

**ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE YEAR 2006**

**CATEGORY #1 DECREASE IN THE LENGTH OF TIME THAT CHILDREN IN
FOSTER CARE WAIT FOR ADOPTION**

AWARDEE: **Richland County Children Services**
(Category #1 Decrease in the Length of Time That Children in Foster Care Wait for Adoption)

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The innovative efforts of Richland County Children Services have substantially reduced the length of time that children in foster care wait for adoption. In the first half of 2000, the mean length of stay for a child in foster care in Richland County, Ohio prior to the finalization of an adoption was 864 days. Over the next five years, the Agency was able to decrease this length of time by 168 days, or 19%. Richland County's Children Services put in place a plan to rapidly secure more adoptive families and reduce the length of time children wait for an adoptive placement, some of which include:

- Dual licensing all foster homes as foster-to-adopt homes to prepare in advance for the possibility that a foster placement will evolve in to an adoptive placement.
- Provide emergency assistance to caregivers to avoid financial crises as a means of stabilizing children in their homes.
- Establish a Community Services Team made up of former resident staff to support kinship and foster caregivers. The teams provide transportation to and from appointments, respite for caregivers, and organized summer youth activities.
- Free prevention activities, such as counseling services for families planning to adopt to help explore the implications of adoption and to anticipate potential post-adoption issues.
- Assistance of attorneys who file Petitions for Adoption on behalf of relatives and keeping in contact with Juvenile and Probate Court regarding scheduling of hearings. Regular communication with the courts has led to speedier Finalization Hearings.

Richland County considers its initiatives to secure adoptions for older children, African American children, and children in care for two years or more as new ways of doing traditional adoption casework and new approaches to working with traditional community partners.

AWARDEE: **Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services**
(DCFS) – Adoption and Permanency Resources Division
(Category #1 Decrease in the Length of Time That Children in Foster Care Wait for Adoption)

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In an effort to shorten the time Los Angeles County's children spend in foster care prior to being adopted, the county's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) changed the way it conducts business. The Los Angeles DCFS implemented the Concurrent Planning Redesign (CPR) project, which embodies several significant changes to the county's child welfare services work flow. Under the CPR, one social worker is assigned for the life of a case, regardless of how the case plan may change. Preliminary data shows that children with adoptions finalized under the CPR protocols were in out-of-home care on average 4.75 months less than children whose adoptions were finalized under traditional methods. Permanency assessments are completed closer to the time a child enters out-of-home care and a secondary social worker is assigned when parental rights have been terminated. This worker ensures that all legal mandates regarding the TPR hearing are satisfied. Since the initiation of the CPR in March 2005, seven offices have implemented it and 10 offices will begin over the next year. General trends observed among offices that have implemented the Redesign are an increase in activities that promote faster adoptions, which include more activation of plans of adoption and assignment to Adoptions Social Workers. The most significant trend is a more than six month shorter average time to complete an adoption home study (4.99 months under CPR compared to 11.20 months under normal protocols). The Los Angeles DCFS has been innovative in changing practice and the impact it can have on an unprecedented number of children and families.

CATEGORY #2 INCREASED ADOPTIONS OF OLDER CHILDREN

AWARDEE: Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN),
Pennsylvania Independent Living Services
(Category #2 Increased Adoptions of Older Children)

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Every year, approximately 900 youth age out of foster care in Pennsylvania without a significant adult relationship, permanency resource or adoptive family. In an effort to increase the adoptions of older children in foster care and to better prepare those youth who would soon age out of the system without a permanency resource, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare began a collaboration between two of its programs, the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) and Independent Living Services (IL). Within Pennsylvania's

State supervised, county administered systems, workers are often divided by the type of work they do. As a result, adoption workers often gave little thought to IL services for youth and IL workers were not considering adoption services for the youth they served. To begin to change this mindset, SWAN held a Statewide Meeting in 2004 for both adoption and IL workers to stress the importance of permanency planning and lifetime connections for adolescents. The collaboration between SWAN and IL has strengthened since the first Statewide Meeting was held and both programs now partner in all trainings and have combined quarterly newsletters. The results are evident from the 18.5% increase in the number of adoptions of children over age 9 in the first 18 months of the SWAN/IL partnership. In FY 2003, 546 children over the age of 9 were adopted from the Pennsylvania foster care system. In FY 2004, when the SWAN/IL partnership began, the number of adoptions of children over age 9 increased to 684. In FY 2005, 705 children over the age of 9 were adopted. In addition to increasing the number of adoptions, the number of SWAN services being provided to IL youth also increased. As a result, the number of youth discharged from foster care to other types of permanent families, such as permanent legal custodianship families, has also increased.

CATEGORY #3 INTERJURISDICTIONAL ADOPTIONS

No awards.

