



The primary purpose of Adoption Month is to raise awareness about adoption, adoptive families, and children who need adoptive homes. If done well, awareness-raising efforts represent adoptive families in a positive manner, enhance an organization's public profile, and make the plight of waiting children a community responsibility. In this chapter, we discuss tactics to help you enlist the media, government, and businesses in your campaign to build public awareness about adoption.



Awareness

Media

Millions turn to newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet on a daily basis, primed to learn more about what is happening in the world around them. With an engaged audience already at their disposal, each of these venues is an excellent option for spreading the word about adoption. Media coverage reaches a broad spectrum of the general public, including neighbors and relatives of adoptive families, potential donors or contributors, and future adoptive families.

As an opportunity to reach new audiences and a precursor to recruitment, media coverage should include clear, accurate adoption messages. Well-crafted news and feature pieces help to dispel myths and correct misperceptions about who can adopt and what adoption is like. A broad public understanding also improves the lives of adoptive parents, birth families, and adoptees as colleagues and peers become more knowledgeable and supportive.



*Whoever controls
the media—the
images—controls
the culture.*

—Allen
Ginsberg

Getting Started

Before you contact any media organization, lay the groundwork for success. As you begin working with media organizations:

- ☞ **Reflect upon, then focus your approach.** To ensure that your point is conveyed effectively, consider your message and determine your purpose in seeking media attention. Relationship building is an essential but time-consuming element of obtaining positive media coverage, so invest your time wisely. Is the message best presented on television, heard on the radio, or read in print [see page 13]? Is it news or a feature story or both [see pages 14–15]? Answering these questions can guide you to the right media personnel from the start.
- ☞ **Target particular stations and publications to seek coverage.** Who would be most interested in and do the best job covering your story? What types of stories do particular media organizations in your area typically cover? Do they have staff in certain departments who can cover your event or issue? A media directory, usually available for purchase through press clubs (check the phone book), can help you locate media organizations and personnel. Then, to maximize your chances of being covered, thoughtfully select organizations and research how they make content decisions.
- ☞ **Establish personal contact with media personnel.** Start with a phone call introducing yourself, your organization, and your cause. Next, send a written information

packet, possibly including a press release [see page 16], your group brochure, newsletter, photos, an adoption fact sheet, and statistics [see page 65]. Then follow up with another phone call after the written materials have arrived or as the date on which you want media coverage approaches.

- ☞ **Address your material to a specific person.** Unfortunately, correspondence addressed only to “editor” may not get much attention. Instead, call the organization and ask for the name and title of the person you wish to contact. If you are not able to talk with the right person on the telephone, send written materials to a specific editor or other content manager. If possible, identify the person who determines content within particular departments (such as regional news, family, lifestyles, community, etc.) and might be especially interested in your story.
- ☞ **Find creative ways to build media connections ahead of time.** Leading up to Adoption Month, get media personnel to think about adoption issues. For instance, invite editors, reporters, and other story planners to a media luncheon—food is nearly always a good lure. During the luncheon, adoption experts can present an overview of the issues and media representatives can gather information for future stories.
- ☞ **Explore electronic communications options.** The Middleberg/Ross Media in Cyberspace Studies found that nearly 75 percent of managing editors of newspapers and magazines surveyed in 1999 go online at least once a day. The editors

use the Internet to e-mail, contact sources, research stories, and communicate with readers. The popularity of electronic communication provides an additional opportunity for you to connect—people who take days or weeks to return a phone call often respond to e-mail almost immediately. And, since most newspapers, radio stations, and television stations have an Internet site, you can quickly research organizations and contact people. When reporters or editors cover your story, ask if they can also post the story online and include links to your (or other) informative adoption web sites [see “Internet Sites” on page 67].

☞ **Plan to follow up.** Place calls the day before or morning of the event to remind media contacts what will take place, where and when it will be, and whom they can talk to while there. Always be prepared to supply complete information—even if you already sent it—just before and after the event takes place. Once the article is published or the program airs, send thank you notes to both the editor and reporter. Also indicate your willingness to be a future source and suggest additional stories or angles to pursue.

☞ **Consider forming a recruitment partnership with supportive media organizations.** Once you have established a relationship with particular reporters, editors, stations, or publications, they may be willing to make a greater commitment to adoption causes. The foundation you build by working together on news or feature stories could develop into an ongoing recruitment collaboration—perhaps the organization can air or print advertisements, public service announcements, or a recurring waiting child feature [see “Advertising” on page 41 and “Waiting Child Features” on page 53].

Selecting Your Medium

Knowing the advantages of particular mediums can help you focus your relationship-building energy to maximize your results.

Print

From powerful institutions like the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, to small weekly

or monthly neighborhood publications, newspapers reach millions of readers every day. Unlike television or radio, print media allows you to create your own content for publication. For example, you do not need advanced video editing equipment or a high-tech recording system to write a letter to the editor.

Large papers that have more staff reporters are better able to cover news events. With departments that typically correspond to the sections of the paper, you can attempt to connect to one of several reporters or editors who might be interested. You can also send a letter to the editor or persuade the editorial board to run a piece of its own. Some of the smallest papers, on the other hand, will be more receptive to feature articles and lengthy letters to the editor, though they are less well-equipped to respond to breaking news. Some smaller papers may even publish feature or news material that you submit.

Print media can also help you to target a particular audience. In many cities, specialized newspapers serve African American, Latino, Native American, or Asian American constituents. Magazines are also an option—because they need to market themselves to advertisers, most can provide specific information about the demographics of their readers.



Quick & Easy

Media Possibilities

- Write a letter to a talk show or fictional program, thanking producers for covering adoption issues or encouraging them to do so.
- Call in to a radio show about vulnerable children, mental health services, health care reform, special education, or welfare. Remind the public how adoptive families are touched by these issues.
- Send a poem or piece of artwork created by an adopted child to a magazine or newspaper, asking for it to be published.
- Encourage families who came together through adoption to share their story with the media—better yet, volunteer your family.
- Invite a media personality to your next support group meeting or adoption orientation class.
- Add media organizations to your support group or agency mailing list and keep them updated about your activities.

Television

Television presents infinite possibilities for raising awareness during Adoption Month. News, feature stories, even fictional programming can include adoption messages. News stories can appear on nightly local broadcasts—most areas have several network affiliates. Many stations also broadcast morning or midday shows that include feature stories, special guests, or expert interviews. News magazine shows offer an additional opportunity for in-depth coverage.

Besides the network affiliates, low- or no-cost cable access channels and public television stations are also excellent options. They have a smaller audience, but they are actively seeking programming and will likely be happy to air Adoption Month programming. Consider Spanish-speaking stations as well.

Television is best suited to events that include visual appeal. For example, if you hope to get television coverage of your event on the steps of the capitol building, you should plan to include a symbolic representation of waiting children or a performance by a child or children's group rather than just a series of speakers [see "Conducting Symbolic Campaigns" on page 24].

Radio

Radio is another good way to publicize Adoption Month activities and promote awareness about children who need permanent families. You may be able to schedule a short radio call-in show or interview piece, a longer feature, or a series of feature stories on adoption. Contact a station that conducts interviews and records features—public radio stations or those on the AM dial for instance—then offer several ideas. Suggest that a series of several adoption-related spots can be created from a single taped interview, and name yourself or your organization as a resource. Music radio stations are also a viable option—especially those that specialize their broadcasts to reach particular audiences that match your interest (middle-aged women, families with children, or particular racial and ethnic groups, for example). Many have morning talk shows with loyal listeners. Others are accustomed to promoting particular causes and might be willing to discuss adoption regularly.

Disseminating News

At times, controversial adoption cases—Internet baby selling, birth parents who want children back years later, and deaths of foster and adopted children—seem to be the only stories getting covered. While bad news travels fast, with a strategic approach you can interest reporters in publicizing positive adoption messages as well.

First, make certain your news item is newsworthy. Reporters need a "news peg"—an event, research finding, statistical report, or other timely item to announce—to cover your story as news. If your story lacks a news peg, it is a feature, not news, and will be more effective as a human-interest piece.

Well-written press releases can frame most Adoption Month happenings as news. Events, legislation, speakers, trainings, and statistics can all elicit the interest of editors and reporters. To get your news covered:

- ☞ **Provide advance notice about your topic.** Respect the tight deadlines under which every reporter, writer, and editor works. Editors are typically swamped with information; if they know about a subject well ahead of time, chances are greater that they will study and use it.
- ☞ **Send a press release to the news director or editor.** When composing press releases, lead off with your main points. Use an explanatory heading and answer key questions (who? what? when? where? why?) in the first paragraph. Next, support your point with relevant statistics and verified facts, with sources noted [see "Child Welfare Statistics" on page 65]. In the following paragraphs develop the story by supplying background on waiting children, dispelling myths about adoption, explaining steps in the adoption process, or highlighting successes in addressing the problem [see "Writing a Standard Press Release" on page 16].
- ☞ **Stay clearly focused and keep the materials you send brief.** Generally speaking, press releases are one to two pages long.
- ☞ **Assemble a media packet or press kit.** Make covering your event easy. Supply another copy of the press release at the event along with a folder of additional material. Gather resources to reduce the reporters' research responsibilities. List additional contact people reporters can turn to for expert opinions. If your event includes a

It is better to be making the news than taking it; to be an actor than a critic.

—Winston Churchill

speaker, offer camera-ready photos for publishing in the newspaper or on the Internet.

☞ **Consider hosting a press conference.** If you have breaking news, a press conference can bring together staff from several media outlets for a single presentation. Press conferences also provide visuals and audiotape that give a story added appeal. However, press conferences should not be used unless stories are time-sensitive and truly newsworthy—you waste valuable time and money if nobody shows up.

