ADOPTION TRAINING ASSESSMENT

A STUDY OF

BEST PRACTICE TRENDS IN ADOPTION

AND IMPLICATIONS FOR

OHIO'S ADOPTION ASSESSOR TRAINING

PREPARED BY
THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN SERVICES

PREPARED FOR
THE OHIO CHILD WELFARE TRAINING PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

JUNE 2005

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I.   INTRODUCTION

The *Adoption Training Assessment* was designed to examine adoption trends and training needs in Ohio. The study was divided into Year I (July 1, 2003 - June 30, 2004) and Year II (July 1, 2004 - May 1, 2005) activities. A preliminary report was submitted to the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program Steering Committee at the conclusion of Year I activities. Readers may review this report at: http://www.ocwtp.com/Training/Adoption/Assessment%20Reports.htm.

Year I activities focused on an assessment of adoption training needs as identified by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Adoption Section staff, probate judges, and directors of both public and private adoption agencies throughout Ohio.

Year II activities explored feedback from adoption supervisors in public and private agencies, adoption workers in public and private agencies, adoption assessor trainers, the Ohio Adoption Planning Group (a statewide group of adoption practitioners and experts who meet bimonthly to develop recommendations for adoption practice in Ohio), and the Adoption Steering Committee of the OCWTP (the committee responsible for implementing the Adoption Assessor training throughout the state).

The *Adoption Training Assessment* was a multi-dimensional study (using both qualitative and quantitative methods) of adoption trends and training needs to ensure the current OCWTP Adoption Assessor Curricula was responsive to the needs of the client and practitioner population, and based on current research-based best practice. This report summarizes the activities of Year I and reports the methodology, findings, and analysis of Year II activities. The report also includes recommendations for consideration by the OCWTP from the entire two-year assessment.

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II.   BACKGROUND

A. History of Adoption Assessor Training

In Ohio, all adoption and foster care workers in public or private agencies and probate courts are required by law to complete a series of 10Adoption Assessor workshops. The 10 workshops are organized into two tiers. Tier I Assessor Training must be completed during the first six months of adoption or foster care practice, and includes the following six workshops (36 hours of training):

1. *Family and Child Assessment* (2 days)
2. *Birth Parent Services* (1 day)
3. *Post Legalization Adoption Services* (1 day)
4. *Adoption Assistance* (1/2 day)
5. *Placement Strategies* (1/2 day)
6. *Pre-Finalization Adoption Services* (1 day)

Tier II Assessor Training must be completed within three years of completion of Tier I and includes the following four workshops (36 hours of training):

1. *Cultural Issues in Permanency Planning* (2 days)
A. *Openness in Adoption* (2 days)
B. *Gathering and Documenting Background Information* (1 day)
C. *Achieving Permanency through Interagency Collaboration* (1 day)

With the passage of House Bill 419 in 1996, Adoption Assessor training was required for all social workers providing foster care and/or adoption services in Ohio. The following three requirements must be met by all individuals in Ohio who conduct adoptive/foster family assessments, counsel birth families regarding permanency decisions for their children, or supervise adoptive placements:

- The worker must be employed by, or under contract to, a licensed adoption agency or county Probate Court.
- The worker must be a current Licensed Social Worker, Licensed Independent Social Worker, Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (if conducting

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adoption work for a private agency or Probate Court) or be employed by a public children's services agency.

- The worker must complete Tier I Adoption Assessor workshops (six days of training) within six months of hire or contract; and complete Tier II Adoption Assessor workshops within three years of completion of Tier I.

B. Results of Standardized Evaluation

Despite the requirements described above, the Adoption Assessor training has been very well received. Since its inception, participants have evaluated each session through the use of a standardized instrument.

To date, the Assessor training modules have received the following average evaluation scores on a five-point scale (with five being excellent):

- *Family and Child Assessment*   *4.73*
- *Birth Parent Services*   *4.41*
- *Post Legalization Adoption Services*   *4.62*
- *Adoption Assistance*   *4.39*
- *Placement Strategies*   *4.47*
- *Pre-Finalization Adoption Services*   *4.63*
- *Cultural Issues in Permanency Planning*   *4.71*
- *Openness in Adoption*   *4.63*
- *Gathering and Documenting Background Information*   *4.63*
- *Achieving Permanency through Interagency Collaboration* *4.52*

The OCWTP developed a diverse pool of 18 experienced trainers who presented the Adoption Assessor workshops statewide. Three trainers were nationally known experts in the field of adoption and have published numerous books and articles considered state-of-the-art. Three other trainers taught at the university level. All trainer evaluations were consistently high.

C. Study Considerations

There were two significant dilemmas for the developers of the Adoption Assessor training when the Tier I curricula were mandated in 1996. First, the broad diversity of the training population required that the curricula contain so much generalized practice information reflecting the differences in adoption specialization that the workshops could not provide in-depth coverage of specialized adoption practice issues in the time available.

A second dilemma was the consumer demand for information on forms, policies, and rules relating to adoption practice. The OCWTP was responsible for skills training related to "best practice" in adoption services, while ODJFS staff provided training on adoption-related forms, procedures, and rules. When adoption reform legislation passed in 1996, a number of changes in adoption forms and protocol were made at the same time the legislation mandated development of the Assessor curricula. While many practitioners expected the Assessor curricula would be a primary vehicle for disseminating information about changing protocols, ODJFS preferred that state staff maintain their responsibility for training on rules and forms. Though some information related to rules is presented in the Adoption Assessor curricula (Adoption Assistance rules, Putative Father Registry, Indian Child Welfare Act protocol in Ohio, Multi-Ethnic Placement Act permissible activities), the workshops do not present information on in-depth examination of rules and policies or completion of forms. The separation of practice training from rules training created confusion for some trainees, particularly those workers who received limited supervisory coaching on the job.

These two dilemmas are addressed in this study.

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III. YEAR I REVIEW

A. Activities

Year I activities focused on the identification of current and projected adoption issues and perceptions of the Adoption Assessor training as reported by the ODJFS Adoption Section staff, probate judges, and directors of both public and private adoption agencies throughout Ohio. The purpose of gathering this information was to provide guidance as to direction and general issues for the researchers to explore further in Year II.

The following activities were conducted:
- Key Informant Interview with Rhonda Abban, Section Chief of the ODJFS Adoption Section
- Focus group with the seven ODJFS Adoption Section staff
- Focus group with 10 Ohio probate judges attending the Ohio Judicial Conference
- Online survey of directors of public and private adoption agencies
- Initial literature review

B. Summary of Preliminary Findings

Year I data suggested the following findings:

1. Directors, judges, and ODJFS staff overwhelmingly reported that the Adoption Assessor training was relevant and generally met the needs of agency staff.

2. The three groups who participated in the study offered differing opinions on needed changes to the Adoption Assessor curricula. The ODJFS adoption staff focused their responses on policies, on-the-job training, and their passion for the work. Probate judges discussed changes in the way adoptive families are chosen,

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specifically, working with gay, lesbian, or transgendered families; understanding the role of the surrogate parent; and adoption of embryos. Directors focused on staffing issues and agreed that supervisors should provide workers with more opportunities to transfer knowledge from the Adoption Assessor workshops to the job.

3. The Year I literature search reviewed general adoption literature published within the past five years to determine "best practice" standards, explore research findings, and identify gaps in current curricula. The reviews also strongly supported the need to address placement of children with special needs as a priority in adoption practice.

4. Overall, two topics were consistently reported to need more attention in Adoption Assessor training: placing children with special needs and conducting family assessments. These were reported among both focus groups and the online survey. The Year I researchers recommended that these two areas be explored further in Year II through additional focus groups, online surveys, and review of the literature.

A complete copy of the Year I report, containing methodology, demographics, findings, analysis, and recommendations for Year II activities, can be found at:

http://www.ocwtp.com/Training/Adoption/Assessment%20Reports.htm

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IV. YEAR II

A. Methodology

The methodology for Year II was based, in part, on the findings and results from Year I. A mixed-methodology approach was used to determine how key informants, adoption supervisors, adoption workers, trainers, and advocates view the current Tier I and Tier II curricula. In addition, this group of participants was also asked to rate how they viewed specific questions related to adoption issues, adoption protocol, and adoption training.

To gather information about adoption trends, the researchers sought the opinions of managers, practitioners, advocates, and published researchers currently working in the field of adoption. The research design contained multiple opportunities to gain input from these individuals including:

- Six focus groups

- Two online surveys

- Literature reviews

Focus Groups

The focus group format was used to promote discussion of key issues among participants and allow participants to discuss issues in greater depth than a written survey would allow. (Krueger, 1994). The focus group used semi-structured interviews, and the facilitator encouraged participants to discuss the question in more depth within the group.

In Year II, the research design called for gathering feedback from current practitioners (workers and supervisors), training partners (OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee and adoption trainers), and adoption advocates and experts (Ohio Adoption Planning Group). A total of six focus groups were conducted.

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The Northeast Ohio Regional Training Center and the Adoption Network Cleveland volunteered to gather focus groups of assessors, the former primarily public agency workers and the latter primarily private agency workers. These two groups made up the Adoption Assessors in two sites (Akron and Cleveland). Regular meetings of the OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee and the Ohio Adoption Planning Group were used to collect feedback for two additional focus groups. A focus group of adoption supervisors was held at the statewide Adoption and Foster Care Conference offered by ODJFS, and a sixth focus group consisted of adoption trainers.

All focus groups were conducted by at least two facilitators form a pool including Betsy Keefer and Pam Severs of the Institute for Human Service, and Dr. Scottye Cash, a researcher from the Ohio State University.

The focus groups were held:

- October 6, 2004—OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee [20 participants]
- November 19, 2004—Adoption Supervisors [7 participants]
- December 1, 2004—Ohio Adoption Planning Group [15 participants]
- December 3, 2004—Adoption Assessors (Akron) [16 participants]
- December 16, 2004—Adoption Trainers [6 participants]
- January 21, 2005—Adoption Assessors (Cleveland) [32 participants]

Participants were presented with 15 standardized questions (see Appendix A). The first six questions asked for demographic information. The remaining nine questions were multiple-choice questions with four or five options, as well as an "Other" response. These exploratory questions were designed to capture participants' knowledge and opinions about adoption practice and the Adoption Assessor training.

The researchers attempted to use the Classroom Performance System (CPS) to facilitate data collection and discussion in the focus groups. CPS is an advanced technology electronically captures and compiles responses instantly.

The CPS system provided each respondent with a handheld (wireless) remote. Each focus group question was projected on the screen, along with a list of four or five possible answers. Participants chose the letter on their remotes that corresponded to their response to the question and were able to electronically register their responses. Once all of the participants responded, the results were instantaneously calculated and were projected on the screen for further discussion in the group.

Due to technological difficulties, CPS was used in only two of the focus group sessions (OCWTP Steering Committee and Adoption Assessors in Akron). For the remaining four focus groups, responses to the same focus group questions were individually recorded on paper.

Online Survey

As in Year I, an online survey was used to ensure the participation of as many people as possible. Respondents unable to attend a focus group were given an opportunity to provide feedback online. Two online forms were created to accommodate respondents – one for workers and supervisors, and one for adoption trainers. Demographic questions on the two web surveys differed slightly. The online surveys are included in Appendix B of this report.

The surveys asked both demographic questions and questions specific to adoption issues, adoption protocol, and adoption training. Emails were sent to 88 public and 65 private agency directors with instructions to link their supervisors and workers to the online survey.

Several adoption managers and adoption agency directors completed the survey for their supervisors and workers. Their responses are included in the analysis in order to provide a comparison to the other groups.

In addition, 12 Adoption Assessor trainers, who did not participate in a focus group, were emailed and asked to complete the online survey for trainers.

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<u>**Literature Review**</u>

In addition to the collection of data from focus groups and online respondents, the researchers continued to review current literature on adoption trends, research, and practice issues in Year II. Reviews were completed by IHS staff, the contracted researcher, and an adoption trainer. Three books and 10 articles were reviewed during Year II. A complete description of the literature search is found Section C on Findings.

After reviewing the Year I preliminary report, Rhonda Abban, Chief of the ODJFS Adoption Section, requested Year II literature reviews become more focused on issues identified during Year I activities (such as openness and placement of children with special needs) and how those issues impact the Adoption Assessor training. Further, the reviewers went back to Year I reviews and added information on possible implications for Adoption Assessor training. Because Year I reviews were amended, they are included in Appendix C with Year II reviews.

B. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<u>**Focus Group Respondents**</u>

Six focus groups were conducted in Year II. Description of the groups follows.

Adoption Steering Committee: The Adoption Steering Committee is made up of representatives from ODJFS, eight Regional Training Centers, six subcontract agencies, and the statewide training contractor (currently the Institute for Human Services). While most members of the Steering Committee do not provide direct adoption services, the Steering Committee has the oversight responsibility for the adoption training program in Ohio and makes recommendations to the OCWTP. [See Table 1.]

Adoption Workers (Akron): Sixteen people participated in the Assessor focus group in Akron, Ohio. Over half were adoption workers, providing primary services to children with special needs. Approximately three-fourths were from public agencies and one-fourth from private

agencies. Over three-fourths had three or more years of adoption experience and all had completed Tiers I and II of the Adoption Assessor training. [See Table 1.]

Adoption Trainers: Six experienced adoption trainers participated in this focus group. Three were primarily trainers, two others were also adoption workers, and one reported "other." Four of the six reported that they worked with both infants and children with special needs. All six trainers were female, all had masters degrees and all had been training the Adoption Assessor curricula for at least five years. Each of the 10 workshops was represented by at least three trainers present. [See Table 1.]

Adoption Supervisors: Seven people attended the supervisor focus group as part of a larger statewide foster care/adoption conference. All participants had at least three years of supervisory experience and all had completed Tiers I and II of the Adoption Assessor training. Over 70% had at least 11 years of adoption experience. All but one person worked primarily with children with special needs. [See Table 2.]

Ohio Adoption Planning Group (OAPG): The OAPG is a voluntary organization of adoption professionals who have been advocating for best standards of adoption practice throughout Ohio for over 25 years. The group represents public and private agencies, with 47% of its 15 attendees having 11 or more years of adoption experience. Approximately three-fourths of the group had completed Tiers I and II of the Adoption Assessor training. [See Table2.]

Adoption Workers (Cleveland): Thirty-two people participated in this focus group. Over 90% were adoption workers, and 94 % worked with children with special needs (as well as other types of placements). Over 50% had between three and 10 years of adoption experience and most had completed (or were within the process of completing) Tiers I and II of the Adoption Assessor training. [See Table 2.]

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Online Survey Respondents

Approximately half the 129 respondents to the online survey for Adoption Workers and Supervisors were adoption workers. The other half consisted of supervisors, managers, or directors. One agency trainer responded. Over 90% were from public agencies and almost 90% were female. Approximately two thirds of the respondents had a bachelors degree and approximately one third had a masters degree. [See Table 3.]

Five trainers responded to the Adoption Trainers' Online Survey. All respondents to the online survey were female, and all had a masters degree in Social Work. Three worked in public agencies, and two had worked in both public and private agencies. All five trainers had trained multiple workshops in both Tiers of Adoption Assessor training. The respondents' training experience ranged from four to nine years. [See Table 4.]

The following tables report on this demographic information.

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Table 1: Focus Group Respondents: OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee, Akron Adoption Workers, and Adoption Trainers

	Adoption Steering Committee (n=20)	Adoption Workers / Akron (n=16)	Trainers (n=6)
What is your primary role in the adoption field?			
Worker	n/a	53%	33%
Supervisor/Manager	n/a	33%	0%
Trainer	n/a	7%	50%
Consultant/Advocate	n/a	7%	0%
Other	n/a	0%	17%
Type of agency represented			
Public Children Services Agency	n/a	73%	33.3%
Private Child Placing Agency	n/a	27%	33.3%
ODJFS	n/a	0%	0%
Court	n/a	0%	0%
Other	n/a	0%	33.3%
What is your agency/organization?			
Regional Training Center	50%	n/a	n/a
Subcontract Agency	25%	n/a	n/a
ODJFS	5%	n/a	n/a
Institute for Human Services	20%	n/a	n/a
Other	0%	n/a	n/a
How long have you been with the OCWTP?			
Less than one year	16%	n/a	n/a
One to two years	5%	n/a	n/a
Two to five years	37%	n/a	n/a
Five to 10 years	16%	n/a	n/a
More than 10 years	26%	n/a	n/a
What is your primary type of adoption service?			
Children with special needs	n/a	68%	17%
Infants only	n/a	0%	17%
International placements	n/a	0%	0%
Post adoption services	n/a	0%	0%
More than one of the above	n/a	32%	66%

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	Adoption Steering Committee (n=20)	Adoption Workers / Akron (n=16)	Trainers (n=6)
How many years of adoption experience do you have?			
Less than one year	n/a	12%	0%
One to two years	n/a	12%	0%
Three to five years	n/a	32%	0%
Six to 10 years	n/a	19%	0%
Eleven plus years	n/a	25%	100%
How many years of supervisory experience do you have?			
Less than one year	n/a	n/a	n/a
One to two years	n/a	n/a	n/a
Three to five years	n/a	n/a	n/a
Six to 10 years	n/a	n/a	n/a
Eleven plus years	n/a	n/a	n/a
Completed Tier I	n/a	100%	100%
Year Completed			
96-97	n/a	37%	100%
98-99	n/a	19%	0%
00-01	n/a	25%	0%
02-04	n/a	19%	0%
Other			
Completed Tier II	n/a	100%	100%
Year Completed			
96-97	n/a	0%	0%
98-99	n/a	50%	100%
00-01	n/a	18%	0%
02-04	n/a	32%	0%
Other	n/a	0%	0%

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Table 2: Focus Group Respondents: Adoption Supervisors, Cleveland Adoption Workers, and the Ohio Adoption Planning Group

	Supervisors (n=7)	Adoption Workers/ Cleveland (n=32)	OAPG (n=15)
What is your primary role in the adoption field?			
Worker	15%	91%	27%
Supervisor/Manager	85%	3%	27%
Trainer	0%	3%	6.5%
Consultant/Advocate	0%	0%	6.5%
Other	0%	3%	33%
Type of agency represented			
Public Children's Services Agency	29%	16%	33%
Private Child Placing Agency	57%	84%	20%
ODJFS	14%	0%	0%
Court	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	0%	47%
What is your agency/organization?			
Regional Training Center	n/a	n/a	n/a
Subcontract Agency	n/a	n/a	n/a
ODJFS	n/a	n/a	n/a
Institute for Human Services	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other	n/a	n/a	n/a
How long have you been with the OCWTP?			
Less than one year	n/a	n/a	n/a
One to two years	n/a	n/a	n/a
Two to five years	n/a	n/a	n/a
Five to 10 years	n/a	n/a	n/a
More than 10 years	n/a	n/a	n/a
What is your primary type of adoption service?			
Children with special needs	71%	69%	40%
Infants only	14%	0%	0%
International placements	0%	6%	0%
Post adoption services	0%	0%	13%
More than one of the above	15%	25%	47%

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	Supervisors (n=7)	Adoption Workers/ Cleveland (n=32)	OAPG (n=15)
How many years of adoption experience do you have?			
Less than one year	0%	22%	13%
One to two years	0%	9%	7%
Three to five years	14%	38%	20%
Six to 10 years	14%	28%	13%
Eleven plus years	72%	3%	47%
How many years of supervisory experience do you have?			
Less than one year	0%	n/a	n/a
One to two years	0%	n/a	n/a
Three to five years	29%	n/a	n/a
Six to 10 years	14%	n/a	n/a
Eleven plus years	43%	n/a	n/a
Not supervising at this time	14%		
Completed Tier I	100%	94%	80%
Year completed			
96-97	72%	9%	40%
98-99	14%	23%	7%
00-01	14%	31%	13%
02-04	0%	31%	13%
Other		6%	27%
Completed Tier II	100%	84%	73%
Year completed			
96-97		3%	0%
98-99	57%	19%	33%
00-01	43%	19%	13%
02-04	0%	46%	13%
Other		13%	41%

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Online Survey Respondents

The following two tables document the demographics of workers, supervisors, and adoption trainers who responded online.

Table 3: Demographics of Online Worker and Supervisor Respondents

	n=129
1. Is your agency public or private?	
Public	92%
Private	8%
2. What is your agency role? Choose the most senior level.	
Supervisor	33.3%
Trainer	1.6%
Adoption worker	50.4%
Agency director	5.4%
Manager or director of adoption section	9.3%
Other	
3. How long have you been training Adoption Assessor curricula?	n/a
4. What is your highest degree completed?	
Bachelors degree	62.8%
Masters degree	34.1%
Doctoral degree	0.8%
Law degree	0%
Medical degree	0%
Other	2.3%
5. For your highest degree, what was your field of study?	**see narrative**.
6. Gender	
Male	12.4%
Female	87.6%

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Table 4: Demographics of Online Adoption Trainer Respondents

Adoption Trainer	n=7
1. Is your agency public or private?	
Public	42.9%
Private	14.2%
Both	42.9%
2. What is your agency role? Choose the most senior level.	
Supervisor	42.9%
Trainer	14.3%
Adoption worker	14.3%
Agency director	0%
Manager or director of adoption section	
Other	28.5%
3. How long have you been training Adoption Assessor curricula?	5 years
3a. I trained the following workshops: (multiple response)	
Family and Child Assessment	100%
Birth Parent Services	71.4%
Post Finalization Adoption Services	85.7%
Placement Strategies	71.4%
Adoption Assistance	71.4%
Pre-Finalization Adoption Services	71.4%
Cultural Issues in Permanency Planning	71.4%
Openness in Adoption	100%
Gathering and Documenting Background Information	57.1%
Achieving Permanency through Interagency Collaboration	71.4%
4. What is your highest degree completed?	
Bachelors degree	0%
Masters degree	100%
Doctoral degree	0%
Law degree	0%
Medical degree	0%
Other	0%
5. For your highest degree, what was your field of study?	**see narrative**.
6. Gender	
Male	0%
Female	100%

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C.   Findings

Focus Group Findings

Tables 5 and 6 provide participants' responses to the questions posed during the focus group. A summary of responses from adoption trainers, adoption assessors in Akron, and the OCWTP Steering Committee is reported in Table 1. The summary of responses from focus groups of adoption supervisors, adoption assessors in Cleveland, and the OAPG are found in Table 2. The tables were divided in two to make them more readable.

Percentages were calculated by the number of participants who chose each response from the number of participants in the focus group. When a specific question was not asked of a particular group (such as relevance to practice), the percentage indicates n/a (not applicable). A 0% indicates that no one chose a particular response.

When participants chose the response "Other," the facilitator prompted for additional information and discussion. This was recorded by the second facilitator and is presented in a narrative listing at the end of this section.

