

AS PREPARED

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION
FAMILIES FOR KIDS BY 2002 CONFERENCE
WASHINGTON, DC
JUNE 26, 1997**

It is a pleasure to be in the company of so many men and women who have contributed their talents and energies to the critical issue of adoption. Over the years, the Kellogg Foundation has made an unparalleled commitment to improving our foster care and adoption systems, and I am particularly grateful for the Foundation's participation in a discussion I held at the White House last summer about this subject.

Let me thank all of you involved with Kellogg and *Families for Kids* for your leadership in drawing attention to the plight of hundreds of thousands of children across our country who are needlessly languishing in foster care -- and for serving as models of what can be done to improve the child welfare system and bring more hope and security to children so desperately in need of both.

Not only are you heroes to countless children who have benefited from your efforts, you are breaking new ground for elected officials and policy makers -- in Washington and elsewhere -- who have much to learn from your example.

This conference could not be more timely. After years of inattention and partisan politics, we are finally forging a bipartisan consensus on Capitol Hill that could correct some of the most glaring flaws in the adoption process. Today we are within reach of bringing some common sense and compassion to an overburdened, understaffed and outdated foster care system.

Those of you who have worked on children's welfare issues -- as I have for the last 25 years -- have heard no shortage of stories about children who are shuttled from one foster home to another during their formative years.

I will never forget a case I handled about 15 years ago in Arkansas.

I represented a couple who wanted to adopt a four-year-old boy who had been in their foster care for three years. The boy had been badly neglected as a baby by his biological mother, who had psychological problems. When he was less than a year old, she turned him over to the local social service agency so she could follow a boyfriend to another state. At that point, the baby showed all the symptoms of severe mistreatment: he had gained little weight, he was unresponsive and he shied away from human contact.

But in his foster family, he began to thrive. And his foster parents fell in love with him. Even though they had signed the customary state contract prohibiting them from adopting him, they wanted to make him a permanent member of their family.

The state adoption agency refused their request. So the boy was going to be taken from the security of the family he knew and turned over to strangers on some adoption list. Meanwhile, the boy's birth mother filed suit to get him back, claiming she had overcome her problems.

I argued on behalf of the boy's foster parents that the best interests of the child should take precedence over both the birth mother's claims of her biological rights and the state's claims to its contractual agreement. I asked the judge to allow testimony from a child psychologist about the boy's progress in his foster family and about the possible consequences to his physical, intellectual and emotional development if he was separated from them. The judge, who had children and grandchildren of his own, didn't think he had much to learn from these witnesses, but he allowed them nonetheless. In the end, the psychologist's testimony weighed heavily in the judge's determination to allow the foster parents to adopt the boy.

Just as often, however, the child's best interests do not take precedence. And this sad reality is repeated throughout our nation. Antiquated rules and rigid presumptions continue to deny countless children the lasting family connections that can influence whether a child does well in school, stays away from drugs, and goes on to become a responsible, law-abiding adult.

Only recently have we begun to view issues regarding the health and safety of children in foster care through a clear lens -- instead of a fog of distortions and political rhetoric over what constitutes real "family values."

Clearly, no one wants children to be in situations where they are subjected to abuse, torture, starvation or neglect. In 1973, when I was just entering the world of children's advocacy and the law, I wrote an article about children's rights in family situations -- particularly those that pose a threat to their health and safety. As recently as a few years ago, some critics suggested that by supporting a child's right to a loving family, I favored giving government more power to break up biological families and giving children the right to bring trivial disputes with their parents -- like curfews or who takes out the garbage -- to court.

Thankfully, those erroneous interpretations have given way to a clearer consensus about which children should be placed back with their biological parents -- and which should not.

We are beginning to recognize that some parents simply are not capable of taking care of their own children -- and likely never will be. Think about Elisa Izquierdo, the four-year-old girl in New York City who was found starved to death in her family's home last year; or five-year-old Richard Holmes who was discovered earlier this year to have been tortured and abused in his own home in a Maryland suburb.

Clearly, these children and others like them would be better off growing up with the love and support of an adoptive family than with biological parents who put them in harm's way.

At the same time, we have to recognize that some parents who have had problems with their children can learn to be responsible but need help in coping with the stresses of parenthood and child-rearing. In these cases we must make sure that parents have the support and counseling they need.

Today, the House and Senate are considering bills that would bring more order, logic and compassion to the process.

Under both bills, "reasonable efforts" to return a child to his or her family would not be required in extreme cases such as torture, abandonment, physical or sexual abuse. Court hearings to determine the permanent placement of a child would be required within 12 months of his or her arrival in the foster care system, instead of the current 18 months. The hearings would be called "permanency planning hearings" to make clear the goal of the proceedings.

There are also provisions in the legislation to provide financial incentives to states to increase the number of adoptions from the public child welfare system -- and particularly to increase the number of adoptions of special needs children.

These are important steps toward ensuring that children no longer languish indefinitely in foster care. They are particularly critical for children who are traditionally hard to place: those with disabilities, who are medically frail, have siblings, or are minorities. As we embark on a national discussion about race relations, which the President called for earlier this month, let us take special note that a disproportionate number of children in foster care are African-American. These children can bring boundless joy to families, and families can bring boundless joy to them. But we have to work harder to ensure that these unions happen.

Let me be clear: The President is committed to working with Congress to achieve the goals you and the Administration share and to find the funding necessary to achieve the strongest adoption bill possible.

Many provisions in the House and Senate bills incorporate recommendations made in *Adoption 2002*, a report prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services in response to the President's directive to identify barriers to adoption and double the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002.

Giving states flexibility to shorten the adoption process, highlighting strategies that are working, and providing incentives to meet adoption goals -- all part of the President's action plan -- build on other Administration efforts.

To break down financial, cultural and social barriers to adoption, the Administration has made it illegal to deny or delay an adoption on the basis of race. And the President has signed into law a \$5,000 tax credit for families who adopt, with an increase to \$6,000 for families who adopt children with special needs.

The President's chief concern has been -- and continues to be -- that no child is deprived of a safe and permanent home for one day longer than necessary. As he has said, he wants every state, every family court, every case worker in the country to understand that children's health and safety must be paramount in resolving these cases.

He is determined to work across party lines, at every level of government and with every sector of society, to give every child in America the security of a loving, nurturing and permanent home.

Yet while we all know that federal leadership is crucial, we also know that it is not enough to bring about the sweeping change our child welfare system requires.

That's where you come in.

I want to commend the Kellogg Foundation for bringing together policy makers, business and religious leaders, elected officials, judges, child advocates, and foster and adoptive families here to discuss strategies to reduce the number of children waiting to be adopted and to speed up the adoption process so that no child lingers in foster care for more than one year.

I also want to commend you for launching the *Families for Kids* initiative, which has already produced tangible results in eleven sites around the country, including:

- providing counseling for adoptive parents
- modernizing computer data
- bringing together churches to find permanent homes for foster children -- particularly special needs children
- making changes in the judicial system to address the needs of children in foster care.

As a result of these and other efforts undertaken as part of *Families for Kids*, 7,000 children were placed in permanent families last year. Many promising new partnerships are underway. And there are important lessons that can be replicated in every community and state across our country.

Today, we understand even more about the urgency of this mission. As the White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning in April made clear, children need love, nurturing, stimulation and security from the moment they enter this world. Depriving them of consistency and permanence is depriving them of the chance to achieve their God-given potential.