☞ **Find a unique angle.** When national or international adoption news breaks, large media organizations will cover the story. Other organizations will also be interested, but will desire a new twist on what has already been reported. Be prepared to meet their individual requests. Provide “exclusive” information about a specific child or family in your area to set a local story apart. If the national story is negative, turn it around by demonstrating that agencies, parent groups, or support organizations in your area are effectively addressing the problem.

☞ **Connect the story to larger issues.** Reporters will want to link adoption stories to other social questions. Pat O’Brien, founder and director of You Gotta Believe!, a New York agency that specializes in finding homes for teenagers, connects his message to homelessness. His presentations mention that the Coalition for the Homeless found 60 percent of those in city shelters had spent time in foster care. Poverty, substance abuse, learning disabilities, health care, attachment issues, racism, and alternative family structures are a few societal concerns that intersect with adoption.

Promoting Features

Real adoptive families and personal stories are more interesting than panels of professionals or lists of statistics. Feature stories can stand on their own or illustrate a breaking news item. A personal touch and a greater depth of coverage make feature or human interest stories an excellent way to highlight families during Adoption Month. To get your feature published or on the air:

☞ **Pitch several ideas to your media contact.**

The station or publication may not be interested in your first story—perhaps they feel it has already been covered by their organization or a competitor. A subsequent suggestion—even your third or fourth idea—may be the one that sticks.



Take & Use

News and Feature Story Ideas

Suggest these ideas to reporters and columnists for news articles or feature stories:

- a kick-off event for Adoption Month or a new recruitment campaign;
- the top 10 myths about becoming an adoptive or foster parent;
- the continuum of options available to those volunteering to help waiting children: provide respite care, become foster parents, become therapeutic foster parents, become a foster-adoptive family, or adopt;
- a family who went from having no children to adopting three or more children;
- an adult adoptee who found a family during his or her teen years;
- the affect of adoption on other children in the family;
- a family going through the licensing process;
- an educational seminar or speaker offering support to foster/adoptive families;
- the need for families to work with medically fragile infants—possibly with an interview of a family who works with at-risk infants;
- the profile of a single, therapeutic-level foster mom;
- members of a large adoptive family rearranging their lives and home to adopt many children;
- a successful reunification with birth parents and the family’s ongoing relationship with the foster parents;
- a personal look at a child who will be affected by recent or pending child welfare legislation;
- interviews with generations of families who have been providing care;
- the friendships a group of foster/adoptive parents and their children have developed through their parent support group;
- adoption success stories occurring around Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and high-school graduation day;
- symbolic displays celebrating adoption or visually reminding the public of children who wait (artwork, candles, flowers, balloons, calendars, etc.);
- a profile of a child waiting for adoptive placement; and
- availability of subsidies for adopted children.

Adapted from materials by Brenda Goldsmith, Devereux La Hacienda, and Cheryl Pilon, Aid to Adoption of Special Kids (AASK) of Arizona.

Awareness



Step by Step

Writing a Standard Press Release

[Organization's name
Address
City, State/Province, Zip/Postal code]

FOR RELEASE: [Date]

CONTACT: [Name, phone number]

Photographs and interviews with families who have or are in the process of adopting waiting children are available upon request.

Calling Out Ceremony Will Draw Attention to Children Who Need Families

During a Calling Out ceremony at [place, time] on [day of the week], November [date], [an adopted child/your group representative, etc.] will read names of some of the children in foster care who need adoptive families and light a candle in honor of every child who is waiting for a permanent home. "These are real children," says [group representative name, title], "who desperately need families of their own. Because the public is so often unaware of these kids and their needs, we would like to draw special attention to waiting children during National Adoption Awareness Month in the hope that we can unite many of these boys and girls with permanent, adoptive parents."

In [state/province], approximately [number] children live in some type of foster care setting. Many have spent most of their lives in this "temporary" situation, and have moved within the child welfare system more times than they care to remember. [A number or percentage] will never return to their birth families. [A number or percentage of those] are legally free for adoption.

These waiting children come from a variety of backgrounds. Some have physical or mental disabilities; some are part of a sibling group; many are of African American or Native American or Latino heritage; and many are older children or adolescents. Advocates from organizations such as [your group name] are working hard to prove that there is no such thing as an unadoptable child.

This Calling Out for Those Who Wait is part of National Adoption Awareness Month, and is just one of many special November events planned throughout the country to focus attention on adoption.

Those who are thinking about adoption should know that, according to [name], adoption has changed significantly over the last 30 years. "You don't have to be married, childless, under 40, rich, or own a house to adopt," [the representative] says. "You do have to provide a stable, loving home, and be able to help your child work through issues raised by his or her past."

[Organization name] provides specific information about waiting children and the adoption process in [state/province]. To learn more, contact [name, address, and/or phone number].

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Adapted from "Sending Effective Press Releases" by John Hewitt, the Writer's Resource Center, 2001.

Prominently display contact information for your organization as well as the the person who will work with the media.

Set a release date for the information or write "For Immediate Release."

Mention photos at the top of the first page, but only if you have high quality images that add to your story. Never tape or paperclip photos—if damaged they cannot be published.

Include a succinct, enticing title.

The first paragraph includes the most important information—what, when, where, and who.

A quote by a dignitary or organizational representative adds credibility to your release.

Use standard 8 1/2" by 11" paper, an easy-to-read font, and 1 1/2" to 2" margins.

Unless speed is essential, mail your press release rather than faxing it.

Fold your press release so that the headline and date are visible as soon as the editor opens the envelope.

If the release continues onto a second page, include a page number, a two- or three-word description of the story, the contact person's information, and the release date at the top of each page.

Write paragraphs in news style, using short words and sentences.

Never use exclamation points.

Consult either the *AP Stylebook* or the *Chicago Manual of Style* to learn the general guidelines for abbreviating words, writing numbers, and capitalizing names.

Repeat contact information in the text of the final paragraph.

End with three centered number signs.

- ☞ **Tie adoption into other events or stories.** November includes Thanksgiving, so suggest a story about a child and family who are thankful to be together this year. On Veteran's Day, a young veteran of the system who is waiting for a family might be a good fit. On the biggest shopping day of the year, a toy drive for waiting children could capture an editor's attention.
- ☞ **Make adoption the topic of an in-depth reporting segment.** Most news programs include a topical report in their broadcast. These segments are usually human interest items, rather than late-breaking news. Adoption always grabs attention.
- ☞ **Look beyond the traditional ways to highlight adoption.** Don't stop at news and feature reporters. Contact columnists; they are typically receptive to human-interest stories and are constantly looking for ideas. Perhaps the sports reporter can interview an adopted athlete or the meteorologist can mention that participants at an adoption party will have sunny skies [see "Famous Adoptees and Adoptive Parents" on page 79 and "Adoption Parties" on page 57]. Inspire staff writers to print an editorial on adoption by sending a short letter that clearly explains your organization's position and tells why that position was taken.

Conducting Interviews

As with any Adoption Month project, planning and preparation are essential to successful interviews. Whether you meet with media personnel, ask others to share their stories, or anticipate being contacted for information, the more you know about the interview process, the better off you will be.

Prior to the Interview

Interviews are never mandatory—you can choose whether or not to discuss a subject with media personnel as well as control what information you share. If you need time to get ready, ask the reporter to schedule a time to call back later. Prior to talking with a media representative:

- ☞ **Decide whether to grant the interview.** What does the reporter want to talk about? Are you the appropriate person to

answer questions on this topic? Who does the reporter work for? What is the format of the interview—nightly news or feature story? Will the interview be taped? Will you be on camera live? Where will the interview be conducted? How long will it take? Who else is being interviewed for the same story? What is the reporter's deadline? If you agree to talk with a reporter, negotiate the time, duration, and location of the interview. Choose a spot that makes you comfortable and complements your point of view.

- ☞ **Prepare families for being in the spotlight.** Personal interviews can highlight strengths, offer inspiration, and positively influence public perceptions. Still, before families openly discuss their lives, they should consider that children may be teased, co-workers or teachers may react negatively, and strangers may make unwanted phone calls or visits. Families deserve to make an informed decision.
- ☞ **Outline your main points.** If you grant an interview, prepare three to five points that briefly get your message across—preferably in less than 20 seconds. Ask yourself: What is the issue? What is my involvement? Why is it important? What is the historical perspective?

- ☞ **Gather background information.** Find materials—brochures, statistics or historical background—that are helpful to a reporter, particularly if a topic is complex.

- ☞ **Anticipate tough questions.** List the 10 most difficult questions you might be asked in the interview. Think about how you will transition from these questions to reinforcing your the key points.

- ☞ **Rehearse.** Go over the questions until you feel confident. You might even record your answers. Do not, however, plan to read your answers during the interview.

During the Interview

Responding to interview questions is a skill to be honed over time. As you perfect your technique, remember to:

- ☞ **Get your messages across.** Come to an interview with your messages prepared and find opportunities to get them across without ignoring the reporter's questions. Take initiative. You know what is important to the public—so tell them.

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

—Maya Angelou

Awareness

It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.

