



## North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services

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Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Pheon E. Beal, Director  
(919) 733-3055

November 3, 2004

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Attention: Adoption & Foster Care Supervisors  
Adoption & Foster Care Social Workers

Subject: **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF NORTH CAROLINA'S 2003 ADOPTIVE FAMILY SURVEY**

In the spring of 2003 the Division developed and mailed a survey to all families who were receiving monthly adoption assistance benefits. This survey was designed to identify the strengths and needs in the area of post adoption services. Of the total of 8,000 surveys that were sent, 1,607 were received back for a 20% return rate.

The Division contracted with NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network to evaluate the survey. The evaluation has been completed and we are attaching an Executive Summary. If you are interested in receiving the final report, please contact Esther High, Foster Care and Adoption Policy Manager, at 919-733-9464 or [Esther.High@ncmail.net](mailto:Esther.High@ncmail.net).

The Division is very pleased with your many efforts to provide permanent, adoptive homes for children in the foster care system. However, in order to sustain these families we must provide post-adoption services. We hope the results of this survey will assist in your efforts to provide these needy services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Ann Lamm".

Jo Ann Lamm, Program Administrator  
Family Support and Child Welfare Section

JAL/eh

Attachment

**FSCWS-45-04**

cc: Pheon Beal  
Sherry Bradsher  
Another Choice for Black Children  
Methodist Home for Children  
Adoptions Plus  
Children's Home Society of North Carolina  
Children's and Work First Program Representatives  
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Team Leaders

## **North Carolina 2003 Adoptive Family Survey Executive Summary**

To assist North Carolina identify strengths and needs in the area of post adoption services, a survey was developed and mailed by the North Carolina Division of Social Services to all families who adopted a North Carolina child and were receiving a monthly adoption assistance subsidy. A total of 8,000 surveys were mailed and 1,607 were received back for a 20% return rate. NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network conducted the analysis for NCDSS.

### Demographic Information

We were unable to determine if the sample collected proportionately represented the demographic composition of all of the adoptive families in North Carolina. We do know that 51% of the respondents had a household income of over \$45,000 without their adoption assistance and that 62% were Caucasian and 35% were African American. Additionally, 41% of the families had a college degree or a graduate school degree. Another 32% had some college experience which is a total of 73% of families from this sample at least had some college education.

We did assume that families who did not respond to the demographic question for spouse or secondary respondent were single family homes. Given that assumption, 81% of the families were two-parent households, 90% of the families were same race families, and 88% adopted through public child placing agencies. We also know that 59% of the families responded to the survey based on their experience with children who were five or younger when they were adopted. Additionally, 55% of the children adopted were Caucasian and 39% were African American.

### Specific Results

The majority of families had a positive adoption experience as indicated by 91% reporting that they were satisfied with their adoption experience. 86% of families reported that they would recommend adoption to others, and 88% indicated that if they had to do it over, they would adopt their child again. Additionally, 90% families reported that their children were somewhat or fully prepared for the adoption and 70% reported their child feels positive about being adopted.

68% reported that their child was a little or not at all difficult to raise. 40% of the respondents indicated they were comfortable allowing their child to have contact with his/her birth relatives and 47% thought it was helpful to have contact with his/her brothers/sisters. 23% of the families reported trouble receiving respite or therapeutic services and 20% reporting trouble finding support groups for parents.

### Qualitative Themes

Respondents had the opportunity to comment on their adoption experience and expand on any difficulty they experienced. These comments were reviewed by the analysts and several themes emerged. Below is a summary of the key issues identified in each theme.

#### Access to Information or Services

Families reported a need for more information on what services were available and how to access these services for themselves and their children. Many expressed a need for an opportunity to connect to other parents, and for their children to connect with other adopted children. Comments included a need for written information about these services as well as on-going information about any changes to services.

## Age Eligibility Increase from 18 to 21

Families reported a need for the foster care board rate, the adoption subsidy, and/or Medicaid to continue past the child's 18th birthday. Many families reported the child would either not be independent or have completed high school by age 18 and would still be in the home. This appears to be a common theme as many foster/adoptive children have a history of repeating one or more grade level, therefore the child has one or more years in high school past their 18th birthday.

## Agency Communication

Families reported a need for an increased amount of communication with the agency. This included full disclosure of information on the child's background prior to placement, more accurate expectations regarding the child's needs and behaviors, and more timely response to their needs.

