



Military Families and Adoption: A Bulletin for Professionals

What are the benefits of using military families as adoptive resources for children?

Several Adoption Opportunities grants (demonstration projects funded by the Children's Bureau) in the early 1990s demonstrated the benefits of placing children with military families. They found the military to be a largely untapped resource for children waiting for families. The benefits of placing children with military families include ethnic diversity, family structure, and the military support network for families and children.

- ✓ **Ethnic Diversity.** The diversity within the military exceeds that of the general population. (According to the 2000 census, minorities account for approximately 29 percent of the total U.S. population.*) The Military Family Resource Center's (MFRC's) (www.mfrc.calib.com/) annual *Profile of the Military Community* (www.mfrc.calib.com/stat.cfm) shows more than one-third of the active duty military identify themselves as African American, Hispanic, American Indian, Alaska Native, or Asian-Pacific Islander. Given the overrepresentation of minority children in the child welfare system and the recruitment provisions of the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) (www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/mepa94/), the military would appear to be a good resource for waiting children.
- ✓ **Family Structure.** The structure often found in military families can benefit children who have not had much structure in their lives or those with ADD, ADHD, and Attachment Disorder.
- ✓ **Military Support Network.** Military installations have a built-in support network for military families. Family benefits are available from Adoption Reimbursement, Exceptional Family Member Programs, and the New Parent Support Programs on many installations.

What are the challenges in working with military families?

Working with military families presents workers with some unique challenges:

- ✓ Possibility of transfer and/or deployment.
- ✓ Increased likelihood of overseas assignment.
- ✓ Increased involvement of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.
- ✓ Preconceived ideas about military families and lack of knowledge of available resources.

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is applicable if a child travels from one State to another for the purposes of adoption. All 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands signed this agreement, which requires an application for approval before a child can be transferred into the receiving State for placement. The ICPC requires that parties comply with the law of the sending State (the

* U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2001 (No. 15. Resident Population by Hispanic Origin Status, 1980 to 2000, and projections, 2005 to 2050).

How did adoption opportunities grantees overcome the challenges?

State where the child originated) before the sending State's ICPC office will approve the child's transfer. Also, home studies in the receiving State cannot be initiated until ICPC receives the request from the sending State and gives permission to initiate the study. Officials will look at the *State of adoption finalization* to determine the appropriate receiving State (e.g., if a family is adopting a child from Kansas but is finalizing their adoption in Virginia, an ICPC referral would be necessary from Kansas to Virginia). The American Public Human Services Association has a listing of ICPC contacts in each State (<http://icpc.aphsa.org/states.asp>). For military families stationed overseas, ICPC may not apply.

Working with military families may challenge some workers' beliefs or negative stereotypes about military families. Negative characteristics are no more common among military families than among the general civilian population. Each branch of the military has Family Advocacy Programs (www.mfrc.calib.com/links.cfm#fama) focused primarily on prevention services, and all branches practice a zero tolerance policy ensuring that all allegations of child abuse and/or neglect are investigated. Social workers may wish to educate themselves about the unique issues in military families and the available support services by availing themselves of the resources listed in this bulletin. All families, military or civilian, should be assessed on their ability to meet a child's needs.

The grantees used creativity to overcome potential barriers to adoption by military families. Examples of their creative solutions include:

- ✓ Training military personnel on installations (e.g., social workers, chaplains, etc.) to recruit families, complete home studies, or conduct post-placement follow-up visits for families stationed overseas.
- ✓ Training and sensitizing civilian social workers to the cultural standards and communication styles of military personnel, so they could better appreciate the unique culture of many military families.
- ✓ Offering flexibility in the timing of education and/or home study processes.
- ✓ Providing the final court hearing by telephone after completing the post-placement services.

Successful recruitment campaigns and adoption processes with military families are dependent on cooperative relationships between military services and agency personnel. Adoption workers need to understand and respect the military command structure and lifestyle, and military personnel need to be educated about the adoption process.

What resources within the military are supportive of families in general and/or might assist families in their adoption pursuit?

