

Adoption Excellence Awards for the Year 2001

CATEGORY #1 DECREASE IN THE TIME CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE WAIT FOR PERMANENCY

There were no awards in this category.

CATEGORY #2 INCREASED ADOPTIONS

AWARDEE: **Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
Family and Community Services**

ADDRESS: PO Box 83720, 5th Floor
Boise, ID 83720-0036
208-334-5680
208-334-6664 FAX
hardinr@idhw.state.id.us

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's (IDHW) Child-Specific Adoption Campaign brings the voices and faces of waiting children into the living rooms of families who might want to adopt them, one face, one story, one dream at a time. At the heart of Idaho's adoption recruitment campaign are news media and Internet connections that span the State and reach out to portions of five neighboring States. Each week, news anchors of two Idaho television stations introduce a pre-recorded segment of a child enjoying an activity with that reporter, as they chat about school, favorite sports, a favorite pet, or how long the child has waited in foster care for an adoptive family. A number of communities also read a weekly Wednesday's Child column in their local newspaper that presents the unique strengths and capabilities of each child. Information about Idaho's waiting children is accessible on the Internet and via the toll-free Idaho CareLine.

Idaho's recruitment campaign has been dedicated to the development, nurturing, and coordination of multiple government and private collaborative relationships to reduce barriers to adoption. Its successes have gained the attention of State agencies throughout the Northwest, and Idaho has responded to numerous requests to help other States partner with their local news media. In a little over two years, the multi-faceted campaign has been credited with finding adoptive families for 87 of Idaho and Eastern Oregon's 133 hardest to place children. Ten other children await final selection of applicant families. The numbers reflect a 128% increase in Idaho's statewide adoption figures for fiscal year 1999. The effort enjoys support from business and government leaders, and had received in-kind support from over fifty businesses and agencies. This highly replicable effort has nurtured community ownership of a solution to the problem of Idaho's children who have waited too long for a permanent family.

AWARDEE: **California Department of Social Services
Adoption Initiative Bureau**

ADDRESS: 744 P Street, MS 19/77
Sacramento, CA 95814
916-455-5869
916-455-9125 FAX

The California Department of Social Services created the Adoption Initiative Bureau in 1996 in an effort to bring together a broad array of adoption constituents including public and private providers, policy makers, advocates, and most importantly, adoptive families. A dramatic transformation unfolded over a five year period that examined the philosophy and policies underlying the provision of child welfare and adoption services, developed excellent training components that have been utilized statewide, and catalyzed State, county and private providers to work together to achieve permanence. The results were an unprecedented increase in adoptions throughout California, and positive changes in the outlook and functioning within the statewide adoption system. The combination of promoting collaboration and cooperation across agency boundaries, improving social worker efficiency, and significantly increasing public adoption agency funding has moved California to a whole new level of commitment and accomplishments to provide permanency for children in the foster care system. Outstanding components of the effort include:

- Innovative use of technology to disseminate best practices developed in California and other States,

- Adoption Initiative Workgroups that bring together adoptive families, leaders in adoptive family support organizations, public and private adoption agencies, advocates, attorneys and legislators, and

- Regularly convened regional meetings of public adoption program administrators to facilitate inter-agency collaboration and assist in transfer of best practices among agencies.

From the program's outset, there has been a 77% increase in the chances that foster children who cannot successfully reunify will be adopted.

