



# **BARRIERS & SUCCESS FACTORS IN ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE:**

*Perspectives of Families & Staff*

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## Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings of two legislatively mandated adoption-research studies conducted as part of The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids. In the first study, a nationwide purposive sample of 300 families seeking to adopt children with special needs from the public child welfare system was selected, interviewed, and surveyed to determine actual and potential barriers to the completion of the adoption process. In addition, a nationwide sample of 382 private- and public-agency adoption staff members were surveyed to assess their opinions regarding barriers to the adoption process. This first study is referred to as the “Barriers” study in this report.

In the second study, a four-year prospective examination of a nationwide sample of 161 families who had adopted children with special needs was conducted in order to determine factors that contributed to successful adoption outcomes. When all represented states are counted in both studies, family and staff participants came from all ten standard federal regions, forty-seven states and the District of Columbia. This research study is referred to as the “Success Factors” study in this report. Below is a summary of demographics of participants and the major findings from each study:

### Barriers Study

#### Barriers Study: Family Demographics

- Three hundred families who were in the process of adopting from the child welfare system were selected for participation in the Barriers study. Over the past four years, these families were interviewed periodically by telephone. At the close of data collection, July 1, 2007, 98 families (33%) had completed the process, received

children and finalized their adoptions; 102 (34%) families had discontinued the process of adopting a child through the child welfare system; and 16 families (5%) still continued in the process. Among the 16 families who were still in the process of adopting, 7 (44%) of the 16 families had been approved to adopt but were waiting for children to be placed in their homes and 9 (56%) of these 16 families had children placed with them, but the adoptions had not yet finalized. The remaining 84 families (28%) were re-contacted throughout the four year period but for various reasons stopped responding to our requests for updates, so their final adoption outcome is unknown.

- In this report, data from the 102 families who discontinued the adoption process and the 98 families who finalized an adoption are highlighted (N=200). These groups will be referred to as “discontinued” and “finalized.”
- Of the 200 discontinued and finalized families, 183 (92%) were considered general adopter families (defined as families who did not have a prior relationship with the child they were adopting). Of these general adopters, 29 (16%) discontinued prior to completion of training and home study, 50 (27%) discontinued the adoption process after being approved, 17 (9%) discontinued the adoption process after a disrupted placement, and 87 (48%) eventually finalized an adoption.
- Of the 8 foster parent adopters, 7 (88%) finalized an adoption and 1 (13%) discontinued after approval. Among the 7 child specific adopters, 3 (43%) finalized an adoption, 2 (29%) discontinued the adoption process after being approved, and 2 (28%) discontinued prior to completion of training and home study. Of the two relative adopters, 1 (50%) finalized an adoption, and 1 (50%) discontinued the adoption process prior to completion of training and home study.
- Among the 102 families who discontinued the adoption process, 59 (58%) were married couples, 2 (2%) were unmarried same-sex couples, 2 (2%) were unmarried opposite-sex couples, 29 (28%) were single females, and 10 (10%) were single males. The average age of this subsample of prospective adoptive mothers and prospective adoptive fathers was 41. Prospective adoptive mothers averaged 17 years of education; prospective adoptive fathers averaged 15 years of education. Seventy percent (n=71) of discontinued families were Caucasian; 22% (n=22) were African American; 6% (n=6) were interracial; 2% (n=2) were Hispanic; and 1% (n=1) classified themselves as “mixed” (i.e., both parents had the same ethnic/racial mix). The majority (n=96, 94%) of the discontinued families were general adopters, and 86% (n=88) of discontinued families reported that this was their first adoption.
- Of the 98 families who completed the process, received a child, and finalized their adoptions, the majority, 60 (61%), were married couples; 7 (7%) were unmarried same-sex couples; 1 (1%) was an unmarried opposite-sex couple; 29 (30%) were single females; and 1 (1%) was a single male. The average age of prospective adoptive mothers was 41, and the average of prospective adoptive fathers was 42. Prospective adoptive mothers averaged 16 years of education, while prospective adoptive fathers averaged 14 years

of education. Sixty-nine percent (n=68) were Caucasian; 15% (n=15) were African American; 9% (n=9) were interracial (i.e., race/ethnicity of parents is not identical); 3% (n=3) were Hispanic; 2% (n=2) classified themselves as “mixed;” and 1% (n=1) was Native American. The majority of families (n=87, 89%) who finalized their adoptions were general adopters.

- Over half (n=81, 51%) of the 158 children adopted by these 98 families were female, 88% (n=139) were part of a sibling group, 47% (n=74) were over five years of age at placement, and 53% (n=84) were racially mixed or children of color.
- Adoption Barriers: Family Perspectives**
- General adopter families who finalized an adoption as well as those who discontinued were similar in the types of children they wanted to adopt. Overall, families most desired to adopt females and children who were 11 or younger. Families indicated a willingness to adopt children of varying racial backgrounds; however, the majority of families desired to adopt Caucasian children. In both groups, many families were willing to consider adopting children who had experienced prenatal drug use, had learning disabilities, or ADD/ADHD, but were unwilling or unable to adopt children with multiple physical disabilities and children with HIV/AIDS.
  - The motivations to adopt from foster care were similar among finalized and discontinued families. The most common reason among both groups was the desire to help a disadvantaged child, a child with special needs, or a child in foster care. Financial constraints were the second most common reason for adopting from foster care rather than adopting internationally or through a private agency.
  - Parents who finalized their adoptions reported that, at the time of placement, the child issues they considered most challenging were medical needs (n=34, 22%) and having a history of abuse and neglect prior to adoption (n=34, 22%). Other challenging child issues that families mentioned were: ADHD (n=29, 18%); educational needs (n=26, 16%); behavioral problems (n=22, 14%); and prenatal drug or alcohol exposure (n=22, 14%).
  - Parents of children whose adoptive placements disrupted (n=19 children) reported that the most challenging child issues known at placement were ADHD, medical needs, behavioral problems, and educational needs.
  - After in-depth analyses of the transcripts of interviews with the 200 (102 finalized and 98 discontinued) families, the participants were divided into the following five groups based on which steps in the adoption process they had completed: Group 1: Families who made an initial contact with an agency, who may have attended orientation, and who started or completed their initial application, but then discontinued the adoption process; Group 2: Families who had completed an application, but discontinued the adoption process prior to approval, during either the training or home study process; Group 3: Families who completed their home study and training, were approved, but never had a child placed with them; Group 4: Families with whom a child was placed, but the adoption disrupted prior to finalization and the family subsequently discontinued the

- adoption process; and Group 5: Families who completed the adoption process, received a child and finalized the adoption.
- The families' experiences with the adoption process were coded to assess child, family, and agency barriers that each group of families encountered. Coders read the entire transcript and identified every barrier that families felt impacted their entire adoption process. These barriers for the five family groups are discussed in this report as "Overall Barriers." After identifying the overall barriers, coders then attempted to narrow the list of barriers to those that appeared to most negatively impact the families' adoption process. These barriers are discussed in this report for the five family groups as "Top Barriers."
  - Families who finalized an adoption (Group 5) or discontinued after a disrupted placement (Group 4) were most likely to report agency related barriers. Ninety-eight percent of the 98 families who had finalized adoptions and 82% of the 17 families with disrupted placements identified adoption process logistics as an agency related barrier. In fact, adoption process logistics were reported as a barrier by increasingly more families as they moved further along in the adoption process: Group 1 = 60%; Group 2 = 81%; Group 3 = 94%; Group 4 = 82%; and Group 5 = 98%. When analyzing the prevalence of adoption process logistics as a top barrier, a similar trend emerges: Group 1 = 20%; Group 2 = 41%; Group 3 = 51%; Group 4 = 41%; and Group 5 = 68%.
  - Families who finalized an adoption (Group 5) were less likely to report family-related barriers than families in Groups 1-4 (all families who discontinued the process of adopting a child from foster care) when barriers were analyzed overall, as well as when barriers were analyzed for the top barriers that led them to discontinue.
  - Families in Group 4 (disrupted placement) experienced the highest frequency of child barrier factors (76%), but only twenty-nine percent of the families in this group reported child factors to be among the top barriers that influenced their decision to discontinue the process of adopting a child from foster care.
  - Families who discontinued the adoption process after approval or after a disrupted placement and families who finalized an adoption from foster care (Groups 3-5) reported the highest number of agency barriers overall. Families who finalized an adoption (Group 5) reported the highest number of agency barriers as top barriers in their adoption process.
  - The number of child, family, and agency factors were all significantly related ( $p < .05$ ) to the group assignment for families. Seventy-seven percent of families in Group 4 (disrupted placement) and 40% of families in Group 5 (finalized adoption) reported child factors to be overall barriers to their adoption process. All families in Group 1 (discontinued after orientation) and Group 4 (disrupted placement) reported family factors as barriers to their overall adoption process. Fifty percent of Group 5 (finalized adoption) reported family factors. Families in all five

groups reported agency factors as barriers to their overall adoption process: 80% of Group 1; 93% of Group 2; 100% of Group 3; 100% of Group 4; and 100% of Group 5.

- Family factor barriers were most frequently reported by Groups 1 and 4 with a mean of 2.0 and 2.6 respectively. All other groups reported a mean of less than 2 family factors per family. Group 4 families (disrupted placement) reported a mean of 1.2 child factors. Groups 1, 2, 3 and 5 all reported a mean of less than 1 child factor.
- A chi-square test of independence was conducted on the most frequently reported agency factors to determine if there was a relationship between those factors and the group assignments. The most frequently reported agency factors were: agency emotional support, adoption process logistics, jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues, and agency communication/ responsiveness. All of these factors, except jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues<sup>1</sup>, were significantly related to the family's stage of completion in the adoption process (Groups 1-5).

### **Barriers Study: Staff Demographics**

- Approximately 1,659 surveys were sent to staff in 34 states and Washington, D.C. A total of 382

(23%) surveys were received from staff located in 29 states and the District of Columbia<sup>2</sup>.

- Thirty percent (113) of the staff surveys were completed by staff working in private adoption agencies, and the majority (n=269, 70%) were completed by staff working in public adoption agencies. Private-agency adoption workers typically contracted with the state (public) agency to place children from foster care into adoptive placements.

### **Adoption Barriers: Staff Perspectives**

- Major agency barriers identified by staff in this study included the following: an inadequate pool of families; jurisdictional issues related to termination of parental rights, issues with the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC); the size of worker caseloads; and the availability of post-adoption services (respite care, etc.).
- Major family barriers identified included: the type of child desired; criminal background of prospective parents; an inability to accept certain characteristics in a child's background; an unwillingness to access services or community resources; and the lack of experience with special needs children.

<sup>1</sup> Includes the level of difficulty encountered by parents in the adoption process when working with more than one agency or with two different counties, regions or states. This factor includes issues between public and private agencies and issues with ICPC.

<sup>2</sup> Findings must be interpreted with caution, as samples in each state are not representative and may not include responses from both public and private agency staff. Of the 29 states and the District of Columbia, there were seven states from which both public and private agency surveys were received. These states include Arizona, California, Illinois, Minnesota, Mississippi, Texas, and Colorado. Of these seven, 3 are among the states with the highest numbers of available children waiting for adoption: Texas with 10,147 waiting children, California with 4,903 waiting children, and Illinois with 3,621 waiting children.

- Major child barriers identified included: older age of child (over 11); a history of or engaging in sexual perpetration; sexual acting-out behavior; the need for siblings (3 or more) to be placed together; and behavior problems in the home.
- Additional analyses were conducted on responses from staff in the seven states with significant public and private agency representation to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between public and private agency staff members' perceptions of major agency, family, and child-related barriers, using a significance level of .05. In this analysis, 59 private agency staff and 78 public agency staff located in Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi, and Texas were included.
- Adoption agency staff from public agencies were significantly more likely than private agency staff to rate the following as major barriers to adoptive placements: a lack of families appropriate for adoption of children with special needs (80% vs. 60%); the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) (64% vs. 34%); caseload size (63% vs. 42%); and prospective adoptive parents' inability or unwillingness to accept certain characteristics in a child's background or history (61% vs. 41%).

## Success Factors Study

### Success Factors Study: Family and Child Demographics

- There were 161 families and a total of 270 individual adoptive parents who participated in the Success Factors study. These families had finalized their adoptions between 1 and 14 years earlier. Fifty-eight percent (n=93) of families had worked with public agencies, and 42% (n=68) had worked with private agencies. The majority of the families (n=104, 65%) were married couples. There were also 2 (1%) unmarried same-sex couples and 3 (2%) unmarried opposite-sex couples. Forty-seven single female adopters composed 29% of the sample, and single males represented 3% (n=5) of all adoptive parents. The majority (80%) of families identified their ethnic background as Caucasian (n=128). Eleven percent (n=18) were African American, 3% (n=5) were Hispanic, and nine families (6%) identified themselves as interracial couples. Overall, the majority (n=105, 65%) of families adopted children of the same ethnic background as their own, while 56 families (35%) transracially adopted. Caucasian single women (58%) were significantly more likely than couples (30%) to have adopted at least one child of color.

<sup>3</sup> Although the majority of current adopters of children from foster care are foster parents who have had a prior relationship with the child, agencies are continuing to struggle to conduct targeted and general recruitment for families to adopt the many waiting children whom foster parents are not adopting. Many of these are older children who belong to sibling groups. Therefore, we decided deliberately to over-sample non-foster parent adopters (general adopters) to better understand family dynamics in cases in which the family and child have not had a prior relationship, and therefore learn more about factors that lead to their success.

- Of the 161 families, 106 (66%) had adopted more than one child, of whom 44 % (n=47) had adopted 2 children, 40% (n=42) had adopted between 3 and 5 children, and 16% (n=17) had adopted between 6 and 10 children. The majority of families (n=94, 58%) were general adopters<sup>3</sup>, while the remaining families were either adopting a foster child in their home (n=41, 25%), adopting a relative (n=6, 4%), or adopting a specific child known to the family (n=20, 12%).
  - One child from each family selected into the sample was chosen as the focus of the research study. The “focus child” was selected based on the age of the child at placement, the severity of the child’s special needs, the level of challenge the child presented to the parent(s), and the length of time the child had been in the adoptive home. Of the 161 focus children, 55% (N=89) were males, and 45% (N=72) were females. Eighty (50%) of the 161 focus children were Caucasian (non-Hispanic), and the other half were children of color (19% or n=31 were African American, 12% or n=20 were Hispanic, 2% or n=3 were Native American, and 17% or n=27 were mixed race).
  - Focus children were an average of 6.5 years of age at placement into the adoptive home and had been in their adoptive homes an average of 6 years at the time of the interview. Seventy-four percent (n=119) of focus children were between five and seventeen at the time of placement. Of the 161 children, (n=6, 4%) were between 13 and 17 when placed and 39 (24%) were between 9 and 12 at placement.
- Successful Adoptions: Family Perspectives**
- Parents most frequently characterized a successful special-needs adoption as having the following characteristics: 1) Parents were committed to the child and the child’s adoption into the family; 2) The child was still living in the home and not behaving negatively; 3) The child was showing progress in the adoptive home; 4) The parent and child had bonded with each other; and 5) Parents were prepared to adopt a child with special needs and had realistic expectations of the child.
  - Statistically significant differences were found in levels of support families received pre- and post-placement (p=.05). At the initial decision to adopt, 41% (n=66) of families had received positive reactions to their decision from both friends and family. By the time of post-placement, however, 74% of families (n=119) reported positive support of the adoption from both friends and families.
  - Despite the “success of the adoptions,” over half of all families (n=93, 58%) described their child as difficult or very difficult to parent. Children in the study exhibited an average of 10 difficult behaviors.
  - Children described as difficult to parent displayed behavioral challenges including the following: violating rules of conduct (70%), verbal aggression (55%), physical aggression (48%), stealing (48%), and vandalism (31%).

- The most commonly reported post-adoption services used were financial supports including adoption subsidies (89%), help with routine medical care (79%), and help with routine dental care (77%).
- Over 75% of the families received adoption subsidy or help with dental and routine medical care. Ninety percent or more of the families who received these 3 services found them very or extremely helpful.
- Sixty-three to seventy-nine percent of families found various types of counseling, training, and support groups to be helpful. Between 69% to 76% of the families who were counseled on parenting skills, abuse, separation, sexual, and adoption issues found the counseling very or extremely helpful.
- Sixty-seven percent of the families found their child's individual therapy to be very or extremely helpful. At least two thirds of families found that 10 out of 11 types of counseling were very or extremely helpful, while only 50% of families found counseling to prevent an out-of-home placement to be very or extremely helpful.
- Forty-one percent of families reported a problem with finding time to access services. Forty percent of families indicated a lack of confidence in services providers. Thirty-five percent reported that often insurance does not cover a needed service.
- Of the 161 families in the study, 27 families (17%) had no pre or post-finalization contact with any birth or foster family members, and 48 families (30%) had contact with one or both of the child's birthparents either pre- or post-finalization. Of these 48 families, 19 had contact pre-finalization only, while 29 had contact post-finalization (including those who had contact both pre- and post-finalization). This report includes findings from an analysis of those 48 with birthparent contact and the 27 without contact with birth or foster family members.
- In general, families who had contact (either pre- or post-finalization) with the child's birthparents (n=48) were more likely to have adopted a foster child already placed in their home or a child with whom they had a previous relationship (child-specific or relative adoption) than the 27 families who had no contact with the child's birthparents or foster family members. Families who had pre-finalization contact ONLY with one or both birthparents (n=19) were more likely to have court-mandated visits with birthparents than parents who had contact post-finalization. Families who had contact pre-finalization ONLY generally had more frequent contact than the families who had contact with the child's birthparents post-finalization. Families with pre-finalization contact ONLY were more likely to have supervised visits with the birthparents, whereas families who had post-finalization contact had a variety of types of contact, including cards, letters, and emails; phone calls; and supervised or unsupervised visits.

- When comparing families with no contact to families who had some type of contact with birthparents, there were no statistically significant differences between minority/interracial adoptive families and Caucasian adoptive families. Also, there were no statistically significant differences when comparing pre-finalization contact only with one or both birthparents and pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact. Among Caucasian adoptive families, 35% had no contact and 65% had some type of contact. Of the 65% with some type of contact, 43% had pre-finalization only contact, and 57% had pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact. Among minority/interracial adoptive families, 37% had no contact and 63% had some type of contact. Of the 63% with some type of contact, 33% had pre-finalization only contact and 67% had pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact.
- There were statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) in the level of contact when examining the age at placement of the adopted child. For children whose families had no contact, the average age at placement was 4.69 years of age. For children whose families had some type of contact with birthparents, the average age at placement was 6.74 years.
- Families in this sample who adopted children who had experienced physical neglect were significantly more likely than families who adopted children who had not experienced physical neglect to have contact with one or both birthparents (75.6%) versus no contact (24.4%). This held true regardless of whether physical neglect was the sole cause of the child's removal from the birth family or occurred in combination with other circumstances. There were no significant differences related to neglect, however, when comparing pre-finalization contact only and pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact.
- There was a statistically significant relationship for families who were mandated to have contact pre-finalization and whether they had contact post-finalization ( $p < .05$ ). For families who were mandated to have pre-finalization contact with one or both birthparents ( $n=20$ ), the majority did not continue the contact after finalization. Of the twenty families, 70% had contact pre-finalization only and 30% reported contact post-finalization. For the 28 families<sup>4</sup> who were not mandated to have contact with birthparents pre-finalization, 82% of them had post-finalization contact with birthparents.
- Despite the parenting challenges, 88% of parents ( $n=141$ ) believed their child's adoption was a success, 11% ( $n=17$ ) were not sure, and 2% ( $n=3$ ) said their adoption was not a success. Attachment issues, significant behavioral problems of the child and the lack of services were cited as reasons for parents believing their adoptions were not successful.
- When asked to offer advice to prospective adoptive families, families in the study most frequently suggested that adoptive families

<sup>4</sup>Eighteen percent of the 28 families had voluntary contact with birthparents pre-finalization that stopped after finalization.

should display commitment to the child and to the adoption process. They needed to be flexible, tolerant, patient, love the child unconditionally, and maintain a sense of humor.

- When asked to offer advice to adoption agencies, adoptive families suggested that adequate resources and services, such as respite, subsidy, support groups and counseling, should be provided to both the family and the child.

Since the mid 1980s, several Federal legislative initiatives have been instituted in order to increase opportunities for permanency for children in the public child welfare system. The number of adoptions of children from foster care has steadily increased in the years since the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (AACWA), also known as the “Family Reunification Act”. This legislation was passed in order to help facilitate the permanent placement of children, either through reunification with the birth family or, in cases where this was not possible, placement in an adoptive home. The Act established the principles of permanency planning for children in foster care by requiring the development of comprehensive case plans. In addition, AACWA placed limits on the amount of funding that states could receive for foster care services, thereby encouraging the establishment of services provided to children in their home rather than in foster care. AACWA also provided federal funding to states to subsidize adoptions of special needs children. Yet, despite these measures, the legislation had little effect on slowing the entry of children into the foster care system.

