WHEREVER MY FAMILY IS: THAT'S HOME!

Adoption Services for Military Families

The Color Purple...

In military jargon "purple" refers to an issue or operation that includes all uniformed services – Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine and Coast Guard. Purple is what you get when you mix the greens, blues and khakis of the various uniforms. In today's military climate, the services work jointly in many instances, overcoming hurdles en route to their goal. In the same way, adoption professionals and military families can be "purple" as they work towards the common goal of providing great families for waiting children.

Special Acknowledgements

The Families – we wish to thank the military families who so generously contributed their time and stories to this Guide –

George and Cecilia Greene

Jan and Jenny January

John Leavitt

Jim and Gail McCloud

Jim and Karen Potts

We wish you and your families the best that life has to offer.

The Social Workers – we encountered some very dedicated social workers in our journey. Our heartfelt thanks to:

Margaret Linnemann, MSW, LCSW, Foster Care Program Manager, State of Oklahoma

Robin Gibson, BSW, Adoption Specialist, State of Oklahoma

Robin Preusser, VIDA, Voice for International Development and Adoption

Your commitment is truly admirable!

The Practitioners – we also want to acknowledge those "practitioners" (social workers, chaplains and other professionals) in military family service centers, adoption exchanges and public and private agencies who provide creative adoption services and support for military families and the children who wait. You know who you are!

WHEREVER MY FAMILY IS: THAT'S HOME!

Adoption Services for Military Families
A Reference Guide for Practitioners

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Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

WHEREVER MY FAMILY IS: THAT'S HOME!

Adoption Services for Military Families
A Reference Guide for Practitioners

Introduction from AdoptUSKids

AdoptUSKids is honored to join you in your interest in finding and helping military families to adopt children waiting in foster care.

It is ironic that adopting, even when adopting a child from the United States, is often very challenging for members of the military. The mobility of military families presents special challenges that other prospective adoptive families may not face; but challenges can be overcome when committed professionals choose to be creative, flexible and to work collaboratively.

This is an important subject because we need diverse adoptive families. On any given day, over 100,000 of our nation's children wait in foster care to be adopted. Many of them are over the age of nine and/or are children of color. Interested military family members are good candidates as foster and adoptive parents. As a group, they bring diversity in race, culture, ethnicity, and personality. They have had to be flexible and open to change and are very committed, mission-oriented people. In addition, they have access to support from their military community and excellent adoption benefits.

It is the *AdoptUSKids'* mission to *recruit and connect foster and adoptive families with waiting children throughout the United States*. In October 2002, the Children's Bureau entered into a cooperative agreement with the Adoption Exchange Association and its partners, to improve the capacity of States, Tribes and agencies to recruit and retain families for waiting children. Through the collaboration, *AdoptUSKids*:

- Operates the *AdoptUSKids* website (*www.AdoptUSKids.org*)
- Provides technical assistance, training and publications to States and Indian tribes to enhance their foster and adoptive family recruitment and retention initiatives
- Supports, on a national level, the efforts of States, Tribes and agencies with activities such as national recruitment campaigns and periodic national conferences focusing on foster care and adoption
- Encourages and enhances the effectiveness of foster and adoptive family support organizations
- Conducts a variety of adoption research projects

We are grateful to the agency advisors, military professionals, military adoptive families and our project team who helped us develop this publication. They are a visionary group who are very committed to providing effective adoption services for children and military families alike. It is our collective hope that the information and tools contained in the Guide will promote efficient, down-to-earth practices that expedite and support better services for military families seeking to adopt our nation's waiting children.

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Part I Understanding the Issues and Setting the Stage

Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this Guide is to provide a roadmap to make quality and timely adoption services readily available for military families. It focuses on what adoption agencies and military personnel can do to prepare and help military families on their journey to adopt children, including their relatives' children, from foster care. However, many of the principles and practices featured are pertinent to all types of adoptions including inter-jurisdictional, international, and infant adoptions.

Most of the promising practices featured in this Guide are also applicable to providing effective services for military families who provide foster care.

The Guide is divided into the following parts:

Part 1 – Understanding the issues and setting the stage for effective foster and adoption services for military families

Part II – Ten steps in the foster and adoption process with promising practices and stories from military families about their experiences with these steps

Part III – Additional information regarding inter-jurisdictional placements and collaboration with other organizations

Part IV – Tools and handouts for practitioners to use in working effectively with military families and other agencies

Part V – References, websites and agencies helpful to providing foster and adoption services for military families

Catey joins her dad, Sergeant First Class Potts, at his reenlistment

Throughout the Guide, icons are used to bring the reader's attention to certain features. These are as follows:

	Important points to remember
	Checklists, practice tips and promising practices
	Collaboration between agency and military personnel
	Military family adoption stories
	Tools & handouts for practitioners to use with families

Adoption Services for Military Families

At this point, one might ask: "What is so different about adoption services for military families?" The simple answer is nothing is different and, yet, there are a lot of differences.

Most of the differences center on the fact that military families may be subject to frequent moves and/or deployment of the military parent.

In spite of this reality, military families demonstrate incredible resilience, diversity, stability and a sense of community.

The practices highlighted in this Guide are offered to minimize the difficulties, while building on the strengths that military families bring to the table.

Military families face a lot of challenges when they try to find out about adoption. Many websites encourage adoption by military families, but traditional agencies and States may shy away from considering a military parent or family for adoption.

Before we begin, it is important for agencies and practitioners to examine any preconceived notions they have about the military and military families adopting. The adjacent chart of myths and realities illustrates many traditional biases and barriers that, in the past, have made it difficult for military families to adopt children.

- Do you personally hold any of these biases?
- If so, what are the facts or first-hand knowledge upon which you base your assumptions?
- What actions can you take to challenge and get beyond your biases?

"Military families are an untapped resource and we have to accommodate them. As a State and as an agency, we need to realize that we are the ones who need to be flexible."

State Program Manager

Myth	Reality
Military families are not viable resources for waiting children.	Military families and their communities have many strengths including resilience, diversity, inclusiveness, social networks, and educational and health benefits which support them wherever they live. Most potential obstacles are procedural and can be overcome when States and agencies are committed to working collaboratively with military families and across jurisdictions.
There are too many military restrictions on adoption.	Adoption agencies, not the military, may impose restrictions on families in the form of residency requirements, home ownership and mandatory meetings that do not accommodate military schedules and locations.
Military families have a lack of medical and other resources to parent children from foster care.	Military families have access to the same State benefits as civilian families when adopting an eligible child. In addition, medical benefits and care at military medical facilities are available. Reimbursement for designated adoption expenses is available through the military. Other benefits can be provided through the military. (See Adoption Benefits for Military Families, Part IV.)
The high risk of transfer makes the assessment of military families and the placement of waiting children into approved families impossible.	When a family is transferred during the process, the agency from the child's home State and an agency from the prospective adoptive parent's new State of residence can work together to ensure that placement occurs. This involves working through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children in both States to facilitate paperwork and communication. It will require flexibility and commitment from all involved.
Military families who move often will not be able to provide enough stability for children who have experienced multiple moves in their past.	When they move frequently, military families become expert at moving and they know how to make transitions go smoothly. Most children can adapt when their family is with them and they have other support systems.
Military communities are too rigid and inflexible.	Military families know what it is like to be a newcomer; many have formed strong communities and are welcoming of new members while embracing diversity.
Mothers and fathers in the military are strict disciplinarians and would not be ideal candidates for placement of children with behavior problems.	Military families are as diverse as other families in this respect. The important question is: can the family individualize discipline and nurture to the needs of the specific child? Waiting children who have learning disabilities and attention deficits often respond well in families that offer structure.
If a military family moves to another country only an agency familiar with international adoption can work with them.	Military installations are considered to be on U.S. soil and offer many of the same resources and services that families stateside will receive, e.g., access to social work services, parent training, medical care, chaplains and other military services.
The paper work involved in placing a child with a family in the military is complicated and overwhelming.	The paper work is no different than placing any child, including across State lines. Military families can be empowered to facilitate paperwork such as visas and passports and to find resources for their adopted child when they travel out of the country.
Civilians are not allowed on military installations.	Each installation has different procedures, but most will allow someone to sponsor a guest social worker at the installation.

Introducing the Families Featured in this Guide

The January Family

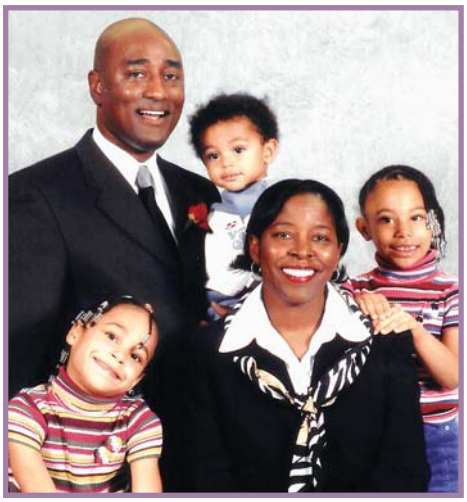
Jan and Jenny January have been married for 12 years and have three sons: ten-year-old Mitchell, eight-year-old Ethan and 19-month-old Theo. Jan is a Major in the Marine Corps and was deployed to Iraq. Jenny sums up their interest in adoption when she says: "I've always wanted to be a foster parent, which would be difficult as a military family because you move around so much. My husband wanted to adopt. As a compromise we decided to adopt someone out of the foster care system." Almost two years ago, when he was just four days old, they made Theo a part of their family on a foster/adopt basis.

The Potts Family

When Sergeant First Class Jim Potts, Career Counselor for the Army Reserves, and his wife Karen began their adoption journey they were already parents of two sons: James Jr., 20, and Jason, 16. The Potts had always wanted a girl and discussed adoption for about six months before they took action. When they received new orders and moved to Pennsylvania they decided that the time was right to pursue adoption of an older child. "We knew that there was a child out there that needed us," explains Karen. They began working with a local private agency that helped them find 13-year-old Catey, who came to them via the *AdoptUSKids* website.

The McCloud Family

Navy Chief Jim McCloud and his wife Gail adopted Salena when she was a year-and-a-half old after providing foster care for her for over a year through a public agency. "We were doing the infertility thing and that wasn't working for us, so we decided to look into adoption. We definitely got lucky," says Gail with a laugh. They explored adopting a child from another country, as well as private adoption, but the money involved was a concern so they decided to become foster/adoptive parents. Gail says with pride: "Salena has definitely turned our world upside down."



The Greene Family

Lt. Commander George Greene and his wife Cecilia were stationed at the White Beach Navy installation in Okinawa, Japan when they made the decision to adopt. They had discussed adoption briefly two years before they really started to explore their options. Because they were stationed abroad, the Greenes learned a great deal about international adoption, but they began to focus on adopting children from the child welfare system in their home State. "As we educated ourselves about adoption we were struck by the enormity of the need," George says. Through the Internet they eventually identified a sibling group of three children from the child welfare system. Today the Greenes are the proud parents of eight-year-old Natalie, six-year-old Jewel and little Kobe who is two years old.

The Leavitt Family

John (Buddy) Leavitt has been a civilian teacher for the Department of Defense for Dependent Schools for 18 years. Buddy took his first step on the path to adoption when he accompanied a married friend of his to an adoption symposium in Germany. He didn't think that he would be allowed to adopt as a single male but while at the symposium he met representatives from The Adoption Exchange, Inc. and learned that he could adopt as a single parent. In 1995, while living in The Netherlands, Buddy adopted then 10-year-old Conrad from a public agency. Buddy has successfully raised Conrad who has grown into an adult and is working stateside.

The Practitioner's Values and Competencies

A staff person who ***has a positive attitude toward adoption by military families and a commitment to help*** is the most crucial element in reaching success.

> *"I just placed a child with a family who are about to get new orders. The message I am giving them is everything will work out because we will work with you."*
>
> **State Adoption Specialist**

It may take extra effort on your part to recruit, prepare and support military families to adopt waiting children, but you can find excellent resources for your waiting children among this population. Once you become known as a staff person who is responsive to military families, the work gets easier and they will find you.

There is a pathway to success that you can follow.

Empower Families – Perhaps more than with other types of adoptions, military families will need to be empowered to be their own advocates. It is best to engage military families as full partners in this life-changing process right from the beginning. Most are very resourceful and up to the challenge. They will be willing to do a lot of the legwork. Your job is to listen, support and teach prospective military adoptive parents everything they will need to know to help them succeed as foster and adoptive parents. Remember that you might not be with them throughout the whole process.

> *"Families need to be aware of the law and to advocate for themselves."*
>
> **Military Adoptive Parent**

Get help – Try to involve experienced military adoptive families as volunteers in recruitment, training, family preparation and post-placement activities.

Become a myth-buster – Be vigilant about your own cultural, racial, sexual orientation, gender identity, social class and personal biases, including how they pertain to military adoption. Everybody has some biases.

It is essential to be aware of your values and not let them get in the way of your effectiveness in working with military families and the children who wait to be adopted. Make it your mission to learn about military families and the communities in which they live and become an advocate for them.

Be a team player – Work on developing collaborative relationships with other agencies, military personnel and other State personnel, so that handoffs can occur with your personal touch.

Be a barrier-buster – Probably the most important thing you can do is to be creative and flexible. Military families will need your help to get through the many barriers they might encounter.

When you develop good rapport with the military parents you work with and if you consider them part of the team and help them grow in autonomy and competence, you will reap more satisfaction from your work. When you go that extra mile you can make a real difference in the lives of the children you serve.

Important points to remember

The following is a list of characteristics which many adoption practitioners possess. Because no one person will have all of these qualities, when you work as a team with other professionals you can maximize the skills needed to be successful in providing foster and adoption services for military families. Look at the list and think about which characteristics describe you best. I...

- Have a sense of urgency for kids who are waiting for adoption.
- Don't hold on to families or children, as though they belong to me or my agency.
- See military families as prospective foster and adoptive resources to be developed and empowered.
- Am respectful and curious about people and focus on the strengths of all types of people.
- Enjoy being creative and open to new ideas and approaches.
- Am culturally competent and committed to knowing about different cultures, including the military culture.
- Have a barrier busting attitude because I know there is always a way to solve a difficult situation.
- Use common sense and good judgment.
- Am not afraid to ask for help from military professionals and other military families who have adopted.
- Am willing "to go the extra mile," be flexible and work collaboratively with military organizations, adoption exchanges and other public and private child welfare agencies.
- Am willing and knowledgeable about working across jurisdictional boundaries and how to get best results for children and families.
- Have a special interest in meeting military personnel, learning military protocol and working with
military families and their communities.

"Workers have a lot of misconceptions about military families."

Military Adoptive Parent

There is no one way to depict a military family's lifestyle, community or military installation, but knowing about some commonalties will help you be credible and effective in your work with military families.

The Mission

The mission of the military, which is to provide for the common defense, is of paramount importance. Families take this mission very seriously and are proud of their commitments. In general, the military recognizes that positively supporting family life enables its members to sustain their commitments to the mission. However, this is a "post-September 11th" world. Security and mission must take precedence.

In most cases, the Unit Commander is the person who makes decisions about parental leave time, changes in schedule, assignments, deployment deferment and/or extension of assignments. In working with military families, it is important to not over interpret limitations placed on the military family member, such as last minute schedule changes. As a committed social worker, you will need to be creative and flexible to problem-solve and work through possible interruptions in the process with the family.

Public Law (PL) 109-163 allows the Unit Commander to approve up to 21 days non-chargeable leave in a calendar year in connection with a qualifying adoption, in addition to other leave. A qualifying adoption is one that is arranged by a licensed or approved private or State agency and/or court and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law.

The average military family has learned to deal with change and adversity, such as risk to personal safety and family separation. As a result, they are resilient, adaptable people who are mission-driven and stick by their commitments.

"We don't want a family to wait a long time for their home study, but sometimes their schedules, especially with deployment, means we have to be creative. We can do the preliminary things a little bit at a time, so when the deployed parent returns, we can move forward when they're ready."

State Adoption Specialist

Military Protocol

Each military installation will have its own protocol. It is very important to follow the installation's protocol if you want to obtain and maintain access. The first thing to understand is that security is a major concern. You will need to get someone to "vouch" for you to get a security pass and you will need to have a current pass always. In the military, rules are rules, not guidelines.

"Remember that the family that sponsors you on to the base is, in essence, responsible for you. If you

do something wrong, it reflects negatively on them. You have to stick with whatever they tell you. There is no gray area. You can't circumvent the system."

State Adoption Specialist

Learning the protocol of your local and/or the family's military installation is very important, even if you are just visiting one family. The following tips may be helpful:

- Identify someone associated with your agency who can serve as an official liaison between the agency and the military support offices. Examples include: a staff person who has military experience and/or has a relative who works at the installation; an experienced military foster or adoptive parent; a board member who has connections to the military.
- Try to find a knowledgeable, connected and respected "cultural guide" to help you understand the protocol at this particular installation and to introduce you to the decision-makers. Every installation will have at least one social worker or chaplain that might be contacted to help with this. Many installations have staffed "Family Service Centers."
- Take time to always work through the proper channels.
- Request a letter of support from the installation commander to use as an entrée into the community, if possible.

"Three bases in our State are cooperative and permit us to do recruitment activities at their community events. But no matter how hard we tried, one Commanding Officer (at the fourth installation) would not allow us on base."

"We are looking into having permission to go on bases for recruitment built into the "memorandum of agreement (MOA)" between the county and the local military base which covers other social services."

