

A young girl with curly hair is blowing bubbles outdoors. She is holding a blue bottle and a yellow bubble wand. The background is a blurred green landscape with sunlight filtering through the trees.

# Strategic Review and Analysis

The Governor's  
Adoption Study  
Committee  
2015 Final  
Report

FEBRUARY 2016

# SAFE STRONG SUPPORTIVE

safe children | strong families | supportive communities



## Contents

Purpose.....	2
Analysis of the Committee's Recommendations.....	2
Further Casey Analysis and Recommendations.....	4
Conclusion .....	8
Addendum.....	8

## Purpose

In 2015, the Governor's Adoption Study Committee published a final report outlining recommendations for advancing, promoting, and improving adoption in Indiana. The Adoption Study Committee proposed five recommendations:

1. Adoption Promotion Brochure
2. Social Media Campaign and Other Adoption Awareness Efforts
3. Fingerprints for Adoptive Parents
4. Create a More Permanent Body to Continue to Study and Advocate for Adoption
5. Continued Commitment to Post-Adoption Services

This report is designed to accomplish the following:

- Review and analyze the recommendations made by the Adoption Study Committee;
- Respond to the Commission on Improving the Status of Children (CISC) - Executive Committee's request for Casey to provide a recommendation on where the adoption topics would best fit within CICS structure;
- Provide additional analysis of target populations and policies in Indiana impacting adoption;
- Identify additional strategies based on research and national practices to enhance the recommendations.

The data contained in this report and attached to the addendum is the latest data available to Casey via AFCARS and NCANDS. It includes a statewide view as well as data for Marion and Lake Counties. Casey recommends Indiana conduct a "deep dive" into their own data system in order to further delineate target populations, demographics, location of children waiting for adoption, etc.

## Analysis of the Adoption Study Committee's Recommendations

### Recommendation 1: Adoption Promotion Brochure

### Recommendation 2: Social Media Campaign and Other Adoption Awareness Efforts

Recommendations 1 and 2 from the Adoption Study Committee are substantive and should help with recruitment of adoptive families. These recommendations could be combined and a comprehensive Communication Platform and Plan could be created to coordinate and link all messaging (including social media and adoption awareness efforts), identification, and recruitment efforts. This platform and plan would include strategies for internal stakeholders (agency staff and leadership) and external stakeholders (cross-system partners, community members, judicial branch, legislative branch, and others.)

By utilizing this method, communication and recruitment efforts could be designed and targeted to specific populations instead of a “one size fits all” approach. For example, a judge may need to be educated on the agency’s adoption practices and his or her role in expediting permanency. A member of the faith based community may need to be reached in a different way, perhaps through his or her pastor.

Creating specific messaging and activities for a designated population will be more effective and can help when measuring whether or not a particular approach is working. For example, the agency could determine how many prospective adoptive families are “liking” the Facebook page and how many proceed to adopt a child(ren) within a certain number of days or months. Tracking data and measures are an important part of any communication and messaging platform; it can determine the impact and allow for continuous quality improvement and adjusting efforts as needed to maximize adoptions.

The National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at Adopt USKids is an excellent resource to assist in developing strong adoption awareness efforts. They have national PSA campaigns that can be customized to your local jurisdiction, tips on how best to use social media in recruitment, and examples of successful adoption awareness campaigns throughout the nation. [Click here](#) to access their website with tools and resources<sup>1</sup>.

### **Recommendation 3: Fingerprints for Adoptive Parents**

It is prudent and effective to eliminate any financial barriers to adoption for foster families interested in adopting children in their care. Waiving fingerprint fees for foster parents adopting children in their care could be a “quick win” to achieve permanency for children living in foster care homes, who are bonded with their foster parents and free for adoption; this population of children is deemed “close to permanency” in the data. Please see the “Further Casey Analysis and Recommendations” section of this report for more details.

### **Recommendation 4: Create a More Permanent Body to Continue to Study and Advocate for Adoption**

The steps outlined in this recommendation are prudent and could be effective if implemented. The more permanent body described could act as a steering committee responsible for implementation oversight of all the recommendations put forward by the Adoption Study Committee. Furthermore, the target populations described in this report could also be reviewed by this body on a regular basis to determine how much progress is being made. It is recommended that this body report to the Governor’s Office on a regular basis to communicate the importance of these efforts and encourage accountability. Please see the “Further Casey Analysis and Recommendations” section of this report for more details regarding the recommended entity to potentially serve as the more permanent body to address these adoption topics.