At the same time, we must not overlook the critical difference that loving parents can make in the lives of older children as well. Children of all ages can benefit from the care and attention of a stable, loving family. And that's why your efforts are so crucial to bringing the best out in all of America's children, whether they are infants or adolescents.

I hope you will continue to lead our nation as we continue this important work. As Americans, we live in the most prosperous country in the world. Our economy is flourishing. We are known the world over for our compassion and generous spirit.

So let's meet this test and show that we really do stand for children. Let's give every child the gift of love that he or she deserves.

Thank you.

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**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
COLUMN FOR RELEASE JUNE 25, 1997
TALKING IT OVER/CREATORS SYNDICATE**

The reality of foster care was brought home to Bill and me when we met a teenage boy at the White House this winter. Bill asked him where he was from. "Fairfax County," the boy said. When Bill asked where in the county, the boy shrugged and answered, "All over."

Unfortunately, thousands of children in our foster care system today have similar stories to tell. Because of the complex regulations, outdated assumptions, understaffed and overwhelmed agencies of our child welfare system, too many children spend their formative years shuttling from one foster home to another. Today, even children lucky enough to find adoptive families will have waited an average of three years or more in a series of temporary homes.

But that can change. The Senate and the House of Representatives are both considering bills that will take important steps toward making sure that no child languishes in foster care.

Currently, a child's case can drag on for years in the foster care system as authorities make repeated attempts to reunite a child with his or her biological parents. Often these parents, for a variety of reasons, are unable to change the behavior that caused them to lose their child in the first place. If either bill becomes law, "reasonable efforts" to return a child to his or her family would not be required in extreme cases such as torture, abandonment, physical or sexual abuse. Court hearings to determine the placement of a child would be required within 12 months -- instead of the current 18 months -- of his or her arrival in the foster care system. To make clear their purpose, these hearings would be renamed "permanency planning hearings."

As a children's advocate and lawyer who has represented parents and children in their struggles with the foster care system for more than 25 years, I believe these steps are long overdue. In 1973, I wrote an article about children's rights under the law, specifically their

rights in family situations that pose serious threats to their health and safety. Even a few years ago, some considered this view controversial. Critics suggested that by supporting a child's right to a loving family, I advocated giving government more power to break up biological families and giving children the right to bring trivial disputes with their parents -- such as bed time or who takes out the garbage -- to court.

Thankfully, that erroneous interpretation of my views has given way to a new bipartisan consensus around the idea that protecting our children from harm and working to provide them with permanent, loving families-- even when that may entail separating them from their biological parents -- should be a priority of our child welfare system. Finally, we are recognizing that there are parents who will never be able to care for their children. And, in order to secure a foster child's well-being and stable development, we as a society have the responsibility to decide as quickly as possible whether a child can return home safely.

Many of the provisions in the House and Senate bills reflect recommendations made in *Adoption 2002*, a report prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services in response to the President's directive to identify the barriers to adoption and double the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002.

Over the years, my husband has dedicated a great deal of time and energy to improving foster care and promoting adoption. As a result of the Administration's efforts, it is now illegal to deny or delay an adoption simply because the prospective parents and child are not of the same race. And last year, the President signed into law a \$5,000 tax credit to help families adopt children.

Federal leadership is crucial, but it will take the commitment of people from all corners of our country to bring about the sweeping change our child welfare system requires. This week, I'll be speaking at a national conference on adoption and child welfare reform sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The conference will bring together business and religious leaders,

policy makers, elected officials, judges, child advocates, and foster and adoptive families to discuss strategies to reduce the number of waiting children and limit the time a child spends in foster care to no more than one year.

The Kellogg Foundation has been working to reform child welfare systems in eleven states and localities. Last year alone, the foundation helped find permanent families for 7,000 children. This was possible because the foundation worked with churches and mounted aggressive media campaigns to recruit prospective adoptive families. And they helped child welfare agencies reform case work procedures, consolidate records, and modernize data collection methods so that no child becomes lost in the system.

Now we must build on their work. With thousands of children leading transient lives in foster care, we cannot afford any more delays. We need to encourage Congress to pass the best adoption bill possible. Thousands of innocent children are counting on us.

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Possible draft language on adoption proposals

We understand that there is considerable interest in the Senate in two new proposals to increase adoption assistance and promote family reunification. The first would substantially expand funding now available within the Family Preservation program for the cost of family reunification services, by creating a new program for this purpose. The second would provide grants to States to help them reduce their backlogs of children awaiting adoption.

The President has strongly supported improvements in adoption assistance, including within his Budget a program of incentives to double the number of adoptions and permanent placements by the year 2002 and offset the cost by reducing foster care costs over time. Thus we welcome the interest in the Senate in this issue.

It is, of course, a difficult time to be proposing new spending, for even the most worthy causes. However, we share the goals of these proposals, and the Administration will work with the Congress to find mutually agreeable ways to achieve them.

Democrats turn up rhetorical heat as tax, budget votes loom

By Patrice Hill
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

House and Senate Democrats used yesterday's balanced-budget debate to sharpen their rhetoric for the larger battle over tax cuts being waged the rest of this week in Congress.

Senate Democrats unveiled their alternative to the bipartisan tax bill pending on the Senate floor, cutting taxes by the same net amount of \$77 billion over five years, but shifting more of the benefits from wealthier taxpayers who save and invest to working-class families who pay no taxes.

"It is important that Americans know what would have been done

if Democrats were in the majority," said Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, South Dakota Democrat.

The bipartisan tax bill already gives part of a \$500-per-child credit to working-class families that currently zero out their tax bills by using the Earned Income Tax Credit. The Democratic plan would enable them to take the full credit, covering an additional 7 million children, sponsors say.

The Democratic bill provides \$41 billion in education tax breaks — more than President Clinton requested. It pares back Mr. Clinton's HOPE tuition credit less severely than the bipartisan bill, provides a tuition deduction of 20 percent to people who have ex-

hausted the HOPE credit, and adds funds for school construction.

On capital gains, the Democratic plan dramatically cuts back on breaks enjoyed by wealthier Americans by substituting a 30 percent exclusion from income for the GOP's dramatic rate reductions. It targets maximum capital-gains relief as well as all of its estate tax relief on small businesses and farms.

In the House, Democrats got a head start on today's daylong tax-cut debate by using much of yesterday's balanced-budget debate to attack the Republican tax bill.

House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt led the charge by proclaiming that today's vote on tax

cuts "is one of the most important votes that will be taken in this Congress." Meanwhile, House Minority Whip David E. Bonior led a liberal assault on the GOP tax and budget bills on the House floor.

In a theme that Democrats hope to amplify in next year's election campaigns, Mr. Gephardt, Missouri Democrat, said the parties' differing tax plans "offer a stark contrast between the values of Republicans and Democrats in our approach to helping middle-income families."

Republicans aim to provide the most tax relief to middle-income families who pay the most in taxes, while Democrats target their relief to families who currently pay little

or no taxes.

"What we have is a replay of the last Congress. They are taking care of the biggest corporations in this country ... while children don't get the necessary health insurance they need and legal immigrants go without," said Mr. Bonior, Michigan Democrat.

While Democrats heaped criticism on the GOP tax bill, the House approved some last-minute changes, primarily to counter criticism from conservative and farm-state Republicans and ensure near-unanimous GOP support in today's vote.

