



DEBRA K. DAVENPORT, CPA
AUDITOR GENERAL

STATE OF ARIZONA
OFFICE OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL

WILLIAM THOMSON
DEPUTY AUDITOR GENERAL

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Members of the Arizona Legislature

The Honorable Janice K. Brewer, Governor

Neal Young, Director
Department of Economic Security

Transmitted herewith is a report of the Auditor General, a Questions-and-Answers document on the Department of Economic Security, Division of Children, Youth and Families—Adoption Program. This document was prepared pursuant to and under the authority vested in the Auditor General by Arizona Revised Statutes §41-1966.

Our questions-and-answers documents were created to provide answers to multiple questions on a particular subject area. We hope that these questions-and-answers documents will fill a need and provide you with timely and useful information on topics of particular interest.

My staff and I will be pleased to discuss or clarify items in this document.

This document will be released to the public on November 18, 2009.

Sincerely,

Debbie Davenport
Auditor General

Attachment

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

Summary

This document answers questions about the Division's Adoption Program, which seeks to obtain permanent homes for children in department custody who cannot be safely reunited with their parents. The Division performs above national medians in achieving timely adoptions, but faces some systemic challenges involving court and division processes and finding adoptive homes for some children. However, actions are being taken to address these challenges, including specialized adoptive family recruitment. In addition, to encourage adopting children with special needs conditions such as a visual or hearing impairment or emotional disability, financial assistance and services are available through the federal- and state-funded adoption subsidy program.



2009

Adoption Program

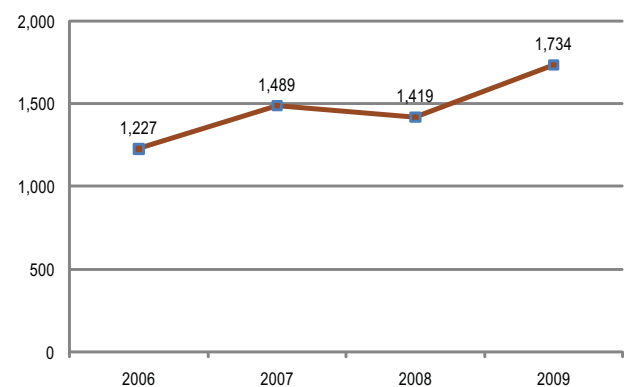
The Adoption Program within the Arizona Department of Economic Security's (Department) Division of Children, Youth and Families (Division) seeks to obtain permanent homes for children in department custody who cannot safely be reunited with their parents. When out-of-home placement is necessary to ensure a child's health and safety, the Division's first priority is to facilitate family reunification. If the child's parents are unable or unwilling to address the safety or risk factors that prevent them from caring for their child safely at home, the Division may recommend to the juvenile court that the child's permanency goal change from family reunification to adoption. As of March 31, 2009, about 20 percent, or 2,047 of the 10,404 children in out-of-home care, had a permanency goal of adoption.

The Division provides adoption promotion and support services with the goal of placing the child in a safe, nurturing, lifelong relationship, preferably with a grandparent, extended family member, or nonrelative such as the child's foster parent. Adoption promotion and

support services include assessing the child's placement needs, preparing the child for an adoptive placement, recruiting and assessing adoptive homes, selecting and supervising the adoptive placement, and assisting the adoptive family in applying for adoption subsidies.

Over the past several years, the Division has increased the number of children leaving department custody for adoption. As shown in Figure 1, between state fiscal years 2006 and 2009, there has been a 41 percent increase in the annual number of finalized adoptions.¹ The Division's success in increasing the

Figure 1: Number of Children Leaving Department Custody for Adoption State Fiscal Years 2006 through 2009



Source: Auditor General staff summary of data provided by the Division.

¹ The rate of growth in finalized adoptions has increased from 12 percent of the total number of children in out-of-home care in fiscal year 2006 to 17 percent in fiscal year 2009. The growth rate is determined by dividing the number of finalized adoptions occurring during the year by the number of children in out-of-home care on the last day of the prior year.

number of adoptions has resulted in its being awarded federal adoption incentive monies in federal fiscal years 2006 through 2009. The federal Adoption Incentive Payment Program authorized incentive monies to states that increased the number of children adopted from foster care

relative to established baseline numbers.¹ The Division was awarded \$500,000 in adoption incentive monies in 2009. It received the award in 2009 along with 37 other states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Question 1: What are the characteristics of children who leave department custody for adoption?

