

**ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE YEAR 2010**

CATEGORY #4 SUPPORT FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

AWARDEE: **Three Rivers Adoption Council**
(Category #4 Support for Adoptive Families)

ADDRESS: 307 Fourth Avenue
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Pittsburgh, PA 15222
412-471-8722
ltotten@3riversadopt.org

Three Rivers Adoption Council (TRAC) is a non-profit agency that has provided dedicated services in Western Pennsylvania for over 30 years. With its “holistic” adoption approach, TRAC has established itself as a leader in the child welfare field by incorporating an integrated support services model for adoptive families into every aspect of the adoption process. This approach has allowed the agency to drastically decrease the disruption rate from the national average of 25% to 9%. TRAC attributes its success to the recognition of each child as an individual and responding to a child’s needs with the appropriate support to insure a permanent placement. The agency has several innovative programs to support adoptive families, some of which include: weekly training sessions for adoptive parents; the Black Adoption Services program, which offers culturally appropriate services to families with an emphasis on African American families; and the Family Connections program, which has a dual focus on child preparation and post-permanency services. TRAC also offers family therapy and respite services for adoptive families. TRAC has contributed to the successful placement of over 7,000 children into permanent families and is proud to offer its wide range of supports to the families it works with.

AWARDEE: **Adoption Support for Kentucky**
(Category #4 Support for Adoptive Families)

ADDRESS: 1 Quality Street Suite 700
Lexington, KY 40507
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Cssaun0@email.uky.edu

Formed in 2002, Adoption Support for Kentucky (ASK) is the only support group of its kind in Kentucky. The goal of ASK is to encourage adoption retention by identifying and addressing the challenges of adoptive families. The program started with 11 parent leaders who aimed to unify and support families. Within one year, the success of ASK was evident and soon after, sixteen leaders were in place providing over 190 groups. Participants of ASK are offered information on policies and procedures; they are provided education and ongoing training; and they have access to a lending library with statewide resources. In 2007, ASK partnered with the University of

Kentucky's College of Social Work, who conducted a study to determine the program's effectiveness. The study concluded that ASK is helpful in providing current information on adoption policies, providing emotional support, information exchange, and helping to avoid adoption disruptions. Adoption Support for Kentucky has experienced tremendous success and has grown considerably from 981 support group attendees in 2003 to nearly 4,000 in 2009. It currently conducts almost 400 support groups yearly and to date has welcomed over 18,000 attendees to various groups and trainings. ASK and its Program Director, Carrie Saunders, have been recognized for their exceptional achievements in supporting families with state and national awards, including the Betty Triplett Award and the 2010 "Parent Group of the Year" award.

AWARDEE: **Family Focus Adoption Services**
(Category #4 Support for Adoptive Families)

ADDRESS: 54-40 Little Neck Parkway
Suite 4
Little Neck, NY 11362
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ffas@familyfocusadoption.org

Founded and staffed by adoptive parents, social workers, and adoption advocates, Family Focus Adoption Services provides recruitment, training, placements, and post-adoption services to adoptive families. The mission of this 23-year old not-for-profit adoption agency is to provide confidence-building adoption services to children and families that its staff would want and expect for their own children and families. Family Focus views its relatively small size as its greatest asset, as it is able to provide each prospective adoptive family and child the individualized services needed to successfully form a family through adoption. The agency's most defining feature is "Empowered Transition", a process that children and potential adoptive families go through before a decision to adopt or be adopted is made. This intense supportive service enables families and children the ability to learn about each other and build confidence in themselves as parents and as children living in a family. There are six steps in the transition process, including the assignment of workers and support advocates, regular meetings to check-in with children and families on how the process and relationships are working, and convening an adoption covenant ceremony at the completion of the final adoption step to affirm the family's commitment to adopt a child and the child's decision to be adopted. Since its inception, Family Focus has placed approximately 300 children with only a 3% disruption rate. The agency attributes much of its success to carefully designed and implemented "front loaded" services offered early and throughout the first year of placements.

AWARDEE: **Children's Home + Aid of Illinois, Northern Region**
(Category #4 Support for Adoptive Families)

ADDRESS: 910 2nd Avenue
Rockford, IL 61104
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Established in 1939, Children's Home + Aid of Illinois, Northern Region office offers a range of adoption and child welfare services, including recruitment, adoption preparation and education, and post-adoption support. Children's Home + Aid began the Adoption & Guardianship Preservation program in 1994 to meet specific needs of post-adoptive and subsidized guardianship families. Since it began, the program has served 373 families, many of whom are at risk of dissolving an adoption. The Preservation program offers voluntary and free services such as individual, family and marriage counseling, school advocacy, support groups, and respite. In the past year, the Preservation program has preserved 91% of placements. Another support service provided by Children's Home + Aid is Adoptive Families Together (AFT), which was developed to increase the stability of the adoption and family system by providing prevention-based marriage enhancement services to decrease the likelihood of dissolution in the adoption and/or marriage. Over the past four years, more than 500 individuals have been served through AFT, at no cost to participants. The program has been successful by providing couples with opportunities to participate in services to strengthen relationship skills and reduce marital and parent/child conflict. This unique program includes social networking, group activities for children and families, post-adoption information and resources, and alumni workshops and educational seminars. Together, these activities have been effective in strengthening the marriages of adoptive parents and thus, the family unit.