One of the changes would address concerns of conservatives who want to deliver the bill's \$400

child tax credit to constituents before next year's election. It would require the Internal Revenue Service to notify all taxpayers that the credit is available on Jan. 1, 1998, and adjust tax withholding to reflect the tax cut.

In a second change demanded by legislators from corn-growing regions, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer dropped his plan to accelerate the elimination of tax subsidies for ethanol producers. The Texas Republican's proposal would allow the subsidies to expire as currently scheduled in 2000.

• Nancy Roman contributed to this report.

The Washington Times

THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 1997

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

Senate struggles to adopt new system of foster care

By Cheryl Wetzstein
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Kevin Green, a Mississippi teenager who grew up in foster care and is speaking about it today in Washington, might have found a permanent home if congressional reforms proposed this year were in place during his childhood.

But those reforms are now on hold because lawmakers have "diametrically opposed" ideas about how to fix the foster-care system, top GOP aides said this week.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Mississippi Republican, has asked senators with competing ideas to begin forging a consensus bill, his spokesman said this week.

The delay disappoints Republican leaders, who hoped after a 416-5 vote in the House on a foster-care reform bill to get a quick, decisive and bipartisan "win" on a family issue by Mother's Day.

Instead, they watched as the House bill was derailed in the Senate, an industry-supported Senate bill strangled on its budget-busting price tag, and a third closely guarded and possibly radical approach developed among Senate conservatives.

The current cease-fire — the first in several months of vigorous behind-the-scenes discussions — pleases adoption advocates such as Maureen K. Hogan, executive director of Adopt A Special Kid.

As evidenced by the court-ordered supervision of foster care programs in 22 states and the District, "the system is literally in failure, massive systemic failure," she said. "For Congress to do a reform that's anything less than a really thoughtful approach isn't just irresponsible, it's immoral."

Each year, some 600,000 abused, neglected or abandoned children enter foster care. Most — 66 percent — are eventually returned home, but many repeatedly re-enter the system and "lan-

guish."

Critics say children get stuck in foster care because states and agencies receive per diem payments for each child in care. Unwilling to give up the money, they won't give up the child — at least for a few years, critics say.

In Mr. Green's case, his mother gave him to foster care soon after he was born prematurely and drug-addicted. She would have terminated her parental rights anytime, he said, but she didn't do it until he was 16 — well past an "adoptable" age in many eyes.

As a result, he grew up in a succession of foster homes while his social workers tried in vain to reunite him with his mother.

Last year, he became one of nearly 15,000 children to "age out" of the foster-care system. He attends classes, works two jobs and lives on his own, thanks to the moral support he got from one of his foster families and several "independent-living" programs.

At 19, he knows that what he got from the system wasn't enough. "I always really wanted to be adopted," said Mr. Green, who will speak at a conference sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Members of Congress have been working all year to pass legislation to promote the adoption of foster-care children like Mr. Green.

At the heart of the debate is a national policy that tells social workers to make "reasonable efforts" to reunite children with their families — a compassionate approach to handle families who are only temporarily distressed, child welfare advocates say.

The policy has unfortunately forced too many children back into unsafe homes, said Reps. Dave Camp, Michigan Republican, and Barbara B. Kennelly, Connecticut Democrat, who sponsored an adoption-promotion bill that passed the House in April with an overwhelming vote of 416-5.

Thompson prods GOP to comply in probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sounding a warning to his own party, the Republican head of the Senate campaign-finance inquiry has told the GOP national chairman not to shield "important facts" from investigators.

In a letter written June 11 and obtained Wednesday by the Associated Press, Sen. Fred Thompson, Tennessee Republican, demanded "complete cooperation" by the Republicans.

"With respect to witnesses, I would also urge you to counsel your attorneys not to attempt to shield important facts with broad and specious assertions of privilege," as others have done, Mr. Thompson wrote Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson.

Mr. Thompson, chairman of the Senate Governmental Affairs

Committee, said he wrote the letter because the Democratic minority complained that Republicans held back key information from investigators.

The Republican National Committee sent Mr. Thompson's panel several boxes of documents in response to a Senate subpoena, but many of the records contained major deletions.

Mr. Thompson wrote the Republican Party chairman at a time he's seeking Democratic support to grant limited immunity to low-level witnesses in the probe. At least two Democratic votes are required for the immunity, which needs a two-thirds committee majority.

On June 12, Democratic committee members blocked Mr. Thompson's initial request to compel testimony from 18 witnesses by

giving them limited immunity from prosecution.

Mr. Thompson urged Mr. Nicholson to "permanently look into this matter and ensure that RNC compliance will be prompt and complete."

Mr. Nicholson wrote Mr. Thompson and the ranking committee Democrat, Sen. John Glenn of Ohio, on June 11 that the GOP organization tried to answer committee concerns.

"Indeed, we invite the committee to pose substantive questions rather than issue inflammatory comments to the media," he wrote.

Republican attorneys, he added, were searching "every file" at Republican headquarters and at a warehouse in an effort to comply. Only material "which has no relevance to the committee's investigation" has been deleted, he

wrote.

Committee Democrats have insisted that Republicans provide their documents without any deletions.

Meanwhile, Rep. Gerald Solomon, New York Republican and chairman of the House Rules Committee, demanded that President Clinton persuade former Democratic fund raiser Charlie Yah Lin Trie to return from China to testify before Congress.

"How do you explain that the U.S. government cannot locate Charles Trie, but Tom Brokaw can?" Mr. Solomon wrote, referring to an NBC News interview with Mr. Trie. In a letter to Mr. Clinton, Mr. Solomon asked that Albright determine Mr. Trie's location in China.

The Washington Times

THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 1997

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

On Thursday, the First Lady is speaking to the Kellogg Foundation Policy Conference on Adoption, *Families for Kids by 2002*, a national gathering of association leaders, advocates, and state officials working to improve the foster care system. The President has shown leadership on this issue by directing HHS to developing a blueprint for administrative and legislative action to increase the number of adoptions out of the foster care system and move children more quickly into permanent homes.

There are two bills in Congress that reflect the President's priorities. We have formally supported the House bill, which CBO estimated at no cost. The Senate bill (sponsored by Senators Chafee and Rockefeller) has a total cost of about \$6 billion over five years. We have taken no formal position on this bill, but would support only two of the provisions that carry a cost. These provisions cost about \$700 million over five years. There is no action scheduled on either of these bills, as Rockefeller and Chafee are resisting Lott's attempts to have the Senate vote directly on the House bill. Many in the adoption community are beginning to criticize the President for not showing leadership at this critical time.

We would very much like the First Lady to announce on Thursday that the Administration supports using a small part of the tobacco tax passed by the Senate Finance Committee on child welfare and to urge the Congress to pass the best child welfare bill possible.

October 1, 1997

Ms. Jennifer Klein
Senior Policy Analyst
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Our Vision: "A permanent, loving family for every child"

Dear Ms. Klein:

During the June, 1997 "Perspectives on Permanency" meeting, many of you requested a written summary of events and activities of the meeting. In response to that request, please find "*Families for Kids National Conference on Policy Perspectives: A Summary of Proceedings*" enclosed.

