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NATION DOUBLES ADOPTIONS FROM FOSTER CARE *National Project Focused on Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Releases New Study*

Chicago, IL – *Fostering Results*, a public education campaign focused on improving child welfare outcomes and supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, released a new study today detailing how 33 states and the District of Columbia doubled the number of adoptions from foster care during the five years since the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997. Of these states, six tripled and two quadrupled their adoption performance. By totaling the peak yearly performance for each of the states and the District of Columbia, the nation's child welfare system was able to double the number of adoptions from 28,000 to over 58,000.

Cumulatively, from 1998 to 2002, states placed over 230,000 children in adoptive homes. More children were adopted this five-year time period than the previous 10 years combined.

“Most experts in 1997 thought the prospect of doubling adoptions from foster care was a pipe dream, based on past experience. But the impossible happened and the number of adoptions exceeded all expectations,” said Jess McDonald, Co-Director of *Fostering Results* and former Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. “In the last five years, states have broken down barriers, formed exciting partnerships and taken advantage of a new, targeted federal financial incentive in an unprecedented way to achieve these impressive results.”

Congress enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 to make significant improvements in a beleaguered child welfare system. By 1997, there were well over 530,000 children in foster care with more children entering and fewer reaching permanent homes. As many as 100,000 of those children were in need of an adoptive home, yet the number of children being adopted remained stagnant. The new law made landmark changes in the nation's foster care system including establishing new financial bonuses – the Adoption Incentive Program – for states to increase adoptions. *Fostering Results* analyzed each state's performance under the incentive program by reviewing the total the number of adoptions during the peak performance year of each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia between 1998 and 2002. The study compared the peak number to the total of each state's average number of adoptions in previous years resulting in an increase of 108 percent of adoptions from the nation's foster care system.

States large and small and from every region of the country met the adoption challenge:

- California tripled its performance by going from an average of 3,287 adoptions to a record breaking 9,859 adoptions in 2001.
- Texas nearly tripled an average of 880 adoptions per year to more than 2,318 adoptions during 2001, its peak year.
- Iowa saw adoption performance peak in 2002 from an average of 350 to 882 adoptions.
- Illinois' performance tripled from an average of 2,200 adoptions to a peak of 7,113 adoptions in 1999.
- Arizona more than doubled adoptions out of foster care, going from an average of 357 prior to 1998 to a peak of 938 adoptions in 2001.
- Missouri saw adoptions improve from an average of 557 adoptions to a high of 1,273 in 2002.
- Connecticut's average of 207 adoptions per year was more than doubled by its peak of 562 in 2002.

Fostering Results' research found that among the lessons learned from states' progress in increasing adoptions was the capacity to innovate and achieve results when financial incentives are aligned with desired policy outcomes and when child welfare agencies and courts work together to improve outcomes for children and families.

Despite their success in placing over 230,000 children in adoptive homes since 1997, child welfare systems nonetheless continue to face the daunting challenge of securing safe, permanent homes for the more than 540,000 children in foster care today.

The study is available at <http://cfrwww.social.uiuc.edu/> and includes state specific adoption data for all states through 2002.

Fostering Results is a public education and outreach campaign supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and based at the Children and Family Research Center at the School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Fostering Results works to build support for improved outcomes for children and families served by the nation's child welfare systems by focusing on the need to improve the way child welfare is financed and the role the courts play in overseeing child welfare cases.