State Program Manager

Family Service Centers

The Department of Defense (DoD) has established comprehensive Family Service Centers at most military installations to help military personnel and their families with a variety of needs. Services may include:

- Information and referral on child and family issues (including adoption)
- Family and child counseling, parenting and other training programs
- Crisis intervention and family advocacy

These centers are often staffed with civilian social workers. Each branch of the military has a different name for these centers. They are

- Army – Army Community Service
- Air Force – Family Support Center
- Navy – Fleet and Family Support Center
- Marine Corp – Marine Corp Community Services
- Coast Guard – Work/Life Office

These centers may be the first place a family might go to learn about adoption and/or

to seek help with family issues. They may be a resource to help families with pre-adoption training requirements, and other needed
pre-and post-adoption and/or educational services.

The Military Community

The military community offers powerful resources for parents that can often be underestimated. The military population provides a high concentration of possible families who reflect the diversity of children served by the child welfare system who may be in need of foster or adoptive homes. In 2003, approximately 36% of active duty members were people of color. Over 50% were married. More information on demographics of
active military members can be found at *www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil*.

Lifelong friendships and support are features that help families cope with disappointments, separations and adversity. Excellent family recreational facilities, community activities and support groups help to reduce isolation for children and families alike. These resources are readily accessible to military families and their children as soon as they enter a new community.

> *"Military families need to be given tips on how to make their home studies come alive for workers who are placing children. Families need to sell themselves and dispel myths that many workers have about military families. They need to delineate what assets are in their community and make them come alive."*
>
> **Private Agency Social Worker**

The military also offers some families opportunities to travel and experience different cultures, which can be a major advantage for the growth and education of a family. Even in distant countries the close-knit life style of the military community is a major benefit.

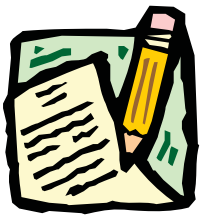
Greene family cultural experience

> *"Being on base, we lived in a very close community. Our neighbors were just as excited as we were about bringing the children home. They were very disappointed when we couldn't bring them back with us after the second trip."*
>
> **Military Adoptive Parent**

Other military benefits for adopting families

The military provides families with extensive health care and educational benefits; reimbursement for adoption expenses; and many other services, which are not ordinarily available to most civilians. (Benefits are explained in detail in Part IV of this Guide.)

Military Family Adoption Story



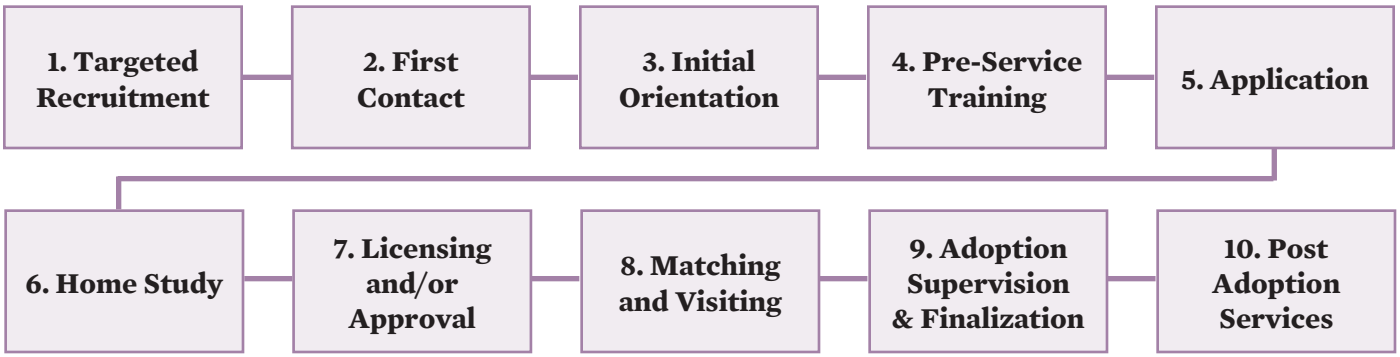
The Potts say that they receive many benefits by being in the military even without living at an installation. This includes commissary privileges that help with the expense of three growing teenagers in the family. They also cite health benefits that have helped to pay for Catey's hospitalization, medication and ongoing therapy as a big help.

Important points to remember

When a practitioner gains knowledge and appreciates the resources available in the military community, it is much easier to advocate for policies and practices that are supportive of adoption by a military family. Some of the things a practitioner might do include:

- Don't take it for granted that other social workers, e.g., a child's social worker, would be aware of the resources available. Play up the family's community resources, benefits and facilities in detail in home studies.
- Advocate, where possible and following established agency protocols, for making exceptions for military families to certain agency policies, e.g., lengthy residency requirements, mandatory meetings, home ownership, income and adoption fees.
- Put together information packets specifically for military families that include:
  - Information on military benefits and assistance programs
  - Websites and information about local, regional and national adoption exchanges
  - Information on parent support groups that are welcoming of military families
  - Handouts and tools featured in section IV of this Guide
- Provide information to your colleagues and agency personnel from other agencies about the strengths and benefits offered by military communities.
- Offer to act as a point person (specialist) within your agency to work with military families and ask for training, as needed, to carry out this role.
- Develop collaborative relationships with your local military Family Service Center staff, chaplain and/or other support personnel.

Part II Steps in the Adoption Process for Military Families



The adoption journey for military families

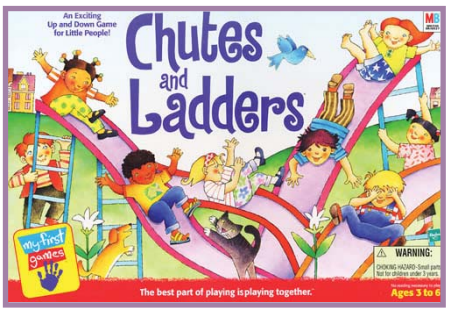
There are at least ten steps that a prospective family must take on their journey to be licensed and/or approved as an adoptive parent. The time it takes can be as long as two to three years, under current conditions. This is a long time in the life of a child.

The practices highlighted in this Guide are intended to make the process more effective and efficient. Although these steps are used to describe the adoption process, readers are encouraged to make adaptations to the foster care licensing/certification process as applicable. Most of the suggestions for improvement are pertinent to becoming a licensed foster parent, particularly in States that use a "dual licensure" process to approve families for both fostering and adopting.

The steps of the adoption process are illustrated in the flowchart in a linear fashion. However, it is important for practitioners to understand that the adoption process does not have to be linear in real life. Some steps may occur simultaneously or in a different sequence. For example, an agency might conduct a home study while a family is in pre-service training or require an application before the family starts pre-service training.

The adoption journey can become even more complicated for military families who are subject to relocation to different jurisdictions and even out of the country. It can feel to them like they are in a real life game of "Chutes and Ladders[1]" where they are moving along through the process, doing everything they should when all of a sudden they are required to go back and repeat earlier steps. This can be very discouraging.

1 Chutes and Ladders is a children's board game by Milton Bradley, Hasbro.



"Workers need to be encouraged to think creatively to find solutions, not stumbling blocks."

Private Agency Social Worker

Eliminating chutes and finding ladders

By using the term, "finding ladders," we are not advocating skipping those crucial steps that are legally necessary and/or the services that families need to prepare for adopting and to support their families afterward. However, we are encouraging practitioners to be flexible and creative in helping prospective parents find ways to reduce time and the complexity of the process wherever feasible.

What can a caseworker do to minimize the number of chutes and find a few ladders to help the prospective family on their journey through the process?

One of the chutes that a family might experience could occur if/when they are transferred. If this should happen:

- Can your agency accept a mutual assessment/home study done by an agency or practitioner outside your State?
- Can your agency accept training that a family completed in a different system than yours?
- Will you be able to help a family who is transferred make a smooth transition to their new agency?
- Can you accept reference checks done by another agency?
- Can you accept video conferencing in lieu of face-to-face meetings?

Using time effectively

Because time is so important to children and families, it is recommended that agencies think about ways they can compress or "chunk" steps together in stages when dealing with all families, and especially military families.

For example, it may be daunting for a family to think about completing all ten steps in the time they plan to be assigned to a particular location. But, can the agency social worker help them think about accomplishing steps one through four in the current location? The result could be a solid packet of information and proof that the family completed training, which could be transportable to a new location.

Perhaps the family already completed the training, but now needs a mutual assessment/home study. Can the agency help them get all their documentation together to do the home study visits and report? Having completed this stage, the family can make early contact with a child welfare agency in their new location and begin their search for a child.

There is a lot of room for creativity and sensitivity in this type of "out of the box" thinking. It is indeed possible to provide "ladders" and help families eliminate "chutes" in the adoption process.

"Many women who call me have husbands who are deployed overseas, so I spend time chatting with them. We can mail out an application packet. We can let them know about the process. We can also do their house assessment. I am willing to do all of this in advance especially if they are interested in adopting the types of kids we have waiting."

State Adoption Specialist

Exploring the 10-Steps

In Part II, we will be examining each step in the flow chart and exploring the process from the agency's as well as the military parent's point-of-view. Our objectives are to explore (1) how this 10-step process can be made more customer-friendly and relevant for military families and (2) how time can be optimized to retain and prepare military parents for the challenges ahead. The subjects covered in each of the steps are as follows:

- What the step is about
- Ideas for collaborating with military personnel
- Real life stories from military families about their personal experience during this step of the adoption process
- Basic "how to" checklist that will help you do it right from the start

Step 1 – Targeted Recruitment of Military Families

What this step is about

When there is a military installation in your area, targeted recruitment initiatives can offer an excellent opportunity to find foster and adoptive families for children waiting in
foster care.

Agencies need to have active targeted recruitment initiatives in place at all times to develop families that represent the racial, ethnic and cultural heritage and diverse communities of the children in their care. Many agencies choose to conduct these activities in collaboration with the military installation in the community. Once an agency is involved with a military community, word of mouth can bring additional families to the agency's door.

Recruitment campaigns that target military families have the following elements:

- Accurate and timely data about the types of children needing care, including their racial, ethnic and cultural characteristics.
- Profiles of families, including military families, who are currently meeting the needs of the children in care, along with reliable information on how successful families have been recruited in the past.
- Desired characteristics and qualities of families to be recruited.
- Information about where the famies targeted by the recruitment campaign shop, live, worship and congregate.
- Involvement of current licensed and approved fo ter and adoptive families.
- Collaborative relationshi with leaders in the target- ed community.

Collaboration between the agency and military services

1. Identify someone in the agency who can serve as an official liaison between the agency and the military support offices.
2. Always get necessary authorization for any recruitment activity to be held at the installation.
3. Once you have authorization, make contacts with personnel who can offer assistance. This may include: the Family Service Center, chaplains and/or other pertinent personnel.
4. After identifying the correct office or official, approach him/her with a preliminary plan to recruit families. Ask for suggestions and guidance on the plan.
5. Share information about the reasons that children come into care and are the responsibility of local and State governmental agencies.
6. Present recruitment as a service to military families and an opportunity for effective inter-governmental collaboration.

Recruitment Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Contact local chapters of various military service organizations and associations including Air Force Association, Association of U.S. Army, VFW, to help with entrée and assist with recruitment activities.

- ☐ Offer to hold information meetings and distribute brochures to:
  - Family Service Center staff
  - Personnel offices
  - Legal assistance offices
  - Offices of health care providers
  - Places of worship

- ☐ Place recurring recruitment ads that feature human interest stories in military publications, websites, and other places that military families frequent such as:
  - Installation newspapers and newsletters
  - Military radio stations
  - Local civilian papers
  - Civilian radio and television
  - Installation telephone directories

- ☐ Put up recruitment posters and distribute information to various service sites, such as schools, chapels, meeting places. Remember to always get permission beforehand. Some suggested posting and distribution sites include:
  - Commissaries
  - The Post Exchange (PX)
  - Laundromats
  - Swimming pools, recreation centers
  - Bowling alleys
  - Installation library
  - Installation golf courses
  - Installation shopping malls
  - Daycare centers
  - USO clubs
  - Places where military families frequently shop and socialize

- ☐ Set up an exhibit table at "newcomer information days" and/or "community information days" sponsored by the public affairs office or other established groups on the military installation.

- ☐ Get permission and make arrangements to link the agency website with other websites that military families visit frequently.

Step 2 – First Contact

What this step is about

Military families may have been considering foster care or adoption for a long time before they make that first contact with your agency. They may have been referred by another family or, perhaps, have been looking for an agency on the Internet or through the Yellow Pages.

The initial contact is a chance to make that critical good first impression with the prospective parent(s).

An agency worker's role may include:

- Helping the prospective military family feel welcomed and encouraged.
- Getting information, answering questions, and motivating the parent to come to a first orientation meeting.
- Logging inquiry and data about the prospective parent.
- Scheduling attendance at the initial orientation meeting.
- Sending a packet of information that includes information about adopting and fostering as a military family, with a personal note.

Collaboration between agency and military services

1. Give installation personnel adoption information so that they can share it with families who may be thinking of making an inquiry.
2. Collaborate with military personnel to help train agency staff who take inquiry calls from military families.
3. Ask designated military personnel to review your agency's protocol for responding to inquiries from military families.
4. Partner with seasoned military foster/adopt parents to follow-up with new inquiring families.

Military Family Adoption Story

When the Greenes were making initial inquiries about adoption, George went to the Family Service Center on the installation in Okinawa, but the staff person there only had information about international adoption. According to George, "If there could be more information in the Family Service Centers overseas about domestic adoption, more families would come forward to adopt."

First Contact Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Plan and host an adoption orientation with an eye to helping all prospective parents to feel welcomed, respected, accepted and needed.
- ☐ Train both foster care and adoption staff(s) in typical concerns of military families and appropriate responses.
- ☐ Prepare the person who answers the phone to answer most of the questions and/or to refer callers to the worker assigned to military families. Don't bounce the caller around from person to person.
- ☐ Establish standards for immediate personal responses to inquiries.
- ☐ Provide good data and general information on the types of children who need foster and adoptive families, including their ages, their racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation, and the importance of placing siblings together. Include examples of the kinds of needs currently exhibited by children served by the agency.
- ☐ Provide information on the agency's orientation and pre-service training processes. Send notes and meeting reminders at least a week before the first orientation or training session and put families in the agency database for mailings, support group meetings, etc.
- ☐ If the family lives locally, invite the family and/or parent to an orientation meeting and/or make an appointment to explore further questions.
- ☐ If the family lives out of the State or country, make an appropriate referral to an agency that provides and/or supports adoption services for military families.

"You always hear horror stories, but it wasn't as intimidating as I thought it would be. Our worker was really nice. She had been doing this work for years. She took it easy, but at our speed because we knew we might have to move."

Military Adoptive Parent

Step 3 – Initial Orientation

What this step is about

Attending an adoption or foster care orientation meeting is a big step for families. The purpose of this first meeting is to welcome, support and build on the prospective parent's initial enthusiasm for adopting, while giving them the essential information they need.

A successful orientation meeting will:

- Establish a foundation for a mutually respectful relationship with a prospective parent. This is the most important thing you can do at this step.
- Provide a packet of information that is positive and addresses most of the initial questions a military parent might have. (See Frequently Asked Questions for Military Parents in Part IV of this Guide.)
- Give the prospective parent a good basic understanding of
  - Who the children are that need care
  - The role and responsibilities of foster/adoptive parents
  - The process they need to go through and awareness of the next steps
  - Availability of Adoption Assistance and Medicaid for eligible children

When parents leave orientation, you will want them to feel valued, optimistic, connected and motivated to continue to explore this journey. Ideally, parents will leave with a scheduled date for their pre-service training and the name and phone number of a person to contact to get answers to their questions and for support.

Collaboration between agency and military services

1. Hold orientation meetings at the installation whenever appropriate and possible.
2. Collaborate with military personnel to explain military adoption benefits and family services.
3. Invite and encourage experienced military families who have fostered or adopted to welcome and talk with prospective families about the rewards and potential challenges of adoption while in the military.
4. Educate military personnel about the steps in the adoption process, so that they can support and educate families.

"One of the things I really liked was that the social worker was very honest about what to expect. She never sugar coated or put an overly positive spin on it. She talked about bonding problems. She didn't try to sell adoption to us."

Military Adoptive Parent

Orientation Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Make the group orientation meeting and/or other individualized orientation sessions specific to the military family(s). Make a good first impression by learning about military protocol and culture prior to providing an initial orientation session.

- ☐ Encourage belonging and camaraderie by feeding families and providing child care at the initial orientation meetings; encourage families to bring food to share at future meetings.

- ☐ Hand out a welcoming packet of information that gives a clear and accurate message about fostering and adopting, the children who need care, federal and State adoption benefits, military adoption benefits and other information pertinent to military families.

- ☐ Explain up front what the requirements are for licensing and/or approval for foster care or adoption, including fingerprints, references, child abuse and other legal clearances.

- ☐ Try to anticipate and address questions and concerns, as this may be the parents' first exposure to the realities of adopting or fostering.

- ☐ Give parents a list of installation personnel who will be able to answer their questions about adopting as a military family. Questions at this point may include: what health and/or financial benefits for adoption are available through the military? At what point in the process will the family and/or child be eligible for benefits? What family services and educational services will be available for the child and family?

- ☐ Offer time after the orientation meeting to answer individual questions and/or provide direct access phone numbers so that families can have private follow-up conversations with staff.

- ☐ Encourage prospective parents to proceed to training to get more information and to empower them to make the best possible decision for their family.

- ☐ Schedule the first pre-service training sessions as soon as possible, preferably within two or three weeks after an orientation meeting.

Step 4 – Pre-service Training

What this step is about

Pre-service training is an important stage in preparing parents to foster children or adopt a child/ren from foster care.

The agency will want to involve prospective foster and adoptive parents in a learning process that prepares them to adopt and:

- Creates a basis for teamwork with the agency.
- Contributes to the parents' growth and development as parents.
- Empowers them to be their own advocates in the foster care licensing or adoption process.

