state funds are limited with facilities being funded primarily through Medicaid or private insurance. Departments of Mental Health were identified as another potential source of funding for residential treatment.

- Mediation and/or Search Services (or provisions for openness in child welfare adoptions): Seventy-six percent of the States provide this service, with most services provided statewide. Services include adoption reunion registries, mutual consent registries, searches based on requests from birth families, adopted persons, and siblings. Fees may be attached; for example, $20 to register and $400 for initial search.

- Additional services provided by States programs include photo listing web sites, crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, pre-adoption training and consultation, and trauma assessments for adoptive families.

Information regarding state-specific responses and the descriptions of the services they deliver is available on the Center's web site at: www.nrcadoption.org.

References

National Resource Center for Adoption: *Adoption Support & Preservation: A Continuing Public Interest*, Revised 2012.

ADOPTION SUPPORT & PRESERVATION SERVICES

A Continuing Public Interest

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER for Adoption

– A Service of the Children's Bureau & – Member of the Training & Technical Assistance Network at Spaulding for Children

Janice King, LMSW, is the Project Manager of the National Resource Center for Adoption and Coordinator for this column. She may be contacted at jking@nrcadoption.org.

AFCARS Data

D o you know the trends in adoption? The latest AFCARS Report, July 2012 preliminary estimates for FY 2011 is now available. Start with the following excerpts to learn more about the trends, and national case level information for children waiting to be adopted and those children adopted with public agency involvement. The full AFCARS Report for all children in foster care for whom the State child welfare agencies have responsibility for placement, care or supervision, and on children who are adopted under the auspices of the State's public child welfare agency is available on the Children's Bureau web site: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report19.pdf.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb
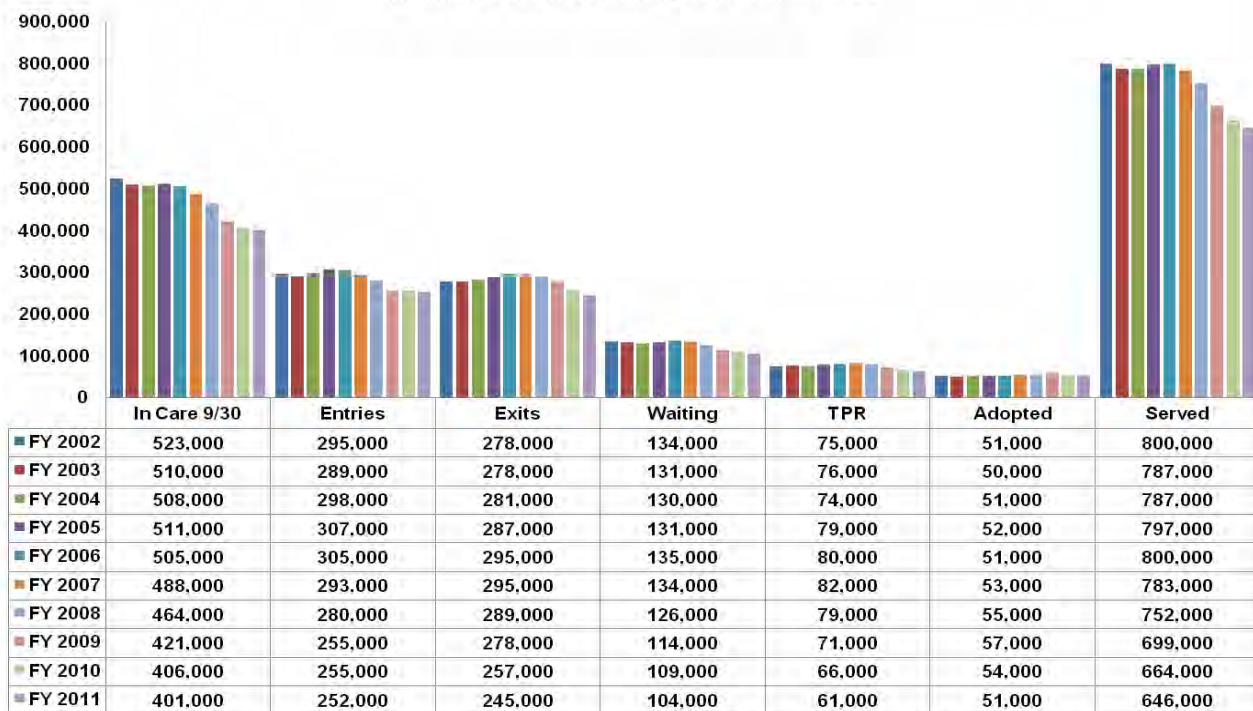
The AFCARS Report

Preliminary FY[1] 2011 Estimates as of July 2012 ● No. 19

SOURCE: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2011 data[2]

Trends in Foster Care and Adoption- FY 2002-FY 2011
(Based on data submitted by states as of July 12, 2012)

Source: AFCARS data, U.S. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families

	In Care 9/30	Entries	Exits	Waiting	TPR	Adopted	Served
FY 2002	523,000	295,000	278,000	134,000	75,000	51,000	800,000
FY 2003	510,000	289,000	278,000	131,000	76,000	50,000	787,000
FY 2004	508,000	298,000	281,000	130,000	74,000	51,000	787,000
FY 2005	511,000	307,000	287,000	131,000	79,000	52,000	797,000
FY 2006	505,000	305,000	295,000	135,000	80,000	51,000	800,000
FY 2007	488,000	293,000	295,000	134,000	82,000	53,000	783,000
FY 2008	464,000	280,000	289,000	126,000	79,000	55,000	752,000
FY 2009	421,000	255,000	278,000	114,000	71,000	57,000	699,000
FY 2010	406,000	255,000	257,000	109,000	66,000	54,000	664,000
FY 2011	401,000	252,000	245,000	104,000	61,000	51,000	646,000

Discussion of Trends

This chart includes data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) by States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico by July 12, 2012.