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Table 5: Summary of Multiple-Choice Responses in Focus Groups 1-3

	Supervisors (n=7)	Adoption Workers/ Cleveland (n=32)	OAPG (n=15)
How relevant was the Adoption Assessor training to your practice?			
Very relevant	71%	71%	60%
Somewhat relevant	29%	29%	33%
Not relevant	0%	0%	0%
Did not take training	0%	0%	7%
What are the key issues facing adoption practitioners today?			
Openness	71%	3%	0%
Placement of children with special needs	29%	50%	47%
Adoption by gay and lesbian couples	0%	0%	0%
Shorter time frames required by ASFA	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	47%	53%
What is the most significant change you foresee in adoption practice?			
Greater emphasis on concurrent planning	43%	19%	33%
More teen placements	0%	38%	7%
Increased conflict around transracial placements	0%	3%	0%
Increased involvement of birth parents	0%	9%	20%
Other	57%	31%	40%

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	Supervisors (n=7)	Adoption Workers/ Cleveland (n=32)	OAPG (n=15)
What is the greatest improvement you have seen in workers or in the system as a result of workers completing Adoption Assessor training?			
Assessors make more accurate family assessments	0%	38%	13%
Assessors develop skills earlier in their careers	0%	25%	40%
Assessors have more knowledge about current legislation	0%	3%	0%
Assessors are better prepared to work with children with special needs	0%	0%	7%
Other (all of the above)	100%	9%	27%
What content area should be modified in the Adoption Assessor training?			
Birth parent services	0%	34%	7%
Placement of children with special needs	0%	22%	40%
Openness in adoption	0%	3%	0%
Cultural issues in adoption	0%	0%	7%
Other	0%	41%	40%
No response	0%	0%	7%

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	Supervisors (n=7)	Adoption Workers/ Cleveland (n=32)	OAPG (n=15)
What content area should be added in the Adoption Assessor training?			
Removing personal bias from family assessment	28.5%	0%	13%
On-the-job coaching	0%	9%	7%
Adoption case planning, including concurrent case planning	28.5%	19%	7%
Interviewing children and families	0%	25%	7%
Other	43%	44%	53%
No response	0%	3%	13%
What content area, if any, should be deleted from the Adoption Assessor training?			
Adoption assistance	0%	4%	13%
Interagency collaboration	0%	25%	7%
Gathering and documenting Background Information	0%	4%	0%
None	100%	63%	80%
Other	0%	4%	0%

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Table 6: Summary of Multiple-Choice Responses in Focus Groups 4-6

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	Adoption Steering Committee (n=20)	Adoption Workers/ Akron (n=16)	Trainers (n=6)
How relevant was the Adoption Assessor training to your practice?			
Very relevant	n/a	25%	83%
Somewhat relevant	n/a	75%	17%
Not relevant	n/a	0%	0%
Did not take training	n/a	0%	0%
What are the key issues facing adoption practitioners today?			
Openness	5%	0%	50%
Placement of children with special needs	75%	25%	17%
Adoption by gay and lesbian couples	0%	0%	0%
Shorter time frames required by ASFA	20%	21%	0%
Other	0%	75%	0%
What is the most significant change you foresee in adoption practice?			
Greater emphasis on concurrent planning	50%	0%	0%
More teen placements	15%	13%	0%
Increased conflict around transracial placements	15%	6%	33%
Increased involvement of birth parents	10%	6%	17%
Other	10%	75%	50%

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	Adoption Steering Committee (n=20)	Adoption Workers/ Akron (n=16)	Trainers (n=6)
What is the greatest improvement you have seen in workers or in the system as a result of workers completing Adoption Assessor training?			
Assessors make more accurate family assessments	10%	19%	0%
Assessors develop skills earlier in their careers	15%	25%	17%
Assessors have more knowledge about current legislation	0%	0%	0%
Assessors are better prepared to work with children with special needs	0%	0%	0%
Other (all of the above)	75%	56%	83%
What content area should be modified in the Adoption Assessor training?			
Birth parent services	0%	19%	17%
Placement of children with special needs	15%	25%	0%
Openness in adoption	0%	0%	0%
Cultural issues in adoption	15%	6%	0%
Other	70%	50%	83%
No response	0%	0%	0%

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	Adoption Steering Committee (n=20)	Adoption Workers/ Akron (n=16)	Trainers (n=6)
What content area should be added in the Adoption Assessor training?			
Removing personal bias from family assessment	10%	6%	0%
On-the-job coaching	40%	13%	0%
Adoption case planning, including concurrent case planning	5%	0%	0%
Interviewing children and families	5%	0%	0%
Other	40%	81%	100%
No response	0%	0%	0%
What content area, if any, should be deleted from the Adoption Assessor training?			
Adoption assistance	0%	0%	17%
Interagency collaboration	0%	0%	33%
Gathering and documenting background Information	0%	6%	0%
None	90%	81%	17%
Other	10%	13%	33%

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Table 7: Summary of Open-Ended Responses in Six Focus Groups

12. How relevant was the Adoption Assessor training to your agency's practice?	
Adoption Supervisors	The training provided a good theoretical overview, but workers still do not know how to do a home study when they come back to the agency until they have shadowed an experienced worker.
	All the training was of high quality, and there were no bad trainers. The Protective Services training was a chore, but the Adoption Assessor training was excellent.
	"This was a good review of things I already knew."
	"The information was somewhat helpful but did not give me the day-to-day practice. It was light on matching and making tough decisions in assessment."
	I disagree. The training provides an excellent model for matching used in my agency.
Adoption Workers (Cleveland)	No comments provided.
Adoption Workers (Akron)	Wanted to learn more about how to actually use the home study form
	Birthparent workshop not relevant for workers placing kids from public agencies.
	Need to do *Gathering and Documenting* earlier
	Some content too basic (e.g., assessing families). Need to know how to assess if they are really good, more on changing hats from foster to adopt
	Most of us deal with abuse and neglect; need more on this
	Agency wants staff to come back and "hit the floor running"
	For those who are foster care assessors, need more on working toward reunification in *Birthparent Services*
	Not geared toward international placements
	Consider specialized workshops for different types of agencies
	Birthparent Services should be Core for all workers in intake. They don't understand the 1616 or Child Study Inventory or open adoption.

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	Whole issue of all workers taking training has to come from the top
OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee	No comments provided
Adoption Trainers	The training was somewhat relevant because I did not really internalize the information until I began training it. The information could be made more relevant if trainers themselves "zero in" on the more practical information and make the material more reality-based with stories. Supervisors need to provide more support for transfer of learning. Much of the information should be directed to ongoing workers, but few administrators understand the importance of Assessor curricula for the ongoing or intake workers. The trainees are much more receptive to the information now than they were in the 1996 "crush."
Ohio Adoption Planning Group	Several respondents who selected "Somewhat relevant" noted they had been practitioners for many years before Adoption Assessor training was implemented. They found much of the information to be material they already knew.

13. What are the key issues facing adoption practitioners today?

Adoption Supervisors	Negotiation of subsidies Greater numbers of children coming in Replace *AdoptOhio* monies to facilitate public/private collaboration Concurrent planning Sibling Placements Post Adoption Services (mentioned by three supervisors) and the lack of competent resources Cultural competency—many experienced workers lack cultural competency and cannot make accurate assessments Need for a statewide directory of competent mental health practitioners
Adoption Workers (Cleveland)	Kin adoption Fear of birth family

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Adoption Workers (Akron)	All of the above
	Compare Openness to Ohio's laws
	Often we are past or close to ASFA end date when we get the child's case for adoption.
	Cases that are appealed
	Placing gay or lesbian children
	Recruitment for older kids, how to advertise or market without making them feel bad
	Shift in collaboration due to ending of *Adopt Ohio*, can't afford private agency network homes but can't recruit own families
	Collaboration not happening
	Recruitment of concurrent families
	Volatile state budget affects subsidy and post adoption services
	Rules not congruent (e.g., . releasing child's last name to adoptive parents when they were foster-to-adopt to begin with and knew it anyway).
OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee	Transcultural placements
	HIPAA (being interpreted so that information is <u>not</u> shared with adoptive parents)
	Judges not meeting timeframes for or moving to permanency (due to continuances and appeals)
	Funding issues to pay for agency services, as well as for families' services
	Follow-up question: Why are "special needs" a key issue?:
	Teens are written off by the system.
	There is a difference between the image of child of families interested in adopting and the children actually available for placement.
	Using appropriate recruitment (rather than outdated styles)
	Worker labeling of children as "unadoptable"
	Mental health issues of children

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	Systemic barrier (more financially viable to continue to foster parent a child than to adopt the same child) Higher education also funded in some states for foster children who age out of the system
Adoption Trainers	We need to provide more training on preparing children with special needs for adoptive placement. Many of the children being placed today have extreme histories, and even infants and young children available for placement have multiple special needs. The negative attitudes of many workers toward birth parents Adoptive parents have access to so much information via the Internet, and this affects their relationships with assessors, attitudes toward waiting children, and birth family histories. Use of more assessment tools, such as the Casey Foundation Family Hardiness Index and the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale by Epstein
Ohio Adoption Planning Group **Ohio Adoption Planning Group**	Post-finalization support Placement of teens and preteens Present-day awareness/diagnosis of mental health issues in birth families and its impact on the placement of children who previously would not have been considered to have special needs Increase in young children being diagnosed with mental illness Barrier in locating adequate mental health resources, both pre- and post-placement; these services are very costly, and agency staff do not feel they have the expertise to support families More diversity among Adoption Assessors needed Subsidy negotiations Barrier to collaboration between public and private agencies, as well as between foster caregivers and adoptive families Sibling groups of three to five children coming into the system Very young girls are giving birth and do not consider adoption as an option; these young girls have subsequent births, and often these are the larger sibling groups coming into care. Substance abuse in birth families is also seen as impacting sibling groups entering care.

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14. What is the most significant change you foresee in adoption practice?	
Adoption Supervisors	Disrupted international adoptive placements Technological advances leading to surrogate parenting Lack of *AdoptOhio* money Concurrent case planning—cuts time a child waits in hall When agencies combine Foster Care and Adoption Departments, agencies make significant progress on dual licensure and concurrent case planning.
Adoption Workers (Cleveland)	Increasing involvement of birth parents Reversing gay adoptions (rescind them) More teen placements Kids returning from adoptive placements into the system Decrease in subsidy and services
Adoption Workers (Akron)	Transcultural adoption issues, already a problem but could get worse Rules overboard for HIPAA regarding adoption Appears that rule makers have no idea of what adoption is and what we do Adoption rules trainers not competent Disruption of special needs adoption due to lack of supports Need to train intake workers Process to revoke a license
OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee	Changes in financing Independent Living as a permanency goal Concurrent planning in Child and Family Service Review (CSFR)

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Adoption Trainers	Fear of MEPA and lack of preparation of families for transracial placements are major issues.

Concurrent case planning and a resulting higher incidence of kinship adoption; one trainer noted those agencies utilizing concurrent case planning are more likely to place children with relatives

Increased involvement of birth families in adoption planning, in both the voluntary/involuntary, public/private arenas |
| **Ohio Adoption Planning Group** | More meetings (oversight), rules and paperwork are taking away from time spent working one-on-one with families.

Better permanency planning needs to occur from the front door on the first day of involvement with a family.

To enhance concurrent planning, it was recommended that intake staff take Adoption Assessor training.

Post-final services to international adopters who were not prepared to adopt are on the increase.

Caseload analysis and genograms be incorporated into Core training

Kinship and its surrounding issues are viewed as an area that will need increased attention.

Increasing need for partnerships between public and private (or other) agencies |
| **15. What is the greatest improvement you have seen in workers or in the system as a result of workers completing Adoption Assessor training?** | |
| **Adoption Supervisors** | Gives background knowledge on the dynamics of adoption

Gives foundation, need to develop skills outside the training |
| **Adoption Workers (Cleveland)** | No comments provided |
| **Adoption Workers (Akron)** | Workers make more accurate assessments.

Workers are better prepared and are more aware of issues, but they still need more skills training, more application activities.

Uniformity among agencies and geographical regions was a particularly positive outcome of Adoption Assessor training. |

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Adoption Workers (Akron)	Workers and agencies are all using the same terminology and definitions, assessment categories, etc.
OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee	All of the above Three respondents reported feeling Adoption Assessor training standardized practice, and gave everyone the same starting point. Concern was raised about legislative changes that occur after training; training of legislative changes is the responsibility of ODJFS. Concern was raised that people need the training sooner than it is obtained.
Adoption Trainers	We don't have to untrain people who have been practicing with poor skills. Gives people good awareness, but does not bring them to the skill level Home studies are better than they were 10 years ago. More uniformity Workers feel more confident in the ability to do the work. The *Field Guide* is so helpful.
Ohio Adoption Planning Group	No comments provided

16. What content area should be modified in the Adoption Assessor training?

Adoption Supervisors	Respondents felt they lacked adequate information to make recommendations about needed modifications. Sessions on *Openness* and *Cultural Issues* are good and should not be modified. One person noted the session on *Birth Parent Services* is geared toward infant adoptions.

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Adoption Workers (Cleveland)	Material geared to infant adoption
	Adoptive placement of children with special needs was glossed over.
	How to prepare family and community
	Didn't learn anything about assessments
	More interviewing skills
	Too basic 101- should be more at masters level. .
Adoption Workers (Akron)	*Birthparent Services*–needs to be Core for all staff
	Openness--needs more emphasis than it is given
	Cultural Issues–can't use for placement decisions--MEPA
	Openness–how we prepare adoptive parents for child's reactions
OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee	Not familiar enough with the curricula to respond to this question
	Need for on-the-job coaching and developing creative incentives to motivate people to become coaches; regional coaches could be available to smaller agencies
	Availability of a good clinical supervisor was mentioned as a need to address workers' preparation.
	Additional Comments:
	Birthparent Services is skewed to infant adoptions, and focuses too much on voluntary versus involuntary TPR.
	Birthparent Services curriculum should include information on working with birthparents who have mental challenges (e.g., mental retardation) and openness in adoption.
	More content and time are needed on placement issues and child preparation.
	Culture should be explicitly defined (as opposed to what people perceive culture to be); it was felt this would cause trainees to recognize that culture is woven throughout the whole process.
	Tier II Culture issues need to be addressed in Tier One.

