Friday, September 1, 2006

Events

September 21 – Model Court Training Academy, Polk County Courthouse, Noon – 1 p.m. (Free CLE).


November 18 – ADOPTION SATURDAY!! Polk County Courthouse – Last year almost 1,000 people attended and 42 adoptions were finalized on that one day.

Gay Foster Families Sought (Excerpts from an article in the Houston Chronicle): Last November, the Montrose [Texas] Counseling Center, a stronghold in the center of the city’s gay community, sent out a call for gay-friendly foster parents. The not-for-profit got at least 12 volunteers, five of whom have registered with a private foster care agency working with the center. That agency will train the parents and help pair foster care kids with them, although none have been placed yet. Unlike other, similar efforts in the nation, this gay-friendly recruitment is coming from outside the state’s child protective agency.

The idea — to recruit gay and gay-friendly parents to the foster care system — comes amid debates about caregiving by gays and lesbians. At least one state, Florida, outlaws adoption by this segment of the population, and others, including Texas, recently debated stopping them from serving as foster parents. At the same time, gay
rights groups say they’ve seen an increased push by some government child welfare agencies, including ones in New York City and Philadelphia, to recruit and train gay-friendly foster parents for gay, lesbian and transgender teenagers.

"Allowing (these youths) to have the type of home life and care in the future that they need improves their ability to be successful as adults," said Jody Marksamer, co-author of a best-practices manual for sexual and gender minorities in foster care. Ann Robison, executive director of the counseling center, said the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services is aware of her organization's effort, but both sides need a face-to-face meeting to work out logistics. The agency oversees foster care for the state, but it outsources some parent training and recruitment to private organizations.

Right now state officials say they can’t guarantee that teens referred by the center will be paired with the parents it recruits. But they welcome the fresh crop of foster parent volunteers. Gwen Carter, Houston-area spokeswoman for Child Protective Services, said her agency has to consider a host of issues — everything from sexual orientation to drug use and religion — when matching a child to a foster home. "If a child says, 'I want to be in a home that will accept my sexuality,' we will try our best to meet their needs," Carter said.

Although a handful have tried, no state bans gays and lesbians from serving as foster care parents, said Rob Woronoff with the Child Welfare League of America. Woronoff heads the organization's programs for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. [Texas] State Representative Robert Talton proposed such measures in 2003 and 2005, but neither passed. Similar bans recently were overturned in Missouri and Arkansas.

In Texas, training on sexuality and gender issues is not mandatory for new foster care parents, although the subject is often discussed, Carter said. Potential parents also aren’t asked about their sexual orientation. The Montrose program, run through its foster care partner, would put parents through an extra level of training, teaching them about issues facing gay, lesbian and transgender teenagers. California recently made this type of training mandatory.

In the Houston area, an estimated 1,700 children under 21 received homeless services, according to a 1999 survey by the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County. The counseling center estimates that about 30 percent of these youths are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Homeless teens are at a higher risk for drug addiction and suicide, according to national studies, and can be vulnerable to adult sexual predators.

Only recently, however, have nonprofits and government agencies begun recruiting gay or gay-friendly foster care parents, said Marksamer, also a staff attorney for the National Center for Lesbian Rights youth project. Washington, D.C., started a program to pair up mentors with gay and lesbian foster kids, and New York City and Philadelphia child welfare agencies have issued public appeals for gay-friendly foster parents, Woronoff said.
Feds Cite 'Grave Concern' About Las Vegas Foster Care (Excerpts from an article in the Las Vegas Sun): A federal official warned Nevada of "grave concern" about the state of foster care in the Las Vegas area, less than a week before a 15-month-old boy died at the Clark County shelter for abused and neglected children.

Authorities have not said how Joshua Sharp died. Officials said he was found unconscious Tuesday at Child Haven and could not be revived before being pronounced dead at a hospital. Police were investigating when emergency services were summoned for the boy, and county officials said they were reviewing how and when staff reported he was in distress.

The case renewed pressure on county and state officials to address concerns about oversight and overcrowding in a system where officials have said 11 children died from 2001 to 2004. At least two more children died at Child Haven this year, and a 2-year-old who disappeared June 10 from a foster home in North Las Vegas has not been found.

County management of child welfare services "should be a grave concern to the state," federal Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families regional administrator Sharon Fujii said in an Aug. 11 letter to Michael Willden, Nevada state Department of Health and Human Services director. Thomas Morton, county Department of Family Services director, issued a statement Wednesday saying he was developing a plan to address federal concerns and recommendations. Morton said he was barred by state privacy rules from disclosing much information about deaths and near fatalities in the child welfare system.

