

**The Sisters and Brothers Together Project**  
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**Northeast Ohio Adoption Services**  
5000 East Market Street  
Warren, Ohio 44484  
Phone: (330) 856-5582

Cynthia Deal, BA - Executive Director  
Connie Maschmeier, MSSA, LISW, CCDC III - Project Director

In collaboration with  
**The Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services**  
3955 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, Ohio 44115  
Phone: (216) 431-4500

Jim McCafferty - Acting Executive Director

Author: Connie Maschmeier, MSSA, LISW, CCDC III  
Contributions made by: Victor Groza, Ph. D. and Mary Brooks, MBA

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### **The Sisters and Brothers Together Project Northeast Ohio Adoption Services**

Cynthia Deal, Executive Director  
Connie Maschmeier, Project Director

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# **Executive Summary**

## **Project Description**

The Sisters and Brothers Together Project was a three-year federally funded Adoption Opportunities demonstration project. Northeast Ohio Adoption Services (NOAS) partnered with The Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) to increase the number of siblings placed together in permanent homes and to improve the quality of sibling bonds for children in the child welfare system. In the process, barriers that impede this practice were identified. The four specific project objectives were as follows:

- 1) Timely response to sibling groups at the point of initial placement.
- 2) Increase the number of placements of sibling groups as a group in foster care and adoption.
- 3) Development of innovative practices to promote preservation of sibling bonds and reunification of sibling groups.
- 4) Institutionalization of improved policy, practice and beliefs with regard to sibling placement.

Dr. Victor Groza, of the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, developed an evaluation plan to assess how effectively the objectives were achieved. This report summarizes the Project's achievement of its goals and objectives by reporting tasks identified and carried out as described in the evaluation plan.

## **Summary**

Eleven sibling groups totaling 39 children were officially referred to the Sisters and Brothers Together Project. During the life of the Project NOAS placed 15 sibling groups, consisting of 37 children, who were not referred to the Project and 28 children were placed individually into adoptive homes. By combining the 65 children NOAS placed and the 34 children who found permanency as a result of the Project, NOAS assisted 99 children in the permanent custody of CCDCFS in finding permanence with loving families!

In addition to helping children find permanence, the Project developed the Sibling Decision Making Matrix, a tool to assist professionals in making sibling placement decisions, and developed a three hour curriculum to train professionals and parents about the significance of the sibling relationship. Over 1,000 individuals were trained about the significance of the sibling relationship! Finally we implemented proven recruitment techniques.

The Project encountered some challenges related to staffing. The Project was not fully staffed until January of 1998 and then endured some staff turnover and two maternity leaves. Other challenges were related to navigating a bureaucracy as large as CCDCFS and time constraints hindering our institutionalization efforts.

## **Recommendations**

We must continually strive to heighten the awareness of professionals and caregivers about the significance of the sibling relationship. In addition to heightening awareness, systems and services must be in place to support sibling placements.

### **Philosophy**

- The agency must practice on the premise that siblings should be placed together unless a compelling reason exists in the children's best interest to the contrary.
- The agency believes that children have a right to be in contact with their siblings. Withholding contact with a child's sibling is not an acceptable form of punishment.

### **Policy**

- Both the custodial agency and the network agencies must have formal written policies about keeping siblings together and maintaining connections.

### **Best Practices for Custodial Agency**

- It appears that the most successful way to keep siblings together when they enter care is to have a separate specialized foster care program designed specifically to accept large sibling groups. This seems to be the only model to keep siblings together while also meeting the needs of the foster family and retaining staff. A partnership should be developed between CCDCFS and an existing (or newly created) foster care agency to duplicate a program similar to the Hull House Neighbor to Neighbor foster care program or the Jewish Child Caring Association, Sibling Homes Foster Care Program.
- Contracts with private agencies need to include expectations regarding siblings.
- Relationships between public and private agencies should be developed and nurtured.
- Improve MIS (track/ link siblings), be linked online to all network agencies 24 hours a day.
- Hold foster homes open for large sibling groups (provide incentives).
- Utilize the sibling decision-making matrix (or a similar tool) when making sibling placement decisions.
- Through assessment by a social worker of each child and the sibling group as a whole to assess their relationship, strengths, and needs.
- If siblings must be separated place them all in the same network in as close geographic proximity as possible.
- Re-evaluate the three to five working day review and implement it if the practice is effective.
- Sibling specific questions should be included on all forms at CCDCFS (i.e. Semi Annual Reviews, intake, placement, disruption, ongoing, adoption, etc.).
- All siblings to be discussed at every SAR/ staffing.
- All members of a sibling group to be assigned to the same worker.
- Worker caseloads need to decrease to allow for adequate time to focus on sibling relationships.
- A competent social worker should thoroughly assess each child and the sibling group as a whole to assess their relationship, strength, and needs.

- Family preservation services should be utilized more frequently to preserve sibling placements (heighten workers awareness about their availability, increase availability).
- As already indicated, there is a need and a desire to have trained sibling consultants available to make objective placement recommendations. There are only a handful of individuals competently trained to do the consultations at this time. Sibling consultants need to be trained and a system has to be in place to make these individuals available to workers and supervisors wanting to utilize them.
- Sibling placement recommendations made by therapists who have only seen one child in therapy or have not made extensive efforts to consult with other therapists that siblings may be seeing will not be accepted.
- Clarity needs to be obtained about confidentiality related to siblings.
- Children should never be labeled “unadoptable.” Professionals should be searching for permanency and connections to siblings even when the child is referred for independent living services.

### **Best Practices for Private Agencies**

- Leadership needs to be offered to all of the private agencies about revising their policies to include specific statements about valuing the sibling relationship and keeping them together whenever possible.
- Quarterly reports from private agencies need to include information about sibling contact i.e. when visits occurred, who was present, observations, etc.

### **Training**

- All new public and private workers need to be trained about the importance of keeping siblings together.
- Ongoing sibling trainings need to be offered at least quarterly to public and private agency employees.
- Develop a high quality video that discusses the importance of the sibling relationship, ways to rebuild relationships between siblings who have been separated, how to parent large sibling groups, etc. We were approached numerous times by other professionals asking for such a resource and none exists to our knowledge.
- Train Guardians Ad Litem and other court representatives regarding sibling issues.
- We trained the therapists who worked at residential treatment facilities and those working for private foster care agencies but not those in private or group practices. Because many social workers hold the recommendations made by therapist in very high regard it would be wise to offer them ongoing education about siblings and how to make sound placement recommendations.
- Workers need to be trained on how to access MIS information.
- Educate workers and foster parents about how to obtain a waiver to go over capacity for sibling groups.

### **Recruitment**

- All recruitment pictures of the children should be taken as a group if that is how they are to be placed.

### **Services to Families**

- Families should be trained in pre-service training about the significance of the sibling relationship throughout the lifespan.
- Families should have regular training opportunities to learn about different aspects of the sibling relationship.
- Their assigned social worker should help them to assess their ability and desire to parent a sibling group.
- Potential families should be linked to “buddy” families who are parenting a sibling group similar to what the potential family is hoping to adopt. The family has an opportunity to learn about the joys and challenges of parenting a sibling group and they have a mentor/ source of support once they get a placement.
- Families need access to fiscal support for immediate start up costs i.e. clothes, linens, beds, school supplies, and other miscellaneous items. Maybe they could be provided with a “welcome package” (with toys, linens, etc) for each child upon placement.
- Families need access to subsidized room additions (ranging from low interest loans to additions being partially paid for), subsidized vans, and subsidized industrial size appliances, subsidized utilities, subsidized daycare, access to affordable medical and dental services and early intervention services.
- Upon placement families should be provided with house cleaning services and have easy access to transportation services.
- Post adoption services such as respite, crisis intervention, psychiatric services, and in home therapy should be easily accessible.
- Access to additional college funds for adopted siblings similar to what they would have had access to if they remained in foster care.
- Regular recognition for their commitment to siblings.

# I. Problem Identification/ Literature Review

## The Importance of Sibling Relations Across the Life Span<sup>1</sup>

Most children grow up with siblings. The time siblings spend together in their early years is often greater than the time they spend with their parents. It is a complex relationship (Pfouts, 1976) that lasts for a lifetime, longer than most marriages and parent-child relationships (Dunn, 1985). Sibling relations may be very strong at some points, weak at others, peaceful and fun, conflictual and intense. A person's identity is interwoven with his or her siblings.

Sibling relations exert considerable influence on individual development (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Pfouts, 1976; Sutton-Smith, 1982; LePere, Davis, Couve, & McDonald, 1986). In early childhood, siblings are companions and playmates. Through games, conversations, and conflicts they learn to interact with others, solve problems, and negotiate. During the early school years, the sibling relationship continues to be emotionally intense for many children and an ongoing developmental influence (Amramovitch, Pepler, & Corter, 1982). Older siblings assist younger siblings in the transition to school by both acting as role models and by giving information about the experience—good or bad—to their younger siblings. Sibling relations often serve as a basis for peer relations. A sibling can also serve as a point of familiarity in the unfamiliar circumstances of school.

Older siblings are attachment figures for younger siblings. Attachment behaviors attempt to increase or maintain proximity or contact with a person who is viewed as stronger, wiser or able to protect/provide safety and security. Behaviors include crying, following or calling out to the person, greeting the returning person, moving toward, reaching, clinging, or embracing the person. These behaviors occur naturally but increase under conditions of fear, change, or uneasiness/anxiety. Most children react to these behaviors in each other. Children provide emotional nurturance, support or reassurance for the well being of another who is viewed as younger or weaker. Specific supportive behaviors include moving toward, hugging, kissing, caressing, holding the other, offering reassurance or changing the focus of the distressed individual's attention. Stewart and Martin (1984) indicate that by the end of preschool years children serve as subsidiary attachment figures for their younger siblings.

Sibling relationships are not without conflict. It is normal for there to be conflict or rivalry at different stages in the relationship between siblings. Rivalry and conflict are not necessarily negative. Sibling conflict is a normal part of the sibling relationship (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982), providing opportunities to learn flexibility, competence, and fair play (Bank & Kahn, 1982). These skills are used in relationships with family, peers, and as adults with spouses, friends, and colleagues. The intensity and frequency of conflicts is affected by several factors including differences in temperament (Brody, Stoneman & Burke, 1987; Dunn, 1985), the emotional climate of the family (Dunn, 1985) and parental behavior toward the siblings (Brody et al., 1987; Dunn & Munn, 1986). Conflict is normal, healthy and can be positive—particularly when there are opportunities for successful conflict resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> This literature review was adapted from the chapter on siblings in Groze, V. (1996). Successful Adoptive Families: A Longitudinal Study of Special Needs Adoption. New York: Praeger.

While all aspects —both positive and negative—of the sibling relationship exist in well functioning families, they are intensified in dysfunctional families. In these families, children learn early to depend upon and cooperate with each other in order to cope (Hochman, Feathers-Acuna & Huston, 1992). Children grow more attached to their siblings when they have experienced severe parental losses and neglect or abuse. Their attachment is greater than that shown by siblings who have not experienced such losses (Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982). It is important to keep in mind that children don't really differentiate between good and bad—they see life and relationships as familiar and unfamiliar. Therefore, what professionals and those outside the family judge as questionable or unacceptable family functioning, children tend to see as normal and customary. Within the context of these problematic families, sibling relations intensify. When children are traumatized by removal from the familiarity of their families, it is the siblings to whom they turn because they represent familiarity. Without accessibility to that sibling, their trauma often increases.

While it is unclear to what degree sibling relationships affect adult personality, the power of the relationship lasts far past childhood, withstands separations of time and space, and provides emotional strength for most people in later life stages (Cicirelli, 1982; Hegar, 1988). Contact with siblings in late adulthood provides a sense of nearness, belonging, and the assurance of attachment to a family. In old age, the cycle of the sibling bond comes full circle. It provides a shield against the insecurity of aging and the loss of parents (Dunn, 1985; Hegar, 1988). The bond between them often intensifies as they once again become each other's companions after their parents or spouse are deceased and adult children are on their own (Hochman, Feathers-Acuna & Huston, 1992).

### **Adoption Outcomes and Siblings**

In the past it was thought that placing siblings together resulted in more negative child welfare outcomes. However, there are mixed results when reviewing the data on adoption disruption—the termination of the family relationship before legalization. Some researchers suggest that placing siblings in the same home increases the risk of disruption (Bohen, 1979; Kadushin & Seidl, 1971; USRE, 1986; Boyne et al., 1984). For example, Kadushin and Seidl (1971) indicate that 28% of sibling placements ended in disruption versus 1% of single child placements. However, it should be noted that a relationship between age and sibling placements was found. The average age of single placements was four years and of sibling placements was seven years. This suggests that age at placement may have played a factor in the disruption of sibling placements; confounding the simple conclusion that sibling placement increases the risk for problems. Other, more current, researchers report no association between disruption and sibling placement (Barth, Berry, Yoshikami & Goodfield, 1988). For example, Barth and colleagues (1988) found that sibling placements were no more likely to disrupt (33%) than single child placements (35%). However, sibling placements for children older than 15 tended to disrupt more than single-child placements for children older than 15. Related research by Rosenthal and Groze (1990) on adoption stability did not find sibling placements related to adoption disruption.

Finally, some researchers (Rosenthal, Schmidt & Conner, 1988; Festinger, 1986) found sibling placement for older children to be associated with reduced risk of disruption. For example, Festinger (1986) indicates that children who were placed alone disrupted at the rate of 10.7% compared to 5.6% for children who were placed with siblings. There were no significant differences in age of the two groups at the time of placement. Of the children who were placed by themselves in Festinger's study, 11.9% had siblings placed in other adoptive homes. Of the separated siblings, over

90% were believed to have moderate to severe problems. Supporting Festinger's research, Rosenthal and colleagues (1988) found that as the age of the child increased, the risk of disruption increased for non-sibling groups; however, for sibling groups there was no linear association between age of the child and sibling group placement.

In a longitudinal study of four years that examined siblings placed separately and together, Groze (1996) found a difference between siblings placed apart and siblings placed together on several dimensions of parent-child relations, although there is no trend in this pattern over time. The major difference was that siblings placed together did not have the same type of relationship with their adoptive parents as the siblings placed separately, which provided partial support for the importance of the sibling bond. The sibling group as a subsystem within the larger family system formed a unique and strong bond that affected the quality of parent-child relations—these relations were not problematic, but different in intensity. In addition, siblings who were separated showed more anxiety/depression, which also provides limited support about the effects of being separated. Anxiety/depression may be the concrete manifestation of the existential crisis promoted by being separated from one's sibling(s).

In essence, the evidence is not clear or compelling about how sibling groups affect adoption risk or child welfare outcomes. Making decisions about separating or maintaining sibling groups with the paucity of our current knowledge and assessment skills poses unacceptable negative, life-long consequences to children (Jones & Niblett, 1985). It can deny a child or children the opportunity for a relationship that may be an important source of strength and attachment throughout the life span. While there is not clear evidence that sibling group placement negatively affects outcomes, practice wisdom suggests that trying to place siblings together is difficult. The next section includes an overview of research about specific factors that affect placement.

### **Siblings and the Child Welfare System**

Studies suggest that 93% of children in foster care have full, half, or step siblings (Timberlake & Hamlin, 1982) and up to 85% of children enter foster care at the same time as one or more of their siblings (Wedge & Mantle, 1991). According to Hochman and colleagues (1992), 30% of the children entering foster care are sibling groups of four or more. In a recent study in Cuyahoga County (Wells & Guo, 2000); over 66% of the children in foster care had an identifiable sibling also in the system although this percent is probably higher. The Management Information System (MIS) has difficulties tracking siblings with different last names who enter the system at different times.

Child welfare workers are often faced with the question of whether it is better to place all brothers and sisters together or whether it is better to place siblings individually or in sub-groups when looking for an initial placement in foster care. This issue emerges again once permanent custody is obtained and decisions must be made around securing permanency for children in care. While few facts are available to give practice direction beyond case specific examples (Wedge & Mantle, 1991), it appears that factors affecting placement decisions regarding siblings include worker and agency philosophy (Jones & Niblett, 1985; Ward, 1984), sibling interaction (Ward, 1984), circumstances of the child when entering the child welfare system (Ward, 1984; Wedge & Mantle, 1991), timing of siblings entering the child welfare system, and placement availability (Ward, 1984; Jones & Niblett, 1985).

Many professionals do not start from the premise that siblings should be kept together and the belief that there must be compelling evidence to separate them. Instead, professionals immediately start evaluating the pros and cons of keeping siblings together, which is an approach that starts with the premise that siblings should not necessarily be kept together. Jones and Niblett (1985) found that professionals attending a workshop about the placement of siblings did not consistently support the assumption that siblings should be kept together unless there are strong contraindications. As professionals consider the merits and deficits in keeping siblings together, personal values have considerable impact on professional decisions (Jones & Niblett, 1985). Some workers may have strong feelings about a child needing a two parent family, what constitutes “too” large of a family, and what is a normal (and healthy) amount of sibling rivalry.

Sibling interaction is a second factor influencing placement decisions. Sometimes there is something compelling about the particular sibling interactions that causes workers to consider separation. Siblings who seem to relate well are more likely to be placed together while sibling conflict or rivalry is often used to justify decisions to split children. Of course, as outlined above, conflict is a normal part of sibling relations. When children are separated because of rivalry or conflict, it teaches them that the way to deal with conflict is to avoid it rather than to work it out (Hochman, Feathers-Acuna & Huston, 1992). As part of sibling interaction, it is not unusual for older children to play a care-taking role with a younger sibling. This is not necessarily negative and, by itself, should not be used to justify separating siblings. With the appropriate adoptive family, both children can develop appropriate roles with each other so that the older child can be helped to be a child again and the younger child can learn to trust adults (Hochman, Feathers-Acuna & Huston, 1992). Perhaps one child has more difficulties and is scapegoated. The belief is that by separating children, families can better meet the different emotional needs of the individual children. Some believe that separating siblings is a way to foster healthy interactions, reduce scapegoating, and allow children to reclaim their childhoods or prevent premature assuming of adult roles (Ward, 1984). Practitioners react to behaviors such as sexual reactivity, sexual offending, and aggression when making placement decisions. However, these behaviors are not necessary and sufficient evidence to separate siblings.

A third factor that influences placement decisions is the timing of when siblings enter the child welfare system. Siblings are separated when they come into care sequentially rather than simultaneously (Wedge & Mantle, 1991). Sequential entrance into the child welfare system (that is, they enter one after the other) results in separation. Separating siblings when they enter care contributes to their continued separation in adoption planning, regardless of their connection with each other (Ward, 1984).

Availability of a placement is a fourth factor influencing placement decisions. Often, siblings are separated when there are too many siblings for the licensed capacity of foster homes. Sometimes, families may be licensed for several children but have other children already in the home. Also, the size of the proposed blended family (adoptive or foster family and sibling group) is cited as a reason for not placing a sibling group together.

The factors that influence whether siblings are placed together or apart need to be evaluated so that the best placements, clinically determined, can be made. Agency philosophies and worker values that promote the preservation of sibling relationships, comprehensive assessment of sibling

relationships and issues, effective management information systems, and increasing the flexibility of foster home licenses can increase opportunities for siblings to be successfully placed together.

## **Implications<sup>2</sup>**

There are several strategies for keeping siblings together. One strategy is to make sure that the public and/or private agency has a clearly stated policy that supports maintaining sibling relations. There must also be a system in place that ensures workers are adhering to the policies. A second strategy is to make placing sibling groups together a priority at the time the children enter the child welfare system. As part of this strategy, extended family and kin resources must be explored for placement. Extended family or kin are more likely to keep the siblings together or will work out a plan as a family group to keep the children connected to each other as well as to the family. When siblings must be separated a system should be in place to “flag” those cases and review them in three to five working days to re-explore placement options in an effort to reunite the siblings. A third strategy is to increase efforts at recruiting, training and retaining foster and adoptive families who want to parent siblings. As part of this strategy, it is also important to have flexibility in licensing requirements so that, even if a foster family is only licensed for 2 or 3 children, the requirement can be waived when a group of siblings enter foster care. Of course, additional resources must also accompany this flexibility. A policy must be established to develop other supports that will promote maintaining the sibling ties if children are separated. This can include face-to-face visits, letters and phone contacts. As part of this plan, siblings can be seen jointly in therapy sessions (Hegar, 1988). Even if placed in separate adoptive homes, barring geographical difficulties, there is nothing to preclude siblings from attending therapy together.

## **Decision-Making on Keeping Siblings Together or Splitting Them Up**

Assessment of sibling relations must be multidimensional. It must be built on the premise that siblings should be placed together. The purpose of an assessment is to determine whether there is compelling evidence to separate them. A tool such as the Sibling Decision Making Matrix (see **Appendix B**) is helpful in assessing the sibling relationship and making placement recommendations.

The first item to assess is the sibling relationship. Describing the relationship fully and accurately, in terms that are concrete, observable and measurable, are the hallmarks of good practice. The degree/type, duration, quality and intensity are all important factors to consider in the assessment. Regarding degree/type, siblings can be characterized as full siblings (same biological parents), half siblings (share only one biological parent), or assumed siblings (share no common biology but have been raised together and they assume that they are siblings).

Duration includes the length of time the siblings have known each other, their developmental stage and significant circumstances. The length of time is straightforward (chronologically measured). However, the developmental stage of the child is important to consider. For very young children, a few hours are long enough to make a significant connection while it may take longer for an older child. So, a few days to a one-year-old may be the equivalent of a month to a 2-year-old—time is variable in children’s minds as a result of developmental age. This caveat is critical for making an accurate assessment of duration in sibling relations.

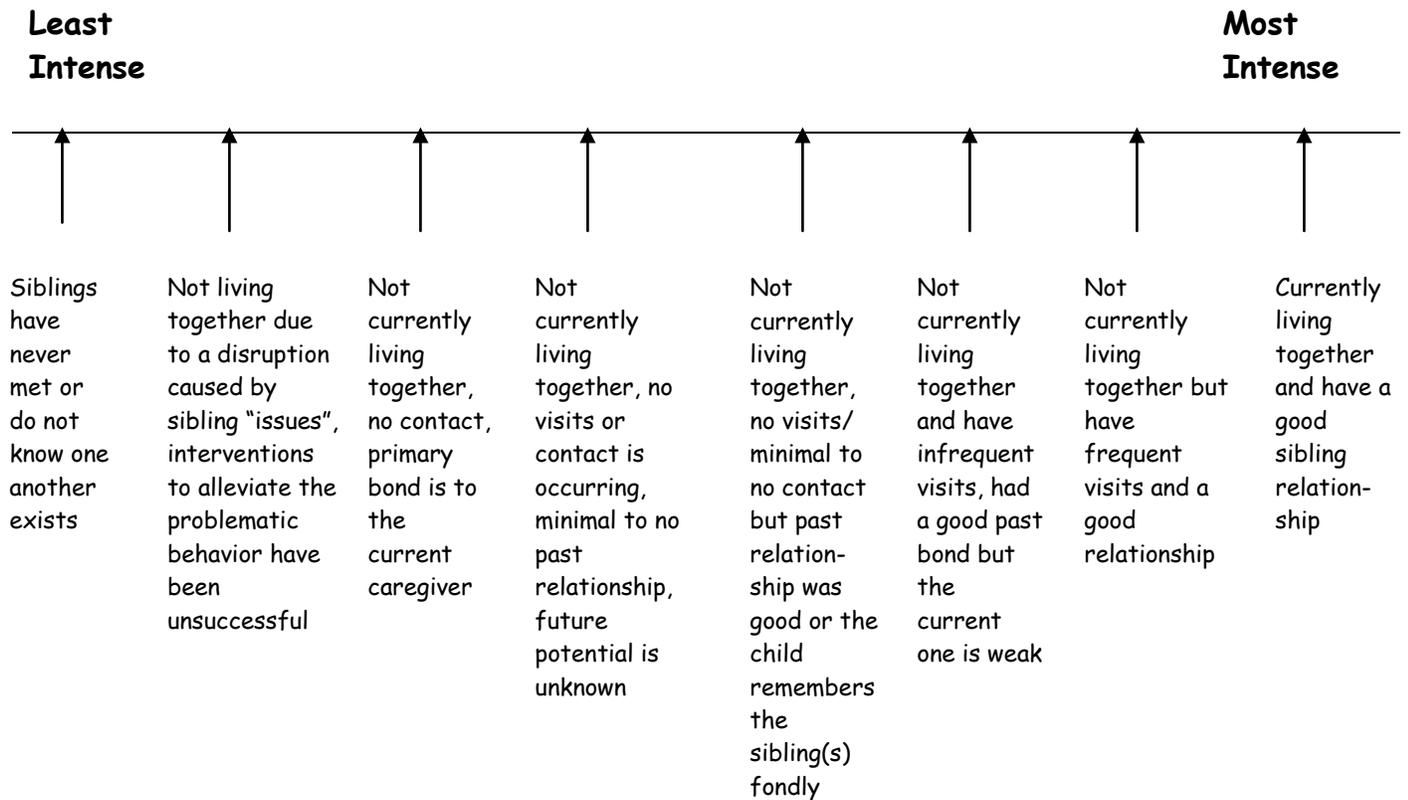
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<sup>2</sup> The authors are indebted to Kay Donley Ziegler who provided some of the background materials for the implications section.