Adoption Reimbursement Policy U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 1341.9 (www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/html/13419.htm), issued by the DoD Washington Headquarters Services' Directives and Record Division, is posted online. This instruction outlines the policy and responsibilities for the reimbursement of qualifying adoption expenses. Up to \$2,000 per child (or up to \$5,000 per year) for qualifying expenses is available to military families whose adoptions were arranged by a qualified adoption agency. Benefits are paid after the adoption is complete. The National Military Family Association (NMFA) (www.nmfa.org/) has a fact sheet, *DoD Adoption Reimbursement Program* (www.nmfa.org/FactSheets/Adoption.pdf), with further information on allowable expenses. A child is considered a dependent in determining travel and transportation allowances (Public Law No. 102-190, section 621, reference (d)). Check with your Judge Advocate General (JAG) if there is a question about this instruction as interpretation varies from installation to installation.

Child Development Programs are available at approximately 300 DoD locations, including 800 centers and approximately 9,000 family child care homes. The services may include full day, part-day and hourly (drop-in) childcare, part-day preschool programs, before- and after-school programs for school-aged children, and extended hours care, including nights and weekends. Not all services are available at all installations.

Deployment Deferment or Extension of Assignment are options military families may request if they need to remain in one State to finalize an adoption. According to DoD Instruction 1341.9 (www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/html/13419.htm), commanders are encouraged to approve requests for ordinary leave once a child is placed in the home of a member. The instruction states that single members or *one* member of a military couple *shall* receive a 4-month assignment and deployment deferment immediately following the date a child is placed.

The **Exceptional Family Member Program** within the military provides many services including assisting families who need to be stationed in areas that provide for specific medical or other services that might not be available in remote locations. It should be noted that the military definition of *special needs* is more narrowly defined to mean "persons with physical or mental disabilities or severe illness." This differs from what adoption professionals often refer to as *children with special needs* - more broadly defined to include children who may be *healthy* but are older, in sibling groups, or members of a minority group. For additional information on special needs resources in the military, go to the Special Needs Network Web site (www.mfrc.calib.com/snn/).

Family Service Centers located on every major military installation can provide military families with information regarding adoption reimbursement and other familial benefits.

Medical Care is available to military families at military treatment facilities, and health care benefits are provided under TRICARE in civilian medical facilities if access to care is not available at an installation. TRICARE is the military medical benefits program that replaced CHAMPUS. An adopted child, including a child placed in the home of a service member by a placement agency, is eligible for benefits after the child is enrolled in the **Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS)—phone: (800) 538-9552**. The patient affairs personnel at a specific medical treatment facility may have information. Specific information on access and eligibility is available on the TRICARE Web site at www.tricare.osd.mil or by calling the DoD Worldwide **Tricare Information Center at (888) 363-2273**.

Family Advocacy Program provides individual and family counseling services for military families. Most of the programs are geared toward prevention and the development of a healthier lifestyle. The **New Parent Support Programs** available at some military installations are one component of the Family Advocacy Program. These programs are available to all families (birth or adoptive) with children ages 3 or under. The MFRC has a *New Parent Support Programs in the Military* fact sheet (www.mfrc.calib.com/pdffiles/nps_fs.pdf) that provides more information.

Tax Benefits for Adoption (www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p968.pdf), Internal Revenue Service Publication 968, is available online. A tax benefit of up to \$10,000 is available for all adoptive families. **While military families do not qualify for services under the Family Medical Leave Act**, they do qualify for this tax benefit.

American Academy of Adoption Attorneys (AAAA)

P.O. Box 33053
Washington, DC 20033
Phone: (202) 832-2222
Web site: www.adoptionattorneys.org/

AAAA is a national association of attorneys who practice, or have otherwise distinguished themselves, in the field of adoption law. AAAA's work includes promoting the reform of adoption laws and disseminating information on ethical adoption practices.

The Adoption Exchange

14232 East Evans Avenue
Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: (303) 755-4756
Phone: (800) 451-5246
Web site: www.adoptex.org/

The Adoption Exchange and VIDA (Voice for International Development and Adoption) collaborated on a project to make adoption easier for families living abroad. Their booklet *Global Connections: A Passport Home—Adoption for U.S. Citizens Living Abroad* can be obtained free of charge by calling The Adoption Exchange. This program is designed for families stationed overseas.

The Adoption Exchange Association

8015 Corporate Drive, Suite C
Baltimore, MD 21236
Phone: (888) 200-4005
Web site: www.adoptuskids.org/

A collaboration funded by the Children's Bureau and managed by The Adoption Exchange Association administers **AdoptUSKids**, the national online photolisting service that provides pictures and brief descriptions of children waiting for families and a registry of waiting families.