—James Thurber

- ☞ **Cite facts.** Reporters love facts and figures that lend credibility to their stories. Accuracy is key; don't exaggerate to make things sound bigger or better than they are.
- ☞ **Be friendly.** It's an interview, not an interrogation. Use anecdotes, humor, and examples to illustrate your points. Establish rapport with the reporter.
- ☞ **Be informative.** Interviews exchange information. You are the source of that information; the reporter represents the public. Do not feel obligated to maintain the social rules of conversation. Once you've answered the question, stop. Beware of the reporter whose silence encourages you to ramble. It's human nature to fill those lulls. Instead, ask, "Have I answered your question?" or remain silent.
- ☞ **Be responsive.** Most reporters are not experts in adoption. You may have to begin at the beginning to help them understand an issue. But remember that reporters are looking for quotable quotes—a punchy response that will fill three lines of newsprint or 20 seconds of air time.
- ☞ **Be confident.** You are the expert. Deliver your message.
- ☞ **Say what you mean.** Avoid overly complex language. "It is clear that much additional work will be required before we have a complete understanding of the issue," should instead be, "We're investigating it."
- ☞ **Don't use jargon.** Avoid terms or acronyms that can't be quoted without explanation. Don't say, "Families have a hard time with ADHD and RAD kids so we offer PRIDE training." Do say, "We prepare families to support children with special emotional and behavioral needs."
- ☞ **Remember your role as spokesperson.** When you are conducting an interview, reporters will not distinguish between personal opinion and that of any organization you are affiliated with—and neither will the public. Answer questions appropriately. If you don't know the group's position on a particular issue, find out; don't speculate.
- ☞ **Don't go off the record.** The comment may not be attributed to you directly, but the reporter often will use the information to confirm a story with other sources. If you don't want something to appear in print, don't say it.
- ☞ **Don't say "No comment" or "I can neither confirm nor deny."** The public views this as, "I know but I won't say." Instead, tell the reporter that you are unable to comment and, if possible, why.
- ☞ **Tell the truth.** It may hurt, but lies are deadly. You will probably get caught, and reporters don't forget sources who mislead them. Give a direct answer when asked a direct question, even if the answer is "No," "I don't know," or "I'm sorry, I can't answer that question."
- ☞ **Don't guess.** Don't assume the reporter will check elsewhere. Chances are good that your misinformation will be printed.
- ☞ **Don't lose your temper.** Sometimes reporters are intentionally rude to elicit a charged response. Respond politely, in control at all times. Don't argue—your angry comments may be reported without mention of the provocation.
- ☞ **Don't answer a question with a question.** The reporter asks, "What do you think about adoption parties?" Don't say, "What do you think about them?" Such responses come across as evasive, pejorative, or hostile.
- ☞ **It's okay to make a mistake.** The tape is rolling and you realize you've made a mistake. Or, more likely, you suddenly find you have no idea what you're saying. Stop. Say, "I'm sorry, I haven't answered your question very well. Let me back up." The reporter usually will prefer your new, crisp response.
- ☞ **Don't comment on others' comments.** Essentially, the reporter is asking you to speak for someone else. Don't do it, especially if you did not hear the individual make the statement. It's possible the person was misquoted.
- ☞ **Avoid reading from prepared statements.** This is especially true when you are on camera. You ought to know what you want to say without a script.
- ☞ **Pause before responding to tough questions.** Avoid such platitudes as, "That's a very good question" or "I'm glad you asked that question." The audience recognizes such obvious stalls. A short pause will give the impression that you wish to make a thoughtful response. Besides, dead time is seldom aired on the news, and silences can't be quoted in print.

☞ **Monitor your delivery.** Especially if the interview is being recorded for television or radio, show confidence. Project your voice and be expressive. Smile when appropriate. Hold your head high. Sit or stand up straight; don't slouch, sway, or rock. Keep your hands at your sides (not in your pockets or crossed over your chest); but don't be afraid to gesture. Make eye contact, and always pay attention so as to avoid embarrassment when a camera catches your eyes wandering.

☞ **Never ask to preview the story.** Reporters generally never let sources review stories, though they often check back for details. Remember, their job is to tell the story accurately—to suggest they can't do so without your input insults their professionalism. Instead, listen carefully during an interview to be aware of when a reporter does not understand something. Remember, misquotes are substantially less likely if you speak briefly and clearly.

After the Interview

Once the interview is over, your work is not quite done. Afterward you may still need to deal with:

☞ **Compliments.** When a story is reported well, let the reporter know with a phone call or letter to the editor. But don't overdo it. If you're too complimentary, reporters may worry that their story wasn't balanced enough.

☞ **Disappointment.** You spend hours preparing for your interview, another hour in front of the camera and you are on the evening news for a grand total of six seconds. Or worse, the entire story is preempted by breaking news. Or you may spend half a day with a newspaper reporter and be quoted only once, or not at all. Stories often are shortened or omitted when other news that the editor considers more timely, exciting, or important appears. During November 2000, for example, Adoption Month events unexpectedly had to compete with the ongoing presidential election for coverage. Don't be disappointed—the time you spent helped establish a good working relationship with the media that will

benefit you in the long run. Chances are good that the story will appear later or that the reporter will be back.

☞ **Headlines.** The story was fine, but the headline was terrible. Remember that reporters usually have nothing to do with headlines. Those are typically written by editors on the copy desk, often under great time and space pressures.

☞ **Criticisms.** News outlets will run corrections, but they don't like them. Don't fuss about minor inaccuracies or differences in viewpoint. However, serious errors and misconceptions should be brought to a reporter's attention. You can write a brief letter to the editor or call the reporter to clear up the inaccuracy. Many reporters either will write a correction or do a follow-up piece that clarifies the information. Avoid going over the reporter's head unless the reporter is completely unresponsive. Then, contact the ombudsman, if the medium has one, to look into how and why errors were made.

*Interview suggestions adapted from "Meet the Media"
by the University of California Irvine's
Communications Office, 2000.*



Step by Step

Answering Interview Questions

This four-step formula—illustrated by the example “Are older children finding homes through adoption?”—can help when answering questions.

First Sentence: Make a statement that answers the reporter's question as briefly as possible. “Yes” or “no” often is sufficient. “Yes, they are.”

Second Sentence: Support your answer. “Data show that families in our [state/province] adopted [number] children over age [statistic] last year.”

Third Sentence: Transition into your message. “We are working to find and prepare more families through increased outreach and training.”

Fourth Sentence: State your message. “Our training conference, held in honor of National Adoption Awareness Month, is one way we support and educate those interested in adopting older children.”

Government and the Courts

Local, state, provincial, and federal government entities are key audiences to involve in Adoption Month activities. These officials manage budgets, create policies, make rulings, and control the custody of children. Although they are central figures in children's well-being, they may not always be closely connected to those with a personal passion about adoption—the children and families.

Organizing an event where a mayor, governor, premier, legislator, or other elected official participates will not only deepen his or her connection to the adoption community, it will attract media coverage and focus additional attention on adoption issues. Likewise, when a local or state court conducts a special event for adoption—such as several finalizations on one designated day—media will be interested. Below are some ideas about involving government officials and the court system when planning Adoption Month activities.



Life's most urgent question is: what are you doing for others?

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Issuing Proclamations

Initiate a city-, state-, or province-wide recognition of Adoption Month by inviting your mayor, governor, or premier to issue an Adoption Month proclamation. Use the proclamation to list current needs, celebrate recent achievements, and encourage action. When signed by an elected official, proclamations also serve as a news peg to get adoption issues covered in the media [see “Disseminating News” on page 14].

To have an Adoption Month proclamation issued in your area:

- ☞ **Call officials' offices.** See if mayors, commissioners, governors, premiers, and court justices are willing and available to issue a proclamation. When you call, try their communications and special events staff.
- ☞ **Use your personal connections.** Ask an adoption-friendly legislator or a child welfare lobbyist who has government connections to make the initial contact.
- ☞ **Follow your call with a confirmation letter.** Remind the official that adoption activities are part of local and national efforts. If possible, include past proclamations.
- ☞ **Help draft the proclamation.** Provide relevant facts, such as the number of waiting children and finalized adoptions during the past year. If the person signing the proclamation is responsible for positive legislation or practices, list them. Finally, write down specific objectives to be accomplished during Adoption Month and the coming year.

☞ **Arrange a signing ceremony.** Consult with the official's staff about a place to hold the signing. Higher level officials will be accustomed to hosting events and may have funds, catering, space, and staff to stage the ceremony. Contribute by extending invitations to adoptive families, waiting children, community collaborators, and others concerned about children. Build a program of speakers, activities, or entertainment to engage the audience.

☞ **Publicize the signing.** To spotlight the official's commitment to children, arrange (or help the official's staff arrange) publicity for the signing ceremony. Media personnel are typically interested in such events—make sure families are present so that reporters can capture images of the official with a waiting or adopted child.

☞ **Thank the official for his or her response.** After the event, send handwritten thank you letters to everyone who was involved—the official, his or her office staff, and other volunteers. By building these relationships, you are more likely to get help with future campaigns.

Cooperating with Courts

Family and juvenile court judges hold significant power in determining outcomes for foster and adopted children. Plus, most chose their profession because of a deep commitment to children and families. They are excellent allies to involve in Adoption Month planning.

Adoption Saturday

One option for involving the courts is to organize a special day where as many parents as possible finalize their children's adoptions. The Alliance for Children's Rights—a Los Angeles-based organization that provides free legal services to children living in poverty—has spearheaded a movement to host a National Adoption Day, with mass finalizations taking place in major cities across the country on a single Saturday during Adoption Month.

The Alliance's adoption project began three years ago, when Los Angeles parents were facing three- to nine-year delays to adopt their foster children. Working closely with the Children's Court, the Department of Children and Family Services, and law firms, the adoption project successfully ended many unnecessary delays and finalized children's adoptions within a few months.

Working with law firms, foster care departments, judicial officers, advocates, and communities across the country, the Alliance expanded its efforts and organized the first National Adoption Day on November 18, 2000. National Adoption Day was a huge success, with 10 cities completing more than 1,100 adoptions in a single day.