In response to concerns regarding the growing number of children in foster care, in 1997, Congress enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), Public Law 105-89. Hoping to facilitate quicker placement of children into permanent homes, Congress included more stringent timelines for parents with children in foster care by requiring states to pursue termination of parental rights if a child has been in foster care for 15 out of the most recent 22 months. While the legislation stipulated that reasonable efforts should be made to reunify families when possible, the legislation encouraged states to plan concurrently for adoption while working towards the goal of family reunification

so that an adoptive placement could be made more quickly should the state need to seek termination of parental rights. Other adoption-related provisions included the stipulation that states must implement policies and procedures for cross-jurisdictional placements and the establishment of a federally funded adoption incentive program.

The Adoption Incentive Program provided incentives or states to increase the number of adoptions. Under the 2003 amendments to the program, incentive funds are awarded to states if they exceed the overall baselines for either foster child adoption, older child adoption, or special needs adoption. States receive \$4,000 for each adoption over the established baseline with an additional \$2,000 for each adoption that is finalized with a Title IV-E Adoption Assistance agreement (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006b). In 2005, twenty-one states qualified for incentive funds through the adoption incentive program totaling over \$11,568,000 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006a).

In the years since ASFA was enacted, the number of adoptions has risen from approximately 31,000 in 1997 to over 51,000 in 2005 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). In 2002, a record number of foster children were adopted – approximately 53,000 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006d). Currently, over three-fourths of all adoptions from the U.S. public child welfare system meet the criteria for “special needs adoptions” (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2002). The term “special needs adoptions” generally refers to adoption of children who are older, belong to a sibling group, or have physical, mental, or emotional problems. In addition, the term also often refers to adoptions of children of color (Reilly & Platz, 2003).

Children adopted from the foster care system in 2005 were an average age of 6.7 years old at the time of adoption. An overwhelming majority of children were adopted by their foster parents (60%) or other relatives (25%). Only 15% (7,502) of the children were adopted by non-relatives. Of the children adopted in 2005, 43% were Caucasian, 30% were African American, 18% were Hispanic, 5% were two or more racial/ethnicities, 2% were an “Unknown” race/ethnicity, 1% were Native American, and 1% were Asian (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006c).

Despite the dramatic increase in the number of children adopted from foster care, thousands of children are still awaiting adoption. According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), the data reporting system for children in foster care, of the 514,000 children in foster care in the U.S. in 2005, 115,000 children were waiting to be adopted. Of these children, only 66,000 have had their parental rights terminated. Over half of the children waiting to be adopted are children of color. Children waiting to be adopted were an average of 5 years old when removed from their birthparents and by September 2005 were an average age of 8.6 years old (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).

### **Background of Research**

Several federal initiatives in recent years have called for research in order to better understand the process of adopting and increase the success of adoptions from foster care. In 2000, the Children’s Health Act of 2000 called for two research studies as described below: Section 330G (c) (2) of the Act states:

*With respect to the adoption of children with special needs, the Secretary shall make grants to carry out studies to identify (A) the barriers to completion of the adoption process; and (B) those components that lead to favorable long-term outcomes for families that adopt children with special needs.*

In 2002, the Adoption Exchange Association was awarded a five-year contract from the U.S. Children's Bureau to establish The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids in order to design and implement a national adoptive family recruitment and retention strategy aimed to increase the number of adoptions from foster care. As part of The Collaboration and in order to comply with the preceding legislative requirements, the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work was awarded a contract to conduct the two congressionally mandated studies.

Similarly, ongoing concerns regarding the need to find adoptive homes for waiting children in the U.S. led to another legislative directive/requirement to provide a report to Congress on the "Dynamics of Successful Adoption." Found in Section 204(b) of the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 (P. L. 108-36 - June 25, 2003), the research requirement was described as follows:

*The Secretary shall conduct research (directly or by grant to, or contract with, public or private nonprofit research agencies or organizations) about adoption outcomes and the factors affecting those outcomes. The Secretary shall submit a report containing the results of such research to the appropriate committees of the Congress not later than the date that is 36 months after the date of the enactment of the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003.*

In keeping with the Congressional requirements, over the past four years, two research studies have been conducted to assess barriers and success factors in special needs adoptions. Families and staff were recruited for participation in both the Barriers study (Study 1) and Success Factors study (Study 2) primarily through direct contact with public and private adoption-agency staff and members of The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids (The Adoption Exchange Association, The Child Welfare League of America, The Northwest Adoption Exchange, The Adoption Exchange Education Center, and Holt International Children's Services). Specific criteria for the types of families needed was given to The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids workgroup members in an effort to help in the recruitment of families for inclusion in both the Barriers study and the Success Factors study. Special attention was placed on including families in the Barriers study who: were first time adopters; were early in the application process; were not trying to adopt a foster child who was in their home; and did not have a child placed in their home for adoption.

In the Barriers study, a nationwide purposive sample of 300 families seeking to adopt children with special needs from the public child welfare system was selected from public and private agencies in 44 states and the District of Columbia. The families have been followed from initial inquiry through finalization of their child's adoption. Interview and survey data were collected and analyzed in order to assess reasons why families chose to follow through with an adoption or discontinue the process. Three hundred eighty-two private and public agency staff from 29 states and the District of Columbia were surveyed to assess their opinions regarding barriers and to elicit suggestions for addressing barriers.

In the Success factors study, a four-year prospective examination was conducted of a nationwide sample of 161 families from 34 states and the District of Columbia who had adopted children with special needs. Special attention was placed on including families who had adopted older children (particularly between the ages of 12-16 years), sibling groups, and children who had been in the foster care system for several years, in order to glean information on how these families and children were adjusting and what factors contributed to positive outcomes. Adoptive parents were interviewed by research staff and periodically administered surveys, including the Parenting Stress Inventory and a marital satisfaction scale. The following report presents the findings from both of these studies.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Prior to the initiation of family recruitment, the Principal Investigator, Ruth G. McRoy, and project staff developed the protocol for the research studies and family and staff data collection instruments. The protocol and instruments were submitted for approval to The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB committee granted approval before data collection began. Continuing Review applications were submitted every year for re-approval of both studies. In addition, several of the participating public agencies reviewed and approved the UT-IRB process and/or required a separate application and approval from their agency before participation.



## Barriers Study: Methods And Demographics

### Family Participants Methods

The goal of the Barriers study was to identify actual and potential barriers to the completion of the adoption process from the perspective of a nationwide sample of 300 families seeking to adopt children from the foster care system. These families were seeking to adopt from public and private agencies. It is important to note that the private agencies contracted with the state (public) agencies to facilitate adoptions of children from foster care. As families entered the study they were assigned to one of two categories: 1) those who were in the process of adopting a child from the foster care system were referred to as “Continuing” and 2) those who had ceased the process of adopting a child from the foster care system were referred to as “Discontinued.” Continuing families may have been at any point in the process, from the initial adoption application to a completed home study and awaiting placement. Some of these families may have originally applied through one agency and then worked with another agency, but were still continuing the process. The majority of prospective adopters were experiencing the process for the first time and had not yet had a child placed in their home when they began participation in the study. There were, however, a few families included in the sample who had adopted previously (and were participating in this study while they were seeking to adopt for the second or third time) or had already received a child, but the adoption was not finalized. “Discontinued” families were either no longer seeking to adopt at all or were no longer seeking to adopt a child from the foster care system. The latter group of families decided to pursue international adoption or the adoption of an infant through a private agency.

### **Initial Data Collection**

Initially, adoption agencies mailed “family packets” to prospective adoptive families qualifying for participation in the study. Families interested in participating were asked to return their packets to the University of Texas Research Team. These packets included consent forms for participation and a demographic form to be completed by families. Participating families then completed an “Adoption Process Questionnaire” which consisted of a series of 21 questions to assess which parts of the adoption process had been completed at the point of enrollment in the study. Upon completion of the process questionnaire, research team members used a structured interview schedule to conduct telephone interviews (usually about one and one half hours) to gather detailed information about the parts of the adoption process completed by the participant at the time of the interview. Discontinued families were given the option of completing an interview or a mailed survey and were asked questions about all parts of the process that they had completed prior to discontinuing their efforts to adopt from foster care. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

### **Follow-up Data Collection**

Upon completion of the initial interview, continuing prospective adoptive families were sent a follow-up survey every four months until a child was placed in the home for adoption and the adoption was finalized, or until the family decided to discontinue trying to adopt a child from the foster care system. This survey included questions about their experiences attempting to adopt since the initial data collection period.

### **Exit interviews**

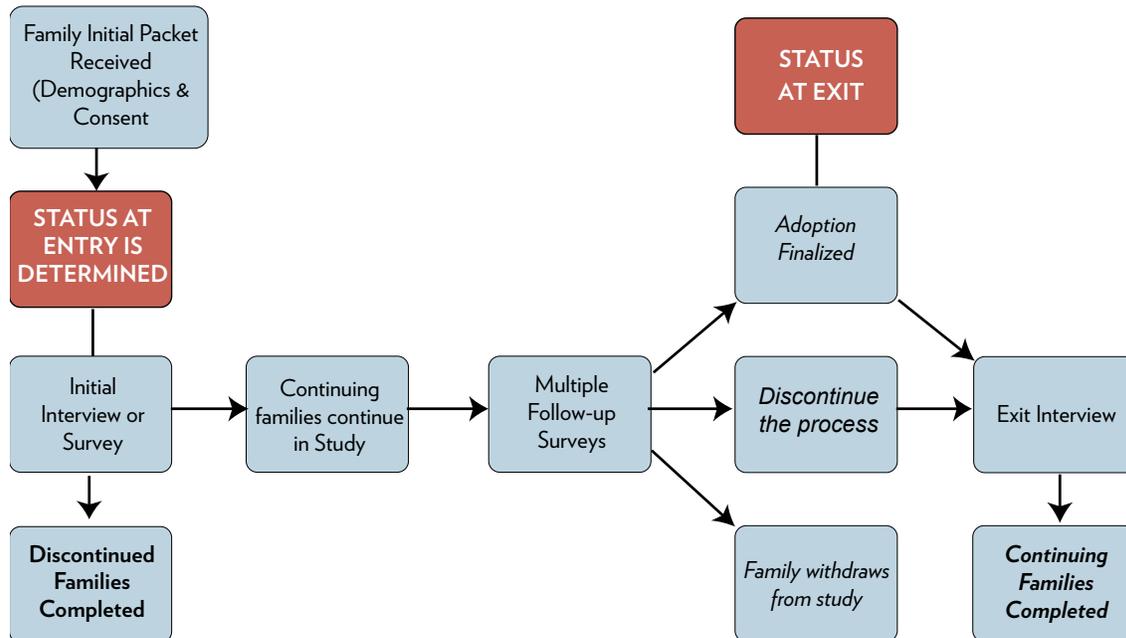
Families exited the study in one of three ways: 1) through finalizing the adoption of a child placed in their home; 2) by choosing to discontinue the adoption process of a child from foster care (which moved the family into the discontinued category); or 3) by choosing to withdraw from the study. Exit telephone interviews were conducted with families falling into the first two groups. These interviews contained questions pertaining to their experience since the last interview and finalization of the adoption, or where appropriate, questions pertaining to the reasons for discontinuing their plan to adopt from foster care.

An illustration of the process of data collection in this prospective study is provided, [see Figure 1](#).

### **Coding Methodology**

Codebooks were developed and tested. Transcribed interviews were then coded by the Barriers study coding team, which was comprised of thirteen staff members: two experienced coders (doctoral students) who served as team leaders and 11 graduate students trained by the team leaders. Coder training entailed two three-hour classes for each of the three codebooks used, followed by the whole team coding and consensing together one to three cases until the team demonstrated acceptable reliability. After training, adoptive family interviews were assigned to a pair of trained coders. After independent coding by the two team members, the pair met for consensus to resolve any areas of disagreement by choosing the most appropriate code. The codes were then checked by one of the two coding team leaders to ensure group reliability as a whole. Individual coding team members were randomly rotated to ensure that the various

Figure 1. Barriers Study Data Flow



pairs of coders were following the same decision-making conventions. The two coding team leaders also coded cases, rotating through working with different team members.

### Demographic Characteristics of Barriers Study Family Participants

#### Family Structure: Initial Data Collection

A sample of 300 families was selected to participate in the Barriers study. The majority, 62%, were married couples, 4% were unmarried same-sex couples, 1% were unmarried opposite-sex couples, 28% were single females, and 5% were single males.

#### Family Status

At the time of initial data collection, 252 (84%) families were continuing the process of adopting and 48 (16%) families had discontinued the process.

#### Age, Education, and Family Income

The average age of the prospective adoptive mothers participating in the Barriers study was 41 years and prospective fathers was 43 years. Prospective adoptive mothers had completed an average of 16 years of education and fathers an average of 15 years of education. There were no significant differences in the income level of those who were continuing the adoption process and those who chose to discontinue. The families who were continuing in the adoption process had an average income of \$72,399 and the families who had discontinued \$71,956.

#### Family Ethnicity by Family Status

Participants were each asked to identify their ethnic background. In cases in which each parent was ethnically mixed, the couple was considered ethnically mixed or “mixed” (e.g., male is Caucasian

and African American as well as the female is Caucasian and African American). Interracial couples were those in which the participants were of different ethnicities. In this sample, there were 23 interracial couples (N=23; 18 continuing; 5 discontinued). Most prospective adoptive families in the study were Caucasian (N=195; 163 continuing;

32 discontinued). The second largest group in the study was African American families (N=59, 48 continuing, 11 discontinued). There were no Native American, Asian, Hispanic, or Mixed Ethnicity families in the sub-sample of families who had already discontinued at study entry.

**Table 1. Family Structure**

<b>Family Structure</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent*</b>
Married Couples	185	62%
Unmarried couples-same sex	11	4%
Unmarried couples-opposite sex	3	1%
Single females	85	28%
Single males	16	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	

\*Percentages do not always add to 100% due to rounding

**Table 2. Family Ethnicity by Family Status**

<b>Status</b>	<b>Total Families</b>	<b>Native American</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Inter-racial</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Caucasian (non-Hispanic)</b>
Continuing	252	3 (1%)	1 (<1%)	48 (19%)	15 (6%)	18 (7%)	4 (2%)	163 (65%)
Discontinued	48	0	0	11 (23%)	0	5 (10%)	0	32 (67%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>3 (1%)</b>	<b>1 (&lt;1%)</b>	<b>59 (20%)</b>	<b>15 (5%)</b>	<b>23 (8%)</b>	<b>4 (1%)</b>	<b>195 (65%)</b>

### Family Ethnicity by Type of Agency

Family ethnicity is presented in the table below according to type of agency used. Almost all families were more likely to use private than public agencies (See Table 3.) but African American, Hispanic, and interracial families were twice as likely to use private agencies than public agencies: African American (N=42, private; N=17, public); Hispanic families (N=10, private; N=5, public); and interracial families (N=16, private; N=7, public). Of the three Native American families, one used a private agency and two used a public agency.

### Adoptive Parent Sample

Three hundred families who were in the process of adopting from the child welfare system were selected for participation in the Barriers study. Over the past four years, these families were interviewed periodically by telephone. At the close

of data collection, July 1, 2007, 98 families (33%) had completed the process, received children and finalized their adoptions, 102 (34%) families had discontinued the process of adopting a child through the child welfare system, and 16 families (5%) were still continuing in the process. Among the 16 families who were still in the process of adopting, 7 families had been approved to adopt but were waiting for children to be placed in their homes and 9 families had children placed with them, but the adoptions had not yet finalized. The remaining 84 families (28%) were re-contacted throughout the four-year period but for various reasons stopped responding to our requests for updates, so their final adoption outcome is unknown. In this report, data from the 102 families who discontinued the adoption process and the 98 families who finalized an adoption are highlighted (N=200). These groups will be referred to as “discontinued” and “finalized.”

Table 3. Family Ethnicity by Type of Agency

Status	Total Families	Native American	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Inter-racial	Mixed	Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
Private	175	1 (33%)	1 (100%)	42 (71%)	10 (67%)	16 (70%)	2 (50%)	103 (53%)
Public	125	2 (67%)		17 (29%)	5 (33%)	7 (30%)	2 (50%)	92 (47%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>3</b> (100%)	<b>1</b> (100%)	<b>59</b> (100%)	<b>15</b> (100%)	<b>23</b> (100%)	<b>4</b> (100%)	<b>195</b> (100%)





## Barriers Study: Family Perspectives

### Barriers Study Barriers to Adoption: Family Perspectives

#### Sample Description

##### Type of Adoption by Family Status

The results presented in this section are based on data collected from 200 families (98 who finalized an adoption and 102 who discontinued the adoption process). The majority (92%) of the 200 families in the Barriers study were general adopters (families who adopted a child with whom they had no prior relationship) (n=183). Of the remaining 17 families, 8 were seeking to adopt a foster child in their home (1 discontinued; 7 finalized adoptions); 1 discontinued adopter and 1 finalized adopter were applying to adopt a relative; and 7 families were applying to adopt a specific child (with whom they were acquainted, but had not fostered) (4 discontinued; 3 finalized adoptions). Families who were trying to adopt specific children with whom they were already acquainted typically had met these children in a variety of ways: as their therapist, teacher, residential treatment worker, and/or through family or friends who were fostering the children. After meeting and interacting with the children the families decided they wanted to adopt them and began the adoption process.

As noted in Table five, 87 (48%) of the 183 general adopters eventually finalized an adoption, 17 (9%) discontinued the adoption process after a disrupted placement, 50 (27%) discontinued the adoption process after being approved for adoption, and 29 (16%) discontinued prior to the completion of training and a home study. Of the 8 foster parent adopters, 7 (88%) finalized an adoption and 1 (13%) discontinued after approval. Of the 7 child specific adopters, 3 (43%) finalized an adoption, 2 (29%)

discontinued the adoption process after being approved, and 2 (29%) discontinued prior to the completion of training and a home study. Of the 2 relative adopters, 1 (50%) finalized an adoption and 1 (50%) discontinued the adoption process prior to the completion of training and a home study.

**Table 4. Type of Adoption by Family Status**

Status	Total Families	General Adopters	Adopting foster child in the home	Adopting a relative	Applying to adopt specific child NOT in the home
Discontinued	102	96 (94%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	4 (4%)
Finalized	98	87 (89%)	7 (7%)	1 (1%)	3 (3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>183 (92%)</b>	<b>8 (4%)</b>	<b>2 (1%)</b>	<b>7 (4%)</b>

**Table 5. Point of Completion by Type of Adoption**

	Discontinued during orientation/application	Discontinued prior to completion of training/home study	Discontinued after approval and child referral (no placement)	Discontinued after disrupted placement (no finalization)	Finalized	Total (N=200)
General adoption	4 (2%)	25 (14%)	50 (27%)	17 (9%)	87 (48%)	183 (100%)
Foster adoption	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)	7 (88%)	8 (100%)
Child specific adoption (non-relative)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	2 (29%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)	7 (100%*)
Relative/kin adoption	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	2 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 (3%)</b>	<b>27 (14%)</b>	<b>53 (27%)</b>	<b>17 (9%)</b>	<b>98 (49%)</b>	<b>200 (100%)</b>

\*Percentages do not always equal 100% due to rounding

## RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT KIND OF CHILDREN DO FAMILIES MOST DESIRE TO ADOPT?

### Type of Child Family Desired to Adopt

The sample of 183 general adopters were asked the type of children they most desired to adopt, were willing to adopt, and those they were unwilling or unable to adopt. Overall, families most desired to adopt females and children aged 11 or younger. Families indicated a willingness to adopt children of varying racial backgrounds; however, the majority of families desired to adopt Caucasian children. Many families said they were willing to consider adopting children who experienced prenatal drug use, had learning disabilities, or ADD/ADHD, but were

unwilling or unable to adopt children with multiple handicaps or children with HIV/AIDS. Very few families indicated they most desired children with physical disabilities, medical fragility, or those with a prior history of sexual abuse or sexual acting out.

During the interviews, families frequently made comments expressing their discomfort with having to indicate to agencies what type of child they desired to adopt and what type of child they were unwilling or unable to adopt.<sup>5</sup> Families who were required by agencies to complete “type of child” forms for their adoption application expressed similar discomfort with this request.

Table 6. Gender Desired by Family (n = 183 families)\*

Gender	Male	Female
Most desired	73 (40%)	97 (53%)
Willing to adopt	89 (49%)	75 (41%)
Unwilling/unable	21 (11%)	11 (6%)

\*General adopters only

<sup>5</sup> Is it important to note that families may have provided responses they felt were more socially desirable.

