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# The ROUNDTABLE

National Resource Center for Adoption  
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## Improving the Educational Well-being for Older Adopted and Guardianship-placed Youth

By Angelique Day, PhD

It has been five years since the former President, George W. Bush, signed into law the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) on October 7, 2008. The law was enacted, in part, as a response to the number of children across the country, whom have lacked permanent homes and are over-represented in school dropout statistics/issues that harm their prospects to transition successfully into adulthood.

Permanency and education well-being are intrinsically connected. Youth placed in homes without the permanency afforded by adoption and guardianships, on average, moved to new foster care placements up to three times per year, with each move resulting in a change of school (Julianelle, 2008).

It is not unusual for high school youth residing in foster care to have changed schools 10 or more times. Since it takes time to recover academically after each school change, many children in foster care not only fail to recover, they actually lose ground (Yu et al., 2002). This largely explains the negative relationship found between placement instability and high school completion (Pecora, et al., 2005).

One study found that youth who had had one fewer placement change per year were almost twice as likely to graduate from high school (Pecora et al., 2003). Only between 54 (Benedetto, 2005) and 58 percent of former foster youth graduate from high school by age 19, compared to 87 percent of students in the general population (Courtney, 2009).

Those that do graduate from high school are less likely to attend college (Courtney, 2009), and those that do enroll in a post-secondary institution are less likely to graduate (Day et al., 2011). By age 19, only 18 percent of foster youth are pursuing a four year degree, compared to 62 percent of their peers (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2009). By age 25, less than 3 percent of former foster youth had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 24 percent of the general population (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2009).

When looking at pursuit of any type of post-secondary credential, it was found that only 26 percent of foster care alumni who enroll in college have earned a degree or certificate within six years of enrollment compared to 56 percent of their peers (Davis, 2006). Not completing post-secondary education limits prospects for employment, which has significant implications on life-time earning potential. According to a study conducted by MPR Associates, a nonprofit consulting agency for the U.S. Department of Education, 25 to 34-year-olds who had a least a bachelor's degree

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earned, on average, 61 percent more than those with only a high school diploma or GED (Aud et al., 2010).

Key educational provisions identified in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act impacting adopted and guardianship-placed youth include the expansion of eligibility criteria of independent living services to include children who leave foster care after age 16 for kinship guardianship or adoptive placements, making them eligible for the education and training vouchers as defined under Title II of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments (P.L. 107–133) (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2009).

It is estimated that around 150,000 youth nationally meet the criteria to receive Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds. Through this program, states can provide current and former foster youth with up to \$5,000 per year for post-secondary training and education (P.L. 107-133, 107th Congress, 2001). The ETV can be used to defray the costs of the following types of expenses: tuition/fees; books and supplies; room and board; and miscellaneous personal expenses, including purchase of a personal computer, transportation, and child care. Youth participating in the program on their 21st birthday remain eligible until age 23 as long as they are making satisfactory progress toward completion of a post-secondary education credential (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2009). Satisfactory progress has been defined by the federal government as the maintenance of at least a 2.0 GPA and no more than one incomplete or course withdrawal per semester (National Foster Care Coalition & Casey Family Programs, 2007).

Several states have also begun to implement their own post-secondary educational assistance programs; many of these programs include services to adopted and guardianship-placed youth. These services include tuition waivers and other scholarship-based programs for foster youth attending state-supported colleges and universities (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Social Science Research Center, College of Sciences & Humanities, Ball State University, 2007). States that contribute targeted educational resources for foster youth realize greater numbers of these youth accessing post-secondary education and training (Collins, 2004).

For states that supplement the Education and Training Voucher program, opportunities are expanded to allow for public university education in addition to vocational education or community college classes.

Foster youth may also benefit from the College Cost Reduction Act of 2009 (P.L. 110-84), which allows students who were in foster care, but adopted or placed in guardianships on or after their 13th birthday, to claim independent status when applying for federal financial aid (Fernandez, 2008).

It is important that adoptive parents and guardians are made aware of these policies and resources that can be used to support the post-secondary goals of youth in their care.

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- (see Improving the Educational - page 6)*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

### Melinda Lis

Randy Pausch (2008) in his book, *The Last Lecture*, emphasizes the importance of children knowing that their parents love them. I would broaden that perspective by saying children need to know somebody loves them.

In the child welfare system, that somebody could be a foster parent, grandparent, cousin, aunt, uncle, sibling, and/or adoptive parent. The need for attachment and relationships ties back to our biological make-up as humans. “. . . we are social mammals and could never have survived without deeply interconnected and interdependent human contact. The truth is, you cannot love yourself unless you have been loved and are loved. The capacity to love cannot be built in isolation.” (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006, p. 234).