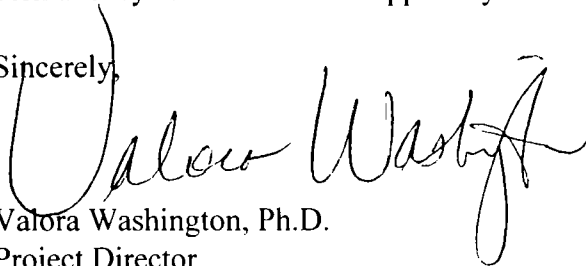
Also enclosed is a copy of the newly published brochure titled, "*Families for Kids of Color: Ways Your Organization Can Help.*"

It is our sincere desire that these materials will be helpful to you as you strive to find permanency for children. We applaud you and your commitment to children and families.

**W.K.KELLOGG
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Sincerely,



Valora Washington, Ph.D.
Project Director
Families for Kids

VW/cas

Enclosures

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*To help people
help themselves
through the practical
application of knowledge
and resources to improve
their quality of life and
that of future generations*

**FAMILIES FOR KIDS NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POLICY PERSPECTIVES:
A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS**

Renaissance Washington DC Hotel
June 25-26, 1997

Event Sponsor:
W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Conference Purpose and Scope:

The Conference brought some 350 current Families For Kids (FFK) grantee representatives and families from all FFK sites together with potential new allies from federal, state, and local government; the judiciary; philanthropy and the nonprofit sector; education; business; grassroots family advocacy groups; and organized religion.

The conference sought to focus national attention on the critical issue of children languishing in foster care ("waiting children"), and to create a sense of urgency about their plight which compelled action and systemic change at the highest levels. Conference presentations and activities also aimed to widen the circle of FFK supporters by clarifying the magnitude of the problems faced by waiting children -- as illustrated through the stories of waiting kids themselves; to articulate the FFK vision and principles of reform; and to disseminate up-to-the-minute information about pending legislation, as well as model policies and practices. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton brought the conference to a close by offering support and gratitude to FFK reformers for their commitment and work in the vineyards of reform.

The conference was timed to provide information useful to the current congressional debate on legislation affecting waiting children and their families, as well as executive branch initiatives on adoption. Sessions were designed to offer information at many different levels of detail: testimonials from affected children and families, conceptual information about intended initiative outcomes, as well as highly technical information needed to implement reform.

The conference's plenary and breakout sessions on June 26 were preceded on the evening of June 25 by a reception and dinner at which the following policy makers spoke about federal legislative and cabinet-level agency activities on behalf of children and families: **Congressman Dave Camp** (R-MI); **Senator Mike DeWine** (R-OH); **Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly** (D-CT); **Olivia Golden** (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services). **Judge Julian Pinkham** (Yakima Nation Tribal Court System) offered a Native American prayer urging FFK participants and other leading policy makers to act wisely to protect the health and well being of children in care.

The morning session on July 26 included four brief video presentations on child welfare system problems and the FFK vision and outcomes which are not summarized in these proceedings.

**Morning Session
9:30 a.m.-12:00N
Families For Kids: A Vision for Children**

Opening Remarks By Valora Washington, Program Director, Families For Kids

(W. K. Kellogg Foundation). Dr. Washington began her remarks by noting that the conference was a call to action and an opportunity for all conferees to share what they knew about policies affecting permanence for children within the foster care system. She said that five questions would give shape to the proceedings:

- How can we better promote healthy development of children in foster care?
- Who are the children in foster care?
- Who should care for them when parents can't?
- What is the plan for these children?
- What can be done by systems and what can individuals do?

She underscored the special problems of children of color within the foster care system -- particularly their disproportionate representation within the foster care system of every state. She also deplored the lack of good data and adequate recognition of race/ethnicity in the policy debates on the issue.

Increasing the chances of permanency for children drifting in the system would, she said, require of new potential allies an act of imagination to elevate a dream of change above the intimidating presence of things as they are. This is what FFK reformers had succeeded in doing and what all reformers must do if we are to enact what 25 years of research has already taught us about children's needs and proven system solutions, she said.

Finally Dr. Washington emphasized the importance of expanding the circle of people who know and care about waiting children -- moving beyond relatively small professional communities to gain broader support.

She closed her remarks by introducing the next two speakers -- Shane Salter and Kevin Green-- two adult African-Americans who had spent virtually their entire childhoods in foster care, never experiencing permanent loving families. "Let there be no more Shane's and Kevin's; let them be our teachers," stated Dr. Washington.

Families For Kids: The Challenge "Through The Eyes of Youth"

Shane Salter, Deputy Director, For Love of Children *(Washington DC)*: Mr. Salter began by telling the story of his own childhood: abandonment at the age of four in a New York City basement apartment where he attempted to care for his six month old brother; later, nine foster homes, two group homes and an orphanage; a long period of school failure followed by a dramatic turnaround featuring graduation from high school as the valedictorian of his class, successful college years and professional development, marriage and children of his own (both biological and adopted).

Salter reminded the audience that the system expected "these [foster children like himself] our most fragile members of society . . . to succeed without help." He asked that society "make a place for each little gentle face," and suggested that he was himself everything the system was throwing away in children, a reminder of all that is "good in children."

Kevin Green, Member, Mississippi Sun Team/Speak Up Now *(Jackson, MS)*: Mr. Green, the son of a woman addicted to drugs, said that his story began in a hospital room where he struggled as an infant to survive and later experienced multiple foster care placements.

He indicated that his Families For Kids advocacy work as part of the Mississippi Sun Team was helping to fill a hole in his heart left by being a person without a family. "Why we turn our backs on kids, I don't know, he said."

Valora Washington noted that 16,000 youth leave the system each year merely because of age without ever achieving a permanent family. She said that an assumption that "we can do better for kids" had led the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to pull together a group of experts in 1990 to consider ways to have an impact. On the advice of these experts, the Foundation had undertaken Families for Kids, initiating reform with a "community visioning process" which ultimately involved 14,000 people in 15 states. The planning process in effect gave participants, she said, a "blank piece of paper" and asked them to imagine what reforms would best address the systemic problems causing so many kids to languish in foster care.

She also summarized the goals and outcomes that had given shape to all reform efforts:

FFK Goals:

- (1) eliminating the backlog of kids languishing in foster care
- (2) achieving system change

FFK Outcomes:

- one year at most before permanent placement
- one stable foster care family
- one assessment to determine need
- one case worker or case work team
- comprehensive support for caregivers .

Community Visioning/Community Leadership

The Honorable William Byars, Jr., Judge of the Fifth Circuit Family Court, Kershaw County, SC. An acknowledged leader of South Carolina's Families For Kids court and legal reform movement, Judge Byars reminded the audience that 100,000 kids nationally were stuck in foster care drift, and that only a "paradigm shift" -- a radical change in the way people began to see the issue -- could initiate successful reform. Byars recalled that his own paradigm shift came when he began to "see the system through the eyes of a child."

Judge Byars noted that the child welfare system stood on two legs: social services *and* the legal system. He also noted just a few of the results of recent child welfare legal reform in SC:

- an embrace of family preservation, if possible
- a stronger focus on permanency
- support for kinship care
- increase in the termination of parental rights by a factor of ten
- increase in adoption by a factor of 6

He emphasized the importance of getting children who cannot return home freed for adoption faster, by expediting termination of parental rights (TPR), so that kids will have a better chance of achieving permanency.

Pat and Ricky Landrum and their two children David and Brittany (adopted through South Carolina Families For Kids) joined Judge Byars on the dais as he concluded his remarks.