**Table 7. Age of Child Desired by Family (n = 183 families)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>&lt; 1 mo</b>	<b>1 mo - 11 mo</b>	<b>1 - 2 yrs</b>	<b>3 - 4 yrs</b>	<b>5 - 11 yrs</b>	<b>12 - 18 yrs</b>
Most desired	59 (32%)	59 (32%)	77 (42%)	69 (38%)	46 (25%)	16 (9%)
Willing to adopt	56 (31%)	56 (31%)	64 (35%)	78 (43%)	91 (50%)	38 (21%)
Unwilling/ unable	68 (37%)	68 (37%)	42 (23%)	36 (20%)*	46 (25%)	129 (70%)

\*General adopters only

\*Percentages do not always to 100% due to rounding

**Table 8. Race/Ethnicity of Child Desired by**

<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Caucasian</b>	<b>African Am.</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Native Am</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Mixed Race</b>
Most desired	82 (45%)	50 (27%)	45 (25%)	34 (19%)	30 (16%)	49 (27%)
Willing to adopt	75 (41%)	88 (48%)	119 (65%)	113 (62%)	118 (64%)	122 (67%)
Unwilling/unable	26 (14%)	45 (25%)	19 (10%)	36 (20%)	35 (19%)	12 (7%)

\*General adopters only

\*Percentages do not always to 100% due to rounding

**Table 9. Special Needs of Child Desired by Family (n = 183 families)**

<b>Special Needs</b>	<b>Inter-Country</b>	<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	<b>Pre-natal Drug Exp.</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>Sexually Abused</b>
Most desired	17 (9%)	2 (1%)	4 (2%)	60 (33%)	3 (2%)
Willing to adopt	128 (70%)	49 (27%)	137 (75%)	93 (51%)	136 (74%)
Unwilling/unable	38 (21%)	132 (72%)	42 (23%)	30 (16%)	44 (24%)

\*General adopters only

Table 9. Special Needs (n = 183 families) (Continued)

Special Needs	Medically Fragile	Phys. Disability	Sexual Acting Out	Multiple Handi-caps	Learning Disability	ADD/ADHD
Most desired	4 (2%)	5 (3%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)	10 (5%)	9 (5%)
Willing to adopt	87 (48%)	97 (53%)	74 (40%)	48 (26%)	157 (86%)	150 (82%)
Unwilling/ unable	92 (50%)	81 (44%)	107 (58%)	133 (73%)	16 (9%)	24 (13%)

\*General adopters only

\*Percentages do not always add to 100% due to rounding

## RESEARCH QUESTION 2: WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE FAMILIES WERE REGISTERED ON ADOPTUSKIDS OR ANOTHER ADOPTION EXCHANGE?

### Adoption Exchange Registration

In the Barriers study, 98 families who had finalized their adoptions were asked if they had registered

with an adoption exchange, and if so, which and how many exchanges? As noted in the following table, a total of 58 (59%) families indicated that they registered on at least one exchange. The most common response was registration on state-specific exchanges (n = 36, 37%) and the second most common was with AdoptUSKids (n = 33, 34%).

Table 10. Adoption Exchanges

Type of Adoption Exchange	Families Registered (N=98)	%
State-Specific	36	37%
AdoptUSKids	33	34%
Local	7	7%
Agency-Specific	6	6%
Multi-State	6	6%
Other	4	4%
Did not specify	0	0%
<b>Total registered on at least one exchange*</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>59%</b>

\*Some families were registered on more than one exchange and therefore the percentages and N's do not add up to the total number of respondents or 100%.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES WHO DISCONTINUED THE PROCESS?

#### Average age, average years of education, and average income for families who discontinued the adoption process

Of the 102 families in the Barriers study who discontinued the adoption process, the average age of both prospective adoptive mothers and prospective adoptive fathers was 41. Prospective adoptive mothers averaged 17 years of education; prospective adoptive fathers averaged 15 years of education. The average family income of families who discontinued the adoption process was \$73,242. The average family income for couples was \$87,219, \$47,969 for single females, and \$62,389 for single males.

#### Family Ethnicity

Participants were asked to identify their ethnic background. In cases in which each parent was ethnically mixed, the couple was considered ethnically mixed or “mixed” (e.g., Caucasian and African American male and Caucasian and African American female). Interracial couples are those in which the participants were of different ethnicities. Of the 102 discontinued families, 71 families (70%) identified themselves as Caucasian (non-Hispanic), 22 families (22%) identified themselves as African American, 6 families (6%) were interracial, 2 families (2%) identified themselves as Hispanic, and 1 family (1%) was mixed.

#### Family Structure

Of the 102 families in the sample who discontinued the adoption process, 59 (58%) were married couples, 2 (2%) were unmarried same-sex couples, 2 (2%) were unmarried opposite-sex couples, 29

Table 11. Family Ethnicity of Discontinued Families

(N=102)		
Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	71	70%
African American	22	22%
Interracial	6	6%
Hispanic	2	2%
Mixed	1	1%
Asian	0	0%
Native American	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100%*</b>

\*Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

(28%) were single females, and 10 (10%) were single males.

### Discontinued Families: Type of Adoption

Of the 102 discontinued families in the Barriers study, the majority (N=96, 94%) were considered general adopters. Four (4%) families applied to adopt a specific child, one (1%) family desired to adopt a child they were fostering, and 1 (1%) family applied to adopt a relative.

### Prior Experience Adopting a Child

Out of 102 discontinued families, the majority (N=88, 86%) families were applying to adopt for the first time. However, 9 (9%) families were adopting for the second time and 4 (4%) families for the third or fourth time.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 4: WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES WHO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE ADOPTION PROCESS BY FINALIZING AN ADOPTION?

Table 12. Family Structure of Discontinued Families

(N=102)		
Family Type	Number	Percent
Married Couples	59	58%
	2	2%
	2	2%
Single Females	29	28%
Single Males	10	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	

Table 13. Type of Adoption by Family

(N=102)		
Type of Adoption	Number	Percent
General adoption	96	94%
Child specific adoption (non-Relative)	4	4%
Foster adoption	1	1%
Relative/Kin adoption	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 14. Number of Children Adopted Previously**

<b>Prior Adoption Experience</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
NO	88	86%
Yes, second adoption	9	9%
Yes, third adoption	3	3%
Yes, fourth adoption	1	1%
Not able to determine from interview	1	1%
<b>Total (N=102)</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Average Age, Average Years of Education, and Average Income**

Of the 98 families who completed the process and finalized their adoptions, the average age of prospective adoptive mothers was 41, and the average age of prospective adoptive fathers was 42. Prospective adoptive mothers averaged 16 years of education; prospective adoptive fathers averaged 14 years of education. The average family income of families who finalized the adoption process was \$73,114. Average income for couples was \$85,005,

\$42,424 for single females, and \$35,000 for singles males.

### **Family Ethnicity**

Of the 98 finalized families, 68 (69%) families identified themselves as Caucasian (non-Hispanic), 15 (15%) families identified themselves as African American, 9 (9%) families were interracial, 3 (3%) families were Hispanic, 2 (2%) families were mixed, and 1 (1%) family was Native American.

**Table 15. Family Ethnicity of Finalized Families**

<b>(N=98)</b>		
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	68	69%
African American	15	15%
Interracial	9	9%
Hispanic	3	3%
Mixed	2	2%
Native American	1	1%
Asian	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* Percentages do not always add to 100 due to rounding

### Family Structure

Of the 98 families in the sample who finalized an adoption, 60 (61%) were married couples, 7 (7%) were unmarried same-sex couples, 1 (1%) was an unmarried, opposite-sex couple, 29 (30%) were single females, and 1 (1%) was a single male.

### Type of Adoption

Of the 98 finalized families in the Barriers study, the majority (n=87, 89%) were general adopters. Seven families (7%) adopted a child they were fostering, 3

families (3%) applied to adopt a specific child, and 1 family (1%) adopted a child that was a relative.

A comparison of characteristics of families who discontinued the adoption process and families who completed the adoption process found that there were no statistically significant differences between the two samples on any of the above “type of adoption” variables: general adoption, foster adoption, child specific (non-relative) adoption, and relative/kin adoption.

Table 16. Family Structure of Finalized Families

(N=98)		
Family Type	Number	Percent
Married Couples	60	61%
Unmarried couples-same sex	7	7%
Unmarried couples-opposite sex	1	1%
Single Females	29	30%
Single Males	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 17. Type of Adoption of Family

(N=98)		
Type of Adoption	Number	Percent
General Adoption	87	89%
Foster Adoption	7	7%
Child Specific Adoption (Non-Relative)	3	3%
Relative/Kin Adoption	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 5: ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN MOTIVATION FOR ADOPTION BETWEEN FAMILIES WHO COMPLETED THE PROCESS AND THOSE WHO DISCONTINUED THE PROCESS?**

#### **Motivation to Adopt through Foster Care**

Study participants were asked why they chose to adopt a child with special needs through the foster care system rather than completing a private infant adoption or seeking an international adoption. Responses were similar among finalized (N=98) and discontinued (N=102) families. The five most common responses were: “wanted to help a disadvantaged child/child with special needs/child waiting in foster care” [n=45 (46%) finalized and n=42 (41%) discontinued]; “financial reasons – too expensive to do private or international” [n=39 (40%) finalized and n=35 (34%) discontinued]; “didn’t want a baby” [n=25 (26%) finalized and n=22 (22%) discontinued]; “wanted an older child” [n=17 (17%) finalized and n=24 (24%) discontinued]; and “there are so many children in the U.S. that I do not want to do an international adoption” [n=25 (26%) finalized and n=14 (14%) discontinued].

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 6: WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN ADOPTED BY FAMILIES WHO COMPLETE THE PROCESS?**

#### **Demographics of Adopted Children**

In this study, 98 families completed the adoption process, received children, and finalized their adoptions. A total of 158 children were adopted by these families. Twenty-two adopted children (14%) were less than one year old, 62 children (39%) were between 1-5 years old, 48 (30%) children were between 6 and 10 years old, 18 children (11%) were between 11-13 years, and 8 children (5%) were 14 years or older. Just over half (n=81, 51%) were

female, while 75 children (47%) were male. Gender data for 2 children (1%) was missing. Sixty children (38%) were Caucasian, 38 children (24%) were biracial, 28 children (18%) were African American, and 18 children (11%) were Hispanic. Ethnicity data for 14 children (9%) was missing. One-hundred thirty-nine children (88%) were part of a sibling group.

The most challenging child issues known by the adoptive families at placement were medical needs (n=34, 22%), history of abuse and neglect prior to adoption (n=34, 22%), ADHD (n=29, 18%), educational needs (n=26, 16%), behavioral problems (n=22, 14%), and prenatal drug or alcohol exposure (n=22, 14%).

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 7: WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN PLACED WITH THE PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE FAMILIES, BUT WHOSE PLACEMENTS THEN DISRUPTED BEFORE FINALIZATION?**

#### **Demographics of the Children Whose Adoptive Placements Disrupted**

Seventeen of the 102 discontinued families 17 (17%) had children placed with them for adoption, whose placements later disrupted and the families discontinued their plans to adopt. A total of 19 children were placed with these 17 families. Three children (16%) were less than one year old, 3 children (16%) were between 1-5 years old, 8 children (42%) were between 6 and 10 years old, 3 children (16%) were between 11-13 years, and 2 children (11%) were 14 years or older. Twelve children (63%) were female, and 7 children (37%) were male. Nine children (47%) were Caucasian, 1 child (5%) was African American, 1 child (5%) was Hispanic, and 2 children (11%) were biracial. Ethnic background data for 6 children (32%) were

missing. Nine children (47%) were part of a sibling group.<sup>6</sup>

The most challenging child issues known by prospective adoptive families at placement of these children were ADHD (n=5, 26%), medical needs (n=4, 21%), behavioral problems (n=3, 16%), and educational needs (n=3, 16%). Additional issues at the point of disruption, which were not known to the prospective adoptive parents at placement, included: developmental/cognitive delays or mental retardation (n=6, 32%); mental/emotional health or difficulty controlling emotions (n=5, 26%); physical aggression (n=5, 26%); history as a victim of sexual abuse (n=4, 21%); and lack of ability to attach appropriately (n=4, 21%).

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS 8 & 9: IN WHICH PARTS OF THE ADOPTION PROCESS DO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS ENCOUNTER THE MOST BARRIERS? WHAT ARE THE MOST FREQUENT BARRIERS THEY ENCOUNTER AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE PROCESS?**

After in-depth analyses of the transcripts of interviews with the 200 (102 finalized and 98 discontinued) families, the participants were divided into the following five groups based on the steps in the adoption process they had completed:

1. Families who made an initial contact with an agency, who may have attended orientation, and who started or completed their initial application, but then discontinued the adoption process;
2. Families who had completed an application, but discontinued the adoption process prior to approval, during either the training or home study process;
3. Families who completed their home study and training, were approved, but never had a child placed with them;
4. Families with whom a child was placed, but the adoption disrupted prior to finalization and the family subsequently discontinued the adoption process; and
5. Families who completed the adoption process, received a child, and finalized the adoption.

The families' experiences with the adoption process were coded to assess child, family, and agency barriers that each group of families experienced. Coders read the entire transcript and identified every barrier that families felt impacted their entire adoption process. These barriers for the 5 family groups are discussed in the "Overall Barriers" sections below. After identifying the overall barriers, coders then attempted to narrow the list of barriers to those that appeared to most negatively impact the families' adoption process. These barriers are discussed below for the 5 family groups in the sections "Top Barriers."

Barrier codes were analyzed and grouped into factors representing related or similar responses.<sup>7</sup> Child factors include child's attachment (child's ability to attach to adoptive family), foster care experiences and history (child experiences in the

<sup>6</sup> In the group of 9 children who had siblings, 3 children were 1/2 siblings who were placed together in one adoptive home. The other 6 children had siblings who were either adopted by other families, placed with a relative, had different permanency goals, or whose whereabouts were unknown to the prospective adoptive parents. The 10 children who were indicated as not having siblings may have had siblings that the prospective adoptive parents did not know about or did not report.

birth-family and foster care, history and length in care), child’s behavior, child’s health, child’s mental health, child’s educational needs, and child demographics (e.g., age and race).

Family factors include: family commitment (to child and adoption process), family’s ability to interact with systems (ability to work with child welfare system, school system, etc.), support systems (formal and informal), family preparation and expectations (life experiences such as prior adoptions, level of expectations, family understanding of type of child available), parent-child match, family composition, family dynamics (e.g., level of functioning prior to adoption application, and spousal disagreement),

child integration (how completely family accepts child), parenting ability and temperament, change in personal circumstances (change due to relocation, death, illness, unemployment, etc.), and family distress at placement disruption/child no longer available.

Agency factors include: availability of services (e.g., therapy, respite), agency emotional support (agency encouragement and helpfulness), availability of financial support (e.g., Medicaid, subsidy), adoption process logistics (e.g., jumping through hoops, red-tape), legal system interactions (legal assistance during TPR, finalization), jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (challenges with

**Table 18. Steps in Adoption Process Completed by Families in the Barriers Study**

<b>(N=200)</b>			
<b>Steps Completed</b>	<b>Discontinued Families</b>	<b>Finalized Families</b>	<b>Total</b>
Group 1: Initial contact, orientation, and/or application	5 (5%)	0	5 (3%)
Group 2: Application completed but discontinued prior to approval (during home study, training)	27 (26%)	0	27 (14%)
Group 3: Approved, received referral(s) or no referral, no child placed	53 (52%)	0	53 (27%)
Group 4: Child placed but no finalization (disrupted placement)	17 (17%)	0	17 (9%)
Group 5: Finalized adoption	0	98 (100%)	98 (49%)*
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>200</b>

\* Percentages do not always equal 100% due to rounding.

<sup>7</sup> See the appendix for charts of barrier factor definitions and results.

working with multiple agencies, counties, states), family assessment (agency screening process), level of agency bias and cultural competence, agency communication/responsiveness (agency communication, worker competence, information sharing and disclosure), and adoption exchange (helpfulness of exchange, worker response to exchange inquiries).

The family data were analyzed to identify barriers that influenced the overall adoption process for each family. Families identified, on average, 10.5 barriers that negatively impacted their adoption process. For each family, the top barriers<sup>8</sup> that had the greatest impact on the family's decision to discontinue the adoption process, or presented the greatest challenges for families who finalized an adoption, were then identified. The top barriers do not represent all of the barriers experienced by a family, but rather those barriers that had the greatest influence on their family and their adoption process. The results within each group reported below indicate first the information on all barriers encountered by families in that group, followed by top barriers that families reported in that group.

Additional statistical analysis were completed to determine if there was any relationship between the types of barriers reported and the family groups. For categorical items, comparisons were conducted using Fisher's Exact Test, a non-parametric alternative to the chi-square test of independence used when sample sizes are small and expected frequencies are low. The number of child, family and agency factors were all statistically significantly related ( $p < .05$ ) to the group assignment for families.

Seventy-seven percent of families in Group 4 (disrupted placement) and 40% of families in Group 5 (finalized adoption) reported child factors to be overall barriers to their adoption process. All families in Group 1 (discontinued after orientation) and Group 4 (disrupted placement) reported family factors as barriers to their overall adoption process. Fifty percent of Group 5 (finalized adoption) reported family factors. Families in all five groups reported agency factors as barriers to their overall adoption process: 80% of Group 1; 93% of Group 2; 100% of Group 3; 100% of Group 4; and 100% of Group 5.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on the groups to determine if the number of child factors, family factors, and agency factors was related to the family group. Frequencies for each type of factor reported by families were significantly related to the group assignment ( $p < .05$ ).

Families in Group 4 (disrupted placement) report a mean of 4.1 agency factors followed by Group 5 (finalized) reporting a mean of 3.9 agency factors and Group 3 (discontinued after approval) reporting 3.6. Groups 1 and 2 reported less than 3 agency factors per family, on average.

Family factor barriers were most frequently reported by Groups 1 and 4 with a mean of 2.0 and 2.6 respectively. All other groups reported a mean of less than 2 family factors per family. Group 4 families (disrupted placement) reported a mean of 1.2 child factors. Groups 1, 2, 3 and 5 all reported a mean of less than 1 child factor.

<sup>8</sup> The top barriers reported for the five groups of families are the most critical 2-3 barriers reported by families. Most families reported experiencing a total of at least 15 barriers during the adoption process.

A post-hoc analysis was conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences between groups for each factor type: child, family and agency. The Games-Howell was used because it is robust even with unequal group sizes, violations to normality and unequal variances. For child factors, the following groups differed significantly in the number of factors reported: Group 1 (discontinued after orientation/application) and Group 4 (disrupted placement); Group 2 (discontinued during training/home study) and Group 4 (disrupted placement), with Group 4 (disrupted placement) reporting the highest number of child factors on average. For family factors, the following groups differed significantly in the number of factors reported: Group 2 (discontinued during training/home study) and Group 5 (finalized adoption); Group 3 (discontinued after approval) and Group 4 (disrupted placement); Group 3 (discontinued after approval) and Group 5 (finalized adoption); Group 4 (disrupted placement) and Group 5 (finalized adoption), with Group 5 (finalized adoption) reporting the fewest family factors on average. For agency factors, the following groups differed significantly in the number of factors reported: Group 1 (discontinued after orientation/application) and Group 4 (disrupted placement); Group 1 (discontinued after orientation/application) and Group 5 (finalized adoption); Group 2 (discontinued during training/home study) and Group 5 (finalized adoption), with Groups 4 (disrupted placement) and 5 (finalized adoption) respectively reporting the highest number of agency factors on average.

Chi-square test of independence was conducted on the most frequently reported agency factors to determine if there was a relationship between those factors and the group assignments. The most frequently reported agency factors were: agency emotional support, adoption process logistics,

jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues, and agency communication/responsiveness. All of these factors, except jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues were significantly related to the family's stage of completion in the adoption process (Groups 1-5).

The jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues factor was equally distributed across the five groups. Agency emotional support was reported by 130 families, forty-five percent of which were in Group 5 (finalized adoption) and 31% of which were in Group 3 (discontinued after approval). Adoption process logistics was reported by 185 families; 52% fell into group 5 (finalized adoption) and only 8% in Group 4 (disrupted placement). Of the 159 families reporting agency communication/ responsiveness, 49% were in Group 5 and less than 1% was in Group 1. See Table 19 for complete data.

### **Group 1 Families**

Five prospective adoptive families made initial contact with the agency, participated in an orientation session, and completed an application before they discontinued the process. Two out of 5 (40%) families in Group 1 worked with private agencies, and 3 out of 5 (60%) in Group 1 worked with public agencies.

*Overall Barriers.* When the total number of barriers was analyzed for this group, family factors remain the primary type of barrier that influenced this group's decision to discontinue the adoption process. Additional family factors mentioned include family composition, parent-child match, and family distress at placement disruption/child no longer available. In addition, some families identified agency factors as areas of concern for them. These factors included adoption process logistics, family assessment, agency

communication/responsiveness, agency emotional support and availability of financial support.

*Top Barriers.* All families in this group cited family factors as reasons for discontinuing the adoption process. One family also cited an agency factor. These participants did not cite any child factors as barriers to their adoption process. The family factors included family commitment, family dynamics, change in personal circumstances, and

family preparation and expectations. The family who identified an agency factor as influential in their decision to discontinue cited adoption process logistics as a barrier. Specifically, this family was concerned that the process would take too long.