## Birth Family Relations

Comments reported related to birth family interactions included that families did not realize they would run into birth families in their daily course of life, or that the birth family would know who they were. Other families reported not being fully prepared for sibling rivalry, and the problems the child's feelings regarding birth family would cause. Additional comments were made related to a need for assistance searching for birth family members.

## Child Preparation Issues

Families reported that children were not adequately prepared for adoption. Some children believed they would be in their former foster family for the rest of their life, and some did not want a permanent family. Other families reported more intensive testing and counseling should be done prior to placement.

## Family Preparation Issues

Families expressed a need for better preparation for behaviors related to specific special needs such as Reactive Attachment Disorder, drug exposure, sexually abuse and Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder. In addition, families expressed a need for training in cross cultural issues and what to expect as children get older.

## Financial Issues

Families expressed a need for addition income to help with the cost of living, daycare costs, college tuition, clothes, psychological services, and travel expenses. Many expressed a need for food stamps, any easier way to obtain reimbursement for vendor payments and a hope that adoption assistance funds could be direct deposited.

## Length of Process

Families expressed frustration at the length of time the adoption process takes. This included issues from a legal perspective such as terminating the parental rights of noncompliant birth families, numerous court continuances and processing the finalization paperwork. One family expressed experiencing a bias by the Assistant Clerk of Court in a particular county. Additionally, families expressed problems with the entire process as a whole from the volume of paperwork, waiting for a placement and unnecessary red tape. Many did express an interest in adopting again if the process could be expedited for experienced adoptive parents.

## Medicaid & Medical Issues

Families expressed difficulty obtaining adequate services accepted by Medicaid, especially dental care. One family expressed the children did not have sufficient medications to last until new medical services could be arranged. A few families lost Medicaid upon finalization or indicated it was difficult to keep.

## Negative Perceptions

Those families that had difficulty with their adoption experience expressed trust issues and agency concerns. They felt they had been lied to or that information had been purposely withheld from them.

## Positive Perceptions

Those families that had a positive adoption experience expressed gratitude and appreciation for their agency's assistance. Many felt it was the best decision they have ever made and are very happy with their adopted child.

## Post Placement Support

Families expressed a need for continued services after finalization. Many families had little or no follow-up with their agency after finalization, and experienced difficulty with their children immediately and sometimes much later after placement. This was particularly felt by foster families who adopted as they had substantial help while fostering, but it ended after they adopted.

## Relative Adoption

A small number of comments from relatives ranged from difficulty with family members, importance of notification of family members, and long term difficulty as grandparents get older.

## Respite Care Issues

Families expressed a need for qualified respite care to prevent an adoption disruption and assistance with the cost of professional respite. Situations requiring respite included emergency, vacations, and weekends.

## School Issues

Families expressed several issues related to school. This included such things as the child's experience of feeling different and being labeled, a need for additional educational services, lack of teacher's knowledge about adoption, and a need for assistance with the cost of tutoring.

## Service Needs

This category outlines specific post placement needs. Families expressed a need for training in specific disabilities and anger, discipline, social and emotional issues. Families also expressed a need for more adoption competent counselors and therapists.

## Summary

Overall, these are extremely good results. There were some key areas we may wish to address that had a significant impact on the family's adoption experience.

We do know that the greater number of family and child preparation activities before finalization, the more prepared the family felt. These included things such as being told or given in writing information about the child's past, discussing difficulties and possible ways to get help, or meeting previous caregivers or other adoptive parents. We did identify that higher income families received more preparation activities than lower income families. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions on this information. One possibility is that the families with higher income may have asked more questions than other families and therefore received more preparation activities.

After finalization, accessing educational services, parent support groups and respite care were especially critical. Additionally, child/individual counseling, working with the agency that arranged the adoption and use of information/referral service were the most helpful in lowering the difficulty level families expressed while raising the child.

It is clear by the positive and negative comments we received through this survey how important it is for families to feel like they have resources available to them after finalization. The complexity and uncertainties of adoption make it difficult for agencies and families alike to know which service they will need when. Any program must have a broad range of services that are flexible to allow parents to access it as needed. Clear expectations and frequent and honest communication appear to be key ingredients to a successful adoption experience.