

Act One

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Adoption in Child Time, Inc.

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

ADOPTION IN CHILD TIME (ACT, INC) IS A NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATION THAT

- promotes early permanency for foster children
- TRAINS ATTORNEYS IN ADOPTION LAW AND POLICIES;
- PROVIDES INFORMATION AND ATTORNEY REFERRALS TO FOSTER PARENTS INTERESTED IN ADOPTION.

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ACT Begins Work On New Initiatives

Achieving early permanency for children in foster care, the primary purpose of ACT's existence, was the theme of an August meeting of ACT leadership. Old and new goals were defined.

Mark Bontrager, social worker with The Villages, proposed that ACT support efforts to develop a case plan quickly once a child comes into care. At present the caseworker has 60 days to present the initial plan to the court. "I have birth parents," says Mark, "who want to get their children back, but they don't know what is required."

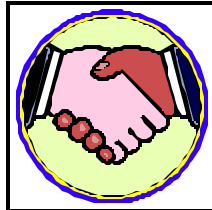
Under the present directive, a child spends two full months in care before any action is taken on his case. ACT proposes that the DFC develop a Family Reunification Plan, a checklist of basic steps required of biological parents whose children have been taken into care. The caseworker would check the relevant data and give it to the biological parents within 48 hours.

Since removing a child from the home is a serious matter, comparable to major

surgery, the reason for the removal should be obvious. Child protective services must report within 24 hours. ACT supports immediate action on a child's case as the first step toward finding a permanent solution within one year.

DFC Takes Action

In pursuit of this goal, President Jim Kenny, social worker Mark Bontrager, and intake specialist Martha Nord met with DFC director James Hmurovich, deputy director Eric Vermeulen and policy planner Stephanie Beasley-Fehrman at DFC offices in Indianapolis. The proposal met with sympathy and agreement. Further action involves developing a definitive checklist to be used statewide and determining the best way to implement this change through the state's



Foster Children Lose a Good Friend

Indiana foster children have lost a good friend with the resignation of state DFC director, Jim Hmurovich. In his eight years in office, Hmurovich cut the average time spent in foster care in half, from over three years to under 20 months.

Indiana was recently recognized by HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson for a 48 percent increase in adoptions, well above the national average. Thompson noted, "I commend states for their efforts to assure that no child grows up without the benefit of a secure, stable family."

Other Hmurovich accomplishments include the implementation of a case conference policy, visits to eleven regions to listen to foster parent complaints, and revisions of the child welfare manual, the foster parents manual, and the DFC/foster parent agreement.

Numbers You Should Know at the DFC

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Protecting Yourself From Charges of Abuse

by Peter A. Kenny, JD

Being charged with child abuse is a devastating experience for foster parents. Foster parents can be charged with abuse of their foster children from many sources. Teens in foster care might accuse them to retaliate for strict rules or discipline. Birth parents, angry about having the child removed, may look for excuses and see abuse where none exists. Caseworkers may hear that a foster parent violated DFC policies, using physical punishment for example, and file a complaint. An adversary, a neighbor, an ex-spouse, even an observer in a supermarket can file charges against a foster parent.

Because of the reporting law, the foster parent may never know where the charge is coming from. And unlike the rest of our system of justice, the person accused is considered guilty until proven innocent.

Child abuse is clearly defined in the statute. A charge of abuse must be investigated to determine whether it is valid (substantiated) or bogus (unsubstantiated.).

Preparing Yourself

To prepare yourself, know the law and the DFC policies. Read your foster parent manual and the caseworker's manual. (They will soon be on the Internet. See our article on page 3.)

Know the definition of child abuse. Know what the investigation entails. Know your rights of appeal. Know when or whether foster children can be removed without your consent.

What to do

As soon as you know charges have been made, write down everything you can remember about the event and date this document. A charge might drag on for months. You do not want to have to rely on your memory months later.

If you hear nothing from the agency, never assume that no news is good news. The opposite might be true

Demand a proper immediate investigation. Vague accusations cloud your profession and your reputation. You want an official record that the charges were unsubstantiated.

Consider hiring a lawyer. A substantiated charge is serious. It means that you can no longer be a foster parent, do respite care, operate a day-care, drive a school bus. In fact, practically any job involving children is closed to you. Given the seriousness of the issue, an attorney is a good investment.

If you need an attorney, hire one promptly when the charges surface. It is far easier, quicker and cheaper to fight to prevent having your foster parent license revoked than it is to attempt to get it back once it has been revoked.

Once the charges are "unsubstantiated," you and your lawyer must make sure that the charge is removed from your record. Although this is required by law, it is foolish to assume it will automatically be done.