CATEGORY #4 FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES

AWARDEE: **Family Connections Christian Adoptions**
(Category #4 Faith-Based Initiatives)

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Family Connections Christian Adoptions (FCAA) has been innovative in the use of agency-church collaboration to increase the overall number of adoptions from foster care. Since the agency began operating early in 1983, it has welcomed the opportunity to work with faith-based organizations and families from all faith backgrounds. In the beginning, FCAA served only 3 counties. In 1992, FCAA was licensed to service all counties in California. Today, the agency has five offices, forty-five staff members, and over 200 committed volunteers. FCAA operates on a limited budget but capitalizes on the idea that given the right education and support throughout the process, most families can successfully adopt and parent children from foster care. FCAA has formed numerous partnership programs with various churches, providing many services such as free office space for pre-adoption classes, informational meetings, and church service time to conduct recruitment efforts. Many of the agency's volunteers serve as "Buddy Families" (mentors) for prospective adoptive families who have questions and anxieties about the adoption process. By matching every new applicant with a Buddy Family, the agency has

created a no-cost method for adoption support, showing new families how successful, rewarding, and normal it is to adopt from foster care. Over the past 23 years, FCAA has had an enormous impact on the lives of over 3,500 children who are now part of permanent, loving families.

CATEGORY #5 SUPPORT FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

AWARDEE: **Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center**
(Category #5 Support for Adoptive Families)

ADDRESS: 621 SW Morrison St., Suite 450
Portland, OR 97205
800-764-8367
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orparc@nwresource.org

Northwest Resource Associates/Northwest Adoption Exchange launched the Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center (ORPARC) in 1999. ORPARC's mission is to provide ongoing support, education, information, assistance, and referral services to Oregon's DHS post adoptive families and assisted guardianship families statewide. ORPARC bases its service array on a needs-assessment survey of families who adopted children from the state foster care system and from professional focus groups. The survey results indicated the need for educational and supportive services to families who adopt special needs children, particularly after the adoption is legally finalized. In response to these findings, ORPARC offers the following services, at no cost:

- Information and referral, which includes a toll-free number for support and resources and a website that lists services, trainings, and statewide support groups.
- Lending library that includes over 500 videos, DVDs, books, CDs, and information packets, which are sent to families.
- On-site trainings for adoptive parents on topics requested by parent support groups.
- Assistance in starting adoptive parent support groups. One-on-one assistance is also provided to families which may include case management and advocacy.
- Assistance to families to connect to respite resources and training materials.

Since 1999, ORPARC has offered services to 7,575 adoptive and guardianship families who are parenting an estimated 9,000 adoptive children. The agency's success is clear from the increasing numbers of adoptive families it serves and an increase in adoptions (10%) every year since its creation. ORPARC has also partnered with many foster/adoptive organizations, including Portland State University (PSU), DHS/Adoptions, and the Child Welfare Partnership to create a Post Graduate Certificate Program in Adoption Therapy at PSU.

AWARDEE: **Casey Family Services, New Hampshire Division**
(Category #5 Support for Adoptive Families)

ADDRESS: 105 Loudon Rd., Bldg. 2

Concord, NH 03301
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603-224-2584 FAX
jdellorme@caseyfamilyservices.org

Founded in 1976, Casey Family Services operates as the direct arm of the Annie E. Casey foundation. Casey Family Services offers a range of programs to children and families found along the permanency continuum, including foster care for children, post-adoption, preservation and reunification services. Casey Family Services, New Hampshire Division (Casey-NH) is a fully licensed and accredited non-profit child welfare agency providing a broad range of programs to meet the changing needs of vulnerable children and families. Specifically, Casey-NH provides counseling, support groups, case management, educational, and advocacy services to families and individuals, as well as community members, who have adopted children and need assistance in strengthening, preserving, and/or supporting the family and child. In the past 5 years, Casey-NH has serviced approximately 450 adoptive families and 750 children through its direct care programs and many others in the forms of trainings, groups, and celebrations. Casey-NH has also been involved with numerous work groups and collaborates with many organizations, including the NH Commissioners Adoption Advisory Council, the State of NH – Division for Children, Youth and Families, and the University of NH to facilitate a respite program.

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

ADDRESS: 233 E Fulton, Suite 24
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616-458-7945
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adoptive@afsn.com

Adoptive Family Support Network (AFSN) was formed in 1991 when a group of parents and child welfare professionals came together to make sure that adoptive families were getting the services, support and encouragement they needed. The group remained as a volunteer organization for five years and worked tirelessly drafting by-laws, securing 501(c) (3) status, organizing a community board of directors and holding social events for families. A few years later, the group joined an existing county collaborative network and looked for ways to collaborate with and support similar adoption support programs that already existed. Today, AFSN supports the lifelong well-being of adoptive families by providing a support network to adoptive families, promoting access to community post-adoption resources, and raising awareness about adoption. AFSN has made a tremendous impact to adoptive families in the West Michigan area through its numerous programs, including pre- and post-adoption information packets, a telephone hotline, support groups and childcare, educational programs, electronic news resources, and family fun events. Most recently, the AFSN Director and Board have expanded its service efforts by developing The Michigan Heart Gallery. This successful project has helped increase awareness of the need for more homes to adopt sibling groups and older children.