The importance of relationships is a theme that is interwoven throughout the articles in this volume of *The Roundtable* (2014, Volume 27, Number 1):

- Dr. Day’s article focuses on educational outcomes and the supports and programs that are in place to help adopted and guardianship-placed youth excel in post-secondary education. One of the primary points that Dr. Day addresses in the article is that youth who achieve permanency, and therefore have a supportive adult relationships, are more likely to do well in school.
- The article by April Curtis, a former foster youth, captures the importance of valuing the biological familial relationships of children and youth who are in care. Ms. Curtis encourages the child welfare system to reframe how it thinks about birth families so that instead of seeing the challenges that these relationships can bring, the system recognizes the opportunities that maintaining these relationships can provide to children/youth.
- Jackie Crow Shoe’s article focuses on the importance of relationships among Native Americans and how this impacts their lens related to permanency. Ms.


Crow Shoe states, “Relationships are an essential part of our traditional values and belief structure, which is where upon so many of our customs continue to be based. Reflecting upon, understanding, and honoring these cultural values when providing permanency-support services is essential to improving permanency outcomes for American Indian children.”

- Leslie Cohen’s article describes how guardianship fits within the permanency continuum, providing an additional permanency alternative that is supportive of existing familial relationships and cultural norms. Identifying both options as permanent arrangements, the article examines critical issues that families and workers need to consider when determining the best permanency option for a family.

Alixes Rosado, a young man who has been in and out of the foster care system since he was age 6, spoke to The Hartford Courant about education for youth in care. He said, “The kids (who) have somebody there caring for them and wanting them to succeed are going to do it.” (2011, para. 2). Isn’t that the case for all of us? We all need to know somebody is there in our corner.

For children involved with the child welfare system, we have to find innovative ways to help them develop new relationships while also helping them bridge relationships with those from their past.

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# My Family Matters Too

By April Curtis

Imagine yourself as a child—taken away from your parents and separated from your siblings and then placed in a new home. This is not only scary, it can be confusing to children that do not understand why they are being taken away from the only homes that they know, regardless as to whether the homes were abusive or neglectful. Imagine yourself having all kinds of questions as to why you are being punished and taken away from your family, but no one answers. In this kind of situation, whom would you turn to for comfort?

For myself, these questions were all too real. I came into the foster care system when I was 3 years old. Originally, I was placed in a relative's home, which allowed me to maintain contact with my extended family. However, when this placement ended, I was put into a traditional foster home and separated from all of my family except for one brother. I never understood why I was only able to visit

with my mom and siblings but not the rest of my family—many of whom had been integral to my life. It was as if my family had disappeared.

This article will explore the magnitude of sibling bonds and the importance of maintaining these bonds even after one of more of the siblings obtains permanency or is emancipated. The article will also explore the critical need to expand the “family” definition in the child welfare system to include extended kin as well as fictive kin who have been key stakeholders in the lives of the children.

## Importance of Maintaining and Strengthening Sibling Relationships

The bonds between siblings can be stronger than the bond between parent and child and often outlast parent/child or husband/wife relationships (Hochman, et al, 1992). Yet in the child welfare system, sibling bonds are often downplayed and sometimes totally overlooked. By focusing on the

best interest of individual children and youth, the foster care system sometimes neglects the best interest of siblings and families. This phenomenon often occurs when there is a significant age difference between the siblings and/or young siblings who are separated. Maintaining sibling relationships decreases the loss children/youth go through and provides life-long supports to individuals who may have few other resources. As a result, siblings should be seen as key family members and efforts made in maintaining these relationships should be considered family preservation.

When parents are completely out of the picture, siblings may be the only accessible family members. Siblings can be there for the emotional trials and tribulations of life, alleviating the stress of isolation. It should be noted that most lifetime transitions, maybe with the exception of marriage, revealed stronger emotional bonds between siblings than that of parents (Kang, 2002). Going through life transitions together can give siblings a sense of stability. In foster care, children face many obstacles including placement instability. Sibling relationship may be the one consistent thing that children and youth in care have to hold onto. Additionally, siblings can help guide each other through the unique experiences associated with being in care.

Retaining sibling ties can also help children/youth maintain their culture, family traditions, shared history, connectedness, and identity. This is who they are, something that no one can take away from them. It provides them with an understanding of their roots, a history, and share memories

*(see Family - next page)*



of their families. It also brings a sense of peace to children and youth when they know that their siblings are safe. This peace can be critical in allowing the entire sibling group to grow individually while also minimizing guilt associated with being in their new homes.

### **Maintaining Family Ties after Permanency**

From the point of initial assessment and placement—past permanency, it is crucial to continually support sibling bonds and family relationships. Child welfare systems need to find ways of maintaining bonds when one or more of the sibling group are emancipated or obtain permanency. Unfortunately, when parental rights are terminated, this often results in a minimization of sibling ties. Likewise, when siblings groups are split and some are adopted, their right to maintain contact with their siblings no longer exists.

