

# Adoption in Ohio

Brief prepared by Jon Bosscher, March 2007

## Child & Family Issue Brief

Approximately 3,700 Ohio children are waiting for a family that can provide a stable, nurturing environment.<sup>1</sup> The goals of adoption services are matching children to families and ensuring the permanency of placement. On average, Ohio children spend 20 months waiting for adoption.<sup>2</sup> Some lingering challenges to adoption placement include:

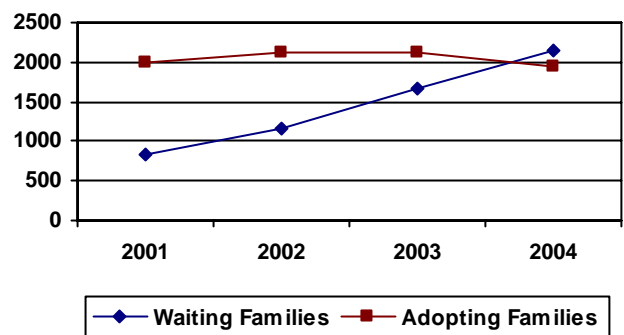
- The widening disparity in the length of time African American and Caucasian children wait to be adopted. African American children often wait twice as long to be placed. The majority of Ohio children awaiting permanent homes are African American—48% versus 46% nationally.<sup>3</sup>
- Over half of children awaiting permanent homes are between the ages of 10 and 20. Children over the age of 9 are considered to have special needs as the difficulty of finding placement for these children increases with age.<sup>4</sup>
- Ohio ranks below the federal standard of placing 32% of children within two years of custody. In 2005, 44% of children were in state custody more than two years.<sup>5</sup>

### *Economics of Adoption:*

Most families seeking to adopt have low to moderate incomes. The cost of a home study and adoption application can range from \$0 to over \$3,000. Foster care adoptions are typically the least expensive, while private agency adoptions can cost as much as \$40,000. These costs are often prohibitive.

The Ohio Adoptive Services Subsidy (OASS) distributes federal funds in an effort to provide assistance directly to adoptive parents.<sup>1</sup>

- Ohio received national recognition for its employment of the Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy (PASS) which can assist with health-related costs.<sup>2</sup>
- The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (1980) created the Title IV-E subsidy for families adopting children with special needs. In January 2007, the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC 5101: 2-49) was amended to restrict the definition of special needs in order to prevent most children adopted through a private agency from receiving Title IV funds.



The number of families actually adopting children has remained fairly steady despite an increase in families waiting to adopt.

### ***Federal Adoption Measures:***

Ohio has yet to achieve the federal adoption measure of finding homes for 32% of children within two years of initial custody. This benchmark tends to be a disincentive for local adoption services to seek permanent placement for children who have been in custody longer than two years. This only compounds the problems involved with finding homes for children over 10, already a majority of those waiting to be adopted.

### ***Recommendations for Ohio:***

The lingering challenges facing Ohio's adoption services can be best addressed by streamlining the system. By supporting innovative solutions, legislators and professionals have the potential to improve the chances of finding families for Ohio's children:

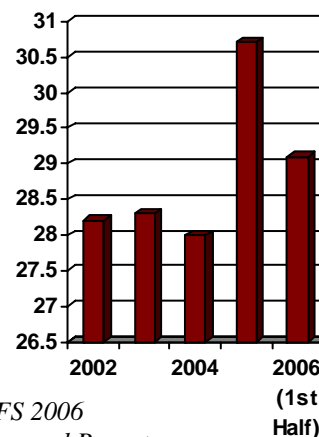
- Shift adoption agencies' focus from "finding kids for families" to "finding families for kids." This subtle change in language places the emphasis on the needs of children waiting to be adopted.
- Begin recruiting efforts when a family initially contacts an adoption agency. The entanglement of bureaucracy and costs that can accompany premature screening may dissuade families from pursuing adoption.<sup>7</sup>
- Provide financial resources for prospective families, such as home study stipends, to reduce the financial barrier to recruitment efforts.
- Standardize home study assessment or institute reciprocity among Ohio counties.<sup>8</sup> Currently, each county requires a different home study assessment which creates a duplication of effort and additional costs. Reciprocity across counties would create a wider pool of adoptive families for children.
- Develop a shared database system among adoption agencies to track adoption placement and disruption rates in order to more effectively target the recruitment of families.

### ***About the Author:***

Jon Bosscher is a graduate research assistant at the Institute for Child & Family Policy. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in History at BGSU.

*References: 1) ODJFS 2005 Adoption Performance Report, 2) Adopt Ohio Kids 2005 Performance Report, 3) ODJFS 2005 Report, 4) ODJFS 2006 Semiannual Report, 5) Adopt Ohio Kids 2005 Performance Report, 6) U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families report to Congress on Adoption, 2004, 7) ODHS, Ohio Adoption Guide, 8) Gail M. Valdez, J. Regis McNamara. "Matching to Prevent Adoption Disruption," Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal. Vol. 11, No. 5, 1994.*

#### **Percent of Children Adopted Within Two Years of Initial Custody, FFY 2002-1st Half of FFY 2006**



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