What organizations can adoption workers access or refer families to while assisting military families pursuing adoption?

**American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)
Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA)**

810 First Street, NE, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002-4267

Phone: (202) 682-0100

Fax: (202) 289-6555

Web site: <http://aaicama.aphsa.org/who.html>

AAICAMA is recognized as the definitive source of technical and legal assistance, training, and information for adoption professionals on issues related to adoption in both interstate and intrastate situations. This Web site provides contact information on adoption subsidies in each State that is currently a member of the compact (as of July 2002). Since this is a national umbrella organization, they do not work directly with families or workers; however, States that have signed on to this agreement are listed on their Web site.

**Department of State
Office of Children's Issues**

2201 C Street, NW
SA-22, Room 2100
Washington, DC 20520-4818

Phone: (202) 736-7000

Fax: (202) 312-9743

Auto Fax: (202) 647-3000

Web site: www.travel.state.gov/adopt.html

The Office of Children's Issues formulates, develops, and coordinates policies and programs and provides direction to Foreign Service posts on international adoption. Workers can refer families to this Web site, which has a helpful booklet on adoption and specific information regarding adoption in more than 60 countries.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)

810 First Street, NE, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002-4267

Phone: (202) 682-0100

Fax: (202) 289-6555

Web site: <http://icpc.aphsa.org/states.asp>

ICPC is a membership organization that does not work directly with families. Workers can go to this Web site to obtain the name and contact information of the compact administrators who facilitate activities and placements under ICPC in their State.

International Concerns for Children, Inc. (ICC)

911 Cypress Drive
Boulder, CO 80303
Phone: (303) 494-8333
E-mail: icc@boulder.net
Web site: www.iccadopt.org/

ICC is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization that publishes the *Report on Intercountry Adoption*, a guidebook to international adoption and U.S. agencies working in specific foreign countries, as well as a listing of adoption agencies willing to work with U.S. families living abroad. The report is available for a donation of \$25 U.S. and APO/FPO and \$40 for families living abroad.

**International Social Service (ISS)
American Branch, Inc.**

700 Light Street
Baltimore, MD 21230-3850
Phone: (410) 230-2734
Fax: (410) 230-2741
E-mail: jselinske@irs.org
Web site: www.iss-usa.org/

ISS is an international network of professional social workers in 146 countries around the world. It is a nonsectarian, nonprofit international social work agency that expedites communication among social service agencies in different countries in order to resolve sociolegal problems of individuals and families. While ISS social workers do not always work directly with overseas families, this agency coordinates identifying and communicating with an agency in another country. Professionals or families can check to see if ISS can directly serve a family in a particular country.

Military Family Resource Center (MFRC)

Crystal Square 4, Suite 302, Room 309
1745 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202-3424
Phone: (703) 602-4964
DSN: 332-2964
Fax: (703) 602-4972
Web site: www.mfrc.calib.com/

MFRC is a resource for enhancing the effectiveness of military family policy and programs. MFRC's mission is to act as a catalyst of information between the DoD Military Community and Family Policy office and military policy-makers and program staff, and to deliver timely, efficient, and effective information services through cutting-edge technology. They can provide information and referral to appropriate resources for families pursuing adoption.

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

2500 North Van Dorn Street, Suite 102
 Alexandria, VA 22302-1601

Phone: (703) 931-6632

Fax: (703) 931-4600

Web site: www.nmfa.org/

NMFA is the only national organization dedicated to identifying and resolving issues of concern to military families. Their mission is to serve the families of the seven uniformed services through education, information, and advocacy. They offer information on benefits for adoption reimbursement and health care, but *not* on placement.

U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
 Washington, DC 20530-0001

Phone: (800) 375-5283

Web site: www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/adoption

The INS is a Federal agency within the U.S. Department of Justice that administers the nation's immigration laws. Their Web site provides a list of INS offices, online forms, and answers to frequently asked questions regarding adoption.

**Sources
 Consulted**

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American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law (1996) *Recruitment of Military Families for the Adoption of Special Needs Children: Final Evaluation Report*. Contact: Bo Chipman (919) 932-5385.

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The Clearinghouses are services of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services