

Preliminary Progress Report to the Colorado Legislature

December 31, 1999

Implementation of H.B. 99-1299

Basis for Report: 19-5-216 (2). "THE DEPARTMENT SHALL MAKE A PRELIMINARY PROGRESS REPORT BY DECEMBER 31, 1999, AND IT SHALL MAKE A FINAL REPORT OF ITS FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 31, 2001."

Increased access for adoption – study – report. (1) (a) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL EXAMINE AND EVALUATE THE PROCESS OF ADOPTIVE PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN IN THE LEGAL CUSTODY OF THE COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND IDENTIFY THOSE ASPECTS OF THE PROCESS THAT MAY BE IMPROVED TO ACHIEVE THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF PERMANENCY FOR THE GREATEST NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN SAFE AND HEALTHY ADOPTIVE HOMES. IN CONDUCTING THIS ANALYSIS, THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD CONSIDER, BUT NEED NOT BE LIMITED TO, THE FOLLOWING.

- I. The best means by which to increase county accessibility to qualified families seeking to adopt and the best means by which to achieve placement of children available for adoption with such families.**

The Colorado Legislature during the 1999 session required through the passage of H.B. 99-1299 the Department of Human Services to establish an Adoptive Family Resource Registry to increase the availability of families who are interested in adopting Colorado's waiting children.

During the legislative session the administration of the Department of Human Services decided

that the family registry must meet the qualifications and specifications for inclusion in the statewide Children, Youth and Family (CYF) computerized management system. With the passage of H.B. 99-1299 planning for the development of the automated Adoptive Family Resource Registry (AFRR) began with adoption staff consulting with Information Technology Systems (ITS), CYF and the Adoption Exchange. The Department plans for the Adoptive Family Resource Registry system to be a part of state's CYF project in future years which will allow for easier access for counties. Additionally, the funding for the Adoptive Family Resource Registry is through donated foundation funds which may or may not be available in the future.

The Department worked with RFP Solutions, Inc. to identify the hardware needed to comply with CYF standards, established screens for an approved family being registered on the system and obtained bids from entities to develop the computer program. This information was submitted to the Rose Foundation who had submitted during the legislative session a letter of intent to assist with the initial funding of the Adoption Family Resource Registry. Since this was a joint project between the State, The Adoption Exchange and the Rose Foundation, the agreement was that The Adoption Exchange would implement and initially administer the Registry.

On November 13, 1999 the Department received a letter from the Rose Foundation stating that a grant of \$87,205 had been awarded to the Colorado Department of Human Services for development, implementation and administering of the Adoptive Family Resource Registry. Governor Owens accepted the award on behalf of the Department on November 23, 1999. Contracts with RFP Solution, Inc. and the Adoption Exchange will be developed in January 2000. It is anticipated that the Adoptive Family Resource Registry will be implemented by March 2000.

II. Whether further automation would be conducive to the achievement of permanency of children.

After the Adoptive Family Resource Registry is developed and implemented the Department will evaluate the effectiveness of the system in expediting home studies and placement of waiting children for adoption. Additionally, the Department will continue to evaluate if there are additional linkages that need to be developed to increase the children's visibility on the Internet. Currently, The Adoption Exchange lists Colorado's children on the Internet including Denver County children. However, Denver County has recently established their own Internet site for children available for adoption in Denver County. We will be reviewing this site with Denver County and it may be beneficial for other counties to consider setting up their own sites.

Also, the Department will explore with the Adoption Exchange if there are additional national computer linkages that would enhance Colorado children's chances for adoption. For example, families who contact the National Adoption Exchange can link to The Adoption Exchange and

view Colorado's children. There is also a linkage on Colorado's State page under the Department of Human Services with the Adoption Exchange.

III. The need for centralization of information.

We have initiated discussion with Department staff who are knowledgeable about setting up Web pages and plan to have an Adoption information page attached to the Child Welfare Division under the Colorado Department of Human Services. It is anticipated that this page will be available in the spring of 2000.

IV. The benefits of additional standardization.

Under H.B. 99-1299, the legislature required that the state board promulgate rules identifying the criteria for the adoptive home study investigation and the minimum uniform standards for the home study reports with which the qualified county departments of social services, individuals, or child placement agencies approved by the department shall comply.

A workgroup was convened in July 1999 consisting of representatives from the community, child placement agencies, county departments and state. The group developed the rules for a standardized home study (assessment) and guidelines for conducting the home study, which are being included in the Practice Handbook. The Volume 7 rules were presented on an emergency basis to the State Board September 1999 and effective October 1, 1999. (See Attachment A) An agency letter was sent to the counties informing them of the changes in the home study requirements. (See Attachment B) Additionally, the Department is working with the Office of Staff Development to develop training to the new study process as well as ensuring that the new requirements are integrated into the Department's on-going training.

