

**ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE YEAR 2004**

There are a total of seventeen recommended awards, in five award categories.

**CATEGORY: FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES**

**AWARDEE:**           **Bethany Christian Services of Michigan**  
(Category #4 Faith-Based Initiatives)

**ADDRESS:**           901 Eastern Avenue, N.E.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49501  
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[bdv@bethany.org](mailto:bdv@bethany.org)

Since its inception in 1944, Bethany Christian Services has grown to 75 locations in 30 states. Bethany Christian Services of Michigan has made permanent, adoptive homes for children in foster care a priority. The program's accomplishments include the placement of over 795 children from foster care into adoptive homes between the years of 1990 to 2003. Every year since 1995, Bethany of Michigan offices have placed more hard-to-place children from the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange than any other agency in the state. Bethany has also provided an array of other services, such as foster care, adoption, counseling, family preservation, and supportive services to over 9,000 children and families. As a faith-based agency, Bethany highly values its collaborative partnerships and collaborative recruitment efforts with the faith-based community, which includes hundreds of supporting churches, and the county Family Independence Agencies. The staff at Bethany of Michigan is often recognized as dedicated in their provision of a full continuum of services and its commitment to placing older, special needs children throughout Michigan.

**AWARDEE:**           **Bennett Chapel Adoption Program**  
(Category #4 Faith-Based Initiatives)

**ADDRESS:**           186 CR 1003  
Center, TX 75935  
936-598-5509

The history of Bennet Chapel Adoptions Program grew out of the initial efforts of Reverend W.C. Martin, his wife, Donna, and Ms. Martin's sister. In 1997, the Martins inquired about

adopting special needs children and in the same year, they were licensed as foster and adoptive parents. Reverend Martin is the co-founder of Saving a Generation Ministry of Bennett Chapel Family Outreach Center, Inc., a 501 C3 organization that has been recognized nationwide for its success in facilitating and supporting the adoption and fostering of many abused, neglected, and hard to place children in a rural area of Texas known as Possum Trot. Through the Martins' contacts in their large congregation and advocacy, members of their church and local community have provided permanent homes for over 70 children. The children being adopted into this small Texas community are considered to be the most difficult to place, as many are minority children and sibling groups. While the Martins have two children of their own, they have also fostered many youth and adopted four children.

**CATEGORY: SUPPORT FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES**

**AWARDEE:**           **Center for Family Connections**  
**(Category #5 Support for Adoptive Families)**

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The Center for Family Connections (CFFC) is a nonprofit organization located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Founded in 1995, its mission is to construct, reconstruct, refurbish, and renovate families. The CFFC is unique in being a mental health agency specializing in adoption and foster care, but does not do placements. This distinctive arrangement enables CFFC to serve clients without the conflicting agency demands that often hamper the work and ethics of adoption placement agencies. The organization provides clinical treatment, consultation, training, education, and advocacy for individuals, families, and professionals who live and/or work in the world of adoption. The CFFC has held a contract with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services for permanency planning and training for over 20 years. Through consultations, it assists the Department in achieving security, safety, and permanence for children. The CFFC is also a strong proponent of collaborative planning and works with many other organizations, professionals, and volunteer groups. Although it is a small organization rooted in the local community, the CFFC's reach is substantial. Many thousands of children, either directly or indirectly, have been impacted by the innovative programs and models developed throughout the years. It serves approximately 1,200 families every year, including family members by birth, foster care, kinship, and adoption.

**AWARDEE:**           **Project STAR/The Children’s Institute**  
**(Category #5 Support for Adoptive Families)**

**ADDRESS:**           6301 Northumberland Street  
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412-242-7414 FAX  
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The Children’s Institute of Pittsburgh is a nonprofit, comprehensive rehabilitation facility for children and young adults. For the past hundred years, it has been committed to advocacy for children and young adults with special needs and assisted them in realizing their fullest potential. Project STAR, a program of The Children’s Institute, is an example of this commitment to advocacy. Project STAR is a nonprofit, social service, adoption and foster care agency licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. Since October 1985, Project STAR has partnered with families and professionals to provide safe, loving and permanent families for hundreds of children with developmental disabilities. The project has been successful in facilitating the adoption of hundreds of children considered less likely to be adopted because of their special needs, such as those with cystic fibrosis, HIV, and other serious medical conditions. Project STAR and its staff train others on current policies and serve as a resource on a variety of special needs issues such as fetal alcohol syndrome and other behavioral conditions. Over the past eighteen years, the project has also provided an array of adoption services to over 500 children and their families. It has provided support during all stages of the adoption process, such as one of its programs for special needs children and their siblings called Camp Success. In addition to the camp, Project STAR sponsors a family support group and provides numerous outings and recreational activities that enhance and nurture families.

