

## 2006 Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee Report

### What is IFAPA?

The Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association (IFAPA) provides leadership in Iowa to ensure that every child has a secure, loving and stable home. IFAPA recruits and retains quality foster and adoptive families, along with offering specialized training, support, and promoting public awareness of the needs of families and children in care.

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### Overview of IFAPA Programs

IFAPA has many programs available to address the changing needs of foster and adoptive families.

- ◆ KidSake Project: Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment and Retention
- ◆ Foster and Adoptive Parent Liaison program
- ◆ Adoption Information Specialists
- ◆ Adoption Respite Program
- ◆ Building Bridges Project: Improving Educational Outcomes for Foster and Adopted Children
- ◆ FAIR-Foster Allegation Information Resource Program and Training
- ◆ Training Program (includes on-going 6-hour trainings and 2-hour support group trainings)
- ◆ Specialized Resources (including Kinship Care Booklet, IFAPA Newsletter, Confidentiality Brochure, Foster Parents and the Courts, etc.)
- ◆ Annual Spring Conference
- ◆ Legislative Agenda and Public Policy Advocacy

To understand the scope of the problem, it is imperative to know that most children in care have been abused, exploited, or neglected prior to entering foster or adoptive placements. They pay a heavy price for their biological parents' inability to care for them. What results is a mental blueprint of abuse and mistrust of adults, along with survival behaviors that require specialized parenting techniques and interventions to assist in building self-esteem and resiliency, improving relationships, improving school performance, and alleviating symptoms of trauma. They may have medical, emotional, behavioral and physical needs that far exceed what families can manage on their own. These needs do not go away.

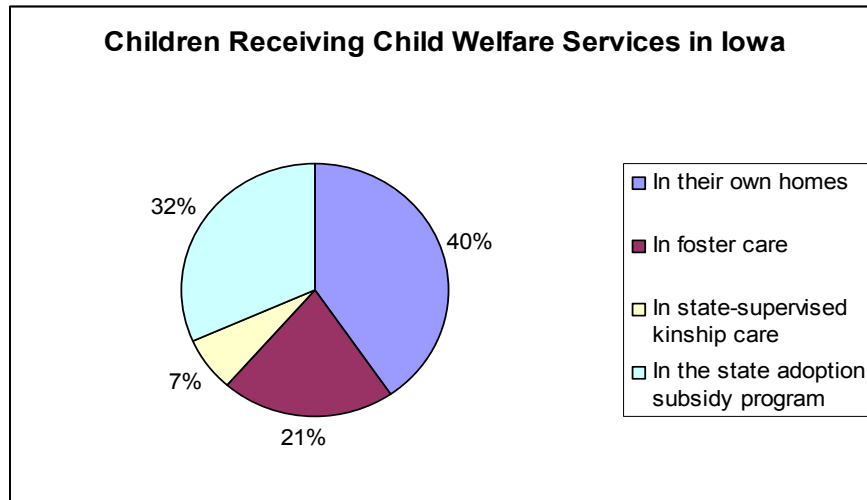


## What Do Child Welfare Services Look Like in Iowa?

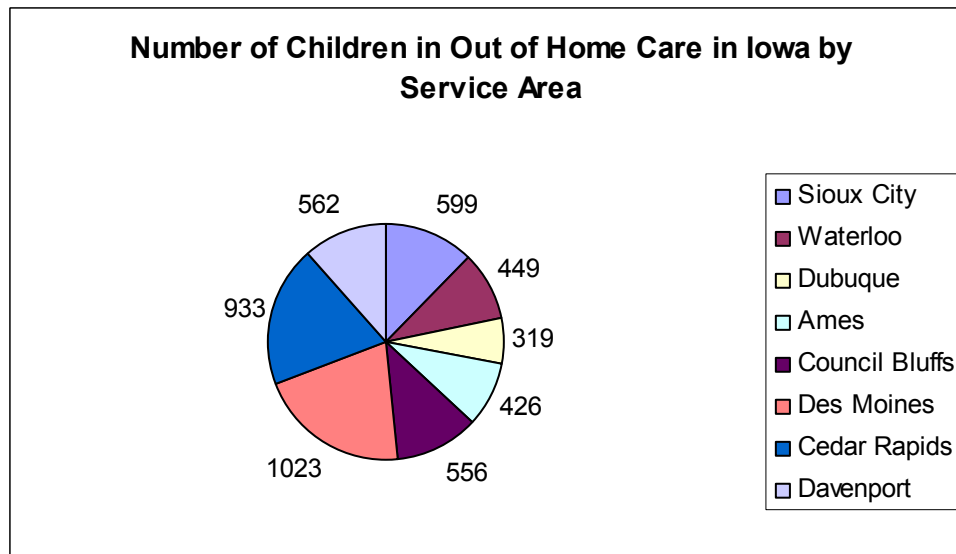
Iowa provides child welfare services to:

