

Talking Points about Adoption Assistance

The following are key talking points that can help in adoption assistance advocacy efforts. If the point is based on research, we have included the citation below. Feel free to use these talking points or your own. We have found the most effective messages:

- explain the special needs and circumstances of children adopted from care
- underline the importance of adoption
- demonstrate what specific differences adoption assistance makes in a child's life
- show that adoption assistance saves money compared to keeping children in foster care

Families face special challenges raising adopted children with special needs

- Currently, 123,000 foster children in the United States are waiting for an adoptive family. Adoption assistance (also known as adoption subsidy) is a critically important tool to encourage the adoption of these children and youth who have special needs.
- Many foster children waiting for adoption—and the children already adopted from foster care—have special physical, mental health, and developmental needs. Studies show that these children are at heightened risk of moderate to severe health problems, learning disabilities, developmental delays, physical impairments, and mental health difficulties.¹
- In one survey, adoptive families reported that:
 - 58 percent of their children needed specialized health care,
 - 68 percent had an educational delay,
 - 69 percent exhibited misconduct, and
 - 83 percent exhibited some other kind of serious behavioral problem.²
- Children adopted from foster care face many more challenges than healthy birth children. And parenting children who have endured abuse, neglect, or other traumas—especially those who suffer from mental health problems or never learned to attach to a family—can be very difficult. It is only logical that governments would offer equitable, case-specific assistance to all families who care for children brought into government custody, yet adoptive families often receive significantly less financial aid and fewer services than foster parents.

Adoption has important benefits for children and youth

- Studies show that children who are adopted from foster care have far better educational and social outcomes than those who remain in foster care.³

¹ Bramlett, M.D., Radel, L.F., & Blumberg, S.J. (2007). The health and well-being of adopted children. *Pediatrics*, 119, S54-S60.

² Sedlak, A., & Broadhurst, D. D. (1993). Study of adoption assistance impact and outcomes: Final report. Rockville, MD: Westat.

³ Triseliotis, J. (2002). "Long-term foster care or adoption? The evidence examined." *Child and Family Social Work*, 7(1), 23-33.

- Research has demonstrated that youth who are adopted, when compared to youth in foster care, are:
 - more likely to complete high school or the equivalent,
 - more likely to attend and complete college,
 - less likely to become teen parents,
 - less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol,
 - less likely to have mental health problems,
 - less likely to be arrested or incarcerated,
 - more likely to be employed, and
 - more likely to have adequate incomes (with one study showing that individuals adopted from foster care have incomes that are 75 percent higher than young adults who age out of foster care).⁴
- The outcomes for youth who age out of foster care without a family are extremely troubling. These youth are at elevated risks of homelessness, poor educational outcomes, poor health, unemployment, and incarceration.⁵
- Adoptive families provide love and emotional security for their children, the stability of a committed family who will be there for them throughout childhood and into adulthood, a place to call home, and financial support.⁶ Like other parents who provide, on average, \$38,000 in assistance to their children between ages 18 and 34,⁷ adoptive parents continue to provide support for their children as they transition into adulthood—support that is not likely to be available for youth who do not leave foster care for permanent families.

Adoption subsidies matter to families and children

- Adoption assistance is a vital support to families raising children with often-serious behavioral, emotional, or physical disabilities. With adoption assistance, families are able to access medical care, counseling or therapy, special equipment, tutoring programs, and other supports that help them raise their children who have special needs.

⁴ Hansen, M.E. (2006). The value of adoption. Washington, DC: American University. Retrieved from <http://www.american.edu/cas/econ/workingpapers/1506.pdf> (May 19, 2008).

⁵ Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Cusick, G.R., Havlicek, J. Perez, A. & Keller, T. (2007). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 21. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago AND Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. K., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A. C., English, D., White, C. R., Hiripi, E., Wiggins, T., & Holmes, K. (2005). Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

⁶ Brodzinsky, D.M., Schechter, M.D. & Henig, R.M. (1992). Being adopted: The lifelong search for self. New York: Doubleday AND Cahn, K. & Johnson, P. (Eds.) (1993). Children can't wait: Reducing delays in out-of-home care. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America AND The Evan B. Donaldson Institute. (2004). What's working for children: A policy study of adoption stability and termination. New York: Author.