V. The resources of other interested entities or foundations that may be available to support public adoptions.

The Department has been working with the National Resource Center on Permanency Planning to develop strategies for planning for permanency for teens. Robert Lewis, a consultant with the Center, will be presenting to the Juvenile Judges' Conference. Mr. Lewis also presented at Colorado's State Child Welfare Conference in May 1999. He is a strong advocate for teens achieving adoption. Additionally, a work group has been convened by the Department, the court and Colorado Court Appointed Special Advocate (C-CASA) and community providers to develop a grant proposal for achieving permanency for teens. We are reviewing programs that have been developed in Iowa, Ohio, Massachusetts and California to replicate portions of their

programs in a pilot. Although the focus is broader than adoption, one of the primary focuses is to ensure that every child who cannot return home is evaluated for adoption.

Effective October 1, 1999 the Colorado Department of Human Services was awarded a \$100,000 planning grant to work on eliminating cross-jurisdictional barriers to the adoptive placement of children. Colorado is one of five states awarded the planning grant. The grant is a collaborative effort with State Judicial, Loving Homes, Inc., a private child placement specializing in adoptive services to children with special needs, Nicholson, Spencer and Associates, a training consortium and the State. It was awarded under the Federal Adoption Opportunities Grants and if the planning grant is successful could potentially result in Colorado being awarded additional dollars to implement the grant over the next four years.

VI. The program and systems developed by others states to achieve maximum access and expedited permanency for children in safe and healthy adoptive homes.

Colorado has received national recognition for the expedited permanency bill H.B. 1178 that was passed by the legislature in 1994. As a result of Expedited Permanency and Federal Adoption Opportunities Grants, Colorado has developed concurrent planning, family group decision making, mediation and permanency options as means to achieve early permanency for children.

The State of Illinois through their IV-E Waiver were able to increase permanency through kinship placements by subsidizing those placements utilizing federal and state dollars. Colorado would hope to be able to achieve similar permanency by developing a subsidized guardianship program for both kinship and foster parents. This would be for situations where kin and foster families are willing to provide permanent care but are unable to proceed with adoption. Several sources of funding could be looked at to accomplish a subsidized guardianship program from a state supported budget initiative to a combination of state and federal funds.

Currently, under the federal government, there are limited dollars for post-legal services. States such as Kentucky, Texas and Minnesota have chosen to fund additional services utilizing state-only dollars. These states report that families have on-going need for additional services beyond the subsidy payments and Medicaid benefits. These services have reduced disruptions, sustained the adoptions and prevented additional out-of-home placements for these at-risk children.

As noted above in number V, Colorado is working with the National Resource Center on Permanency Planning to assist us in developing permanency programs for teens.

VII. The methods used to reduce the number of disruptions in adoptive homes.

Colorado was awarded a Federal Grant in 1998, Colorado Adoption Network-Developing Opportunities (CAN-DO). This was a three year \$200,000 a year grant. This grant was focused on increasing the knowledge base and skills of mental health therapists, county adolescent workers, child protection and adoption staff on working with adoptive families of children with special needs. The compendium that was developed was presented statewide. One of the goals is to ensure that individuals who work with adoptive families were able to intervene in helpful ways and assist the families in sustaining the adoptive placements of children through time.

Recent changes to the Medicaid rules allowed Colorado to provide all subsidized children with Medicaid not just the IV-E eligible children. These changes are ensuring that adoptive children needing services will be able to access them and reduce the risk of disruption.

The Department under another Federal grant "Co-parenting: A Community Based Program for Children with Developmental Disabilities" developed, in collaboration with The Adoption Exchange, Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, adoptive parents, county departments and child placement agency representatives, developed a resource guide to post-legal adoption services in Colorado. This guide, The Compass, will be available for families who adopt children with special needs in Colorado. (See Attachment C) Lastly, the Department under the Expanding Family Options for Permanency Federal grant has produced a video that can be used with birth, foster and adoptive families, guardian ad litem, the court and other providers. The video shows the various permanency options available to birth parents and legal guardians.

Summary

Since the passage of H.B. 99-1299, the Department has moved forward in implementing a statewide Adoptive Family Resource Registry, establishing standardized home assessments and creating an approved vendor list of qualified entities to complete adoptive studies for Colorado's waiting children. Over the next two years we will be identifying aspects of the adoptive process, both within the state and outside of Colorado, that will assist us in achieving permanency through adoption for the greatest number of children in safe and healthy homes. A final report as required by statute will be issued to the General Assembly on December 31, 2001.

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, H.B. 1178 was passed focusing on the expeditious placement and planning for children entering foster care who were zero and under the age of six years of age and their older siblings when appropriate.

During fiscal year 1998-1999 701 new children from 444 families have been served by Expedited Permanency Planning (EPP) programs. The average number of children per family ranges from 1.0 to 2.0 with a combined average of 1.58.

Of the 701 new children who entered the EPP program, the most common reason for Social Services involvement is neglect, which was reported in 66% of the cases. Physical abuse was a reason for DSS involvement for 19% of the cases, whereas sexual abuse represented 5% of the cases.

