INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: State Child Welfare Administrators
    State Adoption and Foster Care Coordinators
    State Developmental Disabilities Administrators
    State TAP Program Directors
    State Developmental Disability Council Directors

SUBJECT: Planning for the Adoption of Children with Developmental Disabilities

LEGAL AND RELATED REFERENCES:

Title IV-E Adoption Assistance
Title IV-B of the Social Security Act
The Americans with Disabilities Act
The Developmental Disabilities Bill of Rights
The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994
The Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 (Public Law (P.L.) 104-188
Title XVI-Supplemental Security Income for the Aged, Blind and Disabled

PURPOSE: The purpose of this information memorandum is to encourage States to plan, coordinate and collaborate with the appropriate public and private agencies, local community groups and families to increase the adoption of developmentally disabled children.

BACKGROUND: At the end of 1994, estimates suggested that 60,000 children had a permanency goal of adoption. It is estimated that 27,000 of those children with a permanency goal of adoption were legally free. Of those children who were legally free for adoption, 70% were described as having special needs, which would have included children with developmental disabilities.

Across the nation, adoptive parents from various social, economic, educational and ethnic backgrounds have successfully adopted children who have developmental disabilities as reflected in family satisfaction and
improved life chances for children. Yet, even
with the many triumphant stories where these
children have been adopted and benefited
enormously from their permanent families there
is still a significant need for adoptive
families for children with disabilities.

There is an opportunity for the child welfare and
the disability communities to pool their
knowledge and resources to promote adoption.
With the appropriate assistance and
supports, individuals who are committed to
parenting a child with a developmental
disability, are able to become successful
parents.

For the child with a developmental
disability, being adopted can mean an end to
living in temporary foster homes or
institutions and the beginning of the
acceptance that can best be experienced in a
permanent family setting. For parent(s) who adopt
a child with a developmental disability, adoption
can mean benefiting personally from the rewarding
experiences that come from parenting.

There are Federal programs, for
example, the title IV-E Adoption Assistance
Program, Medicaid and title XVI-Supplemental
Security Income for the Aged, Blind and Disabled
which provide financial support or the necessary
assistance to families who adopt eligible
children with developmental disabilities.

The Administration on Developmental Disabilities' (ADD)
and the Children's Bureau (CB) want to

RECOMMENDED APPROACH:

The Administration on Developmental Disabilities' (ADD) and the Children's Bureau (CB) want to
promote the adoption of children with developmental disabilities and recommend the following approaches for States:

* Concentrate on the value of "family life" for children with developmental disabilities who are in need of adoption.

* Plan comprehensive recruitment strategies that reflect the needs of the population of children with developmental disabilities in need of adoption.

* Develop adoption recruitment strategies in partnership with families who have adopted children with mild-to-severe developmental disabilities.

* Incorporate an array of flexible, culturally and linguistically responsive activities, recruitment literature, as well as audiovisual materials to promote the adoption of children with developmental disabilities.

* Complete an assessment of those children with developmental disabilities who are in need of families in order to prioritize goals and to obtain a clear description of the adoption needs that should be addressed.

* Provide prospective adoptive parents of children with developmental disabilities with supportive services including (at a minimum):

  o a community resource guide to services and programs for families with children with developmental disabilities;

  o a list of family supportive service organizations that assist families with children who have developmental disabilities;

  o a descriptive list of Federal and State financial adoption assistance programs for adoptive parent(s); and

  o a summary of flexible and specialized services that offer respite care.
We applaud those States that are currently engaging in collaborations that are specifically designed to identify adoptive families for children with developmental disabilities.

Attached is a listing of resources that have proven to be valuable to States that presently have nationally recognized initiatives to recruit families for special needs children. Please carefully review the attached resource listings and exchange among yourselves pertinent information regarding the best practices, concepts, and ideas that may assist in increasing the rate of adoption.

Please forward a description of your most successful recruitment activities aimed at identifying families who are able to provide children with a loving, caring, and supportive permanent home that your State has developed. We are requesting that your voluntary information be forwarded to our offices no later than June 29, 1997 so that a best practices list can be compiled and disseminated to State Child Welfare Administrators.
Please send your successful recruitment activities to:

Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Attention: Kathleen McHugh
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, D.C. 20013

Sincerely,

Bob Williams, D.S.W.
Commissioner
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Developmental Disabilities

Carol W. Williams, D.S.W.
Associate Commissioner
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

ATTACHMENTS