**CATEGORY: INDIVIDUAL AND/OR FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS**

**AWARDEE:**           **Lorena Montgomery**  
**(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)**

**ADDRESS:**           Yuma County Child Protective Services  
3780 S. 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 2A  
Yuma, AZ 85365  
928-341-1159  
928-341-1830 FAX

Lorena Montgomery has been an Adoption Specialist at Yuma County Child Protective Services in Arizona for the past two years. During her time there, she has increased adoptions of older youth by placing and finalizing a total of thirty-seven children in permanent adoptive homes, including fourteen adolescent youths. Ms. Montgomery is a staunch advocate for children and she is a highly conscientious, detailed and enthusiastic worker. Ms. Montgomery always goes

above and beyond the expectations of policy and prides herself on getting to know the children she works with in order to locate a family that will match the personality and other needs of the child. With ever changing policies, high caseloads and turnover of personnel, she reflects a proactive and positive attitude toward her mission and is often described as a positive role model and a dedicated team player. Ms. Montgomery has built a strong statewide network with other state/contract adoption workers, as well as community based agencies. Many believe that she deserves to be recognized for all the good she has done for the children and youth of Yuma County, in large part because of her dedication and leadership qualities.

**AWARDEE:**           **Barbara Holtan**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

**ADDRESS:**           8015 Corporate Drive, Suite C  
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410-933-5700  
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Barbara Holtan is the Executive Director of the Adoption Exchange Association and serves as the Project Director for the Collaboration to AdoptUSKids. In her position, Ms. Holtan is responsible for the AdoptUSKids photolisting website and the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign. She also played an instrumental role in organizing and facilitating the 2004 National Adoption and Foster Care Recruitment Summit. Ms. Holtan is a tireless advocate for children waiting for permanent families and shows great enthusiasm in finding families to adopt them. The work that she has done for the Adoption Exchange Association has been multi-faceted and continues to grow. Ms. Holtan's work now encompasses training and technical assistance, parent support networks, a research component, workgroup activities, the AdoptUSKids website and a national media campaign. Under her leadership, more than 3,000 children have been adopted from the AdoptUSKids website. Prior to joining the Adoption Exchange Association, Ms. Holtan served as the Executive Director of Adoption Services at Tressler Lutheran Services, where she focused on placing children with special needs into adoptive homes. In addition to all of her professional work in the adoptions field over the past several years, Ms. Holtan and her husband are the parents of five children, three of whom came to them through adoption.

**AWARDEE:**           **Suzanne Dosh**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

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Suzanne Dosh has exhibited both personal and professional commitments to helping waiting children find permanent, loving, stable adoptive homes. As a professional, Ms. Dosh demonstrates the highest level of ethics, creativity and leadership in developing services for waiting children. Currently, she is the Director of Programs at The Adoption Exchange, a non-profit organization headquartered in Colorado that provides connections between waiting children and adoptive families. Ms. Dosh has accomplished many goals in this role, including oversight of six federal Adoption Opportunities grants and the opening of The Adoption Exchange office in Nevada and Missouri. Under her leadership, adoption materials for New Mexico were translated into Spanish, she was a founding visionary of two adoptive parent support groups, and she has conducted more than 200 presentations on adoption and permanency-related issues. In the past six years, more than 300,000 potential adoptive families have been impacted by Ms. Dosh's work. As Director of Programs for The Adoption Exchange, her work has contributed to the recruitment of adoptive families for more than 1,700 waiting children. In her personal life, Ms. Dosh has one birth son and adopted six children, including children of color and those with special needs. She truly has a passion for serving waiting children, which has been exhibited by her lifetime commitment to child welfare and adoption issues.