CATEGORY #3 INCREASED PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

AWARDEE: **Adopt 2000**

ADDRESS: 4550 Post Oak Road
Houston, TX 77027-3184
713-960-1757 X 104
713-960-0756 FAX

Adopt 2000 is a collaboration of the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (TDPRS) and six local, private agencies known for their work in child placement - Associated Catholic Charities, DePelchin Children's Center, Homes of St. Mark, Houston Achievement Place, Lutheran Social Services of the South, and Spaulding for Children. These agencies have come together for the purpose of increasing the number of adoptive families for abused and neglected children. Adopt 2000 is committed to placing 700 children in the Houston area who

wait for families to call their own, and is developing a public-private partnership to minimize the time that children wait for permanency. The project has emphasized public awareness, training for prospective adoptive parents, and post adoption support. Adopt 2000 has created a presence in library branches, park offices, health department facilities, multi-service agencies and YMCA branches. During its first year, Adopt 2000 facilitated permanency by placing a total of 412 Houston-area PRS special needs children with adoptive families. In Texas, Adopt 2000 is recognized as a model for other public-private child welfare collaborations. Because of its recognition throughout the State, Adopt 2000 provides consultation services to agencies that are establishing and implementing similar collaborative projects.

AWARDEE: County of Orange Social Services Agency
Orange County Adoption Consortium
Caretaker Conversion Project

ADDRESS: Children and Family Services
800 N. Eckhoff Street
Orange, CA 92868
714-704-8000

The Orange County Adoption Consortium Caretaker Conversion Project is a collaborative effort initiated by the Orange County Social Services Agency. It is comprised of thirteen organizations: Children's Bureau of Southern California, Catholic Charities, Holy Family Services, Institute for Black Parenting, Independent Adoption center, International Christian Adoptions, International Foster Family Agency, IBP- Latino Family Division, Kinship Center, Olive Crest, Orange County Children and Family Services/Adoptions, Southern California Foster Family Agency, and Vista Del Mar. Since its inception in 1997, the consortium has been responsible for a significant increase in the number of cooperative adoptive placements and the number of cooperative finalized adoptions. The project creates a unique collaborative effort between the public agency and the private agencies to facilitate and expedite adoptions for foster and relative caretakers who wish to adopt children already in their care. Since October 1998, 367 caretaker conversion families have been referred from Children and Family Services to the participating private agencies for completion of their adoption homestudy. The agencies work jointly to coordinate services needed, assess the family for their ability to adopt and complete clearances required to approve the homestudy for the family. All homestudies are completed in a comprehensive and uniform fashion, using a standardized format designed by the California Department of Social Services called SAFE (Structured Adoption Family Evaluation). This innovative project has been replicated by other public-private agencies in Los Angeles County, San Diego County, San Bernadino County and Riverside County. As a result, this model has helped increase the number of adoptions statewide.

CATEGORY #4 SUPPORT FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

AWARDEE: T.I.E.S. for Adoption Project

ADDRESS: 1000 Veteran Avenue, 25-46 Rehabilitation

Building
Los Angeles, CA 90095-7142
310-825-9527
310-794-4996 FAX
sedelste@ucla.edu
Susan Edelstein, Director

The T.I.E.S. for Adoption Project is a program based at the University of California, Los Angeles. The project has worked in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCDS), Adoptions Division, since 1995. The goals of T.I.E.S. are to reduce the barriers to the successful placement of foster children, particularly children who have been prenatally exposed to drugs; to promote each child's health, growth and development; and to ensure the children's successful adoptive placements. These goals are reached through training and educational classes for adoptive parents, and providing an array of supportive services at no cost to the adoptive families. Services include training for parents and professionals, support groups for adoptive families, support groups for children, and therapy for children and families. T.I.E.S. maintains an interdisciplinary, interagency staff team composed of pediatricians, psychologists, therapists, educational consultants, social workers, a psychiatrist, a cultural consultant and an adoptive parent consultant. Adoptive parents have the opportunity to receive supportive services from one agency throughout the adoptive process - before placement, during transition, during the adoptive placement, and on-going services and support long after DCFS involvement with the families has ended. The team has embraced the reality that adoption is a lifelong process, and has designed various elements of the program to assist families along the way. T.I.E.S. has been instrumental in assuring the success of adoptive placements for children who have experienced one or more adoption disruptions in the past, and for children who have been labeled "unadoptable."