State Perspectives On Permanency

Bill Graves, Governor of the State of Kansas and First Lady Linda Graves. Mrs. Graves noted that the most important crop in the State of Kansas was kids and that her husband's most important role was that of father to their newly adopted daughter Katie.

Governor Graves noted that when he took office, the child welfare system was broken, the State's leading child welfare agency was operating under the terms of a legal agreement, and adoption was taking much too long. Change was therefore a requirement, and safety and permanence for children were to be the hall marks of that change. The change process had three immediate goals, he said:

- protect kids -- the first job
- focus on outcomes, not social service process
- deliver services more effectively

The Governor also stated that Kansas had privatized the bulk of its child welfare services, and that the initial results of this privatization were encouraging:

- fewer children entering foster care
- more returning home each quarter
- the average stay in care was less than three months
- reunified families were remaining together longer
- more than 70% of those kids placed out of home were being placed *together with one sibling*
- the State was achieving a net gain of five placements a month

Joan Wagon, Former Kansas FFK Project Director and Newly Elected Mayor of Topeka, Kansas concluded the state perspectives presentation by noting that collaboration among many partners had been a successful, primary strategy in Kansas. She also thanked Linda Katz for her pioneering efforts to establish the concurrent planning process that had been such an important innovation in the Kansas FFK initiative and elsewhere.

Achieving Permanency: What We Must Do

Pat Babcock, Program Director (W. K. Kellogg Foundation). Mr. Babcock introduced a panel which included **Nicholas Scoppetta** (Commissioner, Administration for Children's Services, City of New York); **Donna Starr** (President, Native American Commission on Children and Families, State of Washington); **Jim Clark**, State Director, South Carolina Department of Social Services); **Kevin Fitzgerald** (Director of the North Carolina Division of Social Services); **JoAnn Lawer** (Deputy Secretary, Office of Children, Youth & Families, Pennsylvania); and **Marva Hammonds** (Director, Families Independence Agencies, Michigan).

Before recognizing each panelist for separate remarks, Mr. Babcock noted that adoption reform was a partnership of three's:

- all three levels of government
- all three branches of government
- local communities, families, and kids

Brief summaries of the remarks of each commissioner follow.

Nicholas Scoppetta said that New York City had increased adoptions steadily and significantly since 1994, showing a 58 percent increase in 1995, a 58 percent increase in 1996, and a 78 percent increase in 1997 (4,131 adoptions). He credited the following strategies for these promising numbers:

- bringing a new focus on adoption and permanence
- improving system management
- getting the support of two key judges, especially the State's chief judge
- creating a special adoption expediting unit
- creating contract incentives for private agencies doing adoptions (number of completed adoptions a criteria for re-contracting)
- using concurrent planning

- boosting family recruitment with One Church One Child, adoption fairs, and the State's "Family Album"

Donna Starr, a member of the Muckleshoot Tribe, introduced herself by first naming her parents and grandparents, to dramatize how important ancestral and tribal roots are to Native Americans.

Ms. Starr noted that tribal people do not believe in severing their blood ties, as is often the case with mainstream, formal adoption processes. She said that many tribes preferred to place children in guardianships with relatives, using open adoptions as a good last resort. Children, she said, have to know where they are from, so family information must always follow them. She also noted that tribes provide children with something stable to come back to, because tribes will take ownership of kids.

The new State - and FFK-sponsored Native American Commission on Children and Families is, she said, an important vehicle for engaging Washington's 37 tribes in advocacy for Native American children and for bringing together all child-serving agencies to look at a child's whole life. FFK has, she said, "opened eyes."

Jim Clark stressed the importance of improving management of systems serving children. Such management, he said, must begin with good leadership that articulates a clear vision of change and brings together system units so that organizational learning can occur. He also stressed the importance of establishing accountability with county-level managers --making the foremost criterion of job performance by getting kids into families (adoption). Better measurement -- understanding children's points of movement through the system -- was a key to reform. Clark also said that to succeed, county-level managers needed to be granted greater authority, discretion, and flexibility. Ritualistic, hierarchical forms of bureaucracy were counter-productive, he said.

Clark pointed to two issues of great concern to the future of reform:

- 1) the need to raise the quality of foster care homes, always asking, "Is this a home I would want to put my own child in?"
- 2) the need to face more directly the problems of entrenched drug and alcohol addiction and avoid the tendency to automatically grant primacy to the biological mother's wishes (South Carolina has recently more than doubled the number of TPR's, from 800-1500)

Kevin Fitzgerald noted that North Carolina's 8 "FFK counties" were currently outperforming all other counties in terms of increasing adoption rates and stabilizing expenditures. He pointed to the following promising reform trends:

- income maintenance and services are more integrated around values of self-reliance and self-sufficiency
- program identities are now being subordinated to clear program outcomes, with finances beginning to follow outcomes
- a vision of safety and permanency are becoming a movement
- there have been important changes in court and legal reform
- managers and workers have recognized the importance of "being in the community"

JoAnn Lawer summarized developments in the State of Pennsylvania's collaboration with the Casey Foundation's "Family to Family" program, noting that it shared FFK's central values of permanency for children and the need to eliminate the backlog of children in care.

Lawer focused most intensely on the program's steps to develop technological ways of analyzing what is happening to kids in the system, noting that framing outcomes and other indicators of other success, and helping child welfare professionals understand that "data is our friend" were essential to progress.

Other developments of note included:

- adding an additional ground for TPR
- adding a medical history registry
- allowing children to petition for TPR
- creating a statewide adoption network (“SWAN”)

In closing, Lawer praised FFK reformers for their theme, “Through the eyes of the child,” and urged that child welfare services work more closely with mental health care providers to ensure stable adoptions.

Marva Hammonds noted that Michigan had embraced the value of permanency for kids and had in the Kent County (Grand Rapids, MI) Families For Kids initiative a “stellar” performer that had dramatically increased placement of waiting kids. She also summarized a number of other positive developments within the State of Michigan:

- a new package of legislative initiatives that would force attorneys and other legal personnel to recognize a child’s sense of time
- a new community-based process to review child welfare practice
- permanency-focused reimbursement to providers
- trust money to prevent child abuse
- wrap-around services to prevent disrupted adoptions

Luncheon Speakers On the FFK Mandate: Reduce the Backlog and Change the System

Ernesto Loperena (*Executive Director, New York Council on Adoptable Children*) opened luncheon proceedings by noting that the current national policy focus on the health and welfare of children made this an opportune time for the FFK vision.

He also briefed the audience on "Latinos and Child Welfare -- Voces De La Comunidad," a report sponsored by the National Latino Child Welfare Advocacy Group and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to shed light on the lack of information and understanding that now exists about the role child welfare services play in the lives of Latino families and children.

According to the report, Latino children are often undercounted in system census data because they are miscoded as Caucasian or African American, or they are "lost" in the "other" category. Given the status of current data, distinguishing the nature of the Latino experience within the system is not possible. Understanding unique Latino needs is also complicated by the many differences among Latino subgroups now living in America, and by aggregate national data that tends to obscure the status of Latino children where their concentrations are greatest: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Texas.