To involve your city in future Adoption Days, you must secure the cooperation of several key players to make the event a success. First, the juvenile court (or in some cases the probate court) must participate. The court staff, security personnel, and judicial officers need to coordinate efforts to complete hearings on a Saturday. In most cases, the staff time—including judges' services—is voluntary. In Los Angeles, Adoption Day entices judicial officers from the appellate and even supreme court to get involved.

Once the court has agreed to participate, the public child welfare department or agency must arrange to finalize its paperwork in time for the lawyers to complete the legal process. If the participating city decides to recruit attorneys willing to donate their time to finalize adoptions, an area bar association or children's rights group can train lawyers and assist them with the paperwork and confirmation hearings. The Alliance developed an effective process for completing all adoption paperwork in a single Saturday, one month before the confirmation hearing.



Take & Use

Adoption Month Proclamation

Every child deserves a loving, nurturing, and permanent family. Sadly, abused and neglected children in the care of **[county, state, or province's child welfare agency]** are waiting for such a home. These children are not the newborns most people picture when they think of adoption. Generally they are older boys and girls and teenagers who have unique medical, emotional, or physical needs.

Adoption gives them a brighter future, brings great joy to the adoptive parents, and places fewer demands on social services.

WHEREAS, approximately **[number]** children in **[county/state/province]** are waiting for an adoptive family;

WHEREAS, nearly all of these children have special needs because of physical, mental, or emotional disabilities, because they must be placed with other siblings, because they are children of color, or because they are school-aged;

WHEREAS, these children need extra patience and support to help them overcome previous hardships;

WHEREAS, in **[year]**, **[number]** children who have special needs were placed into adoptive families in **[state/province]**;

WHEREAS, families are able and willing to adopt children who have special needs;

WHEREAS, it is important to stress that a disability, low income, or being single does not disqualify individuals from adopting; and

WHEREAS, children waiting for adoptive parents and families who have adopted these children require and deserve community and agency support;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, **[mayor/commissioner/justice/governor/premier]** of the **[city/county/state/province]** of **[name of city/county/state/province]**, do hereby proclaim

**November [year] as
Adoption Awareness Month
in [name of city/county/state/province].**

In honor of this event, I encourage community agencies, religious organizations, businesses, and others to celebrate adoption, honor families that grow through adoption, further an awareness of the changes and issues in adoption, and focus attention on those children who live in the shadow of an uncertain future while they await permanent families.

Signed _____

Date _____

Finally, organize publicity for the day. In Los Angeles, Adoption Days are some of the sole opportunities for the court and children and family services to obtain favorable press. The Alliance, with help from foundations, has assisted the participating cities by providing press kits, teddy bears, t-shirts, and banners.

After three successful Adoption Saturdays in Los Angeles and one National Adoption Day, the Alliance has learned that the following items help make the day a success:

- ☞ **Teddy bears**—Set up teddy bears around the courtroom in places where the children can see them. One judge always starts the hearing by asking the child to pick out a special teddy bear, name it, and keep it as a memento. The judge then has all the other children present also pick their own bear.
- ☞ **Balloons**—Inflate balloons the morning of Adoption Day to decorate courtrooms and waiting areas, making the courthouse look festive. Invite children to take a balloon with them after the hearing.

☞ **Food**—Donuts, lollipops, cookies, and candy are always a hit. Volunteer attorneys, judges, and courthouse staff also appreciate bag lunches.

☞ **Disposable cameras**—Law firms or community partners can donate disposable cameras for the families. On a normal court day, families need a permit to have cameras and video recorders in court, but on Adoption Day permits are unnecessary because no other hearings take place.

☞ **Certificates**—Create a certificate of “family membership” that the judge signs and gives to the family. Families love it when judges read and sign the certificate.

☞ **Pictures**—After each hearing, ask the judge to pose for a picture with the family.

If you wish to participate in the 2001 National Adoption Day on November 17 (or a future Adoption Day), contact the Alliance for Children’s Rights at 213-368-6010 for assistance in developing a strategic plan.



In Depth

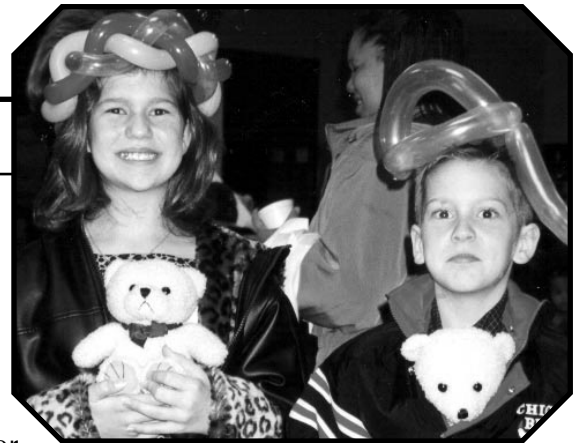
Dallas Joins National Adoption Day

On Saturday, November 18, 2000 the Target: Kids in Court organization participated in National Adoption Day, finalizing 99 adoptions in Dallas, Texas. The event was a collaboration of Kids in Court; Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA); the Dallas branch of Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher, a law firm that had previously participated in adoption-related *pro bono* work in Los Angeles; and the Alliance for Children’s Rights, the Los Angeles-based group spearheading the national project.

According to Evy Ritzen, planning director for Kids in Court, “Usually adoptions are scheduled like any case; there can be an adoption sandwiched between a case of delinquency or anything else. We wanted Adoption Day to be a positive, celebratory experience for all the families and children.”

Lawyers from Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher held a “Paperwork Saturday” several weeks before Adoption Day, for parents to complete necessary forms for adoption finalization. Staff from the firm decorated their offices and had a child-care facility where children were supervised while lawyers gave advice and direction to their parents.

On November 18, more than 100 volunteers decorated the courthouse with balloons, banners, and ribbons; greeted families; handed out disposable cameras; and distributed donated photo frames as a memento of the occasion. Volunteer organizations such as Comfort for Court Kids also donated teddy bears [see newly adopted children with their bears, inset] and the Alliance provided t-shirts to adult and child participants.



While the adoptions were being finalized, a party with cookies, snacks, videos, and coloring tables for children filled the courthouse halls. “It was a great success,” says Ritzen. “We sent out evaluations a few weeks after the event and the families loved it, hands down.”

Presently, Kids in Court and the Alliance are building a pilot program to schedule all adoptions to be finalized on one Saturday during each month. By doing so, says Ritzen, they hope to create a monthly occasion for celebration, then invite all families back in November for a National Adoption Day celebration.

Court Calendars

You can also encourage your court to set aside specific time on a regular basis to finalize adoptions. Dedicating a certain amount of the court's time exclusively to adoptions ensures that a child will not wait while the system catches up on its backlog. A court that dedicates particular time on its calendar to adoption makes a statement that children are a priority and finalization is important. In California, two counties took different approaches to prioritizing finalizations:

- ☞ Ventura County dedicates every Friday afternoon to adoption proceedings. Judge Colleen White spends a half day processing six to eight adoptions each week. She gives each of the children a stuffed animal when the adoption is completed.
- ☞ In Contra Costa County, adoption matters are heard daily before any other matters. At 8:30 a.m., Judge Lois Haight asks if any adoptions are pending. If so, they are always heard first.

Adapted from "Court Adoption and Permanency Month: Technical Assistance Package" by the Judicial Council of California's Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee, and the Center for Families, Children, and the Courts, 2000.

Generous Jurors

You can involve more than just the family and juvenile courts in foster care and adoption. Since 1997, the Howard County Department of Social Services (DSS) in Columbia, Maryland has worked with citizens called for jury duty to raise funds for foster children. The Generous Jurors project asks those selected to hear trials to donate their stipend—10 dollars per half day of service—to foster youth. Over the last four years, Generous Jurors have donated nearly \$50,000. The program works because:

- ☞ All of the funds pay for items foster children need, never administrative costs. Generous Jurors fund haircuts, tickets to athletic events, summer camps, college scholarships, braces, and an annual holiday party with gifts.
- ☞ The program is mentioned on the phone line jurors call when they are selected for duty. At the courthouse, they see a video about the project before they are given their reimbursement money. A simple form allows them to make the donation.

Counties that attempted to replicate the project but asked for the money back after giving it to jurors were less successful.

- ☞ Once established, the project requires little oversight. Showing the video and distributing donation cards become part of the regular process of working with jurors. Each quarter, funds are transferred to an account at DSS. A unit supervisor approves requests for expenditures, which are submitted by children's caseworkers.

Barbara Law of Howard County DSS has a kit of information about the Generous Jurors to help others replicate its success. To obtain a copy, call 410-872-4200, ext. 258.



Take & Use

Calling Out Script

Opening Statement

[Tens of] thousands of children across **[the United States/Canada]** need permanent, loving adoptive families who can provide extra support to help them overcome previous hardships. Here in **[state/province]**, **[number]** children are legally free for adoption. They are waiting; they are in limbo. Many have a physical or mental disability; many have emotional issues and problems because they have been denied a sense of stability and trust. A great number are African American, Native American, and Latino. Many need to be placed in homes with their brothers and sisters. Many are school-aged, and some are teenagers. They share a common bond: the desire to be someone's son or daughter and to be part of a forever family.

We fervently believe there *is* a family for each waiting child. Our task is to make our waiting children more visible and bring them together with parents. These children are calling out—to be loved, to feel wanted, to share their potential and themselves...to be adopted.

These are some of our children who wait:

[Recite names and ages of waiting children. Include a visual reminder of the children in care through the symbolic use of photos, dolls, balloons, ribbons, etc.]

Closing Statement

Each of these children is calling out, asking us to value them as part of a family and part of their community. Collectively and individually, morally and responsibly, we must listen. Let us answer their call—as parents, as public officials charged with their well-being and protection, as citizens speaking out on their behalf. Children grow better in families, and each of us has a vested interest in protecting our most valuable natural resource.

