

Driving Change in Adoption

ACTION STEPS SUMMARY

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ACTION STEPS SUMMARY

The tables in this document provide a detailed summary of the action steps identified by participants related to each policy or practice recommendation summarized in the Recommendations section of this report.

Table 1. CONSENT AND CONSULTATION
<p>WHY THIS MATTERS: <i>Think Tank participants emphasized that children and youth should be involved in any critical decision making around their legal permanency and information privacy, in a manner that responds to their developmental needs.</i></p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 1: Collaborate closely with youth with lived experience to reform existing consent/consultation policy.</p>
<p>POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A federal blueprint (revision of CAPTA) should establish minimum standards for state’s consent practice • Establish an Adoptee Bill of Rights • Identify existing youth advisory board and youth with lived experience in adoption to help determine what consent and consultation should look like in state-specific adoption process • Determine what age-appropriate tiers of informed consent should look like • Children and young people should be consulted in age-appropriate ways to make decisions about their preferences for a family, the creation of the profile, the posting of their profile, and the supports they need after adoption • Equip the state’s adoption workforce with clear practice guidance detailing expectations for informed consent and ongoing consultation
<p>RECOMMENDATION 2: Create a process for automatic, periodic review of existing consents and adoption profile with the child or young person.</p>
<p>POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish 6-month automatic profile review with child/young person to update information and quarterly review of current consents • Create a clear process for a child or young person to request a review of their profile as needed outside of the automatic review • Review the child/young person’s current consents during the adoption process on a quarterly basis to ensure their understanding of what they are consenting to, and what (if anything) they would change

Table 2. PHOTOLISTING

WHY THIS MATTERS: *Think Tank participants emphasized the importance of safeguarding the personal information and images of children and young people. They felt that, with the technology available, more innovative options for photolistings are possible to represent a child or young person holistically.*

RECOMMENDATION 1: Share children’s or young people’s information securely

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- As an alternative to public photolistings, consider leveraging password-protected portals for vetted families to view children’s or young people’s profiles in limited numbers
- If posting images or videos in a protected portal, ensure there are protections to prevent screenshots and reverse image searches
- Consider creating a bidirectional matching portal, where children/young people can be matched with potential families, or even other types of support (for example, foster parents, legal representative, CASA, etc.)
- If hosting events with children’s or young people’s personal information, extend invitations only to families already vetted (for example, through background checks, trainings, and mental health screenings)
- Ensure children or young people have been informed of their rights and understand the information they are consenting to share

RECOMMENDATION 2: Create policy guidance requiring privacy protections for listings

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Identify young adult advisory boards or youth with lived experience who can collaborate to revise or develop policy guidance outlining minimum privacy and security standards for photolisting and profiles

RECOMMENDATION 3: Engage children and young people meaningfully in developing and periodically reviewing their listing.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Provide age-appropriate worksheets for a child to fill out about themselves and indicate what information they’d like included in their listing
- Encourage submissions that provide a holistic picture of a child or young person, beyond their photo and written description. Examples include poetry, artwork, collage, vision board, personal statements about themselves and the type of family they are looking for, snippets of audio file interviews between the child/young person and an adult support, list of accomplishments, activities, interests, and music playlists.
- Assist a child or young person in selecting a trusted adult of their choosing to support the development of their listing (can be an adult support not affiliated with child welfare or their treatment team)
- Selected adult support should be trained in trauma-responsive engagement and strengths-based narrative writing to prepare them to codevelop a child or young person’s profile

RECOMMENDATION 4: Inform children/youth of their options for photolisting/profiles and provide choice as to where it is posted.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Develop a consent process that includes explaining to children and young people, in a developmentally appropriate way, what their options are for listing their information, and respect their right to choose who can view their profile (including their own family of origin as well as nonrelatives)