### **Group 2 Families**

Twenty-seven prospective adoptive families completed an application to adopt but discontinued

**Table 19. Most Frequently Reported Agency Factors**

<b>Family Group</b>	<b>Agency emotional support</b>	<b>Adoption process logistics</b>	<b>Jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional</b>	<b>Agency communication/responsiveness</b>
Group 1 (n=5) Discontinued after orientation/ application	1 (.8%)	3 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (.6%)
Group 2 (n=27) Discontinued during training/ home study	16 (12.3%)	22 (11.9%)	3 (5.8%)	19 (11.9%)
Group 3 (n=53) Discontinued after approval	40 (30.8%)	50 (27%)	15 (28.8%)	46 (28.9%)
Group 4 (n=17) Discontinued after disrupted placement	15 (11.5%)	14 (7.6%)	5 (9.6%)	15 (9.4%)
Group 5 (n=98) Finalized adoption	58 (44.6%)	96 (51.9%)	29 (55.8%)	78 (49.1%)
<b>Total Number of families reporting factor</b>	<b>130 (100%)</b>	<b>185 (100%)</b>	<b>52 (100%)</b>	<b>159 (100%)</b>

\* The percentages are based on the number of families reporting each factor and therefore add up to 100% for each factor.

prior to finishing the training and/or home study. Ten out of 27 (37%) of families in Group 2 worked with private agencies and 17 out of 27 (63%) families in Group 2 worked with public agencies.

*Overall Barriers.*<sup>9</sup> When all barriers were identified by families in this group, we found that five families (19%) reported child factors, 21 families (78%) reported family factors and 25 families (93%) reported agency factors. The most frequently reported child factor in the overall barriers was child's mental health (11%). The most frequently reported family factors were change in personal circumstances (37%), followed by parent-child match, family commitment, family composition, family preparation and expectations, and family dynamics, all at 19%. For fifteen percent of families, parenting ability and temperament was a barrier.

In the overall barriers, the main agency factors were adoption process logistics (81%), agency communication/responsiveness (70%), agency emotional support (59%) and level of agency bias and cultural competence (30%).

The following quote is illustrative of barriers experienced by families in this group:

*“The main barriers are getting social workers to call you back. Had it not been – I mean my son was not on any of the websites. Had he not needed an immediate placement and they placed the call to our agency, I wouldn't have known about it. And the kids that are on the website – it takes forever to get information, to get caseworkers to call back. I mean there are kiddos on there now that were there two*

*years ago when I first started looking. And, you know, you just get no response. I mean there are a lot of kids I've asked about and you don't get responses.”*

*Top Barriers.* The top barriers experienced by families in this group were all family factors (59%) or agency factors (63%). Change in personal circumstances led 33% of the families in this group to discontinue. Examples of these changes included relocation, job change, marital status change, and death/illness in the family. Fifteen percent identified barriers related to family preparation and expectations, including parents' expectations of the children available for adoption. Seven percent cited family dynamics as a barrier. Each of the following three family factors were indicated by 4% of the families in this group as barriers: parenting ability and temperament, family commitment, and family composition.

This group reported six agency factors: adoption process logistics (41%), agency communication/responsiveness (33%), agency emotional support (26%), level of agency bias and cultural competence (7%), availability of services (4%), and family assessment (4%).

### **Group 3 Families**

Fifty-three families were approved for adoption but never had a child placed with them and subsequently discontinued the adoption process. Thirty-six out of 53 (68%) families in Group 3 worked with private agencies, and 17 out of 53 (32%) worked with public agencies.

<sup>9</sup>Percentages will not add to 100% because participants could have mentioned more than one family factor.

*Overall Barriers.* When all barriers mentioned by families in this group were explored, the frequency of barriers reported increased in all factor types: child, family and agency factors. The most reported child factor was child’s foster care experiences and history (26%), followed by child’s mental health (11%) and child’s health (8%). The most reported family barriers were change in personal circumstances (32%), parent-child match (23%), family preparation and expectations (21%), family commitment (17%), and family dynamics (17%).

The most often reported agency barriers were adoption process logistics (94%), agency communication/responsiveness (87%), agency emotional support (75%), jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (28%), level of agency bias and cultural competence (28%) and availability of services (26%).

Families discussed their feelings in the following quotes:

*“The waiting for a match was very challenging. And it was gut-wrenching at times because you know your profile is sitting on somebody’s desk and this one person who has never met you before is going to decide if you are right for this child that you know you’re right for. And that was the part of the process that’s just—I know it’s impossible for every caseworker to meet with every parent who’s involved with every kid. But for us, we felt like we were just so ready; the waiting and everything being out of our hands was the most gut-wrenching and challenging part of the process.”*

*“We would get calls that would never go further than the initial call. ‘We have this*

*child, are you interested ...’ and my answer was always, ‘yes’. It just never seemed to happen. I guess 5 or 6 times they called like that and I said, ‘what’s the next step?’ ‘Well, I’ll call you back with the details, blah, blah, blah’. But the call back never came.”*

*“Many times – we waited, kept getting put off, then would get a letter saying the child was placed with another family – too emotionally draining. They should do their homework prior to telling you they think they have a match. We were never told why we were not chosen.”*

*Top Barriers:* Few families (13%) in Group 3 reported child factors to be the top barrier influencing their decision to discontinue. Families in this group primarily reported family factors (53%) and agency factors (81%) to be the top barriers.

The child factors identified as top barriers were foster care experiences and history (6%) and child’s mental health (4%).

Twenty-six percent of the families reported change in personal circumstances as a primary cause of discontinuing the process. Nine percent cited family commitment. The three other most frequently indicated family factors were parent-child match (8%), family preparation and expectations (8%), and family dynamics (8%).

Families in Group 3 also described agency factors that impeded their adoption process. The top four agency factors were adoption process logistics (51%), agency communication/responsiveness (49%), agency emotional support (42%), and jurisdictional

and inter-jurisdictional issues (13%). One example of a specific difficulty was the frustration families experienced after being referred a child, expressing interest, and then not being chosen for that child, often without being given a reason for the agency's choice.

#### **Group 4 Families**

The 17 families in this group discontinued the adoption process after a disrupted placement. Eleven out of 17 (65%) families who experienced a disrupted placement worked with private agencies, and 6 out of 17 (35%) worked with public agencies.

*Overall Barriers.* When the total number of barriers was analyzed for this group, the frequency of families reporting barriers increased in all three factor types: child, family and agency factors. All families in this group (100%) identified agency and family barriers. Families identified six child factors, with foster care experiences and history (53%) and child's attachment (29%) being the most frequently identified. Families again reported nine family factor barriers influencing their decision to discontinue the adoption process, with the most frequently cited barrier being family distress at placement disruption/child no longer available (94%), parent-child match (41%), family commitment (24%), support systems (24%), family preparation and expectations (24%) and family dynamics (24%).

In the overall barriers, families reported 9 agency factor barriers. The most frequently reported of the agency factor barriers were agency emotional support (88%), agency communication/responsiveness (88%), adoption process logistics (82%), availability of services (53%), jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (29%), level of

agency bias and cultural competence (29%), and legal system interactions (24%).

One example of an agency communication/responsiveness barrier concerns disclosure of information about the child to the adoptive family. Families reported instances of child information being withheld, misrepresented, or potential issues they may encounter in the future being minimized.

One family discussed their feelings in the following quote:

*“When it came to reviewing the kids’ files and everything, they lied to us. They didn’t tell us, you know, the problems that these kids were having, and there wasn’t anything in their files that we read about some of the things that, you know, we found out later on after we had the kids. You know. None of this. And so, we found out that the little boy had been sexually abused when he was younger by his grandfather, which, you know, we did not know. So we didn’t know how to deal with it when it started coming out. That’s when we started taking him to get help. But, it, it was probably the worst experience that we’ve been through in our lives. I don’t think we ever want to go through it again.”*

*Top Barriers:* Child factors were reported as top barriers by 29% of families in Group 4, more than in any other group: child's attachment (12%), foster care experiences and history (18%), child's behavior (6%), and child's mental health (6%). Nine family barrier factors were reported as top barriers in this group: family distress at placement disruption/child no longer available (65%), parent-child match (18%), family commitment (12%), family dynamics (12%), and child integration (12%).

Families in this group reported eight agency factors as top barriers. They were level of agency emotional support (71%), agency communication/responsiveness (47%), adoption process logistics (41%), availability of services (29%), level of agency bias and cultural competence (18%), legal system interactions (18%), jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (18%), and family assessment (6%).

### **Group 5 Families**

The 98 families in this group finalized an adoption. Fifty-six out of 98 (57%) finalized families worked with private agencies and 42 out of 98 (43%) families worked with public agencies.

*Overall Barriers.* When the total number of barriers was analyzed for families in Group 5, the frequency of families reporting barriers increased in all factor types: child, family and agency factors. The most frequently reported child factors were foster care experiences and history (26%) and child's behavior (14%). The most frequently reported family factors were family commitment (18%), family preparation and expectations (15%), and family composition (10%).

In the overall barriers, the families reported ten agency factors. The most frequently reported were adoption process logistics (98%), agency communication/responsiveness (80%), agency emotional support (59%), availability of services (39%), jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (30%), legal system interactions (27%), and level of agency bias and cultural competence (22%).

One family discussed their feelings in the following quote:

*“Well, for me with my daughter, once the decision was made, she needed a placement and we went and got her. The very, very easiest was falling in love with her. All you have to do is look at her. She’s a challenge, but she’s just—we have a lot in common. It was an excellent match.”*

*Top Barriers.* Although these families completed the adoption process, they still identified barriers encountered in the adoption process. Specifically, they reported five top child factors, eight top family factors and ten top agency factors that were barriers to their process. The most frequently reported top child factors were child's foster care experiences and history (6%) and child's behaviors (6%). Of the top family factors, the most reported were family preparation and expectations (9%), family commitment (6%), family composition (4%), and child integration (4%).

Families in Group 5 most frequently reported agency factors as the top barriers in their adoption process. The most frequently identified top agency factors were adoption process logistics (68%), agency communication/responsiveness (46%), agency emotional support (23%), availability of services (15%), jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (14%), legal system interactions (11%), and level of agency bias and cultural competence (10%). Examples of availability of services include lack of therapy, support groups, and psychiatric services.

### **Summary:**

- Families in Group 1 who discontinued very early in the process reported that family factors were most influential in their decision to discontinue the adoption process.

- Families who finalized an adoption (Group 5) were less likely to report family-related barriers than families in Groups 1-4 (all families who discontinued the process of adopting a child from foster care) when barriers were analyzed overall, as well as when barriers were analyzed for the top barriers that led them to discontinue.
- Families in Group 4 (disrupted placement) experienced the highest frequency of child barrier factors (76%), but only twenty-nine percent of the families in this group reported child factors to be among the top barriers that influenced their decision to discontinue the process of adopting a child from foster care.
- Families who finalized an adoption (Group 5) or discontinued after a disrupted placement (Group 4) reported the most agency related barriers. Ninety-eight percent of the 98 families who had finalized adoptions and 82% of the 17 families with a disrupted placement identified adoption process logistics as an agency barrier factor. A trend emerges that indicates this factor is reported by more families as they move further along in the adoption process: Group 1 = 60%, Group 2 = 81%, Group 3 = 94%, Group 4 = 82%, and Group 5 = 98%. When analyzing the prevalence of the factor as a top barrier, a similar trend emerges: Group 1 = 20%, Group 2 = 41%, Group 3 = 51%, Group 4 = 41%, and Group 5 = 68%.
- Families who discontinued the adoption process after approval or after a disrupted placement and families who finalized an adoption from foster care (Groups 3-5) reported the highest number of agency barriers overall. Families

who finalized an adoption (Group 5) reported the highest number of agency barriers as top barriers in their adoption process

**RESEARCH QUESTION 10: WERE THERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FAMILIES OF COLOR AND CAUCASIAN FAMILIES IN THEIR IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS TO ADOPTION?**

To assess whether there were any differences in barriers to adoption between families of color and Caucasian families, the two types of families in each of the five adoption process groups were compared on all child, family, and agency factor barriers. For families who finalized an adoption of a child from foster care, there were no statistically significant differences between families of color and Caucasian families on any of the factors.

However, differences were found among families who discontinued the adoption process. When analyzing the top barriers reported by families who discontinued the adoption process, there were statistically significant differences ( $p=.05$ ) between families of color and Caucasian families on one family factor, family dynamics (e.g., level of functioning prior to adoption application, and spousal disagreement), and one agency factor, jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (challenges with working with multiple agencies, counties, states). Families of color were more likely to report the family factor, family dynamics, (19% v. 4%) and Caucasian families were more likely to report the agency barrier, jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (14% v. 0%).

In an analysis of the overall barriers impacting the adoption process for families who discontinued,

there were also statistically significant differences ( $p=.05$ ) between families of color and Caucasian families on two family factors, family distress at placement disruption/child no longer available and change in personal circumstances, and one agency factor, jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues. Caucasian families were more likely to report the family factor, family distress at placement disruption/child no longer available (24% v. 7%), and families of color were more likely to report the family factor, change in personal circumstances (change due to relocation, death, illness, unemployment, etc) (42% v. 23%). Caucasian families were more likely to report the agency barrier, jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (30% v. 7%).

the agency barrier, jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (30% v. 7%).

#### **Summary:**

- When analyzing the top barriers reported by families who discontinued the adoption process, families of color were more likely to report the family factor, family dynamics (19% v. 4%), and Caucasian families were more likely to report the agency barrier, jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues (14% v. 0%).
- In an analysis of the overall barriers impacting the adoption process for families who discontinued, Caucasian families were more likely to report the family factor, family distress at placement disruption/child no longer available (24% v. 7%), whereas families of color were more likely to report the family factor, change in personal circumstances (change due to relocation, death, illness, unemployment, etc) (42% v. 23%). Caucasian families were more likely to report

**Table 20. Barriers Experienced by Families of Color and Caucasian Families**

<b>Overall Barrier Comparison For Families with Discontinued Adoptions (n=102)</b>	<b>Was a barrier</b>	<b>Families of Color (n=31)</b>		<b>Caucasian Families (n=71)</b>		<b>Total (n=102)</b>	
Family distress at placement disruption/ Child no longer available*	No	29	93%	54	76%	83	81%
	Yes	2	7%	17	24%	19	19%
Change in personal circumstances*	No	18	58%	55	77%	73	72%
	Yes	13	42%	16	23%	29	28%
Jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues*	No	29	93%	50	70%	79	77%
	Yes	2	7%	21	30%	23	23%
<b>Top Barrier Comparison For Families with Discontinued Adoptions (n=101**)</b>	<b>Was a barrier</b>	<b>Families of Color (n=31)</b>		<b>Caucasian Families (n=70)</b>		<b>Total (n=101**)</b>	
Family dynamics*	No	25	81%	67	96%	92	91%
	Yes	6	19%	3	4%	9	9%
Jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues*	No	31	100%	60	86%	91	90%
	Yes	0	0%	10	14%	10	10%

\* p<.05

\*\* One family did not report any factor-related barriers in the “top barrier” analysis, so they are not represented in this sample.

## METHODS

To obtain additional perspectives on barriers to adoption, the research team distributed surveys to participating public and private agencies for completion by administrative staff, recruitment staff, adoption exchange staff, adoption subsidy staff, and family and child workers. A goal of 360 completed staff surveys was set. The 29 items on the survey included questions assessing agency and system barriers, family and child-related barriers, solutions to overcome barriers, and child's preparation for adoption. The survey was available to agencies in either electronic or hard copy form. Electronic copies were sent to agency liaisons via e-mail attachments and liaisons were asked to forward the survey to all available adoption-related staff for completion. Hard copies were mailed in individual packets to agency liaisons and individual packets were provided to all available adoption-related staff. Both versions of the survey were sent with a cover letter, which contained instructions for completing and returning the survey. Hard copy surveys were also distributed at national, regional and local conferences and trainings by the Principal Investigator or AdoptUSKids Trainers.

Approximately 1,659 surveys were sent to staff in 34 states and Washington, D.C. A total of 382 (23%) surveys were returned. Of the surveys returned, 113 (30%) were completed by staff working in private adoption agencies, and 269 (70%) were completed by staff working in public adoption agencies. Surveys were returned from staff located in 29 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>10</sup>

### Staff Demographics

Of the 382 respondents, 323 (85%) were female, 39 (10%) were male, and 20 (5%) did not provide information about their gender. On average, staff respondents had worked at their current agency 10.3 years. Two hundred sixty-nine staff (70%) worked in a state agency and 113 (30%) worked in a private agency.

### Results

From a list of agency, family, and child-related factors, staff respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the extent to which they believed these factors were barriers to the adoption process, with “1” indicating “not a barrier at all” and “5” indicating a “major barrier.” For purposes of analysis, ratings of 2 and 3 were combined to indicate “somewhat a barrier” and responses 4 and 5 were combined to indicate “major barrier.” The top five agency, family, and child factors rated by staff as “major barriers” are described below. Additional analyses were conducted on the seven states with public and private agency representation (59 private agency staff and 78 public agency staff) to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between public and private agency staff members’ perceptions of major agency, family, and child-related barriers, using a significance level of .05. Unless otherwise noted, statistically significant differences were not found between public and private agency staff perceptions of major barriers.

### Agency – Related Barriers

1. **Inadequate pool of families appropriate for adoption of children with special needs / Inadequate pool of prospective adoptive families (in general).**

Of the 382 staff respondents, 67% (N=255) rated “inadequate pool of families appropriate for adoption of children with special needs” as a “major barrier” (rated a 4 or 5 on the rating scale). Fifty percent also rated “inadequate pool of prospective adoptive families (in general)” as a major barrier.

After rating each factor listed on the survey on a scale from 1 to 5, survey respondents were given an opportunity to identify strategies for overcoming the factors they rated as “major barriers.” For example, to overcome the problem of having an inadequate pool of prospective adoptive families, the majority of respondents stated that agencies should increase their efforts at family recruitment. More specifically, staff noted that “recruitment of minority families” and “families willing to adopt older children and sibling groups” were needed. Other solutions to this barrier included: 1) hiring workers whose sole responsibility is recruitment; 2) improving and increasing marketing and community awareness; and 3) dedicating state funds to statewide recruitment. One respondent also added that agencies should “utilize our

<sup>10</sup> Findings must be interpreted with caution, as samples in each state are not representative and may not include responses from both public and private agency staff. Of the 29 states and the District of Columbia, there were seven states from which both public and private agency surveys were received. These states include Arizona, California, Illinois, Minnesota, Mississippi, Texas, and Colorado. Of these seven, 3 are among the states with the highest numbers of available children waiting for adoption: Texas with 10,147 waiting children, California with 4,903 waiting children, and Illinois with 3,621 waiting children.

families to get the word out about adopting,” as [adoptive] families are “a major resource we have yet to use.”

There was a statistically significant difference in how public and private agency adoption staff perceived barriers related to inadequate pools of families, in general and for children with special needs. Analyses revealed that 60% of adoption staff working in private agencies rated “the lack of families appropriate for adoption of special needs children” as a major barrier, whereas 80% of adoption staff in public agencies rated it as a major barrier.

**2. Jurisdictional issues related to termination of parental rights (publication, litigation, full dockets, etc.)**

Forty-eight percent (N=183) of survey respondents rated “jurisdictional issues related to termination of parental rights” as a major barrier. Full dockets, paperwork delays, too few judges and court personnel, appeals by birthparents, and judges giving birthparents “too many chances” were all cited as reasons for delays in the termination process.

Over half (59%) of respondents who rated this a major barrier believed that hiring more judges and attorneys and training and educating judges and attorneys, specifically about the Child Protective Service system and termination of parental rights, would begin to address this barrier. Other solutions offered by respondents included changing current laws and policies to speed up the process, prioritizing TPR cases,

increasing communication and cooperation within the jurisdictions, and reducing caseloads or hiring more staff to address the problem of paperwork delays.

**Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC)**

Of 382 staff respondents, 46% (N=176) believed that there were barriers in relation to the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC). Poor communication and coordination between states, failure to adhere to timelines, and disagreement between states regarding responsibility for services were all cited as problematic aspects of the ICPC process. One respondent characterized the ICPC process as a “large barrier for out-of-state adoptions... Once a family is selected in another state and the ICPC application has been processed, the child CANNOT visit the selected family. Time to bond must be put on hold; often the process takes 6 to 9 months to get approval in the receiving state.”

Solutions that were suggested by staff to overcome barriers related to ICPC included streamlining the entire process, holding states accountable for ICPC timelines and service provision, and promoting cooperation among workers while also emphasizing worker persistence. One staff member specifically suggested that “bureaucratic barriers” to the ICPC process be reduced by “hold[ing] states accountable for delays in completing home studies or approving placement, [and] eliminating discrepancies between IV-E Medical Assistance and non-IV-E Medical Assistance for kids moving across state lines.”

There was a statistically significant difference in how public and private agency adoption staff perceived ICPC barriers. Analyses revealed that 34 percent of adoption staff in private agencies rated ICPC as a major barrier, whereas 64 percent of adoption staff in public agencies rated it as a major barrier.

### 3. Size of workers' caseloads

Forty-five percent (N=172) of survey respondents rated "size of workers' caseloads" as a major barrier to the successful completion of the adoption process. For many caseworkers, this not only included the number of cases carried but also a number and range of responsibilities in areas other than adoption, such as child protection. Both were thought to create delays in the adoption process.

Of the respondents who listed caseload size as a major barrier, 62 percent said the solution to this problem was to reduce caseloads by hiring more staff. In addition, respondents believed that worker responsibilities needed to be reorganized or reduced in order to increase their focus on adoption cases. They believed that hiring more workers might also help to relieve some of the additional responsibilities that they have. Respondents suggested that in order to hire and retain competent and committed staff, agencies should increase pay as well as pay compensatory and overtime.