Training Curricula

Many excellent training curricula are available and have similar content. Talk to colleagues, State officials and others about recommended programs. A good curriculum should help families:

- Understand and support the role of birth families when fostering and/or adopting.
- Have sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether to apply to become an adoptive or foster parent or both.
- Know what type of child or siblings they can parent, the support services they will need and how to access services.
- Develop new understanding of parenting skills needed to adopt or foster a child who has experienced neglect and abuse.
- Have the information and documentation needed to begin a mutual assessment/
home study process.

Flexibility in meeting training requirements

Many agencies spread pre-service training over a period of eight to ten weeks. This may cause some apprehension for military parents, if they believe they may be transferred during the process. Flexibility may be needed to accomplish this step more efficiently. For example, some agencies offer this training in an intensive weekend format. Flexibility may also be needed to help the family transfer credit for training completed to their new agency.

While being part of a pre-service training group can provide families with a very dynamic growth experience, as well as connect them with other parents for support during and after they adopt, some parents may not always have access to this service. Some families, living out of State and/or in another country, may already have a completed home study, but have not completed the specific training you require to adopt a child from your State. Creative planning and thinking will be needed to work out a plan for equivalent training in the family's location. Here are some ideas for making training more flexible:

- Identify competencies for parents required in your training program.
- Determine other ways that families might gain these competencies. Such as:

Military Family Adoption Story

Living in Okinawa the Greenes needed to be creative about getting in their pre-service training hours. They went to parenting classes that were offered through the Family Service Center. They recorded their training hours and compiled a list of books and articles they had read on adopting older children.

- Encourage families to participate in training programs available in their current location, including training offered by their Family Service Center.
- Assign and discuss required readings.
- Provide your training material for self-study programs.
- Use an experienced mentor in the new location or by telephone to coach and support the family through training.

Collaboration between agency and military personnel

1. Work with military personnel to find space for training on or near the installation to best accommodate military families.
2. Work with military personnel to locate experienced foster and/or adoptive families who are in the military and are interested in participating as co-trainers.
3. Collaborate with military personnel in pre-service training to welcome participants to the training, answer military questions and function as co-trainers if interested.
4. Contact the Family Service Center or Military Treatment Facility and inquire about collaborating on meeting the training needs of families. For example, do these facilities offer training on parenting children with mental health, behavioral and other challenges?
5. Offer to reciprocate and collaborate with the Family Service Center in offering training, if there is an installation nearby. For example, invite the social worker from the Family Service Center to speak to an adoptive/foster family training group about benefits available through the military or offer to be a speaker at one of their training sessions offered to parents.

Military Family Adoption Story

The Potts had to complete 48 hours of intensive training to adopt an older child. The training was offered on Saturdays, which was no trouble for Karen, but Jim had to have his supervisor cover for him during the Saturdays he was in training. "I was grateful I had an understanding boss," Jim says.

Pre-Service Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Compress training programs to the shortest time possible, while maintaining quality.
- ☐ Offer flexibility in the timing of educational sessions to meet the work loads of military families. For example, schedule training on weekends, allow the military parents to make up sessions, allow parents to attend different sessions.
- ☐ Provide food initially and then encourage families to bring snacks to build relationships between the group members.
- ☐ Encourage sharing of ethnic, cultural and family traditions during training.
- ☐ Have panel presentations including experienced military adoptive parents, birth parents and adult persons who have been adopted. Encourage families to meet and converse with other prospective parents, staff and experienced military foster and adoptive parents.
- ☐ Ask adoption, foster care and military staff who will be working with families to attend some sessions in order to build and maintain a continuing relationship with the parents.
- ☐ If using a pre-established training curriculum, tailor the content to include information that is applicable to military families.
- ☐ Allow one-to-one time after the training concludes to answer questions that participants may have.
- ☐ Track training attendance. Follow up with families who are absent from a training session and offer opportunities to make up missed sessions in group or individual sessions.
- ☐ Keep information about waiting children in front of parents during training, so that they sustain their passion and focus on foster care and adoption.
- ☐ If the family is relocated during training and/or cannot access required training where they currently live, help them develop a plan to complete equivalent training at their new location.
- ☐ Keep a record of training completed by families for transfer to a new location. Also provide certificates for training completed. Encourage families to keep their own training log to travel with them. (See tool in section IV of this Guide.)
- ☐ Always evaluate training for relevance for military families and make continuous improvements.

Step 5 – Application Process

What this step is about

Agencies differ in when they provide the application, but it is usually necessary to have an application before any formal background checks occur.

When a family must move during the process, it is customary for the receiving agency to require a new application to conduct the home study and other processes with the family. This is a legal requirement in most jurisdictions to safeguard the rights of the family and to authorize the agency to carry out its responsibilities. With good explanation, families will understand the necessity of repeating this part of the process in a new location.

The following are some ideas for making the application process as simple and non-threatening as possible for military families:

- The application process parallels with other processes, so as to reduce the total time to placement.
- Eligibility requirements and potential difficulties are identified and resolved early on in the process.
- Applicants are helped to understand the process and are provided with the help they need from start to completion, e.g., filling out forms, getting references, medical, legal and other records and language translation, if needed.

Collaboration with Military Personnel

1. Work with military support staff to identify potential agency barriers and/or eligibility requirements that may stand in the way of adopting or fostering for military families. Explore ways to help the agency eliminate these barriers.
2. Seek help of military support staff, as needed, to assist families who may have questions or difficulty in completing the application process or finding proper documentation.

Military Family Adoption Story

Buddy remembers the application process as being very "heavy on paperwork," but as a civilian employee for the military he was used to doing paper work. He quips, "The home study was a breeze after completing the application process."

Adoption Application Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Provide simple, straightforward application forms and discuss them at the orientation meeting.
- ☐ Clearly explain the application process and how military families have successfully completed this process.
- ☐ Prepare parents for the fact that background checks and references may be needed from every State they have lived in; emphasize that the purpose of these background checks is to help assure the safety and well-being of children who may be placed in their care.
- ☐ Encourage applicants to provide information for background checks, references and medical statements as soon as possible. Have the application and consent forms to contact references in hand, prior to seeking private information from or about parents.
- ☐ Break information collection down by starting at the orientation meeting and continuing over time.
- ☐ Provide special assistance for applicants who need it, e.g., invite staff from the Family Service Center to answer questions regarding military issues or benefits.
- ☐ Have in place a reliable tracking system for applications and related paper work so that, if a family is transferred, requirements are complete and a record of them can go to another agency in a timelyfashion.
- ☐ Make sure that the application and other technical requirements such as references, medical and background checks are completed before beginning the mutual assessment/home study. This practice allows time to eliminate possible glitches in advance and reduces overall wait time for families.
- ☐ Be willing and prepared to send documentation on to another agency immediately, as a matter of agency policy, if the family requests it and gives their consent. Provide the family with copies of all materials transferred.
- ☐ **Note:** Be aware of legal and regulatory restrictions around redisclosure of information about the prospective family provided by third parties such as medical reports and personal references. Suggest to families that they ask these parties to keep extra copies of their reports to provide to a new agency in the event the family relocates before completion of the home study process.

Step 6 – Home Study Process

What this step is about

This is the time during which the licensing and/or family workers meet with the applicant(s) face-to-face to mutually assess the potential for placement. At least one visit will be required in the family's home. Home studies can be done one-on-one with a family or with a group of families. Some agencies are using the term "Family Profile" as synonymous with the term home study. The adoption worker prepares a written report of the home study, which will be shared with other agencies and/or workers of children who need placement.

The idea is not to screen people out of the process. The best home studies are a mutual assessment process, where the agency evaluates the prospective parent(s) and the parent(s) is empowered to explore the best plan for their family. This sets the stage for the family to be actively engaged in questioning and deciding whether a particular child or sibling set is right for them. Good outcomes for a mutual assessment/home study might include:

- All participants see clearly whether a particular placement will or will not work for the family and the child.
- Parents and their household members are prepared and ready to proceed to placement.
- Parents who are not ready or are not legally eligible for fostering/adopting are encouraged to volunteer, provide respite care or seek other helping roles.
- Parents and staff see this as an educational and strengths-based process.
- Parents have explored and identified the resources they will need to support them and their adopted child, including the availability of Adoption Assistance and Medicaid for eligible children.

Collaboration with military personnel

1. Work with the local installation personnel to identify sites on or nearby the installation that will be conducive to holding group home study meetings.
2. Invite military staff to work with you and the families to identify and understand the various resources available to families who foster and/or adopt while in the military.
3. Ask military support staff to help identify other military foster and/or adoptive families to act as mentors or buddies to help answer questions and offer support during the home study and waiting process.

Military Family Adoption Story

While living in Okinawa, the Greenes accessed the State's website that they wanted to adopt from. Here they found the forms and checklist for the home study process. George says that, "Because we were overseas we wanted our home study packet to be as complete as possible."

Home Study Process Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Without compromising the home study process, condense it to accommodate military families' schedules; establish a schedule of contacts with families and adhere to it.
- ☐ If conducting home study groups, offer families the option of having them at the installation or nearby.
- ☐ Offer military families the option of having home study sessions at other locations if they are concerned that colleagues and superiors will learn private facts about their lives.
- ☐ Be prompt and personal in responding to military families during the preparation and home study process. Make efforts to provide personalized attention to families in an effort to build trust between the family, the practitioner and the agency.
- ☐ Conduct the home study as a strengths-based, educational process and not as an investigation.
- ☐ Help military families explore the various resources available to them through the military to meet the needs of a waiting child.
- ☐ Make sure the home study format and process take into account the military life style and community strengths. Clearly articulate these strengths in the home study document. Where possible barriers exist, explain the resources the family will have at their disposal to help them overcome these barriers.
- ☐ Connect families in the study process to an experienced military adoptive family for mentoring and
support.
- ☐ Help families connect with adoption support groups that welcome military families, including linking to Child Welfare Information Gateway, National Adoption Directory (*www.childwelfare.gov*).
- ☐ Work with military families to learn to advocate for themselves during the home study. Prepare them with questions to ask, when considering a specific child for placement. Child Welfare Information Gateway fact sheets on adoption are useful tools to consider.
- ☐ Immediately upon learning that the family will be transferred before completion of the home study process, research and form relationships with agencies in the new location that can pick up with the family where you left off.
- ☐ Include credentials of the social worker doing the home study and/or a copy of the agency license when transferring the home study to another agency.

Step 7 – Licensing and/or Approval

What this step is about

By this point the agency knows whether or not an applicant is going to be approved. It is important to inform families as soon as they have been approved to adopt and/or licensed to foster.

For military families, timely approval decisions are important, so that they can complete this step prior to a reassignment, if this is an issue.

Desirable outcomes at this step include:

- Timely completion of the home study and other licensing/approval paperwork.
- A State foster care certification or licensing and adoptive family approval process that is timely and efficient.
- The agency reviews the family's written home study with the family and they are given a chance to correct any inaccuracies prior to it being finalized.

Collaboration with military personnel

1. Inform military personnel of the process involved in approval and engage them in supporting parents through this period, if desired by the parent and appropriate.
2. Get permission to hold "Waiting Parents" meetings at the installation as a support to families during and after the approval process until child placement.

The McCloud family

"I'm a very private person. I don't like people snooping around in my business, but the home study wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. The security checks that Jim had to go through for the Navy wanted much more detailed information than we had to provide in the home study."

Military Adoptive Parent

Licensing and/or Approval Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Set deadlines and standards for timely completion of family home studies and licensing/approval.
- ☐ When a family will need to foster a child for a period prior to adoption, consider using dual licensure/approval, so that the home study can be completed concurrently for either foster care and/or adoption.
- ☐ Use technical staff, such as an administrative assistant, to assist in processing licensing/approval
  paperwork.
- ☐ Review the contents of the home study with the family, so they have a chance to fix any mistakes or
  misunderstandings. In some States a family can receive a copy of their home study, but not all States have rules that allow families to have a copy.
- ☐ Inform families when all the paperwork is complete and licensing/approval has been achieved.
- ☐ Continue to contact parents regularly to provide assurance, inform them of current waiting children and to explain reasons for delays. Personal or email notes are also helpful and mean a lot during this period.
- ☐ In order to reduce the length of time that children have to wait for placement, complete all necessary paperwork, training, home study and licensing/certification or approval in a planful and timely fashion.
- ☐ Be willing to transfer any and all completed paper work in a timely manner should the family be transferred to another installation and/or must move for any reason. Include credentials of worker and/or a copy of the agency's license when transfers are made.
- ☐ **Note:** Be aware of legal and regulatory restrictions around redisclosure of information about the prospective family provided by third parties such as medical reports and personal references. Suggest to families that they ask these parties to keep extra copies of their reports to provide to a new agency in the event the family relocates before completion of the home study process.

Step 8 – Matching and Visiting

What this step is about

Matching and facilitating visits between the military parent(s) and his/her prospective adopted child or sibling group is a very important step in the process. How does the agency assure the right match between prepared foster or adoptive parents and a child/sibling group's needs? Following are some ideas[2]:

- The agency has a reliable information system that identifies waiting families and honors their preferences.
- The parent has the necessary information about the child to make an informed decision about placement including:
  - The child/children's personality, behavior, preferences and needs
  - The child's placement history
  - The child's medical, genetic, psychological, education history
  - The birth parents' status and feelings about having contact with the child and adoptive parents; court or agency restrictions on contact due to safety considerations.
  - Sibling connections and how they are to be maintained
  - Availability of Adoption Assistance and Medicaid for eligible children
- The family and child have pre-placement visits both in the child's current location and in the family's home, prior to placement.
- The child/children are prepared by their agency social worker to come into this new family. Lifebooks about the child and the family are an excellent tool to prepare both children and their new family for placement.

Military families will usually need to make arrangements to travel for visiting the child, whether they live in the United States or out of the country. Costs for travel for visiting will probably not be reimbursable by the military in these instances. Some States may consider paying or reimbursing travel expenses for pre-placement visits, when requested. After the adoption is finalized a family may be able to ask the State for reimbursement for travel associated with the adoption through the federally-funded "non-recurring expenses" provisions in Adoption Assistance. (See adoption benefits chart in Part IV of this Guide.)

The military family member will usually need to get approval from his/her Commanding Officer for any leave time. PL 109-163 allows the Unit Commander to approve up to 21 days non-chargeable leave in a calendar year in connection with a qualifying adoption, in addition to other leave. (See glossary for definition of a qualifying adoption.) If both parents are in the military, only one member shall be allowed leave under this legislation. The non-military family member may be eligible for leave covered by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) through their employer.

2 AdoptUSKids publication, "Finding a Fit to Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Adoptive Families with Waiting Children," is an excellent guide to use in matching children and families. Visit www.AdoptUSKids.org for ordering information.

Matching and Visiting Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Provide families with all available and legally allowable information about the children waiting to be adopted.
- ☐ Make sure that waiting families have all the information necessary to make an informed placement decision. Full disclosure of all known information about the child should take place prior to placement and this disclosure needs to be documented in the placement record.
- ☐ Discuss the unique needs of the identified child and help families think about the resources and supports they currently have access to and those that they will need to develop.
- ☐ Make arrangements for purchase of service with an agency or social worker in the family's State or out of country location to facilitate and supervise the placement, if this will be needed to accomplish the placement.
- ☐ Determine the child's eligibility for Adoption Assistance and inform the prospective adoptive parents about how your agency will work with them to determine the amount of Assistance that the child will receive.
- ☐ Help families identify resources and benefits provided by the military and when each of the benefits can start. (See handout, Adoption Benefits for Military Families, Part IV of this Guide.)
- ☐ Create a plan for visitation that involves current foster parents, birth relatives, siblings, adoptive family and other individuals involved in the child's life and pertinent to the placement plan.
- ☐ Coordinate a pre-placement conference to plan educational, medical and social services for the child and his/her new family. Include all currently involved interested parties to plan for transitioning the child to his/her new home, school and services.
- ☐ If the child is from a different State than the family, be sure to do the following:
  - Involve the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) office and the Interstate Compact for Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA) staff or office in both States. (See ICPC and ICAMA description in Part III of this Guide.)
  - Learn if there are any State-specific issues, such as the need for court approval.
  - Assist the family in making travel arrangements and secure funding for travel as appropriate and available.

Collaboration with military personnel

1. Make sure that you and the family have accurate information about the resources that the military will be able to provide to a specific family. If the family is unsure, help them ask the appropriate questions of military support staff.
2. Help families contact support services that can help them transition a new child into their home.

- ☐ See the adoptive family during a pre-placement visit with their child and/or arrange for the family to be seen by an agency social worker where the family lives. Use the visit to assist in identifying any concerns and resources needed and to support the family and child during this period.

- ☐ Provide families with general information regarding Adoption Assistance with ongoing reminders that:
  - Although the Federal Social Security Act includes Adoption Assistance as an entitlement program for qualifying children, not all children who are adopted from foster care are eligible.
  - Some children moving from foster care to adoption may qualify for State-funded Adoption Assistance.
  - The amount of Adoption Assistance for which an eligible child may qualify is individually determined by the State that is placing the child for adoption (not the adoptive family's State)
  - Each State administers the Federal Adoption Assistance program and their own State-funded Adoption Assistance program in a unique way.

- ☐ Refer families to the Adoption Assistance section of Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*) for specific information about the Adoption Assistance program in the child's State. Be sure that families know that application for Adoption Assistance must be made before the adoption is finalized although the point in the adoption process that the benefits begin varies according to each State's Adoption Assistance regulations.