- ◆ more than 7,600 children in their own homes
- ◆ more than 4,000 children in out of home care
- ◆ about 1,300 children in state-supervised kinship care
- ◆ more than 6,000 children in the adoption subsidy program

According to the DHS Child Welfare in Iowa By the Numbers report dated June 2004, there are 45,000 ongoing cases for workers at any one time.



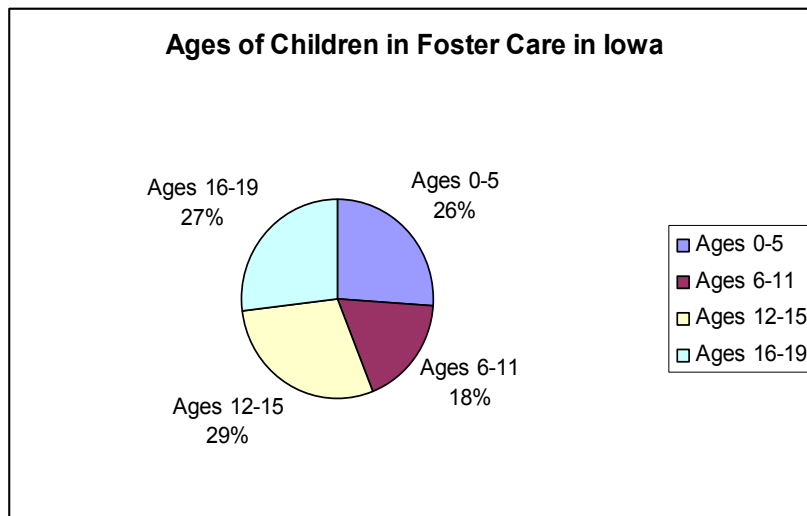
## Who is in Out of Home Care in Iowa?



**Of these 4,867 children, 2,783 were in foster care in FY 2005.**



## Who is in Family Foster Care in Iowa



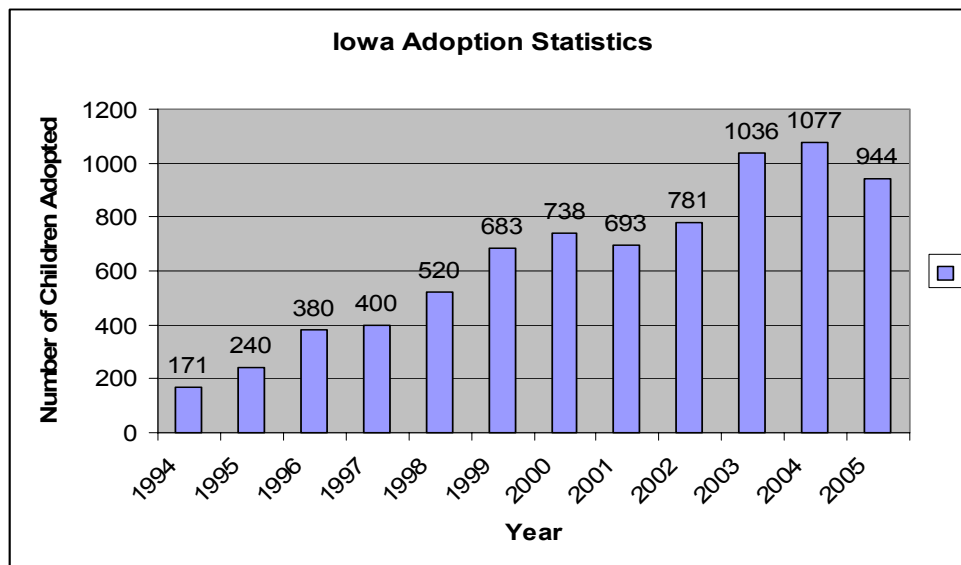
- ◆ **Iowa's foster children are older than the national norm**, because Iowa's foster care roles include youth found to be delinquent. In 2001, almost 60 percent of Iowa foster children were between 11 and 18, 10 percent higher than the national average. That year, 16 percent of children in foster care in Iowa were between 6 and 10, and 24 percent were 5 and younger.
- ◆ **Children of Color are over-represented in Iowa's foster care system.** African American children in Iowa are almost four times more likely than Caucasian children to be removed from their families. Native American children are seven times more likely to be removed from their families.
- ◆ **On any given day, approximately 125 children in Iowa's foster care system are waiting for adoptive families.**