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Adoption Trainers	Engaging the birth father
Ohio Adoption Planning Group	*Birthparent Services* curriculum should be modified to be more public-agency focused. *Openness* goes hand-in-hand with *Birthparent Services*

17. What content area should be added to the Adoption Assessor training?

Adoption Supervisors	One respondent felt there is bias toward GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Transgender) families in assessment. There is a need for more simulation or application activities to get workers to the skill level sooner. More information on maintaining sibling ties More information on helping families stretch to accept children with special needs Supervisors would benefit from a 2-3 page synopsis of each workshop so they could assist workers with transfer of learning. Other respondents agreed with this suggestion and said they would like to have copies of all handouts and the Power Point slides.
Adoption Workers (Cleveland)	Sibling relationships Involuntary birth families
Adoption Workers (Akron)	Need more about siblings in the adoptive home already (birth or adopted prior to this adoption) Deal with the placement of sibs All of the above Supporting families after placement More specialized workshops Recruitment (child specific) and preparing kids with special needs Need more practice, realistic, specific to what the job is, what to highlight in the assessment

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	One person really uses the *Field Guide.*
	Need reference guides or checklists
	Need definition of "boundary issues" –are we talking sexual boundaries, property, etc.?
OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee	All of the above
	Adoption supervisors/clinical supervisors' training needs should be addressed in Assessor training.
	On-the-job coaching to include all the above issues
Adoption Trainers	Engaging the adoptive family
	All of the above!
	Case planning
	Becoming aware of personal bias
	Infertility
	Preparing older children for adoptive placement
Ohio Adoption Planning Group	Respondents identified multiple options: (13% selected A and D; 7% selected C and E; 7% selected A, B, C, and D; 7% selected A and C; and 7% selected B and C)
	Preparing children for adoption
	Concerns were noted that children are unaware of the process they are in until after permanent custody is obtained.
	The loss issues of children need to be further addressed.
	Development of the child's team to become his mentor after age 18 or to become the child's permanent family
	Understanding of the Core training limitations (how to adequately cover topics in limited hours of training) led to discussion of "elective" topics; one suggestion was developing a large focus group for workers to interact, share the type of adoption service they practice, as well as implementation techniques.
	A bonding and attachment elective workshop

18. What content area, if any, should be deleted from the Adoption Assessor training?

	Supervisors commented their workers generally see *Adoption Assistance* as the most valuable workshop.

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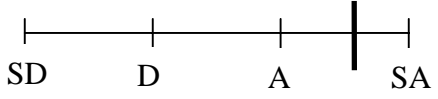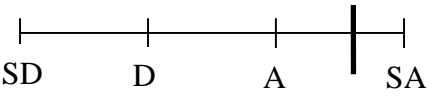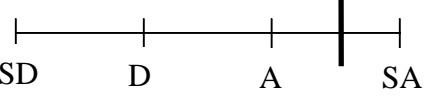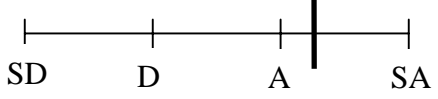|	
Adoption Supervisors	*Gathering and Documenting Background Information* is important because it keeps us out of law suits. Supervisors did not want to delete any information from Assessor training.
Adoption Workers (Cleveland)	No additional comments .
Adoption Workers (Akron)	Need more in-depth assessment with families Made home studies more factual, gave good format Depends on trainer Ohio forms thorough, 1673, forces you to get to know family Small group activity of strengths, needs, and concerns….need handout of sample questions (e.g., from *Field Guide* excerpt) Found handouts very helpful, referred back to them Need additional training on why kids act as they do
OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee	Respondents did not feel they knew the curricula well enough to make recommendation to remove content.
Adoption Trainers	Three trainers did not feel the session on *Interagency Collaboration* is as useful as other topics; with *AdoptOhio* gone, there is less need for this curriculum.
Ohio Adoption Planning Group	No information provided

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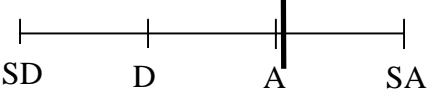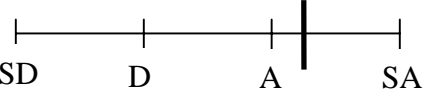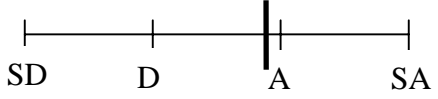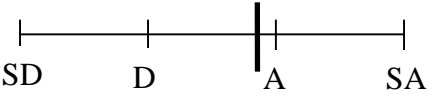
Online Survey

The online survey was designed for adoption workers, supervisors, and trainers who had not been part of any focus groups. Though agency directors had an opportunity to respond to an onlin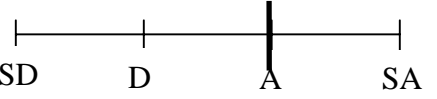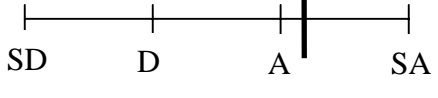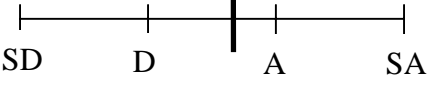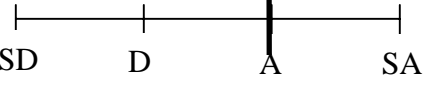e survey during Year I data collection, a significant number of directors and managers responded to the online survey during Year II; their responses are included in this report. An Assessor trainer, who is also a county agency worker, responded; this respondent's answers were captured in the adoption worker data. Therefore, three groups had adequate representation to warrant breaking out the findings separately. The percentages are provided for each response and for the scale questions (Questions 7 through 26), the mean is provided and any statistically significant differences are noted.

Table 8: Findings for the Caseworker & Supervisor Survey

Scaled Questions		
Adoption Issues		
7. My adoption experience has been with special needs adoptions (e.g., older child adoptions, children with disabilities, etc.)		
Adoption Worker	**Supervisor**	**Agency Director/Manager**
Strongly Agree	53.9%	53.5%	57.1%
Agree	40.0%	25.6%	14.3%
Disagree	4.6%	18.6%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	1.5%	2.3%	0%
Don't Know	0%	0%	14.3%
Average Score	3.46	3.30	3.50

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<tr><td></td><td>SD   D   A   SA</td><td>SD   D   A   SA</td><td>SD   D   A   SA</td></tr>
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8. Children are not being prepared to move from foster placement to adoptive placement.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	9.2%	2.4%	14.2%
Agree	44.6%	44.2%	42.9%
Disagree	38.5%	39.5%	42.9%
Strongly Disagree	4.6%	11.6%	0%
Don't Know	3.1%	2.3%	0%
Average Score	2.60	2.38	2.71

SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

9. The shorter time frames required in the Adoption and Safe Families Act don't provide the birth family with the services and support needed.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	9.2%	7.0%	14.2%
Agree	16.9%	16.2%	28.6%
Disagree	47.8%	32.6%	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	13.8%	32.6%	28.6%
Don't Know	12.3%	11.6%	0%
Average Score	2.25	1.97	2.29

SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

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10. Dually licensed Foster/Adopt homes are beneficial for moving children to permanency more quickly and effectively.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	70.7%	69.8%	71.4%
Agree	26.2%	27.9%	14.3%
Disagree	3.1%	2.3%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%
Don't Know	0%	0%	0%
Average Score	3.68	3.67	3.57

SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

11. Concurrent planning has facilitated more timely adoptive placements.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	30.8%	25.6%	28.5%
Agree	46.2%	46.5%	42.9%
Disagree	13.8%	11.6%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	1.5%	4.7%	0%
Don't Know	7.7%	11.6%	14.3%
Average Score	3.15	3.05	3.17

SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

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Adoption Protocol		
12. An instrument should be developed to assess a child's readiness for adoption.		
	Adoption Worker	**Supervisor**	**Agency Director/Manager**
---	---	---	---
Strongly Agree	28.2%	27.9%	42.8%
Agree	35.9%	39.5%	14.3%
Disagree	20.5%	23.3%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	7.7%	7.0%	14.3%
Don't Know	7.7%	2.3%	14.3%
Average Score	2.92	2.90	3.00

SD	D	A	SA	SD	D	A	SA	SD	D	A	SA

13. An instrument should be developed to assess the best matched family for meeting the child's needs.		
	Adoption Worker	**Supervisor**	**Agency Director/Manager**
---	---	---	---
Strongly Agree	33.8%	27.9%	14.3%
Agree	43.1%	41.9%	57.1%
Disagree	15.4%	11.6%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	3.1%	16.3%	0%
Don't Know	4.6%	2.3%	14.3%
Average Score	3.13	2.83	3.00
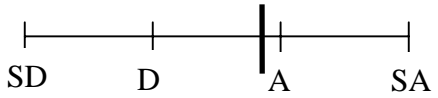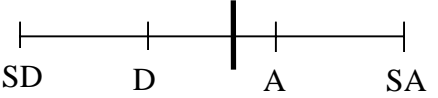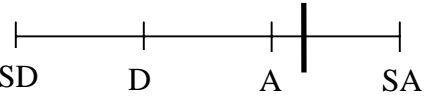
SD	D	A	SA	SD	D	A	SA	SD	D	A	SA

A Study of Best Practice Trends in Adoption and Implications for Ohio's Adoption Assessor Training,
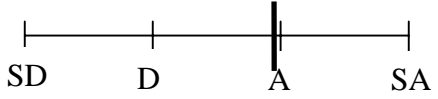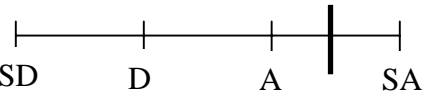*Ohio Child Welfare Training Program – June 2005*
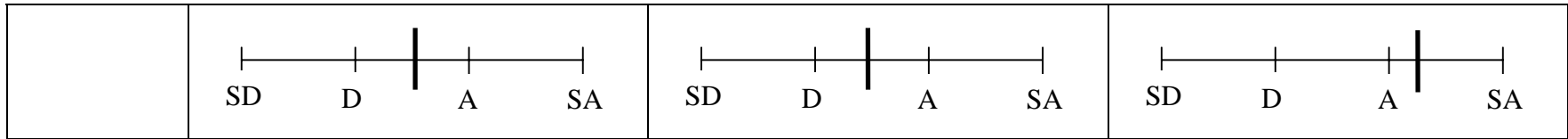
41

Adoption Training

14. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on how to place children with special needs.** (p<.10)

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	10.8%	0%	14.3%
Agree	44.6%	37.2%	57.1%
Disagree	30.8%	37.2%	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	12.3%	16.3%	0%
Don't Know	1.5%	9.3%	0%
Average Score	2.55	2.23	2.86
	SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

15. New adoption workers are entering the field of adoption practice without having adequate preparation.
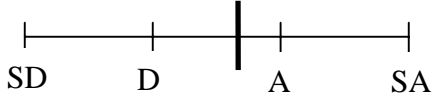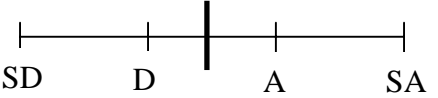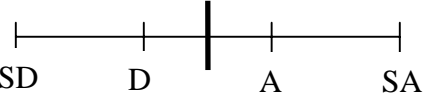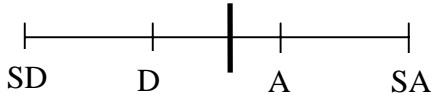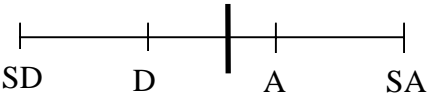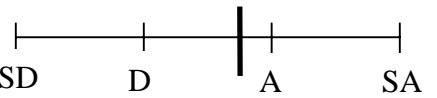
	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	18.5%	14.0%	28.6%
Agree	43.1%	46.5%	57.1%
Disagree	23.1%	27.9%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	1.5%	2.3%	0%
Don't Know	13.8%	9.3%	0%
Average Score	2.91	2.79	3.14