**AWARDEE:**                   **Pat Reynolds-Harris**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

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Pat Reynolds-Harris is recognized for her unique ability to mobilize others to take action on issues that affect the safety and permanency of children. As founder and director of the California Permanency for Youth Project in Oakland, California, she had the vision to consider the plight of teens in foster care. Through this project, Ms. Reynolds-Harris initiated projects, such as the National Youth Permanency Convening and California Task Force on Youth Permanence. Equally as valuable has been her work in establishing local and national collaborations and various workgroups. Through her leadership, counties throughout California work on permanence for youth and do so with the input of youth and former foster youth as a top priority. In effect, Ms. Reynolds-Harris has provided a resource center on youth permanence and thus has spearheaded the coalescing of a national youth permanence movement. Ms. Reynolds-Harris has committed forty years to child welfare, including her service as the Executive Director of the Black Adoption Placement and Research Center and Regional Director at Children's Home Society of California. Among other accomplishments over the course of her career, she initiated the development of six family resource centers and established the San Francisco Child Project. Ms. Reynolds-Harris has been described as a mentor, leader, and advocate in developing empirically based practices that promote and secure permanency for children and youth.

**AWARDEE:**           **Deborah Sullivan**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

**ADDRESS:**       Massachusetts Department of Social Services  
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[Deborah.Sullivan@state.ma.us](mailto:Deborah.Sullivan@state.ma.us)

Despite the devastating decrease in state funding over the past three years, Deborah Sullivan has found many innovative ways to recruit permanent families for the children in foster care in Massachusetts. As the Director of Resource Recruitment for the Massachusetts Department of Social Services, Ms. Sullivan has been able to expand and improve the Department's recruitment efforts. When all of the State's recruitment staff was eliminated in 2002, she re-designed the Department's recruitment plan. In spite of staff reductions, Ms. Sullivan worked to strengthen relationships with the private sector and the business community. Ms. Sullivan also established a collaboration with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange and Jordan's Furniture Company to expand the company's support of targeted recruitment for older special needs children. Her commitment has inspired many other workers to maintain their commitment to the recruitment plan she developed. Ms. Sullivan's personal commitment to recruiting permanent homes for children with special needs has undoubtedly benefited foster and adoptive parents and the children in their care. During a period of diminishing resources, her efforts have assisted in the continuous placement of children with special needs into stable, loving homes and to the improved public perception of the Department and the children in its care.

**AWARDEE:**           **Ernesto Loperena**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

**ADDRESS:**       New York Council on Adoptable Children  
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New York, NY 10018  
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212-714-2838 FAX  
[eloperena@coac.org](mailto:eloperena@coac.org)

For the past 21 years, Ernesto Loperena has been the Executive Director for the 34-year old New York Council on Adoptable Children (COAC). Two of his major contributions at COAC include its city-wide expansion of the African American and Hispanic child adoption program and the work he did to establish New York City's first private program for children orphaned by AIDS. Under his astute leadership as President of the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), between 1986 and 1990, Mr. Loperena revitalized this organization and raised its position as the broadest-based coalition of adoptive parent and professional advocates for adoption in North America. Over the years he has worked tirelessly both in the forefront of the

adoption advocacy movement and behind the scenes. In this capacity, he has served on numerous child welfare-related advisory commissions on the local, state, national and international levels. Further, Mr. Loperena has testified on Capitol Hill and served in many leadership roles, such as an Advisory Board member of New York City's Commissioner of the Administration for Children's services and President of the Board of Directors of Voice for Adoption. He is also a member of the Latino Commission on AIDS, the AdoptUSKids Workgroup, and the Adoption Exchange Association. Mr. Loperena mentors countless Latino child welfare professionals throughout the country and serves as a source of inspiration, encouragement, and knowledge to many other leaders in the national adoption arena.

**AWARDEE:**           **Janice Scheurer**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

**ADDRESS:**           Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri  
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Janice Scheurer has devoted her entire 25-year professional career to the promotion of adoption of children in foster care. At the beginning of her career, she worked as an Adoption Specialist in the Family Court of Saint Louis City. Under her direct leadership from 1988 to 1997, over 3,100 adoptions were finalized when Ms. Scheurer worked at the Family Court of Saint Louis County as an Adoption Specialist/Deputy Juvenile Officer. In this position, she was also instrumental in moving guardianship hearings from the Probate Court to the Family Court, which resulted in more sensitive and age-appropriate treatment for children needing permanency. Because of her dedication, many of these children were ultimately adopted. Ms. Scheurer has the unique ability to understand and advocate for adoption on both the micro and macro levels. In her current position as the Director of Child Welfare Services at Lutheran Family and Children's Services, Ms. Scheurer is responsible for the development and supervision of the agency's statewide child welfare program. In addition to her regular job responsibilities, she is currently President of the Adoption and Foster Care Coalition of Missouri and chairperson of its Legislative Committee and a board member of the Community Adoption Council of Greater Saint Louis. Ms. Scheurer's efforts in the area of advocacy have resulted in many changes in Missouri's laws that protect children, reduce barriers, and smooth the path to permanency.