Fujii said conditions for foster children in Clark County had worsened since federal officials examined the system in February 2004. Fujii noted Child Haven was designed to hold 84 children and 20 infants, but had 205 children on June 30. More than half were age 4 or younger. The facility in Las Vegas had 146 children on Wednesday, including 40 infants, officials said.

The letter found the average length of stay for children was 45 days - more than three times longer than the Family Services policy of two weeks. Some children remained at the facility for three to six months, and federal officials met one child who had been at Child Haven for more than two years, Fujii said. The letter also faulted county officials for "unnecessarily" removing children from homes and putting them in Child Haven. The letter instructed the state to set remediation goals by Aug. 31 or face sanctions for noncompliance with a program improvement plan approved in February 2005. Possible penalties were not specified.
**August Statistical Summary:** During the month of August, the Iowa Supreme Court rendered no decisions in juvenile cases. During the month of August, the Iowa Court of Appeals rendered 14 opinions in juvenile cases. Of those 14 cases, 11 were TPR cases and 3 were CINA cases. Here is what happened on each of those types of cases:

**TPR Cases** In 11 cases, the parent(s) appealed the trial court’s order terminating parental rights. In 10 of those cases, the Court of Appeals affirmed the termination of parental rights. In one case, the Court of Appeals affirmed the termination of parental rights on the father and reversed the termination of parental rights on the mother.

**CINA Cases:** In one case, a permanency order was vacated due to a failure to appoint an attorney for a child when the roles of Guardian ad Litem and attorney conflicted. (See the past issue of Child Views for a description of this ruling.) In another case, the parents appealed an order denying their application to modify a dispositional order. The ruling denying the modification was affirmed. In the third CINA case, a parent appealed from a permanency order that continued custody in DHS and gave full responsibility to DHS for determining all visitation. The Court of Appeals affirmed the trial court’s order, saying that error was not preserved (see description of ruling below).

**In Interest of D.B. (Iowa Court of Appeals, August 23, 2006):** In the middle of a permanency hearing, the father left the courtroom. Father’s attorney remained, but “expressed no position ‘in regards to any of the specific recommendations’ for permanency.” The Court of Appeals held that father’s failure to raise the issue of visitation at the permanency hearing “…leaves us nothing further to review on appeal.”

**Numbers of Interest**

The U.S. Census Bureau has released fresh information concerning our nation’s population in its first release of data from the American Community Survey. The Survey began as a test program in 1996 and has gradually expanded to where it can now provide detailed data for nearly 7,000 geographic areas, including all Congressional districts and counties or cities of 65,000 or more. In coming months, more data from the survey will cover income, poverty and housing. Here is some of the “fresh” information supplied by the Census Bureau in its latest survey results:
Immigration:

- Over all, immigrants now make up 12.4 percent of the nation’s population, up from 11.2 percent in 2000. That amounts to an estimated 4.9 million additional immigrants for a total of 35.7 million, a number larger than the population of California. From 1990 to 2000, the total population showed a 57 percent increase in the foreign-born population, to 31.1 million, from 19.8 million.
- More of America’s immigrants come from Mexico than any other country, an estimated 11 million in 2005, compared with nearly 1.8 million Chinese and 1.4 million Indians.
- The percentage of immigrants who were born in European countries has dropped sharply — 29.4 percent in the last five years.
- While 58 percent of the immigrants who arrived in the United States since 2000 settled in 5 of the traditional gateway states, 24 percent settled in 9 second-tier states (including Georgia, Massachusetts and Washington) and 11 percent found homes in 11 third-tier states, many of which have seen little immigration before (stretching from Connecticut to Minnesota to Nevada).
- By far the largest numbers of immigrants continue to live in the six states that have traditionally attracted them: California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey and Illinois. Indiana saw a 34 percent increase in the number of immigrants; South Dakota saw a 44 percent rise; Delaware 32 percent; Missouri 31 percent; Colorado 28 percent; and New Hampshire 26 percent.

Education:

- The survey showed an increase in the number of Americans over age 25 who hold a bachelor’s degree or higher — 27.2 percent of that population in 2005 compared with 24.4 percent in 2000. In 1940, only 4.6 percent of Americans held a bachelor’s degree.

Age:

- The survey found that the percentage of Americans who are 65 or over is shrinking, from 12.6 percent of the population in 1990 to 12.4 percent in 2000.

“When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments: tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he may become.” – Louis Pasteur