Caucasian and Hispanic children under 6 years old accounted for about one-half of the children adopted during the 6-month period ending March 31, 2009. The children lived in out-of-home care an average of 2 and a half years, although most were living with their adoptive families before their permanency goal was changed to adoption. Sixty percent of the children were adopted by their relatives or foster parents, and nearly 30 percent of the children were adopted by the families with whom they were initially placed.

There were 764 children who left department custody because they were adopted during the 6-month period ending March 31, 2009. As shown in Table 1, Caucasian and Hispanic children under the age of 6 years accounted for about one-half of the adopted children. The majority of children lived in out-of-home care more than 24 months, although most were living in their adoptive placement at the time their permanency goal changed to adoption. Nearly 30 percent of the children were adopted by the families with whom they were initially placed. Arizona data submitted to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System indicates that 35 percent of the children were adopted by their relatives and 25 percent by their foster parents.

Table 1: Descriptive Information on Children Obtaining a Finalized Adoption Between October 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009¹

	Number	Percent
Age		
Birth to 5 years	443	58%
6 to 12 years	259	34%
13 years and over	62	8%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	339	44%
Hispanic	280	37%
African American	95	12%
American Indian	27	4%
Asian	7	1%
Other	16	2%
Length of time in care²		
Less than one month	0	0%
1 to 12 months	36	5%
13 to 24 months	252	33%
More than 24 months	476	62%
Number of placements³		
One	219	29%
Two	219	29%
Three	128	17%
Four	82	10%
Five or more	116	15%

1 Their were 764 children who left department custody for adoption during the 6-month period ending March 31, 2009.

2 Length of time in care is calculated from the date of the child's most recent removal from home.

3 Number of placements reflects the number of different placements the child has lived in since his/her most recent removal from home.

Source: Auditor General staff summary of information from the department report titled *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements Semi-Annual Report for the Period of October 1, 2008 through March 31, 2009*.

¹ The federal Adoption Incentive Payment Program was created as part of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and was revised under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to provide stronger incentives for states to find adoptive homes for older children and children with special needs. The program awards states \$4,000 for every foster child adopted above their 2007 baseline, plus a payment of \$8,000 for every foster child age 9 and older and \$4,000 for every other special needs child adopted above the respective baselines. In addition, states receive \$1,000 for every foster child adopted over and above the level of the state's highest foster child adoption rate for previous years.

A comparison of descriptive information on children leaving department custody for adoption with children who had an adoption goal but did not yet have a finalized adoption found both similarities and differences. As indicated in Table 2, the two groups were similar in respect to ethnic distributions and average length of time in out-of-home care. However, the age distributions showed that adopted children accounted for a higher percentage of children under the age of 6 years and a lower percentage of children in their teens. There was also a slight difference in the average number of different homes or settings the children lived in during their time in out-of-home care.

Table 2: Comparison of Descriptive Information On Children with a Finalized Adoption Versus Children with an Adoption Goal

	Finalized Adoption¹	Adoption Goal²
Age		
Birth to 5 years	58%	49%
6 to 12 years	34%	38%
13 years and over	8%	13%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	44%	41%
Hispanic	37%	38%
African American	12%	14%
American Indian	4%	5%
Asian	1%	Less than 1%
Other	2%	2%
Length of time in care		
Average	30 months	29 months
Number of placements		
Average	2.8	3.4
Median	2.0	2.0

¹ Percentages are based on 764 children who left department custody for adoption between October 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009.

² Percentages are based on 1,856 children in department custody on September 30, 2008, with a goal of adoption.

Source: Auditor General staff summary of information from department reports titled *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements Semi-Annual Report for the Period of October 1, 2008 through March 31, 2009*, and *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements Semi-Annual Report for the Period of April 1, 2008 through September 30, 2008*.

Question 2: What systemic challenges does the Division face in achieving timely adoptions of children, and what is being done to address them?