The final part of duration is to look at significant circumstances in the lives of the siblings. According to Terr (1990), traumatized children often experience time distortions and distortions of sequence of events. Practitioners should not confuse children’s sense of time or discount a child’s inability to remember events, sequences, or sibling relations as an indication that the relationship with the sibling was of insufficient duration to be meaningful. This inability may be developmental or may be the result of trauma that has yet to be resolved.

The third area to assess is the quality of sibling relations. Assessing the quality of the sibling relation can be quite subjective. It is helpful to view quality as a continuum from a strong/ positive relationship to a non-existent/ negative relationship. The quality of the relationship changes over time and depends upon the family and social context. Quality cannot be assessed at one given point in time, or without considering the impact of family, school, neighborhood, church/synagogue, and peers.

The last area to assess is the intensity of sibling relations, which should also be viewed as a continuum from least to most intense.



The above graph demonstrates that intensity is greatest for siblings who have a current relationship and lowest in cases where sibling relations are denied, disrupted, questioned, or in those cases where a sibling connection or relationship has not yet developed (prospective). This guideline, along with the other components of the assessment, can provide a comprehensive view of sibling

relations. Once there is comprehensive information using the premise that siblings stay together unless there are compelling reasons to separate them, all efforts should be made to place siblings together.

### **Strategies for Separated Siblings**

Often, separation of siblings occurs when there is an emergency placement. When children have to be separated on an emergency basis, practice should focus on making the best plan possible for the children, not the best plan for the adults or “the system”. This may mean that a younger child is placed with an older child and the middle children are placed together, or the boys are placed together and the girls are placed elsewhere. It is important to make sure the children know where each of their brothers and sisters is going and when they will see each other again. The information should be written for each child because in the trauma of placement most children will not remember what has been told to them, or will forget important details. Before the children are separated, create the visitation plan so both of the caregiving families and the siblings know when and where they will see each other again. Make a personal and professional commitment to reuniting the siblings as soon as possible. Pursue relative and extended kin placement options. Staff the case within three to five working days to assess the placement options, looking for opportunities to reunite the siblings.

Siblings who remain separated, for an extended period of time or permanently, should be flagged by the agency for staffing because it is an exemption to policy. The staffing and decision-making about the case must be a team decision. The team should include the birth parents, foster parents, child welfare caseworker, supervisor, Guardian Ad Litem and, when appropriate, the children. Families caring for separated siblings must be willing to ensure sibling visitation. Develop a detailed contract with the families that specifies the maximum time between visits, frequency of phone contact between siblings, and plans for keeping current the addresses and phone numbers of all the siblings. A copy of the contract should be given to the children. The child welfare worker in these cases must assist with early visitations and monitor visitation plan compliance.

### **Preparation of Siblings for Family Placement Together**

The histories of their lives in “the system” is complex and causes confusion for children. In addition, the multiple traumas that children suffer result in time distortions (Terr, 1990). Lifebooks (Aust, 1981; Wheeler, 1978), timelines and placement trails (Pinderhuges & Rosenberg, 1990; Allen, 1990; Young, Corcran-Rumppe, & Groze, 1992; McMillen & Groze, 1994) assist children and families in clarifying this confusion. These tools can be used to help siblings understand each other's perceptions and experiences about their history, including their history with the birth family. Many siblings also need information about and opportunities to practice “normal” sibling interactions. Providing structure to visits with the help of a trained therapeutic recreation specialist can be very beneficial. Sibling issues should be addressed in both individual and sibling therapy sessions. Siblings and prospective families should be aware that individual, sibling or family therapy might be helpful periodically throughout the children's development.

### **Preparation of Families for Sibling Placement**

Children in the child welfare system bring with them complex histories. Using a placement trail/ prediction path that documents significant facts such as number of placements, types of placements, whether siblings were together or apart in various placements provides a visual picture of the child and their history to the adoptive parents. Knowing this history can be helpful to families.

Siblings are likely to recreate similar family patterns in their foster or adoptive homes that replicate their experiences in the birth family. Prospective families need to be educated about these dynamics and family therapy should be included in pre and post-placement services. Family therapy can assist families in recognizing problematic interactions and behavior patterns and empowering them to intervene more quickly and effectively to interrupt the cycle.

From family system perspective, the sibling group as a subsystem is a significant component of family functioning (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Hegar, 1988). Working with the children as a subsystem can help them as they explore their relationship to each other as well as their relationship in the context of the family system in which they were adopted (Hegar, 1988; Ranieri & Pratt, 1978). Intervention for children must include assisting the child in finding new roles in the adoptive family system in which he/she can gain family recognition, a new identity, and self-esteem (see also Pfouts, 1976).

Finally, an array of easily accessible and affordable formal and informal services is necessary to strengthen and preserve the family that adopts sibling groups. Failure to provide services and case management to assist families with their service needs increases the stress on the developing family system, placing them at great risk for negative adoption outcomes (see Groze, 1996).

## **II. Project Description**

With the belief that siblings have a right and a need to be placed together in the child welfare system, Northeast Ohio Adoption Services (NOAS) requested and received funding for the Sisters and Brothers Together Project. The Sisters and Brothers Together Project (hereafter referred to as the Project) was a three-year federal demonstration grant. NOAS, in collaboration with the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS), worked to increase the number of siblings placed together in permanent homes and to improve the quality of sibling bonds for children in the child welfare system. In the process barriers, which impede this practice, were identified. The four specific project objectives were as follows:

- 1) Timely response to sibling groups at the point of initial placement.
- 2) Increase the number of placements of sibling groups as a group in foster care and adoption.
- 3) Development of innovative practices to promote preservation of sibling bonds and reunification of sibling groups.
- 4) Institutionalization of improved policy, practice and beliefs with regard to sibling placement.

NOAS is a private, not-for-profit, non-custodial adoption agency with offices in Warren and Cleveland, Ohio. The mission of the agency is to find homes for children with “special needs”. Since 1978 NOAS has placed over 900 children into adoptive homes. No fees are charged to adoptive families. NOAS provides pre-adoption training, family and child assessments, and pre and post adoption services. With a staff of approximately 30, NOAS contracts with counties throughout northeast Ohio to find adoptive families for children in the permanent custody of county children service agencies. NOAS is a member of AdoptOhio, a statewide initiative designed to increase the adoption of Ohio’s waiting children.

CCDCFS is a very large urban public child welfare agency. The adoption department includes nearly 100 workers who are attempting to find permanent homes for the 444 children waiting in the Permanent Custody of the CCDCFS (according to January 31, 2001 figures). This number is deceiving because it does not include all of the children who are in foster to adopt homes, kinship homes, and those receiving independent living services. There are actually about 1,500 children in the permanent custody of CCDCFS.

NOAS was the lead agency, responsible for managing and carrying out the Project. CCDCFS was the public partner who held custody of the children referred to the Project and who had a desire to identify and institute practices that would increase the number of siblings being placed together. Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau (BJCB) provided guidance on how to navigate the Cuyahoga County child welfare system during the start-up phase of the Project. We also utilized BJCB's camping facility and contracted with their therapeutic recreation specialist.

In order to achieve the primary objectives of the Project NOAS retained two full-time social workers. They completed family and child assessments, provided pre and post adoption services, and coordinated sibling visits. A part-time recruiter, part-time secretary and a full-time project director completed the Project staff. Several other NOAS staff members lent their services to the Project as needed. For example, our executive and associate directors provided administrative oversight as necessary, our clinical supervisor supervised the clinical case loads of the two full-time social workers, the director of training and development supervised the part-time recruiter, and the support staff helped as necessary.

An evaluation plan was developed by Dr. Victor Groza, of the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, to assess how effectively we achieved our objectives. The remainder of this report summarizes the Project's achievement of goals and objectives by reporting tasks as described in the evaluation plan.

### **III. Sibling Groups**

#### **A. Referred Sibling Groups**

The Project worked directly with sibling groups in need of adoptive families. The original grant proposal stated that we would provide direct services to 45 sibling groups. We actually provided comprehensive direct services to 11 sibling groups. The size of the sibling groups ranged from two to six children per group resulting in the Project providing 39 children with a full array of direct adoption services.

The 11 sibling groups that were formally referred to the Project were assigned as a sibling group (not as individuals) to a NOAS social worker. It is not uncommon at CCDCFS for members of the same sibling group to be assigned to different workers when they enter care sequentially. The NOAS social worker completed a child assessment on each child within the sibling group. The child assessment identified the child's strengths and needs by exploring all aspects of the child's life. Developing a relationship with the child and identifying their strengths and needs enabled the social

worker to better identify the qualities in a family that would best match the child and the sibling group as a whole. A child specific recruitment plan was developed for each sibling group.

The children who were referred to the Project were demographically similar to the children in the permanent custody of CCDCFS. The ages of the children ranged from five to thirteen years old (reflective of their ages at the time they were initially referred to the Project). 82% of the sibling groups were African American; approximately 86% of the waiting children in Cuyahoga County are African American (from 1/01 adoption department statistics). Only two of the 11 groups were living together at the time they were referred to the Project and most had additional siblings who were not referred to the Project (usually because they were already adopted or had “aged out” of the system.) Almost all of the sibling groups referred to the Project had experienced multiple moves and separations from one another. In 1999 49% of the children in the permanent custody of CCDCFS had waited 24 or more months for a permanent family (January 2000 AdoptOhio Performance Report). Similarly, the majority of the siblings referred to the Project had been in permanent custody for more than 24 months. A significant proportion of the children referred to the Project had been diagnosed with a mental health diagnosis and many had been prescribed psychiatric medication at some point in their lives. Please refer to **Appendix A** for a table listing and brief description of all of the sibling groups referred to the Project, as well as bar graphs depicting demographic information.

At the same time Project staff were working with siblings referred from CCDCFS, NOAS realized an increase in the number of siblings referred to the “non Project” adoption program. As the awareness of sibling related issues increased so too did the number of siblings who achieved permanence together. In addition to those children officially referred to the Project, NOAS also placed 15 additional sibling groups consisting of 37 children and 28 children were placed individually into permanent families. All of the children were in the permanent custody of CCDCFS. The 15 sibling groups included nine pairs of siblings, five groups of three siblings, and one group of four. If a family did not match the needs of one of the referred sibling groups we assessed if they matched any other sibling groups or individual children in the custody of CCDCFS.

By combining the 11 sibling groups referred to the Project, the 15 others groups placed into permanent families, and the 28 children NOAS placed individually, 99 children in the permanent custody of CCDCFS were placed into permanent families during the life of the Project. NOAS is proud to have assisted those children in finding permanence with loving families!

## **B. Sibling Consultations**

In addition to providing full adoption services to sibling groups, we also provided sibling consultation services. This process involved reviewing the case record and meeting with the siblings, caregivers, and professionals involved in the case. Although we strongly believe that siblings belong together, each case was evaluated independently by assessing several factors. In **Appendix B** you will find the Sibling Decision Making Matrix that was developed by the Sisters and Brothers Together Project to help social workers comprehensively assess placement decisions involving siblings in a multi-dimensional way. The matrix focuses on safety factors, attachment issues, the family’s ability and willingness to parent the sibling group, and the children’s wishes. We disseminated the Sibling Decision Making Matrix to the 88 public child welfare agencies in Ohio, all of the State Departments of Child Welfare, several private foster care and adoption agencies, several residential treatment facilities, and several child advocacy groups such as North American Council on

Adoptable Children, Child Welfare League of America, Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies, Ohio Foster Care Association, etc.

Utilizing the Matrix does not completely eliminate social workers making decisions based on their own life experiences and values, but it does encourage a more objective and thorough assessment regarding how siblings should be placed. Feedback from professionals who have utilized the Matrix has been overwhelmingly positive.

In addition to formal consultations, we were called informally or stopped in the hall while at CCDCFS numerous times for suggestions and referral resources. The willingness of some of the workers to utilize “sibling consultants” suggests that this needs to be a permanent service available to CCDCFS workers. Although the intrinsic value of the sibling relationship is a value we would like to see institutionalized at CCDCFS, consultants are valuable as well. The benefits of utilizing sibling consultants include ensuring that the assessment of siblings is objective, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive. Sibling consultants serve as advocates for siblings in the child welfare system.

## IV. Project Evaluation

In order to assess the success of the Sisters and Brothers Together Project we tracked several activities completed during the Project. In the first year of the Project, Victor Groza developed the evaluation plan which dictated our data collection efforts. The following is a summary of our activities and outcomes for the time period spanning from October 1, 1997 to April 30, 2001 (please note that the Project was not fully staffed until January of 1998).

### A. Collaboration/ Relationship Building

#### 1. Formal Meetings Held with CCDCFS Administration

The Project Director was involved in 37 meetings with CCDCFS administrators totaling 49.5 hours. Please refer to **Appendix C** for a complete list of meetings attended and individuals present. Initially the meetings primarily focused on relationship building. Once working relationships were developed, the meetings focused on identifying needed changes in the system to ensure that more siblings are placed together and how to implement the needed changes.

#### 2. Challenges of Collaborating with CCDCFS

The process of having meetings and forming relationships with key people at CCDCFS was challenging at times. Typical of large metropolitan child welfare agencies, at all levels of employment, the staff is overwhelmed with the amount of work they must take on. Although many people have strong feelings about the need to keep siblings together, most did not have extra time and energy to devote to the Project as one of their daily responsibilities. We were lucky in the sense that most of the individuals we worked with remained employed at CCDCFS. Also typical of large metropolitan child welfare agencies, CCDCFS struggles with a high rate of worker turnover. We had particular difficulty identifying a chief/ administrator that was an appropriate liaison for the Project from the ongoing department. The ongoing department is primarily responsible for either reunifying the child with the birth family or obtaining permanent custody of children. We overcame this barrier by working directly with each supervisor in the ongoing department rather than attempting to engage

a chief. The amount of time invested in developing relationships during the first year of the Project was very worthwhile and beneficial throughout the life of the Project and will last beyond its closure.

### 3. Benefits of Relationship Building/ Mutual Respect

As the Project Director interacted with CCDCFS employees at several hierarchical levels, a great respect for them as individuals and the system as a whole developed. As is typical of any developing partnership there were stresses and predictable stages of development (forming, norming, storming, and performing). CCDCFS is a very large system that attempts to provide above average services to children and families. The commitment on the part of the workers towards the children and families surpasses that of many other social work professionals. As a result of the respect that was developed, the Project Director found herself defending the workers and sometimes the “system” when others would make derogatory comments. CCDCFS and its employees are often erroneously depicted negatively in the local media and it is not uncommon to hear workers from private agencies sharing their negative opinions about CCDCFS workers and practices. Defending and advocating for the County employees resulted in two unintended outcomes:

- 2) When County employees learned of the positive feelings about their performance and integrity (either by being directly complimented or by “word of mouth”) they were more willing to collaborate on cases, listen and participate in trainings, and to go above and beyond to meet the requests made of them.
- 3) By not allowing employees of private agencies to place all of the blame and responsibility on County employees they were encouraged to take a more active role in meeting the needs of the children.

As project staff developed an appreciation of the amount and complexity of the work County employees were expected to do, they were able to be more effective advocates for siblings. Project staff learned that building collegial relationships results in better services for children.

## **B. Training Received by Sibling Project Staff:**

We tracked the workshops and conferences attended by the Project staff. By tracking this information we ensured that staff were continuing to expand their knowledge base and professional development but we were also interested in identifying if any of the workshops were particularly valuable for professionals working with sibling groups.

All of the social workers working with the Project completed State mandated “Tier I: Assessor’s Training”, qualifying them as Certified Adoption Assessors, and two staff members completed “Tier II Assessor Training” which is currently the highest level of training available in Ohio. This provided the foundation for ethical and competent adoption practice. Workers also participated in computer training, training specific to sibling issues, and training on miscellaneous other topics resulting in 642 accumulative training hours. Please refer to **Appendix D** for a complete table of trainings attended by Project staff.

Staff identified that one of the most beneficial trainings was related to creating therapeutic lifebooks and timelines for children. For children in care, and especially for children separated from their siblings, lifebooks are often the safest and most effective way to help them feel connected to their past and help them to integrate their past experiences into their entire life. It is through

lifebooks that separated siblings can look at pictures of their brothers and sisters and discuss their thoughts and feelings about being separated. It is imperative that workers be competent at completing lifebooks with children. A “prediction path” is another valuable tool to help identify patterns in sibling behaviors and relationships. If regular visits are not feasible due to distance or safety, siblings can keep abreast of their sibling’s development through pictures.

## **C. Services Provided to Sibling Groups**

### 1. Case Management Hours

The goal was to provide 400 hours (in three years) of case management to assist families in accessing supportive services i.e. wrap around, flexible funding, buddy families, and case consultation. This goal was exceeded by over 100%. The sibling groups who were placed needed varying amounts of services after being placed into adoptive homes; however, almost all needed intensive services prior to placement. By referring to **Appendix E** you can see that, paperwork (22.3%) consumed the largest proportion of a social workers time followed by meetings (22.2%) and travel (14.7%). All three of these responsibilities take away from the face-to-face time social workers have with their clients. This could be cut in half if siblings were placed together; there would only be one home to visit, one set of paperwork to complete, and a reduced number of meetings to attend. Later in this report we will identify the services that families reported needing.

### 2. Therapeutic Interventions Provided

As part of the services offered by the Project, innovative therapeutic interventions, including art and recreational therapies, were available. There were three very successful camping experiences for our sibling groups. The children found the camps very enjoyable and they appreciated the opportunity to spend time together. Therapeutic camp experiences were provided in collaboration with Bellefaire JCB. The camp director, experienced in therapeutic recreation, utilized initiatives, debriefing, and “challenge by choice” modalities with the children.

Initiatives refer to tasks that propose a problem to an individual or a group and the solution is always a physical process combined with emotional risk. The basic goals of an initiative are:

1. To increase the participants sense of personal confidence and self-esteem.
2. To increase mutual support and cooperation within the group (especially helpful with separated siblings).
3. To provide a forum that emphasizes communication as a vehicle for problem solving (especially helpful with separated siblings).
4. To give and explore the perceptions, attitudes and feelings of success or lack of success.

After the completion of an initiative the group processed the event. Processing can also be referred to as debriefing, the process of tying in and connecting the whole of the adventure experience. In addition to the initiatives that are designed to be inclusive of all group members the recreation therapist also utilized “Challenge By Choice.” Challenge by Choice encourages individuals to go beyond their old way of thinking or behaving by pushing them into new territory, new ways of thinking, dealing with their fears, and accepting support. A ropes course was one of the modalities utilized in the Challenge By Choice program. The process of utilizing initiatives, debriefing, and Challenge by Choice was well received by the children and families that participated in the camp experiences.

The first camp was held June 12, 13, and 14, 1998. Three sibling groups attended the camp, one group of six, and two groups of three. All of the children were excited to spend the weekend together with their siblings because they were not residing as a sibling group in their foster homes. It was very gratifying to see the siblings spending time together. One sibling group of three was particularly touching to watch as the protective big brother helped his little sister ride a bike over the weekend, and taught her how to fish.

The second camping weekend was held September 25, 26, 27, 1998. During this camp we invited families who had adopted sibling groups. Both the parent(s) and the children attended. This was also a very enjoyable weekend. Three families attended. They participated in several attachment-enhancing exercises and simply had fun together.

Our final camp experience was held June 25, 26, 27, 1999. Four sibling groups attended. Three of the four groups had participated in the June 1998 camp experience and requested to come back. During this second weekend the children not only took advantage of being together with their siblings but also used their peers as an informal support system. They were very happy to reconnect with one another although they had not seen the other sibling groups for one whole year. This speaks to the power of support groups for people of all ages experiencing similar situations. They were able to process what it feels like to be separated from siblings and other related issues without much prompting from adult facilitators.

After witnessing the therapeutic value experienced by the siblings during the camp we attempted to develop a similar experience on a monthly basis for siblings. On March 25, 2000 we launched "Saturday Smiles." Saturday Smiles was a day of recreation, art therapy, and music therapy for siblings offered once a month. We offered Saturday Smiles on May 20, 2000 and July 29, 2000. We were disappointed by the turnout; we did not have more than three sibling groups attend any of the sessions. Some of the fixable barriers that we were able to identify included not providing transportation for the children and not opening the day up to all of the children living in the home where the sibling was residing. There were also some unavoidable barriers including the large age span of the siblings, which made it difficult to plan activities. Also, the varying degrees of commitment from families to maintain a relationship between siblings in their care proved to be a barrier to service delivery.

We did find that the children who attended asked to come back and they enjoyed the non-traditional modalities of art and music therapy. The recreation therapy was also beneficial for the children in many ways including teaching the siblings how to have positive fun together, support one another, communicate, and share. In addition to camping weekends and Saturday Smiles we had a picnic for all NOAS families who had adopted siblings. On July 11, 1998 The Sisters and Brothers Together Project hosted the Sisters and Brothers Together Picnic. The event was held on a beautiful Saturday afternoon on the campus of Bellefaire JCB. NOAS retained the services of Bellefaire's therapeutic recreation director to lead the games and group activities. Everyone participated in the fun! The day began with the parents receiving training on how to help their children cope if they have been separated from their sibling(s). The trainer for the workshop was Regina Kupecky. The children played games during this time. Following the training the adults and the children participated in two separate focus groups. Both groups were articulate (outcomes from the focus

groups are detailed later in this report). They poignantly described how siblings being separated affected them. Following lunch it was an afternoon of fun! Many nearby merchants donated prizes, as did some of our families; no one went home empty handed!

### 3. Sibling Visits

It was extremely difficult to provide sibling visits twice a month. According to CCDCFS policy, the public agency foster parents are not required to coordinate and provide transportation for sibling visits. Transportation is available through CCDCFS but the County social worker is responsible for coordinating it and the visits must be included in the case plan to allow access to the transportation service. Unfortunately social workers sometimes forget to include sibling visitation in the case plan. The private foster care networks are expected to coordinate and provide transportation for sibling visits. This has not traditionally been monitored and enforced but we are beginning to see improvements. Despite diligent efforts, there are many reasons visits do not occur. They include:

- Distance between foster homes. Although CCDCFS tries to place siblings in close proximity to one another, if they have to be placed separately, this does not always happen. One of our sibling groups of four lived in three separate homes all of which were a minimum of one hour away from our office in different directions. One two-hour sibling visit required 16 staff hours (this group required two people for supervision). When weather was questionable, visits were sometimes cancelled due to the long traveling distances.
- Residential treatment centers sometimes use sibling visits as a reward and discontinue them as a punishment. Sibling visits are often not viewed as therapeutic and as a child's right. They become part of the behavior modification plan and sibling bonds get damaged in the process.
- Occasionally foster parents do not cooperate but, more commonly, they are not aware of the significance of the sibling relationship (lack of training) and they are not expected to coordinate the visits.
- Simple things like vacations (both on the part of the workers and the foster families) can interfere with sibling visits, especially in the summer months.
- There are also system barriers interfere in sibling visits, they are identified in the summary of the focus groups included in this report.

Workers reported feeling frustrated during sibling visits because of the chaotic nature of the visits. Sometimes workers had a difficult time finding activities that encouraged siblings to interact with one another. We again found the services of a trained recreational therapist to be invaluable. We utilized a skilled recreation therapist to help with one sibling group that was particularly troubled. Sibling visits were very difficult to manage for this group of four. The recreation therapist planned therapeutic activities and provided more structure to the visits.

## **D. Family Recruitment/ Community Awareness**

This section summarizes the recruitment events that NOAS participated in, it compares the referral sources identified by families who only called the agency for information and those who followed through with accepting an adoptive placement, results from a follow-up study related to intake calls, and marketing theories utilized by the Project. It was impossible to separate the Project recruitment efforts from those of the entire agency (NOAS). Agency wide statistics are being cited in this section. Parents who adopted sibling groups referred to the Project are included in these

numbers. During the life of the Project NOAS received 1,636 calls from prospective adoptive parents inquiring about our services.

### 1. Community Outreach/ Family Recruitment Efforts

In an effort to raise awareness about the children waiting for adoptive families, NOAS hosted/ participated in numerous events in the communities that surround the Warren and Cleveland offices. Please refer to **Appendix F** for a complete table of recruitment/ community outreach efforts NOAS participated in.

In addition to the events NOAS participated in independently, the agency was also represented at numerous collaborative recruitment events as a member of the Adoption Awareness Coalition. The Adoption Awareness Coalition is an alliance of agencies and organizations that come together to promote the stability of children and families, raise public awareness about adoption and children waiting for adoption, and provide educational programs for adoptive families and professionals in Northeast Ohio.