There was a statistically significant difference in how public and private agency adoption staff

perceived caseload barriers. Analyses revealed that 42 percent of adoption staff in private agencies rated caseload size as a major barrier, whereas 63 percent of adoption staff in public agencies rated it as a major barrier.

### 4. Availability of post-adoption services after finalization / Lack of respite care

Forty-two percent (N=160) of survey respondents believed that the lack of availability of post-adoption services after finalization was a major barrier in the adoption process. Services seem to be particularly scarce in rural areas. One respondent noted the "limited availability of services for children with serious special needs, especially in the area of mental health and sexual abuse." Forty percent also rated the lack of respite care services as a major barrier.

More than half of respondents (56%) who rated lack of post-adoption services as a major barrier believed that funding was the best solution to this problem. While some respondents noted that existing services should be improved, most concluded that existing services could be expanded and improved through funding, and that new services could be offered if more funding was available. One respondent proposed that prospective adoptive families provide respite for families who have adopted, which would provide a needed service for adoptive families, and serve the purpose of providing the hands-on training that respondents believed to be critical in several areas of family training and education.

## Family – Related Barriers

### 1. Prospective adoptive parents’ specificity in type of child desired (i.e. parent wants young child with minimal special needs)

Sixty-seven percent (N=256) of agency staff survey respondents rated the adoptive parents’ specificity in the type of child they desired to adopt as a major barrier to the adoption process. Survey responses indicate that prospective adoptive parents may have unrealistic expectations about the type of children available for adoption or unrealistic behavioral expectations of children with special needs. Furthermore, responses seemed to indicate that many prospective adoptive parents want to adopt a young, Caucasian child with minimal special needs.

Of the respondents who rated this as a major barrier, 49% believed that the barrier could be overcome through training and education of prospective adoptive parents, as well as hands-on experience with children who have been in foster care. Related to the idea of hands-on experience, one staff member added that “nurturing the relationship between the adoptive parent and former foster parent can be very helpful in helping adoptive families broaden their perspectives on the needs of the child and how community resources can be very helpful.” Additional suggestions to overcome this barrier included recruiting families who are open to adopting older children, sibling groups, and children of color, and improving the screening process of prospective adoptive

parents. Respondents recommended that agency staff members “be more picky” and get more information from prospective parents in the screening process, suggesting that careful and thorough screening early on may reveal prospective parents’ desires and expectations and areas in which training and education were needed. Beyond better screening, survey respondents believed that workers have a responsibility to give prospective adoptive families accurate, honest, and thorough information about the type of children who are available for adoption.

### 2. Prospective adoptive parents’ criminal background (major offenses, such as crimes against a person or substance abuse convictions)

Fifty-one percent (N=195) of survey respondents rated the criminal background of prospective adoptive parents as a major barrier to families being approved for adoption and completing the adoption process. Specifically, offenses such as crimes against a person and substance abuse convictions tended to keep many families from being approved for adoption.

Of the 51% who rated criminal background problems as major barriers, 28% of survey respondents reported that the barrier should not be overcome or the barrier could not be overcome. Staff also recommended that prospective adoptive parents should be better screened and that criminal and background checks should be thorough and conducted as early as possible.

### **3. Prospective adoptive parents' inability or unwillingness to accept certain characteristics in a child's history or background**

Forty-five percent (N=172) of staff survey respondents rated prospective adoptive parents' inability or unwillingness to accept certain characteristics of a child's history or background as a major barrier. Some staff members perceive that parents' unwillingness to accept a child's background is due to a lack of education and misunderstanding that "love will solve the problem." Other survey respondents reported that some parents expect children to adapt to their home environment, rather than parents and children adapting and changing together.

More than half (64%) of respondents who rated this factor as a major barrier suggested training and education should be offered for prospective adoptive families which "stretches" families' perception of what types of children and behaviors they can handle. Related to training and education, respondents suggested that training in the form of hands-on experience with children who have lived in foster care would be beneficial. Agency support and family therapy were also offered as ideas for increasing families' acceptance of children's backgrounds and histories.

There was a statistically significant difference in how public and private agency adoption staff perceived barriers related to prospective parents' inability or unwillingness to accept certain child background and history characteristics. Analyses revealed that 41% of

adoption staff in private agencies rated this as a major barrier, whereas 61% of adoption staff in public agencies rated it as a major barrier.

### **4. Prospective adoptive parents unwillingness to access services or community resources**

Forty-four percent (N=168) of staff survey respondents rated prospective adoptive parents' unwillingness to access services or community resources as a major barrier to the completion of the adoption process.

Of the 44 percent who rated this factor as a major barrier, 45% believed that family training and education were needed to overcome this barrier. Specifically, families needed to be educated on services and resources available in the community, and they needed to be trained on how to access these services and resources. One survey respondent added the following:

"It should be known that our children need safe, stable, loving parents and environments; needing parents who are assertive and who can get the child's needs met if/as they arise. They need parents who are mentally and physically healthy so there is a probability of longer term permanence for the child."

Some adoption staff believed that in addition to training and educating families, more services and resources were needed in the community. In addition, the existing services and resources available in the community should be improved and better funded, namely in the areas of agency

support services and family therapy.

5. **Prospective adoptive parents' lack of experience with special needs children**

Forty-one (N=157) percent of staff survey respondents perceived prospective parents' lack of experience with special needs children to be a major barrier to the adoption process.

The majority of these respondents (53%) recommended training and education to overcome this barrier. Twenty-one percent also recommended that family training include hands-on experience with children who have lived in foster care or that families be matched with an adoptive family that can serve as a "mentor" for the prospective family. Adoption staff believed that close supervision and support by the agency would be helpful, as would therapy for the family and adopted child.

### **Child – Related Barriers**

1. **Child's age**

A large majority of survey respondents reported that a child's age (11 years old or older) was a major barrier to the adoption process. Eighty-four percent (N=321) rated "14 or older" as a major barrier, and 54% (N=206) rated "11 - 13 years old" as a major barrier. One respondent expressed the following sentiment: "We leave kids in inadequate foster homes for too long and let kids get too old in the system. We have no budget for special needs adoption recruitment, even though we know we have hundreds of waiting kids."

When asked to suggest ideas for overcoming barriers related to age, just over half (51%) of respondents who rated these to be major barriers thought that recruitment was the solution to age barriers. Respondents reported that recruitment efforts should be targeted and focused on families who are willing to adopt older children. Staff members recognized that the agency's role in overcoming age barriers not only involved recruitment but also increasing community awareness and use of media campaigns. Furthermore, some respondents believed additional family training and education about older children in the system might result in more families considering adoption of an older child. One respondent suggested that agencies and workers "increase the push for parents to adopt teens – end this cycle within systems that says teenagers are unadoptable and don't need families." Another added that agencies should "provide child-specific recruitment efforts to adolescents to locate resources who had an established connection with youth (birth family member, previous foster parent, mentor, coach, teacher, etc.)."

2. **Child is currently engaging in sexual perpetrating behaviors/ Child has a history of sexual perpetration**

Adoption staff who responded to the survey rated "child's current sexual perpetrating behaviors" and "child's history of sexual perpetration" as major barriers to the adoption process (81%, N=309 and 77%, N=294 respectively). Workers noted that a lack of adequate therapeutic services to address sexual perpetration issues further

compounds this barrier, as does prospective adoptive parents' fears that adopting a child with sexual perpetration issues will harm or negatively impact other children living in their homes.

Of survey respondents who rated sexual perpetration issues as major barriers, 46% believed that funding for therapy and support group services for the child and for families was critically needed during pre- and post-adoption. Some workers stated that these services already existed, but that the services would be improved by having therapists who were specifically trained to work with children and families, who could address problems and issues that are unique to adopted children and adoptive families. In addition, adoption staff believed that prospective adoptive parents could benefit from additional training and education, specifically on sexual perpetration issues and handling associated behavioral issues. Five percent of workers believed that children who have histories of being sexual perpetrators or who continue to be sexual perpetrators should not be placed in homes with other children.

**3. Child is currently engaging in sexually acting out behaviors. Child has a history of sexual acting out (i.e. public masturbation, provocative, etc.)**

Children currently engaging in sexually acting out behaviors or children with histories of sexual acting out were both rated by survey respondents to be major barriers (78%, N=298 and 74%, N=283, respectively). Similar to barriers related to sexual perpetration, workers noted that the lack of services, lack of funding

for services, and lack of adequate therapeutic services made these barriers even more problematic.

Suggestions for overcoming these barriers were similar to those suggested to address sexual perpetration issues, with the exception of placement with no other children. Again, survey respondents reported a need for funding to create new services for children and families, as well as a need to improve existing services. Family training and education on special needs and behavioral issues of children were also provided as ideas to address sexual acting out issues.

**4. Need for siblings to be placed together (group of 3 or more)**

Fifty-six percent (N=213) of survey respondents reported that sibling groups of 3 or more needing to be placed together was a major barrier to placement, due to the overall inadequate pool of prospective adoptive families and because some prospective adoptive families' unwillingness or inability to adopt a sibling group of this size.

Respondents who rated this as a barrier stated that the problem may be overcome by recruiting families who wish or are willing to adopt a sibling group of this size. It also may be addressed by educating current families on the importance of keeping sibling groups together, so that families may broaden their conceptions of what types of children, and how many children they wish to adopt or can handle.

## 5. **Child has behavior problems in the home**

Fifty percent of staff survey respondents reported that children's behavior problems in the home were major barriers in the adoption process. Among the problems mentioned by staff were oppositional defiant behavior, verbal and physical aggression, manipulation, and lying.

Of the 50% who rated behavioral problems in the home as a major barrier, 33 % believed that support and therapy for both the child and the family was necessary to overcoming this barrier. Beyond availability of therapy, staff members believed that the quality of the therapeutic services was equally if not more important. One staff member elaborated by saying children should be enrolled in "...positive counseling, not just someone who the kids can bowl over with their stories of abuse and neglect, someone who will get in there and work with the children." Other ideas for overcoming this barrier included training and education for families, particularly in the area of behavioral issues and special needs. Staff members also believed that improved parenting in the form of increased supervision, consistency, and discipline, may be helpful in reducing behavior problems in the home.

Differences were noted in perspectives between public and private agency respondents. Adoption staff working in private agencies and public agencies identified agency or administrative, family, and child-related factors that they perceived to be major barriers to the successful completion of the adoption process.

Statistically significant differences existed between public and private agency staffs' perceptions of major agency and family-related barriers. Although public and private agency staff agreed that the lack of families available and appropriate to adopt children with special needs was a major barrier, public agency staff believed this to be a greater barrier than did private agency staff. Public and private agency staff also differed in how they perceived ICPC and caseload size as major barriers, with public agency staff rating these as greater barriers than private agency staff. In the rating of family-related barriers, more public agency staff rated the prospective adoptive parents' ability or unwillingness to accept a child's background and history as a major barrier than did staff working in private agencies.





## Success Factors Study: Methods & Demographics

### Methods

As part of The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids, researchers at the University of Texas at Austin conducted a 4-year prospective examination of a nationwide sample of successful adoptive families who adopted children with special needs. Successful adoptive families were defined as families whose finalized adoptions remained intact and the adoptive parents remained committed to parenting the adopted child. A nationwide sample of public and private adoptions agencies were asked to assist in identifying adoptive families for participation in the study. Special attention was placed on including families who had adopted older children (particularly between the ages of 12-16 years), sibling groups, and children who had been in the foster care system for several years, in order to glean information on how these families and children were adjusting and what factors contributed to positive outcomes. In addition, some families were included whose adopted children were under the age of six at the time of placement but had severe special needs. Although all types of adoptions were included in this sample, the majority were general adoptions which were arranged through both public and private agencies. The sample also includes single parent, foster parent adoptions, and relative adoptions.

Initially adoption agency staff mailed a “family packet” to adoptive families qualifying for participation. As families submitted completed “packets” to the project office, one adopted child from the family was selected as the “focus child” for the family. The focus child was selected on a case-by-case basis after reviewing the demographic information provided by the adoptive parents. Criteria used to determine the focus child included the age of the child at placement, the quality and

severity of the child's special needs, the level of challenge the child presented to the parents, and the length of time the child had been in the adoptive home. The final study sample consisted of 161 families who had adopted at least one child who had been in the home for 1-14 years at the time of participation in the study.

Telephone interviews (usually lasting 2-3 hours) were conducted with one adoptive parent per family using a semi-structured interview schedule. Many interviews lasted longer than three hours, as the adoptive parents seemed to love talking about their families. Topics covered in the interview included: 1) adoptive parent background and adoption process; 2) couple's relationship at the time of the adoption; 3) child's history and background experiences in foster care; 4) child preparation for adoption and the adoption process; 5) family and child adjustment at the time of the adoption; 6) current adjustment to the adoption and adoptive parent feelings about the child; 7) bonding/attachment/relationship with child; 8) post-adoption services; 9) preparation for ongoing contact with birth family members; and 10) transracial adoption experiences (if applicable). These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to the complex nature of these adoptive parent interviews, all interviewers were members of the Collaboration to AdoptUSKids core research team. Interview transcripts of the entire sample of success factors families (N=161) were double coded by experienced staff members of the AdoptUSKids research team.

In addition to the interview, adoptive families also completed the following measures as part of the study.

### **Adoptive Parent Survey**

Two weeks after the completion of the telephone interviews, an adoptive parent survey was mailed to participating families. Permission was obtained from Reilly & Platz (2003) who had conducted a similar study of successful special needs adoptions, to adapt, for the purposes of this study, selected questions on the adoptive parents' knowledge of the child's background and history as well as the child's medical, physical and behavioral challenges. These items were included in the mailed survey in addition to the following two measures:

**Parenting Stress Inventory (PSI)** (Abidin, 1986) is a self-report questionnaire designed to predict a child's current behavioral and emotional adjustment as well as to identify parental stress that may be a function of parent-child systems. The PSI identifies two domains as sources of stressors—child characteristics and parent characteristics. Test-retest reliability ranges from .61 for the child domain to .91 for the mother domain (Abidin, 1986). The PSI has been normed on both non-clinical and clinical samples of parents. The full version of the PSI consists of 120 items and takes less than thirty minutes to complete. The PSI short form consists of 36 items and results in a Total Stress Score from three scales: Parental Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction, and Difficult Child.

**Marital Satisfaction Scale** is a five-item scale assessing marital satisfaction based on the conceptual framework developed by Fowers & Olson (1993) for use in the **ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale**.

**Longitudinal Follow-up Surveys**

One and two years after the initial interview, the research team sent follow-up surveys to assess changes in family and child functioning over time. As follow-up data collection is ongoing, data from the follow-up surveys will not be included in this report.

**Demographic Characteristics of Successful Families**

**Family Structure**

There were 161 families and a total of 270 individual adoptive parents who participated in the study. The majority of the families (n=104, 65%) were married couples. There were also 2 (1%) unmarried same-sex couples and 3 (2%) unmarried opposite-sex couples. Forty-seven single females adopters composed 29% of the sample, and single males represented 3% (n=5) of all adoptive parents.

**Age, Income, and Education**

At the time of data collection, the average age of the adoptive mothers was 45 years and adoptive fathers was 46 years. The adoptive families had an average income of \$61,991. The average income of the couples was \$72,826, single females was \$36,922, and single males was \$52,800. More than half of the sample of adoptive parents had completed either a bachelor’s or graduate degree. Below is a detailed description of the parents’ educational levels.

**Family Ethnicity**

The majority, 80%, of families identified their ethnic background as Caucasian (n=128). Eleven percent (n=18) were African American and 3% (n=5) were Hispanic. In this sample, there were 9 interracial couples including Caucasian and African American, African American and Hispanic, Hispanic and Native American, etc. One family was of mixed ethnicity (e.g., both participants were Caucasian and African American).

Table 1. Family Structure

<b>Family Structure</b> <i>N=161 families; 270 adoptive parents</i>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Married Couples	104	65%
Unmarried couples-same sex	2	1%
Unmarried couples-opposite sex	3	2%
Single females	47	29%
Single males	5	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	

**Table 2. Education Level of Adoptive Parents**

Highest Education Achieved	Mothers	Fathers
Grade school or some high school	3 (2%)	2 (2%)
High school diploma or GED	9 (6%)	13 (11%)
Some college (includes junior or community college)	42 (27%)	31 (27%)
Technical, vocational, or trade school	9 (6%)	9 (8%)
College graduate (Bachelor’s degree)	50 (32%)	26 (23%)
Graduate school (Master’s or Ph.D.)	40 (26%)	22 (19%)
Other	2 (1%)	3 (3%)
Missing information	1 (1%)	8 (7%)
<b>Total = 270 participants</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>114</b>

**Table 3. Ethnicity of Families**

Family Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	128	80%
African American	18	11%
Interracial	9	6%
Hispanic	5	3%
Mixed	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	

**Transracial and Same-race Adoptive Families: Family and Focus Child Ethnicity**

Overall, the majority (n=105, 65%) of families adopted children of the same ethnic background as one parent (n=8) or both parents (n=97): 78 Caucasian (non-Hispanic), 14 African American, and 5 Hispanic. However, 56 (35%) families transracially adopted. Of the transracial adopters, the majority were Caucasian families who had adopted 50 children of color.

**Number of Adopted Children**

Of the 161 families, 106 (66%) had adopted more than one child. Forty-four percent (n=47) of the multiple adopters had adopted 2 children (including the

focus child), and 39% (n=42) had adopted between 3 and 5 children total. Seventeen (17%) families had adopted between 6 and 10 children.

**Ages of Children in the Home**

Almost all of the families in this study (97%) were parenting children who were school age or older. Only two percent were parenting only children less than five years of age. Two-thirds (67%) of the sample were parenting at least one teenager at the time of the study.

**Type of Adoption by Family Status**

Of the 161 families who participated in the Success Factors study, 58% (n= 94) of these families were

Table 4. Family Race/Ethnicity by Child Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity of Adoptive Family:	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Native American	Mixed Race*	Inter-racial**	Total
Child's Race/Ethnicity:							
Caucasian	78 (48%)	0	0	0	0	2 (1%)	<b>80 (50%)</b>
African American	15 (9%)	14 (9%)	0	0	0	2 (1%)	<b>31 (19%)</b>
Hispanic	12 (7%)	1 (1%)	5 (3%)	0	0	2 (1%)	<b>20 (12%)</b>
Native American	3 (2%)	0	0	0	0	0	<b>3 (2%)</b>
Mixed Race*	20 (12%)	3 (2%)	0	0	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	<b>27 (17%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>128 (80%)</b>	<b>18 (11%)</b>	<b>5 (3%)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1 (1%)</b>	<b>9 (6%)</b>	<b>161 (100%)</b>

\* Mixed Race includes biracial and multiracial individuals. The mixed race family includes two parents who are both similarly mixed (African American and Caucasian, for example).

Table 5. Number of Children Adopted

Number of Adopted Children	Number of Families (n=106)	Percent
2	47	44%
3	13	12%
4	17	16%
5	12	11%
6	8	8%
7	3	3%
8	2	2%
9	3	3%
10	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100%</b>

general adopters (not adopting a specific child they were fostering or knew before placement). Of the remaining families, 41(25%) had adopted a child they had fostered, 6 (4%) adopted a relative, and 20 (12%) adopted a specific child but one who had not been in their home for foster care. In this latter group, families had initially come into contact with these children due to the parents' roles as therapist, teacher, residential treatment worker, or through family friends who were fostering the children. After meeting and interacting with the children, the families decided they wanted to adopt them.

#### **Foster Parent Adopters**

Of the 161 families, 32 (20%) adoptive families were also fostering children in their home. Most had one or two foster children living in the home in addition to their adopted child[ren]. The remaining 129 (80%) families were not currently fostering children.

#### **Type of Adoption Agency**

Public agencies facilitated the adoptions for 58% of the families, and private agencies facilitated placements for 42% of the families.

**Table 6. Ages of Children in the Home**

<b>Children's Ages</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
School age and teens (5-21 yrs.)	45	28%
Teens only (13-21 yrs.)	37	23%
School age only (5-12 yrs.)	32	20%
Preschool, school age and teens (0-21 yrs.)	25	16%
Preschool and school age (0-12 yrs.)	16	10%
Preschool only (<5 yrs.)	4	2%
Missing Information	2	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 7. Type of Adoption**

<b>Total Families</b>	<b>General Adopters</b>	<b>Foster Parent Adopters</b>	<b>Relative Adopters</b>	<b>Specific Child Adopters (non Foster Child)</b>
<b>161</b>	94 (58%)	41 (25%)	6 (4%)	20 (12%)

Table 8. Number of Families Currently Fostering Children

Number of Children Currently Being Fostered	Number of Families (N=32)	Percent
1	16	50%
2	10	31%
3	4	13%
4	1	3%
5	1	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 9. Type of Adoption Agency

Agency Type	Number	Percent
Private	68	42%
Public	93	58%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Description of Focus Children

### Time in Adoptive Home and Age at Placement

Focus children were an average of 6 1/2 years of age at time of placement (range = 0 to 17 years) in the adoptive home and had typically been in the home an average of 6 years at the time of the interview (range = 1 to 14 years).