At a minimum, child welfare systems should include requirements for on-going visits and assistance in making these visits take place even after one or more siblings obtains permanency or ages out of care.

Child welfare systems could also develop search and connection sites that allow youth to reconnect with family members and mediation services that help youth and families negotiate on-going contact. Maintaining sibling bonds should be addressed prior to movement to permanency and then included in post-permanency planning and supports.

Illinois has taken this one step further and passed a sibling law (Public Act 97-1076) in 2012. The new law seeks to preserve sibling relationships when in a child/youth's best interest.

The law supports children and youth in care by putting into place systemic supports and requiring the Department of Children and Family Services to preserve sibling relationships when in a child/youth's best interest. The law supports relationships between siblings in care and those emancipated. It also requires training on all levels and develops brochures for children and youth in care about siblings' rights. Furthermore, the law requires ongoing juvenile court review of sibling relationships, establishes the use of pre- and post-permanency sibling contact agreements, and makes available Adoption Registry services to former wards of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services at age 18 rather than 21.

The law can be viewed in entirety at <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/97/PDF/097-1076.pdf>.

### **Expanding the Definition of Family**

Instead of defining family as the siblings and biological parents, child welfare systems need to expand this definition to include extended kin. Similar to sibling bonds, these relationships can be critical for children and youth to establish their identity and a sense of grounding. These relationships can also be critical when a child/youth is no longer in the child welfare system and may not have a large support network.

When a child or youth first enters care, creative ways to identify and establish relationships with all family members needs to be completed. Even if the family members can't be placement resources, they should be included in case planning. Likewise, all family members should be invited for visits—perhaps changing parent

visits to family visits. The key is to find creative ways for all family members to engage in the lives of the children and youth.

### **Conclusion**

All child welfare systems can improve the emphasis placed on family relationships. With the growing use of technology (Skype, emails, social media, etc.), we should be able to identify ways to maintain family bonds even when the logistics pose challenges.

Simple changes can be made to improve the bonds with family members such as, taking pictures at every visit to maintain memories, allowing family members to go to performances and events, asking family members to put together a family album for the children/youth, allowing family members consistent times to meet in person and/or via phone calls. Siblings in particular should not have to wait until their visit to say things like "happy birthday" or "Merry Christmas."

The harsh reality of it all is that to address that siblings have rights to be together, is to have to acknowledge that siblings have constitutional rights (Patton, 2001).

Child welfare systems need to reframe how they think about birth family. Instead of focusing on the challenges of maintaining these bonds, the focus should be on the opportunities these bonds allow for growth and identity.

**April Curtis** is a consultant for the National Resource Center for Adoption. 

# Sibling Math: How Much Contact is Enough?

By April Curtis

How much do siblings in your state visit with each other? Complete the following equation:

$$X \text{ (hours of visit per week)} \times 52 \text{ weeks} / 24 \text{ hours} =$$
  
Total days siblings not living together spend together in a year.

For siblings who see each other once a week for an hour that adds up to just over two days per year. No matter how many hours you plug in the first line you have to ask yourself if the final number is really enough for siblings to stay connected.

- How much time did you spend with your brothers and/or sisters?
- Is this enough to foster their relationship?

Be creative in the development of strategies to maintain sibling ties. In a time of growing use of phones, Skype, emails, social media; what can you do keep the siblings you work with connected to each other?

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## Improving the Educational *(continued from page 2)*

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**Angelique Day, PhD**, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Wayne State University. 

# The Importance of Relationships for Native American Families

By Jackie Crow Shoe

Understanding the culture of my people is critical to bringing about systems change for Native American families. Relationships are an essential part of our traditional values and belief structure, which is where upon so many of our customs continue to be based. Reflecting upon, understanding, and honoring these cultural values when providing permanency-support services is essential to improving permanency outcomes for American Indian children and youth.

Historically, policies and laws such as American Indian Boarding Schools, The Dawes Act of 1887, Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, and the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 were designed for the sole purpose of forced assimilation. These policies and laws were one of many strategies implemented to solve the “Indian problem.” Many American Indian people viewed the Indian Adoption Project as one of these strategies.

Between 1958 and 1967, hundreds of Native American children were removed from their families and communities and placed in non-Indian homes to be raised. As a result, Native American children and youth were raised in homes that did not reflect their customs and traditions. Communities that experienced this type of forced adoption, whether they are the adoptees themselves or the parents and extended families of

children/youth who were removed, were traumatized by this practice and many are still healing today.

The Indian Adoption Project, along with other practices that have historically taken place regarding Indian children/youth, impact how tribal communities view adoption today.



