

Assessing Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families' Needs for Support*

Before creating or adapting services to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families, it's a great idea to assess the overall needs of these families in your community. Conducting a community needs assessment** helps your child welfare system in several important ways, including:

1. Learning more about the needs of adoptive, foster, and kinship families. A good survey can supplement your agency's own observations and experiences. It can give you detailed information from a larger and more representative group of people than you can get from anecdotes alone.
2. Getting a more honest and objective description of needs than people might tell your agency directly.
3. Surfacing needs you didn't know were important to foster, adoptive, and kinships families or that you never knew existed.
4. Making sure any services your child welfare system provides are aligned with the community's needs.
5. Identifying or understanding any differences in needs or services available in different counties, regions, or service areas.
6. Ensuring resources aren't being wasted on services that aren't needed or valued, enabling your child welfare system to redirect resources as needed or making improvements in services that aren't doing all they could.
7. Gathering information that can inform and enrich other efforts. For example, this assessment information can be relevant for the statewide assessment for your Child and Family Services Review and help you develop strategies to incorporate into any needed Program Improvement Plan.

* This information is adapted, with permission, from the Community Toolbox. Learn more at http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1042.aspx

You can find sample surveys and focus groups questions, along with much about assessing families' needs in [Chapter 2 of *Support Matters: Lessons from the Field about Support Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families*](http://www.nrcdr.org/develop-and-support-families/support-matters) (<http://www.nrcdr.org/develop-and-support-families/support-matters>).

** Note: This discussion of a needs assessment is referring to a community-level assessment of the needs of the group of foster, adoptive, and kinship families. This is different from the needs assessment child welfare systems conduct with an individual child or family, such as would be done for an individual service plan.



There are several ways to assess families' needs, including in-person or phone interviews, paper or online surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, public forums, data analysis, and more. A few of the more common approaches are:

- **Using existing data**—You might use agency placement data or Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data to start your needs assessment. You can also look to information others have gathered (such as previous surveys conducted by foster and adoptive family support organizations in your community).
- **Listening sessions and public forums**—Listening sessions are forums you can use to learn about the community's perspectives on local issues and options. They are generally fairly small, with specific questions asked of participants. Public forums tend to be both larger in number of participants and broader in scope than listening sessions. They are gatherings where attendees discuss important issues at a well-publicized location and time. For example, if you're holding community meetings related to your Child and Family Services Review, you may be able use the opportunity to gather information to assess the needs for support services for adoptive, foster, and kinship care families. You can plan for such meetings as part of your process for developing strategies related to permanency or placement stability as part of a Program Improvement Plan.
- **Interviews and focus groups**—These are less formal than forums, and are conducted with either individuals or small groups (usually fewer than 10, and sometimes as few as two or three people). They generally include specific questions, but allow flexibility for moving in different directions, depending on what the participants want to discuss. Open-ended questions (those which need something more than a simple answer), follow-up questions or discussion on interesting points, and a relaxed atmosphere that encourages people to open up are all part of most assessment interviews and focus groups.
- **Surveys**—There are several different kinds of surveys, any or all of which could be used as part of a community assessment. You can find a [sample survey in Chapter 2 of *Support Matters* \(see page 32\)](#).

Idea from the field—Washington State examines its post-adoption support

In 2012, the Washington State Auditor's Office conducted a survey to determine to what extent the needs of families who adopt from foster care were being met. The survey was part of an ongoing effort in which the auditor's office conducts independent, comprehensive performance audits of state and local governments. For its examination of adoption support, the office also reviewed literature on post-adoption needs and services and studied similar states' post-adoption programs. The auditors also examined the process of negotiating adoption assistance benefits.

To conduct the survey on service needs, the office selected a random sample from the more than 9,000 families who were receiving adoption assistance benefits during fiscal year 2012. Of the 1,686 individuals sampled, 750 completed the survey. Released in February 2014, key survey findings include:

- Most families' needs are being met, but 29 percent of families expressed an unmet need.
- The biggest gaps in services were for families raising children with diagnosed disabilities. Of these families, 57 percent had an unmet need.
- One of the largest unmet needs was for family counseling. Other unmet needs included information on services and parenting, support groups, and child care or after-school care for children who need special supervision.

To learn more about the survey and the rest of the performance audit, read [*The Experiences and Perspectives of Washington Families who Adopted Children from Care*](#).

Contact the [National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids](#) (NRCDR@adoptuskids.org or 303-755-4756) to find out how we can assist your child welfare system in applying insights from the *Support Matters* publication as part of your recruitment, development, and support of families.



More free resources at:
adoptuskids.org

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