## How Long Do Children Stay In Care?

- ◆ **In 2001, the median stay in care for Iowa foster children was 10.7 months, almost half of the national median of 19 months.**
- ◆ **The longer a child is in foster care the more it costs.** An analysis of 220 foster care cases showed that Iowa spent:
  - \$9,000 per child during the first year in care
  - \$10,000 during the second year in care
  - \$12,000 during the third year in care
  - \$19,000 during the fourth year in care
  - \$38,000 during the fifth year of care

## Where Do Children Go When They Leave Foster Care?

- ◆ **The vast majority return to their birth families.** In 2001, 79 percent of Iowa children who exited foster care were reunited with their birth families, surpassing the national rate by more than 20 points. Almost 12 percent left foster care for adoption.
- ◆ **Each year, about 250 Iowa youth age out of foster care with no permanent, legal connection to a family.** To provide youth in foster care ages 18-21 access to supports they need to become productive members of society, DHS is proposing the legislature fund the Preparation for Adult Living Program (PALS).
- ◆ **In 2005, 944 children were adopted from foster care.**
- ◆ **In the past 10 years, 7,252 children have been provided permanent homes through adoption.**
- ◆ **Foster parents adopt 78% of Iowa's children with special needs.**



## Foster and Adoptive Parents in Iowa

Currently there are 5,212 foster and subsidized adoptive families in Iowa. There are an additional 549 adoptive families living out of state who receive Iowa adoption subsidy funds.

Foster and adoptive families provide safe, loving, and stable homes for children who are in desperate need of a place to live. Foster and adoptive parents believe children deserve to have a family, regardless of the child's family history or his or her emotional, medical, physical or behavioral struggles. Families of all types and backgrounds have come forward to parent children with extreme needs.

Foster parents are often faced with the dilemma of not being recognized as a part of the support team for the children in their care. Foster parents can provide valuable information when they are included in case planning for the child. IFAPA recommends the legislature adopt a Foster Parent Bill of Rights to assure foster parents are partners in planning for the children in their care.

## IFAPA Provides On-going Training to Foster and Adoptive Parents

IFAPA has contracted with experts within Iowa and across the nation to offer training on diverse topics. IFAPA strives to provide quality training on the multi-faceted issues facing foster and adoptive families. These trainings focus on parenting techniques and information that is critical to parenting children who have experienced abuse and neglect, resulting in the need for emotional, behavioral, physical and medical interventions. IFAPA evaluates every training offered and tracks feedback to determine the additional needs of children and topics for future training.

Training foster and adoptive parents is critical to a child's healing process. Training provides the knowledge to prepare a family to intervene positively with a child. Positive interaction allows the child to begin the healing process by improving his or her self-esteem and resiliency, school performance, ability to develop relationships, and alleviating symptoms of trauma.

Additionally, there are over 40 IFAPA trainers across Iowa that have attended intensive Trainings of the Trainers to offer the following trainings on-going across Iowa:

- ◆ Preventative Practices: Strategies for Minimizing the Risk of Child Abuse Allegations in Foster Homes
- ◆ Managing Your Risk
- ◆ Teaching Life Skills
- ◆ Life Long Connections: Permanency for Older Youth

Training is offered state-wide throughout the year in 6-hour formats, along with being offered at support groups and at the annual IFAPA State Conference. With the exception of the annual conference, there is no fee for foster or adoptive parents to attend IFAPA trainings.

On average, IFAPA trains over 3,000 foster and adoptive parents per year through its 6-hour trainings. This does not include the parents that are trained at the annual IFAPA Conference or during the monthly support groups held across the state.