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16. In order to improve adoption practice, supervisors need to provide workers more opportunities on the job to reinforce classroom or workshop learning.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	21.6%	14.0%	42.9%
Agree	53.8%	67.4%	57.1%
Disagree	20.0%	9.3%	0%
Strongly Disagree	3.1%	9.3%	0%
Don't Know	1.5%	0%	0%
Average Score	2.95	2.86	3.43

SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

17. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on conducting family assessments that provide information helpful in determining good adoptive homes.** ($p<.05$)

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	4.6%	2.3%	28.6%
Agree	58.5%	48.8%	57.1%
Disagree	26.2%	27.9%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	9.2%	16.3%	0%
Don't Know	1.5%	4.7%	0%
Average Score	2.59	2.39	3.14

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	SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

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18. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on removing personal bias when conducting the family assessment. (p<.10)

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	6.2%	4.6%	28.6%
Agree	75.4%	58.1%	14.3%
Disagree	13.8%	23.3%	57.1%
Strongly Disagree	1.5%	9.3%	0%
Don't Know	3.1%	4.7%	0%
Average Score	2.89	2.61	2.71
	SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

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19. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the values of the social work profession and the adoption worker.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	6.1%	7.0%	28.5%
Agree	78.5%	55.8%	42.9%
Disagree	10.8%	34.9%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	3.1%	0%	0%
Don't Know	1.5%	2.3%	14.3%
Average Score	2.89	2.71	3.17
	SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

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20. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA). ** (p<.10)**

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	12.4%	4.7%	14.2%
Agree	47.7%	37.2%	28.6%
Disagree	29.2%	37.2%	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	1.5%	9.3%	14.3%
Don't Know	9.2%	11.6%	14.3%
Average Score	2.78	2.42	2.50
	SD ⊢ D ⊢ A ⊢ SA	SD ⊢ D ⊢ A ⊢ SA	SD ⊢ D ⊢ A ⊢ SA

21. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on working with birth families.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	7.7%	14.7%	14.3%
Agree	55.4%	37%	57.1%
Disagree	32.3%	37%	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	3.1%	9%	0%
Don't Know	1.5%	2.3%	0%
Average Score	2.69	2.69	2.86
	SD ⊢ D ⊢ A ⊢ SA	SD ⊢ D ⊢ A ⊢ SA	SD ⊢ D ⊢ A ⊢ SA

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22. The training should provide more material on types of special needs (Reactive Attachment Disorder, ADHD, etc.) that children may have.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	41.6%	41.9%	14.3%
Agree	49.2%	48.8%	71.4%
Disagree	9.2%	9.3%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%
Don't Know	0%	0%	0%
Average Score	3.32	3.33	3.00

SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

23. Additional training should be provided on termination of parental rights.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	26.2%	16.2%	14.3%
Agree	33.8%	51.2%	85.7%
Disagree	36.9%	20.9%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	7.0%	0%
Don't Know	3.1%	4.7%	0%
Average Score	2.89	2.80	3.14

SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

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24. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the adoptive child's grieving process.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	3%	7.0%	14.3%
Agree	58.5%	44.1%	57.1%
Disagree	24.6%	34.9%	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	10.8%	7.0%	0%
Don't Know	3.1%	7.0%	0%
Average Score	2.56	2.55	2.86

| SD   D   A   SA | SD   D   A   SA | SD   D   A   SA |

25. As a result of completing Tier I and Tier II, there have been improvements in the assessor's ability to assess, place, and support adoptive children.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	13.8%	11.6%	28.6%
Agree	67.7%	67.4%	57.1%
Disagree	4.6%	7.0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	6.2%	0%	0%
Don't Know	7.7%	14.0%	14.3%
Average Score	2.97	3.05	3.33

| SD   D   A   SA | SD   D   A   SA | SD   D   A   SA |

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26. As a result of completing Tier I and Tier II, there have been improvements in the assessor's ability to assess, match, and support adoptive families.

	Adoption Worker	Supervisor	Agency Director/Manager
Strongly Agree	10.8%	9.2%	28.6%
Agree	72.3%	69.8%	57.1%
Disagree	4.6%	7.0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	4.6%	0%	0%
Don't Know	7.7%	14.0%	14.3%
Average Score	2.97	3.03	3.33

	SD D A SA	SD D A SA	SD D A SA

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Table 9: Findings for the Adoption Trainer Survey

Question	
7. My adoption experience has been with special needs adoptions (e.g., older child adoptions, children with disabilities, etc.).	
Strongly Agree	42.9%
Agree	57.1%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.43

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        ┣━━━━━┿━━━━━┿━━━┃━┫
        SD      D       A    SA
```

8. Children are not being prepared to move from foster placement to adoptive placement.	
Strongly Agree	28.5%
Agree	42.9%
Disagree	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.00

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        ┣━━━━━┿━━━━━┃━━━━━┫
        SD      D       A    SA
```

9. The shorter time frames required in the Adoption and Safe Families Act don't provide the birth family with the services and support needed.	
Strongly Agree	14.2%
Agree	42.9%
Disagree	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	14.3%
Average Score	2.83

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        ┣━━━━━┿━━━━━┃━┿━━━┫
        SD      D       A    SA
```


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10. Dually licensed Foster/Adopt homes are beneficial for moving children to permanency more quickly and effectively.	
Strongly Agree	85.7%
Agree	14.3%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.86

```
    |-------+-------+-------|
   SD      D       A      SA
```

11. Concurrent planning has facilitated more timely adoptive placements.	
Strongly Agree	57.1%
Agree	28.6%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	14.3%
Average Score	3.67

```
    |-------+-------+-------|
   SD      D       A      SA
```

12. An instrument should be developed to assess a child's readiness for adoption	
Strongly Agree	71.4%
Agree	14.3%
Disagree	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.57

```
    |-------+-------+-------|
   SD      D       A      SA
```

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13. An instrument should be developed to assess the best matched family for meeting the child's needs.	
Strongly Agree	71.4%
Agree	0%
Disagree	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	14.3%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.29

```
      ├──────┼──────┼───┃──┤
      SD     D      A     SA
```

Adoption Training	
14. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on how to place children with special needs.	
Strongly Agree	0%
Agree	71.4%
Disagree	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	14.3%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	2.57

```
      ├──────┼──┃───┼──────┤
      SD     D     A      SA
```

15. New adoption workers are entering the field of adoption practice without having adequate preparation.	
Strongly Agree	28.5%
Agree	42.9%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	28.6%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	2.71

```
      ├──────┼───┃──┼──────┤
      SD     D     A      SA
```

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16. In order to improve adoption practice, supervisors need to provide workers more opportunities on the job to reinforce classroom or workshop learning.	
Strongly Agree	57.1%
Agree	42.9%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.57

```
        ├────────┼────────┼────────┃────┤
        SD       D        A    ┃   SA
```

17. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on conducting family assessments that provide information helpful in determining good adoptive homes.	
Strongly Agree	14.3%
Agree	71.4%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	14.3%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	2.86

```
        ├────────┼────────┃┼───────┤
        SD       D       ┃A        SA
```

18. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on removing personal bias when conducting the family assessment.	
Strongly Agree	14.3%
Agree	85.7%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.14

```
        ├────────┼────────┼┃───────┤
        SD       D        A┃       SA
```

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19. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the values of the social work profession and the adoption worker.	
Strongly Agree	0%
Agree	57.1%
Disagree	42.9%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	2.57

```
    |------|------|------|------|
   SD     D      A     SA
```

20. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA).	
Strongly Agree	42.9%
Agree	42.9%
Disagree	14.2%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.29

```
    |------|------|------|------|
   SD     D      A     SA
```

21. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on working with birth families.	
Strongly Agree	0%
Agree	71.4%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	14.3%
Don't Know	14.3%
Average Score	2.67

```
    |------|------|------|------|
   SD     D      A     SA
```

22. The training should provide more material on types of special needs (Reactive Attachment Disorder, ADHD, etc) that children may have.	
Strongly Agree	57.1%
Agree	42.9%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.57

```
        ├────────┼────┃─┼────────┤
        SD       D      A      SA
```

23. Additional training should be provided on termination of parental rights.	
Strongly Agree	14.2%
Agree	42.9%
Disagree	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	28.6%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	2.43

```
        ├────────┼──┃──┼────────┤
        SD       D      A      SA
```

24. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the adoptive child's grieving process.	
Strongly Agree	0%
Agree	42.8%
Disagree	28.6%
Strongly Disagree	28.6%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	2.14

```
        ├──────┃─┼────┼────────┤
        SD      D      A      SA
```

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25. As a result of completing Tier I and Tier II, there have been improvements in the assessor's ability to assess, place, and support adoptive children.	
Strongly Agree	28.6%
Agree	57.1%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%
Don't Know	14.3%
Average Score	3.33

```
   ├────────┼────────┼────────┼│──────┤
   SD       D        A          SA
```

26. As a result of completing Tier I and Tier II, there have been improvements in the assessor's ability to assess, match, and support adoptive families.	
Strongly Agree	28.6%
Agree	57.1%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	14.3%
Don't Know	0%
Average Score	3.00