⁷ Schoeni, R.F. & Ross, K.E. (2005). Material assistance from families during the transition to adulthood, in R.A. Settersten, Jr., F.F. Furstenberg, Jr., & R.G. Rumbaut (Eds). *On the frontier of adulthood: Theory, research, and public policy* (pp 396–416). Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

- Just as foster care maintenance payments do not cover the true costs involved in the basic care of a child,⁸ adoption subsidies are modest financial supports that provide adoptive families with additional resources to meet their children’s needs.
- Recent statistical analyses have found a strong relationship between the percentage of children who receive adoption subsidies and the rate of adoptions among children in foster care.⁹ These analyses made clear that the higher the percentage of children who received adoption assistance in a state, the higher the rate of adoption of foster children in that state.
- Economic analysis also shows that the rate of adoption from foster care is strongly correlated with the *level* of adoption assistance support.¹⁰
- For the average state, an increase of just \$36 in the adoption assistance rate was associated with an increase of 1.785 adoptions per 100,000 persons in the state. With this small increase in adoption assistance levels, the average state saw nearly 10 more children in foster care being adopted.¹¹
- Studies have consistently found that the availability of adoption subsidies is essential to many families’ ability to adopt children from foster care.¹²
- In a recent survey, 81 percent of pre-adoptive and adoptive parents said that adoption assistance was important to their decision to adopt, and 58 percent said they could not adopt a foster child without this support that helps them meet the child’s special needs. The same study cited inadequate adoption assistance support as one of the two most critical barriers to adopting from foster care.¹³
- A lack of adoption assistance seriously affects children’s ability to find a permanent family and might resign them to a childhood spent in foster care. Research shows that post-placement support—including adoption assistance—is a key factor in many families’ decision to adopt children who have special needs.¹⁴ Authors who analyzed state data noted that “[a]doption subsidies are perhaps the most important tool by which the child welfare system can encourage adoption and support adoptive families.”¹⁵

⁸ Barbell, K. (1999). *The Impact of financial compensation, benefits, and supports on foster parent retention and recruitment*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America. AND Children’s Rights, National Foster Parent Association & University of Maryland School of Social Work. (2007). *Hitting the M.A.R.C.: Establishing foster care minimum adequate rates for children*. New York: Children’s Rights.

⁹ Dalberth, B., Gibbs, D. & Berkman, N. (2005). *Understanding adoption subsidies: An analysis of AFCARS data*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/adoption-subsidies/report.pdf> (May 19, 2008).

¹⁰ Hansen, M.E. & Hansen, B. (2005). *The economics of adoption of children from foster care*. Washington, DC: American University. Retrieved from <http://www.american.edu/academic.depts/cas/econ/workingpapers/2005-10.pdf> (May 19, 2008).

¹¹ Hansen, M.E. & Hansen, B. (2005).

¹² Hansen, B. & Hansen, M.E. (2006). An economic analysis of the adoption of children from foster care. *Child Welfare*, 85(3), 559–583.

¹³ Children’s Rights (2006), *Ending the Foster Care Life Sentence: The Critical Need for Adoption Subsidies*

¹⁴ Hansen, B. & Hansen, M.E. (2006). (cited in Hansen, The value of adoption)

¹⁵ Dalberth, B., Gibbs, D. & Berkman, N. (2005). *Understanding adoption subsidies: An analysis of AFCARS data*.

Adoption—and adoption assistance—save money

- Adoption assistance is cost-effective. An analysis demonstrated that the 50,000 adoptions from foster care each year save from \$1 billion to \$6 billion in government funds.¹⁶ The same report estimates that supported adoptions cost less than half than foster care. The savings result from reduced administrative costs and court oversight.
- Another study found that each dollar spent on an adoption from foster care saves about three dollars in public and private costs. This analysis showed that each adoption saved from \$90,000 to \$235,000 in public costs, and even more in private costs.¹⁷
- Researchers have calculated that each adoption nets between \$88,000 and \$150,000 in private benefits due to the differences in incomes between young adults who were in long-term foster care and those who were adopted.¹⁸ Thus, even small increases in adoption assistance payments reap long-term rewards for the adopted children and society.

¹⁶ Barth et al. (March 2006), “A comparison of the governmental costs of long-term foster care and adoption,” *Social Service Review*.

¹⁷ Hansen, M.E. (2006). The value of adoption.

¹⁸ Hansen, M.E. (2006). The value of adoption.