The Division’s performance in achieving timely adoptions is above national medians, but it faces some systemic challenges involving court and division processes and finding adoptive homes for some children. To address these challenges, the Division and courts are improving processes, and the Division is using specialized recruitment to match children with families willing and able to care for them.

In line with federal expectations, the Division strives to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. The federal government established five measures to assess state child welfare agencies’ performance in achieving timely adoptions. According to a federally prepared state data profile for the 12-month period ending March 2009, Arizona exceeded the national medians on all five measures, including the percentage of children adopted in less than 24 months and the median length of time in foster care prior to adoption (see Table 3 on page 4). Further, Arizona’s performance placed it in the top 25 percent of the nation on all five measures.

However, according to division management, because adoptions must be pursued in a deliberate and prudent fashion to ensure that the best interests of the children and the rights of their parents are met, it may take more than 2 years to

Table 3: Comparison of Arizona and National Performance on Federal Adoption Indicators for the 12-Month Period Ending March 31, 2009

	Arizona	National Median
Percentage of children exiting to adoption in less than 24 months of latest removal from home	38.4%	26.8%
Median number of months in foster care prior to exiting to adoption	26.6 months	32.4 months
Percentage of children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer who exited to adoption by the end of the year	35.4%	20.2%
Percentage of children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer who became legally free for adoption during the first 6 months of the year	16.1%	8.8%
Percentage of children exiting to adoption within 12 months of becoming legally free	65.6%	45.8%

Source: Auditor General staff summary of information from the federal report titled *Arizona Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 27, 2009*.

achieve some adoptions. For example, before pursuing an adoption, the Division must make a concerted effort to reunify the family. Further, the parents must be afforded due process before their parental rights are terminated.

Although the Division's performance in achieving timely adoptions is above national medians, there remain systemic challenges that contribute to delays in finalizing adoptions. Similar to other states, Arizona faces challenges involving child welfare and court processes, terminating parents' rights to custody of their children, and having a sufficient pool of adoptive homes available.¹ However, actions are being taken to address them. Specifically:

- **Concurrent planning**—Division policy requires staff to use concurrent planning when the chances of reunifying the child with his/her parents within 12 months are poor, but staff do not use it consistently. Concurrent planning is a case management process whereby the family and child protective services specialist, i.e., case manager, work together on reunification at the same time that the specialist works on an alternate permanency goal, such as adoption, in case reunification is not successful. Case record reviews, including a 2007 federal review of division performance in achieving positive outcomes for children and families, found that there was little evidence of concurrent planning. Specifically, the 2007 federal review noted that although concurrent goals were listed in the cases examined, in most instances, the specialists were not working toward the goals simultaneously.²

Division management reported that it has taken various actions to improve implementation of concurrent planning. Specifically, throughout 2009, it has been evaluating staff's use of concurrent planning as part of an ongoing process in which a random sample of case records is reviewed to assess staff compliance with division policies. If appropriate, individualized feedback is provided to the case managers and their supervisors. Additionally, in an effort to increase staff knowledge and awareness of concurrent planning, the Division requires all case managers and their supervisors to take four training modules on concurrent planning. As of October 1, 2009, over 950 staff had completed one or more of the modules. Finally, division management is reviewing the concurrent planning policy with stakeholders, including juvenile court judges, attorneys, foster parents, and others, to educate them on the Division's practices.

- **TPR filings**—Division policy directs that termination of parental rights (TPR) be pursued according to federal requirements or when a child's permanency goal changes to adoption, but this is not always occurring. Federal law requires that a petition to terminate parental rights be filed when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months. The exceptions to this requirement are when the child is being cared for by a relative, there is a documented compelling reason why it would not be in the child's best interests, or reasonable efforts have not been taken to achieve a

¹ Urban Institute Child Welfare Research Program. (2004). *Foster care adoption in the United States: A state by state analysis of barriers and promising approaches*. Retrieved April 16, 2009, from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411108_FosterCareAdoption.pdf

² The federal Child and Family Services Review assesses the performance of state child welfare agencies on specific child safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes and agency systemic factors. Review findings are derived from agency self-assessments; state data profiles prepared by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; case reviews; and interviews and focus groups with stakeholders such as children, parents, foster parents, and agency and court personnel.

case plan goal of reunification. The 2007 federal review noted that although the Division has a system in place to file TPR petitions in a timely manner, some petitions were not filed in a timely manner. In some instances, it was because there was a documented compelling reason. However, in other instances, there was no reason documented in the case file. Therefore, it was unclear why the petition was not filed. Division management indicated that it is monitoring the timeliness of TPR filings through permanency court hearings and team decision-making meetings where permanency options are being discussed.

