

## **ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE**

### **What is foster care?**

The majority of youth in the foster care system enter it because they have suffered physical or emotional neglect or abuse. The foster care system exists to provide a temporary, stable, and home-like environment for these children who must be separated from their parents. Foster care is intended to be a short-term solution; the goal for children in care is *permanency*, a permanent placement through reunification, kinship care, or adoption. If parental reunification is not possible, most children become available for adoption.

### **What does NCFA believe about foster care?**

NCFA advocates for permanency for *every* child in foster care, whether that permanency is achieved through reunification or adoption. We give special attention to finding families for the more than 104,000 children currently eligible and waiting to be adopted. NCFA's recommendations for foster care reform focus on studying and reassessing existing child welfare policies in order to establish clear policies and allocate resources to allow more children and youth in care to find permanency in a timely manner. NCFA prioritizes the crucial but often neglected strategy of parent recruitment and training, as well as the important post-adoption services that allow families to succeed and thrive. We believe that placing a child in an adoptive family is *not* the end of the process; support and services must be available for as long as needed for the sake of the child and his or her parents. At the heart of all our policy recommendations for foster care is the belief that every child deserves a safe, nurturing, permanent home – whether that is through reunification, kinship care, or adoption.

### **What are the facts?**

As of September 30, 2011:

- Number of children in U.S. foster care: 401,000
- Number of children waiting to be adopted: 104,011
- Number of children adopted from foster care in FY 2011: 50,516
- Percentage of children adopted out of foster care who were adopted by their foster parents: 54%
- Average age of a child in foster care: 9.3 years old
- Average length of stay for a child in foster care: 23.9 months
- Average length of stay for a child in foster care waiting to be adopted: 23.6 months
- Percentage of children adopted out of foster care who receive an adoption subsidy: 90%
- Percentage of children adopted out of foster care who are adopted by single parents: 30%

(Source: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/afcars-report-19>)

### **How does it work?**

#### ***Foster/Resource families***

Foster/resource families provide essential care and support to youth that have experienced abuse and/or neglect and have been separated from their families. Children and youth in care often require specialized care in addition to a stable home environment. Child welfare systems are always in need of qualified foster parents to help care for children and youth in care. Both married and single adults can apply to become licensed foster/resource parents. Foster parents are required to complete a homestudy and attend training classes in order to be approved to care for children. This process varies from state to state, and usually takes several months to complete, depending on each state's requirements. Once parents are approved, children can be placed in their care until the children are reunified with biological family, adopted, or moved to another placement.

#### ***Adoption from foster care***

Those interested in adopting a child from foster care have several different options: some adopt an unrelated child available for adoption; some foster-to-adopt; some adopt a relative from foster care. Not every foster parent chooses to adopt, but foster parents are responsible for around 54% of adoptions from foster care.

Adoption from foster care is not an expensive process. The majority of families that adopt from foster care (90%) will receive some kind of adoption subsidy to help provide for the child. Families adopting from foster care are also eligible for the one-time adoption tax credit.\* Finally, because state agencies generally facilitate adoptions from foster care, the legal process can be completed at no or little cost.

In order to adopt from foster care, parents must complete a homestudy and background check; in many cases they must also fulfill all state requirements for foster parents. A child will then be placed in their home with the intent that she or he will be adopted. The time it takes to legally finalize an adoption varies based on each child's unique needs and experiences, as well as state law.

The finalization of an adoption is only one step on the path to permanency. It is essential that the adoptive family receive any and all necessary, ongoing support so the child can thrive in the new family. Support services might include individual and family counseling, respite care, support groups, or other services based on the unique needs of each family.

\* To learn about the history of the adoption tax credit and current efforts to preserve and make it permanent, visit [www.adoptiontaxcredit.org](http://www.adoptiontaxcredit.org). For more information about how to claim it, see <http://www.nacac.org/taxcredit/taxcredit.html>.

### **Where can I learn more?**

FamiliesforAll.org: NCFA's website dedicated to connecting children waiting to be adopted in foster care with forever families because we believe there's enough love in America for every child.

AdoptUSKids ([www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)): A program of the U.S. Children's Bureau to raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families, and to assist states, territories, and tribes in recruiting and retaining families to adopt or foster children.

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption ([www.davethomasfoundation.org](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org)): The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption believes that every child deserves to live in a safe, loving, and permanent family, and that every child is adoptable. The Dave Thomas Foundation provides resources to educate the public on foster care and brings systemic change through Wendy's Wonderful Kids, a highly successful child-focused parent recruitment model for children and youth in foster care. Youth served by this program are up to three times more likely to be adopted.

Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's Foster Youth Internship Program ([www.ccaainstitute.org/our-programs/foster-youth-internship/about.html](http://www.ccaainstitute.org/our-programs/foster-youth-internship/about.html)): CCAI's Foster Youth Internship program offers young adults who spent time in foster care with the opportunity to complete a congressional internship and share their experiences and opinions on how to improve the foster care system.

NCFA's monthly policy publication, the *Adoption Advocate* (add link: [www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/adoption-advocate.html](http://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/adoption-advocate.html)), covers a wide range of topics in adoption and foster care. Recent *Adoption Advocate* articles focusing on issues in foster care include:  
No. 51: The Unique Educational Challenges Facing Youth in Foster Care (add link: [https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFA\\_ADOPTION\\_ADVOCATE\\_NO51.pdf](https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFA_ADOPTION_ADVOCATE_NO51.pdf))  
No. 48: Supporting Maltreated Children: Countering the Effects of Neglect and Abuse (add link: [https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFA\\_ADOPTION\\_ADVOCATE\\_NO48.pdf](https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFA_ADOPTION_ADVOCATE_NO48.pdf))

No. 47: Advocating For America's Youth in Foster Care: Perspectives and Recommendations from Former Foster Youth (add link: [https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFA\\_ADOPTION\\_ADVOCATE\\_NO47.pdf](https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFA_ADOPTION_ADVOCATE_NO47.pdf))

No. 39: Engaging the Private Sector to Increase Positive Permanency Outcomes for Children in Foster Care (add link:

[https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/nca\\_adoption\\_advocate\\_no39.pdf](https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/nca_adoption_advocate_no39.pdf))

No. 38: Race and Identity in Transracial Adoption: Suggestions for Adoptive Parents (add link: [https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/nca\\_adoption\\_advocate\\_no38.pdf](https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/nca_adoption_advocate_no38.pdf))

No. 35: Better Prospects, Lower Cost: The Case for Increasing Foster Care Adoption (add link: [https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/NCFA\\_ADOPTION\\_ADVOCATE\\_NO35.pdf](https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/NCFA_ADOPTION_ADVOCATE_NO35.pdf))

Financial Resources ([www.adoptioncouncil.org/for-families/financial-resources.html](http://www.adoptioncouncil.org/for-families/financial-resources.html)): NCFA maintains a list of adoption grants, loans, and fundraising tools that might help facilitate your adoption.