CATEGORY #5 PUBLIC AWARENESS

AWARDEE: **Jordan's Furniture**

ADDRESS: 100 Stockwell Drive
Avon, MA 02322-1108
508-580-4900

Jordan's Furniture has created a unique public-private enterprise that continues to thrive and shape the adoption community in Massachusetts. This joint venture, known as the Jordan's Initiative, has set in motion creative recruitment and public awareness efforts. The Jordans are responsible for sponsoring the two largest and most successful adoption parties in the history of Massachusetts, preceded by major media campaigns promoting the events and raising awareness of special needs adoption. The Jordan's Initiative has been the impetus for extensive and far-reaching systemic changes in adoption, shifting the philosophy toward collaboration and commitment to waiting children. The landmark Memorandum of Commitment, signed by the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, the Department of Social Services and its private contracted agencies, began as a statewide meeting, inspired by the Jordans, of directors of special

needs adoption services. The purpose was to identify barriers to the timely adoption of waiting children and determine ways to support prospective families through the adoption process. Committees worked on two central issues: how to better coordinate recruitment and matching activities among agencies, and how to increase public awareness and understanding of waiting children and the adoption process. From this initial work, regional coalitions were established across the State. Bimonthly meetings address common issues and share information on waiting children and families and coordinate a statewide training calendar. The Jordan's Advisory Board oversees activities and has taken on an event-planning role, including statewide conferences, and such targeted activities as the Recruitment Event for Older Boys, and Appreciation Day for special needs adoption social workers. Barry, Eliot, and Heather Jordan have infused their energy and spirit throughout the Massachusetts adoption community. The Jordan Initiative has created an atmosphere for revitalization and positive change in the world of adoption in Massachusetts.

AWARDEE: **New Mexico Children, Youth and Families
Department, PSD
Foster a Future
Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment
Unit**

ADDRESS: 300 San Mateo NE, Suite 500
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505-763-0014
505-763-0041 FAX
Contact: Sandy Hickey

In July of 1998 the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department established a foster and adoptive parent recruitment unit and initiated a marketing and advertising campaign called Foster a Future. The Foster a Future campaign combines community and media relations, child specific recruitment, and a focused effort to motivate families to inquire about adoption. Adoption recruitment, once one of the myriad responsibilities of social workers, nearly tripled after the first year of the recruitment unit's work. The unit is staffed by four individuals with experience in the marketing and promotion field. Their uncanny ability to build relationships has shaped a network in which established partnerships and serendipitous collaborations create opportunities for waiting children to find permanent homes. The Heart Gallery is one event in which portraits of sixty-plus children were created by over forty artists and presented at an art opening. The exhibit travels across the State and boasts many successful placements of the very special children available for adoption. Other unique events and projects include: the Run for Adoption; the Make a Difference Festivals sponsored in partnership with local bookstores; and Adoption Day at the Roundhouse, an awareness raiser for elected officials during the State legislative session. Coming up in 2001 are new strategies: Santa Fe Southern Railroad's Chartered Train for Adoption; movie theater slides promoting foster care and adoption; video store displays, including brochures and a specially produced Foster a Future video available at no charge; and screening of an episode of the series "Touched by an Angel" which tells the story of an older child who is adopted, followed by question and answer. In addition to events and projects, the staff has garnered extensive in-kind support through donated media and advertising. They produce Futures, the State's adoption magazine, maintain the State adoption web site,

update the Foster a Future brochure, disseminate an event calendar, and follow up with prospective foster/adoptive parents to make certain they are receiving the services they need. The unit staff are passionate about their work and capture the spirit of the children who need permanent homes.