Table 3. RECRUITMENT OF DIVERSE FAMILIES

WHY THIS MATTERS: *Think Tank participants described how trust, cultural grounding, and intentional community presence are essential to engaging diverse caregivers, including kin, in adoption.*

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish or expand child-specific, kin-first recruitment policies and practices.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Develop, and embed in practices, child-specific and kin-specific recruitment plans
- Allocate resources (economic and concrete supports) to address barriers to placement of sibling groups and preserve family connections
- Adjust licensing regulations to be kin-friendly and reduce systemic barriers
- Utilize Family Find searches to generate lists of contacts that can receive notification that a child/youth in their family is awaiting adoption, and youth can decide who they would like to contact

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest in community-centered, culturally grounded recruitment.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Use Geomapping and demographic data to identify communities with prospective families who reflect the identities of children and youth awaiting adoption
- Embed recruiters within trusted community centers and hubs; develop relationships with community champions who support adoption recruitment
- Expand outreach, recruitment, and support of diverse family structures (LGBTQIA+ families, Gen Z adults, multigenerational households, unmarried caregivers, etc.)
- Host and fund networking events to connect prospective families with families who have adopted, such as family bike rides, PTA connections, and churches

RECOMENDATION 3: Effectively communicate supports available before, during, and after adoption finalization.

POTETIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Normalize talking about post-adoption supports at first touchpoints with prospective families
- Offer families concrete supports along their adoption journey (fire extinguisher, cell service for young person, furniture, pay for home study, etc.)

RECOMMENDATION 4: Center recognition and repair of harm and trust building.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Meaningfully acknowledge historical harm with communities most impacted by the child welfare system
- Engage in “socially conscious” recruitment for prospective families who do not want to reinforce harm by the system, through awareness and active consideration of broader social, cultural, and historical impacts
- Host and fund, or attend, culturally aligned community events (not only adoption focused) to build presence and trust

Table 4. RETAINING PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES

WHY THIS MATTERS: *Think Tank participants emphasized that helping families feel prepared and supported, through realistic expectations and transparent communication, enables them to remain engaged throughout the adoption process and beyond.*

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish realistic expectations around youth and family needs before, during, and after the adoption process.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

- Provide training about the impact of trauma and how to respond/support a young person (for example, Trust-Based Relational Intervention [TBRI])
- Intentionally portion complex information about adoption process into digestible formats for families (for example, email series on the right information at the right time)
- Provide low-stakes opportunities for families to address biases. An example is annual Youth Advisory Board event with foster parents and adoptive families considering adopting a young person (to be clear, this is not an adoption event)
- Collective expectations setting: looking for best fit with room for growth or change and addressing unrealistic expectations
- Intentional approach to address stigmas around adoption and adoption of older youth, youth with a variety of needs, expectations of gratitude, etc.
- Continue to provide “just-in-time” type of education as process continues
- Acknowledge family/child fears and use this to launch prevention- and support-focused conversations around family needs
- Equip families with knowledge of, and tools to manage, a child’s experience of grief
- Avoid toxic positivity in framing of communication, normalize hard conversations about adoption process
- Emphasize and normalize a child or young person’s need for healthy connection and attachment, then call out specific supports that can meet a child or young person’s unique needs (Frameworks Institute, 2022).
- Reframe messaging to be strengths-based, and acknowledge that every child’s success story begins with the right connections to supportive, trusted adults

RECOMMENDATION 2: Effectively communicate supports available before, during, and after adoption finalization.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

- Families are looking for partnership—provide consistent follow-through and proactive communication
- Help explore and grow a potential family’s natural support system through their existing social, familial, and community supports to sustain connections and caregiving capacity over time
- Create a peer cohort of connected families with lived experience in the adoption process
- Peer-to-peer mentoring
- Create an intentional hand-off process during times of transition before, during, and post-adoption
- Take an overlapping practice approach where a preadoptive worker and post-adoption worker overlap/coordinate their service delivery as part of case transfer
- For example, C. does a “warm hand-off” between adoption teams, from recruiter, to licensing support specialist, to adoption and post-adoption