[Conclude with another activity that is appealing to the eyes or ears such as a talent show by children, a performance by a children's choir, a child reading a poem about adoption, etc.]

Influencing Legislators

Adoptees and adoptive families are affected daily by laws about birth certificates, subsidy rates, and program and staffing budgets. Good laws and policies can make post-adoption support services available, help adoptees reunite with birth parents, or reduce workers' case loads. Legislation in other areas—education, affordable housing, mental health services, child care, etc.—also significantly affect adoptive families. Political action can either be reactive, responding to pending legislation, or proactive, focusing legislative attention on children's issues. Since most legislative bodies are not in session during November, Adoption Month is a good time to build relationships with policymakers or collaborate with other like-minded adoption activists to set legislative agendas.

Conducting Symbolic Campaigns

Adoption advocates representing states, provinces, and counties have found unique ways to raise government officials' awareness about adoption and foster care. Their efforts include symbolic representations—dolls,

hearts, balloons, and photographs—to help make their messages real. Symbolic campaigns help organizations generate excitement and find officials who are willing to champion the cause of adoption. After these campaigns, adoption advocates report that foster care and adoption receive more attention and funding than ever before. Some symbolic campaign possibilities are:

✎ **Calling Out Ceremonies.** Stage a calling out ceremony at a visible government headquarters, such as the capitol building steps. Read names of children within the county, state, or province who are waiting for adoptive homes. Other information, such as a child's age and length of time in care, makes the reading more dramatic [see "Calling Out Script" on page 23]. Visually represent each child—for example with a paper doll, balloon, ribbon, or photograph—to demonstrate how many children are waiting and offer visual appeal for the media. Calling out ceremonies often also include a program of speakers and performances by children. Be certain to invite parents, children, and advocates.



In Depth

Ceremony Calls Out Waiting Children

For Adoption Month 2000, District Eight of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) organized a festive, symbolic calling out ceremony in the rotunda of the state's regional service center in Fort Myers.

The ceremony—organized by a committee of recruitment and retention professionals and other adoption advocates—centered on the district's 50 waiting children, whose photographs were featured on individual cards with their names and ages. The cards were passed out to audience members, who were then invited to read the children's names, one by one, at a microphone. A children's bell choir from an area private school participated in the ceremony, ringing bells after each child's name and age.

Crowd members then attached the cards to a visual display that remained in the rotunda [see display, inset].

In addition to a large gathering of onlookers, last year's event drew media staff and local dignitaries. According to DCF's lead adoptions counselor Victoria Punnett, media attention is the major benefit of the ceremony. "They always come, every year," Punnett says. "Most of the newspapers, TV, and radio stations show up. Sometimes they even follow some adoptive families home from the event to do a personal interest story."

District Eight has held a calling out ceremony every year on the first Friday of Adoption Month for several years,



and always includes waiting children, adoptive parents, adoption professionals, and a keynote speaker. The 2000 event featured a television news personality, himself an adoptee, who spoke about the importance of finding families for waiting children. Several parents also spoke about their personal experiences and the rewards of being an adoptive parent.

The event is also valuable for recruitment, says Deborah Web, DCF's communications officer. "A day after the 2000 event, more than 40 phone calls came to our adoption line from interested potential adoptive parents."



Take & Use

Guided Fantasy Exercise

This exercise can enhance the program at various types of Adoption Month events. Facilitators should pause often, allow time for reflection, be prepared for tears, and help participants process their feelings.

Relax, take a deep breath, and turn on your imagination. All of us here have one thing in common: we have a home to go to tonight. Take a moment to think about that home. Think about the rooms; maybe you have a favorite room. Think about the people who live with you—your partner, friends, children, parents. Maybe you have a pet. Imagine yourself at home.

I want you to listen carefully; I am a person in a position of authority. My job is to move people to live in new homes. Tonight I am going to move you to a new home with a new family.

What are you thinking? If you think you'll run away, know that I will find you and bring you back. That is my job.

Grab a trash bag and hold it in your hands now. The move must take place quickly because your present family can no longer meet your needs. You have 30 minutes to pack a garbage bag. What will you put in? You can only take what will fit. The new family doesn't have room for a pet. You can't take your bike. You can't take all of your stuffed animals. You can't say goodbye to the nice lady next door who gave you a cookie last week. You can't ask why.

We are driving to a new neighborhood. It's much nicer—bigger houses, better cars, more fashionable. The family you are going to live with has more money than the one you came from.

What word best describes your feelings? Do you have questions? You're probably wondering, "Why are you taking me?" "How long will I stay?" "When can I see my family?" and "What will the new people be like?" These are good questions, but I don't have answers.

How about your family? How do they feel about your sudden leaving? What questions might they have?

We are at the street where you will live. We drive up to a big house. We knock on the door. What words describe your feelings? The front door opens. This is your new family—new adults and new children are all standing there smiling. They are excited you've come. They've been waiting a long time to be a mommy or daddy.

How many of you adjust right away to your new home? How many are angry or sad? What will you do if you are angry or sad? Remember, if you are thinking you will leave, I will find you and bring you back because this is my job.

How soon would you like to see the family you left behind? How often? You are strong; you have good coping skills. You've managed to adjust to your new environment. Time goes on. However, you cannot see your left-behind family unless I make the arrangements. Because I've got so many people to move, I haven't had time to do that. You have not seen your family since you left. I do finally arrange for you to visit them in my office, under my supervision.

It is two years later. You've seen your family a few times, but the visits have not been regularly scheduled. But you are doing all right.

One day there is a knock on the door. It's me. I have wonderful news. You are never going home, but it doesn't matter. I've found a new family where you can stay forever.

Now you have time to prepare to move. What will you take with you? How does your current family feel about your leaving? Do you want them to help you leave? I bring you to spend several weekends with your new family.

We are driving to your new house. You wonder if your first family still remembers you. Do they live in the same house? You do not ask, because I already told you that this new family is wonderful for you. Now with your new family, what words best describe how you are feeling? Do you want to go? Are you ready to go? Most of all, will you ever be the same again?

Close your eyes and think about how this would change you. Thousands of children experience this each year. For some, there are only a few moves like this. Others move dozens of times before finding a permanent family or leaving the system with no family at all.

Discussion Questions:

1. What one word best describes how you are feeling emotionally or physically?
2. What did you put in your garbage bag for the first move?
3. What did you take with you during the second move?
4. Did you want to see the families you left behind?
5. Will your relationship with your new family be easy to establish?
6. Will you have adjustment problems?
7. Would you talk to anyone about your problems? Would you talk to a counselor?
8. What types of behavior would show your anger, sadness, and fear? Would you be destructive or depressed, suffer from nightmares, or hoard food?
9. How do you think these behaviors affect foster and adoptive parents?

☞ **Foster Dolls.** The Foster Care and Adoption Association of Nevada raised awareness by making legislators honorary foster parents. Each legislator received a second-hand doll with information about a fictional child. Many kept and cared for their neglected dolls throughout the 12-week session. Legislators also received weekly letters from the association about foster care and adoption concerns.

☞ **Valentine Hearts.** Each February, the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board prints colored paper hearts that symbolize different situations for foster children:

- red for children waiting for finalization;
- pink for children waiting for adoption;
- white for children without a goal of adoption; and
- clear for children who have aged out.

Each heart lists the child's age upon entering care, age at which their parents' rights were terminated, current age, and number of days waiting for adoption. Hearts are given to the children's legislators and district juvenile judges to be hung on pipe cleaner trees in their offices. A heart tree also goes to the lieutenant governor and a garland is made for the United States' President.

☞ **Bus Journey.** In Wisconsin's Racine County, officials and community leaders took a "Journey Home." They received a photo and description of a child and imagined that child's journey through foster care as they took a bus tour of the places children in the system frequent. Early in their journey, they used the "Guided Fantasy Exercise" [see page 25] to help them identify with children's moves through foster care. Along the way, participants met an abuse investigator, emergency room doctor, foster parent, and adoptive parent. Child welfare professionals shared statistics, explained the need for foster and adoptive parents, and suggested ways community members could help. At the closing ceremony, participants looked again at the child's profile that they were given and learned that some of the children were adopted, others returned safely home, but many were still waiting in foster care.

The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us.

—Dorothy Day

Voting

On the Tuesday following the first Monday of every November, Americans go to the polls. Supporting candidates who champion children's issues is a natural extension of Adoption Month activities—plus a way to build policymakers' awareness of adoption.

Make your vote count for children and help others do the same. If you oppose or support a particular candidate because of his or her policies on children, send postcards or e-mails to friends telling them about it. Leave voter registration cards behind when you visit places where other child-friendly voters go—churches, schools, or support group meetings.

If you are truly committed to making children's issues a priority in an upcoming election, host politicians in a forum or attend a previously scheduled one. Churches, community agencies, children's health groups, child care providers, schools, and other organizations may be willing to join you. Invite candidates to present their positions and take questions and invite media to witness the event [see "Disseminating News" on page 14]. Competing candidates may be willing to attend together or at separate times. Consider having youth ask some or all of the questions.

Advocating for a Cause

Whether or not you have elected child-friendly candidates to office, your work has just begun. When legislation is pending, weigh in on the subject. When it is not, bring adoption-related causes back to the forefront. At times, policy questions that are not about adoption on their surface nonetheless affect adoptive families. When advocating for your position, you can reach the policymaker in one of only three ways:

☞ Place a Telephone Call

Strategy: If you cannot say what you want to say within three minutes, write a letter.

- Make notes and rehearse what to say.
- Identify yourself.
- Use bill numbers when possible.
- Be prepared to leave a short message.
- Time the call shortly before key votes.
- Ask others to make calls as well.
- Don't insist on a call back.

