

**Adoption Council of Ontario
Executive Summary of 2012 Surveys of
Adoptive Families & Adoption Professionals
Regarding Mental Health Issues and Support**

Highlights of 2012 Survey of Adoptive Families

Our Adoptive Families Survey Monkey survey was sent out in October 2012 to our e-newsletter listing of several thousand people. 445 adoptive families responded to the survey. The families represented a mix of types of adoptions - public (61%), international (31%) and private (14%), with some families doing more than one type of adoption. Some adopted recently, others not - 64% adopted more than 3 years ago. Their children were various ages when they were adopted - 40% were less than a year old, 49% were 1 to 3 years old and 17% were 4 to 6 years old.

Key highlights of the Adoptive Families survey results are:

- **74%** of the adoptive families have used some kind of professional services (other than their adoption worker or their agency worker) since their child/children were adopted
- **64%** of the adoptive families think that one or more of their children have mental health issues - the most predominant being: Anxiety (70%), ADHD (64%), Attachment issues (53%) and Trauma-based issues (46%); **30%** of the families have more than one child with mental health issues
- When asked if their child/children were receiving truly adequate professional services prior to the time of adoption, **77%** of the families said No
- Only **33%** of the families found it easy to find someone to help them with their child/children's mental health issues
- **70%** of the families were put on a waiting list to see a professional
- **45%** of the families do not consider their professional to be "Adoption Competent" in terms of being able to effectively treat all members of an adoptive family;
- **53%** of families have had to change professionals at least once, the predominant reasons being that there was no improvement (38%) or the professional didn't seem to understand my child (33%)

- **86%** say it is very important that the mental health professional be Adoption Competent
- **67%** of families are at least partially paying for these professional services out of their own pockets
- **91%** do not think there are enough qualified mental health professionals in Ontario capable of helping adoptive families
- **99%** think more adoption related training of mental health professionals would be of benefit to adoptive families
- And worthy of note, even after answering 38 questions, **142** of the families took the time to provide substantive "other" comments about their experiences and struggles finding appropriate mental health supports for their children and their families

Highlights of 2012 Survey of Adoption Professionals

45 responses were received from the approximately 345 Ontario Adoption Professionals. Of the professionals, 61% worked for a public child welfare agency and 50% were in private practice, with some doing both. Of the respondents, the largest focus of adoptions were public adoptions (84%) with about half of the professionals also involved in private adoptions and/or international adoptions. 22% of the respondents had been involved in kinship adoptions. The professionals who responded were an experienced, seasoned group. 60% of the respondents had over 15 years experience in this field, while 78% had 8 or more years.

The Adoption Professionals corroborated the experiences of the adoptive families in their survey responses.

Key highlights are:

- **68%** of the professionals report that over half of the children they have placed have special needs; 64% report that more than 20% of the children they have placed have mental health issues
- When asked if in their opinion adequate mental health professional services were provided to the children they had placed, prior to their adoption, only **7%** said a definitive Yes, **37%** said To Some Extent, fully **23%** said No, and another **14%** said they Weren't Sure
- When asked if the families they are dealing with are getting the help that they need on a timely basis, **73%** said No.

- When asked if they think there are enough Adoption Competent mental health professionals in Ontario, **97%** said No.

When asked what types of services adoption professionals find that adoptive families need, the following are highlights:

- Therapy for abuse & neglect, trauma
- Affordable services
- Attachment issues
- Psychological issues
- Play therapy
- Psycho-educational assessments
- FASD assistance
- Crisis intervention
- Behavior management

When asked for which kind of services adoption professionals find **most difficult** to find professional assistance, the following are highlights:

- Affordable, timely services
- On-going, long term treatment
- Behavior management
- Play therapy
- Attachment therapy
- Mental health services
- Psychiatric services
- Adoption specific issues
- Trauma- based treatment

Highlights of 2013 Follow-up Survey of Adoptive Families

A brief follow-up survey of Adoptive Families was performed in February 2013 to try to ascertain from which sector families were mainly getting their support for mental health services. The Survey Monkey Survey went out to the same ACO e-newsletter group that the original survey went to.

We wanted to have an idea if most families were using publicly funded agencies or using private practitioners and to what extent they were using their employer's assistance plans. As well we wanted to better understand if most families were looking to a particular category of mental health provider

so we could better focus our efforts. We asked them to tell us if they were using a social worker, or a psychologist or a family doctor or a family counsellor, or a therapist or a child and youth worker or a psychiatrist.

We received 170 responses to the follow up survey. The results indicate that families are receiving support from both public agencies and private practitioners, in almost equal portion - an approximately 50/50 split. We also determined that families were receiving support from a very wide variety of providers - social workers, psychologists, family doctors, pediatricians, therapists, counsellors, and psychiatrists.

It became clear that an Adoption Competent training program will have to address a wide cross-section of mental health providers, in both the public system and the private system.