By way of introducing the first speaker, Nicholas Scoppetta, Mr. Loperena said that Mayor Giuliani had begun important child welfare reform in New York City by naming Nicholas Scoppetta, a former foster child, Commissioner of a newly-formed agency, Administration for Children's Services, City of New York (the agency is responsible for the welfare of some 40,000 children in 60 agencies). Mr. Loperena expressed confidence in the new changes.

Nicholas Scoppetta commended Mayor Giuliani for his courageous commitment to keeping needless abuse-related child deaths from recurring.

Mr. Scoppetta also summarized the most important recent developments in the New York City reform movement:

- establishing a separate agency for children's services
- protecting the agency from budget cuts
- adding 53 million to the new agency's budget
- regular meetings between the Mayor and Commissioner to report on progress
- a newly-released report of reform progress

He concluded his remarks by stating that recent reforms had done more for child welfare in NYC in the last two years than had been accomplished in the previous twenty years.

Rudolph Giuliani (*Mayor of New York*) reminded conference participants, with a smile, that New York City was the "Capital of the World" -- a city of seven and a half million legal residents, an additional 7 million illegals, and two million "guests."

Protecting children from abuse and neglect is, he said, "an enormously complex and difficult task" which required a special agency and a shift from a culture of unaccountability to one of accountability. He said that he was heartened by several recent interventions by ordinary citizens to help children in distress. These, he believed, were indications that the community at large was beginning to feel responsible for helping kids and confident that their efforts would be heeded by officials and indeed make a difference.

He said that local governments, particularly city governments, had the best chance of helping kids and families, because they were closest to problems and needs. "We must encourage the stability and preservation of families," he said, "almost as a compulsion."

The dramatic reduction in crime in NYC was also helping families and children, he said. New understanding and enforcement in domestic violence cases was particularly significant he said, because 75 percent of all violence perpetrated against wives also involved child victims. He stressed the importance of addressing domestic violence publicly, stating that if “we had dealt directly with domestic violence 20 years ago, we wouldn’t have so many violent young adults now.”

In conclusion, he noted that the “real beneficiaries of adoption are adults, and people are beginning to recognize this.” He also stated that reform efforts were “building a better, more secure country.”

Afternoon Breakout Sessions (2:00-4:30)
Implementing Change: Conversations About Permanency

Participants were at liberty to choose from among the following five different breakout sessions:

1. **Taking Action to Achieve Permanency for Kids**
Putting State Policy and Legislative Frameworks in Place
2. **Building Blocks for Permanence**
The movement to restructure or privatize child welfare services. Will these efforts ensure permanency for children?
3. **Funding Mechanisms for Outcome-Based Systems**
Innovative alternatives are addressing reduced mainstream funding. How are states developing new resources?
4. **Promising Practice Solutions: “*Early Interventions*”**
Innovative solutions that include intervention before children are removed from their family, reducing foster-care drift and identifying critical cultural issues.
5. **Promising Practice Solutions: “*The Backlog Blitz*”**
The end result: Movement into Permanent Families. How Best Can We Achieve this outcome?

Brief summaries of moderators, presenters, and discussion themes for each of these sessions follow.

Breakout Session #1
Taking Action to Achieve Permanency for Kids
Putting State Policy and Legislative Frameworks in Place

Moderators:

Kathleen Hayes, *Project Director, South Carolina Families for Kids*
Sara Anderson Mims, *Project Director, North Carolina Families for Kids*

Presenters:

Mark Hardin, *Director, Child Welfare, American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law, Washington, DC*
Ron Haskins, *Staff Director, Subcommittee on Human Resources, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, Washington, DC*
Cassie Bevan, *Staff Professional Assistant, Subcommittee on Human Resources, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, Washington, DC*
Barbara Pryor, *Legislative Assistant to Senator John D. Rockefeller (D-WV), Washington, DC*
Judy McKenzie, *Executive Director, Spaulding for Children, Southfield (Detroit), MI*

Major Objectives and Themes

True system reform in child welfare services requires a fundamental paradigm shift away from programs and policy developed to suit specific interest groups, agencies, and funding sources toward services needed to assure that all children find permanent homes. Eleven (11) Families for Kids communities, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, have encouraged policy makers and legislators to make this shift by establishing a clear vision of permanency for all foster children and specific goals that improve the child's stability and reduce the child's time spent in foster care.

Panelists in this session addressed those policy and legislative issues that most clearly support the type of reforms necessary to institutionalize improved outcomes for children. Key themes included: Reasonable Efforts, Enforcing Time Frames, Permanency Options in Statute and Policy, and Court Management.

Panelists compared and contrasted Senate and House versions of current adoption bills before Congress, noting that both made health and safety paramount concerns, shifted away from family preservation at all costs toward a greater emphasis on permanent placement, pushed for more expeditious placement of children into permanent homes, and redefined "reasonable efforts" (to reunify children with families). All agreed that the principle difference between the two bills was money, with the Senate bill being the more generous of the two.

Discussion of permanency options in policy and practice emphasized the need to recognize the importance of adoption as an option offering lifetime commitment and legal security. The value of doing strength-based assessments was also stressed. Yet older children must be prepared to make it with or without permanency, through partnerships with churches, planned rites of passage, internships, etc. Professionals, it was suggested, should ask, "What is the life plan?" not just, "What is the permanency plan?" Presenters noted that when politicians consider subsidies (e.g. for children with severe disabilities), they often engage in a "shell game" that ignores the real costs of caring for kids in the absence of permanent families. Such short-sighted thinking was roundly criticized.

Finally, the presentation on the Court Improvement Program (CIP) offered a definition of the three pillars of permanency: (1) good casework; (2) good service delivery; and (3) good court processing of cases. The principal features of CIP reform were also summarized, as follows:

- speeds up court decision making process
- improves scheduling of court hearings
- embraces “1 judge, 1 case” principle (for consistency)
- increases expertise of judges and attorneys
- creates officially-recognized caseloads (more time per case)
- had the potential to spotlight judicial stars and laggards

Breakout Session #2

Building Blocks for Permanence

The movement to restructure or privatize child welfare services. Will these efforts ensure permanency for children?

Moderators:

Wendy Lewis Jackson, *Project Director, Kent County, Michigan Families for Kids*

Antoinette Nelson, *Project Director, New York City Families for Kids*

Rita Wolf, *Interim Project Director, Kansas Families for Kids*

Presenters:

Teresa Markowitz, *Commissioner of Children and Family Services, State of Kansas, Topeka, KS*

Karabelle Pizzigati, *Director of Public Policy, Child Welfare League of American, Washington, DC*

Gary Crow, *Executive Director, Lorain County Children Services, Elyria OH*

Michael Weekes, *Deputy Commissioner of Quality Management and Program Development, Massachusetts Department of Social Services, Boston, MA*

Major Objectives and Themes:

A number of states are restructuring their child welfare services as a way to support reform and provide better permanency options for children. Major examples include the transferring of child welfare services to the private sector through an outcomes-based contractual agreement, privatization of state agencies, or the partial or full combining of mental health, social services and/or public health departments at the state or local level. A critical factor for consideration is how these new structures will impact permanency, casework decisions, and costs. Thus key themes for discussion were: Public/Private Sector Roles, Managed Care Integration, and Children's Services.

Presentations on managed care and privatization emphasized key principles and strategies in use across the country, and challenges involved in implementation. Essentials for a good managed care approach were also summarized, as follows:

- assessment
- building on what works
- good information management systems
- an emphasis on quality improvement
- realistic pricing systems

Presentations on child welfare service delivery systems stressed the importance of outcomes and the promise of incentive-based approaches.

