

**ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARD  
FOR THE YEAR 2007**

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

**AWARDEE:**           **Jane Robertson**, Lorain County Children Services, Ohio

Jane Robertson is the Manager of the Family-Based Care Department at Lorain County Children Services in Ohio. Under her leadership, several key strategies to reduce barriers to timely permanence have been developed and successfully implemented. One such strategy is “Permanency within One Year,” which has become the guiding value for the agency’s child protection workforce. The “Permanency within One Year” initiative has:

- created significant improvements in the agency’s overall work system by implementing concurrent planning at the beginning, investigation level;
- developed positive collaboration and relationships with the court through timely Permanent Custody hearings; and
- led to an increase in community support by way of a foster-to-adopt program and child-specific recruitment.

“Permanency within One Year” plans for a child’s permanency goals to begin when a case is first assigned to a worker. All workers on behalf of the child work together as a team to ensure all permanency options are explored. The child’s adoption worker begins concurrent planning at the time of filing, which allows for a more seamless transition for the court, adoptive family, and the child. This strategy has led to a decrease in the length of time between the date of permanent custody and that of the adoption finalization from 817 days to 126 days. Ms. Robertson also developed a recruitment strategy that significantly increased the likelihood that a child’s first placement in to foster care was their only placement. This strategy included recruitment of a diverse group of foster families and leading thoughtful matching meetings at the time of initial placement. Ms. Robertson has made a significant and steady impact in decreasing the length of time children wait for adoption.

**CATEGORY #2 INCREASED ADOPTIONS OF OLDER CHILDREN**

**AWARDEE:**           **James McCafferty**, Cuyahoga County Department of Child and Family Services, Ohio

James McCafferty is the Director of Cuyahoga County Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). Cuyahoga County is the largest county in Ohio and one of the poorest cities in the nation, where 47% of all children live below the federal poverty level. Under Mr. McCafferty’s leadership, the agency and community have embarked on a comprehensive mission to support, serve, and enhance preventive services for older children in their county. Over the past six years, Mr. McCafferty has reduced by 60% the number of child custodies from 6,456 in July 2001 to 2,854 children in custody in July 2006. He also led the agency in finalizing the adoptions of

1,525 waiting children in three years. Further, from 2004-2006, the implementation of child specific recruitment strategies led to the adoption of 331 teenagers. Mr. McCafferty embraced the Annie E. Casey Family to Family practice model, which helped DCFS reach out to neighborhoods and better enhance community partnerships. This effort led to the recruitment of neighborhood based foster caregivers and partnering with non-traditional neighborhood groups and private provider agencies to transform their services from placement services to a continuum of community based services. Mr. McCafferty also advocated for investing the Governor's \$5 million Executive Order for adoption activities in to activities to find permanent homes for older children.

#### **CATEGORY #4 FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES**

**AWARDEE:**           **Jewish Family & Community Services, Inc., Jacksonville, Florida**

Created in 1917, Jewish Family & Community Services (JFCS) has led the way with innovative programs and models of service delivery. JFCS is a non-sectarian, non-profit social service agency that provides foster care, adoption, emergency financial assistance, grocery deliveries, counseling, adult services, and more. JFCS provides a coordinated set of services for all family members, including children, birth and adoptive parents. Since 2003, JFCS has provided adoption recruitment, matching, case management and therapy for children and families involved in foster care. It is the lead private agency in its District for completed adoptions for the past two years. In 2004, JFCS finalized 16 adoptions and more than doubled that number in 2005 to 37 adoptions. More recently in 2006, JFCS finalized 91 adoptions and in 2007 it finalized 108. In 2006, the agency successfully closed 240 cases and provided in-home prevention services to 90 families. JFCS also coordinates legal services, adoption subsidies, medical assistance, and post-placement support services. To improve service accessibility and cultural sensitivity for the families it services, the agency collaborates with other community-based providers to access subsidized day care, medical services, and academic social programs. The agency also works closely with the Florida Department of Children and Families to provide comprehensive services to children and families at risk of abuse and neglect and to ensure that families have access to the most efficient and effective resources in their communities.