## Youth Track offered at 2006 IFAPA State Conference

In support of the high number of teens in foster care who "age out" of the system without a permanent home, who might face sudden homelessness, increased incidences of pregnancy, incarceration, and unemployment, IFAPA has contracted with Sue Tew of 2Consulting to offer a Youth Track at the 2006 IFAPA State Conference. Youth will have an opportunity to learn about resources available to them as they leave the system and transition to adulthood, what awaits them when they leave the system, an opportunity to network with other youth who share similar experiences, to learn advocacy and communication skills, and to learn how to maintain connections with important adults in their lives.

## KidSake Recruitment and Retention Project

IFAPA's KidSake project focuses on finding special families for special children. The goal of KidSake is to recruit families willing to provide a safe temporary environment for foster children and to recruit families willing to adopt children with special needs, ages 8 to 18.



## The Six Steps to Foster or Adopt a Child:

### **Step 1: Learn about foster care and special needs adoption.**

Contact KidSake at 800-243-0756. Our staff can answer questions you have and send you an informational packet about foster care and adoption.

### **Step 2: Attend a face-to-face orientation.**

Orientations are held for Iowa families interested in foster care and/or special needs adoption by private agencies contracted with KidSake. During an orientation you will learn about the licensing/approval process, be given characteristics of waiting children and be able to ask questions. If you are ready for an orientation, contact KidSake. KidSake will collect information from you and forward it to a contracted private agency in your area to contact you within five business days and invite you to an orientation. At the orientation, you will sign an application which allows DHS to conduct record checks on anyone living in your home that is 18 years of age and older. These record checks must be completed prior to being registered for PS-MAPP training.

### **Step 3: Attend PS-MAPP training.**

PS-MAPP is a training program for the preparation of prospective foster and/or adoptive families. During the course of ten classes, participants learn about the children needing placement. Each new foster/adoptive parent leaves the program with specific strategies, techniques, and plans for utilizing effective discipline with children who have been abused and neglected. The training provides skill development and information on the child welfare and foster care systems, and gives initial policy and procedure information. In two-parent families, both parents must attend the training. There is no cost to you for this training and it is held at various locations throughout the state. Attending the training does not obligate you to further pursue foster care or special needs adoption if you do not feel it is right for you. The PS-MAPP training program is coordinated by the ISU Child Welfare Project.

### **Step 4: Complete a home study.**

Families must undergo a formal evaluation process (home study interview) in order to determine their appropriateness for foster care and/or special needs adoption. A social worker will be assigned to complete your home study. During interviews with your home study worker, you will be asked to talk about your parenting style, your life experiences and how they affected you, your sense of family, your expectations for a child, the reasons you want to foster and/or adopt, and your ability to adjust your family style to include a new family member. Careful pre-evaluations of prospective families are critical in order to safeguard children and avoid adoption disruptions. DHS focuses on selecting the best possible family for a child, rather than finding a child for a specific family.

### **Step 5: Become approved for foster care and/or special needs adoption.**

When your home study is completed, it will be approved or denied by the Iowa Department of Human Services. When approved for foster care, you will receive a license listing the number of children you are approved to care for in your home.

### **Step 6: Receive a placement.**

**Foster Care:** After you receive your foster care license, you may receive a call from DHS regarding a foster child who is in need of placement. The worker will discuss information about this child with you and you will have the opportunity to make a decision about whether or not you will be able to take the placement.

**Special Needs Adoption:** If you are approved, you can inquire about children listed on the KidSake website or in our publications. If you are selected for a child, multiple pre-placement visits will begin. Later, during the pre-adoptive placement phase, the child will be placed in your home. The adoption worker will continue to visit you and the child, offering assistance and support. An adoption may be finalized after a minimum of 6 months of placement.



# The Six Step Process to Foster or Adopt a Child

This flow chart is a visual overview of the process to become a foster and/or adoptive parent in Iowa.

**Step 1:**  
**Learn about foster care and special needs adoption.**  
 Contact KidSake. Our staff can answer questions you have and send you an informational packet.

**Step 2:**  
**Attend a face-to-face orientation.**  
 Orientations are held for Iowa families interested in foster care and/or special needs adoption by private agencies contracted with KidSake.

**Step 3:**  
**Attend PS-MAPP training.**  
 PS-MAPP is a training program for the preparation of prospective foster and adoptive families. Participants will learn techniques to work with children who will be in their care.

**Step 4:**  
**Complete a home study.**  
 Families must undergo a formal evaluation process in order to determine their appropriateness for foster care and/or adoption.

**Step 5:**  
**Become approved for foster care and/or special needs adoption.**  
 When your homestudy is completed, it will be approved or denied by the Iowa Department of Human Services.