### 2. Referral Sources of Intake Calls:

An analysis of recruitment efforts implemented by NOAS was completed in order to assess their effectiveness. When families contacted NOAS they were asked how they were made aware of our agency, how were they referred? Based on referral information from all 1636 intake calls it appears that the most effective referral source was special events which accounted for 18% of the calls; 15% cited the newspaper, 15% were referred by another agency, 12% by Ohio Families For Kids, and 7% became aware of NOAS due to the phone book. Please refer to **Appendix F** for a complete table of intake call referral sources and a bar graph.

Our initial goal was to recruit 50 foster/ adoptive families. Obviously, we surpassed our goal based on the 1636 intake calls received. However, the truly significant statistic is the number of families who followed through with pre-service (pre-adoption education) classes, family assessments, placements, and finalizations. Our records indicate that 152 individuals completed the entire pre-service training series during the life of the Project, 172 families submitted an application to begin the adoption process, 147 children were placed, and 149 adoptions were finalized.

### 3. Referral Sources for Families that Accepted Placements

Obviously, how we recruit families that ultimately follow through with the adoption process is more important than how we recruit the families who do not. **Appendix F** identifies the referral sources for the 147 families that accepted placements during the life of the Project. The referral source was indicated when they initially contacted the agency.

From this chart we can see that it is imperative that we maintain positive relationships with other adoption agencies (primarily public agencies), as they were our number one referral source. Staff members and previous adoptive/ foster families were also very successful at recruiting families. Based on the data that we collected we cannot speculate about the original motivating factor that caused families to contact the public agencies. It would be interesting to research what the original referral sources was for the families who initially contacted the public agencies to see if similar marketing techniques are effective for public and private agencies. NOAS' expertise in finding

families for children who are considered difficult to place leads other agencies to make referrals to NOAS.

#### 4. Follow-up Study on Families that Requested Information

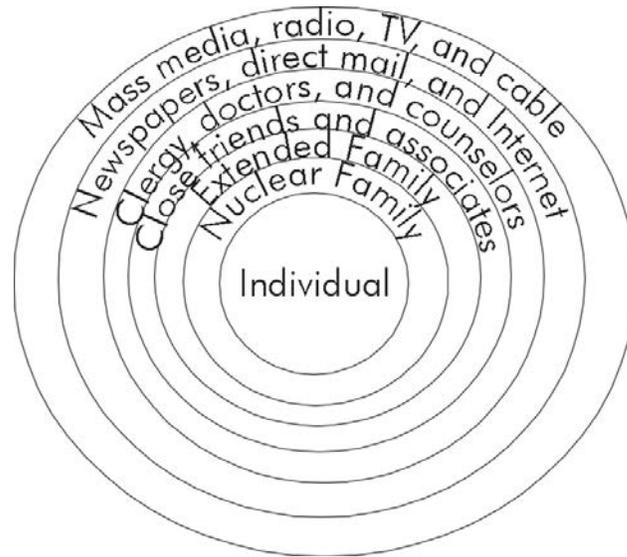
In an effort to identify barriers and learn how to retain more families during the adoption process, a volunteer called all of the families (N=99) who contacted NOAS (between 12/98 and 6/99) for adoption information and requested an information packet but did not follow through after initial contact with the agency. Please refer to **Appendix F** to review the questionnaire she utilized when speaking to families. She was unable to make contact with a significant portion of the families (32%). However, those that she did speak to identified several reasons for not following through (please refer to **Appendix F** for a complete listing). At call back, 55% (37 households) of the families that she spoke to requested additional information about adoption and NOAS – supporting the claim that it usually takes families two or more years to begin the adoption process from the time they initially consider it. In an effort to further assess our recruitment efforts we tracked if there was any movement towards adoption from the 37 people that requested additional information about six-months after they requested the information. Only 2 of the families (out of 37) who requested additional information about NOAS followed up with any action. Unfortunately to date, neither of those families has followed through with accepting a placement. We referred one family to another agency that was better suited to meet their needs and the other family withdrew themselves from the adoption process.

#### 5. Recruitment Insights

After examining the referral sources for all families who contacted NOAS and those that accepted a placement there are a couple of interesting trends that became evident. In both groups, other agencies were valuable sources of referrals. It is imperative that NOAS continue to collaborate and maintain positive relationships with both public and private child welfare agencies in Northeast Ohio. Aside from other agencies, the referral sources for those seeking general information and those who ultimately accept a placement differ greatly. It appears that the more general and less personal methods of communication i.e. newspapers and the phone book were effective in generating interest and those that accepted a placement tended to be linked to NOAS in a more personal way. Many of the families that accepted a placement either had contact with a staff member or a family who had previously adopted through NOAS. This disparity supports the Circles of Effectiveness model.

Vince Breglio, a leading Republican research analyst and public opinion expert, developed the Circle of Effectiveness model. The model shows how people are influenced to make decisions. Personal circles (nuclear and extended family, close friends) have the most influence and the broader mass media (TV and radio) have the least.

## Circles Of Effectiveness



This knowledge led us to develop the “Parent Recruiter Program”. The goal of the Parent Recruiter Program was to provide parents who had previously adopted through NOAS with the education and tools needed to independently recruit additional families. We developed and distributed recruitment tools to the families. One tool that was developed was a foldout business card that listed the steps necessary to become a foster or adoptive parent and detailed how to request additional information. The card also had space for the Parent Recruiter to provide their name and number if they choose to, making that personal connection that is so important. A similar business card tool has been effective in a neighboring public child welfare agency that operates a highly successful parent recruiter program.

To pilot the program we contacted several parents who had previously adopted through NOAS, explained to them the value of adoptive parents speaking to potential adoptive families, reminded them of the desperate need for more families, and educated them about marketing strategies. Four families initially agreed to meet on a Saturday to discuss our plan of action. Unfortunately, the Parent Recruiter Program did not develop as we had hoped. The program was difficult to maintain because of family commitments and the demanding nature of volunteer management. Due to the demands on staff time they were not able to devote the necessary time and energy needed to coordinate activities to nurture relationships with families, and to maintain their enthusiasm to help.

While supporting the Circles of Effectiveness model, we were also aware of marketing research that shows that people must receive a message at least three times before it is retained. Therefore, we believed the most effective communications/outreach plan was to use all levels of effectiveness, ensuring both personal and mass media messages were received. By selecting specific communities that had a higher proportion of residents likely to pursue adoption (based on research commissioned by Ohio Families for Kids – refer to **Appendix F** for additional information) we could focus our efforts and saturate the community with adoption information thereby increasing community awareness and interest about adoption.

In one of the communities targeted (Maple Heights) we developed strong relationships within the community with city officials and businesses that resulted in true partnerships with members of that community. We approached individuals and businesses by explaining how building a partnership with NOAS would be mutually beneficial. Children would benefit by having a larger pool of potential adoptive parents and their business would benefit by experiencing increased customer loyalty because their patrons would be supportive of the businesses efforts to help children. As a result of those relationships we were able to spread the message about the waiting children in need of permanent families.

One successful recruitment method that was implemented was inserting information into all of the city employee's paychecks (approximately 250 employees). As a result of the insert we had one family begin the adoption process with NOAS. Another example of success was the Wendy's "Adoption Corner". For the "Adoption Corner" we set up information regarding adoption in a local Wendy's restaurant and had a staff member present to answer any questions families had. Advertising was done in the local paper the week prior to the event. From one Wendy's "Adoption Corner" one family completed the education classes. Another example of Circles of Effectiveness is a story that appeared in the company newsletter at a manufacturing company about one of their employees who recently adopted (story found in **Appendix F**). This is a perfect example of the community educating others about adoption. Because we implemented the bulk of the marketing strategies within the last year, we speculate that we were unable to capture a significant portion of the outcome.

As a result of relationship building NOAS developed an ongoing partnership with several Wendy's franchises in Northeast Ohio. The franchises made an ongoing commitment to raise funds for NOAS earmarked for recruitment efforts. This money will allow several recruitment efforts previously funded by the Sisters and Brothers Together Project to continue. NOAS is committed to the proven recruitment methods developed and demonstrated by this Project and intends to continue them beyond the life of the Project.

## **E. Focus Groups**

We conducted seven focus groups, each one-hour in length, with one hundred and eleven people involved in the process. Please refer to **Appendix G** to review the questions asked during the focus groups and for a table that lists the focus groups that were conducted. We explored the reasons why siblings get separated, what families need in order to properly care for large sibling groups, the benefits of keeping siblings together (for the kids, families, and workers), and how to build connections between siblings that are or have been separated. Following are the results from the focus groups:

**Note:** While trainings were not formal focus groups, they were equally effective at gathering information, ideas, and opinions. Information gathered at trainings is summarized below along with that gathered from focus groups.

## Reasons Why Siblings Are Separated in Foster and Adoptive Homes

- **Ignorance regarding the importance of the sibling relationship**
  - ◆ Some people believe that the sibling relationship is less important if the siblings have never met one another.
  - ◆ Half-siblings, step-siblings, and foster siblings are seen as being “less siblings” than full siblings.
  - ◆ There is often a bias that the younger a child is the less significant the sibling relationship is.
  - ◆ The sibling relationship is only viewed in the “here and now” and not throughout the lifespan.
  - ◆ Some people believe large families are “unhealthy” i.e. children do not get enough individual attention.
  - ◆ Behavior during sibling visits is used as an indicator of the children’s ability to live together (children are often hyperactive during visits).
  - ◆ The children state that they don’t want to live together and this is used as the basis for separation.
  
- **Foster Parents**
  - ◆ There are not enough foster parents that want the children who are available (i.e. large sibling groups).
  - ◆ Many restrict the number, age, sex, and special needs they will accept which necessitates splitting sibling groups (licensing standards encourage/require this specificity).
  - ◆ Inadequate housing and/or lack of bedroom space.
  - ◆ Some foster parents sabotage placement opportunities that become available for the siblings to be placed together because they get attached to the child(ren) in their care and don’t want them to move.
  - ◆ Some foster parents disrupt one sibling and keep the other(s).
  - ◆ They may believe in the value of siblings but they feel powerless to make needed systemic changes (more “grass roots” efforts are needed).
  
- **Children’s Behaviors**
  - ◆ Fighting, sibling rivalry, sexual reactivity, parentified child, one is “bad”, one needs “individual attention” – these are all reasons cited for separation.
  
- **Birth Family**
  - ◆ Siblings may have different fathers and the father and his family are only willing to parent their biological kin.
  - ◆ Birth family rights – efforts towards reunification etc. may leave one or more children in the home while others are in protective custody.
  
- **Therapists**
  - ◆ Often they do not see all members of a sibling group yet they make recommendations about how they should be placed.
  - ◆ Many lack specific training on adoption/ sibling issues.

- **Residential Treatment Centers**
  - ◆ Often their focus is simply on behavior management.
  - ◆ Contact with siblings is used as reward/ punishment, not viewed as a right.
  - ◆ Individualistic approach, the child in treatment is the client with little regard for family connections.
  
- **Management Information Systems (MIS)**
  - ◆ Often siblings are not linked in the MIS resulting in separate placements.
  - ◆ CCDCFS is not linked online with all of the private foster care networks, which results in inefficient searches for available foster homes and limited access to some foster care networks resources after normal business hours.
  - ◆ Due to the inadequacies in the MIS, valuable statistics about the prevalence of sibling separation cannot be gathered.
  
- **Social Workers**
  - ◆ Very overworked, carrying unrealistic caseloads.
  - ◆ Staff turnover is problematic.
  - ◆ For some the sibling relationship is just not a priority.
  - ◆ Social workers believe that there is a higher likelihood of finding permanence for the children separately and that their need for permanency outweighs their need for one another.
  - ◆ Some may overlook perfectly good parents who may be willing to adopt large sibling groups i.e. single parents, large families, gay individuals and couples, etc. due to their own personal values/biases.
  - ◆ Focus on the weaknesses of the children and families rather than their strengths.
  - ◆ Workers are unaware of how to access waivers to place siblings in a home that will be exceeding licensing capacity in order to keep siblings together.
  
- **Agency/ system shortcomings**
  - ◆ Lack of communication between departments, professionals, and agencies. (Siblings are often placed in several different foster care networks and seen by several different therapists resulting in the involvement of numerous professionals in each case).
  - ◆ The focus is different at intake than at the time of adoption. There is often a 2 year time lapse before adoption preparation occurs – it is not until this time that the realities of permanently separating siblings becomes a concern to some professionals.
  - ◆ There are inadequate services to support sibling placements (i.e. furniture, appliances, house keeping, respite, post adoption services, etc.).
  - ◆ Labeling of kids “unadoptable” when they reach a certain age or have certain “problems”.
  - ◆ Not recruiting for the children as a sibling group.

- ◆ Sibling relationships are simply not a priority. There is no written policy about sibling placements and no corrective action plan when separation is temporarily unavoidable.
- ◆ Need continuous training opportunities for staff regarding sibling issues (new worker orientation, ongoing staff training, etc.).
- ◆ Unspoken agency values and/or formal policies about what makes someone a suitable parent causes children to linger in the system.
- ◆ Ohio Adoption Photo Listing shortcomings (This has improved since the focus group took place, in the past kids who were listed were often unavailable. Sibling groups often were not pictured with their siblings, which continues to be problematic).
- ◆ Competition between public and private agencies i.e. ownership of families
- ◆ Don't have adequate resources to keep siblings together (not enough foster homes).
- ◆ Lack of incentive for foster parents to adopt siblings (loss of income, children no longer get a free college education once adopted).
- ◆ Need education for foster parents to become adoptive parents.
- ◆ Education about the importance of siblings should be provided to everyone who comes into contact with the children in the child welfare system (pre-service - potential families, social workers and supervisors at public and private agencies and within all departments, GAL's and other court representatives, ombudsperson, therapists, other professionals).
- ◆ More family preservation (including preserving sibling groups) needs to be available and utilized.
- ◆ There is limited accountability to ensure that sibling visits are occurring (networks should have to report frequency of sibling visits in their quarterly reports to the County).

➤ **Legal Issues**

- ◆ Magistrates/ Courts/ GAL's – are often not educated about the importance of siblings. It may be useful to have a legal advocate specifically for the rights of siblings.
- ◆ Families have cited lengthy legal processes as a barrier to permanency for children.
- ◆ Confusion regarding confidentiality laws. For example, if a sibling is in a finalized adoptive placement is the County allowed to contact that family to see if they are interested in adopting their child's siblings when they become available? Who has access to that closed adoption file?
- ◆ Adult siblings have no right to search for their siblings although neither individual requested a closed adoption.

## Services Needed by Families Who Foster or Adopt Large Sibling Groups

- **Housing needs/ transportation**
  - ◆ Offer a program that funds the building of additions to homes for 0% interest or fully/ partially subsidize the additions
  - ◆ Subsidize the cost of utilities
  - ◆ Provide additional or industrial size appliances (washer/dryer/dishwasher)
  - ◆ Provide a cleaning service or a “mother’s helper”
  - ◆ Provide low interest loans, or subsidize a van to transport large sibling groups
  
- **Immediate start up costs**
  - ◆ Clothes
  - ◆ Food
  - ◆ Furniture/ beds
  - ◆ School supplies
  - ◆ Other miscellaneous items
  
- Link them with a “**buddy family**” who is similar to theirs and has adopted a similar sibling group
  
- Provide extensive **post adoption services**
  - ◆ Psychiatric services
  - ◆ Medical/dental
  - ◆ In-home services (therapy)
  - ◆ Daycare
  - ◆ Crisis support
  - ◆ More early intervention services
  
- **Respite**
  - ◆ Should be easily available
  - ◆ Family vacations/ entertainment could be partially paid for under respite
  
- **College tuition** should be partially or fully funded even after an adoption is finalized (they do this in Florida)
  
- More **recognition/ acknowledgment** for the ultimate commitment and sacrifices these families make!

## Benefits of Keeping Siblings Together

### ➤ **Benefits for children**

- ◆ They don't have to experience another loss, may lessen trauma
- ◆ Since they don't have to worry and wonder where their siblings are and about their well being, children feel safer in a new home if they are with their siblings.
- ◆ Shared history is validated, older siblings may remember both the good and bad times in the birth home which can be shared with younger siblings to create a history/roots, and preserve some of their family culture
- ◆ They live with someone who looks similar to themselves, which may help with identity development.
- ◆ They can maintain their birth order, even if entering a home with other children.
- ◆ They can learn to work out their problems within the sibling unit which can then be applied to life in general.
- ◆ They don't have to ask themselves the painful question "Why are my siblings adopted and I'm not?"

### ➤ **Benefits for the agency/worker**

- ◆ Visit one home
  - Less travel time (do not have to coordinate sibling visits)
  - Less travel expenses
  - Saves paperwork time
  - If it's an adoptive placement only one family assessment needs to be done, only one set of finalization papers (depending upon the County/ State)
- ◆ Theoretically, if the children are less traumatized due to living with their siblings, they will need less therapy
  - Saves money
  - Saves transportation time
- ◆ Higher worker moral
  - Workers would be less overwhelmed, easier to manage caseloads
  - Workers feel good about what they are doing
  - Less staff burnout
  - Reduced staff turnover
- ◆ Fewer lawsuits (adults who were separated from the siblings when they were children in the public child welfare system are suing and winning lawsuits)
- ◆ Better public image for the agency, more community involvement
- ◆ Reduced time devoted to helping adult adoptees search for their siblings
- ◆ Fewer foster and adoptive parents would be needed

## Ways to Build/ Maintain Sibling Connections When Living Separately

- Arrange for the siblings to visit at least two times a month
- Have all the children see the same therapist on the same day, they can visit in the waiting room and the therapist can make better recommendations after having met all the children
- Have foster parents provide respite for the siblings of the children they foster
- Play games and utilize other techniques while on visits that encourage siblings to interact and get to know one another
- They should be placed in the same community, live in foster homes within walking distance, go to the same schools
- Every foster home should have pictures of the siblings not living there on the wall or in a prominent place. Don't act like they don't exist! Photos of birth parents in the foster home can also be therapeutic.
- Social workers and foster parents should facilitate the sharing of pictures, cards, letters, phone calls and gifts between the siblings (provide pre-addressed and stamped envelopes).
- The children can draw pictures for one another, write poems, etc.
- Work on life books - always include addresses, phone numbers, and pictures of each sibling.
- Gather the children for a family portrait.
- Solicit advice about the likes and dislikes of the younger siblings from the older siblings.
- Help children understand that their siblings have gotten older if an extended period of time has passed since their last contact.

### **F. Sibling Trainings Provided by NOAS staff:**

#### 1. Professionals/ Conferences

One of the primary goals/ objectives of the Project was to institute change within CCDCFS so that more sibling groups are placed together. Training CCDCFS and private adoption and foster care agency employees about the significance of the sibling relationship was one of the methods of instituting change. We trained over 1000 individuals in 32 different workshops about the importance of keeping siblings together. Please refer to **Appendix H** for a complete list of sibling trainings. Trainings ranged from 1.5 to 3.0 hours however, we were flexible depending on the needs of the group. We received supportive feedback from the workshop participants about the importance the topic. We even provided one workshop for Guardians Ad Litem in hopes of influencing the legal community.

We developed the "Siblings Are Forever" curriculum for child welfare professionals. It was most effective as a three-hour curriculum but could be modified to a 90-minute workshop if necessary. The same curriculum was also effective at conferences geared to foster and adoptive parents and it could also be offered to foster parents to meet their ongoing training requirements.

Because of staff turnover regular repetition of the workshop content needs to be scheduled. Arrangements have been made with the CCDCFS training department to offer the sibling workshop

at least quarterly but at times it will be offered monthly depending upon the demand within the agency. Please refer to **Appendix H** to view the “Siblings Are Forever Curriculum”. We submitted a copy of this curriculum to the Institute for Human Services (IHS) in an effort to disseminate it to other agencies. IHS is a private agency hired by Ohio and other states to develop child welfare curriculum.

## 2. Pre-Service Training

Pre-Service Training is the state mandated training that potential foster and adoptive parents must attend in order to have their family assessment (homestudy) process approved. Pre-service training is intended to prepare potential adoptive and foster parents for the realities of parenting a child that has been abused/neglected. IHS developed the curriculum for the training. In Ohio, the HIS curriculum is mandated. NOAS provides pre-service training to families at no cost.

Each series of training includes 36 hours and the following topics are covered:

- ◆ Team building
- ◆ Family systems and abuse and neglect
- ◆ Impact of abuse and neglect on child development
- ◆ Attachment/ separation and placement
- ◆ Love and logic (discipline)
- ◆ Cultural issues in placement
- ◆ Primary families
- ◆ Sexual abuse
- ◆ Effects of care giving on a family
- ◆ Permanency issues for children
- ◆ Permanency issues for families

NOAS provided 14 pre-service training series in the Cleveland location and 15 pre-service training series in the Warren location. 152 individuals completed pre-service training during the life of the Project. This includes families that attended training at either our Warren or Cleveland office or a combination of the two.

Throughout the 36 hours of pre-service training NOAS trainers make every effort to incorporate the significance of the sibling relationship. One of the most effective times to focus on sibling issues is during Session I after viewing the video “Diary of a Metis Child”. During the video a young man is reflecting on his childhood in foster care, loss of siblings, and his brother’s eventual suicide. Other natural areas to focus on sibling issues include: during the discussion on grief and loss and the training on primary families. We encourage trainers to utilize activities in the “Siblings Are Forever” curriculum when educating potential families.

IHS also develops and distributes post-adoption workshops. They indicated an interest in developing a post-adoption curriculum focused on sibling issues. We have forwarded our materials to them in hopes of collaborating on the post adoption curriculum.

## V. Findings

### A. Placement Department Pilot Project

In March and April of 2001 we launched a pilot project in the placement department at CCDCFS. We targeted three supervisors/ workers within the department. For five weeks they were to record data about all of the placements they were involved in that included siblings. They were to review 50% of the placements (every other one) within three working days to assess if another placement option had become available that would allow the siblings to be reunited. This was a small sample both in terms of the number of cases involved and the time frame in which it was conducted. A more comprehensive study is required to accurately assess the effectiveness of a three working day review.

Interestingly, none of the placements were altered at the three-day review point in a way that resulted in more siblings being placed together. The pilot project did confirm some of the already identified barriers to siblings being placed together. We monitored 56 sibling groups of which four could be placed together at the time of initial placement. The four groups that stayed together were groups of three children or less. The groups ranged in size from two children to seven with the average group size being 3.48 children (195 children/56 sibling groups.) Workers were asked to record how many placement resources they explored prior to making a decision. Their answers varied from 0 (meaning the child had to go to the juvenile detention facility) to 22 with the average being 6.38 placements explored (217 explored placements/ 34 valid cases.) The major barriers that were identified included:

- Relatives only being willing to take in children they were biologically related to resulting in the separation of half-siblings.
- Children in need of residential treatment are separated from their siblings not only in terms of not living together but also by long distances between their treatment facilities and foster homes, which prevents them from having visits with any regularity.
- It is not uncommon for one or more of the siblings to remain within the birth home while others are removed and placed into foster care or residential treatment, obviously causing them to be separated and adding immense strain on their relationship.
- If one or more siblings are in finalized adoptive placements it continues to be difficult to access their records to see if their parents would be interested in taking in another child.
- If the siblings are abusing one another and are not responding to therapy or other interventions then there is an obvious need for separation.
- Sometimes there are siblings who have emancipated from the child welfare system but they are not in a position to take in their siblings and they are therefore not able to live together.
- Sometimes the intensity of the children's special needs require more than one home, i.e. medically fragile twins, sexual perpetrator, developmental delays, chemical abuse/ dependency.
- In one situation the ongoing social worker made a placement decision without checking with the placement department and this resulted in the adoptive family of an older sibling being overlooked as a placement option.
- Finally, often times the foster home that has another sibling is full to capacity and cannot take in another child thus resulting in separation.

The outcomes of this pilot were different than we anticipated. A three-day review is being successfully implemented at another agency. Due to the brevity and small sample size the results of this pilot project are questionable.

## **B. Value Congruence Questionnaire**

The evaluation plan called for a yearly assessment of the CCDCFS adoption department's attitude and values regarding siblings. The questionnaires were completed in 1998 and 2000. Please refer to **Appendix I** to review the questionnaire and actual responses. The general consensus from both years indicated that the majority of supervisors and direct practice workers acknowledge having difficulty keeping siblings together. They tended to rate the problems as severe, very severe, and extremely severe as compared to no problem or not very severe. Four invalid responses resulted due to the questionnaire being confusing.

## **C. Sibling Practices at Other Public Agencies in Ohio**

In an effort to identify a public system we could model our efforts after, we conducted extensive interviews with individuals in supervisory positions at five public child welfare agencies in Ohio (Athens, Franklin, Lucas, Summit, and Trumbull Counties). The sizes of the agencies varied and all were smaller than CCDCFS. Only one of the agencies reported having a policy/ philosophical statement stating siblings should be placed together. Only one of the agencies had a protocol in place to review placements in which siblings were separated. Most of the agencies did not have an effective computerized tracking system for siblings. Two of the agencies reported having a system that could link siblings but they were unsure how to navigate the system themselves. The smaller agencies had the luxury of minimal staff turnover resulting in staff members remembering a lot of sibling information and making informal links from memory.

