

Act One

Volume 2, Issue 3

Adoption in Child Time, Inc.

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ONE YEAR IS A LONG TIME IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD

Office of Family and Children Takes Steps to Implement Early Permanency

adoption in child time (Act, Inc) is a not-for-profit corporation that

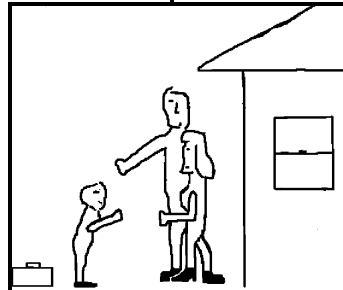
- promotes early permanence for foster children;
- trains attorneys in adoption law and policies;
- provides information and attorney referrals to foster parents interested in adoption.

toll-free in indiana:
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web page:
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James a Kenny,
phd
President
Peter A Kenny, esq
Exec director
Frank Slaby, mba

The Indiana Division of Family and Children (DFC), in its concern to implement new laws concerning foster children, invited ACT President Jim Kenny and ACT Executive Director Peter Kenny to a discussion of upcoming initiatives. During a



In its concern to implement the new laws concerning foster children, the DFC seeks foster parent

very positive meeting, many matters were raised by all parties. Among the actions being taken or contemplated by the DFC are the following:

- 1) Notification of foster parents about all reviews and hearings. Senate Bill 330, which was proposed by ACT and became law in the last legislative session, requires that foster parents be notified of all court hearings five to 10 days in advance, either in person or by certified mail. Foster parents may make their concerns known to the court in oral testimony, in writing, or by requesting legal party status.
- 2) New foster parent manual. The DFC has completed its review and has significantly

updated its foster parent manual. The revised manual, which includes ACT input, will be published in the near future.

- 3) New SNAP committee rules. Changes in SNAP committee procedures are in the review stage.

Changes should become public this fall.

- 4) Concurrent planning. Concurrent planning means that, from the time the child is placed in care, the case manager will begin to develop an alternate plan in the event that reunification does not work out. The purpose is to facilitate and hasten permanence for foster children. Tricia Blender, DFC supervisor of policy and programs, indicated that at this point concurrent planning is merely an idea to be considered. Concurrent planning has not been accepted or implemented in Indiana.

- 5) DFC/Foster Parent Contract ACT proposed and the DFC agreed to consider a revision of the agreement which foster parents sign at each li-

censing period. Written in 1991, the contract needs to be updated so as to conform to current law. ACT intake specialist Martha Nord is compiling foster parent input on this important topic. See page three for her ideas and her work to date.

To contact ACT with your input on any of these topics, write us at the address on page four, call our toll-free number or visit our web page at the address in the left column.

People You Should Know: The Walkers

Tireless workers describes Ken and Dianne Walker, foster parents from New Paris, Indiana, where Ken is a pastor and Dianne is his helpmate, and a full-time foster parent.

In both their previous home in Jasper County, and their current home in Elkhart County, the Walkers have taken leadership positions. Currently they are officers in the Elkhart County Foster Parent Association. (to page 3)

Advocating For Your Foster Child. Here's How.

by James A. Kenny, ACT President

Being an advocate is one of our responsibilities as a foster parent. Nevertheless, even though we have extensive day-to-day knowledge of our children in care, too many of us are afraid to speak up. We fail to represent what we believe is the child's best interests because we fear being blackballed.

Is your child being moved again unwisely? Do you want to adopt and are afraid to say so? Do you believe your child should be in - or out - of a special education class? Does he need some medical treatment? Are there problems with visitation that are being overlooked?

These are just a few examples where foster parents can be effective advocates. If you love your child, you must speak out in his interests.

To be effective use "I" messages. Make it clear that you are voicing your own opinion, and back up that opinion with examples. Do not blame the other party (DFC, other agency, birth parents) for holding a different opinion. Do not whine or complain. Stick to your guns, using those avenues available to you.

1. Say it in writing. Keep a journal with dated entries to document your position. The written word has power over what is merely spoken.

2. Attend all conferences and court hearings. Your voice cannot be heard if you are not there. If you feel afraid, bring another foster parent or the CASA with you. Better still, if the disagreement is serious, bring your attorney along.

3. Use the case conference policy. No important decision can be made concerning your

child without your consent. If you disagree with what the agency plans, you can request in writing a case conference. If you continue to disagree, you have two further appeals to higher levels. And after that, you can still make your position known in court where all matters are ultimately decided. A foster child cannot be suddenly removed against your wise judgment.

4. Work with your CASA. Many foster children have a CASA or guardian-ad-litem appointed to represent the child's best interests. Get to know your child's CASA. By working together you can increase your effectiveness.

5. Try to work matters out within your own county. But if you have made a good effort and you feel your voice is being ignored, if you feel the DFC or agency is not following its own policies, contact James Hmurovich, the director of the Indiana Division of Family and Children. Mr. Hmurovich has traveled to many counties to hear complaints and try to resolve them. He has said he wants to know when the system is not working as it should. Call 317-232-4704 or e-mail him : : jhmurovich@fssa.state.in.us.

