



National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

INFORMATION PACKET
Birth Parents: Needs and Services

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SUMMARY: NEEDS AND SERVICES OF BIRTH PARENTS

Many factors contribute to a family's involvement with the child welfare system. A strong correlation exists between poverty and child abuse and neglect (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2004). Unintended neglect of children often occurs when families are unable to meet basic needs. Caregivers also self-report that the resulting depression and despair from poverty often impairs parenting and increases self-doubt about parenting abilities (Russell, Harris, & Gockel, 2008). Other stressors including substance abuse, mental illness and domestic violence are found to consistently coexist in households where abuse and neglect are present (Gregoire & Schultz, 2001). Another aspect of child abuse is differences in cultural expectations and norms (Negroni-Rodriguez, 2003) as well as the intergenerational transmission of abuse that was considered normal and acceptable when the parents were growing up themselves (Benoit & Dunlap, 2006).

Child welfare systems provide services in an effort to support parents and allow them to better care for their children, however, most public child welfare services focus on the needs of the child rather than comprehensive family support services because agency workers do not have the time or resources to prioritize family support interventions in their practice (Kemp, Allen-Eckard, Ackroyd, Becker, & Burke, 2005). The current system that offers services such as childcare, housing and food assistance, mental health and substance abuse treatment and parenting skills education does not address the fact that many parents begin to feel disconnected from parenting duties when their children are no longer in their care and lose the motivation to complete services and even attend scheduled visits (Colapinto, 1997). Many parents feel that they are repeatedly set up for failure by the system and are resentful of the fact that others are telling them they are unfit to care for their children. Therefore, in providing services to birth parents the system must focus not only on providing appropriate services in a timely manner but engaging parents and allowing them to take an active role in the planning process.

FACT SHEET: NEEDS AND SERVICES OF BIRTH PARENTS

- Parents of children in foster care often have **multiple and especially complex problems** including poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, health problems like HIV/AIDS, and abuse or neglect as a child (Bilchik, 2003).
- It is estimated that most (**65%**) children are placed in foster care for reasons of neglect, indicating a need for more concrete preventive services. **28%** are removed from their homes for physical or sexual abuse (Children's Rights, n.d.).
- The definition of **neglect** varies by state but is frequently defined in terms of deprivation of adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, or supervision (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2007).
- Children whose parents abuse **alcohol and drugs** are almost three times more likely to be abused and more than four times more likely to be neglected than children of parents who do not abuse alcohol and drugs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as cited in Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], n.d.). An estimated **40-80%** of the families involved in the child welfare system have problems with alcohol and/or drugs (Child Welfare League of America, 2001).
- Children removed due to parental alcohol and substance abuse **remain in care longer** and experience significantly **higher rates of adoption** than children removed for other reasons (Vanderploeg, et al., 2007).
- There is a **shortage** in all types of publicly funded substance abuse treatment opportunities for those in need, especially for women. All states report long waiting lists for services. **63%** of the people who are in need of treatment for drug abuse do not receive it (CWLA, 2001).
- **Domestic violence** may be the single most important context for child abuse. In **30% to 60%** of families where either child maltreatment or woman battering is identified, it is likely

that both forms of abuse exist (Edelson, as cited in New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence [NYS OPDV], n.d.). Women report being (**8 times**) more likely to use corporal punishment with their children while living with abusive partners than alone or with a non-abusive partner (Walker, as cited in NYS OPVD, 1998).

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POLICIES & LEGISLATION: NEEDS AND SERVICES OF BIRTH PARENTS

(Adapted from the Child Welfare League of America: www.cwla.org and the Child Welfare Information Gateway: www.childwelfare.gov)

Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980

- Establishes core procedural requirements and safeguards that directly focus upon chronic problems within the child welfare system. Along with requisites such as administrative case reviews and foster care placement reviews the Act also calls for the provision of preventive and reunification services, when safe and appropriate to do so, to high-risk families either preventing or alleviating the need for child removal.

Family Support Act of 1988

- Amends Title IV of the Social Security Act to encourage and assist needy children and parents under the new program to obtain the education, training, and employment needed to avoid long-term welfare dependence, and to make other necessary improvements such as the prevention of neglect.