- ☐ Utilize handouts in Part IV of the Guide to help facilitate the matching and visiting process including:
  - *Frequently Asked Questions for Military Families Preparing to Adopt*
  - *Checklist: Questions for Practitioners to Consider During Key Steps in the Process*
  - *Checklist for Military Parents Adopting Children from Foster Care*

Military Family Adoption Story

In the midst of trying to work out a placement plan, the Greenes ran into problems. Staff had never worked with the military before and had never completed an inter-country adoption. The children did not have passports and the Greenes were told that the agency could not get vouchers to pay for them. Despite the Greenes' repeated offers to pay for the passports, the agency insisted on getting the vouchers. Just as the passport issue was being resolved, the agency then began to raise questions about how the adoption would be supervised once the children went to live with the Greenes in Okinawa. The Greenes had to return to Okinawa without a clear idea of when the children would be placed. This was most traumatic for the oldest child who felt that the Greenes were abandoning her.

Step 9 – Adoption Placement, Supervision and Finalization

What this step is about

This is the period starting from the official placement of a child with his/her family until the adoption is finalized by court order. The period will vary from six to twelve months in most States and, in some instances, it may be longer.

The financial support (i.e. foster care payment or Adoption Assistance subsidy), if any, that is available to the adoptive family to help meet the child's needs is individually determined by the State that has legal custody of the child. The primary tasks of the child's caseworker at this step of the adoption process are to:

- Understand their own State's Adoption Assistance program well enough to be able to provide accurate information about it to the prospective adoptive family
- Take the necessary actions described in their own State's Adoption Assistance regulations and policies to trigger the application process for the child and the adoptive family
- Direct the adoptive family to the specific person or unit within the child's State that is responsible for working directly with the adoptive family to determine the type and amount, if any, of the Adoption Assistance benefits that are available to the child
- Direct the family to other resources, such as Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*), where the family can learn more about Adoption Assistance
- Help assure that all of the steps in the Adoption Assistance application, determination and agreement process, that are required before adoption finalization, occur in a timely manner.

The results we are looking for during this period of supervision include:

- Families have fully incorporated the child as a family member; roles, responsibilities and dynamics have been modified to include the child in the family.
- All Adoption Assistance agreements have been negotiated and signed for eligible children, prior to finalization of the adoption.
- Initial adjustment issues are identified and services are located to support the family.
- The supervising social worker and agency have sufficient information to recommend that the adoption be finalized at the earliest possible point within the laws and regulations of the child's State.
- The family has explored with the military, the child's worker and the Adoption Assistance staff from the child's State whether legal representation is required and who will pay for it. If required, the family has secured legal representation.

Representation in adoption legal procedures

States differ in requirements for the involvement of an attorney in adoption legal proceedings. In those States that require an attorney, it is important to advise the family of this need as soon

Military Family Adoption Story

The Potts had experienced many delays between visiting Catey and having her placed in their home. This was hard on Catey who, according to her parents "hit rock bottom" after she came to live with them. For six months she worried that her parents might return her to her home State instead of finalizing the adoption. They knew that Catey had to consent to her adoption and they were terrified that she wouldn't be able to get up in front of the judge and give her consent. Karen and Jim remember the flight back to Catey's home State for the finalization hearing: "Our stomachs were in knots over the finalization. When we got to court and the judge asked her if she wanted to be adopted by us, her 'yes' was a definite 'yes'. Our flight on the way home was a lot smoother; she was glowing."

as possible, so that necessary arrangements can be made. Families may request information on attorneys who specialize in adoption. The military family's Judge Advocate General (JAG) or legal assistance office can advise them on local adoption laws but cannot represent the service member in the adoption proceedings. Adoption legal fees are qualified expenses for reimbursement under the DoD's adoption reimbursement program and/or may qualify for reimbursement under the non-recurring expense part of the child's State-administered Adoption Assistance program. This information is detailed in Part IV Practice Tools and Handouts for Use with Military Families in the *Adoption Benefits and Military Families* section of this Guide.

The Potts family at home

Finalization of Adoption

The supervising agency, the State(s) and courts can help alleviate obstacles to finalization, when the family lives out-of-State or the country or when the military parent is deployed or otherwise unable to be present in person.

For example, some States and courts will allow a proxy to represent the family and/or military family member at hearings; some courts allow the non-military member to represent the family at finalization hearings. Others permit teleconferencing and video conferencing finalization hearings when one or both of the parents cannot be physically present. Some States do not require any "appearance" at all.

Collaboration with military personnel

1. Build relationships with military personnel that focus on helping families find and utilize the resources they need after a child is placed.
2. Clarify roles when military professionals will be working with the family around adoption and post adoption issues.
3. Help families who have recently transferred to connect with military personnel who can help them find resources.

Adoption Placement, Supervision and Finalization Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Visit the adoptive/foster parents and/or arrange for the supervising agency worker to visit the family immediately after placement to assure all necessary agreements are in place and the family and child are getting the help and support they need.

- ☐ Discuss with the family what is included in post-placement reports and who will be reviewing them.

- ☐ Establish with the family a protocol for supervisory visits including:
  - Who will be responsible for and included in the visits
  - How visits will occur (in-person, by phone, mail, e-mail, video conferencing). Some States require that a social worker have face-to-face visits with the child and the adoptive family at least once every 30 days until the adoption is finalized.

- ☐ Coordinate services and clarify roles when there are civilian and military professionals involved with the family around adoption issues.

- ☐ Discuss issues regarding when and where finalization of the adoption will occur such as:
  - What needs to happen before the adoption can be finalized
  - What can be done to assure flexibility in your finalization recommendation to accommodate families who may be transferred? Ideas may include using video conferencing or other means when one or both parents are not available in person.
  - What, if any, costs will be incurred
  - Where the finalization hearing will occur and what will happen
  - How to obtain the adopted child's birth certificate and social security card
  - How to celebrate the finalization
  - How to obtain and pay for an attorney

- ☐ Plan arrangements for continued contacts with significant people in the child's past when appropriate and it does not compromise the safety of the child or the adoptive family. (Adoption Assistance may be available to assist with the costs of maintaining such contacts.)

- ☐ Provide follow-up support for the adoptive/foster family:
  - Give the family access to the 24-hour emergency hotline
  - Help the family make a plan to attend regular adoptive parent support meetings
  - Respond immediately to telephone calls and emails from the adoptive family
  - Look to the adoptive parents as the prime decision makers for their adopted child

- ☐ In the case of a family who is transferred prior to finalization, establish a plan to work collaboratively with an agency who takes over supervision and finalization services.
  - Assure the family that Adoption Assistance can go with them to another location
  - Make arrangements to transfer the family's Medicaid to the new State, so they don't have to reapply, using services available through the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA).
  - Make arrangements for purchase of service to contract with an agency and/or qualified individual to supervise the placement and make final recommendations, if needed.

Step 10 – Post Finalization Adoption Services

What this step is about

It is very normal for families adopting children from foster care to access post adoption services after the adoption is final. Services may be needed on an ongoing basis or periodically, when a child is approaching a developmental milestone and/or a crisis occurs in the family.

Part of the preparation process is to help families anticipate that special services might be needed at any stage in the family and/or child's lifetime. It is important that families have access to adoption-sensitive services when needed and that services are family-driven. Additional thoughts include:

- Ensure that military families have access to practitioners and agencies that have experience with the unique issues related to adopting a child, including adopting a child from foster care (adoption-sensitive services). This includes:
  - Access to resources to deal with children's learning and behavior problems
  - Access to crisis intervention services
  - Information to deal with child's questions or birth family issues
- Make sure that the family has information and support to help their adopted child deal with adoption issues and/or search for birth relatives when he/she becomes an adult or at other times when this is needed to help the child and family.
- Make sure that the family has contact information for Adoption Assistance staff and other staff who specialize in post adoption services, e.g., ICAMA staff in interstate adoption placements.

Collaboration with military personnel

1. Work with military support staff to help them understand the needs of adoptive families following legal finalization of the adoption and provide publications and other information.
2. Identify who at the installation can help adoptive families access and utilize military benefits and services after finalization. See Adoption Benefits description and definitions in Part IV of this Guide.

"Overseas everyone gets services on base, which are extensive and high quality. So many different races of people live together that there is a great deal of cultural diversity."

Military Adoptive Parent

"Expert counselors are available in the military to work with adopted children about relocating or the issue of having a parent deployed."

State Adoption Specialist

Post Adoption Services Checklist and Tips

- ☐ Learn about post adoption and other support services available in the military community and locally to support adoptive parents.
- ☐ Empower families with the information they need to be their own best advocates in seeking and evaluating post adoption services.
- ☐ Provide families with lists of resources and contacts in your community when they first inquire about adoption, again at placement and when their adoption is finalized.
- ☐ Continuously advocate for post adoption services in your area.
- ☐ Follow-up immediately with inquiries about services and crisis calls from families.
- ☐ Provide crisis intervention services that are timely and directed toward adoptive family preservation.
- ☐ Help families locate appropriate resources and services in their community and on the Internet.
- ☐ Provide regular training opportunities for adoptive families on topics that pertain to raising children adopted from the child welfare system.
- ☐ Conduct post adoption support groups specifically for military families and/or include them in existing parent support groups.
- ☐ Work with military support staff and organizations that can assist adoptive families.
- ☐ Assist adoptive families in advocating for their adopted child or children with medical and school personnel and other helping professionals.

Part III Inter-jurisdictional Placement and Military Families

The world is changing and so are child welfare and adoption. Services available for military families interested in adopting or fostering children can be understood best in the broader context of at least two trends affecting States and agencies serving these children. These are increased federal requirements and increased use of the Internet for adoption.

Increased Federal requirements and monitoring

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) (PL 105-89) mandates that States and their contractors meet more stringent timelines in achieving permanency outcomes for children in their care. In addition, the Child and Family Services Reviews that are mandated by ASFA require:

- An identifiable process for assuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive families are needed, and
- A process for the effective use of interjurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children

Recently, the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006 (PL 109-239) was signed into law. This law amends certain provisions of Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act (the Act), encourages States to improve protections for children and holds them accountable for the safe and timely placement of children across State lines.

Increased use of the Internet in adoption

Families, including families in the military, who are interested in adopting are only a computer click away from learning about how to adopt, networking with other prospective families and finding a possible available child featured on an adoption website.

The Adoption Exchange Association (AEA) was funded by the Children's Bureau in 2002 to implement the *AdoptUSKids* website. By mid-year in 2006 over 6,000 adoptions of children from foster care, many of them inter-jurisdictional adoptions, have been assisted by its services. These numbers do not take into account similar successes of other Internet-based regional and State exchanges. When combined together, these successes are not only unprecedented, but represent a significant trend in how families are becoming more proactive in finding their child or children to adopt. This has the potential to change adoption practice.

As families become more educated and empowered in working with agencies, there is increased pressure to change adoption practice to make inter-jurisdictional methods more user-friendly and accessible to practitioners and families.

These changes are driving the need to develop new models and protocols for providing quality inter-jurisdictional foster and adoption services. As more States and agencies become involved in developing and using effective inter-jurisdictional methods, there can be an expansion of adoption opportunities and quality services for children and youth for whom agencies cannot find permanent families in their own communities.

Relevance for working with military families

Knowledge about effective inter-jurisdictional placement policies and practices will be very helpful in working with military families. They are more likely than other families to need inter-jurisdictional placement services for the following reasons:

- Military families may be transferred to a new installation or assignment at any point during the adoption process.
- Most military families have access to the Internet and use it regularly, so they are likely to use it to educate themselves about adoption and possibly find a child to adopt from foster care this way.
- Doing business long distance, across State lines and even from other countries, is not unfamiliar to military families.
- Military families have access to good benefits and services to help them be successful in adopting across jurisdictions.

Lt. Commander Green with his three children

"As we educated ourselves, we were struck with the enormity of the need."

Military Adoptive Parent

Coordinating Inter-State Placement Services through ICPC and ICAMA

When you want to place a child with a family who lives in another State, you need to understand the process and procedures required under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) and the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA). In each State there are ICPC and ICAMA compact administrators who specialize in facilitating the placement of children and ensuring necessary services and benefits in interstate cases. Their job is to help you understand and guide you through the paperwork and procedures involved in making interstate placements.

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)

ICPC has been enacted by all States, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is an agreement between the States that has the force and effect of law. The Compact:

- Provides protection to and enables the provision of services for children placed across State lines for foster care and adoption;
- Establishes procedures that ensure placements are safe, suitable and able to provide proper care; and
- Prescribes the legal and financial responsibilities of those involved in interstate placements.

ICPC administrators will need to be involved in all cases where children are being placed from one State to another for purposes of foster care and/or adoption.

Understanding Residency for Military Families

When determining an active duty military family's residency for purposes of a foster care or adoption placement, a State may consider a family's:

- *Permanent duty station:* The military installation where an active duty service member is currently assigned and is usually physically located.
- *State of legal residence:* The State in which the active duty service member is considered a resident for tax and voting purposes.

In most cases, the State where the permanent duty station is located should be designated as the State of residence for placement purposes because it is the State where the service member is most likely to be physically present. However, there may be circumstances where the child and/or family may be better served by choosing the State of legal residence.

When determining which State to designate for residency, the State should consider the following factors:

a. Which State would result in a timelier placement for the child?

b. Which State would result in a placement that is in the best interests of the child?

ICPC and Inter-Country Adoptions

Although the ICPC does not govern placements occurring with military families living in another country, the ICPC office has unique understanding and experience in handling inter-jurisdictional placements and may be an excellent resource for consultation and technical assistance when such placements are in process.

Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA)

ICAMA was established to ensure the delivery of medical and other services to children with special needs in interstate situations. ICAMA, which has the force of law within and among the party States, provides for uniformity and consistency of policy and procedures when a family from one State adopts a child with special needs (as defined in State law) from another State, or the adoptive family moves to another State during the time the Adoption Assistance agreement is in effect.

The children covered by ICAMA are those adopted pursuant to Adoption Assistance agreements between States and prospective adoptive parents under the terms of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Through the Compact, States may also extend these protections to children adopted through State-funded Adoption Assistance programs. All but a few States currently participate in ICAMA.

ICAMA coordinates the provision of medical assistance and other benefits for those children who meet the federal government's definition of special needs and are adopted across State lines pursuant to an Adoption Assistance agreement. ICAMA will come into play when a family adopts a child with special needs from a State other than their own State of residence and/or when the adoptive family moves from one State to another and federal or State adoption benefits are involved.

ICAMA compact administrators serve as liaisons between States and serve as the family's point of contact in their State of residence. ICAMA compact administrators will:

- Assist families in identifying the providers of post-adoption services in the State the family resides;
- Identify parent support groups; and
- Serve as resource and a single point of contact for guidance for adoptive families.

Contact information

Contact information for each State is on Child Welfare Information Gateway's Adoption Assistance web pages (*www.childwelfare.gov*). Contact information for ICPC is kept current on the website (*http://icpc.aphsa.org*). The ICPC and ICAMA compacts are administered by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA).

Even if a State is not a member of ICAMA, you can contact the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA) at APHSA for information, resources and assistance in ensuring that a child moving from one State to another receives appropriate benefits and services. *(See Part V, Helpful Organizations, Websites and Other Resources for contact information.)* At publication, forty-eight States and the District of Columbia were members of ICAMA.

This and other relevant State contact information is also available on-line from the Child Welfare Information Gateway at *www.childwelfare.gov*.

The most important things an adoption professional should know about ICPC and ICAMA are:

- Develop a positive working relationship with your State's ICPC and ICAMA personnel.
- Cultivate an attitude of appropriate advocacy and flexibility related to home studies and procedures, with the goal in mind of helping expedite placements and permanency when working with military families.
- Arrange to be trained in the ICPC and ICAMA procedures and paperwork.
- Engage your State's ICPC and ICAMA offices at the earliest possible point in the process, when any interstate placement is being considered and/or when there are questions about residency for a military family.
- Do your work related to the compacts as thoroughly as possible, meet time lines, and use proper forms and procedures.
- Advocate for your agency to purchase interstate home study and post-placement services from an agency in the family's State, when needed, to insure timeliness and quality of services and reports.
- Utilize Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*) and American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) (*www.aphsa.org*) websites to stay up-to-date on the compacts and to know who to contact in each State, as this information does change from time-to-time.

Military Family Adoption Story

The Potts family traveled to another State to meet and visit Catey for a weekend. Because Catey was having trouble in her foster home, the agency wanted to place her with the Potts the following week. There was a problem in that the Potts' agency didn't have the ICPC paper work completed. The family went directly to the agency to provide the necessary information, so that the placement could proceed as needed.

Working Effectively with Adoption Exchanges

As a State or private agency adoption social worker, it is always a good idea to contact your State, regional or national adoption exchange to find out about the services they provide. Adoption exchange personnel are especially attuned to helping practitioners and families with inter-jurisdictional and military family adoption issues.

Adoption exchanges are non-profit organizations or State-operated programs that help locate and recruit prospective adoptive parents for the adoption of children who are waiting for permanency in foster care. Non-profit exchanges are primarily funded through purchase of service contracts with States and private dollars. The *AdoptUSKids* website, a national exchange, is funded through a federal grant.

Exchanges connect families with adoption agencies that can assist them in adopting a child. Most exchanges now have active websites that feature waiting children. Some State exchanges publish a photo-listing book that contains descriptions and photographs of their children in foster care who are waiting for adoption in their State.

In most States, caseloads are very large and it is difficult for agencies to be as responsive to families as they want to be.

For that reason and to gain other efficiencies, some States have contracted with their State and regional exchanges to take on a broader role in recruiting families and expediting placements.

The Practitioner's Role and Adoption Exchanges

Adoption exchanges can be very important resources for making connections between waiting children and military families and for helping facilitate and support inter-jurisdictional military adoptions. However, the ultimate effectiveness of any exchange depends on the practitioners who choose to use them.

Consider the *Important points to remember* that follow to improve your results in working with and through adoption exchanges.