Based on this limited exploration of other public child welfare agencies in Ohio and published research it appears that keeping siblings together is a pervasive problem throughout the United States. The larger the agency, the more difficult tracking and linking siblings becomes. The problem is only exacerbated by high staff turnover rates.

## **D. Notable Sibling Programs in the United States**

### **1. Jane Adams Hull House Association Neighbor to Neighbor Program**

Located in Chicago, Illinois this is a successful foster care program specializing in keeping sibling groups together. They contract with public agencies to take only sibling groups of four or more. The state approves six children per home and will make exceptions for up to a maximum of eight children. Workers carry a caseload of two to four families, usually equaling 20-25 children. The foster parents are considered employees of the agency. They receive a \$16,000 salary, medical and dental insurance, and paid vacation.

More information about this program can be obtained by calling (773) 241-5100 or writing to: Hull House, 5234 South Blackstone, Chicago, IL 60615.

### **2. Jewish Child Care Association, Sibling Homes Foster Care Program**

Located in New York, New York this is another example of a successful foster care program specifically designed to keep siblings together. The agency owns a building that includes three

apartments occupied by foster parents who live there rent-free in exchange for fostering sibling groups. They are also paid a stipend; receive housekeeping services, childcare services, and intensive case management.

More information about this program can be obtained by calling David Goldstein at (212) 425-3333 or writing to: JCCA, 120 Wall Street, New York, N.Y. 10005.

### 3. Camp To Belong

Another respectable effort to honor the sibling relationship is Camp to Belong. Two sisters who were separated in the child welfare system founded the annual camp in Colorado. The sisters plan a weeklong camp experience for siblings currently separated in the child welfare system. The experience is very emotional for the children and the volunteers. The camp has received a lot of publicity recently. The founding sisters are expanding their vision to include advocating for siblings through the legislature in Colorado to keep the rights of siblings paramount.

More information can be obtained by contacting Eileen Forlenza, Executive Director at (303) 791-0915 or writing to: Camp To Belong, 10035 Keenan Street, Highland Ranch, CO 80126.

## **VI. Significant Challenges and Accomplishments**

### **A. Challenges**

#### 1. Personnel

As with most federal grants, we were not fully staffed for the first three months that the Project was funded. In January 1998, the Project Director and two full-time social workers started and began their training and orientation. The Project Director did not have prior experience in the field of adoption. Receiving proper training up front ensured that she was better prepared to identify weaknesses in the system and advocate for needed changes, but the training was time consuming. Progress on the Project was delayed at times due to staff turnover and maternity leave for two staff members.

The supervision design was flawed in that the Project Director supervised the two social workers on general grant related issues however; the clinical supervisor, located 50 miles away, provided clinical supervision on cases. This was problematic in two ways. First, the distance between the two offices was sometimes problematic. Secondly, it is difficult for workers to report to two supervisors. The decision was made to split the supervision because of the Project Director's lack of adoption related experience in the beginning of the Project however, in retrospect, she should have supervised all aspect of the grant after being properly trained to do so.

#### 2. System Challenges

The size of the CCDCFS system that we were trying to navigate was a challenge. With an agency of that size the normal operating principle is to respond to crisis. Although many people care about keeping siblings together, when a child's life is in danger the first priority is safety not sibling relationships. Due to inadequacies in the MIS we were unable to monitor if we achieved the objective to increase the number of placements of sibling groups as a group in foster care and

adoptive homes. The difficulty that we experienced in identifying a liaison in the ongoing department slowed our progress for a couple months. We were able to provide training to each of the supervisory units within the ongoing department by working directly with the supervisors. Having a liaison at the chief/ administrator level may have helped us to more effectively preserve the sibling relationship at the point of initial placement.

Working with departments other than the adoption department proved to be a challenge at times. As was already mentioned, the Project Director did not have experience with adoption prior to accepting the position however there was a tremendous amount of experience among other NOAS staff members and our Project evaluator. But, even the experienced adoption professionals had limited experience working within departments other than the adoption department at CCDCFS.

We were unsure how to navigate the intake and ongoing departments and did not have a strong relationship with anyone in either department. Without a key liaison it was difficult to accomplish our objective related to timely response to sibling groups at the point of initial placement. NOAS' foster care department is very small and could not accommodate additional foster children. Unfortunately we did not attempt to collaborate with Bellefaire's foster care to develop a specialized foster care program for sibling groups.

### 3. Time Constraints

Aside from personnel issues, the biggest challenge we faced was time. We needed an additional two to three years to truly institutionalize philosophical and policy changes at CCDCFS. With the first year being devoted to relationship building, the second on problem identification and solution development, and the third on implementation, we needed additional years for institutionalization.

Also, as a result of the federal government deciding to enforce the carryover rules in the middle of the Project without any warning, we lost access to approximately \$80,000. This money could have been put to good use as described below in the opportunities for the future section. All things considered we truly believe that the Project has made a long-term contribution in Cuyahoga County on behalf of the siblings waiting for permanent homes.

## **B. Successes**

Having just identified the challenges, let's celebrate the successes! In addition to placing 114 children into permanent adoptive homes we also began implementing system changes. The development of the Sibling Decision Making Matrix is an innovative practice tool designed to promote the preservation of sibling bonds and the reunification of sibling groups. As a result of the Matrix and doing consultations, it is now part of the culture at CCDCFS for workers and supervisors to ask if there is a "compelling reason" to separate the siblings and they generally understand that if there is not then the children should be placed together. Recognizing that sibling consultants are utilized when available is another accomplishment. Another wonderful contribution is the development of the "Siblings Are Forever" curriculum. Having trained over 1,000 people about the significance of the sibling relationship is respectable.

In 1998 the Project received the Triad Advocate of the Year award from the Adoption Network Cleveland. We were honored. Placing children into adoptive homes with their siblings and

maintaining contact between siblings who are placed together makes us all very proud. As a result of the Project NOAS' Board of Directors approved a sibling policy for the agency (found in **Appendix J**). NOAS, an agency that definitely believes siblings should be together whenever possible, did not have a formal sibling placement policy. Finally, a best practices article was submitted to a child welfare journal and is currently in the process of being revised for re-submission. We have certainly provided the groundwork for ongoing discussions about siblings.

## **VII. Recommendations**

We must continually strive to heighten the awareness of professionals and caregivers about the significance of the sibling relationship. In addition to heightening awareness, systems and services must be in place to support sibling placements.

### **Philosophy**

- The agency must practice on the premise that siblings should be placed together unless a compelling reason exists in the children's best interest to the contrary.
- The agency believes that children have a right to be in contact with their siblings. Withholding contact with a child's sibling is not an acceptable form of punishment.

### **Policy**

- Both the custodial agency and the network agencies must have formal written policies about keeping siblings together and maintaining connections.

### **Best Practices for Custodial Agency**

- It appears that the most successful way to keep siblings together when they enter care is to have a separate specialized foster care program designed specifically to accept large sibling groups. This seems to be the only model to keep siblings together while also meeting the needs of the foster family and retaining staff. A partnership should be developed between CCDCFS and an existing (or newly created) foster care agency to duplicate a program similar to the Hull House Neighbor to Neighbor foster care program or the Jewish Child Caring Association, Sibling Homes Foster Care Program.
- Contracts with private agencies need to include expectations regarding siblings.
- Relationships between public and private agencies should be developed and nurtured.
- Improve MIS (track/ link siblings), be linked online to all network agencies 24 hours a day.
- Hold foster homes open for large sibling groups (provide incentives).
- Utilize the sibling decision-making matrix (or a similar tool) when making sibling placement decisions.
- Through assessment by a social worker of each child and the sibling group as a whole to assess their relationship, strengths, and needs.
- If siblings must be separated place them all in the same network in as close geographic proximity as possible.

- Re-evaluate the three to five working day review and implement it if the practice is effective.
- Sibling specific questions should be included on all forms at CCDCFS (i.e. Semi Annual Reviews, intake, placement, disruption, ongoing, adoption, etc.).
- All siblings to be discussed at every SAR/ staffing.
- All members of a sibling group to be assigned to the same worker.
- Worker caseloads need to decrease to allow for adequate time to focus on sibling relationships.
- A competent social worker should thoroughly assess each child and the sibling group as a whole to assess their relationship, strength, and needs.
- Family preservation services should be utilized more frequently to preserve sibling placements (heighten workers awareness about their availability, increase availability).
- As already indicated, there is a need and a desire to have trained sibling consultants available to make objective placement recommendations. There are only a handful of individuals competently trained to do the consultations at this time. Sibling consultants need to be trained and a system has to be in place to make these individuals available to workers and supervisors wanting to utilize them.
- Sibling placement recommendations made by therapists who have only seen one child in therapy or have not made extensive efforts to consult with other therapists that siblings may be seeing will not be accepted.
- Clarity needs to be obtained about confidentiality related to siblings.
- Children should never be labeled “unadoptable.” Professionals should be searching for permanency and connections to siblings even when the child is referred for independent living services.

### **Best Practices for Private Agencies**

- Leadership needs to be offered to all of the private agencies about revising their policies to include specific statements about valuing the sibling relationship and keeping them together whenever possible.
- Quarterly reports from private agencies need to include information about sibling contact i.e. when visits occurred, who was present, observations, etc.

### **Training**

- All new public and private workers need to be trained about the importance of keeping siblings together.
- Ongoing sibling trainings need to be offered at least quarterly to public and private agency employees.
- Develop a high quality video that discusses the importance of the sibling relationship, ways to rebuild relationships between siblings who have been separated, how to parent large sibling groups, etc. We were approached numerous times by other professionals asking for such a resource and none exists to our knowledge.
- Train Guardians Ad Litem and other court representatives regarding sibling issues.
- We trained the therapists who worked at residential treatment facilities and those working for private foster care agencies but not those in private or group practices. Because many social workers hold the recommendations made by therapist in very high regard it would

be wise to offer them ongoing education about siblings and how to make sound placement recommendations.

- Workers need to be trained on how to access MIS information.
- Educate workers and foster parents about how to obtain a waiver to go over capacity for sibling groups.

### **Recruitment**

- All recruitment pictures of the children should be taken as a group if that is how they are to be placed.

### **Services to Families**

- Families should be trained in pre-service training about the significance of the sibling relationship throughout the lifespan.
- Families should have regular training opportunities to learn about different aspects of the sibling relationship.
- Their assigned social worker should help them to assess their ability and desire to parent a sibling group.
- Potential families should be linked to “buddy” families who are parenting a sibling group similar to what the potential family is hoping to adopt. The family has an opportunity to learn about the joys and challenges of parenting a sibling group and they have a mentor/ source of support once they get a placement.
- Families need access to fiscal support for immediate start up costs i.e. clothes, linens, beds, school supplies, and other miscellaneous items. Maybe they could be provided with a “welcome package” (with toys, linens, etc) for each child upon placement.
- Families need access to subsidized room additions (ranging from low interest loans to additions being partially paid for), subsidized vans, and subsidized industrial size appliances, subsidized utilities, subsidized daycare, access to affordable medical and dental services and early intervention services.
- Upon placement families should be provided with house cleaning services and have easy access to transportation services.
- Post adoption services such as respite, crisis intervention, psychiatric services, and in home therapy should be easily accessible.
- Access to additional college funds for adopted siblings similar to what they would have had access to if they remained in foster care.
- Regular recognition for their commitment to siblings.

## **VIII. Summary**

The sibling relationship is the longest lasting relationship that most of us will experience in our lifetime. For children involved in the child welfare system their siblings are often their only

sources of familiarity during a very traumatic time. Child welfare professionals and agencies must advocate for the preservation of sibling bonds.

With funding from the Federal Adoption Opportunities Program, the Sisters and Brothers Together Project heightened the awareness of professional about the importance of the sibling relationship. We developed a curriculum that will continue to teach others in the future. A decision making tool was also developed to assist professionals in making sibling placement decisions. Finally, we identified and tested recruitment techniques that are effective in recruiting potential adoptive families. NOAS is committed to the proven recruitment techniques and to advocating for siblings throughout the child welfare system.

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## Appendices

- A. Table of Referred Sibling Groups  
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# **Appendix A**

## Sibling Groups Referred for Adoptive Placement

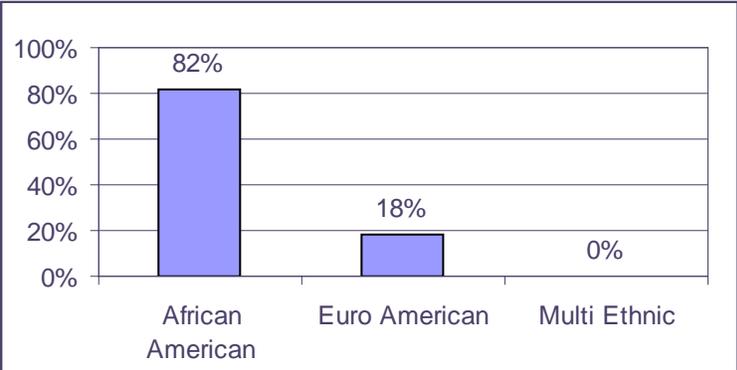
Date Referred	# of siblings referred and race	Ages (at time of referral) and sex	# of siblings who were not referred and race	Ages and sex (of non-referred siblings)	Brief placement history since children were referred to the Project
3-26-98	2  AA  (A sibs)	M- 6 ½ M- 5	2  AA	F- 4 F- 4	The female siblings were already in a foster to adopt placement when the boys were referred to NOAS. The male siblings were placed in a foster to adopt home in June of 1998 with a single female who had already adopted several special needs children. Unfortunately this placement disrupted in April of 2000. Following the disruption the boys were matched with a family through the Ohio Adoption Photo Listing. One of the boys is already residing in the home and the other is due to move in soon.
3-26-98	4  AA  (T sibs)	F- 8 ½ F- 6 ½ F- 5 ½ M- 4	2  AA	M- infant 1- unknow n	The infant (who was placed with his siblings) was reunified with his birth mother. Their foster mother adopted the four children. The adoption was finalized in November of 1999.
3-26-98	6  AA  (B sibs)	F- 13 F- 11 ½ F- 8 F- 7 F- 6 F- 5	1  AA	M - 4	We found an adoptive home that would accept all six girls but the foster mother of the oldest two siblings decided to adopt them. Their adoption has not yet been finalized due to the oldest child getting pregnant. The other four siblings were placed with a single woman in April (2) and July (2) of 2000. This placement was made possible because the adoptive mother received financial help to attain larger housing. The male sibling was adopted prior to the girls being referred to the Project. One of the children from this sibling group is currently in a respite home due to behavioral problems but her mother is committed to her and wants her back provided she participates in therapy.

<b>Date Referred</b>	<b># of siblings referred and race</b>	<b>Ages (at time of referral) and sex</b>	<b># of siblings who were not referred and race</b>	<b>Ages and sex (of non-referred siblings)</b>	<b>Brief placement history since children were referred to the Project</b>
3-26-98	4 AA  (W sibs)	F- 12 ½ M- 8 ½ M- 7 ½ F- 5 ½ M- 9 ½	2  AA	2- unknow n adopted out of state	The foster mother with whom they had resided with for several years adopted four of the children. The adoption was finalized in July of 2000. The 8 1/2 year old resided in a residential treatment facility for over three years but maintained visits with his siblings. He is currently living in a highly structured foster home but he continues to visit with his siblings. Unfortunately it does not appear that he will be adopted by the same woman that adopted his siblings. We are recruiting a home that will allow him ongoing contact with his siblings.
3-26-98	3 AA  (D sibs)	M- 10 F- 9 F- 5 ½	1  AA	M - 14	There were many families who were willing to adopt the girls alone but a single mother wanted to keep all the children together! The girls were placed into her home in June of 2000 and their adoption was finalized in February of 2001, the same month that their brother joined them after he participated in several residential treatment experiences. The oldest sibling lives with his paternal Grandmother. There is inconsistent contact.
3-26-98	4 AA  (B sibs)	F- 11 ½ M- 10 F- 8 ½ M- 7 ½	At least 5 known	M-3 F-1 ? - 1 other specifics un- known	We have yet to obtain permanency for the oldest girl and the oldest boy however, the foster mother who once cared for both sisters states that she wants to adopt the younger of the two girls and the younger boy has been in a foster to adopt placement since May of 2001. Prior to finding a permanent family he was in two different foster homes in the past three years. This is a sibling group with severe behavioral problems and emotional challenges. It is our recommendation that the oldest two siblings be placed individually in homes that will allow for contact between the siblings. In the three years we were

<b>Date Referred</b>	<b># of siblings referred and race</b>	<b>Ages (at time of referral) and sex</b>	<b># of siblings who were not referred and race</b>	<b>Ages and sex (of non-referred siblings)</b>	<b>Brief placement history since children were referred to the Project</b>
					involved with this sibling group the oldest boy has been in a residential group home setting and numerous foster homes. In the last foster home he committed a felony (felonious assault), which resulted in his being placed in a residential treatment facility for children with mental health diagnosis. His diagnosis includes Reactive Attachment Disorder, Major Depression, and Conduct Disorder. The oldest girl has resided in numerous foster homes, a locked residential setting, and an unlocked residential setting. She damages property regularly and has similar diagnosis as her brother.
9-16-98	2 C (R sibs)	F-13 M-12	1 C	Exact age not known but much older and living with an aunt	The older female of this group was disrupting from her foster home and they were going to split the kids and not let them visit to allow them time to “heal”. NOAS fought for them to stay together. They went to a foster home that eventually adopted them and they are doing great. Placed 9-99 Finalized 9-00
9-16-98	4 AA (M sibs)	M-11 F-8 M-6 M-5	N/A	N/A	Placed 12-98, finalized 12-99. Placed with an excellent family that already adopted four children and have since adopted three more siblings who are biologically related to the first sibling group of four they adopted.
2-16-99	4 African American (L sibs)	M- 10 M- 8 M- 6 ½ F- 5	1 African American	M - older	The oldest brother was adopted by his foster family. A family has been identified for the female child.

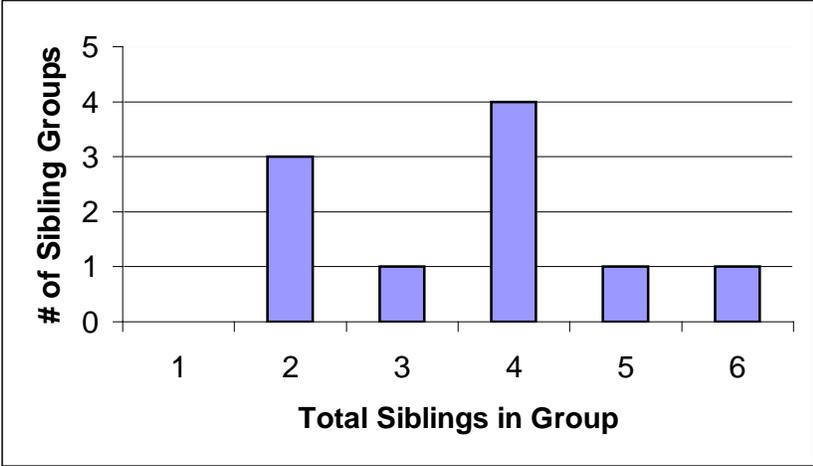
<b>Date Referred</b>	<b># of siblings referred and race</b>	<b>Ages (at time of referral) and sex</b>	<b># of siblings who were not referred and race</b>	<b>Ages and sex (of non-referred siblings)</b>	<b>Brief placement history since children were referred to the Project</b>
4-1-99	2  C  (M sibs)	M-11 ½ M- 10 ½	2  C	M - ? M - ? One adopted, one aged-out, ages unknown	A married couple took in both brothers in June of 1999 with the intention of adopting them however, the younger of the two disrupted from the home due to extreme behavioral problems that resulted from his attachment difficulties. He moved to a different foster home and then to a residential treatment facility. It is unclear where he is currently residing due to a communication breakdown between NOAS and CCDCFS. The other sibling elected to stay and finalize his adoption, which occurred in August of 2000.
9-10-99	4  AA  (P sibs)	M-16 M-8 M-5 F-10	1  AA	M- 14	Foster mom is adopting the three boys. The only sister just disrupted from this home due to her sexually acting out. The oldest boy is currently on hold with our agency due to his extreme sexual perpetrator issues that he is unwilling to address.

# Ethnicity of the Referred Sibling Groups



# Size of Referred Sibling Groups

(Including only the portion of the sibling group referred to the project.)



# **Appendix B**

# SIBLING DECISION MAKING MATRIX

Developed by: Connie Maschmeier, LISW, MSSA, CCDC III  
Northeast Ohio Adoption Services' Sisters and Brothers Together Project  
(Funding provided by Federal Adoption Opportunities Grant #90-CO-0821)

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**Usage:** To be used in all situations in which decisions involving siblings are being made.

**Premise:** Siblings should be placed together in order to support and maintain existing ties and to minimize the degree of loss experienced by the children unless there is a compelling reason in the children's best interest to the contrary.

**Instructions:** The following issues are listed in order of importance and each question should be weighted accordingly. Please refer to pages 7 and 8 for a visual matrix after discussing the following questions.

## **1. Assess past, current and potential relationships/attachment for all of the siblings.**

Fully describe the sibling relationship using concrete, observable and measurable examples.

- **Degree** of the biological relationship of the siblings. This can be characterized as full siblings (same biological parents), half siblings (share only one biological parent), or assumed siblings (share no common biology but have been raised together and they assume that they are siblings).
- **Duration** of the sibling relationship.
  - o **Length**  
The length of time they have known one another, i.e. the older sibling will know the younger sibling for as long as the younger sibling has been alive (unless they have been placed separately).
  - o **Developmental Stage**  
Developmental age affects children's perception of duration for example, two days away from home feels much longer to a three year old than to a 13-year old. Use a child's developmental ages (rather than biological age) when assessing their behaviors.
  - o **Significant Circumstances**  
Traumatized children often experience time distortions and distortion of sequence of events. Children's sense of time and inability to remember

events and sequences of events with their siblings should not be misinterpreted. It is often helpful to visually depict a child's life including moves and significant events using tools such as a placement timeline (found in Keck, G. PhD & Kupecky, R. LSW (1995). *Adopting the Hurt Child*, (p. 153). Pinon Press Co.), a placement genogram (found in McMillen, J.C. & Groze, V. (1994). *Using Placement Genograms in Child Welfare Practice*. *Child Welfare*, LXXII (4): 307-318.), or Rosenberg's life map (found in Pinderhughes, E.E., & Rosenberg, K. (1990). *Family bonding with high-risk placements: A therapy model that promotes the process of becoming a family*. In L.M. Glidden (Ed.) *Formed Families: Adoption of Children with Handicaps* (pp. 209-230). New York: Hawthorne Press.)

- **Quality**

MUST have a thorough knowledge of the maltreatment experienced by the children while in their birth home.

- Cannot be assessed at one point in time, must take into account the lifetime of the sibling relationship.
- Must take into consideration what is happening around the child/ siblings i.e. within the family, at school, in the neighborhood, at church/ synagogue, with peers, etc.
- Describe the roles the children play within the family i.e. parenting sibling, protector, nurturer, history keeper, etc.
  - ◆ If their roles are deemed unhealthy, what steps have been taken to help them develop healthier roles?
  - ◆ Have the children been in a stable environment long enough to feel safe relinquishing the roles that they may have developed for survival?
- Who does the child turn to for support/ guidance?
  - ◆ If not currently living with siblings (and therefore unable to turn to them) did they turn to their siblings for support when living together?
  - ◆ Have the children been allowed to visit at least twice a month while in care to maintain their bond?
- How do the children experience/ express sibling rivalry?
  - ◆ Is it within normal developmental limits?
  - ◆ What steps have been taken to reduce inappropriate behaviors?