State your position briefly and clearly. Do not blame anyone if possible. Tell what you think should happen and why it is not happening. Ask for a fuller hearing.

For ACT's free pamphlet, "Advocating for Your Foster Children," send a business size SASE to the address on page four.

The ACT Bookstore

ACT publishes and offers for sale the following books and pamphlets: See address on page 4.

The Right To a Permanent Home: Stopping Foster Care Drift. (2nd edition) 1998. 52 pages. \$21.50 ppd. Summary of the research on bonding and attachment, new federal and state laws, DFC policies, and adoption subsidies. Written as a legal brief.

The Attorneys' Resource Book. (regularly updated), 1998, 313 pages. \$53.00 ppd. A how-to book for attorneys including the current laws, policies, forms to file, and info on how to get paid.

Bonding and the Right To a Permanent Home. 1999. 16pp. \$5.00 ppd.

The following ACT brochures are **free** with a business size SASE. Up to four brochures per envelope. Brochures may be copied and distributed. Please credit ACT on all copies.

ACT Information Brochure.

Questions and Answers About Adoption by Foster Parents

The Importance of Bonding in Legal Decisions.

The Indiana Case Conference Policy.

The Indiana Cooperative Adoption Law.

Adoption Subsidies and Tax Issues For Adoptive Parents.

How To Advocate For Your Foster Child.

Foster Parent Contract To Be Revised

by Martha Nord, ACT Intake Specialist

I want your ideas!

As foster parents we have the opportunity right now to have some input into important discussions at the state level.

The state is interested in developing a new foster parent/

OFC contract. Do you remember the agreement we all signed when we were licensed? Few of us do, I think. It is outdated and not very meaningful. ACT would like to help develop a meaningful contract between foster parents and the OFC which

defines the responsibilities of each as they work together to promote the best interests of the child and to achieve permanency within one year. Following is the sample contract we have developed so far.

MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CASEWORKERS AND FOSTER PARENTS

1. To make the health, safety and best interests of the foster child the primary guidelines in decisions affecting the child.

2. To recognize that moving children can cause serious harm; to seek and honor each placement as if it will be the last placement necessary. If reunification is no longer the case plan, foster parents and the OFC need to work together to implement another permanency plan. If the foster parents wish to adopt, that should become the permanency plan.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF FOSTER PARENTS

1. To work with the other team members on developing the

case plan and on any changes to the case plan.

2. To keep a journal on each case which records the emotional and physical health of the child, significant events in the child's life, foster parent and child contacts with birth parents, with the OFC, and with other professionals, and information about the progress of the case plan. This journal needs to be available to the court.

3. To attend case conferences.

4. To attend court hearings when the foster parent believes it is in the child's best interests, to make the foster parent's journal available to the court, to provide the court with information about the child and the case.

5. To advocate for the children in their care and to implement the case conference policy when the foster parent believes that the case plan is not in the child's best interests or is not being implemented.

6. To keep the caseworker updated regarding the child and the implementation of the case plan.

7. To read and follow the DFC policies as contained in the Indiana Foster Family Handbook, especially as they pertain to discipline, confidentiality, and bonding.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF CASEWORKERS AND COUNTY OFC'S

1. To work with the foster parents and other team members to develop the case plan and any changes in the plan; to see that the foster parents have a copy of the case plan.

2. To disclose fully all information about the case to the foster parents at the time of placement and as new information becomes

available. The full case file is to be made available to the foster parent to read at the OFC upon request.

3. To include the foster parent in all case conferences.

4. To notify the foster parent of court hearings, as required by ASFA and state laws PL 35 and Senate Bill 330.

We would like your input. What should be added or deleted, changed a little or a lot? Please send your comments before the end of August so that we can bring to the state a document that reflects the best thinking of foster parents. Write to me at 2220 Fairmount Court, Bloomington, IN 47401 or marthanord@hotmail.com or call me at the ACT toll-free number, 1-877-ACT-4KIDS.

The Walkers (cont. from page 1)

The Walkers sponsored a well-attended ACT seminar in New Paris last year.

Licensed since 1993 the Walkers have had 24 foster children. They chose foster parenting, Ken says, "because having children in our lives would enrich us."

Not all challenges were easy. "We had a foster son killed. You don't have anything worse than that." says Ken. "But you gotta take some risk."

The Walkers have adopted Dylan, 4, and they hope to adopt two additional children.

Reflecting on the reward part of their choice to be foster parents, Ken observes, "Now we have three beautiful kids."

A meaningful contract would define the responsibilities of all parties as they work together for the best interests



P O Box 305
Rensselaer IN
47978-0305

In This Issue...

OFC steps toward early permanency...Revising the foster parent contract...Advocacy

When We Move a Child From Home to Home...

When we move a child from home to home
We should approach the move
Like brain surgery.

Review all possible alternatives to avoid this most drastic course.

Still sometimes it must be done.

And when it must be done
We must approach with caution and fear

Knowing we might lose the child entirely

Knowing at best
The procedure will involve pain and trauma
The recovery will be long and difficult
And the scar will remain
Forever.