CATEGORY #6 INDIVIDUAL AND/OR FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS

AWARDEE: **Lucy McGough**
Professor

ADDRESS: Louisiana State University Law Center
Paul M. Hebert Law Center
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803-1000
225-578-8846
225-578-5935 FAX

Professor Lucy McGough has devoted her professional life to making contributions to the legal arenas of foster care, permanency and adoption. Significant among her achievements is the comprehensive improvement in Louisiana's laws relating to children. From 1986-1991 Professor McGough served as project coordinator for the Louisiana Children's Code Project, which codified and harmonized all laws affecting the exercise of juvenile court jurisdiction. Under her direction, this effort provided an opportunity for input from both professional and lay persons representing the full spectrum of children's legal interests, resulting in a codification of laws which supports the best interest of children and is easily understood by lay persons as well as attorneys. Following this she became Reporter for the Children's Code Advisory Committee to the Louisiana Law Institute, which has drafted all major amendments to the Code since its inception. Under her leadership, Louisiana's laws have undergone comprehensive revision, most notably in facilitating and supporting permanency for children in foster care, and improving adoption practices. Because of her consistent dedication to the creation of a legal structure which focuses on the best interests of children, State laws were easily adapted to comply with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, particularly related to the time frames for permanency planning and provisions for termination of parental rights. Considered Louisiana's leading expert on children's issues, Professor McGough frequently works alongside people at all levels who serve and advocate for children. She frequently lectures the judiciary on such issues as child development and laws affecting children. She provides staff training to the Department of Social Services in the areas of creating permanency and facilitating adoptions for children in foster care. She also makes herself available for consultation with everyone from child welfare professionals to prospective adoptive parents. Professor McGough first developed her lifelong interest in children's issues as a caseworker, and became interested in the law from her work in the juvenile courts. She eventually became the first female law professor at Emory Law School. Among other awards and distinctions, Professor McGough received a Kellogg National Foundation Fellowship, with which she studied the relationship between cognitive child psychology and children's treatment in the legal system. Her energy and inspiring leadership have enabled the State of Louisiana to establish high standards in governing the adoption process.

AWARDEE: **Charles C. Harris**
Chief, Children's Services Section
NC Department of Health and Human Services

ADDRESS: NC Department of Health and Human Services
NC Division of Social Services
Children's Services Section
325 N. Salisbury Street
2408 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2408
919-733-9467
chuck.harris@ncmail.net

Mr. Charles Harris has been the Chief of Children's Services for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services since 1994. Throughout his tenure, Mr. Harris's advocacy for North Carolina's children has been unprecedented. The initiatives that he has championed include Families for Kids, the Casey Foundation's Family to Family program, Federal Child Welfare Waiver Demonstrations, and Challenge for Children. When funding for any single initiative permitted implementation in only some of NC's 100 counties, Mr. Harris infused the philosophy statewide to affect practice in all counties. He has worked diligently with the court system, the mental health system and the General Assembly to improve outcomes for children. At the same time, he has reached out to forge partnerships with private agencies. This outreach has resulted in contracts with four private agencies that specifically focus on the recruitment and support of adoptive homes for special needs children. He initiated the concept of performance-based contracts that make payment contingent upon outcomes reached for children. Agencies are paid in increments at various points in the adoption process - after placement in the adoptive home, at the time the Decree for Adoption is entered, and after a year of post-adoption supervision. This structure creates an incentive for service excellence and success for children. He has addressed the problem of over-representation of African-American children in the foster care system by actively recruiting foster and adoptive homes, and by reaching out to communities that more closely reflect the cultural makeup of children in the foster care system. As one part of this effort, he established a creative partnership with the General Baptist State Convention, a religious organization that represents over 5000 African-American churches in the State. Through Mr. Harris's advocacy, the General Assembly has created two funds to support adoption. The Special Children Adoption Fund rewards counties and private agencies for placing children in adoptive homes, which they could not accomplish with existing funds. The Special Children Adoption Incentive Fund provides support for adoptive parents of children with very special needs. In 1995, when Mr. Harris first became Chief of Children's Services, 661 special needs children were adopted from the foster care system. In State fiscal year 1999-2000, the number increased to 1,231. The increase is the result of the many initiatives championed by Mr. Harris, his strong support and encouragement to staff, and his message to all of the counties that no child who remains in foster care has permanency. Through his leadership, North Carolina has become known across the nation as a State that refuses to recognize long-term foster care as a goal for any child.