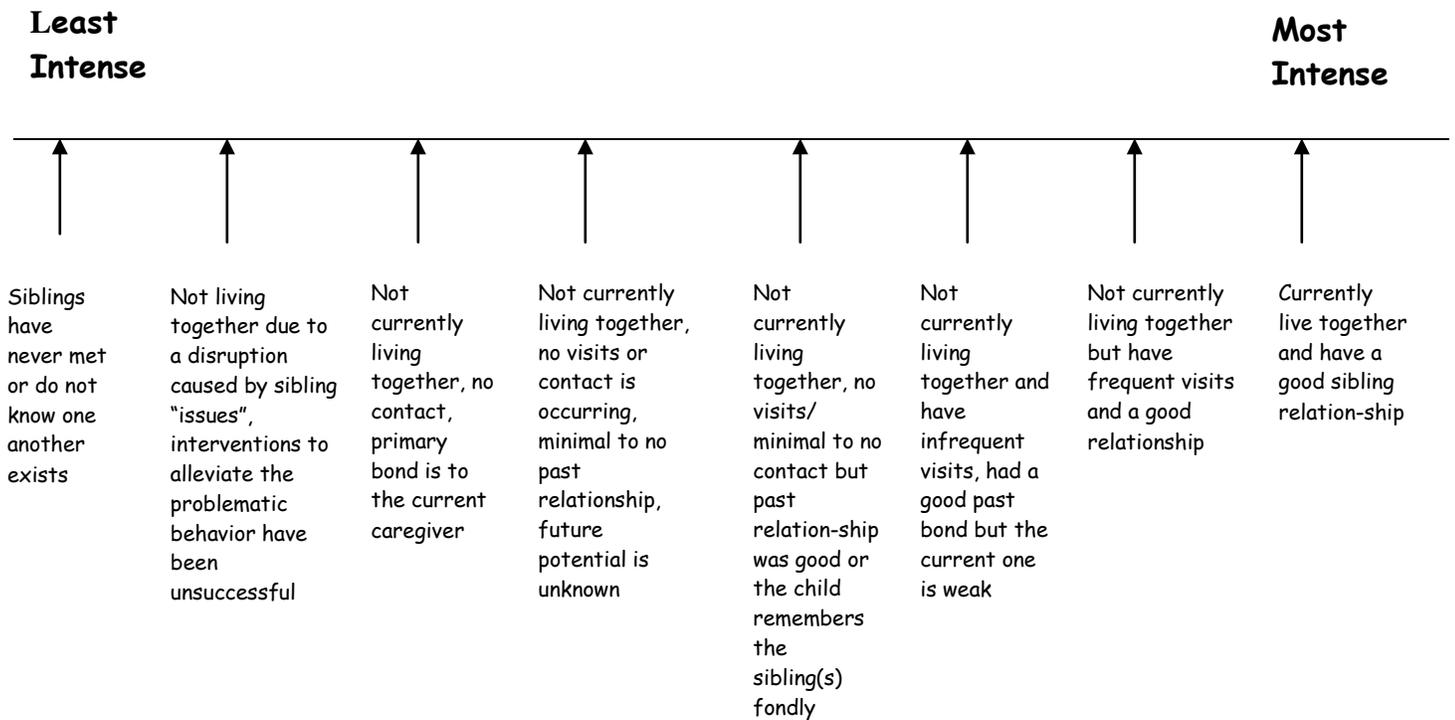
- **Intensity** of the relationship.

**Note:** Intensity should be measured over the lifetime of the sibling relationship. The intensity of the current sibling relationship should be weighted most heavily, unless the children are living separately and are not visiting at least two times per month. In this situation they may not have an opportunity to have a strong relationship. Child development research indicates that the potential future relationship should be considered more significant than the past relationship.

When assessing the intensity of sibling interactions it is imperative that the developmental ages of the children be taken into account. For example, when school aged children get together for a visit they may not play together but instead engage in parallel play because they are developmentally delayed or adolescents may not express a significant interest in their siblings because they are participating in many outside activities - these should not be taken as signs of dis-interest, rather developmentally age appropriate behaviors.

- When a professional visited and observed the children interacting during visits what did he/she observe?

The continuum below depicts the intensity of the sibling relationship based on their current situation.



**2. Are there any safety risks associated with the children being placed together?**

- Describe any risk factors associated with the children being placed together, most common being:
  - Sexual Reactivity - inappropriate sexual touching or fondling
  - Sexual Offending - an older/ more powerful sibling victimizes a younger/ less powerful sibling
  - Aggression - that results in physical harm
- Describe the context of the behavior and the dynamics of the situation in which this behavior occurred.

- ◆ Were the children made to touch one another in the birth home or observe sexual activity?
- ◆ If there has been sexual activity between the siblings does it seem more like sexual reactivity (acting out abuse they have experienced or witnessed) or a sexual offense involving a perpetrator and a victim?
- ◆ How much time has passed since the last incident?
- ◆ What is the likelihood that it would be repeated?
- ◆ What interventions have been implemented thus far to reduce risk? What was the result?
- ◆ Have the children matured or made progress in therapy?
- ◆ What services can be implemented to reduce risk? i.e. sibling therapy, alarms on doors, individual therapy, etc.

**Note:** If the risk of re-occurrence is high, treatment interventions have been unsuccessful, and no family can be found then separation is necessary. An appropriate plan should be developed to maintain contact as the reunification plan is developed and implemented. If developing a reunification plan is not in the children's best interest then a plan should be made to maintain contact and the children should be guided through the grief process.

### **3. Weigh the possible long-term benefits of keeping the siblings together vs. potential attachment damage in the future:**

#### Benefits experienced by the children due to placing/keeping the siblings together:

- The children do not have to experience another loss (can begin to heal.)
- The children have a shared history (sense of roots.)
- Learn to work through their problems rather than running from them.
- Feel safer in a new home when they are with their siblings.
- Better able to attach to caregivers when the sibling attachment has not been damaged.
- There are other people in the family that look like them.
- They have a shared biological/ genetic history that can predict future health needs for the siblings.

\* Personalize the list for these particular children.

#### Benefits experienced by the siblings due to separating/keeping them separated:

- If the child(ren) is staying with a family that they have resided with for a significant period of time and have formed attachment to, their ability to attach may not be damaged.
- The children may be physically and emotionally safer remaining separated.
- The children's special needs may be better met if they are placed separately.

\* Personalize the list for these particular children.

If a current caregiver wants to adopt a child(ren) in their care (but not the entire sibling group) utilize the following questions to identify the best permanent placement plan for the children.

#### **Child**

- \* Does the child feel close to the caregiver?
- \* Does the child give affection to the caregiver (i.e. appropriate kisses, hugs, cuddling?)
- \* Does the child like to spend time with the caregiver?
- \* Does the child demonstrate respect towards the caregiver?
- \* Does the child communicate with the caregiver?
- \* Does the child generally get along with the caregiver?
- \* Does the child trust the caregiver?
- \* How does the child relate to the caregiver's significant other (if one exists?)

#### **Caregiver**

- \* Does the caregiver feel close to the child?
- \* Does the caregiver give affection to the child (i.e. appropriate hugs, kisses, cuddling?)
- \* Does the caregiver like to spend time with the child?
- \* Does the caregiver demonstrate respect towards the child?
- \* Does the caregiver communicate with the child?
- \* Does the caregiver generally get along with the child?
- \* Does the caregiver generally trust the child?
- \* How does the caregiver's significant other (if one exists) relate to the child?

If both the child and the caregiver answer yes to the majority of the questions there is a strong mutual bond.

If the parent answers yes to the majority of the questions and the child does not, it is probably best to have the child remain with the caregiver as they are demonstrating their commitment to the child in the absence of the child having formed a mutually satisfying attachment.

If both the child and the caregiver or just the caregiver answer no to the majority of the questions it is not a good placement match at this time.

#### **4. Assess the foster/ adoptive family's ability and willingness to meet all of the children's needs.**

- Describe the family's values about siblings.
  - ◆ With appropriate support services could all of the siblings remain together?
  - ◆ If yes, list what services would be necessary to preserve the placement.
  - ◆ Have these services been offered?
  - ◆ If yes, what was the family's reaction?

**Note:** If the family is not willing to accept the necessary services to preserve the placement then they probably do not fully appreciate the significance of the sibling bond. This makes it unlikely that they will maintain ongoing contact if the children are separated.

## **5. The children's expectations and wishes regarding their placement**

**Note:** This should be assessed independently from the caregiver's wishes by interviewing each child alone. Remember that these children are dealing with multiple loyalty and safety issues that can affect their ability to make healthy decisions for themselves. They are probably unable to take into consideration the longevity of the sibling relationship and they may base their decision solely on their current relationship with their siblings or their current caregivers. They may also be repeating messages they are hearing from their current caregivers. Their developmental age must be considered when evaluating their wishes; it is not developmentally congruent to ask children to make life-altering decisions.

**Note:** If it is entirely necessary that the siblings be separated/ remain separated then a viable visitation/ sibling bond maintenance plan must be created during the staffing/ meeting. It should include:

- Frequency of face-to-face visits, phone calls, picture sharing, E-mails, letters, etc. Who will coordinate/transport and who is responsible for initiating and carrying out the efforts should be specified. The names, addresses and phone numbers of the foster/adoptive homes where all of the siblings are living should be included in the plan.
- All parties need to sign the plan.
- Everyone, including the children, should receive a copy of the plan that same day.

Questions and comments regarding this decision making tool can be directed to:

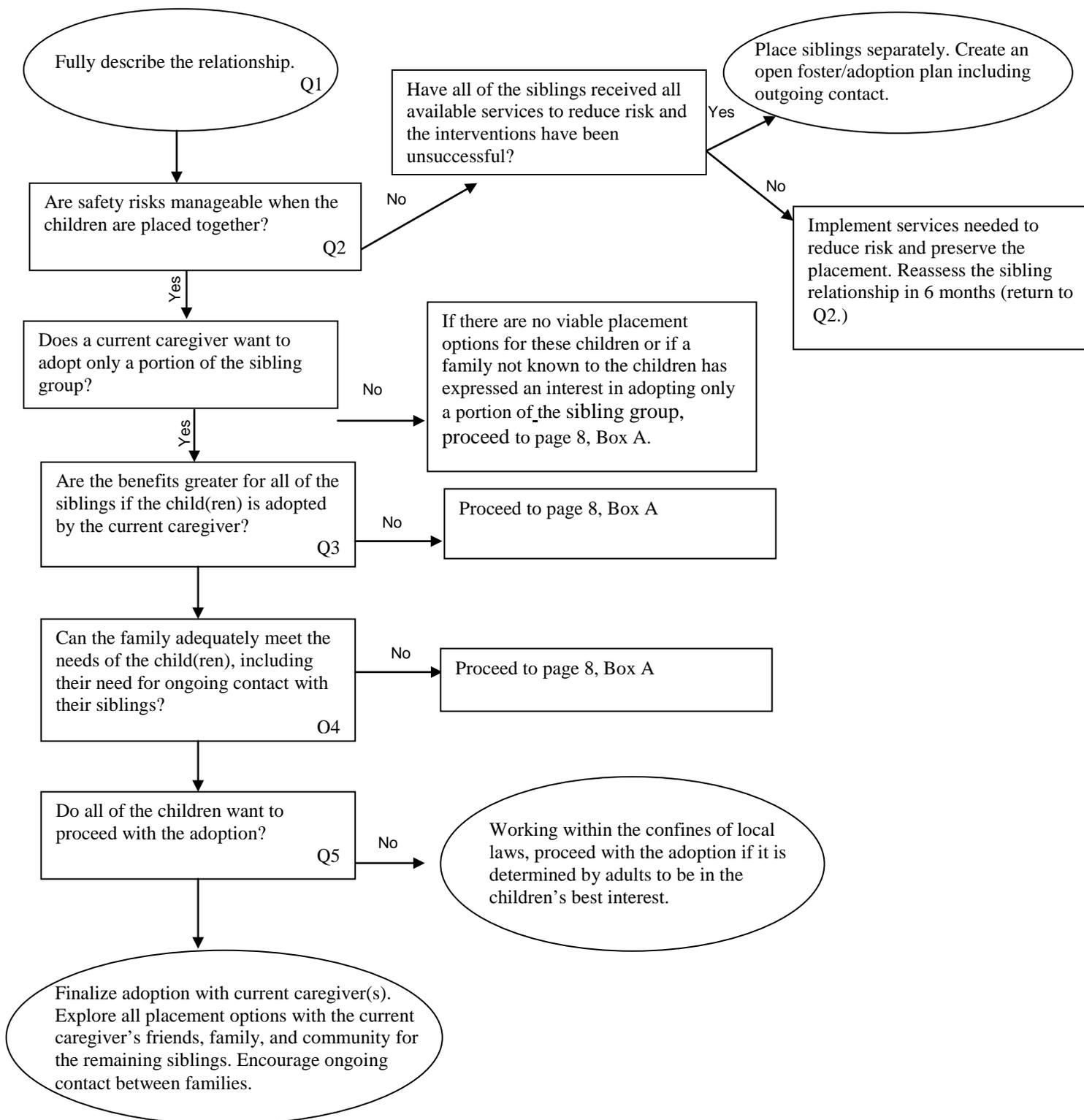
Connie Maschmeier, Project Director  
Northeast Ohio Adoption Services  
15715 Libby Road  
Maple Heights, Ohio 44137  
216-581-9710 ext. 107

Cm/cm  
8-30-01

# Sibling Decision Making Matrix

Created by: Northeast Ohio Adoption Services  
Sisters and Brothers Together Project  
(Grant #90 CO 0821)

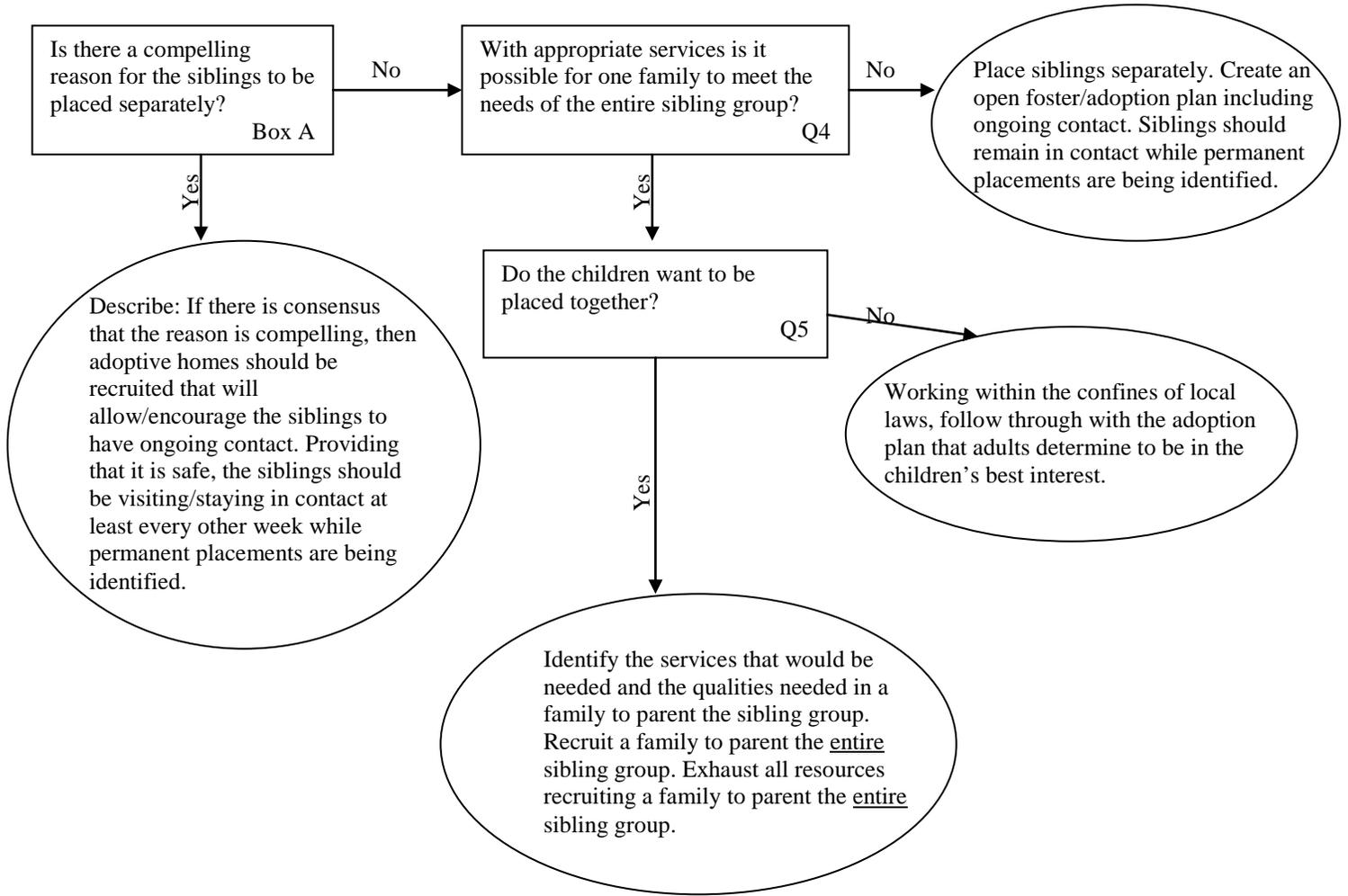
NOTE: This matrix is to be utilized in conjunction with the questions provided to guide your discussion.



# Sibling Decision Making Matrix

Created by: Northeast Ohio Adoption Services  
Sisters and Brothers Together Project  
(Grant #90 CO 0821)

Continued...



Note: If a compelling reason in the children’s best interest does not exist, then they should not be separated. The most common examples of compelling reasons include:

- Sexual offending behavior that has not been responsive to therapeutic interventions
- Extreme physical aggression toward siblings that has not been responsive to therapeutic interventions.
- Current caregiver wants to adopt the child(ren) in their home but not the entire sibling group. The child(ren) in the home have a strong mutual bond with the caregiver. Services were offered to support the caregiver in providing for all of the available siblings but the caregiver declined the services.

*Copies of this document may be made but not altered.*

# **Appendix C**

## Formal Meetings Held with CCDCFS Administrators

Date	Purpose	Length (hours)	In Attendance	Outcome
2-4-98	Planning meeting for an upcoming workshop on child specific recruitment	1.5	Connie Maschmeier Judy McCartney Constance Walker	Initial plans made
2-10-98	Initial meeting	1.5	Connie Maschmeier Andrea Hampton	Relationship building
3-5-98	Initial meeting	1.5	Connie Maschmeier Andrea Hampton Kim Lanier	Relationship building
3-11-98	Ongoing planning of upcoming workshop	1.5	Connie Maschmeier Mary Brooks Constance Walker	Planned workshop
3-20-98	Role clarification	2.0	Connie Maschmeier Andrea Hampton Joan Largent Kim Lanier Kathy Franz Victor Groza	Roles clarified and priorities set
5-13-98	Initial meeting	.5	Connie Maschmeier Jerry Blake	Relationship building
6-10-98	Identify Project liaison in the ongoing department	1.0	Connie Maschmeier Marsha Wickliffe Pat Rideout	Liaison identified
6-22-98	Discuss contractual arrangements	2.0	Connie Maschmeier Kathy Franz John Hostetler Dottie Klemm	Clarified and updated contract
6-24-98	Initial meeting	1.0	Connie Maschmeier Lisa Petrus	Relationship building
9-23-98	Liaison's meeting – identify accomplishments and set priorities for upcoming six months	2.0	VictorGroza Joan Largent Kathy Franz, Connie Maschmeier Andrea Hampton Judy Seman Lisa Petrus Dottie Klemm Jennifer Sevits	Accomplishments and goals discussed
3-1-99	Planning meeting	1.0	Connie Maschmeier Andrea Hampton Joan Largent	Discussed system issues

<b>Date</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b>In Attendance</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
3-5-99	Judge Donnelly of the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas called the meeting	2.0	Connie Maschmeier John Hostetler	Became more aware of some of the barriers families' face when attempting to adopt children from CCDCFS
6-4-99	Discuss providing training at department meetings	1.0	Kathy Franz Cheryl Jamison Chiefs from the ongoing and intake departments at CCDCFS	Decided on how to best provide the training
6-17-99	Liaison's Meeting	2.0	Kathy Franz Victor Groza Andrea Hampton Cheryl Jamison Shannon Bernardi Arlene Myott	Discussion focused on instituting a 72-hour review policy for siblings who are separated
11-5-99	Liaison's Meeting	2.0	Kathy Franz Victor Groza Cheryl Jamison Connie Maschmeier	Progress and goals were discussed
12-7-99	Policy focus	1.0	Denise Goodman Cheryl Jamison Connie Maschmeier	Discussed policy writing and implementation at CCDCFS
1-3-00	Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) workshop	1.0	Connie Maschmeier Pat Rideout	Planning for upcoming GAL workshop sponsored by Sib grant
2-23-00	Liaison's Meeting	1.0	Victor Groza Dottie Klemm Joan Largent Arlene Myott Andrea Hampton Connie Maschmeier Cheryl Jamison Debby Forkas	Review of progress/ barriers and priorities  Distribute draft of mid-project report
2-23-00	GAL workshop	1.0	Lisa Lassen Connie Maschmeier Pat Rideout	Workshop planning

<b>Date</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b>In Attendance</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
3-15-00	Mid-Project Report	1.0	Debby Forkas Andrea Hampton Connie Maschmeier Judy Seman	Review the mid-project report
3-16-00	Visitation tracking	1.0	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Discussed developing a tracking visit for family visits
3-23-00	Visitation tracking	1.0	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Ongoing discussion about a tracking system
4-6-00	Visitation tracking	1.5	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Ongoing discussion about a tracking system
4-13-00	Visitation tracking	1.5	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Ongoing discussion about a tracking system
4-13-00	Sibling Decision-Making matrix	1.0	Debby Forkas Cheryl Jamison Connie Maschmeier Judy Seman	Matrix revisions
5-5-00	Finalize mid-project report, discuss project dissemination, finalize decision making matrix, discuss article publication	1.0	Kathy Franz Victor Groza Cheryl Jamison Connie Maschmeier	Discussed identified issues to focus on
5-12-00	Visitation tracking	1.5	Connie Maschmeier	Committee reports
5-26-00	Management Information System (MIS) Concerns	1.0	Jerry Blake Debby Forkas Dottie Klemm Connie Maschmeier	Discussion regarding inadequacies in the MIS at CCDCFS
8-11-00	Visitation tracking	1.5	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Committee reports
8-30-00	Sibling visitation sub-committee	2.0	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	First meeting focusing on sibling visit tracking issues
9-21-00	Sibling visitation sub-committee	2.0	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Developing plan to track visits

<b>Date</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b>In Attendance</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
10-12-00	Visitation tracking sub-committee	1.5	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Committee reports
10-13-00	Visitation tracking committee	1.5	Connie Maschmeier and representatives from CCDCFS	Committee reports
11-2-00	Sibling issues during semi-annual reviews (SAR)	1.0	Connie Maschmeier Judy Seman	Discussed how siblings are addressed during SAR's and if the forms are effective
11-2-00	72 hour reviews in the placement department	1.0	Debby Forkas Connie Maschmeier	Planning to initiate the pilot project to review sibling separations in the placement department
2-22-01	Family Preservation Services	1.0	Connie Maschmeier Judy Seman	Discussed how family preservation services are utilized regarding siblings
3-1-01	Placement department project	1.0	Debby Forkas 3 placement dept. workers Connie Maschmeier	Instruction regarding implementing the pilot project
<b>Totals</b>	<b>37 meetings</b>	<b>49.5 Hours</b>		

# **Appendix D**

## Training Received by Sibling Project Staff:

Date	Staff (by staff number)	Title	Length (hours)	Accum. Hours
1-26-98	61, 62, 63	How to document properly (Gail Knapp – NOAS)	2.0	6.0
2-3-98	61	Inter-Organizational Collaboration (assessor training)	6.0	6.0
2-9-98	61, 62, 63	Concurrent Planning	3.0	9.0
2-11-98	61, 62, 63	Subsidy (Ohio Families for Kids)	3.0	9.0
2-23-98 to 2-26-98	61, 3	Grantee's Meeting in Washington	?	?
4-14-98	61, 63	Windows 95	3.0	6.0
4-23-98 & 4-24-98	61	Word Beginners	3.0	3.0
4-23-98 & 4-24-98	62, 60	Family and Child Assessment (assessor training)	12.0	24.0
4-24-98	60,61, 62, 63, 7	Child Specific Recruitment (Ruth Amerson – Another Choice for Black Children)	6.0	30.0
4-27-98	7, 61, 62, 63	Training the Trainers (Cindy Deal)	5.0	20.0
4-29-98	62	Word Beginners	3.0	3.0
5-6-98 & 5-7-98	61,63	Word Intermediate	6.0	12.0
5-13-98 to 5-15-98	Most NOAS staff	Partners for Permanency Conference (NOAS)	Est. 18.0	18.0+
5-19-98	61, 62, 63	Lifebooks (Regina Kupecky)	2.0	6.0
5-20-98 & 5-21-98	60,61	Birthparent (assessor training)	12.0	24.0
5-26-98 & 5-27-98	61	Family and Child Assessment (assessor training)	12.0	12.0
6-3-98	60, 61, 62	Pre-finalization (assessor training)	6.0	18.0

