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Background Brief on...

Adoption

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Adopting Through the State of Oregon

Children at risk of abuse or neglect are removed from their homes by the state's Children Adults and Families department (CAF) and placed in foster care for their safety. CAF works with the family to address its problems with the goal of keeping the family intact. If a child cannot be safely reunited with a parent on a permanent basis within a year, CAF implements an alternative plan, such as guardianship, long-term relative care, foster care, or adoption.

Family Reunification Efforts	Parental Termination Process	Adoptive Placement Efforts
(12 months on average)	(12 months on average)	(12 months on average)

Adoption Benefits

When children experience a variety of settings through foster care, the resulting emotional and psychological impairment may last the child's lifetime. Adoption is viewed as a way to give children the kind of security and stability they need and may have been lacking within their birth families or in foster care.

Balanced with the need for a speedy placement is the need for the placement to be a good one, one that will last, and one that best meets the individual needs of the child.

What Children Need Homes

CAF is a "special needs" adoption agency. Eligible children have at least one of the following conditions or factors:

- Are over the age of 8 years
- Have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities
- Are members of a minority population
- Are siblings
- Are "at-risk" for future problems
- Have significant emotional ties to adoptive family while in their care as a foster child

Healthy infants or young children are rarely available through CAF. Families wishing to adopt a healthy newborn infant or toddler are encouraged to contact one of Oregon's licensed private adoption agencies.

Federal Law Changes Adoption Process

Concerned that existing laws and procedures required children to remain in dysfunctional families or wait in foster care without a permanent placement, Congress enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. The Act contained a number of provisions, all with the goal of moving children from foster care to an adoptive home more quickly.

In response, Oregon modified its laws, policies, and procedures and launched its own adoption reform initiative, resulting in an increase in adoptive placements.

In addition to changed CAF policies, the 1997 Oregon Legislature enacted Senate Bill 689, referred to as the "Best Interests of the Child" Act. The act's provisions included terminating parental rights sooner if the parents did not make necessary changes, reducing the time the state takes to find adoptive homes, and increasing the number of families trained and certified to be adoptive families.

CAF Finalized Adoptions							
1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
427	468	441	665	755	831	1071	1118

Who May Adopt

According to the CAF web page, potential adoptive families have the following characteristics:

- Are single, married, or divorced of all ages and incomes
- Live in a house or apartment
- Can work with social workers and/or therapists and support people
- Have not been convicted of a violent crime or a crime against a child
- Are flexible, energetic, and able to care for a child
- Work inside or outside their home
- Are open to learning new things
- Can talk with adoption workers about themselves and their families

Prospective adoptive parents are recruited by CAF through newsletters, waiting child columns in newspapers, public service announcements, church bulletin inserts, adoption parties, and the CAF web page.

Preference is given to the child's relatives who are interested in adopting.

The Adoption Process

- An individual or family interested in adopting a special needs child contacts an adoption worker through their local CAF branch or the Special Needs Adoption Coalition.
- Prospective adoptive parents must undergo pre-adoption training to prepare them for the challenges of a special needs child.
- Prospective adoptive families must undergo a "home study" where a caseworker visits the family's home and evaluates the prospective adoptive parents' suitability to adopt and parent a special needs child and whether they meet the minimum standards as set out in CAF rules.
- Once a child is legally available to be adopted, the caseworker reviews the home studies for possible matches.
- A three-person adoption committee reviews 1-4 possible matches for each child and selects one.
- Child is placed with family, and is supervised by CAF for approximately one year.
- Adoption is legally finalized.

Adoption Assistance Program

To remove financial barriers to adoption and to ensure that families who adopt have the necessary services and financial resources to meet their children's ongoing needs, Congress enacted the Adoption Assistance Program in 1980. CAF assesses the child's needs and determines the amount of the subsidy on a case-by-case basis.

Rights of the Original Birth Family

Mediation services are available through the adoption program to assist the birth parents and adoptive parents in coming to agreement on the level of openness in the adoption, and the amount of contact the adoptee has with relatives.

Legislative Concern

Some Oregon legislators shared the concern voiced at the federal level regarding children languishing in foster care, and feared that state policies might be hampering speedy adoptive placements. These concerns were echoed by private adoption agencies, who thought they could provide faster adoption placement at less cost.

House Bill 3728 (1997), created the Task Force on Adoption Services. The task force was charged with reviewing current policies and procedures of CAF and making recommendations to the legislature. A number of

procedural recommendations were made. That report was issued June 1998 and is available in the Legislative Library.

In addition, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee produced the *Study of the Adoption Process of the State Office for Services to Children and Families* in September 1998. Because the context of CAF adoptions are different—legal costs involved in parental termination, greater difficulty in placing special needs children—direct comparisons with private agencies were difficult. The findings were inconclusive, but suggested that more discussion occur within CAF regarding expanding the use of private adoption agencies and linking payment rates to private adoption agencies with the time involved in carrying out the contracted task.

The 1997 legislature increased the adoption budget at CAF by \$3.7 million to fund 38 positions including adoption workers and family recruiters. With this additional resource coupled with changes in the law, a number of recommendations were implemented, resulting in more finalized adoptions for Oregon's most vulnerable citizens.

For More Information:

DHS Adoption Services webpage,
<http://www.dhs.state.or.us/children/adoption/>

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