- **TPR appeals**—The courts have significantly reduced the time for hearing TPR appeals between state fiscal years 2005 and 2009. State law affords individuals a due process right to appeal legal action terminating their parental rights. Guidelines issued by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges recommend a maximum of 150 days to process TPR appeals.¹ Arizona’s Chief Justice has set a 140-day goal. Data compiled by Arizona’s Court Improvement Program Committee indicated that the average number of days to process appeals decreased from 311 days in fiscal year 2005 to 152 days in fiscal year 2009. The Division and the Court of Appeals attributed the improved performance to rule changes that enabled the State’s two appellate court divisions to process appeals more efficiently.

- **Adoptive homes**—It is sometimes difficult to find adoptive homes for children, especially for children with special needs. Statute defines eight specific conditions that may qualify a child as having special needs. Special needs describes not only children who have disabilities, but also includes older children, children belonging to ethnic minority groups, sibling groups, and children with other special conditions (see textbox). According to division staff and a national survey of public and private adoption staff, it is often difficult to find adoptive homes to care for children with special needs.² For example, finding homes for older children, particularly teens, can be a challenge because of the higher cost of supporting the children, and adolescent behavior.

Special Needs Conditions

- Racial or ethnic factors
- Age of 6 or more years at time of application
- Physical, mental, developmental disability
- Emotional disturbance
- High risk of physical or mental disease
- High risk of developmental disability
- Sibling relationship
- High risk of severe emotional disturbance if removed from foster parents’ care

Source: Arizona Revised Statutes §8-141(A)(14).

Most of the children needing adoptive homes in Arizona have one or more special needs. According to division data reported to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Reporting and Analysis System, 643, or 84 percent, of the children in department custody who were adopted in the 6-month period ending March 31, 2009, had one or more special needs (see Table 4).

Table 4: Children Leaving Department Custody For Adoption by Primary Special Needs Condition For the 6-Month Period Ending March 31, 2009¹

Special Need	Number	Percent
Medical condition or disability	465	72%
Sibling group	145	23%
Ethnicity	19	3%
Age	14	2%

¹ The table lists an unduplicated count of children by their primary special needs condition. However, some of these children may have more than one condition.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of Arizona adoption data submitted by the Department to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System for the 6-month period ending March 31, 2009.

¹ National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (2000). *Adoption and permanency guidelines: Improving court practice in child abuse and neglect cases*. Reno, NV: Author.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families. (2007). *A report to Congress on barriers and success factors in adoptions from foster care: Perspectives of families and staff*. Retrieved June 19, 2009, from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/barriers/index.htm>

Most of the children were identified as having a medical condition or disability, such as a visual or hearing impairment or an emotional disability. Division management reported that although staff are required to record any special needs of the child in the Division's automated case management system, these needs are sometimes not identified until the adoptive parents apply for an adoption subsidy (see Question 3 for information on adoption subsidies). As a result, division data may slightly underrepresent the number of children with special needs.

Although the majority of children with an adoption goal are adopted by relatives or their foster families, there are still many for whom an adoptive home needs to be found. Specialized recruitment efforts are used to find suitable adoptive families for these children. This type of recruitment is known as child-specific and focuses on matching the child's specific needs with families willing and able to address those needs. See Question 4 on page 9 for additional information about the Division's recruitment activities.

Question 3: What is the adoption subsidy program and how is it funded?

The adoption subsidy program is a federal and state partnership that provides assistance to adoptive families to encourage the adoption of special needs children. Assistance may include monthly maintenance payments and reimbursement for adoption and special services expenses, and the adopted children may be eligible for healthcare coverage. In fiscal year 2009, Arizona expended \$114 million for adoption subsidies with 70 percent funded with federal monies and 30 percent funded with state monies.

