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# National Adoption Attitudes Survey

Research Report

June 2002

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Executive Summary

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## Executive Summary

In America today, more than 134,000 children wait in foster care for adoptive homes. That is more than enough children to fill any stadium in the country. It's a mid-sized town of children. These children have many characteristics – most are older than five, some have brothers and sisters who need to be adopted together and some have physical or behavioral challenges.

In 2001, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption developed a three-year strategic plan to enhance the national initiative to find permanent adoptive homes for children waiting in foster care. However, a major issue emerged – a lack of solid, accurate and actionable data on how people view adoption in this country, particularly foster care adoption.

How can public attitudes about adoption be changed if we don't know what they are today? How can we educate the general public when we don't know what they already know? How can policymakers create laws if they don't know about Americans' concerns and perceived needs? How can adoption advocates and agencies enhance their practices without knowledge about adoption perceptions?

Now, with the results of this landmark study focusing on adoption attitudes, concerns, opinions and perceptions, answers to these questions are becoming clearer. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption sponsored the study in cooperation with The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute to provide a wealth of information about how Americans think and feel about adoption.

The research has uncovered many new and exciting findings. The most significant finding is one of hope. About four in ten Americans have considered adopting a child at one time in their lives. This equates to about 81.5 million adults. Considering there are 134,000 children in foster care waiting for families, these children would all have a home today if just 0.2% (1 in 500) of these adults actually pursued and completed the adoption process. Unfortunately, children available for adoption still languish in the foster care system because not enough families who consider adoption do it. A goal of this study is to help identify why this is happening and to help change it.

The survey results highlight another key finding: Americans have a favorable opinion of adoption, and the proportion has increased during the past five years. Sixty-five percent of Americans have experience with adoption either through their own family or through close friends. Personal experience with adoption has also increased over the past five years. Additionally, nearly all Americans have extremely positive views about adoptive parents and support employers adding adoption benefits to match maternity and paternity benefits. So why don't those who think so favorably of it – or are touched so directly by it, pursue adoption more often? Why are so many American children facing a possible future without a permanent family?

The adoption community may find particularly useful some of the data about demographic differences of those most likely to adopt. According to the survey, Hispanic populations are more likely to consider adoption than African-American and White populations – though African-American populations are most likely to consider adopting a child who has been in foster care. Income and education are not major factors in considering adopting. Almost half of those between the ages of 35 and 54 indicated they have considered adopting. Females are more likely to consider adoption than males. The detailed information identified in the survey about willingness to adopt should be invaluable to adoption professionals in enhancing efforts to recruit adoptive parents based on a child's needs.

The study also revealed that the mental and physical health of a child is far more of a factor in an adult's desire to adopt that child than race, age, time in foster care or even the income needed to raise the child. The study clearly shows many Americans have some misperceptions about children available for adoption in foster care (and adopted children in general). For example, most perceive adopted children as more likely to have drug problems and more problems in school than biological children. Although adopted children undergo an adjustment period, the reality is that the majority of adopted children have similar long-term outcomes as biological children.

Some other misperceptions are revealed in the study. The most common is a fear by 82% of Americans that the birth parents would try to regain a child once the adoption is complete – something that statistics show rarely happens (and often sensationalized in media coverage). The cost of adoption is also a concern, though foster care adoption is generally inexpensive and frequently includes government subsidies.

Many other issues, such as international adoption, inter-racial adoption and open adoption, are explored and offer insight into American views about these increasingly common trends in adoption.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption commissioned this study in cooperation with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute to find specific ways to encourage the adoption of the growing number of children in the United States' foster care system who are waiting for permanent homes and loving families. The Foundation and the Adoption Institute designed and managed the study, as well as analyzed the results with Harris Interactive<sup>sm</sup>, publisher of *The Harris Poll*<sup>®</sup>. The study is the most comprehensive ever completed that measures the factors associated with consideration of adoption. The findings are designed to assist the Foundation, the Adoption Institute, adoption agencies and policymakers to move children from foster care into permanent homes and loving families – Dave Thomas' lifetime vision.

The primary goal of the research was to provide information necessary to impact public policies, enhance adoption practices and inform the media and public about adoption so more Americans will consider adopting the many children who want and need permanent

homes and loving families – particularly those waiting in foster care. Now we have critical information upon which we can act.

## Contact Information

**If you have any questions regarding the results, methodology or distribution of this survey, please contact the organizations that are proudly sponsoring this research in order to find permanent homes and loving families for waiting children:**

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