Important points to remember

- Find out which adoption exchange(s) your State or agency currently uses.
- Cultivate a good working relationship with at least one person at the adoption exchange to whom you can go for help and information.
- List children on local, State and national exchanges and always keep your listings up-to-date.
- Make it a high priority to respond quickly to families who inquire about listed children. Be open to military families who inquire.
- Ask for help from your State, regional or national exchange when you are stuck on a problem involving a military family.
- Be willing "to go the extra mile," be flexible and work collaboratively with military organizations, adoption exchanges and other public and private child welfare agencies.
- Advocate for more flexibility in your State to purchase services from your adoption exchange to help expedite adoptions that you need help to complete.
- In making a placement of a child listed on an adoption exchange, make sure that the receiving family has a trained adoption professional to help them understand full disclosure information related to the child and help to prepare them for parenting a specific child. Some exchanges are able to provide this service, especially if they also offer post adoption services.

Military Family Adoption Story

The Potts family had been interested in several children that they had seen on adoption exchanges before they adopted Catey. When it would come time to match the children, the Potts say that they were told by many agencies that they were not willing to place children with them because they were likely to move and the children needed stability. Jim cautions agencies: "Don't equate moving with stability. We tell Catey that it doesn't matter where you live as long as you have your family with you."

Collaboration between Practitioners & Agencies to Provide Services

In working with military families, there is a good possibility that you will be collaborating with other public and/or private agencies either within your State or from another State to make a successful placement. Some of the possible scenarios include:

- You need to place a child from your State with a relative in the military in another State or another country.
- A military family living in another State or another country is interested in adopting a waiting child from your State that you listed on a State, regional or national adoption exchange.
- Your approved military family locates a child or sibling group to adopt from another State.
- Prior to finalization, a family you have placed a child with is transferred to a new military installation, perhaps in another country.
- A military family living in another country, perhaps a resident from your State, inquires about adopting from your agency.
- You are asked by another State or private agency through the ICPC to complete a home study and/or supervise a placement for a military family that is residing in your area.

Whether you are on the sending or receiving end of such requests for service, you can make a significant difference. It is ideal when both the sending and receiving agencies are committed to partnering with one another to make an adoption work.

However, experience shows that it takes only one solidly committed professional to achieve positive results in the whole chain of adoption steps, including when more than one agency is involved.

Develop a collaborative attitude and style

Here's how you can be part of a positive, solution-focused process:

- Networking with others to achieve adoptions and permanency for children.
- Reaching out to others to problem-solve and remove barriers to placements.
- Developing strong and supportive personal relationships with colleagues to achieve quality work.
- Coaching and encouraging your colleagues in the necessary steps to perform an inter-agency adoption. When another agency or practitioner lacks information and/or skills to do inter-agency work, take the initiative to provide correct information and support.
- Giving positive feedback during the process and credit to colleagues when success is achieved.
- Being open to life-long learning about what you need to know to be effective in collaborating with others.
- Recognizing and acknowledging when you don't have the knowledge or experience needed to provide the requested service; then, ask for help.

Learn to use technology effectively

It is important for adoption and foster care workers to keep up to date in using technology. With increasing availability of communication technology, it is possible to keep in close contact with other agencies and families. You can support and share placement work in rural areas, across jurisdictions, agencies, and even in different countries. Video and teleconferencing are more readily available to assist in the work and can be used in place of non-mandatory face-to-face home visits, court hearings and to maintain communications.

Find resources to facilitate military family adoptions

This is not as hard as it used to be. Most practitioners have access to the Internet today; if not at work, then at home. The Child Welfare Information Gateway is an excellent resource for finding the information and resources you need. Also visit the *AdoptUSKids* website. *(See Helpful Organizations, Websites and Other Resources in Part V.)* Most adoption agencies have their own websites and contact information.

Be open to considering families who are stationed in other countries

Experience has shown that military families who are living abroad are generally willing to be proactive in completing the necessary requirements for adoption. If you let them, they can find someone to help with home studies, submit necessary paperwork, meet training requirements, as well as arrange for pre-placement visiting and post-placement supervision. They can find support groups and other services that will be needed. Families also have access to their Family Service Center for specialized training and post adoption services.

Military Family Adoption Story

When the Greenes ran into difficulty with the placement of their three children, they turned to Voice for International Development and Adoption (VIDA) for help. VIDA certified that all of their paperwork was in order. The children's public agency contracted with VIDA to provide post-placement supervision abroad. Rebecca Preusser from VIDA says: "The Greenes made it happen. They found the services and they made it happen."

"Family Service Centers do not do the home study, but they will help to fulfill segments of the pre-adoption requirements, so that the home study can be completed."

Private Agency Social Worker

Also, there are national experts and agencies with experience in working with military families, including those who live abroad. They can provide the resources you need to provide quality services. (Some of these are listed in Part V of this Guide.)

Advocate for purchase of service

Some agencies and practitioners are reluctant to place children in an unknown county or State because they perceive they cannot trust that appropriate services will be provided to the children and families, once they leave their control. Practitioners can feel conflicted and powerless when there is a need to purchase services from an unknown agency when their agencies are not supportive of the

idea. Having the ability to purchase needed services is critical to being successful in working with military families.

There are well-established ways that services can be arranged between two agencies. The first is through reciprocal agreements and the second, through purchase of service contracts.

Some counties and States have entered into formal reciprocal arrangements with adjacent jurisdictions or with agencies that they regularly depend on to provide responsive and quality services. These agreements can be very effective when strong partnerships are forged.

In general, the child's agency will have more control over the quality of services being provided by another agency when they enter into performance-based, purchase of service agreements.

Performance-based contracts are not foolproof, but they can provide the following advantages:

- Content and frequency of services can be tailored to the specific case situation
- Reporting requirements and timeframes can be monitored.
- Requirements for ongoing communication with the child's agency can be specified.
- Needs for flexibility and making special arrangements can be accommodated. For example, arrangements can be made to complete a home study or provide adoption supervision when the military family resides out of the country.
- Ability to provide case continuity with the family's original agency can be assured, when it is a private agency that has been involved with a family from the beginning.

There are usually two key stages at which purchase of service may be needed. These include:

1. Pre-placement preparation – purchasing a home study and/or completing one that was started by your agency; guiding a family through obtaining background information and helping them to prepare for the placement of a specific child.
2. Post-placement supervision and support services – services provided to assist the family and to meet legal adoption supervision requirements and reports.

The committed practitioner will consider it a responsibility to advocate for purchase of services when it is needed to assure the success of an adoption. Some tips for being an effective advocate include:

- Ask your supervisor for help in finding out how to access funds for purchasing services from another agency.
- If your supervisor doesn't know, you may want to consult with your State's Adoption Specialist or Adoption Manager or other persons to whom your supervisor directs you.

Advocate for adequate Adoption Assistance and medical coverage for the child

Most children in foster care will qualify for some type of Adoption Assistance. Once a child's adoption is legally finalized, the door may be closed for a family to get financial help and support. In most cases, it is considered good practice to open an Adoption Assistance case, for a qualifying child, even if the payment is for one dollar, before an adoption is finalized. Military families have good benefits while they are in the military, but some will eventually leave the service and may need Adoption Assistance to meet the needs of their growing child or teenager.

3. From Placing Children Across Geographic Boundaries: A Step-By-Step Guide for Social Workers. *National Adoption Center and the Adoption Exchange Association*

Final Words about Adoption Services for Military Families

The military families interviewed for this Guide are incredibly resourceful and dedicated people. The practitioners who do this work are creative, skilled, passionate and confident. They have learned to trust that other professionals will take the necessary steps to make adoption with military families work for their waiting children. Their stories say best what needs to be said ...

"For us it didn't have to be a baby. Babies were not the ones who weren't getting adopted. It was the older kids and the sibling groups."

Adoptive Parent

"I kept calling, going from one person to the next. I thought that someone has the information and if I rang enough phone lines, I'd find it."

Adoptive Parent

"We had a good family and we had the abilities to adopt. Part of us wanted to do a good deed, but it is so ironic because we are the ones who were blessed."

Adoptive Parent

"I went to an adoption party and found out about Conrad there."

Adoptive Parent

"We have started to email reference letter requests and to accept references via the Internet. We also got home study information from one parent in the military through email."

State Program Manager

"We saw Catey on the AdoptUSKids website. We are very happy with the way that her State treated us, even though we live in another State. We think they were more willing to work with us, because they have military bases in the State. We will go back to them to adopt again. This time we are interested in a boy up to twelve."

Adoptive Parent

"We think it will be tough on Catey when we have to move, but our strong family values will get us through. We tell her: "It doesn't matter where you live, as long as you have your family with you."

Adoptive Parent

"I want to be a liaison for other military families who have questions about adoption."

Adoptive Parent

"When working with military families you have to be really flexible. It is hard and not ideal sometimes, but worth it."

State Adoption Specialist

"Don't get discouraged—you have to decide in your mind what you would do if these kids were already yours."

Adoptive Parent

Part IV Practice Tools and Handouts for Use with Military Families

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Tool/handout	How to use this tool/handout
Adoption Benefits and Military Families	A tool for practitioners to understand how military benefits, federal and State benefits can work together to support an eligible child adopted from foster care. This tool can also be used to explain benefits to families.
Checklist: Questions for Practitioners to Consider During Key Steps in the Process	A tool for practitioners to explore critical questions with families at relevant stages in the adoption process.
Frequently Asked Questions for Military Families Preparing to Adopt	A handout for military families seeking to adopt a child from foster care. Many of the questions pertinent to military families are answered in this handout, but it is not meant to be the only research about adoption they will use.
Checklist for Military Parents Adopting Children from Foster Care	A handout for military families to help get them started with the adoption process. It includes many points that other military adoptive parents and experts believe to be very important at different stages in the process.
Military family activity tracking log	This is a tool for families to use in tracking their own progress through the steps in the adoption process. It is meant to empower families to be their own advocates through these steps and identifies the information they need to keep on hand in the event they must relocate at any point in the process.

Adoption Benefits and Military Families

The chart that follows is a summary of the possible benefits that a military adoptive family and/or their adopted child may be eligible to receive. It is provided to help social workers and families explore what financial and other benefits may be available to assist with the adoption of a child/sibling group from foster care.

Military Benefits

Pre-Adoptive Placement

TRICARE benefits for a child who is placed for the purposes of adoption. Child must be listed in Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) database as an eligible child.

If approved by the commanding officer:

- Military adoption leave
- Deployment Deferment
- Coast Guard parental leave

Permanent change of station travel allowances including international, only when the child(ren) to be adopted is included in original orders

Legal advice from legal military assistance office

Military social service programs and personnel, including: chaplains, *Child Development Program, Exceptional Family Member Program, and Family Service Center* services

Educational programs for children at installations

Federal, State and Other Benefits – Child qualifying as "special needs"

Eligibility for each of these benefits is individualized to each family, child, agency and State, as well as to the circumstances of the child's original placement into foster care.

Pre-Adoptive Placement

Foster care payment, as agreed with custodial agency

Medicaid and/or other State medical coverage

Child and/or family travel costs, as agreed with placement or custodial agency

Support and counseling from child's home State and/or adoption agency; or if relocated, new agency designated to work with the family

Some children may be eligible for **Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments**, based on determination of developmental disabilities and other qualifying factors

AdoptAir – Airline travel, at a nominal fee, may be available to transport children up to 1,000 miles to visit prospective families.

Federal adoption tax credit, and in some States with an income tax credit, a State tax credit may be available to taxpayers for qualifying adoption expenses, at any stage in the adoption process. Consult your income tax preparer or IRS and State tax instructions for more detail.

Some employers may offer direct payment or reimbursement of eligible expenses, paid leave benefits, or a combination of benefits for adoption.

Military Benefits

Additional – After Adoption is Finalized

Department of Defense (DoD) adoption reimbursement program which provides qualified families with up to $2,000 per child or $5,000 in one year's time for multiple children; may be reimbursed for qualifying expenses, e.g., adoption agency fees, legal fees, some medical expenses. This does not include travel. Note: a family cannot "double dip" i.e. use both the DoD program and nonrecurring cost reimbursement Adoption Assistance program for the same expenses.

Housing and other benefits available for all legal dependents of military members

Post adoption support and counseling from military Family Service Centers, chaplain, other military personnel

Federal, State and Other Benefits – Child qualifying as "special needs"

After Adoption is legally ordered or finalized

Adoption Assistance: Adoption Assistance is a set of cash and medical benefits that may be available to an eligible child who is adopted from foster care. Eligibility for and amount of these benefits is determined for each child by the public child welfare agency in the State in which the child is in foster care. For an eligible child, these benefits may include any or all of the following:

- **Non-recurring cash assistance:** a one-time reimbursement made to the adoptive family at the time of adoption finalization for certain expenses that the family incurs during the application, approval, placement and finalization steps of the adoption
- **Monthly payments:** also referred to as adoption subsidy, this benefit is a regular monthly payment made to the adoptive family by the State from which the eligible child is placed for adoption to meet the child's identified needs
- **Medical assistance:** many children who are adopted from foster care qualify for Medicaid through Title XIX of the Social Security Act. In many instances, coverage for a child who is not eligible for Medicaid is provided by the State in which the child's adoptive family resides or has residence.

Federal and State Adoption Tax Credit: Federal (and in some States) adoption tax credit may be available to taxpayers for qualifying adoption expenses, at any stage in the adoption process. Consult your income tax preparer or IRS and State tax instructions for more detail.

Post Adoption Services: These services may be available through local adoption agencies, mental health service agencies and/or private providers. These services may be paid for by the child's home State according to the Adoption Assistance agreement.

Employer Adoption Assistance: Some employers may offer direct payment or reimbursement of eligible expenses, paid leave benefits, or a combination of benefits for adoption.

See "Explanation of Terms" for more detail on all of the above topics.

Explanations of Terms[4]

Adoption Assistance: Adoption Assistance is a set of cash and medical benefits that may be available to an eligible child who is adopted from foster care. It can include federal and/or State benefits that may be available to the child until the age (usually between 18 and 21) that the State has determined in its laws, regulations or policies.

Application for Adoption Assistance and a signed agreement between the adoptive family and the child's State must be in place before the adoption is finalized, although changes to the benefits can be negotiated between the family and the child's State after finalization.

The purpose of Adoption Assistance is to reduce the financial barriers that may exist to achieving adoption for children who have "special needs." Eligibility for and amount of these benefits is determined on an individual basis for each child by the public child welfare agency in the State in which the child is in foster care. It is based on factors such as:

a. whether the child meets the State's criteria for "special needs," which may include a challenging physical, mental or emotional disability or condition, membership in a racial or ethnic minority, being part of a sibling group that needs to be adopted together, or being an older child;

b. the circumstances at the time of the child's removal from home and placement into foster care;

c. a court determination that the child cannot live safely with his or her family and when such a determination was made;

d. whether the child is eligible for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI);

e. the type and amount of financial and medical support that the child was receiving or was eligible to receive while in foster care;

f. whether reasonable efforts to place the child for adoption without Adoption Assistance have been made;

g. what other resources may be available to the adoptive family to meet the child's needs;

h. and other factors that the child's State's Adoption Assistance staff can provide information about or that can be found at Child Welfare Information Gateway. Go online to *http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance/* and enter the two-letter abbreviation for the child's State in the indicated box.

Eligibility for Adoption Assistance payments and either type of medical assistance described below is included in an Adoption Assistance agreement that must be signed by the adoptive parent(s) before the adoption is finalized even if such assistance does not begin until a future date.

The four major categories that comprise Adoption Assistance are:

1. **Non-Recurring Cash Assistance:** Non-recurring cash assistance is a one-time reimbursement made to the adoptive family at the time of adoption finalization for certain expenses that the family incurs during the application, approval, placement and finalization steps of the adoption. The maximum amount of reimbursement, what expenses qualify for reimbursement and how the family must document them, and how and when application for reimbursement of non-recurring expenses must be made are determined by the child's State. For more information, consult with the Adoption Assistance staff in the child's State or go to Child Welfare Information Gateway at *http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance/* and enter the two-letter abbreviation for the child's State in the indicated box.

4 References: Child Welfare Information Gateway. Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted from Foster Care: A Fact Sheet for Families. www.childwelfare.gov. National Military Family Association (NMFA). DoD Adoption Reimbursement Program. www.nmfa.org

2. **Monthly Payments:** Also referred to as adoption subsidy, this Adoption Assistance benefit is a regular monthly payment made to the adoptive family by the State from which the child is placed for adoption to meet the child's identified needs. The amount of this assistance and when it begins is individually determined for each eligible child by the child's State following the process that the State has determined. Federal policy requires that application for Adoption Assistance, including adoption subsidy, and a signed Adoption Assistance agreement be in place before the adoption is finalized in order for this benefit to be available to the child later if cash subsidy does not begin now. In other words, signing an Adoption Assistance agreement with the child's State preserves for the adoptive family the right to begin or to renegotiate the amount of the subsidy in the event of a change in circumstances in the child's condition or the resources that are available to meet the child's needs.

   - For more information, consult with the Adoption Assistance staff in the child's State or go to *http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance/* and enter the two-letter abbreviation for the child's State in the indicated box.

3. **Medical Assistance:** Many children who are adopted from foster care qualify for Medicaid through Title XIX of the Social Security Act. In many instances, coverage for a child who is not eligible for Medicaid is provided by the State in which the child's adoptive family resides or has residence. Regardless of the source of the medical assistance, it is intended to be a benefit of last resort. This means that it is tapped after TRICARE or any private health insurance coverage that the family provides for the child.

   - The child's eligibility for Title XIX Medicaid is usually made long before his or her adoption is planned, usually at the time that the child first enters foster care, and is based on criteria related to the child, not the adoptive family. Adoption Assistance staff in the State that places the child for adoption is responsible for discussing this eligibility with the child's adoptive family after the family makes application for Adoption Assistance. In the event that the child is not Medicaid-eligible, the child's State will work with the adoptive family and the adoptive family's State through the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA) to identify medical benefits that may be available to the child there.