<b>Date</b>	<b>Staff (by staff number)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b>Accum. Hours</b>
6-15-98	61, 62, 63	Diversity: A Quilt of Many Cultures	6.0	18.0
6-16-98 & 6-17-98	61, 63	Excel Basic	6.0	12.0
6-18-98	61, 62, 63	Sisters and Brothers Belong Together (Regina Kupecky)	1.0	3.0
6-22-98 & 6-23-98	61, 63	Excel Intermediate	6.0	12.0
6-26-98	60, 62	Post-finalization (assessor training)	6.0	12.0
6-29-98	61, 62, 63	Why Sisters and Brothers Belong Together (Regina Kupecky)	3.0	9.0
6-29-98	61, 62, 63	Attachment Disorder (Regina Kupecky)	3.0	9.0
8-13-98 to 8-16-98	60, 61, 62, 7, 3, intern and others	North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)	est. 24.0	24.0
9-4-98	61	Field Instructor Training – Ursuline College	2.0	2.0
10-7-98	61, 69, intern	Concurrent Planning/ Adoption and Safe Families Act (Bellefaire)	7.0	21.0
10-6-98	69	Birth Parent Services (assessor training)	6.0	6.0
10-21-98 and 10-22-98	69	Family and Child Assessment (assessor training)	12.0	12.0
10-30-98	61	Field Instructor Training – Ursuline College	2.0	2.0
11-18-98	69	Placement/ Adoption Assistance (assessor training)	6.0	6.0
11-19-98	69	Pre-finalization (assessor training)	6.0	6.0
11-20-98	61, 62, 69	Ethical Issues/Dilemmas (Victor Groza)	4.0	12.0
11-24-98	69	Post-Finalization (assessor training)	6.0	6.0
12-6-98 to 12-9-98	61, 62, 7 and others	Keeping the Promise of Permanency: Achieving Excellence in Special Needs Adoption (CWLA and Family Builders Network)	est. 24.0	24.0
12-14-98	69	(assessor training)	6.0	6.0

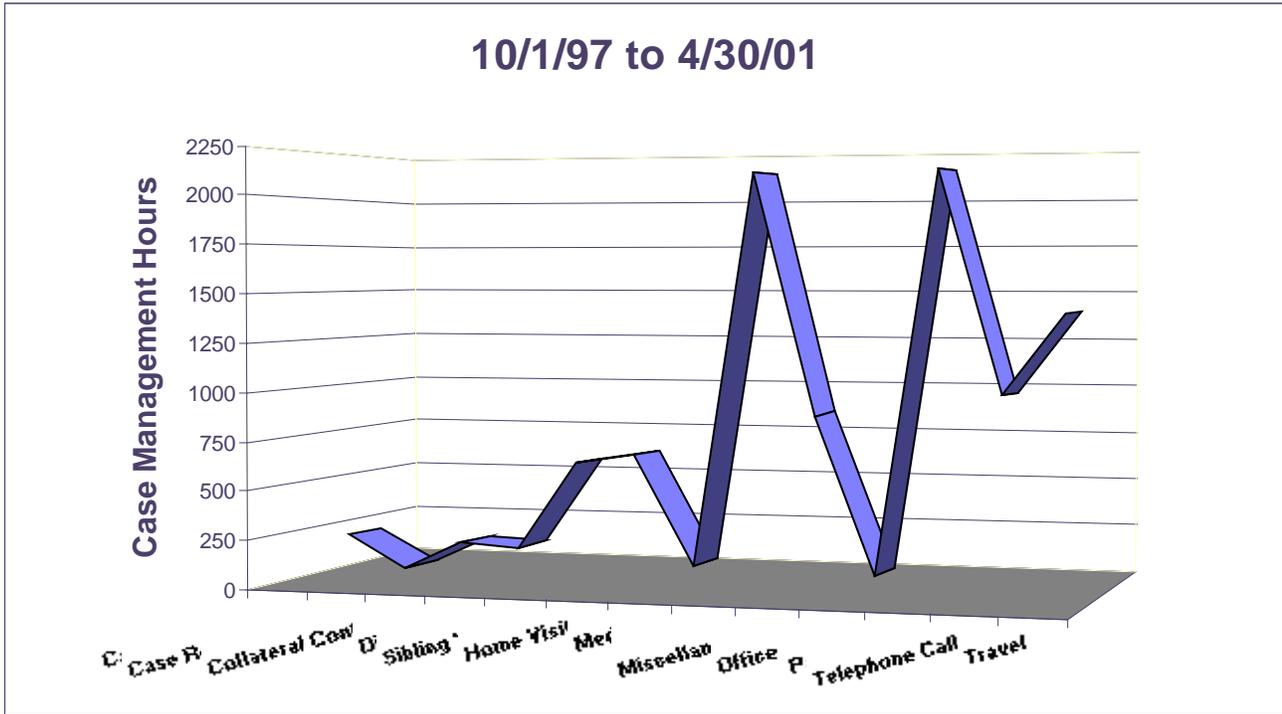
<b>Date</b>	<b>Staff (by staff number)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b>Accum. Hours</b>
12-17-98	69	(assessor training)	6.0	6.0
1-7-99 and 1-8-99	69	Cultural Issues in Permanency Planning (Tier II assessor training)	12.0	12.0
2-12-99	69	Psychopharmacology Made Simple	7.0	7.0
2-18-99	69	Adoption Network Cleveland – general meeting	2.0	2.0
2-19-99	61	Attachment Disorder (Greg Keck)	6.0	6.0
2-24-99	50	(assessor training)	6.0	6.0
3-1-99 to 3-2-99	61	Grantee’s Meeting in Washington	12.0	12.0
3-11-99	61	Ohio Department of Human Services Conference	2.0	2.0
4-12-99	69	Background Information (assessor training)	6.0	6.0
4-29-99	69	Collaboration (assessor training)	6.0	6.0
5-5-99 to 5-6-99	Many NOAS staff members	Staff members attended numerous workshops as part of the NOAS Spring Conference	Est. 12.0	12.0+
6-14-99 to 6-15-99	69, 36	Openness in Adoption (completed assessor training)	12.0	24.0
9-13-99	All	Confidentiality in the computer age	1.0	1.0
11-18-99	Most	Traveling the path to permanency for adolescents, Bob Lewis	3.0	3.0
11-23-99	61	Children’s records laws in Ohio	3.0	3.0
3-27-99 to 3-31-99	61,60	Grantees meeting	?	?
4-5-99	36, 69	Sexual Abuse training	6.0	12.0
4-10, 11, 12-99	61, 36	Training of Trainers, Denise Goodman	18.0	36.0
5-5,6-99	61, 69	NOAS spring conference	6.0	12.0
6-9-99	61, 36	Structured Decision Making, CCDCFS	3.0	6.0
9-6-99	36	Circles of Support, NOAS clinical excellence series	6.0	6.0
9-20-99	61, 49	Mental Health Services and the Amish Culture	3.0	6.0
9-26, 27, 28-99	61	Training on Content, Jane Schooler	18.0	18.0
12-23,24-00	61	Openness in Adoption	12.0	12.0

<b>Date</b>	<b>Staff (by staff number)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b>Accum. Hours</b>
11-7,8-00	61	Cultural Issues	12.0	12.0
1-17-01	61	Gathering and Documenting Background Information	6.0	6.0
<b>Total Training Hours:</b>			<b>424</b>	<b>642</b>

**Note:** Accumulative Training Hours were calculated by multiplying the length (in hours) of the training by the number of employees who were present. In instances in which the number of employees is unknown, the hours were calculated as if one person were present.

# **Appendix E**

## Case Management Hours



<b>Case Management Hours 10-97 to 4-30-01</b>		
Case Conference	206	2.2%
Case Record Review	37.8	0.4%
Collateral Contact	178.25	1.9%
Dictation	162.75	1.7%
Sibling Visits	612.8	6.4%
Home Visit	663.5	6.9%
Media	93.5	1.0%
Meeting	2121.75	22.2%
Miscellaneous	879.95	9.2%
Office Visit	71.25	0.7%
Paperwork	2130.59	22.3%
Telephone Call	995.75	10.4%
Travel	1409.55	14.7%
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>9563.44</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

# **Appendix F**

## Recruitment/ Community Outreach Efforts

**Key:** P = print media  
 A/V = Audio/ Visual Media  
 N/A = Not Applicable  
 ? = Data was unavailable

Date	Activity/ Event	Length (hours)	# Attended
1-16-98 to 1-25-98	Cleveland Boat Show at the International Exposition Center	80.0+	1000
1-29-98	Information Meeting	2.0	5
2-6-98 & 2-7-98	Boat Show at the Eastwood Mall	16.0	?
2-25-98 to 2-28-98	Boat Show at Chapel Hill Mall	24.0	?
2-26-98	Information Meeting	2.0	5
3-6-98 to 3-7-98	Sportsman Show at the Eastwood Expo. Center	16.0	?
3-7-98	Child Abuse/ Family Awareness Month at Chapel Hill Mall	7.0	?
3-26-98	Information Meeting	2.0	2
3-28-98	Ohio Families for Kids Adoption Fair (a mailing to 50,000 families preceded this event)	3.0	120
4-15-98	CCDCFS "Spring Fling" this is an event that encourages County employees to adopt waiting children	3.0	100
4-18-98	Adoption 101 – sponsored by Adoption Network Cleveland for people just beginning to consider adoption	6.0	60
4-30-98	Information meeting in the Cleveland office	2.0	6
May 1998	Our June information meeting was advertised in the May issue of the Berea Gazette	N/A	N/A
May 1998	NOAS annual flower sale with waiting kids display .We receive a lot of community recognition as a result of this event. Held in Warren, Ohio.	240.0+	?
5-12-98	Community open house to announce our presence in the Cleveland area	3.0	200
6-26-98	Information Meeting	1.0	1
5-28-98	Information meeting in the Cleveland office	2.0	?
June 1998	A child specific recruitment article was published in the June issue of the Berea Gazette	N/A	P
6-25-98	Information meeting in the Cleveland office	2.0	?
6-26-98	Courthouse display in the park	6.0	300
6-29-98	WKDD Sunday Magazine	1.0	P

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
July 1998	In the July issue of the Adoption Network Cleveland newsletter an article written by a NOAS employee about the importance of the sibling relationship was published	N/A	P
7-11-98	The first annual Sisters and Brothers Together picnic was held.	6.0	110
Summer 1998	The summer issue of the NOAS newsletter included a two-page article about the Sisters and Brothers Together Project	N/A	P
8-14-98	The News Herald printed a notice about our next information meeting.	N/A	P
8-17-98	A NOAS social worker and one of our adoptive families taped a 30-minute cable TV show about the importance of keeping siblings together.	N/A	A/V
8-20-98	The Sun Messenger printed a notice about our next information meeting.	N/A	P
8-22-98	She represented NOAS at the African American Heritage Festival	8.0	3500
9-12-98	NOAS hosted our annual fund raising gala	6.0	175
9-24-98	The News Herald printed a notice about our next information meeting.	N/A	P
9-24-98	Information Meeting	.5	0
10-2-98	Channel 43 child specific interview	1.00	A/V
10-10-98	Adoption 101	1.0	40
10-12-98	Took two sibling groups on referral to the Project to the Great Lakes Science Center to be taped by Channel 5 news	3.0	A/V
10-26-98	Attended a media luncheon coordinated by Adoption Network Cleveland	1.5	10
10-29-98	Information Meeting	2.0	5
November 1998	An article was featured about the Project in the Cleveland Call and Post	N/A	P
November 1998	We set up a display for one week at the Cleveland Heights Public Library	42.0	?
11-4-98	Sponsored a workshop titled "Special Needs Adoptions" as part of Adoption Awareness Month	2.0	10
11-13-98	We set up a display at an OFFK Adoption Fair in Akron	4.0	15
11-14-98	We set up a display at the Cleveland Health Museum	8.0	?
11-18-98 & 11-24-98	NOAS' Sibs Project Director was interviewed both days by a local radio station (107.9) about special needs adoption.	2.0	A/V

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
11-19-98	Information meeting in our Cleveland office	2.0	?
11-21-98	Set up a display at the Northern Ohio Christian Business Expo	6.0	800
11-2-98	Helped to staff a phone call in connected to a news story about special needs adoption. NOAS' Sibs Project Director was interviewed for this story.	1.0	A/V
12-3-98	The Warren offices hosted an open house for our families and the community	5.0	60
12-31-98	Attended a Kwanzaa celebration at which she discussed special needs adoption	6.0	?
1-7-99	Distributing flyers in the community	4.0	?
1-8-99	Distributing flyers in the community	4.0	?
1-12-99	Adoption issues for lay ministers	1.0	10
1-24-99	Had a two hour meeting with potential adoptive parents	2.0	?
1-27-99	Kiwanis Meeting	1.0	14
2-2-99	Had a two hour meeting with potential adoptive parents	2.0	2
2-9-99	Distributed flyers and had a display at the Jefferson Community Center	4.0	?
2-26-99	Trumbull County Cluster (Cross System Training Display)	3.0	75
2-27-99	Had a display at Youngstown State University	4.0	?
3-4-99	Event at Packard Music Hall	3.0	75
3-20-99	Had a display at Cleveland State University as part of Adoption Network Cleveland's Adoption 101"	4.0	?
4-1-99	Letters sent to Cleveland area churches	N/A	254
4-9-99	Set up a display at the Black Pages Diversity Expo	6.0	300
4-10-99	Attended a recruitment event at Thiel College	2.0	200
4-16-99	Adoption Fair	2.5	50
4-17-99	Posting adoption flyers in the African American Community	3.0	10
4-22-99	YSU English Festival workshop	3.0	30
May 1999	NOAS flower sale -- Waiting kids display	240.0+	2000 + A/V
May 1999	An article focusing on the sibling relationship was on the front page of Adopt Talk magazine and NOAS Executive Director was quoted.	N/A	P
5/5/99	Display of waiting children and kidsbook at NOAS and Barbara Lewis Roberts Spring Conference at Cuyahoga Fall Sheraton Suites	8.0	120

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
5/6/99	Display of waiting children and kidsbook at NOAS and Barbara Lewis Roberts Spring Conference at Cuyahoga Fall Sheraton Suites	8.0	120
5/8/99	Ohio Families for Kids Family Expo Day child specific display and kidsbook at Independence Holiday Inn	3.0	100
5-8-99	Attended the Kent State Family-A-Fair	6.5	200
5-8-99	OFFK recruitment day	4.0	50
5-10-99	Channel 5 telethon NOAS	1.0	A/V
5-15-99	Attended NOAS family reunion and talked to people about adoption!	2.0	50
5-19-99	Attended a leadership conference	.25	20
5-15-99 & 5-22-99	Attended the Christian School Convention and posted flyers	1.0	35
5-26-99	Individual information meeting	.5	1
5-28-99	Passing out flyers in the African American Community	.5	30
6-2-99	NOAS golf outing and Dinner Recognition Banquet at Avalon Lakes -- TV Coverage of Event and Display of Waiting kids.	3.0	150 + A/V
6-5-99	Attended the Randall Park Mall Adoption Fair	5.5	125
6-12-99	Distributed flyers in the African American community	3.0	15
6-18-99	Distributed flyers to libraries	.5	N/A
6-19-99	Distributed flyers at KSU	2.0	N/A
6-25-99	Attended African American Story Tellers event in Cleveland Heights	4.0	?
6-26-99	OFFK family expo display, Portage Co. at Twinsburg, Ohio hotel,	3.0	100
7/17/99	Press conference – Unity Jam Christian Music Festival at Prodigal Media’s headquarters on Boardman-Canfield Road in Boardman. ABC, NBC, CBS, 3 TV stations and 2 newspapers	1.0	167,000 – P A/V
7/24/99	Unity Jam all day Christian Music Festival Canfield Fairgrounds. Booth and display. Also passed posters to Christian bookstores and organizations for their bulletin boards	12.0	2,000
8/7 and 8/8/99	Twinsburg Twins Festival, child specific display and kidsbook Chamberlain Park in Twinsburg, Ohio	24.0	15,000
8/14/99	Sisters and Brothers together picnic and games at BJCB campus on Fairmount, Shaker Heights at the Wulliger Center	8.0	20

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
8/18/99	Cluster Group picnic at Howland Park for current foster families and newcomers interested to foster or adopt; had child specific display and kidsbook	4.0	50
9/18/99	13 <sup>th</sup> Annual Gala Dinner Dance with photo display of child specific photos and TV coverage on agency mission with channel 27	6.0	A/V
9/27/99	Spoke to African American Girl Scout Troop #324 at Second Baptist Church in Warren – showed kidsbook and spoke on adoption for Girl Scout Poster and Recruitment project in their Trumbull Co. churches	2.0	12
10/3/99	Boardman Rotary Oktoberfest in Boardman Park (Loudspeaker announcements to visit booth). Display of waiting children and kidsbook	9.0	10,000 A/V
10/14/99	WKBN, CBS TV in Youngstown nominated NOAS Family as recipients of the “Hometown Hero Award.”	3 min.	A/V
10/23/99	Make a Difference Day event to recruit community volunteers. 500 child specific flyers to Trumbull County neighborhoods	6.0	P
11/1/99	Monthly Issue – Mahoning Valley Parent – feature article on Adoption Day celebrations	?	P
11/1/99	Cleveland Heights Public Library display of waiting children for National Adoption Awareness Month.	1,440.0	A/V
11/3/99	We had full page (½ kids ½ ad featured in the Morning Journal newspaper in color	8.0	P
11/4/99	Youngstown Vindicator had article about NOAS family and special needs adoption for National Adoption Awareness Month	8.0	P
11/4/99	YSU awareness display and kidsbook at Kilcawley Student Center for community awareness	7.0	A/V
11/11/99	Full page black and white page of kids faces and names in the Youngstown Vindicator	8.0	P
11/13/99	Ohio Families for Kids Expo day at Holiday Inn, Independence, Ohio	2.0	100
11/16/99	Cuyahoga Co. Sponsored Cuyahoga County kids at Berea City Center	3.0	50
11/18/99	Families for Teens sponsored workshop on teen permanency with Bob Lewis at Northeast Ohio Regional Training Center in Summit County	7.0	50
11/20/99	Adoption Fair, Jane Edna Hunter Building of Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services in Cleveland	4.0	110
11/23/99	House Party	3.0	4

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
11/27/99	African Dance Event at Jr. High School – Shaw East Cleveland	3.0	75
11/29/99	NOAS Executive Director interviewed for CBX Channel 27 I Youngstown about waiting children and our Angel Tree project – awareness raising	.25	A/V
Fall 1999	Newsletter Child Specific Children	N/A	P
12/5/99	Kwanzaa Family Day at Randall Park Mall – Kwanzaa’s seven principles related to adoption on flyers.	11.0	500
12/9/99	Kwanzaa event sponsored by Cuyahoga County Community College East Campus, Highland Heights	2.0	120
December 1999	Speaking Engagement with Federated Women’s Clubs	1.0	25
December 1999	Girl Scout Troop 324 distributed flyers and posters to African American Churches in Warren	12.0	?
December 1999	Distribution of flyers to beauty shops and neighborhood businesses in Cleveland	12.0	30 shops
12/22/99	Classified ads for Warren education groups in Vindicator, Tribune, Farm and Dairy, and Morning Journal	N/A	P
12/29/99	Classified ads for Warren education groups in Vindicator, Tribune, Farm and Dairy, and Morning Journal	N/A	P
1/2/00	Recruitment at Kwanzaa event at Youngstown Buckeye Elks	4.0	?
1/5/00	Internet website agency general info and start of child specific data,	4.0	A/V
1/14/00	Eight Classified ads for Cleveland ed groups Wednesdays and Sundays for Akron Beacon Journal, Sun Press, Sun Euclid, and Plain Dealer	N/A	P
1/17/00	Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland Museum Martin Luther King Celebration	7 hours	?
1/22/00	Martin Luther King program – Western Reserve Historical Society	7 hours	?
1/26/00	Channel 5 TV taping for 6 o’clock news at Cleveland office	1.0	A/V
1/30/00	Plain Dealer “A Child Waits” Child Specific	N/A	P
1/31/00	Cleveland Cable to run until 2/15 on Cable TV (6 stations)	N/A	A/V
2/6/00	Cleveland Plain dealer Specific Child ad 2/13	N/A	P
2/9/00	Diversity dept. program for Black History Month at John Carroll University.	2.0	175
2/12/00	Storytelling event at Cleveland Museum – flyers	2.0	500

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
2/13/00	Jazz Concert at Cleveland Museum – flyers	2.0	40
2/14/00	Youngstown YWCA Mahoning Cluster group of mostly African American families	2.5	12
2/16/00	Public Library, Warren – display and flyers	6	30
2/17/00	Public Library, Warren – display and flyers	6	40
2/19/00	Awareness presentation at Lord of Life Lutheran WLCA retreat, Ursuline Motherhouse Canfield	1	20
2/24 through 2/27/00	Display of waiting children and kidsbook along with Welcome Home raffle early flyers – Eastwood Expo Home Show	50.0	10,000
2/26/00	Gospel music at Historical Museum, Cleveland	2.0	125
2/28/00	Window display and bulletin boards at agency	N/A	?
3/3, 3/4, and 3/5/00	Home Show at Eastwood Expo display and Kidsbook	27.0	?
3/14/00	Adoption Corner at family restaurant	2	100 P & A/V
3/17/00	Families through Adoption (YMCA) 10 minute presentation & table	.25	25
4/9, 4/16, and 4/30/00	Plain Dealer and Beacon Journal classified ads for classes starting May 6, 2000	?	P
4/10/00	NOAS/Posters at I 31 Cuyahoga Co. family restaurants for recruitment	N/A	A/V
4/15/00	Trumbull Family and Children First Council Wellness Block Grant & KSU Trumbull Campus. African American NASA Astronaut Speaker. - - GS troop – display and storytelling pamphlets and house raffle info.	4.0	400
4/16/00	Girl Scouts of Trumbull Co. Award ceremony with Troop #324 speaking about NOAS project.	1.0	100
4/17/00	Cleveland cable PSA's for ed groups	N/A	A/V
4/18/00	Cable PSA flower sale for Armstrong cable and cable ad 2 weeks for Flower Sale on Time-Warner Cable	N/A	A/V
4/18/00	Adoption Coalition recruitment event	N/A	50
4/20/00	Channel 33 TV newscaster with our hat and T-shirt with general agency awareness and house raffle		250,000 A/V
4/21/00	Press conference – Tours of Welcome Home 2000 Raffle house	3.0	A/V
4/28/00	Radio Interview with talk show host WKBN	1.0	A/V
5/2, and 5/3/00	Annual Spring Conference – Akron General wellness Center with Bob Lewis as speaker	16.0	100
May 2000	Press releases for flower sale, Stamp event, Early Bird. Cable TV for Flower sale.	N/A	P & A/V

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
5/5 through 5/28/00	Annual spring Flower Sale at Hunters Square Plaza daily photo display of waiting kids	207.0	6,000
5/5/00	Early Bird drawing for House raffle	1.0	10 P & A/V
5/9/00	Junior League of Youngstown Annual Dinner, awareness presentation and fund raiser.	3.0	130
5/11 and 5/12/00	Howland Kiwanis Teeter-Totter-a-Thon , in Howland – display and kidsbook	48.0	1000
5/11/00	WOHI radio/ Telephone Interview	.5	A/V
5/13/00	A New Day in Hough (Thurgood Marshall Recreational Center) Cleveland – display and flyers	15.0	250
5/15/00	400 TV spots with NOAS House Raffle information- Tickets in Supermarkets	3.4	A/V
5/16/00	Trumbull Post Office (Adoption Stamp Unveiling – Tribune Article and Vindicator and display.	3.0	P
5/24/00	Every child a Star and awareness presentation at Youngstown State University Social Work Class	.45	A/V
5/25/00	Adoption Stamp unveiling in Cuyahoga – Adoption Coalition - awareness	3.0	200
5/25/00	NOAS Recruitment information on a Stamp Adoption Awareness flyer at 31 family restaurants	N/A	P
5/25/00	Foster Care Appreciation, dinner at Leo’s and Candle lighting ceremony.	3.0	20
5/31/00	Howland Tab of Tribune back cover ad and 1400 word editorial and photo space - human interest story on NOAS adoptive family and raffle information	N/A	P
6/1/00	Adoption Fair – Cleveland – 15 agencies	3.0	150
5/2/00	NEOARE meeting, Summit County Training Center NOAS Display	3.5	20
6/3 and 6/4/00	African American Achievers Festival courthouse Square -- Warren	14.0	500
6/14/00	Golf Outing June 26, 2000 at Trumbull Country Club. Print PR 3 newspapers, TV Press releases 3 stations	7.0	108
6/17 through 6/25/00	HBA Parade of Homes House raffle – flyers and recruitment materials	45	7000
6/18/00	Waiting children display at church	8.0	45
6/27/00	NOAS night at the Scrappers baseball game (screen coverage)	.05	3000
7/4/00	Welcome Home raffle tickets at Howland and Canfield 4 <sup>th</sup> of July Celebrations	4.0	2500
7/6/00	Channel 21 – Youngstown with TV coverage on House Raffle and mission of agency	.25	25000 A/V

