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Adoption in Massachusetts: Private and Public Agency Placements and Practices in 2005: Issue Brief on Adoption-Related Services Offered

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The Center for Adoption Research is part of the Center for Health Policy and Research (CHPR) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School under the direction of Dr. Ron Steingard. CHPR's mission is to promote and conduct applied research, evaluation, quality improvement, education and training aimed at informing policy decisions and advancing practice to improve the health and well-being of people served by public agencies. For more information, please contact us at healthpolicy@umassmed.edu.

At the Center for Adoption Research, under the direction of Martha Henry, Ph.D., we are dedicated to developing practical responses to improve foster care and adoption policy and practice by conducting research, policy analysis, and developing education and training programs. In line with our mission, we conduct an annual survey of all licensed adoption agencies in Massachusetts. This survey collects information on the number and nature of adoptions finalized in Massachusetts each year.

Background

Since 1999, Massachusetts law¹ has required that every licensed adoption agency in the Commonwealth provide annual information about the number and nature of adoptions finalized through their agency. Massachusetts is an agency state, meaning that all residents seeking to adopt a child must utilize the services of an adoption agency licensed by the state. Specifically, all Massachusetts citizens interested in adopting a child must, at a minimum, have a home study conducted by a Massachusetts licensed adoption agency. These agencies may provide services for private domestic adoptions, international adoptions or they may contract with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide services for adoptions from foster care.

The Center for Adoption Research collects and analyzes the data on the number and nature of adoptions finalized annually, and disseminates this information to interested parties. The request for data from licensed Massachusetts agencies, issued in the summer of 2006 to collect information about adoptions finalized in calendar year 2005, was completed and returned by 45 private adoption agencies² and by DSS. The results of this survey are being presented in five issue briefs. This issue brief focuses on services offered by private adoption agencies.

¹In 1999, HB 4900 37 amended M.G.L. 28A §10 (c) (8). This is the fifth annual report. Previous reports can be downloaded from www.umassmed.edu/adoption/index.aspx. In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, only licensed adoption agencies may legally place children for adoption. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) regulates adoption agencies in Massachusetts; contact them at www.eec.state.ma.us for information about regulations, as well as a listing of licensed agencies. The EEC Central Office is located at: 600 Washington St., 6th Floor, Suite 6100, Boston, MA 02111.
Phone: (617) 988-6600

² This represents a 98% response rate from private agencies.

Services Offered

Post-adoption services are important to the stability and well-being of the adoptive family. Agencies were asked whether they offered any of 24 services commonly provided by adoption agencies or identified as important services by parties involved in the adoption process (e.g., counseling services and support groups). The services provided differed by agency, in part because of the different types of adoptions offered (e.g., private domestic, intercountry, foster care). Table 1 shows the percentage of agencies reporting each service offered (both pre- and post-placement of a child).

Massachusetts Adoption Agencies Offering Services. Of the private adoption agencies completing the 2005 survey, 76% (n=34) offered services for domestic adoptions (either directly or networking with other agencies), 76% (n=34) offered services for international adoptions (either directly or by networking with other agencies), and 27% (n=12) offered services for adoptions from foster care through a contract with DSS. Thirty eight percent (n=17) of the private adoption agencies reported that they offered home study and post placement services for adoptive parents working through another agency, and 47% (n=21) offered counseling services to birth parents. Results from the survey indicate that 363 birth parents received counseling services during 2005. Of the birth parents who were counseled, 148 made adoption placements for children through a Massachusetts adoption agency.

Informational/Educational Meetings. The most common service provided by agencies (89%) was individual orientation meetings. An orientation generally involves introducing a family to the agency's services, and providing an overview of the adoption process. Orientations can be presented in either an individual or group format. Approximately half of all agencies provided group orientation meetings. One agency provided an online pre-adoption workshop.

Services for Birth Parents. Just over half of the agencies (56%) provided pre-placement counseling for birth parents, while 49% of agencies provided post-placement counseling services for birth parents. Very few agencies provided birth parent support groups (2% pre-placement, 4% post-placement) or birth parent housing (7% pre-placement, 4% post-placement). Birth parent living expenses were provided by 40% of agencies pre-placement, and 27% of agencies post-placement.

