

Adoption Bonuses: The Money Behind the Madness
DSS and affiliates rewarded for breaking up families

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Child "protection" is one of the biggest businesses in the country. We spend \$12 billion a year on it.

The money goes to tens of thousands of a) state employees, b) collateral professionals, such as lawyers, court personnel, court investigators, evaluators and guardians, judges, and c) DSS contracted vendors such as counselors, therapists, more "evaluators", junk psychologists, residential facilities, foster parents, adoptive parents, MSPCC, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, YMCA, etc. This newspaper is not big enough to list all of the people in this state who have a job, draw a paycheck, or make their profits off the kids in DSS custody.

In this article I explain the financial infrastructure that provides the motivation for DSS to take people's children – and not give them back.

In 1974 Walter Mondale promoted the Child Abuse and Prevention Act which began feeding massive amounts of federal funding to states to set up programs to combat child abuse and neglect. From that came Child "Protective" Services, as we know it today. After the bill passed, Mondale himself expressed concerns that it could be misused. He worried that it could lead states to create a "business" in dealing with children.

Then in 1997 President Clinton passed the "Adoption and Safe Families Act." The public relations campaign promoted it as a way to help abused and neglected children who languished in foster care for years, often being shuffled among dozens of foster homes, never having a real home and family. In a press release from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services dated November 24, 1999, it refers to "President Clinton's initiative to double by 2002 the number of children in foster care who are adopted or otherwise permanently placed."

It all sounded so heartwarming. We, the American public, are so easily led. We love to buy stereotypes; we just eat them up, no questions asked. But, my mother, bless her heart, taught me from the time I was young to "consider the source." In the stereotype that we've been sold about kids in foster care, we picture a forlorn, hollow-eyed child, thin and pale, looking up at us beseechingly through a dirt streaked face. Unconsciously, we pull up old pictures from Life magazine of children in Appalachia in the 1930s. We think of orphans and children abandoned by parents who look like Manson family members. We play a nostalgic movie in our heads of the little fellow shyly walking across an emerald green, manicured lawn to meet Ward and June Cleaver, his new adoptive parents, who lead him into their lovely suburban home. We imagine the little tyke's eyes growing as big as saucers as the Cleavers show him his very own room, full of toys and sports gear. And we just feel so gosh darn good about ourselves.

Now it's time to wake up to the reality of the adoption business.

Very few children who are being used to supply the adoption market are hollow-eyed tykes from Appalachia. Very few are crack babies from the projects. [Oh... you thought those were the children they were saving? Think again]. When you are marketing a product you have to provide a desirable product that sells. In the adoption business that would be nice kids with reasonably good genetics who clean up good. An interesting point is that the Cape Cod & Islands office leads the state in terms of processing kids into the system and having them adopted out. More than the inner city areas, the projects, Mission Hill, Brockton, Lynn, etc. Interesting...

With the implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, President Clinton tried to make himself look like a humanitarian who is responsible for saving the abused and neglected children. The drive of this initiative is to offer cash "bonuses" to states for every child they have adopted out of foster care, with the goal of doubling their adoptions by 2002, and sustaining that for each subsequent year. They actually call them "adoption incentive bonuses," to promote the adoption of children.

Where to Find the Children

A whole new industry was put into motion. A sweet marketing scheme that even Bill Gates could envy. Now, if you have a basket of apples, and people start giving you \$100 per apple, what are you going to do? Make sure that you have an unlimited supply of apples, right?

The United States Department of Health & Human Services administers Child Protective Services. To accompany the ASF Act, the President requested, by executive memorandum, an initiative entitled Adoption 2002, to be implemented and managed by Health & Human Services. The initiative not only gives the cash adoption bonuses to the states, it also provides cash adoption subsidies to adoptive parents until the children turn eighteen.

Everybody makes money. If anyone really believes that these people are doing this out of the goodness of their hearts, then

I've got some bad news for you. The fact that this program is run by HHS, ordered from the very top, explains why the citizens who are victims of DSS get no response from their legislators. It explains why no one in the Administration cares about the abuse and fatalities of children in the "care" of DSS, and no one wants to hear about the broken arms, verbal abuse, or rapes. They are just business casualties. It explains why the legislators I've talked to for the past three years look at me with pity. Because I'm preaching to the already damned.

The legislators have forgotten who funds their paychecks and who they need to account to, as has the Governor. Because it isn't the President. It's us.

How DSS Is Helped

The way that the adoption bonuses work is that each state is given a baseline number of expected adoptions based on population.

For every child that DSS can get adopted, there is a bonus of \$4,000 to \$6,000.

But that is just the starting figure in a complex mathematical formula in which each bonus is multiplied by the percentage that the state has managed to exceed its baseline adoption number. The states must maintain this increase in each successive year. [Like compound interest.] The bill reads: "\$4,000 to \$6,000 will be multiplied by the amount (if any) by which the number of foster child adoptions in the State exceeds the base number of foster child adoptions for the State for the fiscal year." In the "technical assistance" section of the bill it states that, "the Secretary [of HHS] may, directly or through grants or contracts, provide technical assistance to assist states and local communities to reach their targets for increased numbers of adoptions for children in foster care." The technical assistance is to support "the goal of encouraging more adoptions out of the foster care system; the development of best practice guidelines for expediting the termination of parental rights; the development of special units and expertise in moving children toward adoption as a permanent goal; models to encourage the fast tracking of children who have not attained 1 year of age into pre-adoptive placements; and the development of programs that place children into pre-adoptive placements without waiting for termination of parental rights."