AWARDEE: **Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)**
(Category #5 Support for Adoptive Families)

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and Families
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The Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN), developed in 1992 by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, is a public/private partnership that provides a variety of services leading toward the development of permanent homes for children in foster care in Pennsylvania. In 2003, SWAN began providing three post-permanency services to all families who adopted children or made a commitment to offer a permanent home for children in the Pennsylvania foster care system. Families self-refer for all SWAN post-permanency services. The Case Advocacy unit of service ensures that families receive access to services designed to meet families' needs after they have made a permanent commitment to a child. These services are strength-based and emphasize collaboration. The Support Group unit of services helps build relationships, forms a community of mentoring, provides education and offers socialization activities for families and/or children. The Respite unit of service provides families with in and out of home planned breaks to support a consistent level of parenting. In spring of 2006, SWAN conducted a survey of the 1,100 families that have received SWAN post-permanency services since 2003. SWAN learned the following from results of the survey:

- 84 percent reported that post-permanency services were helpful
- 88 percent reported they had a positive experience
- 86 percent felt supported throughout the post-permanency process
- 65 percent felt they were somewhat or much more in control of their family

CATEGORY #6 INDIVIDUAL AND/OR FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS

AWARDEE: **Dr. Carol "Cassie" Statuto Bevan**
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

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For almost twenty years, Dr. Cassie Bevan has served in numerous capacities on Capitol Hill as a trusted advisor for Members of Congress and their staff on child welfare issues. She has been a

dedicated and enthusiastic advocate for foster and adoptive children throughout her career. Dr. Bevan has held many leadership positions in several Congressional subcommittees and committees, including Republican Staff Director of the former U.S. House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families and Professional Staff member of the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human resources, specializing in welfare and child welfare issues. In 2001, Dr. Bevan became a Senior Advisor on children's issues to former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay. She currently is Senior Professional Staff for the House Committee on International Relations working on international adoptions and human rights issues. Over the past several years, Dr. Bevan has worked tirelessly to educate Congressional staff on child welfare issues. She has played a significant role in drafting legislation, including the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, and that which provides education and training vouchers for children in foster care. Dr. Bevan's advocacy has also led to numerous other legislative accomplishments that have positively impacted permanency outcomes for children in foster care, such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the Adoption Tax Credit in 1996, the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000, and passage of the recently-enacted Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006. Dr. Bevan's accomplishments are witness of her commitment to child welfare and her willingness to work on all levels to ensure positive outcomes for vulnerable children.

AWARDEE: **Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye**
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

ADDRESS: Court of Appeals of New York

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Creating permanency through adoption has been a personal crusade for New York State Chief Judge Judith Kaye for many years. In 1983, Judge Kaye became the first woman to serve on the State Court of Appeals and ten years later, she became the first woman ever to be appointed New York State Chief Judge. In this role, she serves as the Chief Judicial Officer of the State and the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals. In 2003, Judge Kaye started the *Adopt Now* initiative, which has drastically reduced the number of children who linger in foster care. As a direct result of this initiative, there are approximately 4,000 children living in foster care that are freed for adoption in New York State, down from more than 6,000 in 2003. Through Judge Kaye's leadership, the *Adopt Now* initiative has linked the New York State judiciary with State and local departments of child welfare. This led to an ongoing working collaboration among the Office of Court Administration (OCA), New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and other New York State local child welfare districts. This is the first time in New York State's history that local districts and the family courts have collaborated over an extended period of time to bring about necessary reforms and system changes necessary to move children expeditiously to permanency and promote record numbers of adoptions statewide. In a time of fiscal constraint, OCFS, OCA and

ACS were able to support and implement many new initiatives that increased the number of adoptions, including the implementation of statewide adoption case conferencing reviews which provides an opportunity to examine each freed child's case individually to identify barriers to adoption. Chief Judge Kaye challenges local districts to think creatively in finding permanency for all freed children and she chairs monthly meetings to ensure adoption initiatives remain on course. Through *Adopt Now*, Judge Kaye has made the timely adoptions of thousands of New York State children her personal and professional goal. Since 2003, more than 11,000 children have found permanency through adoption in New York State.