Raising children other than one's own is not foreign to Native people. All tribal communities have had socially acceptable practices for doing so and have risen youth in accordance with their own cultural mores. Although raising children and youth other than your own has been a consistent practice in tribal communities, terminating parental

rights has not been a common practice. The idea of terminating parental rights and denying children/youth's place in their birth families does not often align well with tribal communities value of relationships. It is my opinion that this difference coupled with the historical experience many tribal communities have had with adoption often causes tribal communities to be at odds with adoption as a permanency goal. As a result, we have to find practices that allow our people to care for their own children in a manner that honors our traditions and values. One example of this is called customary adoption.

Customary adoption allows Tribes to meet the permanency needs of their children while honoring their own tribal values and beliefs. Some states recognize customary adoption in their laws and statutes as a permanency option for children who are dependent of the juvenile court and eligible under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Customary adoption transfers the custody of children/youth to the care and protection of adoptive parents without the termination of parental rights. Tribal customary adoption occurs under the customs, laws or traditions of the Tribe.

White Earth Band of Ojibwe in northern Minnesota has taken this ceremony of customary adoption and used the court system to legally formalize this traditional practice. According to the White Earth's

*(see Importance of Relationships - page 11)*



# Exploring Adoption and Guardianship with Relative Caregivers

By Leslie Cohen

The Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) was made available to states as a result of the passage of the Foster Connections to Success Act passed in 2008. The title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) is a formula grant that helps States and Tribes who opt to provide guardianship assistance payments for the care of children by relatives who have assumed legal guardianship of eligible children whom they previously cared for as foster parents. As of December 2013, 31 States and two Tribes have adopted GAP.

One of the primary functions of a caseworker is to guide families through the permanency process; which could include either adoption or guardianship if reunification is not a viable option. Anecdotally and through research, we know that caseworkers sometimes harbor personal biases when it comes to placing value on adoption and

over adoption and subsequently worry about the stability of resulting guardianship arrangements.

To minimize this concern and to lay the groundwork for stable permanencies, it is critical that caseworkers are adept at helping families make well-informed, permanency decisions. This includes helping families explore their commitment to permanency through a series of critical discussions that assess their strengths, weaknesses, and needs as well as an honest and accurate detailing of the differences and similarities between permanency alternatives. The discussions must not only focus on the child/youth's needs today, but how those needs might change in the future and how they can be addressed.

For most families, caseworkers are the tour guides that lead them down the path to permanence. As a result, caseworkers must recognize the significance of their role in framing

make informed decisions about what option will work best given their unique needs. This article provides basic steps that caseworkers should adhere to as they explore permanency options with families.

## Exploring Intent to be a Permanent Resource

One means by which to bolster the stability of placements is for caseworkers to ascertain caregivers' willingness and capability to care for children/youth to adulthood rather than assuming relative caregivers willingness and capability. Even before reunification is determined not to be a viable permanency option, caseworkers should engage relative caregivers in conversations about permanency and the possibility of pursuing alternative plans.

When children or youth live with relative caregivers, workers often assume that the children or youth will be able to remain in those homes indefinitely if reunification is not possible. Although relative caregivers may have been willing to care for the children/youth while the parents "got themselves together," caregivers may not have given much thought to what would happen if the parents are not able to resume their parental roles.

Unlike traditional foster care placements, relatives often do not have the luxury of time when deciding to become resource or foster parents. Decisions are often made at the spur of a moment to prevent children from

(see *Exploring* - next page)

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**Once it has been determined that relative caregivers are dedicated to raising children or youth in their home to adulthood, it is paramount to determine what option, guardianship or adoption, is most appropriate.**

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guardianship.<sup>1</sup> For example, it has been reported that caseworkers worry about the commitment of family members that choose guardianship

the breadth and significance of caregivers' commitments to children and youth for whom permanence is being considered and help families

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Youth and Families (2011). Synthesis of Findings: *Subsidized Guardianship Child Welfare Waiver Demonstrations*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.





living with strangers. Given the speed with which some family members are required to make this decision, it often means that they have not considered plans for the future including their interest and ability to care for the children or youth until adulthood.

The first step to ensuring thoughtful decision making should be talking to the relative caregivers and making a clear determination of their commitment in caring for the children/youth until adulthood. Before discussing the specifics of a particular permanency option, it is important to gain an understanding of relative caregivers' general interest in and capabilities of becoming permanent resources for the children/youth in their home. This discussion should include the following major components:

1. Ability to provide a safe and permanent home for children.
2. Need for ongoing support from the formal child welfare system.
3. Intent to care for children or youth until adulthood.

#### 4. Awareness on how decisions will impact family relationships.

An open and honest discussion with relative caregivers will help caseworkers assess their capability and willingness to care for children or youth. It will also lay the foundation for future permanency discussions by providing insight into the strengths, weaknesses, and concerns of relative caregivers.

