

MEDIA ADVISORY: EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE SUNDAY, NOV. 14, 2004

Adam Pertman, Executive Director
apertman@adoptioninstitute.org
617-332-8944 or 617-763-0134

Hollee McGinnis, Policy Director
hmcginnis@adoptioninstitute.org
212-925-4089 or 646-263-9236

Major New Study Finds High Success Rate for Adoptions from Foster Care

NEW YORK, Nov. 14, 2004 – A major new study released today by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute reports that the vast majority of adoptions from foster care are remaining intact over time, notwithstanding concerns by many professionals that the failure rate of such adoptions would rise as a result of huge increases in their numbers during the last decade.

The Adoption Institute report, entitled “What’s Working for Children: A Policy Study of Adoption Stability and Termination,” offers generally good news for the growing number of children being adopted from foster care nationwide – and for the families in which these boys and girls are finding permanent homes. The study was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

The 71-page report also raises questions about the effectiveness of state data-collection systems on adoption disruption (termination before legal finalization) and dissolution (termination after legal finalization). And it offers recommendations for improving policies and practices in order to lower the number of terminations, increase the prospects of success for the 129,000 children currently waiting in foster care for permanent homes, and improve the daily lives of the adoptive families that remain intact but nevertheless encounter challenges.

“Our research will surprise few of the tens of thousands of adoptive families formed each year with children from foster care, because they know how successful they are,” said Adam Pertman, Executive Director of the Adoption Institute. “But this should provide a reality check for people used to hearing mainly bad news about ‘the system’ and, hopefully, our findings will also serve as impetus for making improvements that will help all the parents and children involved.”

Among the principal findings in the Adoption Institute’s report are:

- * The vast majority of adoptions of children from foster care remain stable over time. Concerns by professionals and researchers that policies promoting such adoptions would lead to more terminations generally appear unfounded.
- * More complete information is needed. An array of problems, including a lack of uniformity in definitions and inadequate data collection, prevents a thorough understanding of the reality on the ground or of the impact of various risk factors.



* Nontraditional parents are effective. Families headed by single, foster, older, lower-income and less-educated parents (as well as by kin) have better stability rates than the average, and therefore provide important opportunities for placement of children from foster care.

* Post-adoption services are vital. In addition to careful matching and preparation before a placement, providing assistance of various kinds after the child is in an adoptive home is critically important in helping to promote stability.

Among the Adoption Institute's recommendations are:

* Improve family matching, preparation and education. Careful family evaluations should be systematically conducted, along with the use of specific tools and protocols, to enhance the matching process and enhance the prospects for success.

* Develop comprehensive disclosure policies. Many terminations (and problems in intact families) occur because parents receive inadequate information; states should therefore routinely provide better, more comprehensive information, including portable health records.

* Provide consistent, reliable support. Post-adoption services are critically important, both to lessen the possibility of termination and to enhance the functioning of intact adoptions; mental-health services and temporary residential care should also be available.

The Adoption Institute studied the relevant social science research over the last 20 years, and conducted a survey of 15 states' information-collection capabilities, yielding important findings about data collection, termination rates and risk factors. States reporting disruption information in our study all had low rates, ranging up to 8.4%, for adoptive placements in 1999; dissolution rates were similarly low, from 0.4% to 5.4% for 1998 adoptions and for children entering care in 2000. Other research examined by the Institute showed comparable or even better results.

BACKGROUND: Increasingly over the past 25 years, as a result of professional consensus that children benefit more from adoption than from long-term, temporary foster care, public policy has promoted the placement of boys and girls with permanent adoptive families. This development has resulted in massive increases in adoptions from foster care: 50,000 children were adopted in 2001 – a 36% jump from 37,000 in 1998 and a 78% rise from 28,000 in 1996. Many professionals feared the number of terminations, consequently, also would increase.

ABOUT US: The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, an independent nonprofit, is one of the pre-eminent research, policy and education organizations in its field. Its objective is to improve the lives of everyone touched by adoption – especially children – by providing reliable, research-based information that will lead to more ethical and effective policies, practices and laws.

To obtain a copy of the study's executive summary or the complete report, visit our website at www.adoptioninstitute.org or call 212-925-4089. For an interview or more information, please contact Executive Director Adam Pertman at apertman@adoptioninstitute.org or 617-0332-8944 or Policy Director Hollee McGinnis at hmcginnis@adoptioninstitute.org or 212-979-0382.