4. **Agreement Only:** A signed Adoption Assistance agreement must be in place **before** the adoption is finalized in order for any Adoption Assistance cash or medical benefit to be available to the child, even if those benefits do not begin until sometime in the future. In other words, an "Agreement Only" is appropriate when there is not a current need for financial assistance or medical coverage. It provides assurance that if the circumstances of the child or adoptive family change in the future, the family can request the needed benefits. Families are encouraged to consider this option when a child is at risk of future problems but there are no needs at this time.

AdoptAir: This program is offered by the Adoption Exchange Association (AEA) in collaboration with Mercy Medical Airlift and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to all AEA member agencies. AdoptAir utilizes the resources available in the private aviation sector of the National Charitable Transportation System.

Adoption Leave for Members of the Armed Forces: Public Law 109-163, the FY 2006 National Defense Authorization Act, authorizes non-chargeable leave of up to 21 days in one calendar year for a member of the armed forces adopting a child in a qualifying child adoption. This is in addition to other leave.

Child Development Programs: These programs are available at approximately 300 DoD locations, including 800 childcare centers and approximately 9,000 family childcare homes. The services may include full day, part-day, and hourly (drop-in) childcare; part-day preschool programs; before- and after-school programs for school-aged children; and extended hours care including nights and weekends. Not all services are available at all installations.

Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS): Is a computerized database of military sponsors, families and others who are entitled under the law to TRICARE benefits. DEERS registration is required for TRICARE.

Employer Adoption Assistance Programs: Some employers offer a separate employee benefit provided by direct payment of eligible adoption expenses by the employer or the reimbursement of eligible expenses through an account (usually administered by a third party) funded by the employee, employer or both. Companies may offer direct payment or reimbursement of eligible expenses, paid leave benefits, or a combination of benefits for adoption.

Exceptional Family Member Program: The aim of this program is to assign service members to locations that can meet the special medical or educational needs of their family members. It assures provision of services for dependents with special needs.

Family Service Centers: These Centers are located on every major military installation to provide family support and advocacy services. Social workers at these centers are available for family and/or child counseling and treatment, as needed; to strengthen family functioning; promote the prevention of child abuse; preserve and support families where abuse and neglect have occurred; and collaborate with State and local civilian social service agencies. Different designations for Family Service Centers are:

- Army – Army Community Service
- Air Force – Family Support Center
- Navy – Fleet and Family Support Center
- Marine Corp – Marine Corp Community Services
- Coast Guard – Work/Life Office

Federal and State Adoption Tax Credit: The Federal Adoption Tax Credit is available to taxpayers who have either initiated or completed the adoption process. For domestic adoptions, taxpayers may claim the adoption tax credit in the tax year that they incur the qualifying expense, without regard to the status of the adoption, up to the maximum allowed per adoption ($10,960 in 2006). A taxpayer claiming the credit for the adoption of a child who has been defined by their State as having met the definition of a "special needs child" is assumed to have incurred the maximum amount of qualifying expenses and may claim the full credit. In addition to the Federal Tax Credit, some States also offer a State tax credit for qualifying expenses. It is always best to seek the advice of a qualified tax expert or the Internal Revenue Service to determine how this benefit directly applies in individual situations. Information regarding the Federal Tax Credit can be obtained at *www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html*. In addition, information can be obtained regarding federal and State adoption tax benefits by visiting the Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*).

Military Definition – Special Needs: Dependents with life-long physical or mental disabilities and/or long term medical or health care needs.

Post Adoption Services: These services are provided by many public child welfare agencies and private adoption agencies. If families are stationed in the United States, their adoption caseworker, the child's caseworker, the State Adoption Specialist in the family's or child's State or the ICAMA specialist in the child's or family's State can help them find the services available in their State. Adoptive parent support groups are also a great source of information about the services in a family's area. Some military installations have active adoptive parent support groups.

Pre-Adoptive Placement: Child placed by a court, State agency or licensed adoption agency and/or other authorized source for the purpose of adoption.

Qualifying Child Adoption: An adoption performed by a licensed/approved agency or Court or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law. (This does not include stepparent adoption, but includes infant and inter-country adoptions.) This is a military term and should not be confused with a 'child with special needs' for Federal benefits.

TRICARE: Is the health benefit program for all seven uniformed services including the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Public Health Services. Children placed in the custody of a service member or former member, in anticipation of a qualifying legal adoption by the member are eligible for TRICARE. (See definition of a qualifying adoption.)

Important Notes:

1. It is important to encourage families to talk to the right authorities, have correct up-to-date information in writing to confirm benefits and take nothing for granted. Information frequently changes and will vary from State to State.

2. All details of federal and State benefits for a specific child with special needs must be in a child specific written adoption agreement, signed by the State authority and the adoptive parents. This can be signed prior to the date of an adoption placement, but must be signed no later than the date the adoption is finalized.

3. Military benefits are available for all adopted children and not just children with special needs. Some of these benefits are available at placement when the child is placed for the purposes of adoption, such as TRICARE health benefits. (See Adoption Benefits and Military Families Chart.)

Checklist: Questions for Practitioners to Consider During Key Steps in the Process

This checklist has been adapted from original checklists developed by The Adoption Exchange, Inc., Voice for International Development and Adoption (VIDA) and the National Military Family Association. Adoptive parents, representatives of the military and adoption workers have developed this checklist to assist practitioners in helping military families in their quest to adopt. This checklist is not meant to be a complete list, as each situation is unique. This is a place to begin, a place to organize your thoughts and get started.

Important questions to consider during initial inquiry

- ☐ What is the family's and/or parent's current location and expected duration of assignment?
- ☐ Are one and/or both parents career military and/or how long do they expect to be in the military?
- ☐ If not living stateside, what are the family's plans to return to the States and/or begin the process in their current location?
- ☐ Has the family made contact with the Family Service Center at the local installation?
- ☐ Does the family or parent have an approved current adoption home study? If not, what are their plans and possible resources for obtaining a home study?
- ☐ How can your agency be helpful to the family?

Important questions to consider during orientation

- ☐ What military and civilian benefits are available for military families adopting and who can families go to for correct information about military benefits?
- ☐ What happens if a family must move during the process? What will the agency do to help the family transition to a new agency?

Important questions to consider during pre-service training

- ☐ Has the family taken any other adoption preparation and/or classes pertaining to parenting children with special needs?
- ☐ Can just one parent in the family take the training and be certified in the conventional way?

- ☐ If the family has to move during training, can the remaining training be accelerated and/or provided one-on-one before they move?

- ☐ Are specialized parent training programs available at the installation or in a family's community that could be equivalent training programs?

- ☐ Can child-specific preparation and training be offered via Internet and/or teleconferencing?

- ☐ Will the receiving agency "give credit" for training sessions already completed?

Important questions to consider during the home study process

- ☐ What services will be available to support the family and address any health, mental health or educational needs their adopted child might have?

- ☐ Will the adopted child be eligible for TRICARE (see glossary in Part V for definition) at the time of placement and/or do other special arrangements need to be made to provide for medical care, if needed?

- ☐ Will any adoption service fees be charged to the family? Have fees been agreed upon up front and in writing, if there are any?

Important questions to consider during matching and visiting

(See Adoption Benefits description in Part V for description and definition of benefits and terms used in this checklist.)

- ☐ When an interstate placement is involved:

  - Have you contacted the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) and Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (IACMA) offices in your State? (Although visiting is exempt from ICPC, it is good practice to notify your State ICPC Administrator of the possibility of an interstate placement.)

  - Has the family's State of residence been determined to be either their permanent duty station or the military member's State of legal residence? (This is important so that interstate planning can proceed in a timely manner and serve the child's best interests.)

- ☐ Has the post-placement supervision and visitation plan been agreed to by the family, and the sending and receiving agency social workers?

- ☐ Has a pre-placement conference been set up for all involved parties to plan services for the child after placement?

- ☐ Is there a plan for post-placement supervision and services and the child's education?

- ☐ Have interagency agreements been established and/or purchase of service agreements been negotiated and agreed upon, if another agency is to be involved?

- ☐ Will alternative caregivers be available as needed?
- ☐ Have arrangements been made to obtain a passport to meet visa requirements for the child, if needed for a move to another country?
- ☐ Is the military adoptive parent eligible for adoption leave as a member of the Armed Forces and/or is a non-military parent eligible for FMLA? What arrangements can be made for leave?
- ☐ Does the family understand what they need to do to enroll the child in the DEERS database for TRICARE medical coverage? Does the family know for certain what military benefits are available, specific to the child or children being adopted?
- ☐ Will the adopted child be eligible for civilian benefits such as Adoption Assistance (State or federal) and/or Medicaid? Is there a signed Adoption Assistance agreement in place?
- ☐ Is there a signed contract in place between the family and the child's custodial agency related to the benefits that the child is eligible for instead of or in addition to Adoption Assistance, e.g., temporary foster care payments? Is the necessary paperwork done to secure all benefits the child and/or family are entitled to at the point of their eligibility?
- ☐ Has the "agency of record" been clearly established? Has it been made clear that the agency of record has responsibility to plan for the child in case of an adoption disruption prior to finalization?

Important questions to consider during the placement and supervision process

- ☐ Have all financial agreements and other adoption benefits been established and clarified in an Adoption Assistance agreement?
- ☐ Has there been an opportunity for the child to have positive farewell visits with current caregivers and significant people in his/her life?
- ☐ In the case of an active duty status for one parent, has power of attorney been established to complete the placement process with the remaining parent?
- ☐ Has the child's record been prepared and given to the pre-adoptive family, including full disclosure documents?
- ☐ Has the family been informed of the applicable statutes regarding the confidentiality of adoption records, who may access the records and how authorized persons apply for such access?
- ☐ Are the services in place that the family needs to supervise and support their adoption through legalization and afterwards?
- ☐ Does the family have the child's social security card?
- ☐ What are the child's State laws regarding where the adoption can be finalized?
- ☐ Will the family need an attorney to assist with finalization and, if so, does the child's State have policies regarding retaining and paying for an attorney?

Frequently Asked Questions for Military Families Preparing to Adopt

Where can I get information about adoption?

Researching the different types of adoption, who is involved in each type and what types of children are available for adoption, is the first step in helping you to clarify your interest. There are many resources available to help you including a very comprehensive fact sheet developed by Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*) entitled, *Adoption Options: A Fact Sheet for Families*. Doing a search on their website for "Adoption Options" will lead you to the article.

Visiting your military Family Service Center or chaplain to see if they are aware of adoption resources including parent support groups near your installations may also be helpful. If you are living abroad, you may want to talk with your installation's school or medical clinic personnel who are often familiar with local resources and services.

What does an adoption home study entail?

All families interested in adopting will need to go through a process that is designed to educate and prepare them to adopt; to gather information about them; to evaluate their qualifications to parent an adopted child; and to work with an adoption professional to match them with a child or sibling group for whom they have an interest and qualifications to adopt. The Adoption Home Study Process published by Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*) will provide you with detailed information about the home study process. Search using "home study" on the website to get to this fact sheet. Some agencies may call a "home study" a family assessment or family profile process.

How will the home study process differ for families in the military?

If you are living abroad you will need to have a home study completed by a social worker who has the necessary credentials required by the child's State of residence and/or the State where the petition to adopt will be filed.

If you are adopting a child who is in foster care, the State Adoption Specialist in the State where the child resides and/or is in custody will need to be contacted to make sure that any State-specific requirements are addressed before the home study is completed.

If adopting a child born outside of the United States, families are required to comply with the laws of their State of legal residence, U.S. immigration law, and the laws of the child's country of residence.

How can I arrange for adoption services, such as a home study or post-placement services, if I am stationed abroad?

You may need to locate an agency or service within the United States to help you arrange for a home study or other adoption services. There are agencies that have a special focus on adoption for military families. Agencies that can steer you in the right direction include:

- Adoption Exchange Association (*www.adoptionea.org*)
- *AdoptUSKids (www.AdoptUSKids.org*)
- The Adoption Exchange, Inc. (*www.adoptex.org*)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*)
- Voice for International Development & Adoption (*www.vidaadopt.org*)

How long will the adoption process take?

Every family's situation is different and time frames to complete an adoption vary. It is not unusual for the home study process to take up to a year, depending on an agency's waiting list and training requirements. In addition, it may take as many as 6 to 18 months for a family to be matched with a child and for pre-placement visits to occur. Families living abroad may need to travel back to the United States to meet and visit with their child. Despite the fact that time frames can initially seem daunting, families will have a lot to do to prepare themselves for the addition of a new family member during the time they are waiting to adopt.

Am I eligible for leave when I adopt a child?

Public Law 109-163, the Fiscal Year 2006 National Defense Authorization Act, allows the Unit Commander to approve up to 21 days non-chargeable leave in a calendar year in connection with a qualifying adoption, in addition to other leave. If both parents are in the military, only one member shall be allowed leave under this new legislation. A qualifying adoption is one that is arranged by a licensed or approved private or State agency and/or court and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law. Contact your Unit Commander's office to determine current leave options and procedures.

The non-military parent, if relevant, may be eligible for leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), through his/her civilian employer.

What if I am transferred or deployed?

Depending on where you are in the adoption process, being transferred will require some accommodation. For example, you will need an approved home study in the State in which you reside, even when you have identified a child to adopt from your previous State of residence.

If you are in the home study phase, you may be able to have some of your home study materials transferred to another agency that is near to your installation. This may or not be helpful, as States and/or adoption agencies usually require families to use their own forms. You need to be sure to talk to your adoption worker about helping to locate a new agency and transferring information, should you be planning a transfer.

If a child has been placed in your home, but the adoption is not yet finalized, the following options exist:

- Being transferred to another State with your adopted child prior to completion of the adoption will require that your worker seek prior approval from the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) in the State where you currently reside and the State you are moving to.
- If you are being deployed and your adoption is not yet complete you may want to seek a Deployment Deferment or Extension of Assignment to remain in one State until the adoption can be finalized.
- Depending on where you are in the process, early finalization may be possible, e.g., some States allow for early finalization in foster parent and relative adoptions. It is also possible that an agreement can be reached with the court and agency to allow for finalization with the non-military member of the family being present and accommodations made for the military member to be present by proxy or affidavit, teleconference or other means. Not all States require the presence of the adoptive parents at finalization hearings.
- A skilled adoption attorney may be useful to you in this process. Your child's caseworker can provide you with more information about their State's rules for obtaining and paying for an attorney.

What are the characteristics of the children in foster care who are available for adoption?

Of course, every child is unique and a child first. Many of the children who wait for adoption are members of sibling groups who need to be kept together. About 30% of the children are adolescents and teens. A majority of the children who need adoptive families are of African-American, Hispanic/Latino and Native American heritage.

Children usually come into foster care because they have been neglected, abused and/or abandoned by their birth parents. They become available for adoption after efforts to reunify them with their birth family or relatives have not been successful and legal termination of parental rights has occurred or is being planned.

Having experienced trauma and instability in their young lives, children in foster care are likely to have developed emotional, behavioral, social and/or developmental challenges. They may struggle in child-like ways to cope with their earlier experiences. Some may have faced significant discrimination and rejection due to self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ). Some children are more naturally adaptive and resilient, while others will be more difficult to parent through their childhood and teen years.

How do I prepare to adopt a child from foster care?

First, do your research. Check out Child Welfare Information Gateway, where you will find helpful articles and fact sheets about adopting a child from foster care.

Contact the State child welfare agency or an adoption agency in your area to find out what training is being offered that focuses on adopting a child from foster care. Pre-service training may seem like a hurdle to overcome when you already know you want to adopt, but it will help you make an informed decision and prepare for the challenges ahead. If adoption training is not readily accessible where you are currently living, find out from your agency or home State what equivalent training will be necessary. Once you know the requirements, you might be able to access similar training near your installation. Your installation's Family Services Center or social worker are good sources for information about parent training.

Another great way to learn about adopting a child from foster care is to locate an adoptive parent support group near you and talk to other parents who have adopted. They will steer you to the right resources. Again, if this possibility does not exist for you in your community, try searching the Internet for support group information (*www.AdoptUSKids.org* is an informative website).

Will I have to pay fees to adopt a child from foster care?

The costs of adoption can vary depending on which type you choose. Independent, international and infant adoptions generally have fees for services.

Adopting waiting children from the foster care system generally does not entail service fees if you work directly with a public agency or a private agency that has a contract with the public agency to provide such services. However, to expedite your home study process, you may decide to work with an agency that charges fees for services such as the home study. If this is the case, it is important to have an understanding up front as to what the fees will be. Child Welfare Information Gateway's website has a publication, *Costs of Adopting: A Fact Sheet for Families*, with more information. A search on this website for "costs of adopting" will pull up this fact sheet.

In some instances, State or private agencies will agree to purchase services from another agency in a different State or location to pay for the costs of adoption services, when a family is adopting a child from their care. This is something you can ask your social worker about.

You also need to be aware that travel costs to visit your child or arrange for other services may not be reimbursed by the military. For example, if you are stationed in another country and your child was not included in your original orders, you may not be able to have the new child's travel costs covered. Some States are open to reimbursing and/or arranging for travel costs of an adopted child and/or the adoptive family. It is important to clarify arrangements in advance.

Will I need an attorney to adopt a child from foster care?

States differ in requirements for the involvement of an attorney in adoption legal proceedings and how the costs for these services are paid. In those States that require an attorney, it is important to consult with an attorney as soon as possible, so that necessary arrangements can be made.

Adoption agencies can often provide names of attorneys who specialize in adoption. Your family's Judge Advocate General (JAG) or legal assistance office can advise you on local adoption laws but probably cannot represent the service member in the adoption proceedings. Adoption legal fees are qualified expenses for reimbursement under the DoD's adoption reimbursement program and/or may qualify for reimbursement as a non-recurring cost under the child's State Adoption Assistance program.