### Presenting the Options

Once it has been determined that relative caregivers are dedicated to raising children or youth in their home to adulthood, it is paramount to determine what option, guardianship or adoption, is most appropriate. Due to the federal government's desire to ensure that adoption is considered by all families, caseworkers must document the efforts made to discuss adoption with relative caregivers in the case records.

In the event that adoption is determined to not be an appropriate option, caseworkers must document reasons for this conclusion. The

documentation helps to ensure that both caseworkers and caregivers are not compelled by preconceived notions of its appropriateness for relatives and that adoption is not glossed over as a viable permanency option. While the documentation helps to ensure that consideration has been given to adoption, it is the content of that discussion that empowers relative caregivers to make permanency decisions that support their needs, capabilities, and interests.

The best method of determining that adoption is not an appropriate option for children is to have a thorough discussion that allows for the comparing and contrasting of adoption and guardianship. There are many legitimate differences between adoption and guardianship; it is critical that workers stick to the facts. These facts can often be obtained through state policies, procedures, and legislation or from fact sheets and training materials prepared by the state.

The following topics should be discussed as it pertains to both adoption and guardianship and the impact the differences will have on families:

- legal rights and responsibilities of the caregiver
- parental rights
- decision-making rights
- relationship to siblings
- child's legal name
- financial support (amount and duration)
- medical assistance
- post-permanency services
- non-recurring expense reimbursement for the transfer of guardianship or finalization of the adoption

(see Exploring - page 12)

# REVIEW of CURRENT RESEARCH

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Keeping up with current research can be challenging for busy professionals. However, the importance of evidence-based/evidence-informed practice is critical. The following is a review of the article, “Adoption Subsidies and Placement Outcomes for Children in Foster Care.”

In a substantial study on the effects of adoption subsidies on the time spent in foster care and the quality of those placements, Buckles conducted a secondary analysis of more than 2.5 million unique cases drawn from Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

This study was undertaken because prior studies on adoption subsidies did not yield the sample size or validity to identify causal relationships. In addition, so many child, family, and case worker features determined the receipt, size, and duration of subsidies, that previous studies could not disentangle these important variables to definitely determine the effectiveness of such subsidies.

This investigation found that when foster children become eligible for adoption subsidies, foster parents are more likely to adopt them, thereby shortening their time in foster care; this is particularly true for white foster children. Findings also revealed that the average increase in adoptions for subsidy-eligible children in any given state over the six year study period was only 11.3%, this increase was mostly driven by foster parents adopting children in their care once

those children became subsidy-eligible. Indeed, the placement status for the vast majority of children across all states did not change during the study period.

This study is particularly methodologically strong because the author used an advanced statistical technique to overcome the presence of unknown confounding variables such as child, case worker, and family personal characteristics. By comparing how each state defined the special needs status required for subsidy eligibility along with the average age of eligibility for children in states with and without an age cutoff for eligibility, the investigator was able to determine how the likelihood of being eligible for a subsidy was related to unmeasured variables, and therefore how any differences in adoption status post-subsidy could actually be attributed to the subsidy receipt. While some limitations of this work exist related to how states were compared for analysis, the size and scope of this research has significant implications for developing future studies on how child adoption subsidy programs influence child well-being long-term. 🧠

To access the full article: Buckles, K.S. (2013). Adoption Subsidies and Placement Outcomes for Children in Foster Care. *Journal of Human Resources*, 48(3), 596-627.

## Importance of Relationships *(continued from page 7)*

Band Judicial Code 4a-1 Purpose (1) (2) (3) (4), the customary adoption code shall be liberally interpreted and construed as an exercise of the inherent sovereign authority of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe to fulfill the following express purpose:

1. To embody and promote the basic traditional values of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe regarding the protection and care of the Tribe's children. The White Earth Band of Ojibwe believes that it is the responsibility of the Tribe, the tribal communities and extended families to protect, care for, and nurture our children.
2. To promote the belief of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe that children deserve a sense of permanency and belonging throughout their lives and at the same time they deserve to have knowledge about their unique cultural heritage including their tribal customs, history, language, religion and values.
3. To provide for the best interests of the Tribe, tribal communities and the Tribe's children.
4. To afford judicial processes which allow for formal adjudications that address the issues of the rights, responsibilities, care, custody, and control of minor children when the biological parents are unable or unwilling to provide a safe, stable, nurturing and permanent environment for their children by conferring jurisdiction upon the White Earth Children's Court to hear and adjudicate such matters.




Since 1999, White Earth has used customary adoptions for not only White Earth Tribal members but also provide this practice for other Tribes. As of today, White Earth has provided customary adoption for approximately 360 children.

In Minnesota, customary adoption is recognized by state and local agencies. Minnesota state law supports tribal customary adoptions by providing adoption assistance for youth adopted according to tribal custom and code, when all other eligibility criteria are met.