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
7/7/00	Stamp unveiling at Newton Falls with a letter writing project, big photo display, kidsbooks and an art contest	3.0	1000
7/7, 7/8 and 7/9/00	Welcome Home Raffle tickets at YSU Festival of the Arts	72.0	3000
7/8 and 7/9/00	Display - New Jerusalem Fellowship Church (Warren) African American Annual Summer Community Festival.	16.0	400
7/22/00	Black Family Expo – Cleveland Convention Center with display and kidsbooks	4.0	3000
7/24/00	Summer newsletter delivered with waiting kids – 2000 families and organizations	N/A	P 2,000
7/29/00	Historical Society African American Event at Cleveland Museum w/ display and Kidsbooks	3.0	200
8/4/00	Stamp unveiling at Youngstown main post office – with display, kidsbooks and flyers – TV coverage	5.0	250,000 A/V
8/12/00	Black Family Day at Cleveland convention Center with display of waiting kids, kidsbooks	8.0	2000
8/21/00	House Raffle TV coverage with info on mission of NOAS	.05	250,000 A/V
9/16/00	Family Recruitment Program at Maple Hts. Office with display, flyers and kidsbooks	?	?
9/17/00	Cleveland Browns football game Dream Seats program – Waiting kids with publicity in newspapers and at Stadium, TV coverage and big screen coverage at stadium.	.5	8000 A/V P
9/30/00	Sister-Sister African American women’s event – Cleveland with display and flyers	8.0	1600
10/4/00	Key leader open house Maple Heights, with display and kidsbooks	3.0	22
10/7/00	The Mustard, Turnip, Mixed Greens Festival and Collard Green Cook Off, Copley Ohio – photo display, flyers and kidsbooks.	8.0	A/V
10/8/00	Spaghetti Dinner at Maple Heights nursing home with display, kidsbook and flyers	3.0	?
10/19/00	Adoption Corner in Cleveland Restaurant – display and flyers	4.0	75
10/28/00	Make a Difference Day project , Warren NOAS with publicity for agency & mission	6.0	P A/V
11/2, 11/3, and 11/4/00	Adopt Ohio statewide conference on adoption – Sheraton Four Points, Columbus – display, kidsbooks and flyers	24.0	P
11/6/00	Community Open House in Maple Heights – kidsbooks, flyers, display	3.0	A/V

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
11/14/00	Family Recruitment program and dinner in Warren for National Adoption Awareness Month. – display and kidsbooks	2.5	25
11/15/00	Morning Journal – Columbiana county – donor sponsored child specific full page ads	?	P
11/16/00	Mailed Flyers to 30 donors for community -- Columbiana County bulletin boards	?	P
11/23/00	The Adoption Fair at Warrensville Heights Library – flyers and kidsbooks – sponsored by Cuyahoga County	4.0	50
11/26/00	The Adoption Fair at Maple Heights Library with flyers and kidsbooks, - sponsored by Cuyahoga County	4.0	10
12/2/00	Delivered flyers to some African American churches in Warren and Youngstown	2.0	400
12/5/00	Angel Tree Open House in Warren with displays/flyers community donors with child specific photos. TV interview about Angel Tree and waiting kids, TV video of waiting kids, print reporter	3.0	250000 A/V 120 P
12/13/00	Child specific classified and display ads in newspapers ads – classes in Warren.	N/A	P
12/20/00	Kwanzaa principles related to adoption flyers to African American pastors in Youngstown and for Warren Kwanzaa events along with waiting child flyer with child specific photos and short narratives.	6.0	P
12/20/00	Radio audio PSA's to 6 radio stations including country station, oldies, gospel	.5	250,000 A/V
1/3/01	Child Specific Posters in Howland and Warren business for ed groups	2.0	P
1/3/01	Repeated Classified ads and ed groups	N/A	P
1/3/01	Window display at NOAS Warren for Martin Luther King & Black history month	1.5	?
1/10/01	Display and story telling on adoption to entire grade school assembly and parents at Word of Life Christian Academy, Warren	5.0	500
1/10/01	Child specific posters for restaurants – Lorain, Cuyahoga, Trumbull and Mahoning	?	?
1/12/01	Cleveland area Cable TV community Calendar ads for 7 stations	N/a	250,000 A/V
1/13/01	Maple Heights Library, Martin Luther King celebration with child specific flyers	2.0	30
1/15/01	Same Library Program in Warrensville Hts.	2.0	150

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
1/25/01	Community Calendar Ads for print in Maple Heights Area	N/A	P
1/28/01	Awareness presentation at New Springfield Church of God with display and kidsbook	1.0	A/V
1/28/01	Flyer for restaurants with family testimonials	N/A	P 35
2/6/01	Awareness Presentation – Warren Exchange Club	1.0	20
2/8/01	Boys, Boys, Boys matching event with video, photos, and recruitment narrative and additional info from social workers at Maple Heights, NOAS	1.5 hours	30
2/12/01	Payroll inserts for Maple Heights City employees	N/A	500 P
2/17/01	Crowdtations Breakfast – Western Reserve Historical Society – flyers, kidsbooks – African American audience	2.0	150
2/22, 2/23, 2/24, and 2/25/01	Eastwood Expo Center Home and Garden show display with kidsbook, flyers, and display board of waiting kids.	37.0	9000
3/1/01	KSU Black grad students brown bag meeting with NOAS video, flyers with African American kids and kidsbook and picture display.	2.0	15
3/5/01	Family Recruiter group Warren – adopted child presentation and community awareness	2.5	30
3/5/01	Girl scouts posters and art work for future use	N/A	P
3/11/01	Summit County Music festival with full display, kidsbook, and flyers	5.0	100
3/15/01	Display, kidsbook, and flyers at “Family First Council” at the Boardman Holiday Inn on South Ave for Mahoning Co. Comprehensive Strategy	8.0	N/A
3/21/01	YSU Social Worker Field Fair on campus	8.0	1000
3/24/01	12 Annual Karate Kids Tournament at Poland Middle School, Poland Ohio – display flyers, kidsbook and banner all day	8.5	400
3/29/01	Home Builders Association, (HBA) Table Top Night with members and vendors with displays at Mr. Anthony’s Banquet Hall in Boardman on South Avenue – display, kidsbook, and flyers	4.5	400
3/29/01	On-going awareness Public Service announcements on 6 radio stations.	EA. AD .5 MIN	250,000 A/V
4/7/01	Ashtabula Church – 20 African American Pastors – will pass child specific flyers	2.0	125
4/18/01	Homes Magazine. Com ad for specific child provided by realtor in real estate booklet	?	P

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity/ Event</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># Attended</b>
4/21/01	Pilot program boys at Parkman Community Center – Parkman - kids books – information meeting – spokes families spoke of their adoption experiences.	2.5	30
4/22/01	Charity Walleye Tournament – ending weigh- in for participants and families– display and kidsbook at Mosquito State Park	2.0	200
4/23/01	Legislative breakfast NOAS Warren – to raise awareness – display and kidsbooks	1.5	12
4/24/01	The Review article and 2 page photo story on an adoptive family – feature article in accent on family section	N/A	P
4/25/01	KSU Trumbull campus presentation and kidsbooks	1.0	25
4/26 through 4/28/01	Ashtabula Mall display and books all day	33.0	700
4/27/01	Child Specific flyers and ads sent to area business association with president’s letter	N/A	1000

## Referral Sources for Intake Calls 10/1/97 to 4/30/01

<b>Intake Call Referral Sources</b>				
	10-1-97 to 6-30-99	7-1-99 to 4-30-01	10-1-97 to 4-30-01	
<b>Referral Source</b>	<b>Number</b>			<b>Percentage</b>
Adoption Publication	5	4	9	1%
Agency PR	12	15	27	2%
Ohio Families For Kids	151	43	194	12%
Family/Friend	27	56	83	5%
Fund Raiser	15	11	26	2%
Internet	4	27	31	2%
NOAS adoptive Family	16	17	33	2%
NOAS Staff	45	38	83	5%
Newsletter	1	1	2	0%
Newspaper	53	189	242	15%
Ohio Adoption Guide	13	9	22	1%
Other	11	12	23	1%
Other Agency	100	139	239	15%
Phone Book	52	61	113	7%
Radio	13	14	27	2%
Self	39	28	67	4%
Special Event	65	237	302	18%
Special Mailing	1	1	2	0%
Television	2	22	24	1%
Unknown	20	60	80	5%
Wendy's	N/A	7	7	0%
<b>Total Intake Calls:</b>	<b>645</b>	<b>991</b>	<b>1636</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: These calls are inclusive of the entire agency's recruitment efforts, not just those undertaken in the Cleveland vicinity.

<b>Referral Sources for Families That Have Accepted Placements</b>						
	<b>Oct. 1, 1997 to June 30, 1999</b>		<b>July 1, 1999 to April 30, 2001</b>		<b>Oct. 1, 1997 to April 30, 2001</b>	
<b>Referral Source</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Unknown	21	31%	17	20%	38	26%
Other Agencies	16	25%	37	45%	53	36%
NOAS Staff Members	8	12%	7	9%	15	10%
Ohio Families For Kids	7	11%	5	6%	12	8%
National Adoption Month Kickoff publicity	5	8%	3	4%	8	5%
NOAS Adoptive/Foster Families	5	8%	8	10%	13	9%
Boat Show	3	5%	1	1%	4	3%
Self	0	0%	4	5%	4	3%
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **60% Follow-up Questionnaire**

**“A minimum of 60% of families who do not follow through after initial contact with NOAS will be contacted”**

1. Hello, is this Mr./ Ms. \_\_\_\_\_?

Hi my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from Northeast Ohio Adoption Services. I am following up with families who contacted our agency within the past year to see if we can be of any further service to you.

2. Our records show that you are not currently working with our agency, is this correct?

Yes      No

We are currently trying to learn how we can better serve families and therefore retain more of them.

3. Please be candid, why did you decide not to work with NOAS?

4. What could we have done differently to encourage you to work with our agency?

5. Are you working with another agency now? If not, is there anything we can do to encourage you to work with NOAS now? What?

6. Can I send you some updated information about NOAS for you to review? If yes, verify mailing address.

6. What questions can I answer for you?

Thank you for your time in answering these questions. We are attempting to make constant improvements within our agency so that more children find loving homes!

**CM/6-16-99**

## Results from Family Follow-up:

Listed below are the results from the **99** families that she attempted to contact:

<b>Description of call</b>	<b># in that category</b>	<b># that requested more info. about NOAS during our follow-up call</b>
Number of families who were no longer at the last known number	32	0
Number of people who hung up on us	2	0
Number of families we were unable to reach despite numerous attempts	3	0
Number of families who did not follow through because they wanted an infant	9	3
Number of families who decided not to pursue adoption at this time for undisclosed reasons (changed their minds)	7	3
Number of families that did not follow through for personal reasons i.e. health, death in family, etc.	10	4
Number of families that didn't follow through because the process was more complicated than anticipated	7	5
Number of families who are currently working with another adoption agency	12	7
Number of families that indicated having problems with NOAS (never received information packet, never received notice of education classes, family found training dry and boring, took too long for people to get back to them when they called)	4	4
Number of families that claim to just be gathering information when they called	11	9
Number of families that are now eager to work with NOAS	2	2
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>37</b>

**Only two of the 37 families that request a second mailing of information about NOAS followed through with starting the adoption process. Unfortunately, neither of the families completed the process.**

## Ohio Families for Kids Research

Much of the marketing philosophy and plan was developed based on the knowledge derived from the Ohio Families for Kids (OFFK) Initiative. NOAS retained the former recruiter for OFFK, to develop the marketing plan. OFFK was a 9-county adoption and foster care reform initiative that was able to successfully target those families that were likely to consider adopting the types of children in the care of public agencies. OFFK was successful because it was research based and promoted the strengths of the waiting children. It educated the public about the benefit to them (their self-interest) in adopting.

In 1995, Ohio Families for Kids commissioned research to profile Ohio's current successful adoptive and foster families receiving subsidy. Lida Advertising, in Wichita, Kansas conducted the research, using a segment of the Claritas national demographic profiling system called MicroVision Consumer ID clustering system. The system uses census and aggregate consumer demand data to classify every household in the U. S. into one of 50 unique market segments. Each segment consists of households with similar demographics, interests, purchasing patterns, financial behavior and demand for products and services.

The MicroVision research identified 14 of MicroVision's 50 segments as being more likely than others to become foster or adoptive parents. In addition, the research clearly indicated that foster and adoptive parents are the same people in terms of their demographics, interests, purchasing patterns, financial behavior and demand for products and services. Most social service agencies erroneously launch two separate recruitment campaigns, one for foster parent and one for adoptive parents. Similarly, we suspect that, adoptive parents who ultimately adopt large sibling groups are not significantly different than those indicating a desire for one child. Very few parents approach an agency requesting a large sibling group but after repeated exposure to the importance of the sibling bond and education about the financial help available to support the children, many are open to the idea of expanding their family. This has significant implications about the importance of repeatedly including discussions about siblings throughout the parent education groups and how to go about recruiting families!

Overall, we know that successful foster/adoptive families tend to be blue-collar workers with income and education that is below the national average. They live in both urban and rural locations. The MicroVision research can also be used to identify key segments geographically, by zip code. This geographic pinpointing was used to help select focus areas for recruitment. In addition, the MicroVision research was used to target sources for messages. For example, we know that current successful adoptive/foster families tend to shop in stand-alone discount stores like Wal-Mart more than the mall and many in the top segments buy 15+ lottery tickets each month. This helps identify places to put our promotional materials and staff resources that may have been overlooked in the past. The idea of targeting specific communities and saturating them with the message that children—especially sibling groups—need families and bring new joys to adoptive families draws on the Circle of Effectiveness model. Child specific recruitment begins at the center and reaches out, while other avenues begin from the outer circle and move inward, ensuring that people are hearing and learning about waiting sibling groups and are engaging in learning more. This strategy provides the multiple messages through multiple sources needed to move people from awareness to education to action.

Unique to this Project has been the invitation to everyone in a community to help children find families. Realistically, only a small percent of the public will ever become adoptive parents. Typical recruitment efforts have tried to directly reach only that small percent. The community-wide, narrow focus with deep saturation approach encourages the entire community to support adoption. Everyone, on either a personal or professional level, can help children find families. By increasing the number of sources explaining the needs and benefits of adopting a sibling group, the chance to reach the small percent that will become adoptive parents increases. And as community support for adoptive families increases, more families have a chance to hear positive personal stories and see benefits of adoption.

We also drew upon the theory of social marketing which is defined by Andreasen as, “the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society.” Traditionally, adoption agencies have operated from the organizational mindset, which sees the mission of the organization as inherently good. Social marketing stresses the importance of meeting the needs of the target audience (adoptive parents). When effectively implemented, social marketing helps the community see adoption as beneficial to children, families, and the community at large.

Typically, social service agencies enter relationships with businesses as if we have nothing to offer, social marketing suggests that this is ineffective and will not sufficiently increase the number of potential adoptive families. Mutually beneficial relationships are more sustainable. When a business believes that our mutual customers needs can be met by working together, they will be more likely to participate. One example of utilizing social marketing is to approach hair salons in targeted neighborhoods, which are frequented by current and potential adoptive parents, and begin a partnership in which pictures and descriptions of children are displayed in their shop. The obvious benefit for the children is exposure to potential permanent families; the benefit for the salon is customers increasing their loyalty to the shop because of the shops attempts to help waiting children. Bellefaire JCB’s Minority Adoption Project (MAP) in Cleveland, Ohio is utilizing this example of social marketing. The waiting children are actually having their hair done at the salon that is displaying their picture. This personal contact with the children increases the businesses commitment to helping.

More information regarding the OFFK project can be obtained by contacting Mary Brooks at (330) 434-4713 or by E-mail: [MaryBrooks@juno.com](mailto:MaryBrooks@juno.com).

## **Randy's story**

### ***THIS AND THAT***

#### ***Have You Told Your Children Today Just How Much You Love Them?***

Jack and Helen Lucas had never had the pleasure of doing that til just recently, when after many years of knowing that they were unable to have any children, in April of "99" they met a 15 year old boy named Randy. Helen had tried to talk Jack into adopting years before but he had decided he wanted to wait til he had his own place with a nice yard and some room for children, which they now have.

In November of 1997 they had a meeting with the Northeast Ohio Adoption Services. They took 36 hours of classes and were approved for up to 3 children. Randy's foster parents Bob and Cathy dropped Randy off at his new home with Jack and Helen in July of "99." It was a happy but sad time. They all spent some time together and had lunch, but as in all partings when it came time to leave the tears could not be stopped. Of course Randy felt hurt and betrayed and he retreated to his room crying his heart out. Helen and Jack went to Randy and Jack proceeded to tell him a story about a young boy who was devastated when the police came to his home to tell his father that he had to leave because his mother was divorcing him. Jack was 13 when his dad left and he wanted to go with him so badly. When he was 14 in a courtroom he told them he wanted to live with his Dad. And so Jack told Randy it's OK to cry. The new family held each other and cried together. Randy finally calmed down and slept well that night.

He didn't want to call Helen and Jack "Mom and Dad," so to help him get used to the idea they called each other Mom and Dad. After a couple of weeks it just seemed natural to do the same. It had worked. They got Randy into Robert Bycroft School and that is when Randy informed them he wasn't going and they couldn't make him. Jack didn't argue with him and did manage to get him on the bus the first day, but after the third day he informed them that he hated it. It was definitely time for another talk, and after convincing Randy to give it a month's try for them, he finally decided that school wasn't so bad after all. Randy did so well that he received the student "quarter of the year" award and his teacher gave a speech about how far he had come.

Randy sure must have learned to love his Dad for every night he would go to bed at 9:00 and set his alarm on his watch, lay his ear on it so he would hear it go off when his dad was about to come home from work. He would wait for him to come into his room before he would say anything. Jack, Helen, and Randy were becoming a family. On March 22, 2000 it was time to go to court. Randy was put on the witness stand and asked questions. Jack and Helen also had to have witnesses and testimonies on their behalf. They were also individually taken into the Judge's chambers and questioned. Nervous yet excited, they awaited Judge Pike's final decision. After everything was over, Judge Pike commended Jack and Helen and told them that Randy was now awarded to them to be their legal son.

Jack says of his son, "We love Randy and we are so very proud to have him as our son. In the courtroom everyone was crying, but not Randy and I. We were hugging each other as tight as we could." The three of them left the courtroom with their arms wrapped around each other as one happy family.

Jack and Helen thank the Lord and the wonderful caseworkers that helped them. He says, "What I love most is when Randy looks at us and says, "I love you Mom, I love you Dad."

I had not mentioned during this story that not only does it take special people to take on the responsibility of adoption, but also Randy is mentally handicapped.

Gold bless you Jack and Helen Lucas! And Hello to you Randy Lucas from your Dad's co-workers at Masco Tech! Welcome to the family.

*From "The Connection," written by fabricating plant forklift operator Andie K.*

# **Appendix G**

## Focus Groups Hosted by NOAS Staff:

Date	Type of Group	Length of Group	Estimated Number of People in Attendance
6-18-98	Professionals at NEOARE meeting	1.0	15 people
6-18-98	Professionals at NEOARE meeting	1.0	14 people
7-11-98	Parents who attended the Sisters and Brothers Together Picnic.	1.0	20 people
7-11-98	Children who attended the Sisters and Brothers Together Picnic.	1.0	12 children
4-13-99	CCDCFS and private agency social workers	1.0	15 people
4-13-99	CCDCFS and private agency social workers	1.0	20 people
4-13-99	CCDCFS and private agency social workers	1.0	15 people
<b>Total:</b>		<b>7.0</b>	<b>111</b>

## **Focus Group Questions – Children**

### **Openers**

1. Tell us about your favorite memory with your siblings.

### **Agency**

2. Did it feel like your social worker really cared if you stayed with your siblings or not?  
Why, why not?
3. Did you stay with your siblings in foster care? In adoptive home?
4. If you were separated from your sibling, did the social worker talk to you about why you were separated?

### **System**

5. If you were separated from your siblings in foster care, did you visit them regularly?  
How often? Why?

### **Clinical**

6. If you have been separated from your siblings at any time, how did that feel?

### **Closure**

7. If you could say anything to the people who get to make decisions about siblings being separated, what would you say?
8. Share one more fond memory of your siblings.

## **Focus Group Questions – Families**

### **Agency**

1. What written policies about sibling placement and visitation are in place at the public agency you are working with?  
  
How well is the policy monitored?  
  
Is the policy followed?
2. Did it appear to you that it was a priority to the worker to place the siblings together? Why, why not?
3. Did the social worker encourage you to keep all of the siblings together?
4. Did you accept the entire sibling group? Why/ why not?
5. Did you find out after having the child(ren) placed in your home that they had other siblings in different foster/adoptive homes?
6. Did the social worker discuss with you the importance of sibling bonds?
7. Did the social worker attempt to remove the barriers that made it difficult to accept a sibling group?

### **System**

8. Did the court order sibling visitation?
9. What are the disadvantages for the system when siblings are placed together?
10. What are the advantages for the system when siblings are placed together?
11. What are the system barriers that prevent or make it difficult to keep siblings together?
12. What are the characteristics of foster and adoptive homes that are successful at caring for sibling groups?

### **Clinical**

13. If you are the parent of a sibling who does not reside with one of their siblings, how do you think this has affected your child?
14. What supports do families need in order to keep siblings together? CM/2

## **Focus Group Questions – Professionals**

### **Agency**

1. What are your agencies written policies about sibling placement and visitation?  
  
How well is the policy monitored?  
  
Is the policy followed?
2. What system does your agency utilize to track siblings, both when they enter care together and separately?
3. What agency values promote siblings being placed together?
4. What agency values impede siblings being placed together?
5. What worker values impede siblings being placed together?
6. What worker values promote siblings being placed together?

### **System**

7. Does the court order sibling visitation?
8. Does the court order siblings not to visit?
9. What are the disadvantages for the system when siblings are placed together?
10. What are the advantages for the system when siblings are placed together?
11. What are the system barriers that prevent or make it difficult to keep siblings together?
12. What are the characteristics of foster homes that are willing to accept sibling groups?

### **Clinical**

13. When are you successful at keeping sibling groups together?
14. What are the clinical barriers to keeping sibling groups together?
15. What clinical barriers cause siblings to be separated?  
  
Who gets to make the decision that they will be separated?
16. What are the clinical benefits for the children when they are placed together with their siblings?

17. What are the clinical benefits for the children when placing them apart?
18. What therapeutic interventions are you currently using with separated siblings?
19. What has your experience been related to adult adoptees searching for their siblings?
20. What supports do families need in order to keep siblings together?

# **Appendix H**

## Sibling Trainings Provided by NOAS staff:

Date of Training	Who was Trained	Length of Training (hours)	Estimated Number of People in Attendance
5-14-98	Professionals who attended the Partners in Permanency Conference	2.0	40
6-18-98	Professionals at the NEOARE meeting	2.0	40
6-29-98	NOAS staff members	2.0	16
12-8-98	Keeping the Promise of Permanency: Achieving Excellence in Special Needs Adoption (CWLA and the Family Builders Network – San Antonio, Texas)	1.5	125
12-8-98	Keeping the Promise of Permanency: Achieving Excellence in Special Needs Adoption (CWLA and the Family Builders Network – San Antonio, Texas) “Regina’s Bag of Tricks” – she discussed siblings during her training	1.5	75
3-1-99	Professionals attending the Grantee’s Meeting	2.0	50
3-11-99	Professionals and parents attending the Ohio Department of Human Services Conference	2.0	35
4-6-99	Lisa Petrus’ unit at CCDCFS	1.5	30
5-5-99	Professionals and parents who attended the NOAS Spring Conference	2.0	6
7-15-99	Bernie Brook’s unit at CCDCFS	1.5	30
7-29-99	Participant attending the North American Council on Adoptable Children conference	1.5	29
8-18-99	Nancy Fong-Farmer’s unit at CCDCFS	1.5	40
8-18-99	Elsa Popchak’s unit at CCDCFS	1.5	30
9-14-99	Participants attending the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA) Conference	1.5	30
9-15-99	Cindy Weiskittel’s unit at CCDCFS	1.5	30
9-16-99	Jocelyn Dillard’s unit at CCDCFS	1.5	21
9-20-99	Placement department at CCDCFS	1.5	9
10-13-99	Ken Boris’ unit at CCDCFS	1.0	26
10-18-99	Sandra Holt’s unit at CCDCFS	1.5	44
10-20-99	Veronica Halloway’s unit at CCDCFS	1.5	37
2-9-00	CCDCFS foster parent support group	1.0	30
4-1-00	Curtis Proctor’s class at Case Western Reserve’s Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences	1.0	20
4-25-00	Workers at the Ohio Youth Advocate Program	1.25	11
5-9-00	Workers at the Cleveland Christian Home	1.5	20
6-5-00	Workers at Beechbrook	2.0	25

<b>Date of Training</b>	<b>Who was Trained</b>	<b>Length of Training (hours)</b>	<b>Estimated Number of People in Attendance</b>
6-15-01	Guardian Ad Litem's Promoting Permanency in Sibling Relationships	3.0	18
6-16-00	Participants at the Ohio Family Care Association conference "Caring for Families Caring for Kids"	3.0	38
10-5-00	Participants at the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA) conference "New Challenges: New Solutions"	1.5	8
11-3-00	Participants at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Statewide Adoption and Foster Care Conference	1.5	14
2-8-01	Bellefaire foster parent ongoing training	3.0	40
2-9-01	Participants attending a one-day workshop on adoption issues at John Carroll University	1.0	25
4-23-01	CCDCFS foster parents attending a cluster meeting (Harvard Community Center)	2.0	35
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>54.25 Hours</b>	<b>1027</b>

### **32 Trainings Provided**

# **Siblings are Forever**

**3 Hours**

This workshop is designed for social work practitioners,  
administrators, and foster/ adoptive parents.