☞ Write a Letter

Strategy: Reach a decision-maker right before he or she votes on an issue.

- Keep your letter to a single page and subject.
- Use bill numbers when possible.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and include your name and address.
- Personalize—use stories and experiences to support your argument.
- Don't count on petitions, mass-produced cards, or form letters. They have value, but not much.
- Ask for a response, such as "How will you vote and why?" or "What information do you need?"
- Don't expect an immediate response.
- Send your letter by regular mail—fax and e-mail letters are less powerful.

☞ Visit a Policymaker

Strategy: Establish a personal relationship of support and friendliness.

- Schedule a specific time for a visit in your office or theirs.
- Establish rapport first, get their support second.
- Know your facts.
- Bring concisely written information to leave behind.
- Talk with the policymaker; don't grill, pressure, belittle, threaten, or intimidate.
- Thank the policymaker for the job he or she is doing and the time spent with you.

Whichever contact method you select to advocate with policymakers, remember that:

- ☞ You're going to be more productive if you see this as a long-term relationship rather than a one-night stand. You don't have to accomplish everything at once.
- ☞ Communications should be short and simple. Limit yourself to one or two issues per visit, letter, or contact.
- ☞ Policymakers are just plain folks. Like you, they want to have a nice day. Make your contact with them as pleasant as you can. Say or write something nice. Never attack when you disagree. Attacks, especially if they become personal, shut doors and make approaching with the next issue much harder.

- ☞ The policymaker's staff members are critical to your effort. Treat them as important people, and they can unlock doors for you. The policymaker often relies on them for advice and direction.

- ☞ Know policymakers who are important to your issue on a first-name basis; even if they disagree with your position, it makes advocacy easier.

- ☞ Policymakers always respond better to concrete experiences than to abstract concepts. Bringing a family is a more effective way to communicate the cause than bringing a program staff person.

- ☞ Always speak or write positively and confidently about your issue, program, or agency. Never cut other programs down.

- ☞ Policymakers appreciate constituents who serve as resources. They can't know everything about every issue; often they look to people they know and trust for guidance and advice. Make sure targeted policymakers are on your mailing list for newsletters and invitations to special events.

- ☞ Anticipate arguments against your program or policy so you can respond to questions. Read newspapers and journals; know what people are saying about your issue. Know other issues that interest the policymaker then engage him or her in discussions about your common interests.



Quick & Easy

Court and Government Options

- Write a letter to one or two of the elected policymakers who represent you. Share a story about how good (or bad) adoption policies have affected your life. Thank the policymaker for working on adoption issues or encourage them to do so.
- Bring stacks of brochures about your agency or support group to courthouses and leave them in waiting areas or at free literature stands.
- Thank the judge who finalized your child's adoption by sending a card and recent family photograph.
- Surf the Internet looking for children's advocacy sites. Add your e-mail address to an action alert listserv so you can get messages about and respond to pressing legislative issues.
- Volunteer to work on the campaign of a pro-child candidate, help with voter registration, or assist at the polls on election day.

Awareness

- ☞ Straightforward answers are the most effective response to difficult, unexpected, or blunt questions.
- ☞ Five letters can win the day. Most policymakers don't get five personal letters on any issue. Put five letters on their desk from constituents who are concerned with an issue and you can win the argument.
- ☞ Electronic communication is important, but doesn't have the impact of personal contact. Higher-level officials receive so many e-mails and faxes that they "bulk" them, counting up totals for and against.
- ☞ Thank you notes are appropriate after visits or following an accomplishment that helped your cause.

Adapted from "Putting Some Flesh on the Bones: Twenty Hot Tips for Success as an Advocate for Any Cause" by Congregations Concerned for Children Child Advocacy Network, 2001.

Mobilizing Others

Once you've become active on an issue by educating yourself, extend your knowledge and enthusiasm to others. When elected officials hear a message from just one person, they can pass it off as an isolated special interest. However, after multiple contacts from individuals, families, and organizations who are all concerned about the same issue, policymakers know their votes on particular issues matter to their constituents.

A "Capitol Day" on which adoptive and foster families join together to visit lawmakers and educate them about child welfare issues can effectively mobilize your group. Other times, you may want to use an action alert—a message that mobilizes individuals by asking for a specific action to be taken on current political issues.

Action alerts have been happening on paper, through telephone trees, and via fax machines for a long time. Today, computer networks make sending them cheaper—an e-mail alert can travel far from its origin by being forwarded from friend to friend and list to list without any additional cost to the original sender. Remember, however, that conducting campaigns only by e-mail leaves out a certain percentage of your constituents.

Gathering E-mail Addresses

E-mail is the building block of online activism; nearly everyone with a computer and a modem can get an e-mail address for little or no money. Surprisingly, many organizations do not collect e-mail addresses from their members, activists, or families. To start:

- ☞ Add a space for "e-mail address" to every membership form, petition, and response card you provide to your members or the public. This should go along with phone number and fax number.
- ☞ Ensure that everyone in your organization makes it part of their routine to ask for this information whenever they make contact with someone interested in the organization (on the phone, at meetings, etc.).
- ☞ If your group publishes a newsletter, include a short article in your next edition saying that your group wants to use e-mail communication in the future, and needs readers' e-mail addresses. Provide an e-mail address to which they can send this information.
- ☞ Add a field to your contact database to accommodate this new information. Again, an e-mail address should be considered at least as important as a phone or fax number.
- ☞ Focus your greatest effort on gathering e-mail addresses from those who are most likely to respond to your electronic communications (the people you can count on to write letters, make phone calls, attend meetings, etc.).
- ☞ Publicize your organization's e-mail address. Include it on your business cards, brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, and other publications. E-mail communication is a two-way street.

Excerpted from "An Activists' Strategy for Effective On-line Networking" by ONE/Northwest, 2001.

The impersonal hand of government can never replace the helping hand of a neighbor.

—Hubert H. Humphrey

Sending Action Alerts

Once you have built even a small database, begin contacting people regularly via an e-mail list—often referred to as a listserv—about your issues. When developing action alerts:

- ☞ **Establish authenticity.** Bogus action alerts travel as fast as real ones. Don't give alerts a bad name. Include clear information about the sponsoring organization and provide the reader with several ways of tracing you—e-mail address, postal address, web site, phone number, etc. Including contact information makes sense anyway—you want people to join your movement and establish contact with you.
- ☞ **Date it.** Paper mail and faxes get thrown away quickly, but action alerts travel through the Internet forever. Do not count on the message header to convey the date; people who forward Internet messages frequently strip off the header. Give your recommended action a clearly stated date, for example, "Take this action until November 17, 2001." If you anticipate follow-up actions or if this is part of an ongoing campaign, say so.
- ☞ **Clearly mark the beginning and end.** You can't prevent people from modifying your alert as they pass it along. Fortunately this typically only happens accidentally, as extra commentary accumulates at the top and bottom of the forwarded message. Put a bold row of dashes or something similar at the top and bottom so extra material will look extra—be clear what you and your credibility are standing behind.
- ☞ **Ask your reader to take a simple, clearly defined, rationally chosen action.** For example, you might ask people to call their representatives and express a certain view on an issue. In your message, list or provide a way to find that representative's name and number. Explain how to conduct the conversation: what to say and how to answer likely questions. Your purpose is not to impose your thinking but to help others accomplish a task that might otherwise be intimidating. Decide whether to ask for e-mail messages (which can be huge in number but small in effect), written letters (which will be fewer but more effective), or phone calls (which fall in between).

☞ **Make it easy to understand.** Begin with a good, clear headline that summarizes the issue and the recommended action. Use plain language, not jargon. Check your spelling. Use short sentences and simple grammar. Solicit comments on a draft before sending it out.

☞ **Get your facts straight.** Your message will circle the earth, so double-check. Errors can be disastrous. Even a small mistake makes it easy for opponents to dismiss your alerts—and Internet alerts in general—as rumors. Once you discover a mistake, issuing a correction is impossible; the correction will not get forwarded everywhere that the original message did.



Resources

Legislative Advocacy Web Sites

canada.gc.ca

Link to Canadian government sites, including government officials, departments and agencies, and services for children.

pm.gc.ca

Review news headlines and key initiatives then contact the Prime Minister.

www.parl.gc.ca

Track legislation and contact policymakers via the jointly maintained site of the Senate, House of Commons, and Library of Parliament.

www.whitehouse.gov

Contact the President, Vice President, or other staff.

www.house.gov and
www.senate.gov

Learn about current legislation and contact Congressional representatives.

thomas.loc.gov

Read text of past and current legislation and view records from committee hearings.

www.fec.gov

Obtain forms to become a registered voter from the Federal Elections Commission.

www.dnet.org

Enter your zip code into the League of Women Voters' Democracy Net to find out which candidates and issues will appear on your ballot.

www.cdfactioncouncil.org

See each Congressperson's voting record on children's issues by visiting the Children's Defense Fund.

www.cwla.org

Review action alerts on children's issues from the Child Welfare League of America.

Awareness

☞ **Start a movement, not a panic.** Do not say, “Forward this to everyone you know,” or “Please Act NOW!!!” You’re not trying to address everyone, you’re trying to target a group of people who are inclined to care about the issue. If the issue really is time-critical, then explain why, in sober language. Do not get obsessed with the immediate situation. Your message may help avoid some short-term calamity, but it should also contribute to a long-term process of building a social movement. Maintaining a sense of that larger context will help you and your readers from becoming dispirited in the event that you lose the immediate battle.