AWARDEE: **Paul VanderVelde**
(Category #6 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

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Paul VanderVelde has devoted his professional life of service to improving the lives of vulnerable children and families around the country, with special emphasis on promoting adoption for abused and neglected children in the foster care system. Over the past 25 years, Mr. VanderVelde's accomplishments have included:

- Director of Michigan's Children's Services, Department of Mental Health, where Mr. VanderVelde developed and implemented four federal grants to demonstrate innovative approaches for the permanency planning, adoptive placement, and post-adoption services for children and youth with special needs.
- In the 1990's, Mr. VanderVelde served as the Director of the Kellogg Foundation's \$38 million national initiative called *Families for Kids* (FFK). Under his leadership, planning grants were awarded to 19 communities in 15 states to successfully develop a consensus strategy for foster care and adoption reform. In the 11 implementation sites, adoptions or guardianships were finalized for 60,000 children. The FFK initiative emphasized systems change and shifted the culture of social service agencies and courts to view permanency "through the eyes of the child."
- Mr. VanderVelde provided leadership as the Executive Director for Adoption Services for Children's Home Society of Florida, where he planned and implemented innovative, effective adoption services for Florida's privatizing child welfare systems.
- Served as Chairperson of the Post-Legal Adoption Consortium (USDHHS) and Advisory Board member of Spaulding's National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoptions.

Mr. VanderVelde paved the way with his creative adoption initiatives in demonstrating that a foundation and its resources could meaningfully and proactively retrieve and activate the resources of others, including communities, to serve families and children.

CATEGORY #7 PHILANTHROPY

No awards.

CATEGORY #8 BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS/INITIATIVES

AWARDEE: **Jockey International – “Jockey Being Family”**
(Category #8 Business Contributions/Initiatives)

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asweeney@coneinc.com

Jockey International, a privately-held, family-owned Midwest apparel company, created its first signature citizenship initiative, *Jockey Being Family*, in October 2004. The initiative, which started in Wisconsin as a way of engaging Jockey employees in service and volunteer activities, is focused on supporting families after they have adopted a child from the U.S. foster care system. Through research, Jockey learned that many companies focus philanthropic efforts on recruiting adoptive parents but few, if any, were supporting families post-adoption. Drawing on the apparent need for more post-adoption resources, Jockey focused its funding on organizations that provide such services to families. Jockey now supports leading national and local nonprofit organizations that deliver post-adoption services to families in Wisconsin and nationwide through fiscal and in-kind donations. Among others, Jockey supports Adoption Resources of Wisconsin, North American Council on Adoptable Children, and Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Employee engagement is an important part of *Jockey Being Family* and more than one-third of employees in Jockey’s headquarters volunteer their time and talents to support local adoptive families with a number of activities, including the “Home to Stay” backpack program and “Home Adaptation Project”. Volunteers of the “Home to Stay” program create personalized backpacks filled with books, music, and toys for newly adopted children in Wisconsin. Jockey volunteers also make hand-made blankets to place in the backpacks. Volunteers of the “Home Adaptation Project” assist with remodeling the homes of local adoptive families with children with severe disabilities. Jockey has been recognized as the 2005 Wisconsin Adoption Advocate of the Year and profiled as an employer with enhanced adoption benefits, one of which includes a \$10,000 stipend per child per year to any employee who adopts.

AWARDEE: **KSDK – News Channel 5 “A Place to Call Home” Program**
(Category #8 Business Contributions/Initiatives)

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In metro St. Louis, more than 4,000 children are in the foster care system. More than 500 of

these children are waiting for an adoptive family. In August 2002, KSDK-TV NewsChannel 5 launched “A Place to Call Home” initiative to tackle this issue. This highly successful adoption program has found homes for 98 local children over the past three years. To date, 195 children have been featured, and 50% of them have, or are in the process of being placed in an adoptive home. Most of these children are older and or/sibling groups. On the television programs, segments feature youth doing their favorite activities. Each child is featured 3 times in a week, during highly-rated time slots. “A Place to Call Home” reaches 250,000 viewers in 31 counties in Missouri and Illinois and generates 800 calls per year from people who are interested in fostering or adoption. Approximately 225 of these callers are referred for licensure. KSDK promotes “A Place to Call Home” with up to 20 monthly PSAs, monthly “myth-busting” stories, and a prominent place on their popular website. Through all of these activities, KSDK makes a \$3 million investment to the importance of finding adoptive homes for children. To further their commitment to children in foster care, KSDK partnered with the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition (FACC) during the 2005 holiday season to grant *Little Wishes* for children in foster care. Holiday wish requests were taken from children and *Little Wishes* was advertised to individuals, businesses, and organizations, which pooled their funds together to grant children’s holiday wishes. KSDK and FACC partnered with Federal Express, which provided volunteers to ship the gifts to children, free-of-charge. As a result of these efforts, 5,854 wishes were granted for 3,126 children.

CATEGORY #9 JUDICIAL OR CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

No awards.