CATEGORY #5 INDIVIDUAL AND/OR FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS

AWARDEE: **Janice Goldwater**
(Category #5 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

ADDRESS: Adoptions Together
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Suite 200
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Janice Goldwater is the Founder and Executive Director of Adoptions Together, located in Maryland. Ms. Goldwater created Adoptions Together in 1990 in an effort to find permanent homes for all children in need, including children of color, older children, waiting siblings, children with medical or behavioral challenges, and medically fragile infants. Her passion in promoting and increasing permanency for children has contributed to long-term stability for more than 3,000 children. Since its inception, Ms. Goldwater's agency has also provided post-adoption, mental health and educational services to thousands of families. To further her mission, Ms. Goldwater uses her facilitation skills to build collaborative relationships with other organizations to maximize benefits for children and families. For instance, Ms. Goldwater partnered with Washington, DC's child welfare agency to launch the Parent Advocate Project. The Parent Advocate Project provides services to families to help expedite reunification and reduce re-entries. In its inaugural year, the Project achieved reunification within 12 months for 64% of participating families. As an established leader in the field, Ms. Goldwater is frequently featured on the radio and television and also participates on panels at conferences across the country. Adopting a child gave Ms. Goldwater unique insight into the reality experienced by children and families in the child welfare system. She continues to be driven as a dedicated

mother, professional, and administrator who inspires and energizes others to remain focused on improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

AWARDEE: **Linda Coffin**
(Category #5 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

ADDRESS: 109 A-2 Half Moon Circle
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Linda Coffin is well-known in Florida for the numerous contributions she has made as a volunteer on behalf of children in foster care. Her dedication and devotion is recognized and most notable in the work she has done to secure permanent forever families through the Palm Beach County Heart Gallery. Ms. Coffin has secured exhibit locations, financial support, volunteer photographers, and reached out to gain the faith community's support. She has taken the lead to ensure that the Palm Beach County Heart Gallery is present throughout Florida by personally reaching out to photographers, legislators, and other individuals who are key to the success of Heart Galleries. Ms. Coffin's efforts have led to the display of over 30 children on any given day at various Heart Gallery exhibits across Palm Beach County. For more than 20 years, Ms. Coffin has met the needs of at-risk children and their families by creating innovative programs and services, including The Birthday Club and The Belle Glade Emergency Closet. Many children in the child welfare system do not have an opportunity to celebrate their birthday, which gave Ms. Coffin the idea to contact local chefs and bakeries and tell them about the unmet needs of these children. Through the Club, donations are made and children in foster care are able to have birthday celebrations. Ms. Coffin also started the Emergency Closet for the Foster Parent Association, which provides clothing and toys for families serving foster youth. It is run out of a building secured by Ms. Coffin and staffed with volunteers. In addition to all of her volunteer work, Ms. Coffin has also been a foster parent to more than 21 children over the past decade and still finds the time and devotion to be involved in their lives as they've grown older.

AWARDEE: **Eileen Mullen**
(Category #5 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

ADDRESS: Bureau of Community & Family Support, NH Division for CYF
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Eileen Mullen is the Bureau Chief of the Bureau for Community and Family Support at the New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Ms. Mullen began her career over 25 years ago as a Child Protective Services Worker and then moved to the Adoption Unit. It was evident early in her career that she had a passion for adoption. In her role as the first Family Support Specialist, Mrs. Mullen created family-centered, supportive programs that were available for all families. She played an instrumental part in normalizing the idea that every family needs support. Ms. Mullen also served on a committee to improve the preparation of undergraduate students who were interested in social work. This effort was the beginning of their use of IV-E funds to help hire interns. Ms. Mullen's career came full circle when she

became a DCYF Administrator in the Bureau of Family and Community Support. Under her supervision, adoption and foster care trainings were merged and more emphasis was placed on recruitment of families for older youth, respite care, and post-adoption support. Ms. Mullen is an advocate for community collaboration and has worked with legislators to ensure policies that strengthen community-based programs. Her efforts led to the creation of the Community and Faith Based Initiative, which over 4 years has grown from a small collaboration with a few churches to a strong partnership with over 100 churches and hundreds of members of the faith community. This initiative recruits foster and adoptive parents, uses child-specific recruitment, and provides supports for foster and adoptive families. From all of the work she has done around the need to do more to support adoptive parents and relatives who are caregivers to developing a post-adoption program, Ms. Mullen is a wonderful example of a dedicated and passionate child welfare professional.