For over 25 years, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the State of Arizona have partnered in providing an adoption subsidy program. Adoption subsidies, or assistance, are cash payments and/or services available to families to encourage the adoption of special needs children by minimizing financial obstacles to the adoption.¹ According to the North American Council on Adoptable Children, adoption subsidies make it possible for children with special needs to be adopted by loving families who require additional resources to help them thrive. Further, according to that same council, adoption subsidies save public dollars because adoption is less expensive than

long-term foster care and results in positive outcomes that reduce youths' needs for public services.²

The Department administers Arizona's adoption subsidy program. Children may receive federally funded subsidies under Title IV-E or state-funded subsidies. State-funded adoption subsidies are provided for special needs children who are not eligible to receive federal adoption subsidies. To qualify for adoption subsidies, the child must be legally able to be adopted, have one or more special needs as defined in state law, and meet certain other eligibility requirements (see textbox on page 7). According to Arizona data submitted to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 92 percent of the children in department custody who were adopted in the 6-month period ending March 31, 2009, received monthly adoption assistance. Of these children, 86 percent received all or a portion of their subsidy from federal monies and 14 percent received all of their subsidy from state monies.

Recurring and nonrecurring adoption assistance for the adoptive parents of special needs children, and healthcare coverage for the children, is available through both federal and state adoption subsidies. Specifically:

- **Recurring adoption assistance** is provided in the form of monthly maintenance payments to the adoptive parents for the care of the special needs child. The amount of the monthly maintenance payment varies

¹ Adoption subsidies are not available for the adoption of children without special needs.

² North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2008). *The value of adoption subsidies: Helping children find permanent families*. Retrieved October 16, 2009, from <http://www.nacac.org/adoptionssubsidy/valueofsubsidies.pdf>

Federal and State Adoption Subsidies Eligibility Requirements

Federal and state subsidies—Child must meet all of the following:

- In custody of the Department of Economic Security or a licensed private child-placing agency
- Cannot or should not be returned to the birth parents
- Reasonable but unsuccessful effort taken to place without adoption assistance unless being adopted by the child's relative or foster parent with whom the child has already established significant emotional ties

Federal subsidy—Child must also meet one of the following:

- Eligible for federal Title IV-E maintenance payments while in foster care
- Eligible for Supplemental Security Income before the adoption is finalized
- Born to a minor who was in foster care and receiving federal IV-E maintenance payments covering both the parent and child when the adoption was initiated
- Received federal subsidy in a previous adoption, but whose original adoption was dissolved or the adoptive parents died

Source: 42 United States Code Annotated §673 and the Division's *Children's Services Manual*.

depending on the child's special needs and the level of care required. For example, a family adopting a child with severe developmental impairment requiring constant care receives a higher payment rate than a family adopting a child with mild impairment requiring care appropriate for his/her age. However, the rate cannot exceed the amount that a licensed foster family can receive. As shown in Table 5, the maximum monthly adoption maintenance rates ranged from \$590 to \$1,072 effective March 1, 2009.¹

Table 5: Maximum Monthly Adoption Maintenance Rates Effective March 1, 2009¹

Basic	
0 through 11 years	\$ 590
12 through 20 years	652
Specialized²	
Adoption maintenance level 2	706
Adoption maintenance level 3	898
Adoption maintenance level 4	\$1,072

¹ The monthly rate is based on a 30-day month and calculated by multiplying the daily family foster home maintenance rate by 30. The amount of the monthly payment issued to a family is based on the number of days in the month the child qualified for the subsidy.

² The adoption maintenance level is determined by evaluating the extraordinary needs of the child and/or the additional parenting skill needed to raise the child because of a physical or medical condition; developmental or educational special need; or behavioral or mental health condition. Level 4 rates are reserved for the homes in which a parent is licensed to provide therapeutic care.

Source: Auditor General staff summary of the Division's *Family Foster Home Care Rates and Fee Schedule (Rates effective March 1, 2009)*.

A three-member committee of department staff determines a child's eligibility for adoption subsidies. If the committee determines that an adoptive child is eligible, it will evaluate the extraordinary needs of the child and/or the additional parenting skill needed to raise the child because of a physical or medical condition; developmental or educational special need; or behavioral or mental health condition. The committee will then negotiate a payment rate with the adoptive parents, which is formalized in a signed adoption subsidy agreement. In line with federal policy, the committee may not consider the adoptive parents' income or require the parents to account for how the money is spent.