What benefits are available to help defray the cost of adopting?

There are several resources to help defray the cost of adoption:

- **Military – Adoption Cost Reimbursement**
  Most types of adoptions may qualify for reimbursement when the adoption was arranged by a licensed, private adoption agency, State agency, and/or court, and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law. Military adoption cost reimbursement includes up to $2,000 per child (or up to $5,000 for adoption of more than one child in a year) for qualifying expenses and is available to military families whose adoptions were arranged by a qualified, licensed adoption agency.

  Adoption reimbursement is paid after the adoption is complete for certain qualifying expenses incurred by the adopting family including adoption and home study fees. The National Military Family Association (*www.nmfa.org*) has a fact sheet, *DoD Adoption Reimbursement Program*, with more information on qualifying agencies and allowable expenses.

- **Federal – Non-recurring Cash Assistance**
  Non-recurring cash assistance is a one-time reimbursement made to the adoptive family at the time of adoption finalization for certain expenses that the family incurs during the application, approval, placement and finalization steps of the adoption. The maximum amount of reimbursement, what expenses qualify for reimbursement, how the family must document them, and how and when application for reimbursement of non-recurring expenses must be made are determined by the child's State. For more information, consult with the Adoption Assistance staff in the child's State or go to Child Welfare Information Gateway at *http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance/* and enter the two-letter abbreviation for the child's State in the indicated box.

- **Federal and State Income Tax Credit**
  The Federal Adoption Tax Credit is available to taxpayers who have either initiated or completed the adoption process. For domestic adoptions, taxpayers may claim the adoption tax credit in the tax year that they incur the qualifying expense, without regard to the status of the adoption, up to the maximum allowed per adoption ($10,960 in 2006). A taxpayer claiming the credit for the adoption of a child who has been defined by their State as having met the definition of a "special needs child" is assumed to have incurred the maximum amount of qualifying expenses and may claim the full credit. In addition to the Federal Tax

5 http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm

Credit, some States also offer a State tax credit for qualifying expenses. It is always best to seek the advice of a qualified tax expert or the Internal Revenue Service to determine how this benefit directly applies in individual situations. Information regarding the Federal Tax Credit can be obtained at *www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html*. In addition information can be obtained regarding federal and State adoption tax benefits by visiting the Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*).

- **Employer Adoption Assistance Programs**
  Some employers offer a separate employee benefit provided by direct payment of eligible adoption expenses by the employer or the reimbursement of eligible expenses through an account (usually administered by a third party) funded by the employee, employer or both. Companies may offer direct payment or reimbursement of eligible expenses, paid leave benefits, or a combination of benefits for adoption. According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, a study by Hewitt Associates found that 39% of major U.S. companies offered some level of Adoption Assistance as an employee benefit. [Source: DHHS, Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits (2004), available at *www.childwelfare.gov*.]

It is critically important to talk to the right State and military authorities, obtain correct up-to-date information in writing to confirm benefits and take nothing for granted. Information can change.

What financial benefits are available to help with the costs of raising an adopted child who has been in foster care?

- **Federal Adoption Assistance**
  Children with special needs who are adopted from foster care may qualify for Federal Adoption Assistance. Adoption Assistance is a set of cash and medical benefits that may be available to an eligible child. Eligibility for and amount of these benefits is determined for each child by the public child welfare agency in the State in which the child is in foster care. For an eligible child, these benefits may include any or all of the following:

- **Non-recurring cash assistance:** a one-time reimbursement made to the adoptive family at the time of adoption finalization for certain expenses that the family incurs during the application, approval, placement and finalization steps of the adoption

- **Monthly payments:** also referred to as **adoption subsidy**, this benefit is a regular monthly payment made to the adoptive family by the State from which the eligible child is placed for adoption to meet the child's identified needs

- **Medical assistance:** Many children who are adopted from foster care qualify for Medicaid through Title XIX of the Social Security Act. In many instances, coverage for a child who is not eligible for Medicaid is provided by the State in which the child's adoptive family resides or has residence.

Eligibility for Adoption Assistance payments and either type of medical assistance is included in an Adoption Assistance agreement that must be signed by the adoptive parent(s) before the adoption is finalized even if such assistance does not begin until a future date. Check out the fact sheet: *Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted from Foster Care: A Factsheet for Families* from Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*).

Can my adopted child get medical coverage through the military?

An adopted child, including a child placed in the home of a service member by a placement agency for purposes of adoption, is eligible for benefits after the child is enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Contact the I.D. Card Facility for more information or patient affairs personnel at a specific medical treatment facility.

Specific information on access and eligibility is available on the TRICARE Web site (*www.tricare.osd.mil/deers/newborn.ctm*) or by calling the DoD Worldwide TRICARE Information Center at (888) 363-2273.

Military benefits are available for all adopted children, not exclusively children with special needs.

How can I make an informed decision about whether to adopt an identified child or sibling group from foster care?

Once you have received the necessary preparation and training and have an approved home study, you will be "in waiting" to adopt. When a child or sibling group is referred to you for consideration, there is certain information you are going to need to determine if the child is a good match for your family and, if you decide to proceed with an adoption, what services the child will need once he/she is placed with you.

At first, the agency may provide you with very limited information to determine if you are interested in proceeding to the next step. If you are interested, then it is reasonable for you to ask for and expect more detailed information or "full disclosure" of known information about the child, including at a minimum a medical, genetic, social background and placement history. Two good resources to use to help you determine the questions to ask are 1) *Obtaining Background Information On Your Prospective Child: A Fact Sheet for Families* and 2) *Adoptive Parent Checklist: Meeting Your Child's Special Needs*. Both of these fact sheets were developed by the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA) and can be obtained by contacting the American Public Human Services Association at 202-682-0100 or by emailing Robyn Bockweg at rbockweg@aphsa.org.

Ask for professional help to understand background information
One of the most important things you can do is to ask your social worker and/or engage a professional such as a pediatrician, psychologist or other trusted health or mental health professional, who is familiar with adopting a child from foster care, to help you understand the implications of the information you receive. This person should be able to help you anticipate the child's short-term and longer term parenting and service needs. Only you can make the best possible decision for your family. Having good professional guidance helps you to ask the right questions and make a fully informed decision.

What other services are available for my child and family after adoption?

Child Development Programs are available at approximately 300 DoD locations, including 800 childcare centers and approximately 9,000 family childcare homes. The services may include full day, part-day, and hourly (drop-in) childcare; part-day preschool programs; before- and after-school programs for school-aged children; and extended hours care including nights and weekends. Not all services are available at all installations.

The **Exceptional Family Member Program,** within the military, provides support for dependents with physical or mental disabilities or long term medical or health care needs. They will assist families who need to be stationed in areas that provide for specific medical, educational or other services that might not be available in remote locations.

Family Service Centers located on every major military installation can provide military families with information regarding adoption reimbursement and other familial benefits. Social workers may be available for family and/or child counseling. Different designations for Family Service Centers are as follows:

- Army – Army Community Service
- Air Force – Family Support Center
- Navy – Fleet and Family Support Center
- Marine Corp – Marine Corp Community Services
- Coast Guard – Work/Life Office

Post Adoption Services are provided by many public child welfare agencies and private adoption agencies and/or mental health therapists. Some of these providers may charge fees, which may be reimbursable through your Adoption Assistance agreement, if requested.

If you are stationed in the United States, your adoption caseworker or State Adoption Specialist or Manager can help find the services available in their State. The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption (NCWRCA) maintains a current list of contact information for State adoption program specialists/managers (248-443-7080). Visit their website at *www.nrcadoption.org* and click on NASAP (National Association of State Adoption Programs) to access the list. Also, the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA) staff person in your State may be able to refer you for post adoption services to a reputable provider of services.

Adoptive parent support groups are also a great source of information about the services in your area. Some military installations have active adoptive parent support groups. You may also want to link to Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Adoption Assistance Database*. This database was compiled by AAICAMA (Association of Administration of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance). It provides answers to 13 questions regarding State policies on Adoption Assistance and contact information for post adoption information in each State.

Checklist for Military Parents Adopting Children from Foster Care

This checklist has been adapted from original checklists developed by The Adoption Exchange, Voice for International Development and Adoption (VIDA) and the National Military Family Association.

Adoptive parents, representatives of the military, and adoption workers have developed this checklist to assist military families in their quest to adopt. This checklist is not meant to be a complete or comprehensive list. This is a place to begin, a tool to organize your thoughts and get started.

Starting to prepare:

☐ Sit down together as a family and discuss the child you would like to adopt: age range, gender, race, number of children, medical or educational needs and other considerations.

☐ If living abroad, find a U.S. based agency that is licensed and/or an entity that qualifies for military reimbursement for adoption expenses and works with families living abroad. A qualifying adoption is one that is arranged by a licensed or approved private or State agency and/or court and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law.

☐ Check out what services your installation's Family Service Center will provide such as parenting classes and support groups.

☐ Do on-line research.

- *AdoptUSKids* (*www.AdoptUSKids.org*)Visit this website to see some of the children in foster care for whom adoptive families are being sought. Although it is likely that many of these children will already have been placed into adoptive families (and that's a good thing!) once you have completed the adoption approval process, viewing these children will help you to see the variety of needs that children in foster care have as well as the unique gifts that they can bring to your family. Visiting this website may also help you to decide if adopting a child(ren) from foster care is right for your family.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway (*www.childwelfare.gov*)On this website, readers can find useful fact sheets such as *Adoption – Where Do I Start?*, *Military Families and Adoption – A Fact Sheet*, and *Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care: A Factsheet for Families*. Under the 'Resources' section, click on 'Publications Search' to find these and other topical resources easily and quickly.
- National Military Family Association (NMFA) (*www.nmfa.org*)On this website, readers can find informative fact sheets such as *Adoption Reimbursement Program Fact Sheet*.
- National and Regional Exchanges (*www.AdoptUSKids.org*; *www.adoptex.org*).
- You can find a complete list of State adoption exchange websites by going to

www.childwelfare.gov and typing 'adoption exchange' into the search feature.

- National Adoption Directory: This resource has a State-by-State listing of adoption resources, including licensed private & public agencies, foster and adoptive parent support groups, attorney referral services, State Adoption Specialists, and State photo-listing services. You can access it by typing *www.childwelfare.gov/nad* into your internet browser.

☐ Start prioritizing your leave time – you will want to have a build-up of leave to take for adoption
procedures.

☐ See what special services (i.e., doctors and therapists) and schools are available in your area to help an adopted child to transition to your home.

☐ Educate yourself on your rights and benefits with DoD Instruction 1341.9.

☐ Research costs and financing options and requirements including DoD reimbursement, tax relief, subsidies, loans, grants.

- *Funding Adoption* available at *www.childwelfare.gov*
- *Tax Benefits for Adoption*, IRS publication 968 available at *www.irs.gov*

☐ If living abroad, find out if there is a visa requirement where you are stationed.

☐ Consider giving your Commanding Officer a heads-up that you are planning to adopt and may need adoption leave. (Public Law 109-163, which took effect in 2006, allows the Unit Commander to approve up to 21 days non-chargeable leave in a calendar year in connection with a qualifying adoption, in addition to other leave. If both parents are in the military, only one member shall be allowed leave under this new legislation. A qualifying adoption is one that is arranged by a licensed or approved private or State agency and/or court and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law.) Non-military spouses of service members who work may be able to use the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), if they are eligible through their employer.

Getting Ready:

☐ Prepare a picture presentation of your family and your life. Include pictures of your family using recreational, school, and other facilities at the installation. Organize into an appealing album and make at least three copies.

☐ Line up a licensed agency that is experienced in placing children from foster care to coordinate and complete home study requirements. Helpful factsheets, which can be found at *www.childwelfare.gov*, include:

- *The Adoption Home Study Process*
- *How to Assess the Reputation of Licensed, Private Adoption Agencies* and
- You can find information about private agencies in your State by using this website's *National Adoption Directory*.

☐ Make contact with your Family Service Center to explore what services are available; explore available schools to learn about their programs.

- Department of Defense Education Activity website (*www.dodea.edu*)
- Local school district

☐ Contact housing office to check on availability of larger quarters, if necessary.

☐ Begin your search for an available child to adopt. Work with your agency to identify a child and search State, regional, and national adoption exchanges at *www.AdoptUSKids.org*.

- You may also work directly with the public child welfare agency in your State to get orientation, training, a home study, and placement and post-placement services. Start by calling *AdoptUSKids* at 1.888.200.4005 and provide your name and address. A Recruitment Response Team from your State will contact you by phone and send you foster care and adoption information that is specific to your State.

Placement Planning & Requirements

☐ Understand your identified child's history and unique challenges.

- See *Obtaining Background Information on your Prospective Adopted Child: A Fact Sheet for Families* (*www.childwelfare.gov*)

☐ Work with your adoption worker to obtain a copy of your child's social service record as well as school records and educational assessments and testing; ask for a conference with care providers and education specialists from the agency with legal custody. If this is not possible in person, consider having a video or telephone conference with all the people who are important to the child (foster parent, teacher, social workers, etc).

☐ Determine what needs to be done to obtain command sponsorship for assuring TRICARE coverage, if required.

☐ Obtain your child's birth certificate and social security card

- Obtaining Birth and Adoption Records (*www.childwelfare.gov*)
- Social Security Numbers for Children (*www.ssa.gov*)

- ☐ Make sure that you have made application for Adoption Assistance benefits for your child through the State from which he or she is being placed, based on that State's determination of your child's eligibility for these benefits, including: (a) reimbursement for certain non-recurring expenses you incurred in the adoption approval, placement and finalization processes, up to the limit established by the child's State; (b) monthly subsidy payments; (c) Medicaid.

- ☐ If your State of residence is different from your child's, make sure that the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children (ICPC) and the Interstate Compact for Adoption and Medical Assistance in your State and the child's State are involved. (The State ICPC office where you live currently will assist you in determining whether to use your permanent duty station State or your State of legal residence when assigning residency for the purposes of foster care and adoption.)

- ☐ If living abroad, obtain a passport. Tip: Send copy of airline tickets to the child's custodial agency so they can secure a passport. Try to give as much notice as possible, at least two to three months to accomplish this. Additional information can be found on the State Department website (*www.travel.state.gov*).

- ☐ If living abroad, acquire documentation that shows that the child is residing outside the U.S. in the legal and physical custody of adoptive parents, for the purpose of adoption.

- ☐ Make sure an agency or professionally approved social worker has been designated to provide post-
placement supervision until the adoption can be legally finalized and make contact with the assigned agency/social worker.

- ☐ Obtain your child's full health record and record of immunizations.

- ☐ Develop a list of names and contact information for all important people for the child and service providers.

Adoption Finalization

- ☐ Find out from your child's caseworker how and where finalization will occur and who needs to be
present.

- ☐ If necessary or recommended by policies in your child's State, retain an attorney who is experienced in adoptions of children from foster care and consult with the Adoption Assistance staff in your child's State regarding payment of or reimbursement for these services.

Military Family Adoption Activity Tracking Log

Instructions: This is a tool for you to write in and/or to use as an outline to keep track of the steps completed in the adoption process. It is useful to keep relevant documentation in a file with this log, e.g., names and addresses of agencies, social workers, agency and/or social worker credentials, training certificates, references, copies of applications, etc., in the event of transfer to a new location.

Steps in the adoption process	Your comments, important dates and contact information
Orientation • Document meetings attended • Indicate website research and publications you reviewed • List other adoptive or foster parents you have met	

Pre-service training
• Document training received
• Keep training agendas, handouts, etc.
• Support groups attended
• Other specialized training
  • certifications received
  • classes attended	

Home Study • Keep information on background checks, references and medical information obtained • Dates of home visits and contacts • Keep credentials of agency and person conducting your home study • Ask for a copy of your home study	
Matching and Pre-placement Visiting • Keep detailed information about the child or children you are adopting for your records • Make sure you have a social worker guiding you through this process • Search and understand your identified child's unique history and challenges – download *Obtaining Background Information on your Prospective Adopted Child: A Fact Sheet for Families* (*www.childwelfare.gov*) • Document all necessary arrangements and sign Adoption Assistance agreement, when applicable	

Steps in the adoption process	Your comments, important dates and contact information
Pre-Adoptive Placement • Make sure interstate approvals are obtained to place child across State lines • Make sure there is a plan for post-placement supervision and reports • Make sure child's State has arranged purchase of service agreements with your adoption agency, if applicable	
Adoption Supervision • Keep information regarding the dates of visits and topics discussed • Be open regarding service needs and seek help in making necessary arrangements for services • Make contact with your military Family Service Center to become acquainted and explore possible services and training programs • Make sure you have applied for Adoption Assistance benefits for your child through the child's State, if your child is eligible	
Finalization of Adoption – Court Appearance, if desired or required • Consider retaining an attorney experienced in adopting children from foster care, if you feel it is necessary or this has been recommended by the child's State policies • Make arrangements with appropriate persons to act as proxy and/or be present in person or by alternative arrangement, as planned • Be sure to plan a celebration of the event, whether or not you have a court appearance	
Post Adoption Services • Stay active with a support group, if possible • Make contact with your Family Service Center and local resources for needed services	

Part V Helpful Organizations, Websites and Other Resources

Adoption Exchange Association (AEA)

8015 Corporate Drive Suite C
Baltimore, MD 21236

Phone: (410) 933-5700
www.adoptea.org

AEA is a national association of adoption exchanges. It is the fiduciary agency for *AdoptUSKids*. The website lists all of the member agencies, contact information and free publications.