#### **CATEGORY #5 SUPPORT FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES**

**AWARDEE:**           **Lakeview Center, Inc., Families First Network Special Needs Adoption Program, Pensacola, Florida**

FamiliesFirst Network (FFN) of Lakeview is the child protection division of Lakeview Center, Inc., an affiliate of Baptist Healthcare. The FamiliesFirst Network Special Needs Adoption Program has created processes within the adoption community that supports adoptive families during the training and home study process and after the adoption is finalized. FamiliesFirst Network provides staff support to an adoptive parent support group and a liaison that assists in maintaining the stability and viability of the group, which is a crucial part of the post adoption services array. The Network has also been successful in helping the parent support group take the adoption message to the community to promote awareness and assist potential adoptive

families to become familiar with waiting children and their special needs. FamiliesFirst Network has served as an excellent example of collaboration and partnering with the community to focus on the needs of waiting children. One successful recruitment activity held by the partners was an adoption picnic, where over 325 prospective families attended and nine children met their forever family. The FFN also partnered with an art professor at a local college, a community volunteer, a professional photographer, the media, and a large group of community partners to hold the Art of Adoption Project, which is modeled after the National Heart Gallery project. Since the Project began three years ago, over 30 children have found adoptive families. Recently, FamiliesFirst Network developed child specific recruitment plans and “permanency teams” to find families for older teens and other children who have been difficult to place. Permanency team members include an adoption worker, guardian ad litem, foster parent, FFN home-finder, child’s therapist, and someone from the child’s school or childcare setting. These teams meet periodically to share ideas and tasks related to finding a permanent home for the child. It is anticipated that these teams will result in adoptive families for teens.

**AWARDEE:**           **Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**

The Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association (PSFPA) was founded in 1974 and currently has more than 600 family members and more than 170 agency members. The PSFPA serves resource families through a variety of programs, services, trainings, advocacy and legislative activity. For the past 31 years, the PSFPA has held an annual conference for approximately 300 resource families and child welfare professionals. The conference allows foster, adoptive and kinship families to network with each other and agency personnel. The PSFPA also maintains a website, a toll free telephone number, and produces a quarterly newsletter for resource families. It is the Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association’s advocacy and involvement in making legislative change that has taken the agency’s efforts to the next level. The Association drafted language for and worked closely with the Pennsylvania Legislature on the creation and passage of two new laws, the Resource Family Care Act and the Foster Parent Consideration Act. The intent of these new laws is to have a direct impact on lessening the amount of time children in foster care with the goal of adoption wait for a family by ensuring the following: that resource families are involved from the beginning of the process; by involving families in the development of the child’s permanency plan; requiring agencies to respond to resource families in a timely manner; and by ensuring that foster families will be given first opportunity at adopting a child in their care. Both laws ensure that all resource families and children have a stronger voice.

**AWARDEE:**           **Children’s Aid and Family Services, Inc., Paramus, New Jersey**

Children’s Aid and Family Services, Inc. (CAFS) has provided adoption services since 1899 and has expanded its focus over the years to meet the changing needs of the child welfare population. Children’s Aid and Family Services recently received a grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation to develop their signature program, Wendy’s Wonderful Kids, which promotes child-specific recruitment based on a child’s individual needs. Families who express interest in adopting a child are assigned to an adoption specialist who works with them throughout the entire home study process, training, placement, and post-placement. The adoption specialist visits the family

for six months after placement to provide support and to ensure that supportive services have been set up. After an adoption is finalized, the family continues to be supported by the agency's post-adoptive counseling services (PACS) program. Children's Aid and Family Services PACS encompasses two separate services:

- Pre-adoption counseling services are provided to New Jersey Department of Children and Families, Division of Youth and Family Services' children and families who are in various stages of the adoption process.
- Post-adoption counseling services to any family that has an adopted child less than 18 years old, including respite services.

Children's Aid and Family Services also developed the New Jersey Adoption Resource Clearinghouse (NJ ARCH) in 2003, which provides adoption resources for adoptive parents and youth. A central component of the NJ ARCH is its website that provides a resource directory for adoption and foster parent support groups, mental health providers, pre and post adoption services; newsletters; and recently published information about adoption.