☞ **Tell the whole story succinctly.** Most people have never heard of your issue and need facts to evaluate it. If your opponents have circulated their arguments, you’ll need to rebut them, and if they have framed the facts in a misleading way, then you’ll need to explain what’s misleading and why. On the other hand, you need to write concisely. Even if you are focused on the actions, good explanations count. After all, one benefit of your action alert—maybe the principal benefit—is that it informs people about the issue. Even if they don’t act today, your readers will be more aware in the future.

☞ **Make it easy to read.** Use a simple, clear layout with lots of white space. Break up long paragraphs. Use bullets and headings to avoid visual monotony. If your organization plans to send out action alerts regularly, use a distinctive style so that everyone can recognize your “brand name” instantly.

☞ **Never use a chain-letter petition.** A chain-letter petition is an action alert that includes a list of names at the end; it invites people to add their own name to the list, send in the petition if their

name is number 30 or 60, and in any case forward the resulting alert-plus-signature list to everyone they know. This idea sounds great in the abstract, but doesn’t really work. Most of the signatures will never reach their destination, since the chain will fizzle out before reaching the next multiple of 30 in length. What’s worse, a small proportion of the signatures will be received in the legislator’s office over and over, thus annoying the staff and persuading them that they’re dealing with an incompetent movement that can never hold them accountable.

☞ **Urge people to inform you of their actions.** If you are calling on people to telephone a legislator’s office, for example, you should provide your e-mail address and invite them to send you a brief message, too. Explain that you’ll count the number of calls your alert has generated, and that this information will be invaluable when you speak with the legislator’s staff members later on. Only do this, though, if your mail server is capable of handling a large volume of messages in a short period. Check this out with your service provider in advance.

☞ **Don’t overdo it.** Action alerts might become as unwelcome as direct-mail advertising. Postpone that day by picking your fights and including some useful, thought-provoking information in your message. If you must send out multiple alerts on the same issue, make sure each one is easily distinguishable from the others and provides fresh, useful information. Above all, don’t send unsolicited messages to massive lists of strangers (spam). Send your message only where it belongs.

Adapted from “Designing Effective Action Alerts for the Internet” by Phil Agre, Department of Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 1994-1998. The full article is available online at dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/alerts.html.

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.

— Dr. Seuss



Businesses

If you increase their awareness about adoption, business owners and managers in your community may help you to secure financial sponsorship for Adoption Month activities, become ongoing partners in the quest to find adoptive homes for waiting children, or provide better support to the adoptive parents who work for them.



Contributions and Donations

Almost every business has something to contribute to adoption. They can donate materials or services, share specialized knowledge or abilities, or spread adoption messages to their employees and customers. Adoption Month is a great motivation to begin involving businesses and form partnerships that can last all year long.

Businesses to Target

As you think about which businesses to approach first, begin with those you know best. Organizations where adoptive families, their friends, and their relatives work are good starting points. Some banks and companies are willing to finance Adoption

Month projects, but getting businesses to donate supplies or services or distribute materials is almost always easier. Therefore, target organizations that have:

☞ **Goods and services families need.** Try housing organizations, car dealerships, hardware and household goods vendors, toy or art supply stores, clothing retailers, child care providers, and entertainment venues such as sports teams or amusement parks.

☞ **An engaged audience at their disposal.** Think about major corporations with a large number of employees; movie theaters; organizations that hold festivals, fairs, and community events; places with a large amount of foot traffic or frequent mailings; and restaurants or coffee shops.



In Depth

Club Donates Gala Event Proceeds

On November 4, 2000 Sierra Adoption Services was the beneficiary when the Active 20–30 Club of Greater Sacramento—a group of volunteers united around a mission of charitable giving—held its 20th Annual Monte Carlo Night masquerade ball. The event, which took place in a library gallery, featured music, dancing, gambling, and a silent auction [see attendees in costume, inset]. Two news anchors hosted the event and promoted Sierra's work.

According to Dave Phinney, fund development officer at Sierra, the 20–30 Club took an interest in adoption because he was able to make the issue personal and specific to the Sacramento area. Knowing that the

club tended to support children's organizations, during a presentation to its leaders Phinney outlined the history of two local girls. Phinney discussed how the girls moved through the child welfare system and needed adoptive families, touching on the issues that Sierra regularly deals with.

"When you talk about the number of children available for adoption across the country everyone's eyes tend to glaze over," Phinney said of his presentation strategy. "But when you bring it home and talk about children in the area where these people live, they are able to see how they can help and where the funding will be going."



Through Phinney's presentation, Sierra made a key connection with club members and was selected as the beneficiary of Monte Carlo night, one of the group's semi-annual fundraisers.

According to Phinney, the night was an overwhelming success. The mayor and several other community leaders attended, along with media personnel. Sierra received more funding than requested, and the 20–30 Club asked Phinney to submit an application for Sierra to be beneficiary of a future fundraising event. As a result of connections made at the event, some members also made individual donations to Sierra.

Awareness

- ☞ **Expertise to share.** Approach marketers, advertisers, and graphic artists; journalists and film makers; law firms; mental health organizations; college students and professors; and health care groups.

How to Make Your Approach

Shirley Tabb, director of public relations for the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services, has found enormous success in applying the marketing skills she learned selling cars to obtaining businesses' financial support for adoption. She explains, "Everyone is willing to help children. The challenge lies in communicating your needs to the community." To replicate her success:

- ☞ **Identify key decision-makers in organizations with resources you need, then contact them.** Be specific. Tell them what their help will mean for a child, not for you or your organization.
- ☞ **Solicit support in person to get your foot in the door.** Drop by a prospect's business or ask someone who knows the decision-maker

personally to get you an appointment. Or, invite prominent business and civic leaders to an agency open house. Putting off a request is harder in person.

- ☞ **Letters are easily forgotten or discarded among other solicitations and junk mail, so make yours stand out.** Package it so the recipient will be compelled to open it. Put a cuddly teddy bear in a big basket with photos of children. Include your letter, cover it with clear cellophane paper, and hand deliver it to the prospective sponsor. Be creative. The packaging should visually communicate your message—home, family, kids, and hearts themes can pay off. Address your package to the decision-maker and follow up with a phone call.
- ☞ **Always follow up to relate how successful the sponsored activity was.** People like to hear they made a difference.



In Depth

Businesses Sponsor Run for Adoption

To raise awareness about, gather support for, and financially benefit children in the state foster care system, the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) will host its third annual Run for Adoption in November, 2001. Last year, the Intel Corporation—in cooperation with other businesses including the *Albuquerque Journal*, Simmons Radio Group, and KWBZ-Warner Brothers—sponsored the event.

The day consisted of a 15K run, 5K run/walk, and 1K children's event that together enticed more than 300 participants [see runners, inset]. Runners wore t-shirts that featured the sponsors names as well as names of New Mexico children available for adoption. In the first year of the event, each run-

ner also wore a button with the photograph of a waiting child.

Proceeds generated by the event support foster parents and children, but according to Elie Ortiz, marketing manager for New Mexico CYFD, the real benefit of the run is the awareness it generates. "Every major network covered the run," says Ortiz, "*The Albuquerque Journal*—the largest newspaper in New Mexico—ran several ads and stories about the run and adoption, and a radio station did free promotion for the event. There is no way to gauge how much effect the actual event has in itself, but what is important is the number of people reached and the number of times a person receives a message about adoption."



To find a sponsor for the event, Ortiz sent a mailing with information about waiting children and levels of sponsorship to several large businesses in New Mexico. For their contributions, companies were featured in various promotional materials for the run, and Intel, the largest sponsor, had its name associated with the run in all advertisements and listings.

"It's a great thing for these companies," Ortiz notes. "They are eager to be connected with such a great cause."

☞ **Express appreciation to all your supporters.** Send all of your community friends your newsletters and print their names, phone numbers, and short descriptions of their businesses in each publication. Host an annual luncheon or reception where they are honored—it does not need to be a lavish affair. Just get people together so you can publicly recognize their efforts and solidify their commitment. This is also an opportunity to invite others from the community to visit your organization, see how well you treat community partners, and hear how they can join in.

Partnerships

Some organizations will only be able to make a one-time commitment to helping with your adoption causes—and sometimes that is all you want from them. Other organizations may be interested in becoming ongoing sponsors. Maintaining a partnership requires hard work—consistent communication and a clear purpose are central to success.

Maintaining Relationships

Developing a partnership is not easy—though sometimes the challenges aren't obvious immediately. To ensure a healthy collaboration, use relationship-building strategies from the beginning and continue to employ them as the partnership grows:

- ☞ **Form a task force or advisory board.** Once a corporate partner has been secured, individuals who represent every party involved with the collaboration should convene and commit to regular meetings for the partnership's duration. They should be able to motivate others in their organizations and have decision-making power so as to minimize delays.
- ☞ **Develop shared goals and objectives.** Synergy begins when all players hold the same vision of what they can accomplish together. Synergy is defined as working together to produce an effect greater than the sum of individual efforts. A shared vision is a powerful tool that will take you past differences to a solution-focused partnership. Whenever possible, your agreed-upon mission and plans should be put in writing.



Take & Use

Letter to Solicit Businesses' Support

[Date]

Your name
 Your organization's name
 Address
 City, state/province zip/postal code

Contact name
 Title
 Corporation or business name
 Address
 City, state/province zip/postal code]

Dear [Mr./Ms. contact name]:

Michael turned 13 this fall. He and his sisters, Rosalyn and Alisha, have been waiting for a family to adopt them for more than a year. Each day in foster care they wonder if and when they will find a permanent mom or dad. Nationally, [United States/Canadian figure] of these children will never return home, yet many wait years for the security of an adoptive family. This year [organization/group name] is making a special effort to see that children like Michael find permanent homes. We need your help.