Breakout Session #3

Funding Mechanisms for Outcomes-based Systems

Innovative alternatives are addressing reduced mainstream funding. How are states developing new resources?

Moderators:

Marie Jamieson, *Project Director, Washington Families for Kids*
Renay Sanders, *Project Director, Ohio Families for Kids*

Presenters:

Isaac Palmer, *Deputy Director, Office of Family and Children Services, Ohio Department of Human Services, Columbus, OH*
Fred Wulczyn, *Research Fellow, Chapin Hall Center for Children, the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL*
Chuck Harris, *Chief of Children's Services, Division of Social Services, Raleigh, NC*
MaryLee Allen, *Director of Child Welfare and Mental Health, Children's Defense Fund, Washington, DC*

Major Objectives and Themes

Public agencies are exploring new methods to involve private agencies in the delivery of child welfare services. Panelists described a spectrum of options from small purchase of service contracts to system-wide managed care, including consideration of such questions as:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches?
- What safeguards should decision makers have in place before they move into a privatization of services or contracting out of services?
- How are outcomes measured?

Key concepts addressed included: Managed Care, Outcome-based Contracts, and New Approaches to IV-E and IV-B Federal Funding Waivers.

Definitions of managed care highlighted the tension between fiscal and social policy objectives, and noted that several levels of analysis were necessary to understand critical elements.

One level of analysis -- case management -- is, for example, more than a fiscal mechanism; it relates to staff organization, as well as coordination of service delivery. The fiscal level of analysis typically involves either fee-for service or fixed reimbursement formulas. Fee-for-service arrangements feature per unit costs with variable revenues, whereas fixed reimbursement systems tend to have more predictable revenues -- a characteristic that is appealing to county commissioners. There is a need to tie management reforms to fiscal incentives by linking service outcomes to payment and developing tools to improve case management and utilization.

Managed care is more than privatization if privatized systems merely shift responsibility without linking work to specific outcomes. Managed care is more than a so-called "performance based" system if contractors are not allowed to reinvest or reallocate dollars. Finally managed care systems are more than simple competitive businesses if they use outcomes and allow for reinvestment.

For child welfare systems, risk varies according to service conditions: Volume of Cases is a high risk condition because it is not within the system operators' control; Unit Cost, on the other hand, is a low risk condition because it is fairly easy to control. Planning for volume risk management is critical.

Presentations were made on both the North Carolina and Ohio models of performance-based contracts for the placement of children with special needs. Representatives from both states talked about the use of planned Title IV-E waivers, looking forward to the increase in flexibility offered by the waivers. Both models also feature payments made at intervals throughout the placement process.

For example, in North Carolina, payments for the placement of special needs children into adoptive homes are made according to this formula: 60 percent at time of placement, 20 percent at finalization, and 20 percent if placement is intact one year after placement.

The second example, North Carolina Families For Kids, involves 8 counties in a pure county-administered child welfare system. Data tracking to gauge performance is a hallmark of the system, which looks at:

- restrictiveness of placement
- number of moves and disruptions
- entry into and out of the backlog
- length of stay
- re-entry into care

The five Families For Kids outcomes now form the State of North Carolina's vision for children.

Key elements of the system include:

- the five outcomes
- specific measures of success
- a culture of striving for better performance
- attempting to get the incentives right

The session ended with a presentation on the ways in which the federal government signals its system of care priorities. These general signals were noted:

- higher level of reimbursement for a particular practice
- funding for base entitlement versus caps in the use of discretionary funds
- expediting activities through time-limited funding
- using specific conditions, sanctions, and penalties
- limiting eligibility to specific groups
- granting flexible dollars for innovations

Specific fiscal incentives to promote increased adoptions as written into current House and Senate legislation were also noted. The House bill (*The Adoption Promotion Act*), for example, offers an after-the-fact bonus for each adopted child and includes a significant increase in adoption opportunities grant program dollars. The more generous Senate version (*The Safe Act*) extends the definition of "special needs" to all kids in care, increasing by approximately one-third the number of children covered. It also allows for the use of IV-E dollars for family reunification services for a period of one year, and it includes \$50 million in entitlement dollars to track adoption goal achievement in states receiving federal grants.

The session ended with the expression of some concerns for the future, including:

- increasing numbers of children entering the system
- decreasing SSI benefits for special needs children
- the fate of family services in a child-based rate system
- changing oversight responsibilities vis-à-vis the federal government and the states

The presentations as a group emphasized the critical need for managed care systems to have feedback channels to help determine what is successful and what hard questions need to be asked, as well as to incorporate principles and outcomes to ensure that children have permanent families.

Breakout Session #4
Promising Practice Solutions: "Early Interventions"

*Innovative solutions that include intervention before children are removed from their family,
reducing foster care drift and identifying critical cultural issues*

Moderators:

Jacquelyn Kidd, *Public Policy Analyst, North American Council on Adoptable Children, St. Paul, MN*

Linda West, *Project Director, Mississippi Families for Kids*

Gary Walsh, *Project Director, Montana Families for Kids*

Presenters:

Linda Katz, *Program Director, Lutheran Social Services of Washington and Idaho, Mountlake Terrace (Seattle), WA*

Veneese Chandler, *Executive Director Family Outreach Center, Grand Rapids, MI*

Ernesto Loperena, *Executive Director, New York Council on Adoptable Children, New York, NY*

Donna Starr, *Health and Human Services Director, Muckleshoot Tribe of Indians (Auburn, WA)*

Major Objectives and Themes

Prevention and intervention measures to reduce the length of time children lack permanence are helping to reshape child welfare as we know it. Family involvement and child-centered decision making are critical to reforming child welfare systems. This session discussed innovations in family group conferencing, kinship care, concurrent planning, family advocacy, as well as critical cultural considerations.

The Family Decision Making Conference. The Family and Community Compact Program of Kent County Families For Kids (Grand Rapids, MI) was offered as a promising example of the family group conferencing model, an alternative to foster care. The program serves predominately African American children and families, since 60 percent of children entering foster care in Kent County are African American. Parents of these children often have a history of drug or alcohol abuse and are frequently single parents.

Prospective Compact participants are offered two alternatives: the traditional foster care system, which involves the courts, or the Compact, which utilizes decision making conferences made up of extended family or kinship network members (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.). This group assesses the permanency needs of the child and identifies primary and backup caregivers -- typically extended family members -- as well as needed services. The Family Outreach Center reviews the permanency plan developed in family group conferences, provides supportive services and referrals, and does case follow-up work. The Center receives approximately 100 referrals per year.

Kinship Care Models --New York City. A report on kinship care in New York City established that one-half of all children in the City are in kinship care at the same maintenance rate as regular foster care.