### Age at Placement

Seventy-four percent of focus children in the study were between five and seventeen at time of placement. Of this number, 6 (4%) were between

13 and 17 when placed, 39 (24%) were between 9 and 12 at placement, and 74 (46%) were between five and eight at placement. The average length of time between the time of finalization of the adoption and the time of the interview was 3.5 years.

### Ethnicity of Focus Child

Of the 161 children who were the focus of the study, 50% were Caucasian (non-Hispanic) (n=80) and half were children of color. Nineteen percent of children were African American (n=31), 12% were Hispanic (n=20), 2% were Native American (n=3), and 17% were mixed race (n=27).

**Table 10. Age of Focus Child and Time of Placement**

<b>Age at Placement</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
0 – 1	21	13%
2 – 4	21	13%
5 – 8	74	46%
9 – 12	39	24%
13 – 17	6	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 11. Race/Ethnicity of Focus Child**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	80	50%
African American	31	19%
Hispanic/Latino	20	12%
Native American	3	2%
Mixed	27	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Gender**

Of the 161 focus children, 55% (n=89) were male and 45% (n=72) were female.

**Table 12. Gender of Focus Child**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Males	89	55%
Females	72	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>



## Success Factors Study: Family Perspectives

### Family Factors Associated with Successful Adoptive Families

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WERE THERE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TYPES OF CHILDREN ADOPTED BY SINGLE ADOPTERS AND COUPLES?

##### Family Structure

One hundred sixty-one families (270 individual adoptive parents) participated in the study. Sixty-eight percent (N=109) were two-parent families, 29% (N=47) of the families were headed by single females, and 3% (N=5) were headed by single males. Approximately a third of the families had adopted only one child, a little less than a third had adopted one sibling group, and almost 40% of the families had adopted more than one unrelated child, including multiple sibling groups. Over time, these multiple adopters had adopted single children, single children and sibling groups, or multiple sibling groups.

Couples had a significantly larger number of biological children still in the home and a greater number of foster children than single adopters had. However, there were no statistically significant differences in the number of children adopted by family type.

While the data show that single women had adopted a slightly higher mean number of boys and a greater percentage had adopted older children than couples, the differences were not statistically significant. Nor was the extent to which couples and singles adopted sibling groups significantly different. There was, however, a statistically

**Table 13. Family Structure by Number of Children Adopted**

	<b>Couples</b>	<b>Single Females</b>	<b>Single Males</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Adopted 1 child	32%	38%	40%	34%
Adopted 1 sibling group	29%	23%	60%	29%
Adopted more than one unrelated child (including multiple sibling groups)	39%	38%		37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 14. Current Household Composition**

	<b>Couples</b>	<b>Single Females</b>	<b>Single Males</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Mean number of adopted children	2.7	2.8	2.4	2.7
Mean number of biological	1.5	1.2	0.0	1.3
Foster children	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.5
Mean number of total children in the home*	3.6	2.8	2.8	3.4

\* p < .05; (Single males not included in t tests.)

**Table 15. Family Structure by Type of Child Adopted**

	<b>Couples</b>	<b>Single Females</b>	<b>Single Males</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mean number of adopted girls (NS)	1.32	1.26	0.60	1.28
Mean number of adopted boys (NS)	1.34	1.57	1.80	1.42
% adopted at least 1 sibling group (NS)	53%	51%	20%	53%
% adopted at least one child 11 and older (NS)	17%	23%		
% adopted at least one child transracially (Caucasian families only) (*)	30%	58%	75%	44.5%

\*Significance level calculations do not include single males due to small sample size.

significant difference in the number of Caucasian single women who had transracially adopted (58%) compared to the percentage of Caucasian couples who had transracially adopted (30%). Caucasian single women were significantly more likely than couples to have adopted at least one child of color

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 2: ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR THE ADOPTION PRE- AND POST-PLACEMENT?**

#### **Support for Adoption**

Parents were asked about the level of support they received from family and friends at the time of their initial decision to adopt and after the adoption. At the initial decision to adopt, only 41% of families had received a positive reaction from both friends and family for their decision, and 17% had received mixed reactions from friends and family. However, overall at post-placement, parents in the study reported fairly high levels of support from family,

friends and spouses. Seventy-four percent of the families reported positive support for the adoption post-placement from both families and friends. Only 4% reported mixed support post-placement. This change in level of positive reaction to their initial decision to adopt and reaction at the time of the interview is statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ).

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT KINDS OF POST-PLACEMENT SERVICES WERE PROVIDED TO THE FAMILIES AND WHAT WERE THEIR NEEDS?**

#### **Utilization of Post-Adoption Services**

Included in the family measures was a structured checklist designed to assess which post-adoption services families used and how helpful these services were to the families. Families rated helpfulness on a 5-point scale: 1) not at all helpful, 2) not very helpful, 3) somewhat helpful, 4) very helpful, and 5) extremely helpful. Families were

**Table 16. Families’ Level of Support**

	Initial decision to adopt		Post-Placement	
	n	%	n	%
Positive support from relatives & friends	66	41%	119	74%
Positive support from relatives or friends	60	37%	34	21%
Mixed support	27	17%	6	4%
Negative support from relatives & friends	4	2%	1	1%
Missing information	4	2%	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>100%</b>

also asked to check which services they needed but had not received.

Families reported using an average of 13 different types of post-adoption services. They also reported that they found the majority of services (76%) were either very helpful or extremely helpful. In addition, parents reported that they needed, on average, 6 services that they did NOT receive.

**Types of Post-Adoption Services Used**

The most commonly reported post-adoption services identified by families in this study were financial supports, including adoption subsidies (89%), and help with routine medical (79%) and dental (77%) care. Seventy-seven percent also reported receiving financial supports other than a

subsidy, such as health insurance, medical subsidies, and social security benefits. The next most common set of services families used addressed the child’s psychological and educational needs. Seventy-one percent of families reported using individual child therapy post-adoption, 60% had educational assessments completed, and 59% of the children had psychological evaluations.

In addition to utilizing post-adoption services for their children, many families also identified supports for themselves. For example, 56% of families reported spending time with other adoptive parents as a support mechanism, and 47% reported using family therapy. Only 3% of the families indicated they did not use any post-adoption services.

Table 17. Post-Adoption Services Received

<b>N = 146*</b>	<b>Number of families receiving this service</b>	<b>% of families receiving this service **</b>
Adoption subsidy	130	89%
Routine medical care	116	79%
Dental care	113	77%
Other financial supports	112	77%
Individual child therapy	104	71%
Educational assessment	87	60%
Psychological evaluation	86	59%
Time with other adoptive parents	82	56%
Special education curriculum	76	52%
Family therapy	68	47%
Time with other adopted children	58	40%
Time with experienced adoptive parents	57	39%
Adoptive parent support group	56	38%
Parenting skills counseling	56	38%
Adoption issues counseling	56	38%
Abuse issues counseling	56	38%
Separation issues counseling	52	36%
Respite care (overnight)	46	32%
Speech therapy	43	29%
Legal services <sup>11</sup>	41	28%

<sup>11</sup>Legal services might include assistance for families with a child involved in the juvenile justice system.

**Table 17. Post-Adoption Services Received *con't***

<b>N = 146*</b>	<b>Number of families receiving this service</b>	<b>% of families receiving this service **</b>
Social work service coordination	38	26%
Child development counseling	36	25%
Sexual issues counseling	35	24%
Daycare: out-of-home	32	22%
Daycare: in-home	32	22%
Physical or occupational therapy	30	21%
Child's future counseling	28	19%
Tutoring	27	18%
Support group for adopted child	26	18%
Psychiatric hospitalization	23	16%
Medical care for disability	19	13%
Out-of-home placement (residential treatment, group home, rehabilitation facility, etc.)	19	13%
Counseling to prevent outside placement	10	7%
Daycare for child w/psychiatric problems	13	9%
Transracial counseling	13	9%
Daycare for a disabled child	10	7%
Emergency shelter care <sup>12</sup>	7	5%
Home health nurse	6	4%
Homemaker/housekeeper	5	3%
Drug/alcohol services	3	2%

\*146 of the original 161 families responded to the survey.

\*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as parents could report using multiple services.

<sup>12</sup>Emergency shelter care is a temporary, out-of-home placement for a child taken into state custody care. This is typically a short-term placement for a child while decisions are being made about where the child will live.

### Most Helpful Post-Adoption Services

Over 75% of the families received adoption subsidy or help with dental and routine medical care. Ninety percent or more of the families who received these 3 services found them very or extremely helpful. Other services were found to be helpful, but not as helpful as the subsidy, medical care, etc. For example, 63 to 79% of families found various types of counseling, trainings, and support groups helpful. Between 69 to 76% of the families who received counseling on parenting skills, abuse, separation, sexual, and adoption issues found the service to be very or extremely helpful.

About 67% of the families found their child's individual therapy to be very or extremely helpful.

Two-thirds or more of families found that 10 out of 11 types of counseling were very or extremely helpful, while only 50% of families found counseling to prevent an out-of-home placement to be very or extremely helpful.

Seventy-three percent of the parents who spent time with other adoptive parents found the activity very or extremely helpful, and 51% of the families whose children spent time with other adopted children found the activity very helpful. Although fewer parents (18%) reported that their children were in a formal adoption support group, 63% found the group to be very helpful for their children.

Table 18. Helpfulness of Services Received

N=146	Number of Families Receiving Services	% Finding Service Very or Extremely Helpful**	Missing Values*
Medical care for disability	19	100%	0%
Daycare: out-of-home	32	97%	3%
Legal services	41	95%	2%
Adoption subsidy	130	93%	2%
Routine medical care	116	91%	2%
Transracial adoption counseling***	13	91%	15%
Dental care	113	91%	4%
Daycare: in-home	32	90%	3%
Other financial supports	112	87%	1%
Speech therapy	43	84%	0%
Respite care (overnight)	46	83%	0%

**Table 18. Helpfulness of Services Received**

N=146	Number of Families Receiving Services	% Finding Service Very or Extremely Helpful**	Missing Values*
Tutoring	27	81%	0%
Homemaker/housekeeper	5	80%	0%
Child development counseling***	36	79%	6%
Physical or occupational therapy	30	79%	3%
Special education classes	76	79%	0%
Family therapy***	68	77%	3%
Daycare for child w/psychiatric problems	13	77%	0%
Abuse issues counseling***	56	76%	4%
Adoption issues counseling***	56	75%	2%
Separation issues counseling***	52	75%	2%
Time with experienced adoptive parents	57	73%	2%
Time with other adoptive parents	82	73%	2%
Emergency shelter care	7	71%	0%
Educational assessment	87	71%	2%
Adoptive parent support group	56	70%	4%
Parenting skills counseling***	56	70%	4%
Psychological evaluation	86	70%	5%
Social work service coordination	38	69%	5%
Sexual issues counseling***	35	69%	0%
Home health nurse	6	67%	0%
Child's future counseling***	28	67%	4%

**Table 18. Helpfulness of Services Received**

N=146	Number of Families Receiving Services	% Finding Service Very or Extremely Helpful**	Missing Values*
Individual child therapy***	104	67%	5%
Out of home placement	19	67%	5%
Support group for adopted child	26	63%	8%
Daycare for a disabled child	10	60%	0%
Time with other adopted children	58	51%	2%
Counseling to prevent outside placement	17	50%	6%
Psychiatric hospitalization	23	50%	4%
Drug/alcohol services	3	0%	0%

\* Percent of families who had the service, but didn't provide data on helpfulness (i.e., 15% of the 13 families who had transracial counseling did not report whether it was helpful or not.)

\*\* Percentages in column 3 will not add to 100%. Participants could give more than one response. Also, the percentages are based on the number of participants who provided helpfulness data.

\*\*\*Helpful or very helpful counseling services for 50% or more of the sample.

The top five most needed services were accessed by over 80% of the parents reporting need. For example, of the 96 families who said they needed a subsidy, only 4 families (4%) did not get it. Similarly, of the 104 families who said they needed dental services for the child, only 15 (14%) were unable to get the dental services they needed.

There were, however, a number of other services that many of the families needed but were unable to access. For example, 86 families (59% of the sample) said they needed respite care (overnight), but 48 of those families (56%) were unable to get respite. Similarly, 80 families (55%) said they wanted counseling for adoption issues, but 39

families (49%) did not receive it. Equally needed but not received were a support group for the adopted child, tutoring services, in-home day care, out-of-home day care, time with experienced adoptive parents, and an adoptive parent support group. Close to half of all the families said they needed these 6 services, but only 50% or less of those families received them.

Among the services needed by a third or fewer families, the most unmet needs were for homemaker/housekeeper services (93% did not receive services), day care for children with psychiatric problems (70% did not receive services), and drug or alcohol services (67% did not receive

Table 19. Unmet Service Needs

N=146	Number and % of Adoptive Families who Needed Specific Service		Of the Families Needing a Specific Service, the Number and % Who Never Received It*	
Dental care	104	71%	**15	14%
Adoption subsidy	96	66%	4	4%
Routine medical care	95	65%	6	6%
Other financial supports	88	60%	14	16%
Individual child therapy	87	60%	9	10%
Respite care (overnight)	86	59%	48	56%
Family therapy	81	55%	27	33%
Adoption issues counseling	80	55%	39	49%
Time with other adoptive parents	79	54%	27	34%
Educational assessment	78	53%	14	18%
Time with experienced adoptive parents	75	51%	39	52%
Adoptive parent support group	75	51%	39	52%
Psychological evaluation	73	50%	9	12%
Daycare: in-home	69	47%	44	64%
Special education classes	66	45%	8	12%
Time with other adopted children	65	45%	32	49%
Support group for adopted child	64	44%	51	80%
Daycare: out-of-home	62	42%	35	56%
Parenting skills counseling	62	42%	23	37%
Tutoring	62	42%	40	65%
Separation issues counseling	61	42%	26	43%

Table 19. Unmet Service Needs

<b>N=146</b>	<b>Number and % of Adoptive Families who Needed Specific Service</b>		<b>Of the Families Needing a Specific Service, the Number and % Who Never Received It*</b>	
Abuse issues counseling	58	40%	21	36%
Social work service coordination	53	36%	23	43%
Child's future counseling	50	34%	32	64%
Legal services	50	34%	18	36%
Sexual issues counseling	48	33%	23	48%
Child development counseling	41	28%	17	41%
Homemaker/housekeeper	40	27%	37	93%
Speech therapy	38	26%	7	18%
Daycare for a child with psychiatric problems	37	25%	26	70%
Physical or occupational therapy	29	20%	4	14%
Counseling to prevent outside placement	28	19%	13	46%
Transracial issues counseling	25	17%	15	60%
Psychiatric hospitalization	25	17%	4	16%
Daycare for a disabled child	22	15%	13	59%
Out of home placement	22	15%	5	23%
Medical care for disability	18	12%	4	22%
Emergency shelter care	16	11%	9	56%
Drug/alcohol services	9	6%	6	67%
Home health/nursing	6	4%	2	33%

\* Percentages do not add to 100% because column 3 is a subset of column 2 and column 2 is a subset of all respondents

\*\* (i.e., 15 of the 104 families needing dental care did not receive it.)

services).

**Problems Parents have with Utilization of Services**

Forty-one percent of families in the sample reported a problem with finding time to access services.

Table 20. Problems with Utilization of Services

<b>N=146</b>	<b>N of Families with this Concern</b>	<b>% of Families with this Concern</b>
Lack of time to access services	60	41%
Lack of confidence in service providers	59	40%
Insurance does not cover services	51	35%
Lack of qualified service providers in area	49	34%
Service providers do not understand problems	47	32%
Can not find the right services	46	32%
Services are not available at the right time	42	29%
Family does not know where the services are located	35	24%
Focus child will not go for counseling	33	23%
Transportation is a problem	23	16%
The services are not culturally sensitive	22	15%
The family will not go for counseling	14	10%
Services are offered by a different religious group	10	7%

Forty percent reported a lack of confidence in service providers.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 4: HOW SIGNIFICANT WERE THE CHILDREN’S BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES?

The level of difficulty parents had in parenting the focus child was measured in several different ways. In the interview, parents were asked to rate how difficult the focus child has been to parent. Parents rated difficulty on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult. In the survey, parents were asked to identify the number of difficult behaviors and attributes the child exhibits out of a list of 35 behaviors, and the parents were asked to complete 4 PSI subscales—child reinforcement, adaptability, demandingness, and acceptance.<sup>13</sup>

Children in the study exhibited an average of 10 difficult behaviors. Only 32 parents (20%) described

the focus child as easy or very easy to parent. Thirty-six (22%) described the child as somewhat easy. However, over half, 93 parents (58%) described their child as difficult or very difficult to parent.

On each of the four Parenting Stress Index subscales, more than half of the parents’ PSI scores fell into the high stress range. The highest percentage of parents, 69%, fell into the high stress range in the “child demandingness” subscale as compared to 15% in the general public (Abidin, 1995).

As shown in Table 22, Pearson correlations were used to measure the association between the parents’ assessment of how difficult the focus child was to parent and the more objective measure, “Total Number of Behavior Problems,” and with the four normed PSI measures. All of the measures were significantly associated with the parent’s assessment at  $p < .01$ . The PSI score “Child is

Table 21. Adoptive Parent Stress Measured on the PSI

	High	Normal	Low	Missing
Reinforces parent	58%	36%	5%	1%
Adaptability	61%	30%	9%	0%
Demandingness	69%	23%	8%	0%
Acceptance	64%	30%	6%	0%

<sup>13</sup> Abidin (p. 5, 1995) has normed the PSI subscales and identified cut off points for each scale. The lower cut off is at the 15th percentile or below. The higher cut off is at the 85th percentile or above. He describes families whose scores are higher than the cut off point as manifesting high levels of stress on that scale. He suggests that the families who fall below may be underreporting their levels of stress due to social desirability pressures.

Table 22. Child Behavior Problems, Parenting Difficulty, and Parental Stress

		Total Number of Behavioral Problems	PSI: Child Does Not Give Positive Reinforcement to Parent	PSI: Parent Does Not Accept Child	PSI: Child is Not Adaptable	PSI: Child is Demanding
Parent Assessment of Level of Difficulty	r	0.68*	0.45*	0.51*	0.57*	0.67*
	N	146	145	146	146	146

Demanding” and the “Total Number of Behavior Problems” scores had the highest correlations at  $r=.67$  and  $r=.68$  respectively.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 5: WHAT WERE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHILD BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES?**

**The Children’s Attributes and Behaviors**

Parents were asked to report on what types of attributes the children exhibited and behaviors the children engaged in that made the children difficult to parent. We received responses on this from 146 (91%) of our 161 parents. The most common child attributes parents were addressing were: anger (64%), defiance (60%), impulsiveness (60%), and manipulation (46%). The most common types of behaviors were: violating rules of conduct (49%), lying (49%), arguing with peers (45%), and tantrums (45%).

The table below shows a fairly low percentage of the children described as “easy” to parent engaging

in challenging behaviors, with the exception of lying (29%) and tantrums (25%). The group labeled by the parents as difficult had a much larger percentage of children who were engaged in more serious behavior problems such as: violating rules of conduct (70%), verbal aggression (55%), physical aggression (48%), stealing (48%), and vandalism (31%).

In summary, children described as difficult to parent displayed behavior challenges including violating rules of conduct (70%), verbal (55%) and physical (48%) aggression, stealing (48%), and vandalism (31%). This group was also more likely to be defiant, manipulative and/or depressed. Children in this category also were reported to have an average of five disabilities/ challenges, with the majority having some type of attention deficit diagnosis.

The two most commonly mentioned child challenges were behavioral problems and emotional problems. Over three-quarters of the children were characterized by the adoptive parents as having

Table 23. Child Attributes and Behaviors Related to Level of Parenting Difficulty

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Easy (N=28)</b>	<b>Somewhat Easy (N=29)</b>	<b>Difficult (N=89)</b>	<b>Overall (N=146)</b>
Anger	14%	66%	79%	64%
Defiance	18%	48%	78%	60%
Impulsive	14%	48%	78%	60%
Manipulative	25%	24%	60%	46%
Disobedient	0%	17%	61%	40%
Hyperactivity	7%	38%	49%	39%
Irritability	0%	3%	39%	25%
Depression	11%	14%	40%	29%
Inability to attach to family members	4%	10%	35%	24%
Rejects affection	4%	10%	25%	18%
Cruelty	0%	0%	13%	8%
Withdrawn	14%	3%	12%	11%

Table 23. Child Attributes and Behaviors Related to Level of Parenting Difficulty

<b>Behaviors</b>	<b>Easy (N=28)</b>	<b>Somewhat Easy (N=29)</b>	<b>Difficult (N=89)</b>	<b>Overall (N=146)</b>
Violating rules of conduct	14%	21%	70%	49%
Lying	29%	34%	61%	49%
Argues with peers	14%	31%	58%	45%
Tantrums	25%	31%	56%	45%
Argues with siblings	11%	31%	56%	42%
Verbal aggression	0%	14%	55%	36%
Physical aggression	4%	14%	48%	33%
Stealing	18%	21%	48%	37%
Sabotaging relationships	4%	10%	43%	29%
Vandalism	0%	3%	31%	20%
Running away	0%	0%	27%	16%
Self abuse	0%	7%	26%	17%
Sexual acting out	7%	14%	25%	19%
Bad friends	14%	10%	25%	20%
Suicidal	4%	3%	21%	14%
Violence	0%	0%	19%	12%
Arrests	0%	3%	20%	13%
Eating disorder	0%	7%	18%	12%
Soiling	4%	7%	15%	11%
Threats/use of weapon	0%	0%	15%	9%
Substance abuse	0%	0%	7%	4%
Homicidal	0%	0%	4%	3%
Fire setting	0%	0%	2%	1%

**Table 24. Children's Disabilities and Challenges**

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Behavioral problems	111	76%
Emotional problems	100	68%
ADD or ADHD	81	55%
Learning disability	73	50%
Psychiatric problems	70	48%
Developmental delays	51	35%
Chronic medical, non-life threatening	26	18%
Mental retardation or handicap	21	14%
Motor disability	11	8%
Serious speech impairment or muteness	8	5%
Physical handicap (orthopedic)	7	5%
Serious vision impairment or blindness	7	5%
Autism	6	4%
Seizure disorder	6	4%
Serious hearing impairment or blindness	4	3%
Physical handicap (non-orthopedic)	4	3%
Cerebral Palsy	3	2%
Chronic medical, terminal	3	2%

behavioral problems, while 68% of the children were characterized as having emotional problems. Half of the sample of adopted children had learning disabilities (50%).