Chris Morrison Announces IFCAA Convention

The Indiana Foster Care and Adoption Association (IFCAA) will hold its annual conference Nov. 8, 9, and 10 at the Four Points Hotel, 7701 East 42nd St in Indianapolis. "Nurturing Adolescents" is the theme. All workshops will be geared toward "what to do to help youth live successfully in their community," according to IFCAA executive director Chris Morrison.

Morrison has been IFCAA executive director for eight years. A graduate of Ball State University, Chris has a background in media and communications. Before coming to IFCAA she worked as an advertising director and also helped companies build from the ground up. "All the things I've done in my life have related to communication," says Chris.

Chris observes that this background in communication relates directly to her work for IFCAA. The goal of IFCAA, according to Morrison, is to help foster and adoptive families through information, resources and support. IFCAA is "mostly an educational vehicle" says Morrison.

"My observation of foster parents working in community is that, the more knowledge they have, the better they are at their work." Be pro-active, she urges. Find your peers, network, get and give support. This is why the annual conference is so valuable, says Morrison. Not only do people get current information; they also get to meet people who share the same problems and concerns. People come to the conference and find out they are not alone.

IFCAA and ACT have worked together on a number of

*"The more knowledge foster parents have, the better they are at their work."
Morrison*

News Notes

ACT Goes to Vanderburgh County

At the invitation of county director Lark Buckman, ACT President Jim Kenny and ACT Executive Director Peter Kenny went to Evansville on October 13, 2001. In the afternoon they offered a question and answer session for foster parents. In the evening Jim Kenny, as president of ACT, gave the keynote address at the annual foster parent recognition banquet. The events were sponsored by the Vanderburgh County DFC.

New Magazine On Target For Foster Families

Fostering Families TODAY, a quarterly magazine for "all persons committed to services and permanency for children, including foster and adoptive parents and the professionals who work on their behalf" debuted in April, 2001. It promises to be an exciting magazine devoted to issues that are right on target for foster families. The first issue alone deals with such hot buttons as the "emancipation" of 20,000 children per year from the child welfare system at the age of 18, and the inequality between states of Medicaid services to children in foster care and those who have been adopted with identified special needs.

To subscribe send \$16.00 to Fostering Families TODAY, Subscription Dept.; 246 S. Cleveland Ave; Loveland CO 80537. Or call 1-888-924-6736. Ask your library to subscribe. Give them ISSN 1531-409X.

DFC Manuals To Be Available on Access Indiana

The foster parent manual

and the caseworkers manual of the DFC are being put online at ACCESS Indiana, according to policy planner Stephanie Beasley-Fehrman. No deadline has been set for their introduction. Check online at www.accessindiana.com

Coming Soon

New Agreement Between DFC and Foster Parents

The agreement between foster parents and the DFC which all foster parents sign annually is being revised. New policies of the DFC make such a revision timely and necessary.

The new agreement will specify more clearly the duties of both foster parents and the DFC to one another as well as their mutual responsibilities toward the foster children in care. New policies such as the case conference policy will be included in the agreement.

Ask about the new agreement when your re-licensing comes due.

ACT Puts Attorney Resources On the Web

Revised and updated chapters from ACT's Attorney Resource Book, previously available only by purchase, are being made available at ACT's Website: <http://beam.to/act>. Publishing on the Internet permits ACT to make prompt updates in the ever-changing world of foster care policy and legislation.

Brochures and other resources can also be downloaded from the website.

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. The meaning of bonding; case law; DFC policy. For everyone involved in foster care.

The Attorneys' Resource Book. (regularly updated), 1998, 313 pages. \$53.00 ppd. A how-to book for attorneys: laws, policies, forms..

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.

When Foster Parents Need An Attorney



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In This Issue...

New goals for ACT....Good-by to a friend of foster kids...New DFC/foster parent agreement

Reflections on Emancipation

Remember me? I was your foster kid a few years back when I was 15 year old.
I was pretty ornery, and I didn't much like all your rules.

At 16 I couldn't wait to be emancipated, to be independent, to be able to do anything that I wanted.

At 17 I hardly followed your rules. I was almost emancipated.

Now I've been emancipated for two years.

I know how to balance a checkbook, but I don't have enough money to have a checking account.

I know how to cook eggs, but I can't cook because I can't afford a place with a kitchen.

I wish I had someone to celebrate with when I land a job.
I wish I had someone to care about me when I have a sore throat and a fever.
I wish I had somewhere to go for Thanksgiving.
I wish I had someone to buy presents for at Christmas.

I wish I had a permanent home.