**AWARDEE:**           **Drenda Lakin**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)  
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Drenda Lakin has been a national leader in special needs adoption for more than 30 years. She began her child welfare career as an intake worker with the Illinois Department of Public Aid. Her passion and innovative vision helped her quickly rise through the ranks of the Department to the Adoption and Foster Care Program Manager position for the state of Illinois. In 1987, Ms. Lakin became the Director of the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption. Her achievements include:

- Developing specialized training curricula for child welfare staff, foster and adoptive parents, and practitioners;
- Directing the creation of a curriculum focused on culturally competent practice with minorities;
- Providing training and technical assistance to over 72,000 individuals in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain; and
- Writing numerous articles and papers related to special needs adoption and post adoption services.

Over the years, Ms. Lakin has been a mentor and source of inspiration for numerous adoption professionals. In 1997, she helped State Adoption Program Managers develop a professional network, which eventually became the National Association of State Adoption Program Managers (NASAP). Today, Ms. Lakin serves as the Vice President at Spaulding for Children, a special needs adoption agency in Southfield, Michigan. Her achievements reflect excellence in collaboration building, mentoring, and development of products that are innovative and sustainable. She continues to share her knowledge and expertise while she provides leadership, impact, and excellence in adoption.

**AWARDEE:**                    **The Dominguez Family**  
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

**ADDRESS:**                5549 W. 82<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Burbank, IL 60459  
708-499-3078  
708-499-2614 FAX

Mr. and Mrs. Dominguez have made amazing contributions to bettering the lives of waiting children throughout Illinois. They already had one birth child when they were made aware of the large number of sibling groups that were at risk of being separated if a family could not be found to adopt them together. The Dominguezes were inspired by what they learned and wanted to find a way to give back. In addition to the one birth child they already had, since 1992, they have adopted three different sibling groups, making up seven children. The Dominguezes are passionate, committed parents who devote an amazing amount of time and energy to their children. They have continually provided all of their children with lots of unconditional love and safe boundaries. The Dominguezes do not only devote themselves to their family and the needs of their children, but they are also strong advocates for all other foster and adopted children in

Illinois. Mr. Dominguez speaks on behalf of adoption in the Hispanic community and his wife serves on the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council. Both parents have also served long hours in adoptive parent support groups, encouraging other families and helping them to overcome problems. The entire family, including the Dominguez children, has also helped the Adoption Information Center of Illinois to promote adoption by contributing to their outreach efforts by providing parenting tips and inspirational poems and stories.

### **CATEGORY #8 BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS/INITIATIVES**

Four nominations were reviewed. One was recommended for award.

**AWARDEE:**           **Cleveland Brothers**  
(Category #8 Business Contributions/Initiatives)

**ADDRESS:**       5300 Paxton Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17111  
717-564-2121

Cleveland Brothers is a family owned business in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania that has been operating for more than 55 years and it is well known for its involvement with local charities and the local community. In 2004, Cleveland Brothers partnered with the Statewide Adoption Network (SWAN) to support SWAN Night, during the famous Mitch Smith Memorial sprint car race that takes place in front of more than 10,000 people. The event was designed to increase awareness of the need for permanent homes for the more than 1,200 children in Pennsylvania who are without an adoptive family. Cleveland Brothers offered the SWAN program an opportunity to feature photographs of the state's waiting children, the SWAN logo, and contact information for those interested in adoption on the wings of 23 sprint cars participating in the event. Cleveland Brothers' well-known name and corporate leadership led to more support and local businesses making donations for the event. As a result, various local newspapers and websites wrote articles promoting the event and local television stations volunteered to cover the event and interview race car drivers and one of Pennsylvania's waiting children. In addition to the live coverage, many of the sprint car drivers promoted the event by placing a photograph of the child who was featured on their wing panel on their own personal websites. With no cost to the SWAN program, Cleveland Brothers made it possible to increase adoption awareness and recruitment of families for special needs and older children.