The state of California has also adopted legislation to reflect customary adoption practice.

Customary adoption is one permanency option that has been developed that takes into account the value of relationships. It is a practice created by and for Native Americans. It is my hope that these types of practices will continue to crop up in states throughout the nation so that American Indian children can obtain the permanency they need in a manner that respects and honors their traditions.

**Jackie Crow Shoe** is a Regional Lead Consultant for Tribes for the National Resource Center for Adoption. She is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians from North Dakota. 



- eligibility for Independent living or education and training vouchers, post-secondary education financial aid
- tax credits, impact on food stamps, free meals, and public support programs
- legal options in the event of the death of the adoptive parent or guardian
- inheritance rights
- dissolution

### Supporting the Permanency Decision

As caseworkers guide families through the permanency decision-making process, it is important to respect and support the unique circumstances of relative caregivers. For related caregivers, in particular, there are many reasons that guardianship is a more appealing option than adoption. However, research from some states show that relatives, when presented with both options, are likely to choose adoption over guardianship<sup>2</sup>. Anecdotally, caseworkers report that they feel some caregivers chose guardianship because they are less committed to the children in their care. There are many reasons caregivers do not chose to adopt which do not reflect on the caregivers' level of commitment but rather are tied to managing the complexities of exiting family relationships.

The following are examples of reasons that guardianship may be more appropriate than adoption for some families who are committed to providing permanence for children/youth in care:


- In the event that parental rights have not been terminated by the court, birth parents retain the legal rights to remain a part of the child's life through visitation.
- Guardianship allows relative guardians to manage birth parent-child interactions.
- Guardianship is a legally recognized relationship that does not require the family to redefine existing family relationships.
- Guardianship allows children and youth to retain rights of association with their siblings, grandparents, and other extended family members.
- Guardianship does not require termination of parental rights which may be a large issue for various cultures.

Given the unique nature of family dynamics, it is unlikely that any two permanency explorations will be exactly alike. As a result, caseworkers should focus on helping families to thoroughly explore which of the options will be best supported by their family dynamics. Once a permanency decision is reached, caseworkers can work with families to ensure that the future needs of the children or youth

can be met. This can be accomplished by ensuring that caregivers know the services available to families through the subsidy arrangements, both the Adoption Assistance Agreement and the Guardianship Assistance Program as well as community services. In addition to knowing about the services, families need to know how to access the services.

In closing, it is important for professionals to remember that it is the emotional ties rather than the legal binds (adoption or guardianship) that ultimately determine the quality and significance of a relationship that exists up until and beyond a child's 18th birthday.

As professionals, we can try to bolster the success of these arrangements by ensuring families understand and are vested in the decisions that they make regarding permanence. We can also arm families with the information that they need to be successful in the future. Child welfare professionals must do their part to ensure that families assuming permanence of children through either adoption or guardianship understand the significance of permanence.

**Leslie Cohen** is a Consultant for the National Resource Center for Adoption. Leslie has 21 years of experience in child welfare program/policy development, implementation and evaluation. 

<sup>2</sup> Assisted Guardianship Waiver Demonstrations: Lessons in Implementing a New Permanency Alternative and Key Evaluation Findings, Agency and Courts Meeting, Mark Testa, 2009



EXTRA!  
EXTRA!

# The Center

## NEWS That You Can Use!

### — WEBINARS —

*(The following webinars have taken place and were recorded. Recordings will be posted soon as a resource on our website, [www.nrcadoption.org](http://www.nrcadoption.org). Email notifications will be sent when the recordings are available.)*

#### **Part 1 & 2 – “Understanding and Complying With Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, as amended”**

This presentation focuses on Federal laws that apply to the consideration of race, color, and national origin and how they interrelate; practical guidance on how child welfare agencies and social workers can comply with MEPA in their programs and daily practice; enforcement of Title VI and MEPA; compliance tips; and resources.

Additional policy guidance about MEPA may also be found at the following web link: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/programs/cb/laws\\_policies/laws/cwpm/policy\\_dsp\\_pf.jsp](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp_pf.jsp).

#### **“Re-visiting the Adoption-Guardianship Discussion: Helping Caseworkers Better Understand and Communicate the Permanency Implications of Adoption and Guardianship”**

(co-sponsored with the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections)

As of November 2013, 31 State agencies and 2 Tribes have adopted the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) since the passage of the Fostering Connections Act in 2008. A recent report published by the Children’s Defense Fund and several partners, “Making It Work, Using the GAP Program to Close the Permanency Gap for Children in Foster Care,” indicates that States use GAP to varying degrees. While many factors contribute to the variation in use, the report found that a key element of utilization is tied to a professional’s understanding of, and respect for, the value of kin placements. Successful use of the GAP is also contingent upon professional staff and caregiver understanding of the different permanency options available to them.