These benefits of kinship care were noted:

- the child knows the family
- visits with the birth mother are easier
- the placement is more stable

These disadvantages were noted:

- the length of stay in foster care is typically longer
- visits may need to be supervised
- there are unanswered questions about standards for subsidized guardianships (for kinship care) and about what impact such arrangements may have on adoption as a permanency alternative

A second kind of kinship care placement initiative provided for by the AIDS Orphan Adoption Program (established February 1993) was also summarized, as follows:

- 309 children assisted -- most by kinship placement
- the birth parent is empowered to identify caregivers
- staff ensures that appropriate caregivers are chosen
- funding is provided by AFDC, as well as Veteran's Administration and Social Security entitlements

Permanency and Native American Cultural Issues. Native American children are over-represented in the foster care system. This presentation summarized several values and characteristics of Native American communities that are highly relevant to permanency decision making for Native American children in care:

- reservations are distinct legal and political jurisdictions
- Native Americans regard children as wealth and often have large families
- extended family members are close-knit and often parent relative children as a matter of course
- Native American culture is typically more communal and less materialistic than the dominant culture
- Native American children who practice their traditional cultural ways are less likely to enter foster care

These characteristics need to be recognized and utilized as strengths by child welfare professionals when permanency decisions are being made.

Concurrent Planning In Washington State. This presentation explained that Washington State's pioneering concurrent planning model developed in relationship to a particular history and target population. Paradigm shifts preceding the establishment of the model were the passage of an open adoption law in 1990 and increasing numbers of adoptions both by foster parents and kin.

Children now entering the State's foster care system have increased dramatically primarily because of parental drug and/or alcohol addiction. Those most at risk for foster care drift are under age one and either African American or Native American. While 65 percent of all children entering the system return to their birth families within three months, those with adoption as a goal typically wait up to five years.

Concurrent planning works simultaneously toward two goals: (1) the reunification of the biological family, if possible; and (2) an alternative permanency plan such as adoption, if reunification isn't possible. The model depends on recruiting foster parents and relative families who will both be prepared to work with biological families to attempt reunification, and to adopt, if reunification fails.

Concurrent planning supports two Families For Kids outcomes: one year to permanent placement and one stable foster care placement. The model is child - and family-centered and committed to cultural sensitivity.

Breakout Session #5
Promising Practice Solutions: "The Backlog Blitz"

The end result: Movement into permanent families. How best can we achieve this outcome?

Moderators:

Joe Kroll, *Executive Director, North American Council on Adoptable Children, St. Paul, MN*

Brenda Gadson, *Project Director, Massachusetts Families For Kids*

Karen Abman, *Project Director, Pima County (Arizona) Families For Kids*

Presenters:

Ruth Amerson, *Program Administrator, Another Choice for Black Children, Inc., Sanford (Raleigh), NC*

Kim Stevens, *Family Advocacy Coordinator, Massachusetts Families for Kids, Boston, MA*

Polly Pfeuffer, *Permanency Planning Specialist, Arizona Department of Economic Security, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Tucson, AZ*

Major Objectives and Themes

This breakout session identified system change strategies designed to eliminate the backlog. New cross-functional assessment teams, specialty placement agencies for children of color, and policy-oriented advocacy were chief among the strategies presented.

Cross-functional Assessment Teams (Pima, AZ). To assist in eliminating Pima County's backlog of 395 legally-free children (all in care for two years or more), local Families For Kids organizers created cross-functional assessment teams composed of a permanency planning specialist, a consulting psychologist, a case manager, a support specialist, as well as invited parents and other caregivers. These administratively and culturally diverse teams have helped overcome system fragmentation and in doing so expedited permanency for waiting children. Job duties include:

- collaboratively reviewing cases
- profiling individual children and their needs
- meeting with the case managers and children
- developing permanency and action plans

Several concrete team achievements are already apparent, such as:

- increased community awareness of waiting children
- better agency collaboration
- a greater sense of responsibility for children (ownership)
- improved training and permanency planning procedures
- placement of 239 children as of March, 1997
- more older children asking for families

Another Choice For Black Children, Inc. Specialty agencies focusing on the placement of children of color have become an important element of the child welfare system. The final presentation described the philosophy and practices of one such agency, Another Choice For Black Children, Inc., located in Sanford (Raleigh), NC.

The agency actively seeks to dispel several destructive myths that often impede permanency for Black children:

- that Black children aren't adoptable
- that there are too many children in Black families
- that the Black community isn't interested in adoption
- that the Black family is defeated

Unlike many more traditional child placement agencies, Another Choice does not make extensive use of the church, advertisements, or match meetings. Its distinguishing features include a focus on assessing potential parents in terms of strengths, describing children positively, and emphasizing positive phone contact work. Each worker places 12-15 children per year and provides limited supportive services for approximately three months after placement.

Family Advocacy. Adoptive parents can discover that they are unprepared to deal with the needs of their new children because so many support services are needed but not available to them. The final presentation in this session focused on the strategies family advocates can use to gain necessary support and attention from policy makers. These strategies were advocated:

- recruit families by *retaining* the ones you already have
- engage legislators using legislative breakfasts
- let children and teens speak out
- expand family resources
- get the community, courts, and legislature involved

Concluding Session: Adoption 2002

An Address By First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

The First Lady began her remarks by noting that the video on adoption made in 1995 (shown immediately prior to her remarks) was the White House's first venture focusing public attention on adoption. Since that time, she said, the President has made an unparalleled commitment to improving the foster care and adoption system through the Adoption 2002 initiative.

She thanked all reformers (including Foundation and government leaders like Valora Washington, Paul Vander Velde, Olivia Golden, and Carol Williams) for their help on the President's initiative, for their work on behalf of children needlessly languishing in foster care, and for the knowledge about effective models of service they were contributing to the change process. She called the assembled reformers "heroes to children" and ground breakers for policy makers, and she expressed pleasure in hearing about the many positive impacts growing out of reform efforts.

She also characterized the conference as timely given that federal legislators were forging a bipartisan coalition on some crucial child welfare issues that put the country "within reach of bringing common sense to the overburdened and outdated foster care system" by redefining "reasonable efforts" and offering financial incentives to those interested in adopting children (especially special needs children) from the public system.

To illustrate the significance of current developments, she recounted a case she had tried some 20 years previous when she was representing a neglected four year old whose biological mother had psychological problems. The child's foster parents wanted to adopt; the child welfare agency had refused their request; the biological mother was suing for custody; Mrs. Clinton was arguing that the child be placed with the foster parents. Although serving "the best interests of the child" was not common court doctrine at the time, the judge ruled in favor of the foster parents. The First Lady noted that "we now have a clearer consensus about which children should/shouldn't be reunited with their biological parents"; yet, she acknowledged that "none of us can predict with certainty the outcomes of our difficult decisions" and it is therefore necessary to act on our best judgment at the time. . . and support our professionals when they do so.

She also emphasized the need to recognize and work harder to overcome the disproportionate representation of children of color within the foster care system.

She underscored the President's commitment that no child should be deprived of a safe and permanent home for longer than necessary, and she summarized current efforts to:

- highlight successful strategies
- breakdown financial and other resource barriers to permanency
- make available tax credits for adoptive parents

Finally she thanked the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for bringing reformers to the table to reduce the number of kids waiting for homes and for launching FFK and achieving positive results (as evidenced by church involvement, changing judicial attitudes and systems, and 7,000 new child placements). She expressed optimism about the prospects of reform to change thousands of lives and urged that all present continue to work together.

Conclusion

The W.K. Kellogg Families For Kids initiative is committed to continuing its efforts to focus national attention on the plight of waiting children and to create a sense of urgency that compels action on their behalf. Efforts to widen the circle of those who support change and to educate policy makers and others based on lessons learned from the experience of participating FFK states and localities also remain top priorities.

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Booklet, "Families for Kids of Color," 21 pages

Families for Kids of Color:

**Ways Your
Organization
Can Help**