AWARDEE: **Jerome & Adrienne Welenc**
(Category #5 Individual and/or Family Contributions)

ADDRESS: 3700 W. 64th Place
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Forty years ago when Jerry and Adrienne Welenc decided they wanted to do something to help children, they began a family which started with two children by birth and expanded over time with seven adopted children, one through guardianship, and more than 100 children through foster care. During holidays it is not unusual to find birth parents, siblings, and children who have grown up and out of foster care in their home. The Welenc's believe that every need can be met and always make the most of available resources. For example, the couple maintains food pantries and distributes fresh produce to families every summer. Mr. Welenc regularly arranges health fairs in some of Chicago's most under-served neighborhoods. They also help other families by collecting clothing and furniture to give to parents and arrange seminars with tax professionals for caregivers to help ensure adoptive families have their finances in order so they can take full advantage of the adoption tax credit. The Welenc's have established several long-standing partnerships to help themselves and others with entities such as Chicago's Department of Children and Family Services, foster and adoptive parent support groups, and local businesses. The Welenc's are strong advocates for children and families and have testified before the Illinois Senate about what it takes to build safe, permanent families. They also participate on many committees and advisory boards, including Mr. Welenc's appointment to the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Foster Care, where he was part of the drafting of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights. Ms. Welenc has been the Lead Foster Parent Support Specialist in the Cook Central Region for 15 years. Mr. and Mrs. Welenc's unrelenting dedication and advocacy in child welfare has helped numerous children and families and has earned them respect throughout Chicago.

CATEGORY #8 ADOPTION OF MINORITY CHILDREN FROM FOSTER CARE

AWARDEE: **Children's Home Society of Florida**
(Category #8 Adoption of Minority Children from Foster Care)

ADDRESS: 1485 S. Semoran Bld., Ste 1448
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David.bundy@chsfl.org

Children’s Home Society of Florida (CHS) has worked in close partnership with the Department of Children and Families to improve dependency systems and adoption outcomes. It has played an important role in helping Florida increase the number of children adopted from foster care, especially older children and minorities. Over the past 4 years, CHS has finalized more than 3,200 adoptions for children and adolescents from Florida’s foster care system. Of these adoptions, over 1,400 were minority children, including approximately 1/3 African American. Many of these adoptions included sibling groups, older children, and adolescents. Children’s Home Society of Florida has also partnered with public and private agencies across the state to make innovative, lasting, and replicable practice improvements and sustainable systems change, including reducing the number of children entering care and expediting permanency for those in care. Serving over 100,000 children, youth, and families each year, CHS is committed to culturally and linguistically competent community-based outreach in all counties of Florida. Some of the initiatives that have led to increased adoptions for minority children include:

- Specialized recruitment staff for outreach to minority communities
- Extensive web-based recruitment to profile waiting children
- Early contact with extended family and “relationship mining” to identify placement resources at entry into the system
- “Adoption Champions” who volunteer to sponsor a waiting child for 3 months, including adoptive family recruitment
- Faith-based partnerships, especially with churches with minority congregations
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program

CATEGORY #9 MEDIA/PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE

AWARDEE: **Gia Tutalo-Mote**
(Category #9 Media/Public Awareness of Adoption from Foster Care)

ADDRESS: Forever Family
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Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301
www.foreverfamily.org

Gia Tutalo-Mote is the founder and CEO of Forever Family, a non-profit organization in Florida that uses the power of the media through television segments and on-air promotions to build awareness regarding children and teens in foster care. Forever Family partners with public and private agencies to find adoptive homes and recruit foster parents and volunteers. Online exposure and television and radio media help residents in Florida learn about the need for forever families. Since Forever Family debuted in 2002, hundreds of children have been helped or placed in permanent homes and hundreds of new families, foster parents, and volunteers have

been recruited. Viewers of Forever Family have helped raise over \$300,000 in cash and goods and services for teens aging out of the system and for medically fragile children. As a result of these generous donations, services have been provided to help teens leaving foster care to set up their own apartments and help has been provided to renovate homes or provide handicap accessible transportation for children with severe medical needs. Forever Family first broadcast in South Florida and now airs on major stations throughout the state. Always assessing the needs of the community, Forever Family is an effective method for filling in the gaps in an effort to increase the success of permanency for youth. Ms. Tutalo-Mote is a wife, mother, and Emmy Award winning television producer, who also produces a weekly series of mini-documentaries that air on major broadcast stations throughout Florida to tell the stories of children who are in need of permanent homes.