AWARDEE: **Merri Dee**
Director of Community Relations
WGN-TV

ADDRESS: 2501 Bradley Place
Chicago, Illinois 60618
773-883-3295
773-528-6857 FAX
md@tribune.com

Ms. Merri Dee is the Director of Community Relations for Chicago's WGN-TV Channel Nine. In this role she oversees WGN's various public service campaigns, reaching over 55 million homes, and has maintained an unwavering commitment to children waiting to be adopted. Ten years ago, she proposed "The Waiting Child" media campaign and convinced the station to make and maintain an ongoing commitment to children in need of foster and adoptive homes. She has served as the program's moderator since its inception. Ms. Dee's leadership over the years has secured the consistent support of WGN-TV and Tribune Broadcasting. They have contributed the costs of air-time and production. The PSAs are beautifully produced and broadcast several times a day during peak viewing times fifty-two weeks a year. An adoptive parent herself, Ms. Dee brings a special respect and sensitivity to the presentation of each featured child. Her work has been recognized by many, including the One Church One Child Adoption Partnership, the Archdiocese of Chicago, and two governors. Most recently, the Governor of Illinois commended her work in helping increase the number of adoptions in Illinois by over 50 percent. In its ten-year run, 40% of the children featured on "The Waiting Child" series have been placed with an adoptive family. Merri Dee has been the rock on which "The Waiting Child" is built. She is there week after week, not only in the corporate boardroom, but also for each of the more than 100 children featured every year.

CATEGORY #7 APPLIED SCHOLARSHIP AND/OR RESEARCH

AWARDEE: **Robert Bernard Hill, Ph.D.**
Senior Researcher

ADDRESS: Westat
1650 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850-3195
301-251-1500
301-251-2040 FAX

Dr. Robert Hill, a sociologist and senior researcher, has devoted his professional life to building knowledge about a wide range of urban issues affecting minorities and low-income populations. One focus of his career has been to understand and explain the experience of African-American families. He has published extensively on areas of critical concern to policymakers - strength and resilience in African-American families, raising children in extended kin networks, and the effects of social welfare policy on minority families. Dr. Hill's research and observations directly

influenced policymakers and administrators at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services as they struggled with the explosive growth of the number of children coming into foster care, the geometric increase in the number of children in kinship care, the over-representation of African-American children in the child welfare system, and the excessive average length of care for African-American children in foster care compared with other groups. Illinois used his insights to design a system that would be more culturally sensitive to African-American families. The definition of "family" was shifted from an exclusive focus on birth parents to reflect kin caregiving as well. Dr. Hill's theories prompted the Department to ask relatives directly about their beliefs on adoption and incorporate that information into practice. The Department also developed an alternative permanency option that transfers legal responsibility without disrupting customary kinship norms or severing the natural bonds that connect children to their birth parents and siblings. Currently, as senior researcher with Westat, Dr. Hill is evaluating the subsidized guardianship program in Illinois. He is in the unique position of rigorously evaluating the Illinois demonstration project that was inspired by his theories and built on the foundation of his ideas. Dr. Hill has an active role in the design of the instruments to test the effects of the program and gauge family strengths and relationships. He has the distinctive ability to chat comfortably with a grandmother about her experiences and concerns and to use these experiences effectively as a scholar and social scientist. Dr. Hill's theories are being translated to effective practice in Illinois. Kinship care now promotes permanency for African American children, a reality that would not have been possible had it not been for Dr. Hill's sustained scholarship and persistent exploration of the realities of African American children and their families.