#### **CATEGORY #6 INDIVIDUAL AND/OR FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS**

**AWARDEE:**           **Gayle Hahn**, Tuscarawas County Job & Family Services, Ohio

For the past 27 years, Gayle Hahn has worked as an adoption worker and supervisor for public and private foster care and adoption agencies in Ohio. Ms. Hahn is a passionate advocate for children and her efforts promoting permanency have resulted in over 840 adoption finalizations. Currently, Ms. Hahn is the Placement Services Supervisor at Tuscarawas County Job & Family Services in New Philadelphia, Ohio. During her eight year career in this position, Ms. Hahn has taken every opportunity to recruit adoptive families for waiting children. She has been most successful with recruitment efforts by using many different means of public/private agency collaborations with the goal of achieving more timely permanency for children in care. With only one full-time and one part-time adoption worker, Ms. Hahn was still able to finalize 40 adoptions between July 2006 and June 2007. Each year under her leadership, the agency has increased the total number of finalized adoptions of children over age eight; the number of adoptions doubled from 2001 to 2007. Throughout her professional career, Ms. Hahn has been actively involved in creating Ohio public policy on adoption issues and educating other professionals in adoption practices. Ms. Hahn's years of experience have led many professionals and policymakers to seek out her recommendations on adoption policy and practice. Ms. Hahn's passion and devotion in adoption has helped to accomplish permanency for many Ohio children in foster care.

**AWARDEE:**           **Madelyn Freundlich**, New York, New York

Madelyn Freundlich began her professional career as a caseworker and held positions as General Counsel at the Child Welfare League, Executive Director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, and Policy Director at Children's Rights. Ms. Freundlich is currently an independent consultant. Throughout her career, she has made significant contributions to the development of better programs for children adopted from foster care. Ms. Freundlich has made an enduring

contribution to the field through her influential writing about complex adoption and child welfare issues, including adoption ethics and mental health needs of adopted children. She has taken on complex adoption issues and written articles and books on topics that have pushed practice forward, including Finding a Fit that will Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Adoptive Families with Waiting Children and Post Permanency Services. Ms. Freundlich strives to produce materials that inform new caseworkers and experienced administrators on law, policy and best social work practice. In addition, Ms. Freundlich has worked on material and curriculum development, conducted trainings, and given presentations at national and regional conferences to promote permanence for children and youth in foster care. Over her 30 year career as a leader, collaborator and presenter in child welfare, Ms. Freundlich has touched the lives of and influenced many people, including children and youth in foster care, families, child welfare professionals, and policymakers.

**AWARDEE:**           **Lakawanna Sawyers**, West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

Lakawanna Sawyers, who is an adoptive parent herself, has been employed with the West Virginia Department of Health & Human Services for the past 15 years as a foster care/youth services worker and more recently as a Regional Adoption Specialist. During her ten year career as a Specialist, Ms. Sawyers has completed over 150 adoptions. Despite working in an area with limited resources, Ms. Sawyers has been extremely effective in matching children with special needs to appropriate families. In addition to monthly visits to children and their families and help in locating resources for them, Ms. Sawyers is also very active in recruitment of new foster and adoptive families. Ms. Sawyers works closely with private agencies to recruit adoptive homes for southwestern West Virginia's special needs children and has also done child specific recruitment with various agencies. Her success and devotion have led Ms. Sawyers to serve as a mentor for other agency workers, many of whom are inspired by her accomplishments and desire to acquire the same standards and goals. Ms. Sawyers is very effective at establishing relationships and reaching out to the community to access better resources for her clients. She also establishes good working relationships with her peers and consistently provides leadership and guidance to those who work with her.