**RESEARCH QUESTION 6: HOW SATISFIED ARE PARENTS WITH THEIR MARRIAGE, PARENTING, AND THEIR CHILD’S ADOPTION?**

Several measures of satisfaction were used in this study. Satisfaction with parenting in general<sup>14</sup> was measured using a 10-item scale from Reilly and Platz (2003). Marital satisfaction was assessed using a 5-item scale adapted from Flowers and Olson (1993). Parents’ individual item scores were totaled, then averaged, in order to get marital satisfaction scores that fell between 1 and 5, with

5 indicating the highest level of satisfaction, and parenting satisfaction scores that fell between 1 and 4, with 4 indicating the highest level of satisfaction. Parents were also asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating very satisfied, how satisfied they were with the adoption of the focus child. Parents in the study reported being very satisfied with the adoption of the focus child (4.6 on a 5 point scale) and very satisfied with parenting in general (3.5 on a 4 point scale). For those who were married, parents were satisfied with their marital relationship (4.2).

Pearson correlations were also used to examine the association between marital satisfaction, satisfaction with parenting in general, and satisfaction with the focus child’s adoption. Satisfaction with

**Table 25. Parental Satisfaction with the Adoption**

Satisfaction	Mean	Number
Marital satisfaction	4.2 (of a possible 5)	94
Focus child’s adoption	4.6 (of a possible 5)	161
Parenting in general	3.5 (of a possible 4)	141

**Table 26. Relationship between Parenting and Marital Satisfaction**

		Parenting in General	Focus Child’s Adoption
Marital satisfaction	R	0.24*	0.15
	N	90	94
Parenting in general	R		0.26**
	N		141

\*\* p<.01

\* p<.05

<sup>14</sup>For parents with more than one child, this measure applies to all children being parented (including adopted, biological and foster children).

parenting in general was significantly correlated with satisfaction with the adoption of the focus child as well as marital satisfaction. We did not, however, find a statistically significant relationship between marital satisfaction and satisfaction with the adoption of the focus child.

**RESEARCH QUESTION #7: ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES WHO HAVE CONTACT WITH THE BIRTHPARENTS AND THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE CONTACT WITH ANY FOSTER OR BIRTH FAMILY MEMBERS FROM THE CHILD’S PAST?**

In the interview, the adoptive families (N = 161) were asked whether they have had post-placement contact with anyone from the child’s past and to give reasons for the presence or absence of such contact. In addition, families who had contact were asked to describe the type and frequency of contact and whether the contact continued post-finalization. Coders gathered information from the interviews concerning contact with: birthparents; siblings; extended birth relatives; foster families;

professional staff; and other important individuals such as teachers, neighbors, or friends. For the purposes of this report, two types of contact were compared—those families who have had contact with birthparents and those families who have had no post-placement contact with birth or foster families.

**Demographic Characteristics of Families who had Contact with One or Both Birthparents Post-Finalization**

**Family Structure**

Twenty-nine adoptive families (18%) in the sample had post-finalization contact with at least one birthparent. Although the majority of the adoptive families (n=19, 66%) with contact were married couples, there were also 10 (34%) single female adopters.

**Age, Income and Education**

**Table 27. Family Structure**

Family Structure	Number	Percent
<b><i>N=29 families; 48 adoptive parents</i></b>		
Married Couples	19	66%
Single females	10	34%
Total	29	

**Table 28. Education Level of Adoptive Parents**

Highest Education Achieved	Mothers	Fathers
Grade school or some high school	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
High school diploma or GED	1 (3%)	5 (26%)
Some college (includes junior or community college)	6 (21%)	5 (26%)
Technical, vocational, or trade school	2 (7%)	1 (5%)
College graduate (Bachelor’s degree)	11 (38%)	1 (5%)
Graduate school (Master’s or Ph.D.)	8 (28%)	5 (26%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Missing information	0 (0%)	2 (11%)
<b>Total = 48 adoptive parents</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>

At the time of data collection, the average age of the adoptive mothers was 46 years and adoptive fathers was 47 years. The adoptive families had an average income of \$52,060. The average income for couples was \$68,314 and \$32,042 for the single, female adopters. More than half of the sample of adoptive mothers had completed either a bachelor’s or a graduate degree, whereas more than half of the sample of adoptive fathers had not completed college. Below is a detailed description of the parents’ educational levels.

**Family Ethnicity**

The majority of families (72%) identified their

ethnic background as Caucasian (n=21) and 14% (n=4) reported their ethnic background as African American. In this sample, there were 3 interracial couples (10%) including Caucasian and African American, African American and Hispanic, Hispanic and Native American, etc. and one couple (3%) of mixed ethnicity (e.g., both participants were Caucasian and African American).

**Transracial and Same-race Adoptive Families: Family and Focus Child Ethnicity**

Overall, the majority (n=21, 72%) of the 29 families adopted children of the same ethnic background as one or both parents. However, 8 families (28%)

Table 29. Ethnicity of Families

Family Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	21	72%
African American	4	14%
Interracial	3	10%
Hispanic	0	0%
Mixed	1	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	

Table 30. Family Race/Ethnicity by Child Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity of Adoptive Family:	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Native American	Mixed Race*	Interracial**	Total
<b>Child's Race/Ethnicity:</b>							
Caucasian	16 (55%)	0	0	0	0	1 (3%)	<b>17 (59%)</b>
African American	0	4 (14%)	0	0	0	2 (7%)	<b>6 (21%)</b>
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Native American	1 (3%)	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1 (3%)</b>
Mixed Race*	4 (14%)	0	0	0	1 (3%)	0	<b>5 (17%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>21 (72%)</b>	<b>4 (14%)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1 (3%)</b>	<b>3 (10%)</b>	<b>29 (100%)</b>

\* Mixed Race includes biracial and multiracial individuals. The mixed race family includes two parents who are both similarly mixed (African American and Caucasian, for example).

transracially adopted. Of the transracial adopters, the majority were Caucasian families who adopted 5 children of color.

**Number of Adopted Children**

Of the 29 families who had contact with at least one birthparent post-finalization, 20 (69%) had adopted more than one child. Nine of the multiple adopter families (45%) had adopted 2 children (including the focus child), and 5 families (25%) had adopted between 3 and 5 children. However, 6

(30%) families had adopted 6 to 7 children.

**Type of Adoption by Family Status**

Of the 29 families who had post-finalization contact with at least one of the birthparents, 11 families (38%) had adopted a child they had fostered, and 10 families (34%) were general adopters (not adopting a specific child they were fostering or knew before placement). Of the remaining families, 4 (14%) adopted a relative, and 4 (14%) adopted a specific child, but one who had not been placed previously

Table 31. Number of Children Adopted

Number of Adopted Children	Number of Families (n=20)	Percent
2	9	45%
3	2	10%
4	2	10%
5	1	5%
6	5	25%
7	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 32. Type of Adoption

Total Families	General Adopters	Foster Parent Adopters	Relative Adopters	Specific Child Adopters (non Foster Child)
<b>29</b>	10 (34%)	11 (38%)	4 (14%)	4 (14%)

in their home. In this latter group, families initially met these children due to the parents' roles as therapist, teacher, residential treatment worker, or through family friends who were fostering the children. The families decided they wanted to adopt the children after meeting and interacting with them.

### Description of Children who were in Contact with Birthparents Post-finalization

#### Age at Placement

Children from families who had post-finalization contact with birthparents were an average of 7.6 years of age at time of placement (range= 0 to 17

years) in the adoptive home. Seventy-six percent of children who had contact with their birthparents post-finalization were between 5 and 17 at placement. Of these children, 4 (14%) were between 13 and 17 when placed, 9 (31%) were between 9 and 12 at placement, and 9 (31%) were between 5 and 8 at placement. The average length of time between the time of finalization of the adoption and the time of the interview was 3.5 years.

#### Ethnicity of Focus Child

Fifty-nine percent (n=17) of the 29 families who had contact with the children's birthparents post-finalization had focus children who were identified as Caucasian (non-Hispanic) and 41% (n=12) were identified as children of color. Twenty-one

Table 33. Age of Focus Child and Time of Placement

Age at Placement	Number	Percent
0 – 1	4	14%
2 – 4	3	10%
5 – 8	9	31%
9 – 12	9	31%
13 – 17	4	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 34. Race/Ethnicity of Focus Child**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	17	59%
African American	6	21%
Hispanic/Latino	0	0%
Native American	1	3%
Mixed	5	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 35. Gender of Focus Child**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Males	18	62%
Females	11	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>

percent of children (n=6) were identified as African American, 3% (n=1) were Native American, and 17% (n=5) were mixed race.

### Gender

Of the 29 focus children whose families had contact with at least one birthparent post-finalization, 62% (n=18) were male and 38% (n=11) were female.

### Experiences with Contact in Adoption

Of the 161 families in the study, 27 families (17%) had no pre or post-finalization contact with any birth or foster family members, and 48 families (30%) had contact with one or both of the child's birthparents either pre- or post-finalization. Of these 48 families, 19 had contact pre-finalization only, while 29 had contact post-finalization (including those who had contact both pre- and post-finalization). This report includes findings from an analysis of those 48 with birthparent contact and the 27 without contact with birth or foster family members.

In general, families who had contact (either pre- or post-finalization) with the child's birthparents (n=48) were more likely to have adopted a foster child already placed in their home, or a child with whom they had a previous relationship (child-specific or relative adoption), than the 27 families who had no contact with the child's birthparents or foster family members. Families who had pre-finalization contact ONLY with one or both birthparents (n=19) were more likely to have court-mandated visits with birthparents than parents who had contact post-finalization. Families who had contact pre-finalization ONLY generally had

more frequent contact than the families who had contact with the child's birthparents post-finalization. Families with pre-finalization contact ONLY were more likely to have supervised visits with the birthparents, whereas families who had post-finalization contact had a variety of types of contact, including cards, letters, and emails; phone calls; and supervised or unsupervised visits.

An analysis of the reasons the adoptive parents liked or supported contact with the birthparents reveals a similar trend regarding contact with the birthmother and the birthfather. Many adoptive parents reported that they did not like anything about the contact with birthmother (n=12, 27%) or birthfather (n=7, 35%).<sup>15</sup> Over half (53%) of these families had pre-finalization contact only. However, a large portion of adoptive parents said they supported the contact because they respected the child's birth heritage and understood the importance of the contact with the birthmother (n=26, 58%) and birthfather (n=60, 30%) to the child. Adoptive parents also supported contact because the child wanted contact with birthmothers (n=5, 11%) and birthfathers (n=1, 5%), the adoptive parent felt empathy for the child's birthmother (n=4, 9%), the birthmother supported the child's adoption (n=2, 4%), and because it was the child's right to have contact with birthmother (n=1, 2%).

### Families with No Contact

The 27 parents whose families had no contact with any birth or foster parents were asked why there was no contact with the child's birthparents. The most frequent reason given was that the adoptive parents

<sup>15</sup> Forty-five adoptive families had contact with birthmothers, and 20 adoptive families had contact with birthfathers. Percentages are based on 45 when calculated for birthmothers and 20 when calculated for birthfathers.

<sup>16</sup> Some parents answered this question with multiple reasons, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

**Table 36. Types of Contact with Birthparents**

	No Contact with Birthparents or Foster Families (n=27)	Contact with Birthparents (n=48)	
		Pre-finalization Contact ONLY with Birthparents (n=19)	Post-finalization Contact with Birthparents (n=29)
Foster child, child-specific, or relative adoption	11 (41%)	10 (53%)	19 (66%)
Mandated visits with birthparents while child was in foster care	0 (0%)	14 (74%)	6 (21%)
More frequent contact with birthmother pre-finalization	0 (0%)	4 (21%)	4 (14%)
More frequent contact with birthfather pre-finalization	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	1 (3%)
<b>Type of Contact with Birthmother:</b>			
Cards/letters/emails	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	9 (31%)
Phone calls	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	9 (31%)
Supervised visits	0 (0%)	11 (58%)	10 (34%)
Unsupervised visits	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	3 (10%)
<b>Type of Contact with Birthfather:</b>			
Cards/letters/emails	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Phone calls	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	3 (10%)
Supervised visits	0 (0%)	5 (26%)	4 (14%)
Unsupervised visits	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)

Table 37. Reasons for No Contact

	<b>Birthmother (n=27)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Birthfather (n=27)</b>	<b>%</b>
Adoptive parent never considered contact/rights were terminated or was abuser	16	59%	9	33%
Child never knew the person	6	22%	11	41%
Person was or is in prison	1	4%	5	19%
Concerns for the child's safety	3	11%	4	15%
Person is troubled	4	15%	0	0%
Person is deceased	1	4%	3	11%
Divided loyalties / contact will interfere with bonding	1	4%	1	4%
Bad influence on child	0	0%	1	4%
Child does not want contact	1	4%	1	4%

never considered contact because the birthparents had their rights terminated and/or were the child's abuser [n=16 (59%) for birthmothers; n=9 (33%) for birthfathers]. The second most common reason was that the child never knew the birthparent [n=6 (22%) for birthmothers; n=11 (41%) for birthfathers]. Other answers given included: birthparent is/was in prison [n=1 (4%) for birthmothers; n=5 (19%) for birthfathers]; concerns for the child's safety [n=3 (11%) for birthmothers, n=4 (15%) for birthfathers]; and the parent is troubled [n=4 (15%) for birthmothers].<sup>16</sup>

### Tests of Statistical Significance

For categorical items (i.e., race / ethnicity), comparisons were conducted using either the chi-square test of independence or its non-parametric alternative, Fisher's Exact Test (used when sample sizes are small and expected frequencies are low). Continuous variables (i.e., age at placement) were analyzed using independent samples t-tests.

### Variations in Contact Types

Families were asked to identify what types of contact that they were participating in pre- and post-

finalization and with which birth parent they were in contact. The types of contact were letters, phone calls, day visits and overnight visits. Comparisons were made between families who had contact with one or both birthparents during the pre-finalization time only and those who had contact pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only.

There were statistically significant relationships ( $p < .05$ ) when the following types of contact were analyzed: birthmother letters, birthmother phone calls, and birthmother day visits. More families who had contact with birthmothers through sending letters participated in this contact post-finalization only or pre- and post-finalization (39%); only 5% of families had this type of contact pre-finalization only. Of families who reported birthmother phone contact, 5% only had pre-finalization contact and 39% had post-finalization only or pre- and post-finalization contact. Sixteen percent of families with pre-finalization contact only reported birthmother day visits while forty-eight percent of families with post-finalization only or pre- and post-finalization contact reported birthmother day visits. There were no statistically significant relationships when analyzing any birthfather contact.

### **Mandated Contact**

There was a statistically significant relationship for families who were mandated to have contact pre-finalization and whether they had contact post-finalization ( $p < .05$ ). For families who were mandated to have contact with one or both birthparents pre-finalization ( $n=20$ ), the majority did not continue the contact after finalization. Of the twenty families, 70% had contact pre-finalization only and

30% reported contact post-finalization. For the 28 families<sup>17</sup> who were not mandated to have contact with birthparents pre-finalization, 82% of them had post-finalization contact with birthparents.

### **Contact and Race of Adoptive Parents**

When comparing families with no contact to families who had some type of contact with birthparents, there were no statistically significant differences between minority/interracial adoptive families and Caucasian adoptive families. Also, there were no statistically significant differences when comparing pre-finalization contact only with one or both birthparents and pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact. Among Caucasian adoptive families, 35% had no contact and 65% had some type of contact. Of the 65% with some type of contact, 43% had pre-finalization only contact, and 57% had pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact. Among minority/interracial adoptive families, 37% had no contact and 63% had some type of contact. Of the 63% with some type of contact, 33% had pre-finalization only contact and 67% had pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact.

There were no statistically significant differences between families who adopted transracially and those who did not when comparing no contact with one or both birthparents and contact (pre-finalization, post-finalization or pre- and post-finalization with one or both birthparents). There were also no statistically significant differences when comparing pre-finalization contact only with one or both birthparents and pre- and post-

<sup>17</sup>Eighteen percent of the 28 families had voluntary contact with birthparents pre-finalization that stopped after finalization.

finalization or post-finalization only contact. Among families who adopted transracially, 50% had no contact and 50% had some type of contact. Of the 50% with some type of contact, 54% had pre-finalization only contact and 46% had pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact. Among families who did not adopt transracially, 29% had no contact and 71% had some type of contact. Of the 71% with some type of contact, 34% had pre-finalization only contact and 66% had pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact.

### **Contact and Adoptive Parents' Education and Age**

There were no statistically significant differences between levels of education of adoptive mother or adoptive fathers when comparing no contact and contact (pre-finalization, post-finalization or pre- and post-finalization with one or both birthparents). There are also no statistically significant differences when comparing pre-finalization contact only with one or both birthparents and pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact. There are also no statistically significant differences in level of contact when looking at adoptive parents' age.

### **Contact and Adoptive Parents' Income**

There were no statistically significant differences between family income of adoptive parents when comparing no contact (mean family income \$56,893) and contact (pre-finalization, post-finalization or pre- and post-finalization with one or both birthparents) (mean family income \$54,444). There were also no statistically significant differences when comparing pre-finalization contact only with one or both birthparents and (mean family

income \$57,425) pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact (mean family income \$52,060).

### **Contact and Adoptive Parents' Satisfaction with Adoption**

There were no statistically significant differences in the level of contact when looking at the level of satisfaction the adoptive parents' felt about the adoption.

### **Contact and Age of Adopted Child**

There were statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) in the level of contact when comparing the age at placement of the adopted child. For children whose families had no contact, the average age at placement was 4.69 years of age. For children whose families had some type of contact with birthparents, the average age at placement was 6.74 years.

### **Contact and Child's History**

Families who adopted children who had experienced physical neglect in this sample were significantly more likely to have contact with one or both birthparents (75.6%) versus no contact (24.4%), regardless of whether physical neglect was the sole cause of the child's removal from the birth family or occurred in combination with other circumstances. There was no difference in this group when comparing pre-finalization contact only and pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact.

There was a statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in likelihood of contact if children had

experienced medical neglect. In this sample, children who had experienced medical neglect were more likely to have had pre-finalization contact only (66.7%) than pre- and post-finalization or post-finalization only contact (33.3%) (regardless of whether medical neglect was the sole cause of the child's removal from the birth family or occurred in combination with other circumstances). There were no statistically significant differences when comparing contact to no contact.

There were no statistically significant differences in levels of contact when comparing the following child history factors: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, drug exposure, parent incarceration, parents' drug abuse, abandonment, educational neglect, domestic violence, parents' mental illness, parents' homelessness, sibling death, parents' terminal illness, or child left with relatives. Each of these circumstances could have been the sole cause of the child's removal from the birth family or could have occurred in combination with other circumstances.

### Contact and Type of Adoption

There were differences in the level of contact when looking at the type of adoption for child specific adopters (20% no contact, 80% some contact), foster parent adopters (33% no contact, 67% some contact) and relative or kin adopters (0% no contact, 100% some contact). Half of general adopters had contact and half did not.

### RESEARCH QUESTION 8: HOW DO FAMILIES IN THE STUDY VIEW SUCCESS IN THE ADOPTION?

#### Adoptive Parents' Definition of Successful Adoption

Parents were asked to provide their definition of a successful adoption of a child with special needs. The 5 most frequently mentioned definitions were: 1) parents are committed to the child and the child's adoption into the family, which includes unconditional love and fully integrating the child into the family (29.8%); 2) child is still living in the home and not behaving negatively, such as having trouble with the law, smoking, drinking, or using drugs (21.7%); 3) child is showing progress in the adoptive home—the child's behavior is improving, the child is happier in the home, and physical and medical issues are being resolved or controlled (16.1%); 4) parent and child have bonded with each other, love each other (15.5%); and 5) parents were prepared to adopt a child with special needs and therefore had realistic expectations of the child (the most important part of the preparation is receiving extensive background information on the child) (14.3%).