```
   ├────────┼────────┼────────┼──────┤
   SD       D        A        SA
```

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## D.	Analysis of Significant Findings

Analysis of Focus Groups Findings

Adoption Steering Committee

The Adoption Steering Committee reported the key issue in adoption practice today is placement of children with special needs. There was significant concern about children being "written off" as unadoptable. There was also concern about the mental health challenges of children in the system today.

Almost half of the group reported that greater emphasis on concurrent planning was the most significant change foreseen for the future. All participants reported seeing improvements in workers or in the system as a result of the training. While most did not feel familiar enough with the curricula itself to recommend modification or deletions to the curricula, all agreed that the following list of topics (as specified in question #17) should be added to the curricula:

1. Removing personal bias from family assessment
2. On-the-job-coaching
3. Adoption case planning, including concurrent case planning
4. Interviewing children and families

Adoption Supervisors

All supervisors agreed that the training was relevant to their practice and all agreed that openness in adoption relationships and placement of children with special needs were the key issues facing adoption today. Greater emphasis on concurrent planning was the single most significant change foreseen. While they did not recommend content areas to be modified or deleted, the group identified concurrent case planning and removing personal bias in the family assessment as areas to be added.

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Ohio Adoption Planning Group

All participants rated the training as relevant to their practice. When participants were asked for the key issues facing adoption practitioners today, almost half indicated placement of children with special needs to be the key issue. Approximately one-third agreed that concurrent planning was the most significant change foreseen. All reported some type of improvement in workers or in the system as a result of the training. It was recommended that modifications be made to *Birth Parent Services,* and additional content be added on the placement of children with special needs. Most respondents recommended some type of addition to the Assessor training, such as removing personal bias, on-the-job coaching, case planning and concurrent planning, and interviewing children and families. Eighty percent of participants felt that nothing should be deleted.

Adoption Workers (Akron and Cleveland)

Adoption workers in both focus groups agreed unanimously that the Assessor training was relevant to their practice. When asked for the key issue facing adoption practitioners today, both groups agreed that placement of children with special needs was the most pressing issue. The Akron group reported the shorter time frames required by ASFA as an equally key issue facing practitioners today. Both groups reported that teen placements were the most significant changes foreseen for the future. Approximately half of each group reported that more accurate family assessments and the development of skills earlier in the career were noted improvements after participants attend training. Both groups recommended modifications to the *Birth Parent Services* workshop and requested more information on the placement of children with special needs. In the Cleveland group, 25% of respondents identified interviewing children and families as a necessary addition to the curriculum and almost 20% recommended concurrent planning be added. The Akron group had a more diverse group of suggestions. Both groups (9% and 6% respectively) noted the need for on-the-job coaching.

Adoption Trainers

All trainers reported that the training was relevant for their own practice, as they are all also Adoption Assessors. Fifty percent identified openness as a key issue today while a third foresaw increased conflict around transracial placements for the future. Fifty-percent of the group elaborated that transracial issues around MEPA (Multi-Ethnic Placement Act) and preparation of families, concurrent case planning, and involvement of birth fathers needed to be added. All agreed that improvements had been seen after training. The group recommended modifications to the *Birth Parent Services* workshop (specifically, engaging the fathers), additions in all the areas listed on question #17 (removing personal bias, on-the-job coaching, case and concurrent planning, and interviewing children and families), and deletions in the *Adoption Assistance* and *Achieving Permanency through Interagency Collaboration* workshops.

All Respondent Groups

Of the 96 people included in the six focus groups, every respondent reported the Adoption Assessor training to be relevant to their practice. When asked to identify the key issues facing adoption practitioners today, the most common responses were the placement of children with special needs and openness in adoption. Concurrent case planning was the most significant change foreseen for the future of adoption practice, followed by teen placements and transracial placements. All participants reported seeing improvement in workers or the system after the training. Very few respondents recommended that any content in the Adoption Assessor curricula should be deleted. The module recommended most often for modification was *Birth Parent Services.* The most common content areas suggested for addition to the training were placement of children with special needs and concurrent case planning.

Analysis of Findings from the Online Surveys

The first six questions of the online surveys gathered demographic information and have been previously reported in the demographic section of this study.

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Questions 7-26 were scaling questions presented on a Likert scale. Respondents were asked to note their level of agreement to statements about adoption issues, adoption protocol, and adoption training. The choices ranged from Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), or Strongly Disagree (1). Average "scores of agreement" reported below refer to this scale.

Questions 27-32 were open-ended questions that called for narrative responses that were then tabulated by the researcher. Raw data (actual responses of participants to the questions) can be found in Appendix D.

Analysis of Findings from Worker & Supervisor Online Survey

Scaling Questions 7-26

On the whole, adoption workers, adoption supervisors, and agency directors or managers rated their responses to the online questions very similarly. While there were some differences, few of these differences could be considered statistically significant (p<.10). However, a significant difference among the groups was found in four questions.

There were differences in how respondents viewed the adequacy of information in the training curriculum related to children with special needs (Question #14). Specifically, the supervisors had the least agreement with the statement that the curriculum adequately provided information related to children with special needs (an average rating of 2.23), as compared to the workers at 2.55 and directors at 2.86. This finding seems to indicate that supervisors are finding their workers need additional material on serving children with special needs. The difference in perception of the supervisors as compared to the directors is significant.

Another question reflecting a statistically significant difference (p<.05) in responses of the three groups was Question #17, "The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on conducting family assessments that provide information helpful in determining good adoptive homes." Again, the supervisors had the least agreement with this statement (2.39), as compared to the workers (2.59) and managers (3.14).

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There was another significant difference in responses to Question #18 (p<.10), "The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on removing personal bias when conducting the family assessment." All three groups scored between 2.61 and 2.89. Interestingly, the worker group (2.89), as compared to the managers (2.71), reported more agreement that the training helped them remove personal bias. Even though there were differences, the numbers of all three groups reflect a need to provide more material on how to remove personal bias in the assessment process.

Finally, in Question #20, there was a statistically significant difference (p<.05) among the groups as to their agreement with the statement "Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA)." The workers again reported more agreement (2.78) that the training on MEPA is adequate.

The findings from this survey and from the focus groups provide additional evidence that the curriculum provides adoption workers and supervisors with material related to current issues and trends in adoption. The findings, however, also indicate that additional attention needs to be given to the following areas:

- Working with children with special needs
- Completing accurate family assessments
- Removing personal bias from the assessment process
- Working within the MEPA guidelines

Open-Ended Questions 27-32

The following six questions were open-ended. Respondents were given no choices from which to select a response, but were instructed to respond in a narrative. Although there were many different responses, the researchers categorized similar responses.

Q. 27. What skills do assessors lack after completing Adoption Assessor Training?

The majority of responses included one of the five topic areas:

- Ability to complete paperwork and forms

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- Skills to prepare children for adoption

- Accurate assessment of families, including interviewing skills

- How to negotiate subsidies

- Hands-on experience

Q. 28. In what ways are the new assessors better prepared as a result of completing the Adoption Assessor Training?

The most common responses, by an overwhelming majority, referred to the training as an excellent overview, foundational, broad, informative, and general that contained core knowledge and understanding. MEPA compliance was often cited as thorough and clear.

Q. 29. Should additional components be added regarding cultural competency?

There were approximately as many "yes" responses as "no." MEPA was again cited as something that should always be discussed in order to stay current.

Q. 29a If yes, what specific components need to be incorporated into the Adoption Assessor Training and why?

Again, most of the responses included a reference to MEPA, but many raised the issues of remaining culturally sensitive while being MEPA compliant.

Q. 30. What will make the training "cutting edge" or will promote current "best practices" in adoption?

Respondents listed content areas to include and suggested training methodologies to make the training more beneficial. Content areas most often included more training on issues of attachment, child specific recruitment, and preparing older children. Suggestions for training methodology included:

- Developing or videotaping real life situations

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- Mock homestudies for hands-on experience
- Shadowing
- Role playing
- Teleconferences
- Panels of experienced workers
- Mentoring programs
- Follow-up sessions, "aftercare," refreshers
- Using forms

Q. 31. What are the emerging adoption issues?

MEPA was the most common response, including transracial placements. Permanency, foster-to-adopt (and resultant subsidy issues), and openness were other frequent responses.

Q. 32. What feedback have you received from those who have completed the Adoption Assessor Training?

There were no negative comments. Responses included:
- Gained insight
- Informative
- Good information
- Helpful
- Enjoyable
- Only positive, good feedback

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<u>**Analysis of Findings from Adoption Trainer Online Survey**</u>

Scaling Questions 7-26

The trainers who completed the online survey provided a different perspective on the delivery of the curricula from the workers, supervisors, and managers. Given their knowledge of the area and their experience in the classroom, they were able to provide information on how material is perceived and received by participants in the workshops. In addition, many of the trainers work in the field of adoption, and many function as supervisors. The trainers' concurrent roles as workers and supervisors gave them additional insight.

The findings among all the trainers were very similar. Trainers agreed or strongly agreed that there needed to be additional training on:

- Working with children with special needs (2.57)
- Conducting the family assessment (2.86)
- Ensuring the assessors understood the values of adoption and social work practice (2.57)
- Working with birth families (2.67)
- Termination of parental rights (2.43)
- The adopted child's grieving process (2.14)

Open-Ended Questions 27-32

The following six questions were open-ended. Respondents were given no choices from which to select a response, but were instructed to respond in a narrative. Although there were many different responses, the researchers categorized similar responses. The reader is reminded that the caseworker/supervisor online survey had 129 respondents and the adoption trainers only 7. There should be additional weight placed on the summary findings of responses from the caseworker/supervisor survey.

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Q. 27. What skills do assessors lack after completing Adoption Assessor Training?

Practical application (including forms), preparing children for adoption, and issues of permanency were cited.

Q. 28. In what ways are the new assessors better prepared as a result of completing the Adoption Assessor Training?

Trainers generally had the same responses.

Q. 29. Should additional components be added regarding cultural competency?

Trainers were also split, but agreed that "there will always be MEPA issues to discuss."

Q. 29a If yes, what specific components need to be incorporated into the Adoption Assessor Training and why?

The only response was "working with gay and lesbian families" from one trainer.

Q. 30. What will make the training "cutting edge" or will promote current "best practices" in adoption?

Trainer issues focused almost entirely on topic areas including ethics, preparing children for permanency, openness, and concurrent planning. Including forms and keeping up with rule changes were also suggested.

Q. 31. What are the emerging adoption issues?

Almost all trainers mentioned openness and/or concurrent planning.

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Q. 32. What feedback have you received from those who have completed the Adoption Assessor Training?

Trainers reported positive feedback from participants who found the sessions helpful and confidence building.

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Table 10: Comparison of Average Scores for All Year II Online Participants

The following table compares scores of all online survey respondents. The rating of the responses was:

4   Strongly Agree
3   Agree
2   Disagree
1   Strongly Disagree

	Supervisor	Trainer	Adoption Worker	Manager/ Director
7. My adoption experience has been with special needs adoptions (e.g., older child adoptions, children with disabilities, etc.).	3.30	3.43	3.46	3.50
8. Children are not being prepared to move from foster placement to adoptive placement.	2.38	3.00	2.60	2.71
9. The shorter timeframes required in the Adoption and Safe Families Act don't provide the birth family with the services and support needed.	1.97	2.83	2.25	2.29
10. Dually licensed Foster/Adoptive homes are beneficial for moving children to permanency more quickly and effectively.	3.67	3.86	3.68	3.57
11. Concurrent planning has facilitated more timely adoptive placements.	3.05	3.67	3.15	3.17

	Supervisor	Trainer	Adoption Worker	Manager/ Director
12. An instrument should be developed to assess a child's readiness for adoption.	2.90	3.57	2.92	3.00
13. An instrument should be developed to assess the best matched family for meeting the child's needs.	2.83	3.29	3.13	3.00
14. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on how to place children with special needs.	2.23	2.57	2.55	2.86
15. New adoption workers are entering the field of adoption practice without having adequate preparation.	2.79	2.71	2.91	3.14
16. In order to improve adoption practice, supervisors need to provide workers more opportunities on the job to reinforce classroom or workshop learning. (p<.05)	2.86	3.57	2.95	3.43
17. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on conducting family assessments that provide information helpful in determining good adoptive homes. (p<.10)	2.39	2.86	2.59	3.14
18. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on removing personal bias when conducting the family assessment. (p<.10)	2.61	3.14	2.89	2.71

	Supervisor	Trainer	Adoption Worker	Manager/ Director
19. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the values of the social work profession and the adoption worker.	2.71	2.57	2.89	3.17
20. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA). (p<.05)	2.42	3.29	2.78	2.50
21. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on working with birth families.	2.69	2.67	2.69	2.86
22. The training should provide more material on types of special needs (Reactive Attachment Disorder, ADHD, etc.) that children may have.	3.33	3.57	3.32	3.00
23. Additional training should be provided on termination of parental rights.	2.80	2.43	2.89	3.14
24. The Adoption Assessor training provides adequate training on the adoptive child's grieving process.	2.55	2.14	2.56	2.86
25. As a result of completing Tier I and Tier II, there have been improvements in the assessor's ability to assess, place, and support adoptive children.	3.05	3.33	2.97	3.33

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	Supervisor	Trainer	Adoption Worker	Manager/ Director
26. As a result of completing Tier I and Tier II, there have been improvements in the assessor's ability to assess, match, and support adoptive families.	3.03	3.00	2.97	3.33

For Questions 16, 17, 18, and 20, there was a significant difference in how each of the four groups answered the question. There was no significant difference in the remaining questions.