In the November press release from HHS it continues, "HHS awarded the first ever adoption bonuses to States for increases in the adoption of children from the public foster care system." Some of the other incentives offered are "innovative grants" to reduce barriers to adoption [i.e., parents], more State support for adoptive families, making adoption affordable for families by providing cash subsidies and tax credits.

A report from a private think tank, the National Center for Policy Analysis, reads: "The way the federal government reimburses States rewards a growth in the size of the program instead of the effective care of children." Another incentive being promoted is the use of the Internet to make adoption easier. Clinton directed HHS to develop an Internet site to "link children in foster care with adoptive families." So we will be able to window shop for children on a government web site. If you don't find anything you like there, you can surf on over to the "Adopt Shoppe."

If you prefer to actually be able to kick tires instead of just looking at pictures you could attend one of DSS's quaint "Adoption Fairs," where live children are put on display and you can walk around and browse. Like a flea market to sell kids. If one of them begs you to take him home you can always say, "Sorry. Just looking." The incentives for government child snatching are so good that I'm surprised we don't have government agents breaking down people's doors and just shooting the parents in the heads and grabbing the kids. But then, if you need more apples you don't chop down your apple trees.

Benefits for Foster Parents

That covers the goodies the State gets. Now let's have a look at how the Cleavers make out financially after the adoption is finalized.

After the adoption is finalized, the State and federal subsidies continue. The adoptive parents may collect cash subsidies until the child is 18. If the child stays in school, subsidies continue to the age of 22. There are State funded subsidies as well as federal funds through the Title IV-E section of the Social Security Act. The daily rate for State funds is the same as the foster care payments, which range from \$410-\$486 per month per child. Unless the child can be designated "special needs," which of course, they all can.

According to the NAATRIN State Subsidy profile from DSS, "special needs" may be defined as: "Physical disability, mental disability, emotional disturbance; a significant emotional tie with the foster parents where the child has resided with the foster parents for one or more years and separation would adversely affect the child's development if not adopted by them." [But their significant emotional ties with their parents, since birth, never enter the equation.]

Additional "special needs" designations are: a child twelve years of age or older; racial or ethnic factors; child having siblings or half-siblings. In their report on the State of the Children, Boston's Institute for Children says: "In part because the States can garner extra federal funds for special needs children the designation has been broadened so far as to become

meaningless." "Special needs" children may also get an additional Social Security check.

The adoptive parents also receive Medicaid for the child, a clothing allowance and reimbursement for adoption costs such as adoption fees, court and attorney fees, cost of adoption home study, and "reasonable costs of food and lodging for the child and adoptive parents when necessary to complete the adoption process." Under Title XX of the Social Security Act adoptive parents are also entitled to post adoption services "that may be helpful in keeping the family intact," including "daycare, specialized daycare, respite care, in-house support services such as housekeeping, and personal care, counseling, and other child welfare services". [Wow! Everything short of being knighted by the Queen!]

The subsidy profile actually states that it does not include money to remodel the home to accommodate the child. But, as subsidies can be negotiated, remodeling could possibly be accomplished under the "innovative incentives to remove barriers to adoption" section. The subsidy regulations read that "adoption assistance is based solely on the needs of the child without regard to the income of the family." What an interesting government policy when compared to the welfare program that the same child's mother may have been on before losing her children, and in which she may not own anything, must prove that she has no money in the bank; no boats, real estate, stocks or bonds; and cannot even own a car that is safe to drive worth over \$1000. This is all so she can collect \$539 per month for herself and two children. The foster parent who gets her children gets \$820 plus. We spit on the mother on welfare as a parasite who is bleeding the taxpayers, yet we hold the foster and adoptive parents [who are bleeding ten times as much from the taxpayers] up as saints. The adoptive and foster parents aren't subjected to psychological evaluations, ink blot tests, MMPI's, drug & alcohol evaluations, or urine screens as the parents are.

Adoption subsidies may be negotiated on a case by case basis. [Anyone ever tried to "negotiate" with the Welfare Department?] There are many e-mail lists and books published to teach adoptive parents how to negotiate to maximize their subsidies. As one pro writes on an e-mail list: "We receive a subsidy for our kids of \$1,900 per month plus another \$500 from the State of Florida. We are trying to adopt three more teens and we will get subsidies for them, too. It sure helps out with the bills."

I can't help but wonder why we don't give this same level of support to the children's parents in the first place? According to Cornell University, about 68% of all child protective cases "do not involve child maltreatment." The largest percentage of CPS/DSS cases are for "deprivation of necessities" due to poverty. So, if the natural parents were given the incredible incentives and services listed above that are provided to the adoptive parents, wouldn't it stand to reason that the causes for removing children in the first place would be eliminated? How many less children would enter foster care in the first place? The child protective budget would be reduced from \$12 billion to around \$4 billion. Granted, tens of thousands of social workers, administrators, lawyers, juvenile court personnel, therapists, and foster parents would be out of business, but we would have safe, healthy, intact families, which are the foundation of any society.

That's just a fantasy, of course. The reality is that maybe we will see Kathleen Crowley's children on the government home-shopping-for-children web site and some one out there can buy them.

May is national adoption month. To support "Adoption 2002," the U.S. Postal Service is issuing special adoption stamps. Let us hope they don't feature pictures of kids who are for sale. I urge everyone to boycott these stamps and register complaints with the post office.

I know that I'm feeling pretty smug and superior about being part of such a socially advanced and compassionate society. How about you?

http://www.massnews.com/past_issues/2000/5_May/mayds4.htm