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April 1, 2011

What is a Resource Family? That is a term that you will hear discussed today and frequently in the future. A Resource Family is a term that encompasses foster parents, adoptive parents, and kinship care providers – all of whom may provide care to children involved with the child welfare system.

But the term is more than a “catch-all” phrase. It really reflects our vision of what a foster parent, an adoptive parent, or a kinship provider can be. In a situation in which a child is placed in foster care, the foster Resource Parent is a true resource to the child AND, we hope to the parent. That is, the Resource Parent is able to provide support and guidance to the birth parent, in some cases perhaps even provide direct mentoring to the birth parent. As the children move toward reunification and perhaps, if the birth and resource families are willing, even after reunification, the Resource Parent can remain an ongoing resource for the birth parents – perhaps providing some informal respite, remaining connected with the children, and sustaining a support system to the birth family.

In adoption, the Resource Parent remains a resource to the child AND to the child’s birth family. The Resource Parent who makes a lifelong commitment to parent a child as part of their family is also enabling that child to remain connected to his or her extended birth family – whether that means birth parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins – people important to that child and for that child. The adoptive parent, then, becomes a resource to the child’s birth family to allow a relationship to continue, to have a child understand their past and have a sense of self in their future. In some cases in which the birth parent and resource parent have developed a strong relationship, and in which a birth parent may not be able to meet the needs of the child within the required timeframe and successfully reunify, that relationship can lead to permanency for a child sooner- and, by remaining connected, minimize loss for the child.

Kinship providers are often perceived as the most natural Resource Parents. With grandparents, especially, kinship providers are often parenting both the child and parent simultaneously – offering mentoring, guidance and support to the birth parent while at the same time taking on the role of primary parent of their grandchild. This is often true of other kinship providers, as well.

As we seek to move our system of foster care to one of support, inclusiveness, and a strengths-based focus on the best interests of the child, we will be asking more of our Resource Parents – more of your compassion, more sharing of your knowledge, more support of birth parents, and, most importantly, continued focus on what is truly best for children placed in your care. We believe that children can never have too many people in their lives to love and support them. Your role as Resource Parents is vital in maintaining strong relationships for children through-out their lifetime.

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