Analysis of All Findings in Year I and Year II

In the course of the two-year study, 345 individuals provided feedback about their perception of the most pressing adoption issues today and whether or not the adoption assessor training addresses those issues accurately and to the appropriate level.

All the respondents who participated in this evaluation agreed that the Adoption Assessor training is a critical component in preparing adoption assessors for the job. While there were some differences of opinion as to current trends and issues, participants overwhelmingly agreed that the Adoption Assessor Training was relevant to their practice. Most participants indicated, however, that additional specialized training needs to be developed to provide assessors with specialized and advanced content on complex issues.

The study identified some interesting perspectives from the various roles in adoption practice. Directors indicated that mentoring and coaching of the new assessors needed to be a component of training for supervisors. Supervisors expressed higher expectations that participants would be able to perform adoption tasks (including completion of forms) after attending the training, without additional help. While supervisors and adoption assessors did not have as strong an

opinion about the need for mentoring and coaching, the focus groups identified mentoring and leadership as areas of training that need to be developed and implemented in the future.

There were few statistically significant differences between the supervisors and workers as to how they viewed adoption trends and issues. This seems to indicate that there is congruence on the needs and issues in working in adoption. The probate judges, however, raised unique concerns around surrogate parenting and embryonic adoption that were not reflected by other respondents.

As stated previously, all participants indicated a strong need for additional curricula to be developed on placing children with special needs. This is an area that is consistent with federal incentive programs to reduce the time children with special needs spend in foster care waiting to be adopted.

V.   LITERATURE REVIEW

With the increased emphasis on timely and permanent placements, adoption assessors must become more skilled in the placement of all children (including those with overwhelming special needs), and the accurate and timely assessment of placement resources for them. This current study was designed to understand how the Adoption Assessor curricula can be updated to reflect current trends and new knowledge and research in adoption practice.

Since 1980's PL 96-272 (Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act) of 1980, there has been an increased emphasis on permanency for children. Not only did the Act mandate the use of case plans to formalize the agency's and parent's contractual responsibilities to provide a safe and stable home for children, it also recognized the need for financial adoption assistance for those children who could not return home.

The passage of SB 89 in Ohio created a two-year maximum for children to be "temporarily" placed outside their primary families before agencies were required to pursue permanent custody and permanent placement elsewhere.   With the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), the focus on adoption has grown considerably (Lindsey & Schwartz, 2004).   This federal legislation tightened the time frame even further. Agencies across the country now have essentially one year to reunify the child with primary family before they must pursue permanency elsewhere.

Current Issues and Trends

A general literature search indicated that there were several current issues and trends shaping adoption practice, policy, and research. Over the last decade there has been a continual increase in the number of adoptions in the United States (Lindsey & Schwartz, 2004). While there has been an increase in adoptions, the number of children waiting to be adopted is still high. Lindsey & Schwartz stated "at any given time, more than 75,000 children are waiting to be adopted" (p. 1002). Barriers in finding, assessing, and supporting permanent homes for waiting children include:

- The difficulties surrounding culture and identity in transracial adoptions (Freundlich, 2000; de Haymes & Simon, 2003)

- Placing children with gay and lesbian families (Ryan, Groza, & Perlmutter, 2003)

- Placing children with special needs (Avery, 1998; Erich & Leung, 1998; Keck & Kupecky, 2002)

- Working to help the adoption placement stay intact through pre-service training and supports (Biegel & Blum, 1999; Groza & Ryan, 2002; Prochaska, et al., 2005)

- Providing prospective adoptive parents with accurate information on the child's history (Barth & Berry, 1988; Riggs & Kroll, 2004)

- Lack of post-adoption services (Keck & Kupecky, 2002)

- Recognizing the role and impact of openness in adoption (Avery, 1998; Berry, 1993; National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, 2003; Schooler & Norris, 2002; Sullivan & Lathrop, 2004)

This assessment examined the current issues and trends in adoption to determine if the current Adoption Assessor curriculum addresses these issues and others.

Annotated Bibliography Summary of Literature Reviews

The literature reviewed for this study consisted of books and articles that represented a wide range of adoption topics. The intent was to identify current and future trends in adoption to guide the revision of existing Adoption Assessor curricula or the creation of new workshops. The materials reviewed were categorized as follows:

1. Reviews that validate the topics and scope of issues currently covered in Adoption Assessor curricula
2. Reviews that suggest the need for updates or revisions to the current Adoption Assessor curricula based on newer research
3. Reviews that suggest the creation of new workshops in specialized areas
4. Material that should become parent or trainer resources and recommended reading
5. Material that should be added to foster or adoptive parent training

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1. **Reviews that validate the current topics and scope of issues covered in Adoption Assessor training**

Openness in Adoption: A Bulletin for Professionals, National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (HHS), 2003

This article is consistent in content and philosophy with the two-day Tier II *Openness in Adoption* training. It validates that openness is a growing practice in the adoption community, and we must continue to explore and understand this alternative when making placement decisions for children. It may be helpful to develop handouts of the addendum tables (available for reproduction with appropriate credit) for workshop participants.

The Family of Adoption, Joyce Maguire Pavao, 1998

This book validates that the Adoption Assessor curricula does, in fact, contain an accurate and insightful perspective of the adoption experience.

Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America, Adam Pertman, 2000

Many of the adoption issues discussed in *Adoption Nation* are well represented in the current Adoption Assessor training. The Assessor training stresses the same issues addressed by the author, and his views and opinions are consistent with the philosophy of the curricula. For example, the author believes that "openness will become the norm" in the future – a view expressed throughout the Assessor curricula. Other like-minded issues shared in both the book and the Adoption Assessor training are the adoptees' need for information, the dilemmas of birth

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parents, the cultural implications for agencies and parents, and the difficulties faced by burgeoning numbers of waiting children.

"*Confronting Barriers in Adoption,*" Judith Rycus, Madelyn Freundlich, Ronald Hughes, Betsy Keefer, Susan Yingling, and Emily Oakes, 2005**,** (in press).

This article is an extensively researched treatise on barriers that undermine successful adoption outcomes. The authors explore three major categories of barriers, two of which are organizational barriers and lack of specialized services. While these two categories may not have direct implications for Adoption Assessor training, the third category does.

The third category is "the lack of widespread knowledge and understanding regarding the unique dynamics of adoption, the typical issues confronting adopted children and their families, the risk factors that undermine adoption, and the factors that stabilize, strengthen and preserve adoptive families." These and similar issues are not only introduced in the Adoption Assessor workshops, but are developed to a degree of knowledge and skill consistent with standardized, foundational learning. The article validates the importance of well-informed and skilled assessors in the larger effort of promoting timely permanency for children.

Wrongful Adoption: Law, Policy & Practice, Madelyn Freundlich & Lisa Peterson,1998

Material from this author's book on the same subject is already incorporated into the Assessor workshop*, Gathering and Documenting Background Information.*

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After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth, Jeanne A. Howard and Susan Livingston Smith, 2003

Many of the research statistics about the post finalization needs of adoptive families have been incorporated in the latest revision of the Assessor workshop, *Post Finalization Adoption Services*.

2.   Reviews that suggest the need for revisions or updates to the current Adoption Assessor curricula based on newer research

Hardiness of Foster Families and the Intent to Continue to Foster, Sarah Hendrix, MSW, CEAP, and Janet Ford, Ph.D, 2003

Family hardiness is a quality that should be addressed in *Family and Child Assessment*. This quality can be addressed within the category: Resilience, Coping Skills, and History of Stress Management.

Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America,
Adam Pertman, Executive Director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2000

- This author describes "the explosion of wrongful adoption lawsuits" in domestic adoptions. The book contains information on costly judgments against workers and agencies who provided false or inadequate information to adoptive parents. This trend should be described and explored as it relates to the importance of accurate information presented in the Tier II workshop, *Gathering and Documenting Background Information.*

- While the rights of birth fathers are discussed in *Birth Parent Services*, it should be strengthened to coincide with the national emphasis placed on engaging birth fathers. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) considers the engagement of the birth father in the case planning process an integral function of the child welfare agency in

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providing permanency for children. This link should be added to the Adoption Assessor training in *Birth Parent Services*; *Openness in Adoption; Family and Child Assessment; Gathering and Documenting Information;* and *Cultural Issues in Permanency Planning*.

- Non-traditional families have become a valuable resource for the placement of waiting children. The number of adopting single, gay and lesbian, and kinship parents has increased dramatically nationwide. The *Family and Child Assessment* workshop must be strengthened to provide adoption assessors with knowledge and understanding of and the skills to assess the strengths and challenges for those families. An advanced, specialized workshop on assessing nontraditional families would also further strengthen the skills of adoption assessors.

Journeys After Adoption: Understanding Lifelong Issues, Jayne E. Schooler and Betsie L. Norris, 2002

The Adoption Assessor workshop, *Openness in Adoption*, has not been updated since its original development in 1996. Material in this book would be extremely helpful in assuring the workshop is reflecting current trends in search and reunion. For example, openness has increased in the placement of infants, children with special needs, and foster-to-adopt or kinship placements. The issues of search and reunion may now surface earlier, may include more information than in previous types of searches or may include issues of abandonment of the open agreement itself.

Adoption Disruption and Dissolution: Numbers and Trends, National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, December 2004

The factors and statistics from this recent study impacting adoption disruption should be added to content on disruption in the *Pre-finalization Adoption Services* workshop.

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Helping Foster Parents Cope with Separation, Loss, and Grief, Susan B. Edelstein, Dorli Burge, and Jill Waterman, January/February 2004

According to the literature, many families cease fostering because of difficulty in handling grief when foster children are reunited with birth family members. Given more support while grieving, caregivers might continue in their role and subsequently adopt waiting children in the system. The workshop *Placement Strategies* provides information to assessors on minimizing trauma to foster caregivers during placement of children. The material on supporting grieving foster caregivers in this article should be incorporated in this workshop. It is likely that a half-day workshop on placement strategies shortchanges the complexity of the needs for foster and adoptive parents and for the child. The OCWTP and ODJFS may need to reconsider the time and attention devoted to this important topic, thereby preserving the pool of available resource families for waiting children.

Innovations in Practice and Service Delivery Across the Lifespan, David Biegel, and Arthur Blum 1999

This book raises the issue of unrealistically high parental expectations. Adoption assessors must be directed to this and other risk factors as they consider the assessment categories of Expectations and Motivation, Resilience and Coping Skills, and Openness of Family System in the Tier I workshop, *Family and Child Assessment.* Assessors need to understand why these assessment categories were chosen and how they can be used to predict stability and permanence for children.

The findings also underscore the need for more interdisciplinary training opportunities, and that the OCWTP should be an active partner in providing information to other systems through adoption-related conferences or other innovative means to share important information. This should also be made more explicit in the Tier II workshop, *Achieving Permanency through Interagency Collaboration.*

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"Families Need the Whole Truth," Adoptalk, Diane Riggs and Joe Kroll, Spring 2004

The emergence of HIPAA regulations is an issue that should be addressed in the Tier II curriculum, *Gathering and Documenting Background Information*. Barth and Berry's research regarding the impact of pre-placement information to adoption success should also be incorporated into the same curriculum.

Dialogues About Adoption: Conversations Between Parents and Their Children, Linda Bothun, 2002

In addition to the book's practicality and applicability to parents who adopt, this book is appropriate for post-adoption workers, as well. This material could inform content in the *Post Finalization Adoption Services* curriculum and would be a good resource for many of the post finalization curricula for adoptive parents.

National Attitudes Adoption Surve:; Research Report, Sponsored by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption in cooperation with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, June 2002

Although the research was clearly targeted to the general public, there are a number of findings that have implications for additions or revisions to the Adoption Assessor curricula. Workers should not only be aware of the perceptions and misperceptions of prospective parents, but should also be trained in how to apply this to their practice and to address these issues with families.

- Support for adoption clearly exists, yet there are far too many children waiting for placement. The two-day *Family and Child Assessment* workshop should strengthen the content on the screening-in versus screening-out philosophy of working with prospective families.

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- From the survey, Americans have misperceptions of adoption that should be dispelled (such as the right of the birth family to take the child back after finalization). The *Family and Child Assessment* workshop should also strengthen the education component of family assessment.

- The mental and physical health of a child was found to be more important in the desire to adopt than race, age, time in foster care, or financial subsidy. This indicates that the discussion on "matching" in *Family and Child Assessment* and the resultant content in *Preservice* and *Post-Finalization Services* workshops should also be revised to specifically address these factors. The Adoption Assessor training should educate workers about the perceptions of the general public they may need to clarify or dispel.

- Three emerging trends were identified in the study – international adoption, inter-racial adoption, and open adoption. Recommendations regarding international adoption are described below. Regarding *inter-racial adoption*, the Adoption Assessor training currently devotes two days to cultural issues in adoption ands weaves the issues of culture throughout all the sessions in both tiers. This will be continuously reviewed to assure compliance with the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act as well as practice standards to ensure that barriers to adoption are removed for children and families. The issue of open adoption is also the focus of a specific Tier Two workshop and was designed to meet the emerging trend of openness. This workshop should continue to discuss the practice of openness as an option for many, if not most, placements, particularly foster-to-adopt placements.

3. Reviews that suggest the creation of new workshops in specialized areas

Adoption Nation: How the Adoption RevolutionIis Transforming America, Adam Pertman, Executive Director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2000