One parent described unconditional love and acceptance in the following quote:

*"...They come with all these diagnoses and it's kind of overwhelming at first. ... And when you get deep in the root of them in who they are, it's not so 'special needs' anymore. It's just—they're your kid. And that's who they are."*

A second parent described success more in terms of parental commitment:

*"Raising a kid to maturity where they are self-supporting. And not giving up. And also meeting all their needs no matter what those are. Hanging in there."*

Table 38. Definition of Successful Adoption

Success Themes	Number	Percent
Parental commitment to child	48	29.8%
Child is not behaving negatively	35	21.7%
Child is showing progress in the adoptive home	26	16.1%
Parent and child bonding	25	15.5%
Parents are prepared for the child's adoption & have realistic child expectations	23	14.3%
Parents are working the system for the benefit of the child	14	8.7%
Parents have the necessary skill and temperament to parent a child with special needs	10	6.2%
Agency provides necessary services/Needs of child are met	10	6.2%
Family has support systems in place	9	5.6%
Agency provides moral support	7	4.3%
Family and child are a good match	6	3.7%
Child was prepared for the adoption	2	1.2%
Agency uses best practices with the adoptive family	2	1.2%
Family has legal support in the adoption process	1	0.6%
Agencies have screened out families unsuited to parenting children with special needs	1	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>219*</b>	

\* Total does not add to 161 since parents were able to provide more than one response.

A third parent focused on the role of preparation as the key to success:

*“I would define it as one that the adoptive parents goes in knowing everything that is known about the situation, that there’s no secrets, there’s no things that are held off until later, that they’re told flat out before the placement everything that they need to know. I feel like at least some understanding of issues that could possibly be involved such as disorders that the kids might have ... And I think that any time a special needs adoption happens that the people who do the adoption should at some point have had some kind of contact with children similar to the children that they’re going to adopt.”*

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION 9: WHY DO FAMILIES FEEL THE ADOPTION OF THE FOCUS CHILD HAS BEEN A SUCCESS?**

When families were asked if the adoption of their focus child had been a success, 88% (n=141) said yes, 11% (n=17) said they were not sure yet/maybe, and 2% (n=3) said it was not a success. Parents were also asked about the reasons they felt their adoption had been successful. The largest group, 34%, indicated that the child’s improvement was evidence that the child’s adoption was a success. Twenty-three percent of families also pointed to the fact that bonding had occurred. While meeting minimal success criteria for participation in the study (parents were still committed to the child), the 3 families who reported that they did not feel the adoption of their child was a success were discouraged due to the child’s lack of attachment, the children’s challenging behaviors, and need for out-of-home placements.

The following quote illustrates these concerns:

*“We continue to be a family in crisis. And while I still love my daughter, I am very dissatisfied with or unhappy with her behaviors. Um, some of which relate back to her biological family, um, and behaviors that I think, that I feel very let down. The promised post-adoption support never materialized.”*

Nearly one-fourth (24%) of families defined success in terms of their commitment to the child. This was often described in terms of how the child was viewed as a member of the family. Some stated that the child is “part of their family” or “is treated as if they were a biological child.” Thirteen percent described their success in more minimalist terms such as the child is better off than they were before, the child is still in the home, or the adoption hasn’t dissolved yet. Seven percent of families just said they were satisfied with how things were going or mentioned some of the rewards of adopting.

Other families pointed to the good nature of the adopted child (5%), or they described some parent characteristics that made the adoption a success such as having a good awareness of the child’s presenting issues, active advocacy for resources, and good problem-solving skills. Some families (4%) attributed their success to good matching on the part of the agency that placed the child with them.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION 10: WHAT HAS THE FAMILY CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE FOCUS CHILD’S ADOPTION?**

Families were asked in what ways they believed

Table 39. Adoption Outcome (N=161 families)

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Number*</b>	<b>Percent*</b>
Child improvement	55	34%
Commitment	38	24%
Bonding/Attachment	37	23%
Minimal/Lesser evil	21	13%
Satisfied/Rewarded	12	7%
No answers given	35	22%
Defined adoption as unsuccessful	3	1%

\* Percentages will not add to 100 as families could give more than one response.

Table 40. Success Factors (N=161 families)

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Number*</b>	<b>Percent*</b>
<b>Child</b>		
Good child/Good disposition	8	5%
<b>Parent</b>		
Effective parenting skills	10	6%
Seeking extra resources/information	6	4%
Good training/Information	6	4%
Acknowledge child's history	5	3%
<b>Agency</b>		
Good match	7	4%

\* Percentages will not add to 100 as families could give more than one response.

that their family had contributed to the success of the adoption. Seventy-three percent (N=117) of the families reported that commitment to the child and the adoption process was their main contribution. They gave examples of commitment as follows: “sticking it out through thick and thin” (58 families); “fully integrating the child into the family/not treating them any differently” (56 families); “giving the child unconditional love” (29 families); and “willingness to dedicate extensive amounts of time to the child’s development (9 families).

Thirty percent of the parents suggested that “good parenting skills” contributed to success. The parenting skills most often identified included patience (14 families) and consistent discipline (13 families). Other skills mentioned included: the ability to provide routines and stability (7 families); working as a team (6 families); having good communication skills (6 families); and willingness to make changes in the family system/flexibility (7 families).

Twenty percent of parents reported that they contributed to the success of the adoption by taking the initiative to expand their resource repertoire either by advocating with the public agency, schools, and the mental health system to get their children the resources they needed (16 families) or by seeking new information on effective parenting through experts and trainings (13 families).

Other contributions included having a support network of family and friends, having realistic expectations of a child’s strengths and weaknesses through participation in good training, by

receiving good information from the agency about their child, and from prior parenting experience.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 11: WHAT HAS THE FOCUS CHILD CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF HIS/HER ADOPTION?**

When families were asked to identify how the focus child had contributed to the success of the adoption, 51% of parents felt that improvement in the child’s behavior and evidence of trying hard contributed to the success. Forty-five percent of parents reported that the child accepting the family as their own and being able to bond contributed to the success. A smaller group, 17% of families, reported that the child contributed just by being there. Twelve percent of families reported the child contributed by being a great kid and/or having a sweet disposition. Seven percent could not think of any ways the child had contributed.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 12: WHAT HAS THE AGENCY CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE FOCUS CHILD’S ADOPTION?**

Thirty-seven percent of families reported that the agency contributed by providing moral support, which included emotional support to the parents, a partnership approach, a willingness to advocate for the family, and timely communication with the parents. Thirty-three percent of families said that the agency contributed nothing to the success of the adoption. Twenty-two percent of families reported that the agency-provided resources or services were important to the success of their adoption.

**Table 41. Family Contributions to Success (N=161 families)**

<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Number*</b>	<b>Percent*</b>
Commitment	117	73%
Effective parenting skills	48	30%
Seeking extra resources/Information	33	20%
A support network	13	8%
Good training/Information	12	7%
Missing data	9	6%

\* Percentages will not add to 100 as families could give more than one response.

**Table 42. Focus Child Contributions to Success (N=161 families)**

<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Improvement/Trying hard	82	51%
Bonding/ Initial openness to attaching	72	45%
Being a kid	27	17%
Good kid/Good disposition	20	12%
Missing data	12	7%

\* Percentages will not add to 100 as families could give more than one response.

Fourteen percent of families identified receiving good training and honest and thorough information about the focus child as important to the success of their adoption. Some examples of information parents appreciated knowing up front included: fetal alcohol syndrome, schizophrenia, and attachment issues. Parents reported that knowing the problems up front helped them to identify the most appropriate therapist or medication right away. The services they appreciated receiving were special attachment therapies and respite.

Only 7% of families reported that the agencies provided at least one really helpful worker or that the agency did a really thorough job. Seven percent of families mentioned the financial support provided by the agency as contributing to the success of the adoption.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 13: WHAT ADVICE DO ADOPTIVE PARENTS GIVE TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS AND AGENCIES?**

#### **Families' Advice to Prospective Adoptive Parents**

Participants were asked to provide advice to prospective adoptive parents concerning the adoption process and parenting an adopted child. Families most frequently said that they should display commitment to the child and the adoption process. This included willingness to devote time and attention to the child, provide the child with opportunities to become successful, and a willingness to work with the agency (23%). Twenty percent of families specified the following important characteristics that adoptive families must have: flexibility, tolerance, patience, unconditional love for the child, and the importance of maintaining a sense of humor.

Other responses included: the importance of advocating for the child (13%); maintaining realistic expectations of the child's strengths and weaknesses (12%); being open to discussing and/or contacting the birth family, foster family or other significant individuals from the child's past (9%); interacting with other foster/adoptive parents while in the adoption process to better understand the process, as well as possible child challenges (8%); the importance of fostering the child they are planning to adopt to understand the child's past and develop a relationship with him/her prior to the adoption (8%); and openness to learning about and seeking available resources such as support groups, subsidy and other post-adoption services (8%).

#### **Families' Advice to Agencies**

Based on their experiences with adopting, families were asked to provide advice to agency staff. They mentioned most often the need for adequate resources and services for both the family and child. These included post-adoption services such as subsidy, respite, support groups and counseling (36%). Thirty percent of families indicated that they needed information about the process and the child's background, as well as referrals for services. Other advice included: communicate with families in a timely and honest manner and provide parents with realistic information about the child's potential outcomes based on his/her history (19%); provide good training for agency staff members, prospective adoptive families and adoptive families, including useful parenting tools adequate preparation for both the parents and child for the adoption process (18%); be supportive and encouraging to all types of families during the process as well as after finalization (17%); display a commitment to the process, which included

finding the best possible family for a child and placing the child's needs above standard agency practices (12%); and avoid displaying bias towards families and advocate for both the family and the child (9%).

In summary, adoptive parents felt it was most important that families approach adopting a child or children from the foster care system with commitment to the child and to the process and a willingness to remain flexible, tolerant, and patient. Families need to maintain and display unconditional love for the child, as well as a sense of humor. Adoptive parents felt that agencies need to provide services and resources to support the child and the family. They also expressed that agencies should provide adequate information about the adoption process and the child's background, as well as referrals for services.

**Table 43. Agency Contributions to Success (N=161 families)**

<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Moral support	60	37%
Nothing	53	33%
Resources	36	22%
Good training/Information	23	14%
Competent practices	12	7%
Financial support	12	7%

\*Percentages will not add to 100 as families could give more than one response.

**Table 44. Advice to prospective adoptive families**

<b>Type of Advice</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent*</b>
Families must be committed to child/adoption process	38	23%
Flexibility, tolerance, patience, unconditional love, and a sense of humor.	31	20%
Families need to advocate for child	22	13%
Families must have realistic expectations of child	19	12%
Families need to be open-minded	15	9%
Meeting foster/adoptive parents is important	13	8%
Families should foster child before adopting	12	8%
Families must be open to resources/services	12	8%

\* Percentages will not add to 100 as families could give more than one response.

### **Barriers Study Agency, Family and Child Factors influencing the Adoption Process**

All barrier and success codes were grouped thematically into factors. The factors fall into three categories: agency, family, and child factors. Each factor can have a positive or negative valence; for example, the factor “agency emotional support” could occur as a barrier if the family reported that they did not receive the level of emotional support they needed from their agency during the adoption process, or it could occur as a success factor if a family reported that a high level of emotional support from their agency helped them during the adoption process.

#### **CHILD FACTORS**

##### *Child's Attachment*

Includes the child's ability to attach to adoptive family members and their level of attachment.

##### *Foster care experiences and history*

Includes experiences in foster care, such as length of time in care, the number of placements a child has had, and the quality of care such as abusive or caring foster parents. Also included is child preparation for the adoption and other history, such as reason for coming into care.

##### *Child's behavior*

Includes the presence of child strengths or challenging behaviors. Examples of strengths include being loving and kind, having a good sense of humor, or being perceived as a “great kid.” Examples of challenges include running away, chronic lying, hoarding food, animal cruelty, substance abuse, tantrums, aggression, and parentified behavior.

***Child's health***

Includes the child's health, such as HIV status, special medical needs, and being terminally ill.

***Child's mental health***

Includes the child's mental and emotional health; for example, psychiatric diagnoses, need for psychotropic medications, and difficulty controlling emotions.

***Child's educational needs***

Includes the child's educational needs such as learning disabilities, developmental and cognitive delays, and mental retardation.

***Child Demographics***

Includes the child's age and race.

**FAMILY FACTORS*****Family Commitment***

Includes the family's level of commitment to the adoption process, to a child who has been referred or placed with them, and the child's adoption into the family.

***Family's ability to interact with systems***

Includes the family's efforts and success in working with systems for the child and family's benefit. Systems include the child welfare system and the agency, the school system, mental health systems, service providers for additional ADHD and attachment disorder training and resources, etc.

***Support systems***

Includes adoptive parents' formal and informal sources of emotional and practical support, including support groups, family and friends.

***Family preparation and expectations***

Includes the adoptive parents' level of preparation for adoption, such as training and life experiences that have helped prepare them for adoption and parenting. Also included are their expectations of the child's behavior and achievement.

***Parent-child match***

Includes the extent to which the parents feel that a child who has been referred or placed is a good match with their family including temperament, interests, appearance, and cultural, racial and ethnic background.

***Family Composition***

Includes family size, marital status and family composition, such as the presence of biological, foster or other adopted children being parented at the same time as the adopted child.

***Family dynamics***

Includes the level of family functioning prior to the child's adoption, such as the physical and mental health of family and the way they relate to each other.

***Child integration***

Includes the ability of the adoptive family to fully accept and integrate the child as a family member, while simultaneously acknowledging and respecting his/her past attachments and history.

***Parenting ability and temperament***

Includes the parents' skill in parenting, such as the ability to use effective, non-punitive discipline and important features of temperament such as flexibility, ability to provide structure, stress management and a sense of humor.

***Family distress at placement disruption/Child no longer available***

Includes the experience of families who have had the placement of one or more children disrupt, or who sought to adopt a particular child who became unavailable for adoption (e.g. the child returned to the biological family or was adopted by foster parents).

***Change in personal circumstances***

Includes instances in which a family's level of commitment to the adoption process changed due to personal circumstances such as loss of income, pregnancy, serious illness, or relocation.

**AGENCY FACTORS*****Availability of services***

Includes the extent to which the agency provides pre-and post-adoption services to the child and family, such as therapy, respite, and support groups.

***Agency emotional support***

Includes the extent to which the agency partners with the family in the process of adopting the child—how encouraging, helpful and emotionally supportive the staff are to the family.

***Availability of financial support***

Includes financial issues such as availability of needed subsidy or fees incurred during the application process.

***Adoption process logistics***

Includes the level of bureaucratic “red tape” that parents experience while trying to adopt the child, how easy and quick the process is and any errors and inconveniences experienced, such as redundant, delayed or lost paperwork.

***Legal system interactions***

Includes experiences related to the legalities of the adoption process, such as the termination of parental rights and the finalization of the adoption. It includes the agency's ability to provide assistance with legalities, legal process and delays, and the family's interactions with others such as the guardian ad litem or judge.

***Jurisdictional and inter-jurisdictional issues***

Includes the level of difficulty encountered by parents in the adoption process when working with more than one agency or with two different counties, regions or states. This factor includes issues between public and private agencies and issues with ICPC.

***Family Assessment***

This factor includes the agency's effective screening and assessment of parents for their suitability to raising children with special needs.

***Level of agency bias and culturally competence***

Includes the agency's non-biased and fair treatment of diverse family types and the level of cultural competence of staff members. It includes families' experiences of bias based on race, marital status, sexual orientation, age, financial status, and religion. It includes experiences with others in the system beyond the family agency (e.g. discrimination by child's agency, judge).

***Agency communication/responsiveness***

Includes agency practices related to communication, such as timely responses and access to complete and accurate information. It includes the level of effective and thorough assistance families received during the process of adopting.

***Adoption Exchanges***

Includes the adoptive family's experiences with adoption exchanges, whether the exchanges were easy to use, helpful in finding a child to adopt, and whether agency staff were responsive to their inquires.

### Top Barriers

	Discontinued during Orientation/ Application (N=5)		Discontinued prior to Completion of Training/ Home Study (N=27)		Discontinued after Approval (No Placement) (N=53)		Discontinued after Disrupted Placement, (No Finalization) (N=17)		Finalized (N=98)	
Child's attachment	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	2	12%	3	3%
Foster care experiences and history	0	0%	0	0%	3	6%	3	18%	6	6%
Child's behavior	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	1	6%	6	6%
Child's health	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Child's mental health	0	0%	0	0%	2	4%	1	6%	1	1%
Child's educational needs	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Child demographics	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Family commitment	2	40%	1	4%	5	9%	2	12%	6	6%
Family's ability to interact with systems	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Support systems	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	1	6%	0	0%
Family preparation and expectation	1	20%	4	15%	4	8%	1	6%	9	9%
Parent-child match	0	0%	0	0%	4	8%	3	18%	2	2%
Family composition	0	0%	1	4%	2	4%	0	0%	4	4%
Family dynamics	1	20%	2	7%	4	8%	2	12%	0	0%
Child integration	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	2	12%	4	4%
Parenting ability and temperament	0	0%	1	4%	1	2%	1	6%	0	0%
Family distress at placement disruption/ child no longer available	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	11	65%	1	1%

**Top Barriers *continued***

	<b>Discontinued during Orientation/ Application (N=5)</b>		<b>Discontinued prior to Completion of Training/ Home Study (N=27)</b>		<b>Discontinued after Approval (No Placement) (N=53)</b>		<b>Discontinued after Disrupted Placement, (No Finalization) (N=17)</b>		<b>Finalized (N=98)</b>	
Change in personal circumstances	1	20%	9	33%	14	26%	1	6%	1	1%
Availability of services	0	0%	1	4%	6	11%	5	29%	15	15%
Agency emotional support	0	0%	7	26%	22	42%	12	71%	23	23%
Availability of financial support	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Adoption process logistics	1	20%	11	41%	27	51%	7	41%	67	68%
Legal system interactions	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	18%	11	11%
Jurisdictional/ Inter-jurisdictional issues	0	0%	0	0%	7	13%	3	18%	14	14%
Family assessment	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%	1	6%	4	4%
Level of agency bias and cultural competence	0	0%	2	7%	6	11%	3	18%	10	10%
Agency communication/ responsiveness	0	0%	9	33%	26	49%	8	47%	45	46%
Adoption exchanges	0	0%	0	0%	2	4%	0	0%	1	1%

## Overall Barriers

	Discontinued during Orientation/ Application (N=5)		Discontinued prior to Completion of Training/ Home Study (N=27)		Discontinued after Approval (No Placement) (N=53)		Discontinued after Disrupted Placement, (No Finalization) (N=17)		Finalized (N=98)	
Child's attachment	0	0%	2	7%	3	6%	5	29%	4	4%
Foster care experiences and history	0	0%	1	4%	14	26%	9	53%	25	26%
Child's behavior	0	0%	2	7%	3	6%	2	12%	14	14%
Child's health	0	0%	0	0%	4	8%	1	6%	2	2%
Child's mental health	1	20%	3	11%	6	11%	2	12%	4	4%
Child's educational needs	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%	2	2%
Child demographics	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Family commitment	3	60%	5	19%	9	17%	4	24%	18	18%
Family's ability to interact with systems	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	1	1%
Support systems	0	0%	1	4%	3	6%	4	24%	1	1%
Family preparation and expectation	1	20%	5	19%	11	21%	4	24%	15	15%
Parent-child match	1	20%	5	19%	12	23%	7	41%	9	9%
Family composition	2	40%	5	19%	6	11%	0	0%	10	10%
Family dynamics	1	20%	5	19%	9	17%	4	24%	2	2%
Child integration	0	0%	2	7%	5	9%	2	12%	9	9%
Parenting ability and temperament	0	0%	4	15%	2	4%	3	18%	2	2%

### Overall Barriers *continued*

	Discontinued during Orientation/ Application (N=5)		Discontinued prior to Completion of Training/ Home Study (N=27)		Discontinued after Approval (No Placement) (N=53)		Discontinued after Disrupted Placement, (No Finalization) (N=17)		Finalized (N=98)	
Family distress at placement disruption/ child no longer available	1	20%	0	0%	2	4%	16	94%	2	2%
Change in personal circumstances	1	20%	10	37%	17	32%	1	6%	2	2%
Availability of services	0	0%	4	15%	14	26%	9	53%	38	39%
Agency emotional support	1	20%	16	59%	40	75%	15	88%	58	59%
Availability of financial support	1	20%	2	7%	2	4%	1	6%	13	13%
Adoption process logistics	3	60%	22	81%	50	94%	14	82%	96	98%
Legal system interactions	0	0%	0	0%	4	8%	4	24%	26	27%
Jurisdictional/ Inter-jurisdictional issues	0	0%	3	11%	15	28%	5	29%	29	30%
Family assessment	2	40%	4	15%	2	4%	1	6%	12	12%
Level of agency bias and cultural competence	0	0%	8	30%	15	28%	5	29%	22	22%
Agency communication/ responsiveness	1	20%	19	70%	46	87%	15	88%	78	80%
Adoption exchanges	0	0%	0	0%	5	9%	0	0%	11	11%

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