**AWARDEE:**           **Scott D. Ryan, Ph.D.**, Tallahassee, Florida

Dr. Scott D. Ryan has worked tirelessly in the adoption field for almost twenty years and has made numerous professional contributions to the promotion of the adoption of children from foster care. At the beginning of his career, Dr. Ryan worked for the Florida Department of Children and Families as a foster care counselor and a licensing counselor. Dr. Ryan also worked in the adoption field in Washington, D.C., where he conducted pre-service training programs for prospective foster and adoptive parents. Dr. Ryan returned to Florida to teach at Florida State University, where he is currently the Associate Dean for Research and an Associate Professor at the College of Social Work. He is also the Director of the Institute for Social Work Research, where he conducts adoption-focused research and he is a Senior Research Fellow at the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. Several noted adoption researchers across the country have worked with Dr. Ryan to further knowledge on several issues, such as factors leading to adoption disruption and pre-adoption stress and its association with child behavior in

special needs adoptions. During his tenure, Dr. Ryan has presented at many conferences and published several book chapters, journal articles, and reports on adoption/child welfare related topics and ways to improve policy and practice. Through his teaching at the University, Dr. Ryan has helped guide the professional development of over 100 new adoption professionals. He is also an active member of the adoption/child welfare community, where he has served on several boards, including the Office of the Florida Governor's Adoption and Child Protection Advisory Council and Florida's Adoption Information Center. Dr. Ryan is also the current Editor of *Adoption Quarterly*, an outlet for adoption research.

**AWARDEE:**            **Clem & Bettie BellStewart**, Newport News, Virginia

Clem and Bettie BellStewart are a family who has developed a strong network of support and developmental resources to assist in meeting the challenges of their special needs children. The BellStewarts have adopted five children and are in the process of adopting a sixth child, all of whom were previously in the foster care system. They had a special interest in adopting children in to their homes with special needs and have created an atmosphere of love and acceptance for all of their children, including siblings, a teenager, and children with Cerebral Palsy, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, neurological issues, and Attachment Disorder. Mr. and Mrs. BellStewart are well aware of their children's special needs but have educated themselves about the resources and services needed to address them. They recognize the challenges but rejoice and take joy in their children's successes and have shown remarkable talents in meeting their children's special needs by finding resources to meet their physical, emotional, and cultural needs. The BellStewarts have provided exceptional care to fragile children who might have otherwise remained in foster care if the BellStewarts did not adopt them. Mrs. BellStewart also works as a trainer for the HealthyFamily program, where city and community agencies join together with public and private organizations to assist families in the community to become healthy and self-sufficient. She also volunteers her time to the program to assist with foster parent recruitment and she and her husband are always willing to share their experiences and teach other families in the community.

#### **CATEGORY #7 PHILANTHROPY/BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS**

**AWARDEE:**            **Dave Thomas Foundation For Adoption**, Dublin, Ohio

Established in 1992 by Wendy's founder Dave Thomas, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (DTFA) was created in support of the vision that every child needs a permanent home and a loving family. The Foundation focuses on increasing foster care adoption awareness and making the adoption process easier and more accessible for all families. In 2004, the Foundation piloted their signature direct-service program, *Wendy's Wonderful Kids*, in seven locations across the country. The focus of this program was to assist local adoption agencies in reducing the number of children and duration of time that children remained in foster care. The Foundation awards grants to local child welfare organizations to hire adoption recruiters who can dedicate 100 percent of their time to identify and match families with waiting kids. In two and a half years, *Wendy's Wonderful Kids* has made a national impact on children waiting in foster care by expanding the programs to include 105 recruiters in all 50 States, the District of

Columbia and the Canada. The program's combination of national and local level partners provides a successful strategy to accomplish its goal of matching 8,000 to 10,000 children with adoptive families by 2010. As of August 2007, *Wendy's Wonderful Kids* has served 2,536 children in foster care and matched 1,253 children with adoptive families. Funding for the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is raised through Wendy's restaurants' coin canisters, in-store promotions, and golf tournaments. In 2006, Wendy's in-store fundraising programs raised approximately \$6 million in customer donations to fund the growth of *Wendy's Wonderful Kids*.