¹ Because of department budget cuts in 2009, foster care rates were reduced by 20 percent beginning March 1, 2009, which set the maximum allowable adoption subsidy rate on or after March 1, 2009, 20 percent lower.

Arizona has experienced steady growth in the use of the adoption maintenance subsidy over the years. According to division reports, the number of children whose adoptive families receive monthly maintenance payments has grown from 7,088 children in state fiscal year 2004 to 12,302 children in state fiscal year 2009, a 74 percent increase. The corresponding growth in expenditures was 170 percent, due in part to increases in payment rates over the years.¹ The textbox shows the growth in average monthly adoption maintenance payments from state fiscal years 2004 through 2009. Although adoption subsidy expenditures are growing, these expenses are offset by a reduction in long-term foster care costs.

Average Monthly Maintenance Payment Per Child

Fiscal Year	Payment
2004	\$475
2005	\$488
2006	\$586
2007	\$684
2008	\$710
2009	\$738

Source: Auditor General staff summary of the Division's schedules of *Adoption Services—FY 2004—FY 2008 Actual Expenditures Data as of May 31, 2008*, and *Adoption Services—FY 2008—FY 2009 Actual Expenditures—Data as of August 26, 2009*.

- **Nonrecurring adoption assistance** is payment or reimbursement to adoptive parents for one-time reasonable and necessary expenses directly related to the legal adoption of a child with special needs, which cannot be reimbursed from other sources. These expenses include attorney fees, replacing the birth certificate, and traveling to visit the child during the adoption process. The federal reimbursement limit is \$2,000 per child.
- **Healthcare coverage** is funded through the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), which is the State's Medicaid program. AHCCCS

covers the cost of medical, behavioral health, and mental health services for adopted special needs children until age 21. Because the State and the federal government established adoption subsidies, including healthcare, to facilitate adoption of special needs children, adoptive parents may choose to have their adoptive child covered by AHCCCS, regardless of the adoptive parents' income. However, in instances where the adopted child is covered under both AHCCCS and his/her adoptive parents' private insurance, a coordination of benefits process is in place so that the private insurance is primary.

Arizona's adoption subsidy program also provides a special services subsidy and post-adoption services. The special services subsidy is for the reimbursement of infrequent or uncommon requirements related to a pre-existing condition of the child, such as a need for a wheelchair lift. Division policy requires that all other private or public sources of payment, such as AHCCCS and private insurance, are exhausted before special services are subsidized. Post-adoption services such as support groups and information and education are provided when requested by the family and approved by adoption program staff. Although the provision of some of these services was decreased due to department budget cuts, families are still provided with information and referrals to local educational and community resources.

In state fiscal year 2009, the Division expended \$114 million in state and federal monies for adoption subsidies, excluding healthcare coverage.² As shown in Table 6 on page 9, the majority of the expenditures were for adoption maintenance payments, and the remaining monies were for special services and nonrecurring adoption expenses. Federal monies paid for 70 percent of these adoption subsidy expenditures, and state monies covered 30 percent of the expenditures.

¹ Division officials reported that maintenance payment rates increased in January 2004, June 2004, July 2005, and July 2006 as a result of state legislation.

² Funding for adoption subsidies comes from the State General Fund, and federal Title IV-A (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and Title IV-E (Foster Care and Adoption Assistance) programs. In addition, the State uses monies from the Federal Adoption Incentive Payments Program to fund adoption subsidies and recruitment activities. The State receives award amounts for each adopted foster child over established baseline numbers.

Table 6: Adoption Subsidy Expenditures by Type and Source
State Fiscal Year 2009

Subsidy Type	Federal	State	Total
Maintenance payments	\$78,424,979	\$30,540,949	\$108,965,928
Special services	225,000	3,424,622	3,649,622
Nonrecurring adoption expenses	701,249	701,249	1,402,498
Total	\$79,351,228	\$34,666,820	\$114,018,048

Source: Auditor General staff summary of the Division's schedule of *Adoption Services—FY 2008—FY 2009 Actual Expenditures—Data as of August 26, 2009.*

Question 4: What is the Division doing to recruit adoptive families?