This webinar summarizes the foundation on which guardianship as a permanency option was developed, provide a comparative look at the qualities of permanency for adoption and guardianship, discuss the value of guardianship for kinship families, Native Americans, and older wards, and highlight strategies for the engagement and education of families in the decision-making process. Tips and tools for engagement of families, educating families about the differences between adoption and guardianship and documenting critical discussions are included.

### — ADOPTION STORIES AROUND THE NATION —

Adoption Tapestry is a project of the NRCA. Recognizing that adoption is a unique journey and that there is not one story that exemplifies the experience, Adoption Tapestry collects and shares adoption stories from various perspectives across the nation. It is our hope that these short audio clips will help to inform practice, strengthen the links between individuals connected through their unique permanency stories, enhance our communities understanding of permanency and preserve our families’ voices and insight for future generations.

The stories are intentionally not scripted so that participants can engage in a rich dialogue that provides a glimpse of their domestic child welfare adoption and guardianship experience. NRCA will continue adding stories to the map throughout the year so that there is eventually a story from every state in the nation.

To listen to these stories or if you or someone you know is interested in submitting their own story, please go to NRCA’s website: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/map/>.

*(see More News - next page)*

## — RECENT ADOPTION RESEARCH SUMMARIES —

Check out the NRCA website for Recent Adoption Research Summaries (RARS). One article will be highlighted on the NRCA website the first of each month. The purpose of RARS is to transfer knowledge to State, Tribal, and local systems about evidence-based/evidence-informed approaches related to adoption. You can find the first of these summaries on the NRCA website at: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/Beyond-pre-adoptive-risk-The-impact.pdf>.

## — NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE ADOPTION PROGRAMS —

The purpose of the National Association of State Adoption Programs (NASAP) is to provide a forum in which State Adoption Program Managers can pool their expertise and to promote networking activities as an association with other direct child welfare entities and individual professionals so that each state can develop and maintain an efficient, state-of-the-art adoption program. The association is guided by an 8 member Executive Committee (EC) that serves two year terms with half elected each year. The EC holds monthly teleconferences. Listed below are the 2014 EC members:

### President

John Johnson  
Director of Foster Care and Adoption  
Tennessee Department of Children's Services  
Office of Child Permanency

### Vice-President

Maggie Molitor  
Adoption Program Policy Specialist  
West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

### Secretary

Stephanie Miller  
Permanency Program Specialist  
Idaho Department of Health and Welfare

### Treasurer

Deidre Calcoate  
Adoption and Resource Home Development and Support Manager  
Arizona Department of Economic Security  
Division of Children, Youth and Families

### Member-at-Large

Betty Berzin  
Assistant Director-Adoption Program Director  
New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services  
Division for Children, Youth and Families

### Member-at-Large

Cathe Hoover  
Adoption, Guardianship & Permanency Manager  
Michigan Department of Human Services  
Bureau of Child Welfare

### Member-at-Large

Steve Obershaw  
Adoption and Consultation Manager  
Bureau of Programs and Policies  
Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

### Member-at-Large

Tracey Parker Hirst  
Adoption Program Manager  
Iowa Department of Human Services  
Division of Adult, Children & Family Services

### Ex-Officio Member

Deborah Goodman  
Adoption Program Administrator  
State of Oklahoma Department of Human Services

The EC will be holding peer-to-peer forums throughout the year for NASAP members. For more information about the activities of NASAP, please contact Ingrid Parks, Project Manager, National Resource Center for Adoption, at [iparks@nrcadoption.org](mailto:iparks@nrcadoption.org) or (248) 443-0306.

# The Center Source

## CHILD WELFARE PRODUCT SALES & TRAINING RESOURCES

Listed below are a several products and training resources that are featured in the Spaulding Institute's Catalog. View complete catalog at <http://spaulding.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/CS-Spring-2013.pdf>.

### BARGAINS!

#### Adoption Competency Curriculum DVDs, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption

These DVDs are designed to be used with the *Adoption Competency Curriculum*. This comprehensive curriculum speaks to all the issues in the adoption of children/youth from the child welfare system and focuses on some of the common issues and challenges that occur in transition: The Day Everything Changed, Child Assessment and Preparation, Family Assessment and Preparation, Decision Making and Matching, Talking About Adoption Assistance and Post Adoption Services. No shipping or handling charges!

DVDs	2010	\$20/each	\$120/set of 6
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#### Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents, Deborah D. Gray

This book provides adoptive parents with specific information that applies to children like theirs. It matches children's emotional needs and stages with parenting strategies designed to enhance their children's happiness and emotional health.

#181	2002	<del>\$24.95</del>	\$19.95
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#### Adopting: Sound Choices, Strong Families, Patricia Irwin Johnson, MS

Winner of the 2009 Benjamin Franklin Award as best new book in the self help genre. It tackles very personal questions and addresses the difficult issues that must be examined, preparing the reader to make the best decisions possible as they embark on the journey to family-building through adoption.