### **CATEGORY #9 JUDICIAL OR CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT**

**AWARDEE:**           **The Florida Department of Children and Families**  
(Category #9 Judicial or Child Welfare System Improvement)

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850-487-1111

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[Jerry\\_Regier@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:Jerry_Regier@dcf.state.fl.us)

In November 2003, the Florida Department of Children and Families launched the “No Place Like Home” Initiative. The initiative, which was unveiled by Governor Jeb Bush, targets operational improvements in the state’s adoption program, enhances public awareness, and explores new avenues for recruiting potential adoptive families. The Department established an integrated approach to child permanency across systems, with the use of a number of partners, including the Volunteer Florida Foundation and Governor Bush’s Strengthening Families Initiatives. The work of these partnerships resulted in an increase in the number of children achieving permanency through adoption. The “No Place Like Home” initiative helped to streamline the adoption process in Florida by way of a newly developed curriculum and a process for conducting foster parent and relative caregiver adoptions in groups rather than individually. In 2003, Florida received 3.5 million dollars in federal adoption incentive funds, due in large part to the 40% increase in the number of children moved by the Department into finalized adoption. Florida’s adoption incentive bonus was used to sponsor adoption activities in local communities to implement and replicate the initiatives set forth in the “No Place Like Home” awareness campaign.

**AWARDEE:**            **El Paso County Department of Human Services and the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court of Colorado**  
**(Category #9 Judicial or Child Welfare System Improvement)**

**ADDRESS:**            El Paso County Department of Human Services  
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Colorado Springs, CO 80905  
719-444-5532  
719-444-5598 FAX

El Paso County has a population of 547,567 and the most children of any other county in Colorado who are under the age of 18. As of July 2004, Colorado had 703 waiting children and El Paso County had less than 35. Since 1997, El Paso County has averaged 173 adoptions annually, with approximately 90% of all adoptions taking place within 24 months or less. Much of the county’s success can be attributed to the El Paso County Department of Human Services and Colorado’s 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court partnership with faith-based groups and other human services organizations. In an attempt to change systems and attitudes within the state’s child welfare environment, their shared commitment and dedication to healthy outcomes for children drove this collaborative effort to update and overhaul the system. A few of the following accomplishments have contributed to long-term systems change for El Paso County’s children:

- The Court initiated Dependency Court Mediation to expedite processing of contested matters.
- The Court became the pilot for implementing Colorado’s Expedited Permanency Planning legislation, requiring all children under 6 to receive a permanent home in no more than 12 months.

- A court facilitator was used to move cases through the system and implement a front-loaded process to permanency.
- Additional judicial officers, who focus their time in the area of juvenile dependency and neglect cases, were added to the juvenile bench because of the increasing caseloads.
- A Family Drug Court was created.

**AWARDEE:**           **Adopt Now Project**  
(Category #9 Judicial or Child Welfare System Improvement)

**ADDRESS:**       Administration for Children's Services  
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New York, NY 10038  
212-676-9270  
212-676-0693 FAX

The Adopt Now Project is a collaboration between public child welfare agencies and Family Court in New York State that has led to dramatic improvements in the adoption process throughout the State. Adopt Now has involved the Family Court, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, the New York City Administration for Children's Services and other local public child welfare districts, all of whom have worked together for the past eighteen months to spur needed reforms. These reforms include:

- The simplification of the processing of adoption paperwork involved in the adoption process (such as reducing the time for processing adoption subsidies from six weeks to three weeks).
- The initiation of adoption case reviews, which provide a forum for creative case specific problem-solving and eliminate system barriers.
- Adopt Now grants awarded to nine contract agencies for their use to accelerate the adoptions of children in their care, which increased the number of adoptions for all nine agencies.
- Addressing the long delay in adoptions arising from the disposition of Termination of Parental Rights appeals.

As a direct result of the reforms brought about by the Adopt Now project, 4,455 adoptions were finalized in 2003 in New York State. With no cost to the City or State, overall, Adopt Now has been a creative collaboration that has addressed barriers individually and systematically to timely adoptions for thousands of waiting children.