Family Preservation and Support Initiative of 1993

- Added to the Social Security Act of 1993, this Initiative provides funding to state child welfare agencies for the purpose of developing, establishing, or expanding a program of family preservation services and community-based family support services such as parenting information classes, respite care, and assistance in obtaining benefits.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997

- Renews emphasis on early decision-making to keep children safe and in permanent families by expediting timelines for decision-making. The law requires that a court review plans for a child's permanent living arrangement within 12 months of the date that a child enters foster care. It also requires that if a child is in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, that a petition to end a parent's rights to the child must be filed, unless certain exceptions apply.

The Child Protection and Alcohol and Drug Partnership Act (Reintroduced in 2008)

- This bill would offer \$1.9 billion over five years to state child welfare and substance abuse agencies that agree to take steps in jointly developing and increasing treatment services, establishing appropriate screening and assessment tools, or improving strategies to engage and retain parents in treatment and provide after-care support with the goal of promoting safety and permanence for children and recovery for their parents.

BEST PRACTICES & MODEL PROGRAMS: NEEDS AND SERVICES OF BIRTH PARENTS

The Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP)

- CWOP is a parent/professional partnership dedicated to public child welfare reform in New York City through increased, meaningful parent involvement in service and policy planning. Advocates, many of whom were personally involved in abuse/neglect cases, work to educate and organize parents currently in the system to transform the delivery of services to families on all systemic levels. <http://www.cwop.org/>

Brooklyn Family Defense Project (BFDP)

- Providing representation for parents with abuse and neglect cases in Family Court, BFDP assigns multidisciplinary teams of supervising attorneys, staff attorneys, social workers, social work interns, paralegals and parent advocates to high-needs cases. The Out-of-Court Advocacy Teams comprehensively address the needs of parents including service referrals, welfare and Medicaid assistance, agency case conferences and other support.
<http://www.lsnysny.org/RTF1.cfm?pagename=Offices>

NYC Administration for Children's Services Improved Outcomes for Children (IOC)

- Announced in early 2007, IOC is a comprehensive overhaul of the current child welfare system in New York City designed to improve the results of private foster care agencies under contract to the city. ACS staff actively participate in key decision-making conferences

to expedite the process and avoid duplication of services. Other foster care systems that have implemented similar changes have seen an increase in the number of available foster homes, decreased use of residential care, increased number of finalized adoptions and stability of adoptions, shorter stays in foster care and fewer children re-entering after reunification with their families. http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/about/ioc_initiative.shtml

Children’s Service League Intensive Reunification Program, Topeka, Kansas

- Implementing an evidence-based treatment reunification model the Intensive Reunification Program provides 36 weeks of in-home services with a focus on concrete help in areas such as financial stability, substance abuse treatment and vocational attainment and parents participate in an innovative empowerment-based, parent-driven support group. The program provides multiple opportunities for parent-child interaction which allow for conflicts to arise and be resolved in manners that are not violent or defeating. One year later the families that participated in this model have reunification rates that are double that of comparable families receiving the agency’s conventional reunification services.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/permanency/reunification/related.cfm>

WEBSITES & RESOURCES: NEEDS AND SERVICES OF BIRTH PARENTS

Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care www.pewfostercare.org

- An independent, nonpartisan entity dedicated to developing effective, practical policy recommendations to improve outcomes in the foster care system. Of primary importance are expediting the movement of children from foster care into safe, permanent, nurturing families, and preventing unnecessary placements in foster care.

American Humane Association www.americanhumane.org

- Advances child welfare practices while improving and enhancing the capacity of child welfare systems and the broader community to respond to child abuse and neglect in order to strengthen families. “Guidelines for Need-Based Service Planning in Child Welfare” is available at:

http://www.americanhumane.org/site/DocServer/Casey_intro_booklet.pdf?docID=1341

Child Welfare League of America www.cwla.org

- An association of nearly 800 public and private nonprofit agencies committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of children and families. Advocates for the advancement of public policy, sets and promotes standards for best practice, and delivers superior membership services.

Center for Family Representation www.cfrny.org

- Provides free legal services to parents in crisis, trains practitioners in the child welfare and court systems on best practices to support families and provides leadership at the city, state and national level on how best to strengthen families.

New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence www.opdv.state.ny.us

- Provides information on the overlap between child abuse and neglect and domestic violence and offers intervention guidelines for child welfare workers, curricula for trainings and other information and resources.