Table 5. POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT

WHY THIS MATTERS: *Think Tank attendees highlighted that family and youth needs continue to evolve after adoption, including the need for sustained, accessible, peer-led, community-based, and concrete supports to promote family stability.*

RECOMMENDATION 1: Establish or expand peer-to-peer supports available for adoptive families.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

- Have a helpline that is answered by a parent with adoption experience
- Support groups and peer-to-peer mentoring
- AdoptUSKids podcast and online parent support group
- Create cohorts of connected families with lived experience in the adoption process; peer-to-peer mentoring
- Host and fund events that allow for connection
- Host annual retreat for adoptive families
- Sibling connection events

RECOMMENDATION 2: Ensure families have access to resources and supports beyond the child welfare system.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Create Family Resource Hubs external to child welfare (a few states use their adoption savings fund for this; MI has a post-permanency center)
- Creative contracting out with lived experts (MI) or an Managed Care Organization (KY) to offer follow-up services

RECOMMENDATION 3: Expand or establish economic and concrete supports for youth and families after the adoption process.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

- Tuition waivers/support for postsecondary education, even if adopted
- Resources for relatives to continue adoption training
- Resolve Medicaid & other benefits cliffs (for instance, providing health insurance until 26)
- Respite care
- Educational advocacy assistance (for instance, navigating IEPs and 504 plans)
- Establish waivers/postsecondary supports that are available to youth who are adopted
- Ongoing financial support for discrete expenses (for example, camp fees)

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest in proactive outreach and preventive supports for post-adoptive families to identify crises early and support family stability.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

- Family Resource Hub and postpermanency centers, external to child welfare
- Standardize Foster Care Prevention Plan before finalizing adoption to proactively identify supports that can support family stability and reduce crisis intervention (evidence-based services could be funded by FFPSA)
- Cross-train CPS hotline workers to recognize post-adoption families at intake and respond with prevention services
- Family counseling with an adoption-competent and NTI-trained provider (for example, C.A.S.E)
- Grief-specific services
- Outreach to families at key junctures (for example, based on adoption dissolution data)
- Automatic check-in 1 year after adoption
- Connect in a personal way about available services
- Check-in with family via methods such as email, postcards, fridge magnets, and other reminders as the child ages (driven by data on critical ages when disruptions/dissolutions occur)

Table 6. DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

WHY THIS MATTERS: *Think Tank participants elevated that states need to understand who is awaiting adoption, how youth and families experience the process, and when adoptions are at risk of disruption or dissolution, so that resources, policies, and supports can be targeted to areas of most need.*

RECOMMENDATION 1: Identify and expand data collection and measures to gain awareness of the demographics of youth awaiting adoption.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

- Participants acknowledged that many agencies lack clear, shared data on the demographics of youth awaiting adoption, but felt this information was important for targeted recruitment
- Some participants acknowledged they are aware of out of jurisdiction, out of state, cross-cultural/racial/language adoptions which have resulted from mismatch in recruited families vs. children/youth awaiting adoption (for example, Native child adopted by non-Native, White families; children sent out of state to reside with adoptive family; children adopted by families that did not speak their language)

RECOMMENDATION 2: Gain greater understanding surrounding the experience of youth and adoptive families to improve policies, practices, and available resources.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

- Use journey mapping to understand what adoptive families are currently experiencing in the process (both the physical process and their feelings)
- Give the family a survey about their experience (for example, a jurisdiction offered a stipend and received 448 survey responses)
- Ask families if they feel their post-adoption services are helpful

RECOMMENDATION 3: Establish a process for tracking adoption disruptions and dissolutions to inform prevention and family stabilization as well as resource allocation needs.

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS

- Each state should establish a process for tracking adoption disruptions and dissolutions and report out (for example, SC has a unit that focused on dissolutions)