Please note that, for all of the years shown, some of the data may differ from that shown in earlier versions of this chart. This is due to the fact that some States have resubmitted their AFCARS data after addressing data quality issues.

FFY = Federal Fiscal Year (October 1 through September 30)

Children Waiting to be Adopted[3] on September 30, 2011 ● N=104,236

Age as of September 30th

Mean Age	8.0	
Median Age	7.2	
Less than 1 Year	4%	3,761
1 Year	9%	9,169
2 Years	9%	9,462
3 Years	8%	8,623
4 Years	7%	7,582
5 Years	6%	6,643
6 Years	6%	5,942
7 Years	5%	5,534
8 Years	5%	5,266
9 Years	5%	5,075
10 Years	5%	4,814
11 Years	5%	4,823
12 Years	5%	4,810
13 Years	5%	4,800
14 Years	5%	4,902
15 Years	5%	5,012
16 Years	4%	4,474
17 Years	3%	3,544

Age at Entry into Foster Care

Mean Age	5.0	
Median Age	4.1	
Less than 1 Year	25%	25,525
1 Year	9%	9,546
2 Years	8%	8,345
3 Years	7%	7,551
4 Years	7%	7,085
5 Years	6%	6,682
6 Years	6%	6,309
7 Years	6%	5,755
8 Years	5%	5,286
9 Years	5%	4,866
10 Years	4%	4,188
11 Years	3%	3,607
12 Years	3%	3,042
13 Years	2%	2,379
14 Years	2%	1,750
15 Years	1%	1,051
16 Years	0%	464
17 Years	0%	99

Placement Types

Pre-Adoptive Home	12%	12,961
Foster Family Home (Relative)	23%	24,148
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	54%	56,471
Group Home	4%	3,701
Institution	5%	5,534
Supervised Independent Living	0%	85
Runaway	1%	542
Trial Home Visit	1%	617

Race and Ethnicity

American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%	1,856
Asian	0%	439
Black or African American	28%	29,164
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	190
Hispanic (of any race)	22%	22,929
White	40%	41,655
Unknown/Unable to Determine	1%	1,440
Two or more Races	6%	6,513

NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.

Sex

| Male | 53% |
| Female | 47% |

Children Adopted with Public Agency Involvement in FY 2011[4] ● N=50,516

Age at Adoption

Mean Age	6.4	
Median Age	5.2	
Less than 1 Year	2%	1,059
1 Year	11%	5,806
2 Years	14%	7,011
3 Years	12%	5,855
4 Years	10%	4,831
5 Years	8%	3,937
6 Years	7%	3,357
7 Years	6%	2,914
8 Years	5%	2,555
9 Years	5%	2,373
10 Years	4%	2,143
11 Years	4%	1,871
12 Years	3%	1,645
13 Years	3%	1,387
14 Years	2%	1,132
15 Years	2%	919
16 Years	2%	898
17 Years	1%	641
18 Years	0%	149
19 Years	0%	20
20 Years	0%	6

Time elapsed from Termination of Parental Rights to Adoption

Mean Months	13.6	
Median Months	9.7	
Less than 1 Month	3%	1,275
1-5 Months	25%	12,622
6-11 Months	33%	16,510
12-17 Months	17%	8,491
18-23 Months	9%	4,276
24-29 Months	5%	2,418
30-35 Months	3%	1,383
3-4 Years	4%	2,019
5 Years or more	2%	803

Race and Ethnicity

American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%	773
Asian	0%	233
Black or African American	23%	11,719
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	82
Hispanic (of any race)	21%	10,757
White	45%	22,864
Unknown/Unable to Determine	1%	451
Two or more Races	7%	3,634

NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.

Adoptive Family Structure

Married Couple	68%	33,718
Unmarried Couple	2%	1,114
Single Female	27%	13,331
Single Male	3%	1,415

Relationship of Adoptive Parents to Child Prior to Adoption

Non-Relative	15%	7,196
Foster Parent	54%	25,610
Stepparent	0%	49
Other Relative	31%	14,462

Sex

| Male | 51% |
| Female | 49% |

Receive Adoption Subsidy

| Yes | 90% | 45,504 |
| No | 10% | 5,003 |

The results of this research informed the *Building a Home with Heart* curriculum and formed the basis for four peer-reviewed publications. Abstracts of three of these publications can be viewed: www.socialwork.msu.edu/postadopt/research/index.php.

- Post adoption support web site for couples and professionals: This site provides updated resources for foster, adoptive, and kinship families and the professionals who serve them. The site provides original information and links to other resources that are useful to families and professionals. Visit the web site: www.socialwork.msu.edu/postadopt.

For more information about the project, including the *Building a Home with Heart* curriculum, please contact Rosemary Jackson, Project Manager at jacks807@msu.edu.

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