<sup>1</sup> Full website link: <http://www.nrldr.org/placement-stability-and-permanency/tools-and-resources>

Several jurisdictions across the country have created successful child welfare oversight bodies, most of which were chartered in response to legislation, executive order, or consent decree. Some of these jurisdictions include: Washington State (Braam Oversight Panel); Philadelphia, PA (Community Oversight Board); Los Angeles County, CA (Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection); Georgia (Child Welfare Reform Council); Minnesota (Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children); and Texas (Public-Private Partnership). The focus of these oversight bodies is typically broader than only adoption but they do focus on permanency.

### **Recommendation 5: Continued Commitment to Post-Adoption Services**

Post adoption services have been shown by research to be effective in helping children deal with their emotions and losses and support adoptive parents in helping them understand how best to address issues arising from the adoption. There are four common categories typically requested by families<sup>2</sup>:

- Educational and informational services
- Clinical services
- Material assistance
- Support networks

For a list of core post-adoption services, please [click here](#).

## Further Casey Analysis and Recommendations

The analysis and recommendations outlined in this section compliment the recommendations put forth by the Adoption Study Committee. This policy and data analysis/recommendations provide additional information for the identified steering committee or oversight body to review and assist with implementation of its recommendations.

### **Casey Recommendation: Steering Committee/Oversight Body**

After analysis of the current committee/task force structure within the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana and their assigned priorities, it is recommended that the existing Children's Oversight Committee act as the steering committee or body responsible for implementation oversight of all the recommendations and topics put forward by the Adoption Study Committee in addition to further studying and advocating for adoption.

An Adoptions Subcommittee might be created under the auspices of the Children's Oversight Committee if it is determined that additional experts, consultants, and stakeholders are needed to fully inform this work. The Adoptions Subcommittee would

---

<sup>2</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2012). Providing postadoption services. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

report regularly to the Children's Oversight Committee who in turn would report regularly to the CISC Executive Committee on identified outcomes, priorities, actions, and recommendations. If the Children's Oversight Committee does not become the permanent body, they could be a starting place to begin this work and then make further recommendations to the CISC Executive Committee.

### ***Casey Analysis: Data***

Statewide in Indiana, there are 3,386 children in care 2 plus years<sup>3</sup>, 50% (or 1,699 children) who are "close to permanency" while the remaining 50% (or 1,687 children) are not. Close to permanency includes 3 groups:

- Children with goals of adoption, guardianship or live with relatives who have been in their current family-based placement for 1 year or longer;
- Children with a goal of adoption who are in a family-based setting and have had their parental rights terminated, regardless of length of time in current placement;
- Children with a goal of reunification who are currently on a trial home visit. Family placement is defined as pre-adoptive homes, traditional foster homes, and kinship homes.

Forty-two percent of all long stayers in Indiana are defined as "close to adoption" and most (70% or 987 children) are under the age of 10. Children this young who have been in care 2 years or longer (some greater than four years) have spent much of their lives with these families and have very secure attachments. Often times these families are bonded with them, consider them part of the family, and are willing to adopt.

A subset of children is close to adoption because parental rights have been terminated, in addition to having an adoption goal and living in a stable family setting. There are 761 children, or 54% of the children defined as close to adoption. Nearly 36% (507) of all children close to adoption have had their parental rights terminated and are younger than 10.

Those children not close to permanency (1,687 children or 50% of all long stayers) are distributed across the four permanency goals of Adoption, Reunification, Relative or Guardianship, and APPLA. The permanency goal and placement type of some of the Long Stayers not close to permanency do not match. Some children have APPLA goals but are stable in family home placements. Some children have adoption or relative guardianship goals but are placed in congregate care. Understanding the dynamics of these situations would be useful.

### ***Lake and Marion Counties***

Statewide in Indiana, 20% of the population of children in care are long stayers, which is lower than the national average of 25%. Marion holds close to that average with 22%

---

<sup>3</sup> Casey identifies this population of children in care 2+ years as "long stayers." Please see the addendum for additional data on long stayers in Indiana.



while Lake's population of long stayers is 35%. Similar trends in the breakdown between close to adoption vs. not close to a permanent home hold for Lake and Marion compared to the state.

Compared to the state and Marion County averages (approximately 22% and 20% respectively), Lake County has the highest percentage of long stayers who have been in care 4+ years at approximately 37%. While their percentage of long stayers in care 4+ years is higher in Lake County, about 27% of that population are close to adoption with their parental rights terminated.

Lake and Marion Counties would benefit from the same recommendations outlined below, which are based on statewide data. Please see the addendum of this report for

### ***Casey Recommendation: Data Exploration***

***Conduct an immediate qualitative record review of the 761 children that are closest to permanency (adoption goals, terminated parental rights, and in a stable family placement) to identify the reasons they remain in care.*** The review should analyze the court processes as well as agency policies that may prevent the finalization of adoption for these cases. Permanency Roundtables (PRTs) are not recommended as part of this review. While PRTs can be helpful in identifying system barriers, a qualitative record review similar to the one used in Harris County, Texas (explained below) is a much faster process.