#500	2008	<del>\$28.95</del>	\$21.95
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#### Brothers and Sisters in Adoption, Helping Children Navigate Relationships When New Kids Join the Family, Arleta James

Winner of the 2010 Benjamin Franklin Award as best book in the psychology genre. This comprehensive book goes beyond the common concerns for foster and adoptive families, and focuses on families which already contain children born into them or adopted by them who are developing normally and assists the family in accepting unfamiliar behaviors and different cultures, ultimately helping the new children heal so

that the family can forge strong connections and attachments to one another.

#501	2009	<del>\$30.00</del>	\$21.95
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### BEST SELLERS!

#### Parents As Tender Healers (PATH), Spaulding for Children

PATH is an eight-session competency-based curriculum designed to prepare resource parents (foster, adoptive and kinship parents) for parenting children who have been abused, neglected and spent time in the child welfare system. The jargon-free Trainer's Guide is readily used by both parent and professional trainers. The six video vignettes highlight experiences of children and resource families and provide guidance to potential resource families (1997). Now available on DVD.

First Curriculum	#124	\$495.00
Participant Handbook	#125	\$12.95

#### Core Issues in Adoption, Spaulding for Children

This DVD discusses issues unique to adoption (separation, loss and grief; bonding and attachment; claiming; entitlement; mastery and control; unmatched expectations; family integration; identity formation) through interviews with adoptive parents, adult adoptees and birth parents. By discussing the ways that they have worked through these issues, the individuals reinforce the idea that adoption is different. Their candor provokes excellent discussion about these core issues and helps the audience gain an understanding of the lifelong impact of forming a family in this way. (25 min.)

#119	1996	\$95.00
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#### The Children Who Wait, Spaulding for Children

Special needs adoption practice is shaped and driven by the needs of children who wait for adoption placement. This DVD illustrates how children come into the child welfare systems, behaviors they develop to survive living in the system, and the implications for parenting. It includes parents, children and professionals speaking to these issues. (30 min.)

#035	1989	\$95.00
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## Your Feedback is Important to Us!



The National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) needs your feedback about *The Roundtable*. Please go to the following website to participate in a brief survey provided by Public Research and Evaluation Services, Inc., the independent evaluation firm of the NRCA: <http://surveys.pres-online.org/s3/NRCA-Roundtable-Survey-2014>.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and will not affect your interaction or participation in services with the National Resource Center for Adoption. Your responses are confidential and will be reported in group summary only. Thank you.


Sharonlyn Harrison, PhD, Director  
Public Research and Evaluation Services, Inc.

## We're Here To Help!



NRCA helps States, Tribes, and Territories (STT) identify strengths, needs, and actions that can improve adoption outcomes. This is done through an array of activities including distribution of resources, webinars, tools, curricula, publications and technical assistance. NRCA is available to partner with STTs to increase the number and timeliness of permanency options, improve adoption systems, enhance permanency support and preservation programs and increase cultural awareness and sensitivity. The NRCA can assist STTs specifically to:

- Build capacity related to adoption programs including timeliness to permanency, number of adoptions achieved, preparation of all parties, and quality of the adoption process.
- Develop, expand, strengthen, and improve the quality and effectiveness of permanency support and preservation services.
- Increase cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Integrate policy and practice.
- Establish effective interagency cooperation and collaborations involving all stakeholders, including youth.
- Promote public-private coordination of adoption programs.
- Promote leadership development of minorities and improve professional competency in the adoption field.
- Develop culturally-competent child welfare services.
- Develop a system for full disclosure.
- Insert adoption competencies throughout the child welfare system including mental health providers.
- Develop an evaluation framework for permanency support and preservation services.
- Provide evidence based and promising practices information.
- Develop, refine, and implement policies and practices consistent with federal legislation, including MEPA/IEP, ICWA and ASFA.

Upon request and approval, the Center will provide technical assistance, consultation, information and research materials specific to the needs of the organization. Contact us at: Email: [nrc@nrcadoption.org](mailto:nrc@nrcadoption.org) or (248) 443-0306. 

### THE ROUNDTABLE

Melinda Lis, MSW  
Director

Janice King, LMSW  
Program Manager/Coordinator

Barbara Mucha  
Editor/Layout

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16250 Northland Drive, Suite 120  
Southfield, Michigan 48075  
Phone: (248) 443-0306  
Web Site: [www.nrcadoption.org](http://www.nrcadoption.org)  
E-mail: [nrc@nrcadoption.org](mailto:nrc@nrcadoption.org)

To receive future issues of *The Roundtable* electronically, subscribe on our web site at: [www.nrcadoption.org/subscribe](http://www.nrcadoption.org/subscribe)