

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS:
DECEMBER 2001

A REPORT SUBMITTED TO
THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES
AS PART OF AN EVALUATION OF THE *ADOPTOHIO* PROGRAM

DECEMBER 21, 2001

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is being submitted to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) as a product of the evaluation of the *AdoptOHIO* program being conducted by Steven R. Howe and his associates.

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Twenty-seven telephone surveys were conducted with representatives of public and private agencies who were knowledgeable concerning the *AdoptOhio* program. The interviews were conducted in the first three weeks of December 2001. The key informants answered questions in three areas:

- ? Program strengths and areas for improvement
- ? Problems associated with children who are difficult to place
- ? Opportunities and threats for *AdoptOhio*.

Our key informants represented not only a range of public and private agencies, but also a range of experience with the *AdoptOhio* program. Some had worked with *AdoptOhio* a year or less; others were veterans in the adoption arena and had worked with *AdoptOhio* since its inception. Some respondents were new to the field and some had 20 years of experience. Respondents included adoption workers, mental health counselors or case managers, adoption supervisors, adoption care coordinators, and program directors and co-directors. Geographically, respondents represented the full range of the state, including large cities and small rural counties.

The respondents were invested in the program and generally supported the aims of *AdoptOhio*. They offered a variety of ideas for program improvements. The findings from the interviews are summarized in the attached tables. All of the material in the tables was generated by the key informants and is presented without editorial comment. Material in quotes is verbatim. The rest of the material represents a condensation of respondent remarks. Following are some of the key findings:

STRENGTHS

- ? The program is that it brings people together across the state and opens up lines of communication between counties. This improved communication helps with recruitment of families and placing children.
- ? *AdoptOhio* increased attention on finding permanent families for children in our state. This is a significant benefit for our state's children and families.
- ? The funding and networking opportunities provided assist public and private agencies in their efforts to improve adoptions in their counties.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- ? Memorandums about the program from ODJFS are sometimes confusing.
- ? Respondents wondered what they should be doing and whom to contact if they had questions about the program.

- ? Some respondents mentioned that their Maintenance of Effort levels were too high and wanted to discuss the issue with ODJFS.
- ? Respondents want the web site and the OAPL book kept up-to-date. It can be confusing and discouraging for families if this information is outdated.

HARD-TO-PLACE CHILDREN

- ? Offering additional incentives for agencies and providing aftercare services for parents and children would help with hard-to-place children (e.g., those who have experienced abuse or children with behavior problems).
- ? Developing more effective programmatic responses for hard-to-place children should be a collaborative effort that involves all of the major stakeholders, including the families, agencies, and the AdoptOhio program staff.

FUTURE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- ? Pictures of more of the children should be available on the web.
- ? If videos of the children were available on the web, prospective parents could see and hear the children.
- ? There is concern about funding cuts. Increased funding has enabled agencies to do better work and cuts could be detrimental.
- ? Agencies want “seamless, 365 day per year” contracts. The gaps in contracts or long waits in receiving payments can be difficult, especially for small private agencies.
- ? Ongoing training will remain important, as there has been turnover at several levels within agencies and within the AdoptOhio program.
- ? Respondents like the promotional materials, meetings, and conferences and, in general, believe that increased publicity and awareness will promote higher adoption rates.

Table 1: Strengths of the *AdoptOhio* Program

EFFECTIVE INGREDIENT	EXAMPLES	KEY QUOTES/PARAPHRASES
COLLABORATION	<p>Meetings for sharing information, networking and idea generation</p> <p>Best practices improve; for example, children benefit from having the same caseworker throughout the process</p> <p>Counties have to accept home studies done by privates</p> <p>There is a better working relationship between the county and private agencies</p>	<p>“It’s (<i>AdoptOhio</i>) a huge collaborative”</p> <p>“Now we have one goal in mind...and these are Ohio’s children and not just a certain agency’s child.”</p> <p>“Agencies throughout the state are working together”</p> <p>All agencies on the same page and doing the same thing as far as rules and regulations</p>
MORE CHILDREN PLACED	<p>More children are being placed because private agencies are receiving funding for their efforts.</p> <p>More older children are being placed, also because the private agencies are receiving funding and can help out with this.</p>	<p>“It (<i>AdoptOhio</i>) connects children and families”</p> <p>“It helps us move the kids.”</p> <p>“Families aren’t limited to selecting a kid jus in the areas where they live”</p> <p>It allows us to recruit from a larger pool of families for children who need homes</p> <p>“The state is paying more attention to the idea of adoption”</p>