These children are generally ages 2-12. Rather than trying individual fixes for these cases when identifying barriers or challenges, system fixes should be applied as the other children in the larger close to permanency cohort can also benefit from those system fixes. An example would be in Harris County, Texas where 700 children in similar proximity to permanency were identified. A review of the cases revealed that about half of these children were stalled because of the file redaction process. The process was fixed by identifying and assigning a staff person whose primary function was to review those cases. Over 300 children achieved permanency in about 90 days.

Any strategy should not only be beneficial to long stayers currently in care, but also be proactive in helping to further the agency's understanding of the system in order to prevent future long stays.

There is no need to review all of the cases before a system intervention can be addressed. The system intervention can begin once a representative sampling of the cases have been reviewed and patterns/trends related to barriers start to emerge. To achieve this rapid response, the team reviewing records should include agency quality assurance staff, court staff, and case work/adoption staff depending on who is currently assigned to the case.

A good example of this review process has occurred in Philadelphia, PA where they have focused on increasing exits to legal permanency (including reunification, adoption and legal guardianship) and have a Permanency Steering Committee that has been meeting bi-weekly since June 2015. In addition, in the area of adoptions, they have

deconstructed all of the steps to adoption, from the time that adoption is identified as a goal to finalization/case closure. They have gathered qualitative and quantitative data to determine where there are gaps along the way and developed strategies to address those gaps along with tracking systems to determine progress. For example, they have a contract with the Statewide Adoption Network (SWAN) who subcontract with private providers to complete child and family profiles (aka home studies). Through their analysis they learned that it was being significantly underutilized. Over the past six months, referrals for child profiles have tripled and referrals for family profiles have doubled. Philadelphia is also working very closely with the courts who have also implemented a number of changes in how they operate.

Children who have adoption goals, TPR, but have been in a current placement less than one year, would benefit from deeper data analysis. The drill down should look at placement type and placement history to determine the extent of the impact of placement instability on the child. It should also consider the age of the child and likelihood of this child aging out of care. Children who continue to have close biological family ties, live in congregate care, and are 13 or older should be considered for second chance reunification efforts and re-instatement of parental rights.

### ***Casey Recommendation: Data Exploration***

Because 42% of all long stayers in Indiana are defined as “close to adoption” and most of these children are under the age of 10, it may make sense to reach out directly to these caregivers to identify any obstacles that are delaying permanency. The longer permanency is delayed the less likely it will be reached. In several states, including South Carolina, the system identified a population of youth who were close to adoption yet had not achieved finalization. The Director of the agency wrote a letter to these caregivers to offer assistance in removing obstacles to permanence for these youth. In many cases the concern was around an adoption subsidy or other concrete issue management was able to address immediately. This led to a dramatic spike in exits to permanence for youth.

Additionally, the 620 children that are close to adoption but for whom parental rights have not been terminated (children who have adoption goals, and have been in a current family-based placement for more than 1 year), would benefit from deeper data analysis. The drill down should look at placement type and placement history to determine the extent of the impact of placement instability on the child. The courts should be approached to understand why termination of parental rights has not been completed on the cluster of children close to permanency who have adoption goals accepted by the court and are in stable family placements for greater than one year.

### ***Casey Analysis: Foster to Adopt placements, early permanency hearings, and more frequent court reviews***

Success in other states has shown that policies that require or support foster to adopt placements and policies that require early permanency hearings or more frequent court reviews can contribute to improved time to permanency. No references to these policies were found in the review of Indiana statutes.



### **Casey Recommendation: Policy**

It is recommended that the agency explore state licensing to determine whether they present any barriers for time to permanency and explore whether foster to adopt placements may improve performance in this regard. Further, it is recommended that the agency, in coordination with court partners, identify any court barriers to timely permanency and consider whether earlier permanency hearings for younger children and/or more frequent court reviews would improve time to permanency. Further discussion is warranted as to the value of other approaches, including the requirement of executive leadership approval for decisions at critical points in a case.

## Conclusion

The Adoption Study Committee's 2015 Final Report is an excellent start to making Indiana "...the most adoption-friendly state in the country." The review, analysis, and recommendations contained in this report are designed to enhance and expand on the Adoption Study Committee's work to date and provide additional considerations for the steering committee/oversight body assigned to continue this work. Casey Family Programs is proud to serve as a partner to Indiana and is available to consult or help implement any of the recommendations outlined in this report. One specific example would be helping the CISC Executive Committee and/or the Children's Oversight Committee to identify an adoptions expert, either within Casey or externally, to be available for consultation as they consider adoption recommendations and implementation strategies.

## Addendum

Please see the slowed permanency and long stayer data for Indiana statewide, Lake, and Marion Counties.