**Step 6:**  
**Receive a placement.**  
 After you are approved, you will be able to receive foster placements and/or be able to have a child available for adoption placed in your home.





## The Important Role of Subsidy and Assistance in Permanency for Children in Care

Iowa has successfully provided homes for thousands of abused and neglected children through the special needs adoption subsidy program. Children who qualify for adoption subsidies are the hardest to place for adoption. By definition, children with special needs are typically older children. Some are medically fragile or have emotional or physical disabilities. Most are victims of abuse and neglect and many need to be placed with siblings. In addition, some children are considered special needs because they have a racial or ethnic background that makes it more difficult to place them for adoption.

Iowa must continue to address the real demands children in care place on a family. Parenting a child with special needs goes beyond the day-to-day living expenses. Parents must spend extra time, attention and energy with a child who has special needs. There is usually an emotional and financial toll on the whole family to raise a child with multiple needs, and some children's out-of-control behaviors and mental health issues can strain the entire family system.

Many children have limited access to medical assistance due to the lack of Medicaid providers across Iowa. Children often enter foster care with neglected medical, dental, and mental health issues. A chronic shortage of providers in the state combined with low reimbursement rates make it extremely difficult to access necessary care, especially given the special needs of many children.

Children deserve to have the financial, medical, and emotional support needed to grow and develop. Many families would be unable to provide a permanent home for children with special needs without this additional assistance. Families and children deserve to hear the message from Iowa that children in care are important and that they matter to our state's future.

From information IFAPA compiled through surveys and evaluations completed by foster and adoptive parents, the families listed the following services as critical to their ability to help their child overcome limitations, disabilities and special needs:

- access to support groups
- crisis intervention
- quality therapists
- day care
- respite care
- training

Families also noted accurate and adequate information of the child's biological family history, issues, and diagnosis was vital to their ability to address the needs of a child.

IFAPA provides support groups, training, adoption respite, and support in response to the needs voiced by parents caring for children through foster care and adoption.





## The Iowa Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care Forum

IFAPA, in partnership with the North American Council on Adoptable Children, held a forum “Protecting Children, Promoting Permanent Families” in June 2005. The panelists were members of the community most affected by Iowa’s child welfare system. The forum members illustrated the strengths and limitations of the child welfare system and confirmed the need for reform as outlined by the recommendations of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care.

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care’s recommendations focus on what Iowa and other states need to help children have safe, permanent homes. The recommendations, if enacted, would give Iowa a flexible and reliable source of federal funding and new incentives; and would help dependency courts secure the tools, information, and training necessary to fulfill their responsibility to children.

## Overview of the Pew Commission Recommendations

- ◆ Preserve federal foster care maintenance and adoption assistance as an entitlement and expand it to all children.
- ◆ Provide federal guardianship assistance to all children leaving foster care to live with a permanent legal guardian when a court has explicitly determined that neither reunification nor adoption are feasible permanency options.
- ◆ Build a range of services that keep children from entering care, enable them to leave foster care safely, and support them after they achieve permanence.
- ◆ Strengthen the current Child and Family Review process to increase Iowa’s accountability for improving outcomes for children.
- ◆ Require and encourage courts and child welfare agencies to collaborate on behalf of children in foster care.
- ◆ Give children and parents a strong voice in court.
- ◆ Encourage Iowa Chief Justices to create and directly oversee dedicated dependency courts, and Promote judicial workload and training standards, standards of practice, and codes of judicial conduct that promote better outcomes for children in the dependency courts.

## Recommendations

- ◆ Iowa should support foster care youth until age 21. The Department of Human Services has proposed the Preparation for Adult Living Program (PALS).
- ◆ Iowa should support the current and future placements of children with special needs by adequately funding the cost of subsidized adoptions.
- ◆ Iowa should adopt a Foster Parent Bill of Rights.
- ◆ Iowa should increase access to medical and dental care.
- ◆ Iowa should establish and fund a subsidized guardianship program.
- ◆ Iowa should improve the ability and responsibility of a Guardian Ad Litem to protect and promote a child's well-being.

## Attachments

IFAPA Fact Sheet

KidSake Annual Report

## Sources

Child Welfare in Iowa By the Numbers, DHS report dated June 2004.

Child Welfare League of America. (2004). *State data trends for Iowa*.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Iowa Fact Sheet* (AFCARS Annual Foster Care Database).

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