### **CATEGORY #8 Judicial or Child Welfare System Improvement**

**AWARDEE: Hawaii Department of Human Services**

The Hawaii Department of Human Services (HDHS) has made significant progress in promoting adoptions in recent years and has set the stage for even greater success in the future. The Department's success has largely come from a coordinated and multi-faceted approach in collaboration with the Family Court and community and faith-based organizations. The Hawaii DHS's first priority was to address the disproportionality of Native Hawaiian children in foster care. In 2005, the Department supplemented a federal grant to support Kokua 'Ohana, a pilot project focusing on faith-based recruitment and support for native Hawaiian resource families. Subsequently, the Department focused on facilitated dialogues around the State with birth families, resource families, and child welfare workers and community partners to build relationships and strengthen the "triangle of support" around the child. The Hawaii DHS also recognized that a mechanism was needed to provide a more focused approach to the full continuum of services available to children and resource families. As a result, the Department developed an integrated system of four of the State's foremost community based organizations under the umbrella of Partners in Development Foundation, one of Hawaii's most respected community-based organizations. In 2007, the Department, Family Court, and the William S. Richardson School of Law hosted a "Convening" to promote family connections, family finding, and to promote healthy life-long family relationships for all children impacted by the child welfare system. The Hawaii DHS has been highly successful in promoting adoptions, as it has shown with increases in adoptions from an annual baseline of 150 adoptions in Federal Fiscal Year 1997 to 431 in Federal Fiscal Year 2005.

**AWARDEE: Bexar County Child Welfare Board, San Antonio, Texas**

Fueled by their innovative ideas and collaborations with Child Protective Services (CPS), members of the Bexar County Child Welfare Board (BCCWB) have doubled the adoption rates in San Antonio since January 2005. Bexar County Child Welfare Board members are tireless advocates for abused and neglected children and the caseworkers charged with protecting and caring for them. In order to achieve rapid permanency for children needing adoptive homes, members of the Board formed a partnership with the county and the State to create Project PUSH. Members of the Board literally "push" the adoptions through, making sure that Bexar County attorneys representing children and families expeditiously complete necessary paperwork to finalize adoption proceedings in a timely manner. The Board's efforts resulted in the adoption of 634 children in fiscal year 2006, which represents an increase of more than double the number

of adoptions in 2000. To find homes for the area's 300 to 400 children who are eligible for adoption at any given time, members of the Board are also members of the Heart Gallery Committee. In 2004, the Board initiated a partnership between the County Judges, Child Welfare Board, local nonprofit agencies, and San Antonio's World Champion Professional Basketball team, the San Antonio Spurs, to conduct monthly Mass Adoption Ceremonies. The BCCWB also partners with the San Antonio construction industry to collect Christmas gifts for children placed in foster care. The Board and its partners have met the needs for over 2,000 children under the care of CPS each year since 2001.

### **CATEGORY #10 MEDIA/PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE**

**AWARDEE:**           **You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption and Permanency Movement, Inc.,** Brooklyn, New York

Pat O'Brien created *You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption and Permanency Movement (YGB!)* in New York in 1995. Mr. O'Brien embarked on a coast-to coast mission to bring his new ideas and viewpoints about connecting older children with permanent homes to agencies, institutions, and individuals who followed more traditional thinking about adoption. *YGB!* is one of the few placement agencies in the country that limits its practice to finding permanent homes for teenagers in foster care, without regard to whether the child is free for adoption. It also emphasizes finding relatives to increase the likelihood of finding permanent homes for youth. The New York City Administration for Children's Services partnered with *YGB!* to find permanent families for its teens and pre-teens and the partnership resulted in the expansion of resources for adoption of older children and an increase in the rates of teenager adoptions. The *YGB!* approach to permanency is the use of youth as paid consultants in the primary recruitment of adults willing to adopt older children and young adults. Youth are used as full partners and are honored by *YGB!* as experts who can speak on the positives of adoption and what commitments adolescents need from an adult, based on their own experiences while in foster care. *YGB!* uses media to draw adults to forums broadcast on cable television and radio where the youth talk about what adoption means to them and what it is like to grow up in foster care. Twenty-three percent of all inquiry calls to *YGB!* regarding adoption of older children come from their cable access show, which is produced and hosted by Pat O'Brien. The television and radio shows are called "The Adopting Teens & Tweens Show" and can also be viewed on *YGB!*'s website. What began in New York over a decade ago has already been replicated in many other States. Pat O'Brien and *You Gotta Believe!* have in extraordinary ways created public awareness and generated understanding of the need for permanency for all children in public care.