CATEGORY #8 PHILANTHROPY

AWARDEE: **Reed Smith LLP**

ADDRESS: 435 Sixth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
412-288-3131
412-288-3063 FAX

Reed Smith LLP began its resolute commitment to Allegheny County's child welfare system by responding to a call to community leaders to help reduce the number of children languishing in the foster care system. Hundreds of children were caught in the backlog, some having waited four years or more. Reed Smith quickly became a key participant in a unique public-private effort called the SWAN (StateWide Adoption Network) Adoption Legal Services Project. Reed Smith agreed to single handedly provide all of the pro bono legal services to help relieve the backlog of cases and bridge the gap in the shortage of attorneys available to finalize adoptions. The firm also provided the office space and technological support for the SWAN staff, who manage the project and assist CYF caseworkers in processing paperwork and coordinating the assignment and preparation of adoption cases for the firm's lawyers. Over the last four years, the lawyers of Reed Smith, from its managing partner to its newest associate, have volunteered multiple times to represent dependent children in adoption proceedings, as well as in contested termination proceedings. These lawyers have provided thousands of hours, and invaluable services. Through their efforts, hundreds of children have been taken from the interminable

waiting line, and afforded permanency through adoption. The firm has handled termination and adoption cases for more than 650 children and 528 adoptions have been finalized. Reed Smith's generosity and social responsibility offer hope and healing to the hundreds of children who enter the CYF system every year.

CATEGORY #9 JUDICIAL OR CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

AWARDEE: **Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care**

ADDRESS: 8100 Cameron Road
Building B, Suite 101
Mail Code: Y-967
Austin, TX 78754
512-908-4552
512-908-4554 FAX
hurleyc@tdprs.state.tx.us

The Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care has designed, developed, implemented and enhanced a system of Cluster Courts to assist rural counties in bringing child abuse and neglect cases to final disposition. Cluster Courts gather together a group of rural counties that individually have too few Child Protective Services (CPS) cases to justify a specialized judge, but together constitute a full caseload. A visiting or associate judge is assigned who travels from county to county, holding hearings and trials in all of the CPS cases in those counties. Cluster Court judges, selected for their experience and interest in children's issues, are afforded exception training and education opportunities. Thus, the children involved in CPS cases are provided a priority docket with a well trained, committed judge who is able to make the best possible decisions on their behalf. The Task Force works closely with the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program with the goal of bringing CASA programs to all counties in the State that are served by a Cluster Court. In another innovative endeavor, the Task Force, in close collaboration with Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, has developed the judicial web page which gives juvenile court judges access to individual CPS case data to track children's cases, their permanency plans, and their timely move to permanency. The Task Force has demonstrated the value of strong judicial leadership coupled with cross-system collaboration to directly impact permanency outcomes for children and families.

AWARDEE: **Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, Justice
Supreme Court of Ohio**

ADDRESS: 30 East Broad Street, 3rd Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43226-0419
614-446-2926
614-728-2021 FAX

Justice Stratton has provided substantial, multi-faceted leadership in judicial system improvement relating to adoption and child welfare matters. It is unusual if not unprecedented for a sitting State Supreme Court justice to focus the time, energy, and creativity to systemic improvement in the child welfare and adoption fields that Justice Stratton has. In addition, she recommended and oversaw the creation of the first law school-based Center on Adoption Law at Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio. On the national level, she analyzed judicial barriers to permanency in appellate court proceedings across the United States and then used that information to amend court rules in Ohio. Subsequently, she chaired a national effort to assist appellate courts in expediting appeals in child welfare and adoption cases. Justice Stratton was instrumental in preparing appeals process material for a judicial guidebook published by the National Council on Juvenile and Family Court Judges. She, in her role as a teaching judge at the National Judiciary College, introduced coursework on adoption into the curriculum and personally contributed to curriculum content evaluation for this endeavor. Justice Stratton's consistent, energetic, and selfless work on behalf of children in need of permanent homes has been exceptional.