Table 1: Provision of Adoption Related Services in 2005

Type of Service	Pre-Placement	Post-Placement
Information/Orientation meetings – Individual	89%	31%
Information/Orientation meetings – Groups	56%	16%
Educational Programs – Individuals	53%	42%
Educational Programs – Groups	44%	31%
Birth Parent Counseling	56%	49%
Birth Parent Support Groups	2%	4%
Birth Parent Housing	7%	4%
Birth Parent Living Expenses	40%	27%
Individual and Family Counseling	62%	51%
Parent Training for Special Needs Adoption	38%	16%
Adoptive Parent Support Groups	42%	40%
Support Groups for Children who were Adopted	9%	16%
Support Groups for Adults who were Adopted	9%	9%
Intermediary Services Related to Search in Adoption	11%	42%
Counseling Services Related to Search in Adoption	18%	44%
Intermediary Services Related to Reunion	9%	38%
Counseling Services Related to Reunion	13%	38%
Support Groups for Adoptive Families (including Children)	13%	16%
Therapeutic Day Services	0%	0%
Crisis Intervention	27%	29%
Mentor Families	18%	11%
Recreational/Social Activities	36%	44%
Advocacy	33%	33%
Referrals to Other Services	69%	62%
Other: Online pre-adoption workshop	2%	0%

N = 45

Services for Adoptive Families. Over half of the agencies offered individual and family counseling (62% pre-placement and 51% post-placement) to adoptive families. Agencies also offered support group services for adoptive parents (42% pre- and 40% post-placement), adoptive families (13% pre- and 16% post-placement), children who were adopted (16% post-placement) and adults who were adopted (9%). Parent training for special needs adoption was offered by 38% of agencies pre-placement, while only 16% of agencies offered this service post-placement. More than one quarter of agencies offered

crisis intervention services and one third offered advocacy services. However, no agencies offered therapeutic day services.

Services Related to Search and Reunion. Agencies were asked if they offered services related to search and reunion. The term *search* in adoption can refer to either a birth parent seeking information about a child for whom an adoption plan was completed, or a person who was adopted seeking information about his/her birth parents. The term *reunion* in adoption refers to a personal meeting between a person who was adopted and one or more birth relatives. Over 40% of agencies offered either intermediary services or counseling related to search in adoption, while 38% of agencies offered these services in relation to reunion.

Discussion

Licensed adoption agencies in Massachusetts provide services for private domestic adoptions, international adoptions, and adoptions from the public foster care system. The types of adoptions provided influence the nature of services provided by the agency. While individual and family counseling, and counseling for birth parents were provided by over half of reporting agencies, support group services were not as common.

Post-adoption services are important to the stability and well-being of the adoptive family, and are especially helpful when offered as normative supports for the adoptive family³. While much of the research has focused on adoption from foster care populations, there have been some studies of outcomes for children who were adopted internationally. Although children who were adopted tend to be overrepresented in mental health referrals compared with children who were not adopted, adults who were adopted as children are underrepresented in the adult mental health population.⁴ There are several theories that might explain why children who were adopted are overrepresented in mental health referrals, including genetic factors, issues arising from the adoption process, issues related to pre-adoptive experiences, problems related to the adoptive parent-child relationship, and referral bias.⁵ Referral bias means that parents of children who were adopted are more likely to seek services than parents of non-adopted children, possibly because of increased awareness of resources available and lack of family medical or mental health histories. While some behavioral issues during childhood may be related to the adoption event, access to post-placement services often leads to a decrease in these problems over time. Research suggests that early intervention is helpful; adoptive parents should seek resources and referrals as needed. Children's problems tend to decrease with early intervention⁶ and as they spend more time with their adoptive family.

³ Casey Family Services. (2002). *Strengthening families & communities: An approach to post-adoption services: A white paper*. Downloaded from:

http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casey_pawhitepaper.pdf

⁴ Juffer, F. & van Ijzendoorn, M. (2005). Behavior problems and mental health referrals of international adoptees: A meta-analysis. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 293, (20). p. 2501-2515.

⁵ Peters, B., Atkins, M., & McKay, M. (1999). Adopted children's behavior problems: A review of five explanatory models. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 19, (3) p. 297-328.

⁶ Juffer, F. & van Ijzendoorn, M. (2005).

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