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There are emerging issues in this book that may not be covered to the appropriate level in the current Adoption Assessor training. These are described below with suggestions for revision to the curricula:

- While the practice of international adoption has been a function for private agencies only, there are increasing implications for public agencies. The move toward more international placements has brought with it an increased likelihood that some of these children will come into the care of the public agency. International placements are often unregulated; practices differ from country to country; parents are often provided with incorrect information about the children; and many of the children have severe attachment issues requiring intervention and services. These factors may force public agencies to intervene with post-adoptive services, custody, and re-placement. However, since international adoptions still present a unique need for only certain adoption assessors, this topic area would be more appropriately addressed in a specialized workshop.

- While the issues surrounding surrogate parenting, embryonic adoption, and other technological wonders may seem like something for future generations, according to this author, about "200,000 embryos lie frozen in fertility clinics and laboratories." The OCWTP should monitor the literature, as training may be required in the future.

National Attitudes Adoption Survey: Research Report sponsored by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption in cooperation with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, June 2002

International adoption has been identified as one of the three emerging trends in adoption. Because of its more specialized nature, international adoption has not been identified as a focus of the Adoption Assessor training and will not likely be considered a Core topic. Because this is specific to a particular type of adoption, it is recommended that an advanced (or specialized) workshop be developed for this particular practice.

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Gay and Lesbian Second Parent Adoptions, Abby Lynn Bushlow, 2004

The training program should develop an advanced family assessment course that incorporates information on assessing nontraditional families, including gay and lesbian couples, as adoption and foster care resources. This course could be offered as a specialized adoption course for assessors who have completed their Adoption Assessor requirements.

The Adoption Assessor *Family and Child Assessment* workshop provides foundational information about nontraditional families. There is not adequate time within that workshop to adequately address the nuances of assessing nontraditional families. The OCWTP should consider the development of a specialized workshop of advanced assessment, focusing on assessment of nontraditional families and "second-look" (or in-depth assessment) families.

"Coming Out of the Closet: Opening Agencies to Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Parents,"
Scott D. Ryan, Sue Pearlmutter, and Victor Groza, January 2004

The research regarding non-traditional families from this article should be included in the Tier I *Family and Child Assessment* workshop. Because of time constraints, it may need to be presented as a handout. An additional option is to develop a specialized workshop regarding adoptive parenting by gay and lesbian couples or an advanced assessment workshop that would include other nontraditional families, as well.

Foster Care Adoption in the United States: a State-by-State Analysis of Barriers & Promising Approaches, Jennifer Ehrle Macomber, Cynthia Andrews Scarcella, Erica H. Zielewski and Rob Geen, 2004.

The five "top" (most commonly cited) barriers identified across all 50 states were highlighted in the article, and included the following:

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- The process surrounding termination of parental rights (TPR)
- Limited placement options
- Child welfare case management issues
- Court case management issues
- Lack of or delay in placement planning

The top five most promising approaches are:
- Improved efforts and methods for finding adoptive homes for children awaiting permanency
- Improved management approaches and resources in child welfare agencies
- Improvements in the adoptive home approval process
- Improvements in the frequency and timeliness of permanency hearings
- Improved subsidies and services

An interesting advanced and specialized workshop could be developed highlighting strategies to overcome the most common barriers and take advantage of the most promising practices.

4. **Material that should become trainer/adoptive parent resources and recommended reading**

The Family of Adoption, Joyce Maguire Pavao, 1998
The Family of Adoption is a description of the adoption experience from the perspective of adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees (ranging from young children to adults). It is a compilation of personal stories and resultant lessons to be learned from the author's perspective.

Wrongful Adoption: Law, Policy & Practice, Madelyn Freundlich & Lisa Peterson, 1998

This monograph would be a helpful trainer resource for those trainers presenting this material.

Adoption and Ethics: The Role of Race, Culture, and National Origin in Adoption,
Madelyn Freundlich, 2000

Material from this article would be a helpful trainer resource for those trainers for *Cultural Issues in Permanency Planning*. That workshop includes a large-group discussion of the dilemmas of transracial placement. This resource would enable trainers to enrich the dialogue among workshop participants.

The Black Parenting Book, Ann C. Beal, M.D., M.P.H., Linda Villarosa, and Allison Abner, 1999

This book has already been added as a resource for adoptive parents in the bibliography of resources presented during the *Adoption Preservice* training.

5.   Material that should be added to foster or adoptive parent training

After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth, Jeanne A. Howard and Susan Livingston Smith, 2003

This area of need should be carefully considered as new post finalization workshops are developed for adoptive families.

Becoming Attached: First Relationships and How They Shaped Our Capacity to Love,
Robert Karen, Ph.D., 1998

The material presented in this work has been used for a workshop developed primarily for foster caregivers. The workshop can be modified easily for post finalization adoptive parents. Information presented in this book has been incorporated in a post finalization workshop called *Play with a Purpose: Strategies to Build Attachment*.   While there is some discussion of

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attachment building in the Tier I *Pre-Finalization Adoption Services*, the OCWTP may find the more advanced content presented in this book to be appropriate for Caseworker Core.

Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow, Gregory C. Keck, Ph.D. and Regina M. Kupecky, LSW, 2002

The information presented in this book, while compelling, may not be appropriate for Adoption Assessor workshops. However, there is rich material that could be developed in workshops for post finalization adoptive families. For example, a workshop on *Families and Democracy* might be helpful, particularly for those post finalization families struggling with tentative parenting as a result of weak entitlement.

"Pre-adoption Stress and Its Association with Child Behavior in Domestic Special Needs and International Adoptions,." Victor Groza, and Scott D. Ryan, 2002

One implication of this finding for the OCWTP is the importance of stressing adoption-related issues and unrealistic expectations of prospective adoptive parents during *Preservice* training. The OCWTP can provide group educational opportunities for adoptive parents, and must continue to train workers in the issues presented in *Post Finalization Adoption Services,* so they can provide and access adoption-competent supportive services.

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VI.   FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the two-year *Adoption Training Assessment*, a number of recommendations for the Adoption Assessor training revisions should be considered by the OCWTP.   Final recommendations are divided into two broad categories: Recommendations for Curricula Change and Recommendations for System Change.

Recommendations for Curricula Change

Recommendation #1: Specialized training for assessors who place children with special needs should be developed and offered as elective, but standardized, workshops.

As mentioned in Section II, the Adoption Assessor curricula were written for practitioners who facilitate domestic infant adoptions in private agencies, adoption of children with special needs in public child welfare agencies, as well as international adoptions. While this generic, "one-size-fits-all" training provides general adoption practice information, the workshops do not meet the training needs of specialized practitioners. Those workers placing children with special needs require additional training on child-specific recruitment, identification of kin, placement strategies, preparation of the child for placement, and post-placement support. These skill-building workshops for "special needs" workers should be elective, but available to all workers placing children from the public child welfare system.

Recommendation #2: Adoption supervisors should have a specialized course on *Clinical Supervision in Adoption*.

This workshop would give adoption supervisors more skill in providing good clinical supervision in adoption cases related to case planning, termination of parental rights, assessment of both children and prospective foster or adoptive families, preparing children for adoption, subsidy negotiation, placement planning, and post adoption support.

Recommendation #3: A revision and update of the *Birth Parent Services* workshop should be planned to assure the competencies addressed are relevant to Assessors in both the public and private sectors.

Several respondents in focus groups mentioned that *Birth Parent Services*, a Tier I workshop, is too focused on domestic infant, usually voluntary, relinquishment adoptions and does not provide adequate information on working with hostile birth parents whose parental rights are being terminated by court proceedings. When this workshop was developed in 1996, the goal of the workshop was to prepare workers for legislated changes in adoption work with birth parents (e.g., the Putative Father Registry, and changes in the law regarding open records). Because of feedback from public agencies that the workshop did not address their practice needs, there have been revisions to the curriculum since 1996, and technical assistance has been provided to trainers to assure they are making the training relevant to all participants. It is hard to determine if dissatisfied respondents had the *Birth Parent Services* workshop prior to revisions, and if some of their concerns have now been addressed.

Recommendation #4: Additional training content should be developed as a specialized assessment workshop or a skill-building learning lab that can take the issue of assessing non-traditional families to a greater, more hands-on level.

Assessors working with non-traditional, kinship, or "second-look" families need more highly developed skills in accurate, culturally competent assessment beyond the foundational level currently presented in the Tier I workshop, *Family and Child Assessment.*

Recommendation #5: A new handout should be created for *Family and Child Assessment,* listing possible questions to ask during assessment interviews and behavioral indicators of the levels of functioning outlined in the curriculum (Strength, Minimal, and Caution).

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Although these areas are discussed in the Tier I workshop, *Family and Child Assessment*, this resource would enhance participants' transfer of learning and provide a desk aid to use during the assessment process. This new handout should also be added to the "Adoption Tools" page of the OCWTP website.

Recommendation #6: The OCWTP should identify appropriate resources to assist Assessors needing specific information about special needs of waiting children.

The OCWTP should research e-learning resources and recruit content experts who could develop specialized workshops. Special needs of waiting children might include insecure attachments, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, conduct disorders, mental health problems, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and Fetal Alcohol Effect. A combination of classroom and e-learning opportunities should be made available to workers in the public sector so they can receive the most up-to-date information possible about the special needs of children awaiting placement at the time that it's needed.

Recommendation #7: According to the literature review, topics that should be enhanced or revised in the current Adoption Assessor series include:

- The assessment process as one of screening-in and education in *Family and Child Assessment*
- Importance of accurate information and HIPAA compliance in *Gathering and Documenting Background Information*
- Rights of birth fathers in *Birth Parent Services*
- Trends in *Openness*
- Factors and new statistics in disruption in *Pre-Finalization Adoption Services*
- Supporting grieving foster parents in *Placement Strategies*
- Interdisciplinary training in *Achieving Permanency through Interagency Collaboration*
- Support during *Post Finalization Adoption Services*

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Recommendation #8: According to the literature review, new specialized workshops should be developed incorporating the following topics:

- The impact of disrupted international placements on the public agency
- Surrogate parenting, embryonic adoption, and other technologies of conception
- Overcoming barriers to foster-to-adopt placements

Recommendations for System Change

Recommendation #9: The OCWTP should partner with adoption supervisors to assure more assessors have appropriate coaching and transfer-of -learning opportunities.

Of the many groups surveyed, adoption supervisors were the most critical of the existing Adoption Assessor curricula. In reviewing comments, it was apparent that some supervisors expected that trainees would return from six days of Tier I training as skilled practitioners who would need little in the way of mentoring to perform their jobs. Some supervisors also expected that workers would receive training on rules, protocol, and forms as part of their Adoption Assessor training. These supervisors expressed frustration that coaching and instruction were needed to transfer the worker's new knowledge in assessment and documentation on appropriate forms.

A number of strategies to address this unmet expectation are needed. First, an overview of Adoption Assessor training, for those supervisors who have not completed the workshops themselves, may help them understand the principles and best practice techniques being taught. Transfer of learning strategies could be woven into this overview to assist supervisors in coaching their new workers in application of skills to everyday practice. Second, a summary of each workshop, a list of the competencies being taught, handouts, and PowerPoint note pages for each of the Assessor workshops should be given to every adoption supervisor. Having this information as a desk reference would assist supervisors in reinforcing transfer of learning. A notebook with this information should be distributed to every public agency adoption supervisor. If possible, these notebooks should be made available to adoption supervisors in the private sector, as well.

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Recommendation #10: **Information on developing concurrent case plans and supporting foster-to-adopt placements should be included in the Adoption Assessor workshops.**

Practitioners indicated and research supports the fact that these practices enable children in the foster care system to achieve permanency more quickly.   The Adoption Assessor curricula should remain analogous to best practice standards as prescribed in family-centered child protective services.

Recommendation #11: Several of the most pertinent tools offered during Adoption Assessor training (i.e., protocols for ICWA, MEPA, Adoption Assistance requirements for each program, and the Prediction Path) should be made available on the OCWTP website under a page called "Adoption Tools."

Adoption trainers reported a need for ready access to many of the materials presented in Adoption Assessor training.   In order to immediately respond to this request, in February 2005, the Institute for Human Services placed these resources on the web page. A notice was sent to all Adoption Assessor trainers and all members of the OCWTP Adoption Steering Committee to inform participants of their ability to access these tools whenever needed. The tools were organized on the web page by Tier and by individual workshop; each file was named so participants can easily find information they need. These and other e-learning resources should be explored by the OCWTP as a tool for "just-in-time" learning for assessors.

Recommendation #12: The OCWTP should consider alternative methodologies to enhance the Adoption Assessor training and promote transfer of learning.

The online surveys of caseworkers, supervisors, and adoption trainers echoed much of what the researchers gathered from the focus groups and literature reviews regarding topic areas needed. As with the others, the emphasis was on openness, concurrent planning, and placement of children with special needs. These have been addressed in the recommendations for curricula change.

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The online respondents did, however, focus on additional issues that were not evident elsewhere. Specifically, the online respondents had many suggestions for the actual process of Adoption Assessor training. They included developing or videotaping real life situations, developing mock home studies for hands-on experience, shadowing, role playing, conducting teleconferences, using panels of experienced workers, establishing mentoring programs, offering follow-up sessions or refreshers, and using forms in the sessions.

VII. Appendices

A. Focus Group Questions

B. Online Survey Forms

C. Literature Reviews

D. Online Survey Narrative Data