EFFECTIVE INGREDIENT	EXAMPLES	KEY QUOTES/PARAPHRASES
MARKETING	<p>The website, the OAPL book, and public fairs allow agencies to reach a broader audience and get the information to more potential families or parents.</p> <p>Information is available in all of the counties.</p> <p>Promotes the adoption of children known to private agencies.</p> <p>Information is in a centralized place and families can go there (to the web or OAPL) and find it</p> <p>Prospective parents are able to see the children (idea that a picture is worth a thousand words)</p>	<p>“Gets the word out”</p> <p>“...more accountability...you have all your children listed on the web...this puts pressure on agencies to look at other children.”</p>
FUNDING (INCENTIVES, RECRUITMENT MONEY AND MINI-GRANTS)	<p>The reimbursement is generous and helpful to agencies, if the placement is not a difficult one.</p> <p>This helps the privates function (join in the process).</p> <p>Public agencies don't have to absorb the costs for private agency work anymore.</p> <p>It helps to pay staff salaries.</p>	<p>“Incentives help agencies to go out and recruit children”</p> <p>The publics and privates can collaborate more now that the publics don't have to pay the private agencies (e.g., for adoption studies).</p> <p>“We are funded by a levy (levy doesn't provide enough funding), and we couldn't do our work with <i>AdoptOhio</i>.”</p>

Table 2: Areas for Improvement and Ideas for Making Improvement

WEAKNESS	EXAMPLES	KEY QUOTES/PARAPHRASES
EDUCATION	<p>More meetings and training sessions are needed. They help us with networking and learning policies and procedures.</p> <p>Need to have a November Conference.</p>	<p>Be prepared to answer process and policy questions at meetings.</p> <p>There is lots of turnover at the agencies and at <i>AdoptOhio</i>. Therefore, continual training on billing is needed at both levels.</p> <p>Great chance for collaborating and learning.</p>
FUNDING	<p>Gap in the contracts</p> <p>Long pay interval</p> <p>Some public agencies need more control or say over who they work with</p>	<p>Need for seamless and retroactive contracts. The contract "...needs to be good for 365 days a year."</p> <p>Need to be paid sooner or paid "along the way to cover costs." We don't get our money until finalization. "We don't get our payment until long after the home study is completed."</p> <p>The long wait for reimbursement is hard on the "privates" when they try to place children who are difficult to place. In this instance, the funding is very low and the privates have to wait a long time. Thus, it is harder for them to help in placing difficult to place children.</p> <p>If the private agency isn't doing the job, then we have to do it, and they (the private agency) still get the reimbursement.</p> <p>"They (private agencies) don't add to the process and they get the funds."</p>

WEAKNESS	EXAMPLES	KEY QUOTES/PARAPHRASES
SUPPORT	<p>Support the children</p> <p>Support parents and new families</p> <p>Post-adoptive Services</p>	<p>Find more families to recruit. One idea is to improve recruitment by increasing publicity.</p> <p>Some children don't have their pictures available. Make sure that all children have their pictures available -- on the web or in OAPL.</p> <p>Update the web site, "parents get frustrated" after looking at pictures of children who have already been adopted. It is important to remove the pictures of the children who have already been placed. "Update the pictures and web on a weekly basis"</p> <p>Families need resources and support after the adoption has taken place. It's a problem that the agency is only given enough funding to visit the child and family one time per month.</p> <p>They (<i>AdoptOhio</i> administrators) need to give consideration to increasing supports – in terms of more visits to the family by the caseworkers after the adoption process and other supports.</p>

Table 3: Hard to Place Children

GROUP	WHY AND FURTHER IDEAS
TEENAGERS	“Always a hard group to place.” More education and publicity. It may be important to provide education to prospective parents, education about raising a teenager.
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS	Also a hard group to place. Offer incentives to agencies. More education and support could be provided to parents. Improve support of family and education after the adoption process is completed.
CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED OR HAVE OFFENDED	They have to be in families where there are not other children. More training is needed. More support is needed in terms of treatment programs for these youth.

Table 4: Opportunities and Threats

OPPORTUNITY	THREATS
<p>Publicity – increase advertising, use television; improve public education about adoption. Show the success stories. Sometimes all the public knows about is the one bad case. It would be great to showcase the many success stories.</p>	<p>Not enough publicity</p>
<p>Funding – everyone needs to work together to increase lobbying efforts to show what an important issue this is. Make sure that contracts are “seamless” and there is not a gap in contract funds.</p>	<p>More funding would remove impediments to growth.</p> <p>Not dividing funding – if multiple agencies work to benefit a child, then maybe there could be a formula for splitting up the funding. Sometimes the county and private agencies have a difficult time collaborating due to funding issues.</p>
<p>More Communication – more communication about deadlines (some flexibility in timelines would be helpful); increased responsiveness to billing issues; improving and updating OAPL; developing a grievance process (a way to report problems in the system)</p>	<p>Lack of Communication; unclear memorandums and directives; changing communication</p>
<p>Support the Children – increase service availability, especially for difficult to place children, after the adoption has occurred. Make mental health and evaluation services more accessible and available to children and families. Find funding for caseworkers to visit more than one time per month post-adoption to increase support for the child and family.</p>	<p>Not enough services available to children after the adoption process. Families lack support. Staff need more training in areas of child development and ideas for supporting and strengthening families.</p>