American Academy of Adoption Attorneys (AAAA)

P.O. Box 33053
Washington, DC 20033

Phone: (202) 832-2222
www.adoptionattorneys.org

AAAA is a national association of attorneys who practice, or have otherwise distinguished themselves, in the field of adoption law. AAAA's work includes promoting the reform of adoption laws and disseminating information on ethical adoption practices.

American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)

810 First Street NE Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002

Phone: (202) 682-0100
www.aphsa.org

The American Public Human Services Association, founded in 1930, is a nonprofit, bipartisan organization of State and local human service agencies and individuals who work in or are interested in public human service programs. Its mission is to develop and promote policies and practices that improve the health and well-being of families, children, and adults. APHSA works to educate Congress, the media, and the general public on social policies and practices and help State and local public human service agencies achieve their desired outcomes in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, child care, child support, Medicaid, food stamps, child welfare, and other program areas and issues that affect families, the elderly, and people who are economically disadvantaged. In addition, this organization provides Secretariat services for the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (AAICPC) and the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA).

Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA)

810 First Street NE Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002

Phone: (202) 682-0100
http://aaicama.aphsa.org

AAICAMA is a nonprofit corporation established in 1986 to facilitate the administration of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA). ICAMA is an agreement between and among party States that enables members to coordinate the provision of medical services to children receiving adoption when they move or are adopted across State lines. All but a few

States currently participate in ICAMA. Through AAICAMA, administrators work together to address issues related to the provision of medical and post-adoption services across State lines and to develop and implement sound interstate and intrastate policies and practices in special needs adoption.

Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (AAICPC)

810 First Street NE Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002

Phone: (202) 682-0100
http://icpc.aphsa.org

The Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (AAICPC) was established in 1974 and has the authority to promulgate rules and regulations to carry out more effectively the terms and provisions of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). ICPC is a legal agreement among all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands that coordinates the placement of children for the purpose of foster care and/or adoption across State lines.

Child Welfare Information Gateway
Children's Bureau/ACYF

1250 Maryland Avenue SW Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20024

Phone: (800) 394-3366 or (703) 385-7565
www.childwelfare.gov

Child Welfare Information Gateway is a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau. Its purpose is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families by connecting child welfare professionals, including adoption and other related professionals, to information and resources that help them address the needs of children and families in their communities. It provides print and electronic publications, websites, and online databases covering a wide range of child welfare topics, including child abuse prevention, family preservation, foster care, domestic and intercountry adoption, search and reunion, and much more.

Department of State Office of Children's Issues

2201 C Street NW SA-22 Room 2100
Washington, DC 20520-4818

Phone: (202) 736-7000
www.travel.state.gov

The Office of Children's Issues formulates, develops, and coordinates policies and programs and provides direction to Foreign Service posts on international adoption. Workers can refer families to this website, which has a helpful booklet on adoption and specific information regarding adoption in more than 60 countries.

International Social Service - U.S. Branch

200 East Lexington St., Suite 1700
Baltimore, MD 21202

Phone: (443) 451-1200
www.iss-usa.org

ISS is an international network of professional social workers in 146 countries around the world. It is a nonsectarian, nonprofit international social work agency that expedites communication among social service agencies in different countries in order to resolve socio-legal problems of individuals and families. While ISS social workers do not always work directly with families living abroad, this agency

coordinates identifying and communicating with an agency in another country. Professionals or families can check to see if ISS can directly serve a family in a particular country.

Military One Source

Phone: (800) 342-9647
www.militaryonesource.com

Military One Source is a Department of Defense (DoD) program, similar to an Employee Assistance Program, that provides information and assistance in such areas as parenting and childcare, educational services, financial information and counseling, civilian legal advice, elder care, crisis support, and relocation information. Access to the information on the website is available to the public but access to the toll-free number is restricted to active duty military, their families and survivors. Four fact sheets pertaining to adoption have recently been added to the website and can be found under the 'Parenting' subheading. Trained counselors answer the 1-800 number and can provide information for military families about local adoption resources and military regulations.

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption (NCWRCA)

16250 Northland Drive Suite 120
Southfield, MI 48075

Phone: (248) 443-7080
www.nrcadoption.org

The NCWRC for Adoption supports the National Association for State Adoption Program Managers and provides technical assistance and training for agencies on adoption services for children in foster care.

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

2500 North Van Dorn Street Suite 102
Alexandria, VA 22302-1601

Phone: (703) 931-6632
www.nmfa.org

NMFA is the only national organization dedicated to identifying and resolving issues of concern to military families. Their mission is to serve the families of the seven uniformed services through education, information and advocacy. They offer information on benefits for adoption reimbursement and health care, but not on placement.

North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)

970 Raymond Avenue Suite 106
St. Paul, MN 55114

Phone: (651) 644-3036
www.nacac.org

NACAC maintains a searchable database of parent groups that you can use to find support in your community or region. NACAC conducts training for parent groups on a variety of topics, publishes articles and fact sheets for group leaders, starts new parent groups across the United States, and otherwise aids adoptive and foster parent group leaders.

The Adoption Exchange, Inc.

14232 East Evans Avenue
Aurora, CO 80014

Phone: (303) 755-4756
www.adoptex.org

This organization provides national leadership and training on the subject of adoption services for military families. The Adoption Exchange and VIDA (Voice for International Development and Adoption)

collaborated on a project to make adoption easier for families living abroad. Their booklet, *Global Connections: A Passport Home – Adoption for U.S. Citizens Living Abroad,* can be obtained free of charge by calling The Adoption Exchange. This program is designed for families stationed abroad.

AdoptUSKids

8015 Corporate Drive Suite C
Baltimore, MD 21236

Phone: (888) 200-4005
www.AdoptUSKids.org

AdoptUSKids is a federally funded project dedicated to raising public awareness of and promoting adoption of children from foster care and operates under a cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The project:

- Operates the *AdoptUSKids* website (*www.AdoptUSKids.org*)
- Provides technical assistance, training and publications to States and Indian tribes to enhance their foster and adoptive family recruitment and retention initiatives
- Designated by the Children's Bureau to be lead NRC in providing technical assistance related to inter-jurisdictional placements of children
- Devises and implements a national adoptive family recruitment and retention strategy including national recruitment campaigns, State Recruitment and Response Teams, and periodic national conferences focusing on foster care and adoption
- Encourages and enhances the effectiveness of adoptive family support organizations
- Conducts a variety of adoption research projects

Voice for International Development and Adoption (VIDA)

354 Allen Street
Hudson, NY 2534

Phone: (518) 828-4527
www.vidaadopt.org

VIDA is an international adoption agency that places children with families throughout the world. To serve the needs of children who wait, VIDA also works as an international development agency. This agency can work directly with families.

Glossary of Military and Adoption Terms for Families and Adoption Professionals

Adoption: Adoption is the legal act of permanently placing a child with a parent or parents other than the birth parents. Adoption usually includes the voluntary or involuntary severing of the parental responsibilities and rights of the biological parents and the placing of those responsibilities and rights onto the adoptive parents. After the finalization of an adoption, there is no legal difference between biological and adopted children.

Adoption exchange: These are generally non-profit organizations that help locate and recruit prospective adoptive parents, generally for the adoption of children from foster care, and to connect them with adoption agencies that can assist them in adopting a child that is in the foster care system. Many States maintain a listing of adoptable children waiting in their foster care system. State, regional, national, and international exchanges facilitate adoption matches between children and families in more than one State, or even internationally.

Adoption finalization: The legal process that transfers legal custody of the child from the State or agency that has legal custody of the child to the adoptive parent(s). An attorney and/or agency usually assists with this process. It often requires a court appearance but can also be expedited by teleconference or videoconference if approved by the court. It cannot occur until the adoptive parent(s) have had the child in their home for the time determined by State statute (usually at least six months).

Adoption Leave for Armed Forces Members: Public Law 109-163 allows the Unit Commander to approve up to 21 days non-chargeable leave in a calendar year in connection with a qualifying adoption, in addition to other leave. If both parents are in the military, only one member shall be allowed leave under this new legislation. A qualifying adoption is one that is arranged by a licensed or approved private or State agency and/or court and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law. Contact your Unit Commander's office to determine current authorized leave options and procedures.

Adoption-sensitive services: Services which respond to the unique circumstances and needs of those touched by adoption, includes adopted parents and children, extended families, birth parents and
siblings.

Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA): This is a nonprofit corporation established in 1986 to facilitate the administration of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA). ICAMA established a formal mechanism and uniform forms and procedures to ensure the provision of medical services when a family from one State adopts a child with special needs (as defined in State law) from another State, or the adoptive family moves to another State during the time the Adoption Assistance agreement is in effect. The AAICAMA provides technical assistance, training and support in administering the Compact.

Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (AAICPC): This organization was established in 1974 and consists of members from all 50 States, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The AAICPC has authority under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to promulgate rules and regulations to carry out

more effectively the terms and provisions of the compact.

Child placement agency: A governmental State or county agency or one licensed by the State for purposes of receiving children for their placement in private family homes for foster care and/or adoption.

Deployment: Sent into combat theater (just the service member).

Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS): Is a computerized database of military sponsors, families and others worldwide who are entitled under the law to TRICARE benefits. DEERS registration is required for TRICARE.

Disclosure: Act of revealing information that may be considered secret or confidential and/or is protected by federal or State laws. With respect to adoption, may refer to background information about an adopted child and his or her birth family, including family medical history; and revealing non-identifying or identifying information about the child, birth family or adoptive family, including the child's placement history.

Disruption: The act of discontinuing an adoption, in which the decision is made by the adoptive parents, the child or the legal authority, prior to finalization or legalization of the adoption.

DoD: Department of Defense headquartered in the Pentagon.

Dual licensure: Foster parents and adoptive parents go through the same screening and interview, home study, training and background check processes, and in the end receive the same license/approval to provide foster and/or adoptive care. Dual licensure allows for foster parents, who have cared for a child for some length of time, to naturally and easily change their role from that of a foster parent to an adoptive parent, without having to go through an entirely new home study and training process. Some, but not all States and adoption agencies, conduct dual licensure.

Employer Adoption Assistance: Some employers offer a separate employee benefit provided by direct payment of eligible adoption expenses by the employer or the reimbursement of eligible expenses through an account (usually administered by a third party) funded by the employee, employer or both. Companies may offer direct payment or reimbursement of eligible expenses, paid leave benefits, or a combination of benefits for adoption.

Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA): Under this federal law, covered employers must grant an eligible employee up to a total of 12 work weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for one or more of the following reasons:

- for the birth and care of the newborn child of the employee;
- for placement with the employee of a son or daughter for adoption or foster care;
- to care for an immediate family member (spouse, child, or parent) with a serious health condition;
- to take medical leave when the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition.

FMLA may be available for the non-military parent, but not the military parent. (See Adoption Leave for Members of the Armed Forces.)

Federal Adoption Assistance: Children with special needs who are adopted from foster care may qualify for Federal Adoption Assistance. Adoption Assistance is a set of cash and medical benefits that may be available to an eligible child. Eligibility for and amount of these benefits is determined for each child by the public child welfare agency in the State in which the child is in foster care. For an eligible child, these benefits may include any or all of the following:

- Non-recurring cash assistance: a one-time reimbursement made to the adoptive family at the time of adoption finalization for certain expenses that the family incurs during the application, approval, placement and finalization steps of the adoption
- Monthly payments: also referred to as **adoption subsidy**, this benefit is a regular monthly payment made to the adoptive family by the State from which the eligible child is placed for adoption to meet the child's identified needs
- Medical assistance: Many children who are adopted from foster care qualify for Medicaid through Title XIX of the Social Security Act. In many instances, coverage for a child who is not eligible for Medicaid is provided by the State in which the child's adoptive family resides or has residence.

Eligibility for Adoption Assistance payments and either type of medical assistance is included in an Adoption Assistance agreement that must be signed by the adoptive parent(s) before the adoption is finalized even if such assistance does not begin until a future date.

Federal & State Income Tax Credit: Federal (and in some States) adoption tax credits may be available to taxpayers for qualifying adoption expenses that are incurred at any stage in the adoption process.

Foster/Adopt: Placement of a child with a licensed foster family who intends to adopt the child or children if reunification is not possible and adoption becomes necessary for the child. If the child is not legally free or the case is in appeal, this may also be called a "legal risk placement."

Home of record: The State where the individual enters service. This may also be referred to as State of legal residence, as distinct from State of domicile or State of permanent duty station.

Homesteading: A military benefit allowing a family with a disabled member to be stationed in one location to which the service member returns after duty assignments, rather than moving the family each time a transfer is ordered. Eligibility comes through the Exceptional Family Member program.

Home Study: A general term used to describe the process of assessing and preparing a prospective adoptive family. It is used to determine the family's suitability to adopt and the sort of child whose needs would be best met by that family. It includes a range of evaluative and educational activities. Also referred to as family assessment or family profile.

Inter-Country Adoption: Occurs when a child is a citizen of one country and the adopting parent(s) are citizens of a different country. Also referred to as international adoption.

Inter-jurisdictional placement: A foster care or adoption placement that involves placing a child from one county, State, or country, with a family from another.

Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA): ICAMA was established to ensure the delivery of medical and other services to children with special needs in interstate situations. ICAMA has the force of law within and among the party States. As of September 2006, 48 States and the District of Columbia are parties to the ICAMA.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC): An agreement between the States that has the force and effect of law, the Compact:

- Provides protection to and enables the provision of services for children placed across State lines for foster care and adoption;
- Establishes procedures that ensure placements are safe, suitable and able to provide proper care; and
- Establishes the legal and financial responsibilities of those involved in interstate placements.

Judge Advocate General (JAG): In the military, the office which provides legal advice and services to military personnel and the military service.

Kinship and/or relative adoption: Adoption of a child by that child's relative, godparents, stepparent or other adult who has an established kinship bond with the child's family system. Each State has its own unique definitions for who qualifies as kin or relative and how their rights and responsibilities in adoption may differ from others who adopt.

Lifebook: A book of pictures and mementos documenting a child's life to date. Created for and with a child with the assistance of a social worker, psychologist, foster parent and/or other individuals. The purpose of the lifebook is to provide meaning and continuity to a displaced child whose life may have been extremely disrupted. It is designed to capture memories, provide a chance to recall people and events in the child's past life, and to allow for a sense of continuity.

Medicaid: A federally-funded, State-administered medical assistance program for qualifying people who cannot cover their own medical expenses. Adopted children who meet the federal definition of special needs may qualify as a family of one without regard to their adoptive family's income. Some States provide State-funded medical benefits to children who are adopted from foster care but who do not qualify for federally-funded Medicaid.

Military Treatment Facility: Refers to a military hospital or clinic.

Non-identifying information: Information about a child and his or her health, social and family background that is provided to prospective adoptive parents, but does not include the identity or whereabouts of the birth parents; also may refer to information (except identity and where-

abouts) provided about the adoptive parents, adopted child and adopted child's siblings, usually through the adoption registry of the State in which the adoption petition was filed.

Nonrecurring expenses: See definition of Federal Adoption Assistance.

Permanent duty station: The military installation where an active duty service member is currently assigned and is usually physically located.

Photo listing: Published photos and brief profiles of children who are available for adoption; used by agencies to recruit prospective adoptive parents. Photo listings are in book form and on Internet websites.

Post adoption services: Refers to adoption support services that begin at or continue after adoption finalization. Services may be provided by one or more of the agencies involved in the adoption or by another community agency or helping professional.

Post-placement services: The range of counseling and services provided to the adoptive parents, adopted child and birthparents subsequent to the child's adoptive placement and before the adoption is legally finalized in court. Older children usually need counseling after an adoptive placement, no matter how positive the child feels about the adoptive parents. Post-placement services are provided to make the adoption experience as positive and satisfying as possible to all parties.

Purchase of Service: Contracts and/or service agreements between agencies in the same or different county, State or country when the child's custodial agency agrees to pay another agency for services provided to an adoptive parent and/or child, including post-placement services, home study fees, etc.

Qualifying Adoption: Adoptions with military families that qualify for expense reimbursement and other military benefits. A qualifying adoption includes adoptions arranged by a licensed or approved private or State agency and/or court and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law.

Receiving agency: The agency that works with the adoptive family, making sure it has a completed home study and meets other requirements of the sending agency; assists the sending agency and prospective adoptive family in assessing the suitability of the proposed match with a specific child/ren; and provides post-placement supervision of the placement and progress reports to the sending agency.

Sending agency: The agency that has custody of the child until finalization of adoption or legal guardianship and makes placement decisions for him/her.

Special Needs: In contrast to definitions in other child-related fields (e.g. education), in child welfare **special needs** simply means **hard to place for adoption**. Each State determines the child or situational characteristics that make a child fall into the "special needs" category. They can include a handicap or disability and can also include minority race, being a member of a sibling group,

6 http://www.acf.hhs.gov/j2ee/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=49

older age or anything else identified by the State, including from categories that are described in Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. In order to qualify for Adoption Assistance, a child must be determined by the State having legal custody of the child to be a special needs child, as well as meet the other criteria described in the Adoption Assistance definition included in this glossary.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): Voluntary or involuntary severance of the rights of a parent to the care, custody and control of a child. TPR is usually a necessary legal action prior to an adoption taking place.

TRICARE: The health benefit program for all seven uniformed services, including the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Public Health Services. Children placed in the custody of a service member or former member by a licensed or approved private or State agency and/or court and/or other source authorized to place children for adoption under State or local law in anticipation of legal adoption by the member may be eligible for TRICARE benefits.

Note: *The Encyclopedia of Adoption* provides a complete, single-volume reference to the social, legal, economic, psychological and political issues surrounding the adoption experience and its unique terminology. Written for general readers and professionals alike, each of the nearly 400 thoroughly cross-referenced entries describes and explains in clear terms all the basic information needed to understand adoption. It can be viewed on-line at *http://encyclopedia.adoption.com*.

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