During November—National Adoption Awareness Month—we are sponsoring [name or description of event] to increase awareness about adoption and recruit families to adopt children who need homes. To go forward, we need [donatable items such as paper or art supplies, brochure/poster design, printing or mailing services]. By donating these items, you can play an important role in building a new family and changing a child's life. All donations are tax deductible.*

[Your group name] is a nonprofit group composed of adoptive, foster-adoptive, and foster families, adopted persons, birth parents, adoption professionals, and other adoption advocates. We provide support to the adoption community, offer adoption education and advocacy services to the public, and [personalize description of your services or mission].

Thank you for taking time to review the enclosed information. [Name] will contact you within a week to discuss the project in more detail. If you have any questions in the meantime, please call [name] at [phone number].

Sincerely,

[Name
 Title]

Enclosures

*Note: Businesses can only deduct contributions made to registered nonprofit organizations.

Awareness

When love and skill work together, expect a masterpiece.

—John Ruskin

- ☞ **Remember that partners' reputations rise and fall together.** In collaboration, you share the consequences of each other's successes and blunders. Choose your partners carefully, and continually consider the impact of your actions on your partners' individual and institutional reputation. Celebrate together when things go well. Practice forgiveness if mistakes happen, and learn from them. Document what you have learned so you don't have to relearn it.
- ☞ **Develop an image for the partnership.** The partnership should take on a life of its own. The group should create a name, logo, and stationery that includes all the parties involved and reflects the partnership's mission.
- ☞ **Recognize sponsors.** Highlight corporate sponsors in literature and media coverage connected with your partnership. In addition, give a thank you gift that reflects the work of the partnership. Even more than the additional publicity, sponsors appreciate seeing the results of their work.

Adapted from materials by Gail Johnson, executive director of Sierra Adoption Services and Carolyn Smith, executive director of Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange.

Recognizing that the corporate partnership also must benefit from the collaboration is essential, according to Maureen Heffernan, executive director of Family Builders Adoption Network. Her organization receives financial support from Children's Orchard, a national chain of children's clothing stores. Heffernan's advice to others considering a corporate sponsor: "Realize it is a two-way partnership. For it to be successful, you must be as responsive to their needs as you expect them to be to yours." Tracking reportable outcomes—proof that the donation matters—helps keep sponsors satisfied.

Deciding What to Ask For

Once an organization or parent support group forms a relationship with a business, the possibilities for contribution are plentiful. Companies may be willing to:

- ☞ Give money to your organization or fund a special project.

- ☞ Print articles to promote Adoption Month or publish profiles of adoptive families or waiting children in their employee newsletters.
- ☞ Place adoption flyers in employee paycheck envelopes.
- ☞ Sponsor an day during which proceeds are donated to support adoption.
- ☞ Hold an adoption information fair for employees [see "Information Booths" on page 42].
- ☞ Give discounts or free items to adoptive families on a particular day, during November, or all year long.
- ☞ Sponsor an adoption party by donating space, food, materials, or prizes [see "Adoption Parties" on page 57].
- ☞ Give directly to children via scholarship funds, donated goods, or celebratory parties.
- ☞ Use their connections to involve other businesses, obtain media coverage, or lobby politicians.
- ☞ Sponsor a family interested in adopting by donating a minivan, materials to improve their home, or subsidized child or health care.
- ☞ Sponsor a child waiting to be adopted by donating transportation costs for visits; haircuts, clothes, or professional photography for pictures in waiting child books; or fees for music lessons, scouting, and summer camps.
- ☞ Provide specialized services such as web development, graphic design, and program evaluation, either through their own staff or by paying their contractors to help.
- ☞ Post displays or flyers encouraging their employees and customers to adopt or donate money to adoption [see "Displays" on page 39].
- ☞ Include your adoption message whenever they advertise their own messages [see "Advertising" on page 41].
- ☞ Volunteer employees' time to an adoption service project such as hanging posters and flyers in the community, organizing and providing entertainment at a party for waiting or adopted children, collecting suitcases or gifts for foster children, or setting up an academic or career mentoring program for older children.

Adoption Benefits

Almost any business can contribute to adoption by supporting employees who choose to adopt. Adoption and the Workplace—a project of the National Adoption Center, supported by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption—educates employers about supporting adoption. Many companies offer adoption benefits such as information and referral services, adoption-related expense reimbursements, and paid or unpaid leave. If your workplace does not already support adoptive families, the following information can help you pitch the idea to your employer.

Employers who support adoption benefit by:

- ☞ providing equity for all employees, whether they build families through adoption or birth;
- ☞ recognizing that stable families create responsible, productive employees;
- ☞ becoming an industry leader in a pace-setting, family-focused effort; and
- ☞ generating good will among employees and throughout the community.

Employees whose employers offer support benefit by:

- ☞ receiving financial assistance that can make the difference in their ability to adopt;

- ☞ knowing that their employer is supportive of them and their families; and
- ☞ obtaining time off to be with their children before and after an adoption.

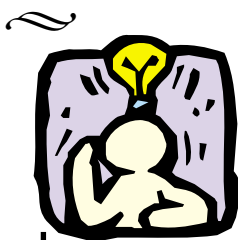
The community benefits when:

- ☞ employers take the lead in supporting adoption;
- ☞ employers are committed to family issues; and
- ☞ families adopt waiting children.

Employers who are concerned about costs will be happy to learn that providing adoption benefits is not expensive. On average, less than half of one percent of employees will use the benefits during a year. It costs little to provide this family-friendly benefit.

The National Adoption Center sells both the *Employer's Guide to Adoption Benefits* and an employee's guide titled *Advocating for Adoption Benefits*. To learn more about adoption benefits, or have an information package sent to your employer, contact: Mady Prowler, Adoption Benefits Coordinator, National Adoption Center, 1500 Walnut Street, Suite 701, Philadelphia, PA 19102; 800-862-3678 or 215-735-9988; www.adopt.org.

*Adapted from "Adoption and the Workplace"
by the National Adoption Center.*



Quick & Easy

Involving Businesses

- Bring a dozen buttons with an adoption-related message to a hardware store or pizzeria. Ask the owner to let employees wear the buttons on their uniforms during Adoption Month.
- If your family has a special place (restaurant, bakery, hotel, or entertainment venue) that is a part of your adoption celebrations, write to that business and send a family photo, thanking them for their role in your lives. Businesses often post letters where others will see them.
- Ask an arts and crafts store to host an adoption art contest or to offer scrapbook items for use in lifebooks at a reduced cost.
- Approach a photocopy shop about reproducing your newsletter or an adoption information flyer (and perhaps helping with the graphic design) at reduced rates.
- Talk with the owners of a neighborhood family fun spot (bowling alley, movie theater, skating rink, etc.) about reducing or waiving admission for foster and adoptive families on a particular day in November.

Awareness



Take & Use

Model Adoption Benefits Policy

Policy

To offer assistance to all employees who are building families, **[name of company]** has developed a policy to provide eligible employees with adoption benefits, including financial reimbursement, adoption leave of absences, and resource and referral services.

Eligibility

Effective **[date]**, all full-time and part-time employees are eligible for adoption benefits immediately upon hire. If an employee and his or her spouse or partner both work at **[name of company]**, only one employee can use the benefit.

To be considered for this benefit adopted children must be under 18. They may be biologically related to either parent, which is known as a kinship adoption. **[You will need to determine a policy on stepchild adoptions.]**

Financial Reimbursement

Eligible adoption-related expenses will be reimbursed to a maximum of **[range is \$2,000 to \$10,000]** per child. Most expenses related to the adoption are reimbursable. These include:

- Agency and placement fees
- Legal, court, and immigration costs
- Birth mother's medical expenses
- Immunization and translation fees
- Temporary foster care costs
- Transportation and lodging
- Child's medical expenses not covered by insurance

Procedure for Reimbursement

Upon placement of the adopted child, employees should obtain an Adoption Assistance Claim Form from the Human Resources department. Itemized receipts for expenses are required for documentation.

Taxation of Benefits

Reimbursements from employers for adoption expenses may be excluded from an employee's federal taxable income. If the employee's modified adjusted gross household income is \$190,000 or less, he or she is eligible for an income tax exclusion of up to \$10,000 for qualifying expenses (beginning in tax year 2002). These expenses include reasonable and necessary adoption fees, court costs, attorney fees, and other related expenses. Beginning in 2003, special needs adopters will not be required to document their expenses in order to claim the tax exclusion. Those with a modified adjusted gross household income of more than \$190,000 are ineligible for the tax exclusion. An employee can consult the IRS at 1-800-TAX-FORM or his or her tax preparer for more information on individual tax returns.

Adoption Leave of Absence

An employee who is the primary caregiver is eligible for up to **[number of weeks]** of **[paid or unpaid]** leave. This time may be used both before and after adoption and will be applied to leave allowed under the Family Medical Leave Act **[refer to Family Medical Leave policy]**. During Family Medical Leave, employees will continue to receive regular benefits that are related to date of hire.

Employees are requested to provide their manager with as much advance information on their need for time off as possible. This will prevent unplanned interruptions in work while allowing employees to take necessary leave.

Adoption Resource and Referral Services

All employees are eligible to use the **[employee assistance vendor or resource and referral service]** for adoption information. Consultants with adoption expertise will be available to provide specific adoption information and materials, community resources, and referrals to adoption agencies.

Coordination with Other Benefits

Upon placement, you may add your child to your medical and group life insurance policies. In addition, qualified employees may enroll in the Dependent Care Assistance Plan. Any additions to your benefits plan must occur within 30 days of placement. You will need completed change forms and a copy of the adoption agreement in order to enroll.

Adapted from "Employer's Guide to Adoption Benefits" by the National Adoption Center.