The Division recruits resource families to provide temporary out-of-home care and permanent placements for children who cannot live safely at home using general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment strategies. In support of these efforts, the Department has awarded contracts to 21 community agencies to, among other activities, recruit culturally and ethnically diverse foster and adoptive families, as well as foster and adoptive families for older children and sibling groups.

The Division is responsible for recruiting, developing, and supporting resource families throughout the State. Resource families include relatives, foster caregivers, and adoptive families. These families provide temporary care through foster care or permanent homes through adoption for children who cannot live safely at home. As previously mentioned, about 20 percent of the children in out-of-home care have a permanency goal of adoption. About 60 percent of these children are adopted by their resource family, i.e.,

relative or foster family. For the remaining children, specialized adoptive home recruitment is needed. Division management reported using three key strategies to build public awareness of the need for resource families, as well as to develop the pool of resource families. Specifically:

- **General recruitment** focuses on large audiences through media and public outreach programs. These programs include public events, public service announcements on television and radio stations, mass media, foster care and adoption fairs, and exhibit and information booths at community events. The Division also operates a centralized recruitment response and information system using a toll-free telephone number and Web site. Through this system, division staff provide prospective resource families with information on becoming foster and adoptive parents. This includes detailed information about the foster home licensing and adoption certification processes. The goal of general recruitment is to increase public awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families.

Because of the Department's recent budget cuts, division management reported that it is not producing or distributing mass media as of March 2009. However, the Department continues to promote the need for foster and adoptive homes through a page on its Web site—www.azkidsneedu.gov. The Division also collaborates with community partners to maintain awareness and feature children awaiting adoption. Some of these collaborations with the media include

Wednesday's Child on Phoenix's Channel 12, *Are You My Family* on Phoenix's Channel 3, publications such as *Today's News-Herald* and *South Mountain Villager*, and local talk shows. In addition to local collaborations, the Division collaborates with the national organization AdoptUsKids. AdoptUsKids maintains a Web site at www.adoptuskids.org and produces and distributes television, radio, and print advertisements in Arizona and nation-wide that promote the message "You don't have to be a perfect parent to be a foster or adoptive parent."

- **Targeted recruitment** focuses on specific groups of children and teens in need of families. Targeted recruitment concentrates on recruiting resource families with specific skills needed to meet the needs of children in individual communities or groups of children with special circumstances. The Division uses both generalized and targeted recruitment to recruit families who reflect the ethnicity of the children in out-of-home care, as required by federal law. According to a report supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, targeted recruitment is the most effective type of recruitment for placing children.¹
- Child-specific recruitment focuses on finding adults who have a significant connection to a child who is in

need of permanency and for children who require special care. This type of recruitment is tailored to the child's or sibling group's unique strengths, interests, needs, and culture. An individualized recruitment plan is developed for the child, and generally includes contacting relatives, friends, former caregivers, and other significant adults in the child's life to help identify a permanent family. If no adoptive family can be identified, information on the child, such as his/her first name, age, interests, and photo, is entered onto Web sites such as Adoption.com and AdoptUsKids.org. The child's information may also appear on Channel 12's *Wednesday's Child*.

In support of the Division's recruitment activities, the Department has awarded Home Recruitment Study and Supervision (HRSS) contracts to 21 community agencies to increase the number of foster care and adoptive resource families. In addition to other activities, these agencies recruit culturally and ethnically diverse foster and adoptive families, as well as foster and adoptive families for older children and sibling groups.² According to division records, the HRSS-contracted agencies were paid \$505,000 for their recruitment efforts in state fiscal year 2009.

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2002). Recruitment, training, and support: The essential tools of foster care. *Family to Family: Tools for rebuilding foster care*. Retrieved October 14, 2009, from <http://www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/recruitment%20training%20and%20support.pdf>

² According to the Division's adoption program staff, because of department budget cuts in 2009, the Division has suspended targeted recruitment for HRSS providers for some recruiting efforts, such as holding informational meetings with communities to raise awareness of the need for adoptive families.





Office of the Auditor General
(602) 553-0333
www.azauditor.gov
Contact person: Catherine Dahlquist

QUESTIONS and
ANSWERS
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