



POST-ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES IN ILLINOIS: RESULTS FROM A STATEWIDE CAREGIVER SURVEY

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In Illinois, the number of children in publicly-assisted permanent homes with adoptive parents and legal guardians surpassed the number of children in state-funded foster care for the first time in July 2000. This historic increase in adoption rates was largely driven by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) mandate that states ensure that children in foster care transition to permanent homes, either through prompt reunification with their biological families or through adoption. ASFA also provided financial incentives to states for increasing the number of adoptions from foster care. Illinois passed this financial incentive along to caregivers by issuing monthly subsidies and offering certain additional services. Although these policies and the resulting increase in the number of children moved from foster care to adoptive homes in Illinois have been widely considered to be a major success, some observers have questioned the long-term stability of these newly formed families and whether the children would receive needed services.

To examine these concerns, the Children and Family Research Center conducted a statewide telephone survey of a randomly selected sample of 350 caregivers who had adopted or assumed legal guardianship of a child living in foster care between July 1, 1997 and June 30, 2002. Caregivers who had adopted more than one child were asked to focus their answers on one randomly selected adopted child in their household. This brief reports on components of the survey that assessed the types of services needed by these post-adoption or post-guardianship families, determined whether they had obtained needed services, examined how needed services were met, and solicited caregivers' views regarding the adequacy of their state subsidy.

Children in this sample ranged in age from 6 to 16 years, with an average age of 12. Caregivers' reports of their children's challenges suggested a significant need for services: 30% had a diagnosed mental health problem, 33% scored in the clinically significant range on a standardized behavior problem measure, and 31% were receiving special education services.

Did Families Need Services and Did They Receive Them?

Nearly all of the caregivers reported needing one or more post-permanency services. Only 15% reported needing no service, 22% needed one service, 26% needed 2-3 services, 25% needed 4-6 services, and 12% had 7-13 service needs. As might be expected, children with identified physical health, mental health, or special education diagnoses had a higher number of service needs, as did children with a higher number of behavior problems. Several caregiver factors were also related to more identified service needs. Caregivers who had higher levels of income and education and those who were employed reported having more service needs.

Most families obtained the services they needed – 81% reported no unmet service needs. However, some service needs were not met: 14% of the families had one or two service needs that were not met and 5% had three or more unmet service needs. As shown in the table below, the most commonly needed services were dental care (39%), day care (37%), counseling (35%), and camp (35%). The service need that caregivers were most likely to report having been unmet was day care – 15% reported a need for day care but did not receive it.



Post-Permanency Services Needed and Received (N=348)

Service	Needed Service	Received Service	Did Not Receive Needed Service
	%	%	%
Dental Care	39	35	4
Day Care	37	22	15
Counseling	35	27	8
Camp	35	26	9
Psychological Evaluation	26	19	7
Speech Therapy	23	17	6
Family Therapy	21	14	7
Psychiatrist	16	12	4
Orthodontia	14	9	5
Educational Advocacy	13	6	7
Respite Care	10	5	5

Children with a diagnosed mental health problem or a behavioral disorder (as measured by the Behavior Problem Index, a parent checklist) were more likely to have unmet service needs. No caregiver or household characteristics were associated with unmet needs.

Are Post-Permanency Subsidies Adequate?

Many caregivers appear to have relied heavily on their adoption and guardianship subsidies to support the costs of raising their child. Thirty percent of the families reported an annual family income of less than \$20,000 (including their subsidy income); the average yearly subsidy equaled \$6180. For some, the subsidy was the primary source of family income. As might be expected, given their limited incomes, the costs of raising their adoptive or guardianship children were a financial burden for some of the families. Twenty-eight percent of caregivers reported having to “do without” so their child’s needs could be met. Caregivers had also borrowed money (25%) or worked extra (31%) to meet their child’s needs. Importantly, 10% of caregivers reported that their child had to “do without” needed services due to a lack of financial resources. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority (63%) of caregivers felt that the amount of their monthly subsidy was inadequate to meet their child’s needs.

However, when asked how much additional money would be required to meet these needs, most (62%) responded \$200 or less per month.

What are the Implications of These Findings?

Most post-adoption and guardianship families, like many traditional families, required some services and had successfully obtained many needed services. A small group of families had multiple unmet needs. Families whose children were challenged by mental health or behavioral problems were more likely to have unmet service needs. These families may benefit from expanding the availability of children’s mental health services. Future research should explore why families with lower incomes and education report fewer service needs. It is possible that families with the greatest material needs are less able to identify service needs or are not aware of services that could benefit their children.

Many families in the study subsist on a very limited income and most of them needed fiscal support to ensure their child’s well-being. However, the adoption and guardianship subsidy provided by the state was viewed as inadequate by most families.



Recommended Citation

Children and Family Research Center. (2011). *Post-Adoption and Guardianship Services in Illinois: Results from a Statewide Caregiver Survey*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Related Publications

For the full report, see Fuller, T.L., Bruhn, C., Cohen, L., Lis, M., Rolock, N. & Sheridan, K. (2006). *Supporting Adoptions and Guardianships in Illinois: An Analysis of Subsidies, Services, and Spending*. Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The report is available on the Center website: cfr.illinois.edu.

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