**Developed By:**

**Connie Maschmeier, MSSA, LISW, CCDC III**

**Contributions from: The Institute for Human Service  
Regina Kupecky**

## **Siblings Are Forever Competencies:**

- ◆ The participant is knowledgeable about the importance of siblings throughout an individual's lifespan and the benefits experienced by children when placed together.
- ◆ The participant is aware of common reasons siblings get separated in the child welfare system and can identify valid and invalid reasons for separation.
- ◆ The participant is aware of the benefits experienced by children when they are placed with their siblings.
- ◆ The participant is knowledgeable about the Sibling Decision Making Matrix and how to utilize it in making sibling placement decisions.
- ◆ The participant acknowledges significant grief and loss issues experienced by children in the child welfare system and how those issues manifest themselves through behavior.
- ◆ Participants understand the value of "normalizing" a child's feelings and the need to "guide" them through the grief process.
- ◆ Participants can identify ways to help siblings feel connected when they do not live together.

## **Workshop Synopsis:**

We know that at least 85% of children in the child welfare system have siblings and 75% of those siblings get separated from each other at some point while they are in care. This workshop provides an overview of the significance of the sibling relationship, valid and invalid reasons for separation, the benefits of keeping siblings together, and how to maintain connections between children who are separated.

## **Time:**

3 hours

## **Equipment Needed:**

TV/VCR

Flip Chart, easel, and markers

Overhead Projector

Prepared handouts and transparencies

A small bucket for the “bravery bucket”

Small pieces of colored paper for the “Bravery Bucket”

Prize for “Bravery Bucket” drawing (a book related to foster care/ adoption works well)

Balloons

Three candy bars for the group who wins the balloon activity

Two different kinds of small candy (enough for the entire class to have one each)

Envelopes (one for each workshop participant)

Index cards (one for each participant – need to fit into envelopes purchased)

Masking Tape

Markers (needed for group activities)

## **Siblings Are Forever Outline:**

<b>I.</b>	<b>Welcome and introductions</b>	<b>15 minutes</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Do You Remember When...? – WIIFM</b>	<b>5 minutes</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Significance of the Sibling Relationship</b>	<b>35 minutes</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Why Are Siblings Separated?</b>	<b>35 minutes</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Benefits of Keeping Siblings Together</b>	<b>15 minutes</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>I Don't Think I Can Handle a Kid Who Has That Problem!</b>	<b>20 minutes</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>When is it Right? When is it Wrong? Utilizing the Sibling Decision Making Matrix</b>	<b>25 minutes</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>Building and Maintain Sibling Connections</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>Conclusion/ Evaluations</b>	<b>20 minutes</b>

## **Siblings Are Forever List of Handouts**

- 1. The Sibling Bond (Available on NAIC website  
[http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f\\_siblin.htm](http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_siblin.htm))**
- 2. Siblings Are Family Too by Regina Kupecky can be obtained by contacting  
Three Rivers Adoption Council in Pennsylvania (1993).**
- 3. Reasons for Sibling Separation**
- 4. Benefits of Keeping Siblings Together**
- 5. How Did Gina Get So Old**
- 6. Children's Reaction to Loss (hard copy available)**
- 7. Themes in Adoption (hard copy available)**
- 8. Sibling Decision Making Matrix**
- 9. Ways to Build Sibling Connections**
- 10. Prediction Path (hard copy available)**
- 11. Guide to Your Child's History (hard copy available)**

**Note:** Hard copies of the handouts (with the exception of "Siblings Are Family Too" can be requested from Northeast Ohio Adoption Services, 5000 East Market Street, Warren, OH 44484.

The handouts were developed by the Institute for Human Services for the Ohio Welfare Training Program and are included with their permission.

## **Siblings Are Forever List of Overheads**

- 1. Siblings Are Forever**
- 2. Lack of Value...**
- 3. Reasons for Separating Siblings**
- 4. Benefits of Staying Together**
- 5. Stages of Grieving**
- 6. Sibling Decision Making Matrix**
- 7. It's Important to Maintain Sibling Bonds...**

## Section I. Welcome and Introductions

15 minutes

**Use: Overhead # 1: Siblings Are Forever**  
**Prepared flip chart listing training agenda**

**Trainer Instructions:** The trainer introduces himself/ herself to participants and asks them to introduce themselves to the group giving their name, agency, position, and number of years of experience.

**Review the agenda.**

**Explain the “bravery bucket”**

- **Point out a bucket you have brought to the training.**
- **Validate people’s fears about speaking in a group setting but also explain the value of their professional and life experience.**
- **Every time a person answers or asks a question or is the spokes person during a group exercise they get to put the name in the bucket to win a prize.**

**Trainer Tips:** If training foster or adoptive families modify the questions. Possible questions include: number of years of parenting experience, number of years fostering, size of the largest sibling group they have cared for, etc.

**It is helpful to write the agenda for the workshop on a flip chart (prior to the training) and post it for easy reference during the remainder of the workshop.**

**To reinforce the “bravery bucket” remind everyone to put their name on a slip of paper after they introduce themselves to the group.**

## Section II. Do You Remember When...? WIIFM

5 minutes

**Trainer Instructions:** Ask participant to either stand or raise their hand if the following statements are true about them:

1. You have one or more siblings?
2. You look like one or more of your siblings?
3. You spend some or all of the holidays with your siblings?
4. You reminisce about your childhood when you get together with your siblings?
5. Your significant other/ friends look at you like you are crazy when you get together with your siblings because you are able to communicate an entire memory with a single look or a half of a sentence?

Give one or two examples of a silly story about you and your sibling that you are fairly certain others will not find funny or be able to relate to:

- Let people feel uncomfortable for a second because they assume you were trying to be funny but your joke failed.
- Ask if anyone else wants to share a similar story about their siblings - usually no one volunteers
- Then say, of course you don't want to share your stories, you don't want to embarrass yourself like I just did! Those stories that I just told you are only special to my brother/sister and I. They aren't funny to you, you weren't there to experience them.

Every time we separate siblings we strip them of the opportunity to share their memories with the people they created them with. No one else can really appreciate their memories like their siblings can.

Encourage participants to reflect upon their own relationship and memories with their siblings as the workshop progresses. We are not talking about cases; we are talking about children and families!

### Section III. Significance of the Sibling Relationship

35 minutes

**Use:**           **Handout #1 – The Sibling Bond**  
                  **Handout #2 – Siblings are Family Too**

**Trainer Instructions:** The following information is to be presented in mini-lecture format.

- 85% of children have siblings and 75% of siblings end up living apart after they enter foster care.
- Sibling relationships last longer and are more influential than any other relationship we have, longer than that with our parents, spouses, or children.
- We have to consider the sibling bond over the lifetime not just at the time we are working with the children. As children they are playmates and companions, through playing, sharing, and talking they learn how to relate to the outside world. In adolescence they may weaken their ties while searching for independence and identity. When they have their own children their relationship may be put on the back burner but, usually, their relationship eventually becomes stronger. The cycle comes full circle when their parents and spouse may be gone and their children are busy raising their own children. Siblings one again become companions.
- The bond that exists between siblings from dysfunctional families is even stronger. They have learned to depend on one another.
- Separating siblings from one another adds to their emotional burden, they must grieve over yet another loss (often a more significant one).
- Older siblings are able to provide a sense of history for their younger siblings, to make them aware of family relationships and ties unknown to agencies and records! They validate the horrors and the good times in the birth family.
- Siblings sometimes get their self-esteem from one another. If they are able to see good qualities in their siblings, they may see themselves as having some good qualities.
- Adult adoptees who were part of the child welfare system search for their siblings more often than their parents. They are suing child welfare agencies to get access to closed records and for wrongful adoption related to their being separated from their siblings.
- The words, touches, glances, jokes, and laughter that only family understands is lost when we separate siblings.

**Trainer Instructions:** The trainer informs the group that they are going to participate in an activity designed to heighten their awareness about what children experience while involved in the child welfare system. Encourage them to think of their own family while listening.

For some individuals, the Guided Imagery elicits a strong emotional response. Trainees should be told that if they believe that the exercise will be painful, they will not be required to participate. Also, if trainees become uncomfortable during the exercise, they may discontinue participation or pass when questions are asked.

To prepare for the exercise, dim the room as much as possible by turning off the lights and closing the drapes. Instruct the participant to put down their notebooks and pens, close their eyes, and relax. Remind them to keep their eyes closed until you instruct them to open them again. Remind them to keep all thoughts to themselves. They will be given an opportunity to respond to questions as the end of the exercise.

Begin with your voice as medium volume and, as you set the atmosphere, become quieter until the room is nearly silent. As you progress through the fantasy, do not read it...act it out! Use your voice, fluctuating tone and volume appropriately. Improvise and personalize as necessary. Go slowly and utilize pauses frequently to emphasize important points and to allow participants to answer the text questions silently.

**Trainer Tip:** Post the flip charts created after the guided imagery on the wall because they will be referenced later in the training.

**Insert hard copy of “The Fantasy” Here**





- Report out on **flip chart** how they felt

**Ask the participants if we can agree that children usually act out their feelings?**

- Report out on **flip chart** how children behave when they feel this way

## Section IV. Why Are Siblings Separated?

35 Minutes

Use: Overhead #2: There is often a lack of value...

#3: Reasons for Separation

Handout #3: Reasons for Sibling Separation

### Trainer Instructions:

- Display OH # 2 while explaining the activity.
- Divide the participants into 4 groups.
- Have two groups list all of the clinical reasons that children get separated (whether they agree with the reasoning or not).
- Have two groups list all of the system reasons kids get separated (basically everything that is not specifically related to children's behaviors).
- Give them 10 minutes to complete their lists.
- Have each group post their list and review them until all answers are shared

**Trainer Tip:** If there are less than 16 people in the training form only two groups. If there are more than 30 people do this activity as a guided discussion with a participant writing responses on a flip chart.

**Have everyone stay in their groups for the next activity.**

Listed below is a list of common answers about why children get separated in care.

### Clinical Reasons

- Their combined **individual needs** may seem too severe and numerous for one set of parents. Professionals believe that they will reach their highest potential, if they get more individual attention by being the only child.
- The children are **sexually acting out** with one another.
- Too much **“sibling rivalry”**.
- One child, usually the oldest, is the **“parenting child”** or “too protective” of siblings so they are removed so the other children can bond with the new parents and the parenting child can become a child again.
- Some people believe that siblings will work together **to sabotage an adoptive placement** if they want to return to their birth home or a previous foster home.
- Workers believe that separately the children stand a better chance of finding a permanent home **because more people are willing to adopt one child.**
- Age differences “the children don't really know each other anyways”, it will be in the child's best interest to be in a home **with children their own age.**
- During and after visits, the children are out of control, the **visits “upset the children”**
- If they were separated when they first came into care they can become **attached to their individual foster parents** and not want to leave.
- Separated based on a **therapist's recommendation.**

### System reasons

- Ineffective Management Information Systems (MIS)
  1. If the children have different last names the MIS may not link them as being siblings.
  2. If children come in sequentially they may not get linked as siblings.
  3. When an adoption is finalized the child's record is sealed permanently even to their siblings.
  4. Multiple placements make it difficult to track who is related and once used to live together.
- High **worker turnover** makes the informal knowledge about who is related difficult to track and rely on.
- Workers are so **overloaded and burned out** that they cannot or will not search the record for information on siblings.
- **Foster parents** want to **disrupt one** of the siblings or part of the group and keep the others.
- Worker, agency, GAL, Judge **bias** "I could never parent all those kids" inferring that no one can.
- Workers, agency, GAL, Judge biases about placing in **non-traditional families**.
- **Ignorance** about the importance of keeping siblings together.
  - “Give the kids a fresh start”.
  - “He/she doesn't even talk about their sibling(s)”
  - “Oh, they've waited a year, we must recruit individually.”
- Different departments, agencies/ professionals **do not communicate** with one another.
- Communication problems between private foster care networks and the custodial agency
- Cultural biases about what constitutes a large family.

**Trainer Instructions: With the participants already in their original four groups divide each group in half. Have four prepared note cards each with one of the following topics on them: individual needs, sexually acting out, parentified sibling, and sibling visits.**

**Instruct the groups that one half of the group has to come up with as many arguments as possible in 5 minutes as to why their reason (identified on the notecard) is a valid one for separating siblings and the other half of the group has to identify all possible reasons why it is not a valid reason to separate siblings. They can record their answers on the note card. Each group will need a spokesperson to review their list for the group.**

**Display OH #3 at the conclusion of this activity.**

**Trainer Tip: A fun way to split the group in half is to put candy at their table. Provide the same number of pieces of candy as there are participants and be sure to have two different kinds/colors. Then all group members who chose the same kind of candy have to argue for or against the reason on their notecard.**

The trainer should be sure the following points are covered:

### **Individual needs**

- Just because a child is needy does not necessarily mean that they will benefit from being an only child. Having too much attention can be problematic for some abused and neglected kids. It is very rare that the child actually gets moved to a home where they are the only child. This discounts the value of the sibling relationship and the healing power of family.

### **Sexually acting out**

- Removing a sibling from a home because he/she is being sexually reactive with his/her siblings does not guarantee that the sexual reactivity will not continue in another environment. They are sexually acting out because of their past, not because they are siblings! Therapy would be a more appropriate intervention. We often move the children into foster homes that have other children due to the shortage of foster homes!

### **Visits “upset the children”**

- Actually, being separated from their siblings “upsets the children.” Emotions are high during visits; they are often chaotic and exhausting for everyone involved! Increasing the frequency of visits is the answer, not decreasing them.

### **“Parenting child”**

- The responsibility felt by an older child for a younger sibling is not necessarily negative, adoptive parents can use it constructively. An adoptive family would be wise to gain the trust of the parenting child by asking them for advice and showing care for the other siblings. The entire group is more likely to trust and bond to the parents if the parenting sibling does. The parenting child can become a child again and the younger child can learn that adults can be trusted. Also, the parenting child’s self-esteem often revolves around their ability to take care of their younger siblings. When their parenting role is stripped of them they often become worried, anxious, and angry not carefree as intended.

The following points should also be covered:

### **“Sibling rivalry”**

- When children are separated because of sibling rivalry, we are teaching them that the way to deal with conflict is to walk away from it and not to work it out. Siblings who remain together learn how to resolve their differences and develop stronger relationships. “Too much” sibling rivalry is very subjective, who gets to decide this?

### **To sabotage an adoptive placement**

- They may try but if the family is properly prepared before placement and they “weather out the storm” the rewards can be wonderful. Many families who have adopted sibling groups report that they like having more than one child so that when one is acting out they most likely have another who is still being good! Research indicates that children with positive attachments to their siblings are more likely to form positive attachments with their adoptive parents.

### **With children their own age.**

- We would never think of making such an ignorant statement about a birth family! Regardless of the age difference, siblings are often the only constant the children have in each other’s life. They can be a source of security and familiarity.

Address other reasons as time allows.

## **Section V. Benefits of Keeping Siblings Together**

**15 minutes**

**Use:**            **Overhead**    **#4 Benefits of Keeping Siblings Together**  
                      **Handout**     **#4 Benefits of Keeping Siblings Together**  
                      **Handout**     **#5 How Did Gina Get So Old?**

**Trainer Instructions:** This information is shared through mini-lecture format and guided group discussion utilizing overhead # 4. This is a summary of the points made while identifying valid and invalid reasons for separating siblings.

### Benefits Experienced by Children

- Kids don't have to experience another loss
- Kids feel safer in new home when siblings are around
- Kids don't have to worry and wonder about their siblings
- They tend to be capable of bonding to an adoptive family if the sibling bond has not been damaged.
- They have a life long bond to share
- They are allowed a sense of history
- They can recall the good and the bad from their past
- They can heal with their siblings
- They can learn to work through their problems rather than just running from them or giving up
- They learn how to share and communicate
- Siblings can maintain their birth order even if there are other children in the home
- The children have someone they most likely look like
- Children don't have to ask the painful question, "Why were my siblings adopted and I wasn't?"

**Trainer Instructions:** Read HO #5 "How Did Gina Get So Old" out loud to participants.

**Trainer Instructions:** Through guided group discussion identify ways in which the agency and individual social workers benefit by placing siblings together and record responses on a flip chart.

Possible responses include:

- Only have to do one homestudy
- Only have to go to one home visit per month (reduced gas and travel time)
- One finalization packet to do and one finalization to attend (depending on local court expectations)
- More likely to see one therapist (less telephone calls to make)
- Children may not need as much therapy because they aren't as traumatized (less money spent)
- Social workers are better able to manage their caseload – reduces burnout- less staff turnover
- Less time spent doing sibling searches for adult siblings
- Less chance of lawsuits

**Section VII. I Don't Think I Can Handle A Kid  
With "THAT" Problem!**

**25 minutes**

**Use: Pre-made flip charts and markers**

**Trainer Instructions: Pre-make six flip chart pages each with one of the following written across the top of the page: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression, Chemical Abuse/ Dependency, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Reactive Attachment Disorder.**

- **Divide the participants into 6 groups**
- **Tell them to decide as a group on one word that they think describes the diagnosis on their sheet i.e. ADHD = hyperactive.**
- **Explain that the DSM IV is the Diagnostic Statistic Manual in its fourth revision. It is the tool that clinicians use when attempting to label a persons behavior and give them a diagnosis.**
- **Try to minimize their fear of the DSM IV, you are not looking for clinical terms just everyday words.**
- **Explain that they will have a very short amount of time to complete this task before having to give their sheet to the next group and begin on the next one.**
  - **Based on the room you are training in specifically explain how the papers are to be "shifted" i.e. clockwise.**
- **They should not duplicate any words already on the list.**
- **Give each group 1 flip chart sheet and a marker.**
- **As soon as the groups unfold their paper begin counting backwards from 10 indicating to them that they are rushed to add a word.**
- **Once every group has added to all six sheet have the groups tape their sheet up in the room (try to keep the sheets near each other).**

**Trainer Tip: You may want to bring a whistle or something else to get their attention when it is time to move on – this activity can get loud. It is helpful if the trainer has provided tape strip to each group as they were completing the flip charts.**

- **Ask the group to take a minute to read down all the sheets (silently) and ask them if they notice any similarities.**
  - **Common answers include "everything is negative", or "they all look very similar"**
- **Enthusiastically say, "they could all be the same kid couldn't they"!**

- **Refer participants back to the flip charts that were created as part of “The Fantasy”**
  - **We made a list of how children often feel when they are part of the child welfare system, and we agreed that children usually act out their feelings.**
  - **Read over the list of behaviors we initially created and then look at the DSM IV lists that we just created.**
  - **What do you notice? The behaviors that kids display due to their feelings are the same behaviors that cause them to be labeled with a mental health diagnosis.**

So, maybe the excessive and concerning behaviors that we often see in children are related to the grief and loss they are experiencing and feeling!

The DSM IV is very subjective. While there are some highly qualified individuals utilizing it to diagnose children and form their treatment plans, there are many others who struggle to use it properly

## **Grief – What Does It Look Like?**

**Use:**  
**Overhead # 5 Stages of Grief**  
**Handout #6 Children’s Reaction to Loss**  
**Handout #7 Themes in Adoption**

**Trainer Instructions: This information is taught through mini-lecture and guided group discussion by utilizing overhead # 5.**

**Most of us have learned the stages of grief at some point in time and most of us have experienced some level of grief in our lives.**

**Ask if anyone remembers the stages of grief are:**

**Denial**  
**Anger**  
**Bargaining**  
**Depression**  
**Resolution**

**Note- taken from Elizabeth Kubler Ross**

**They do not have to be experienced in order and they are not mutually exclusive (can be experiencing more than one stage at a time.**

**Ask Rhetorically: How does grief affects children who are removed from their birth homes due to abuse/ neglect? Reminder – we all agreed that children tend to act out their feelings!**

Ask the group for examples of behaviors a child might exhibit in each of the stages.

The following is a list of some potential correct answers:

- Shock/ denial
  - Compliant (the honeymoon)
- Anger
  - Oppositional/ hyper sensitive
  - Sulk, isolate
  - Sleep/ eating disturbances
- Bargaining
  - Try's to make everything okay by making promises
  - Will be very disappointed when they don't get what they wanted
- Depression
  - Despair, listlessness, fear, panic
  - Lack of interest in people/ surroundings
  - Regressive behavior is common
  - May see emotional and physical symptoms
- Resolution
  - Begins to respond to people
  - Begins to build attachments
  - Begins to have goals

Unfortunately, most children in the child welfare system do not get to the resolution stage because they are repeatedly moved and do not find stability.

We know that children in the child welfare system have experienced severe trauma and for many their trauma includes being separated from their siblings. We believe that most children act out their feelings through behaviors, so maybe we need to be giving permission and guidance on how to grieve all of the losses they have experienced in their young lives.

**Trainer Instructions: Ask participants to again look at the DSM IV lists and help them link behaviors that are commonly labeled as DSM IV diagnosis with specific stages of grief i.e. often see a lot of ODD/ CD diagnosis in the anger stage but this also sometimes looks like depression depending on the child. The may abuse chemicals in either the anger or depression stage, etc.**

Explain that you are not trying to be overly simplistic, some kids truly have psychiatric diagnosis and many need medication. However, there is value in learning more about grief and how it affects children.

If you were to be going to a therapist would you rather be told you are grieving or had a mental health diagnosis of depression? Similarly, children often respond better when their feelings are validated and normalized while they are still being held accountable for their behaviors.

Some families are scared away by large sibling groups if several of the kids have psychiatric diagnosis. If families and professionals had a better understanding of grief and loss more sibling groups would find permanence together!

## Section VIII. Utilizing the Decision Making Matrix

25 minutes

**Use: Overhead #6a and b: The Sibling Matrix**  
**Handout #8: The Sibling Decision Making Matrix**  
**Handout #9: Case Example**

**This material is taught through mini-lecture and guided group discussion while utilizing OH # 6 and Handouts #8 and #9.**

We've talked about the importance of the sibling relationship, valid and invalid reasons for separation, and we agreed that children in the child welfare system have experienced intense trauma and they act out their feelings related to grief and loss.

With all the complexities involved in child welfare cases it becomes very difficult at times to make objective decisions about sibling placements.

This was a tool developed by the Sisters and Brothers Together Project. It is based on the premise that siblings belong together unless there is a compelling reason in the children's best interest to the contrary. It thoroughly explores the sibling relationship, safety and attachment issues, the families abilities and the child's wishes.

**Trainer Instructions: Instruct participants to read HO #9 to themselves. As a group, utilizing OH # 6 (a and b) decide on the appropriate outcome. Encourage participants to read the narrative portion of the Matrix on their own time and to always use the narrative and the visual matrix when making sibling placement decisions.**

## Section IX. Building/ Maintaining Sibling Connections

10 minutes

**Use: Overhead #7: It's important to maintain sibling bonds...**

**Handout #10: A Guide to Your Child's History**

**#11: Prediction Path**

**Trainer Instructions: This material is covered through guided group discussion and utilizing overhead # 7. Group responses should be recorded on a flip chart.**

In situations where siblings must be separated (whether for clinical reasons or lack of available foster homes) the following can be done to help children feel connected to their siblings:

- Place them in the same foster care network
- Place them in as close geographic proximity as possible
- Have regularly scheduled visits (not less than 2 times a month). Everyone involved in the case needs to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Help the foster adoptive families build relationships with each other
- Plan regular respite activities for the children to spend time together. Have foster parents provide respite for one another thereby bring the kids together more often.
- Make strong lifebooks
- Hang pictures of siblings in the home
- Buy phone cards
- Send cards, gifts, E-mails to siblings (simple cards can be made out of construction paper)
- Celebrate siblings birthdays either with them or ceremonially in their absence
- Have them go to the same therapist
- Attend each others school events, staffings, etc.

When children cannot be in contact with their sibling (i.e. closed adoption, unsure of whereabouts, etc.) the following can be done:

- Consistently add pictures and reflections to the lifebook
- Celebrate the missing siblings birthday in some way
- Write letters to the missing sibling in the event that contact is re-established in the future
- Display a picture(s) of the missing sibling in the home
- Discuss the sibling regularly (i.e. how old they are currently, etc.)

## Section IX. Conclusion/ Evaluations

20 minutes

Use:            **Balloons, candy bars**

**Trainer Instructions: Instruct participants to get into groups of three. Give each group one balloon.**

- **Provide a disclaimer: this activity requires you to be very close physically to your group members. If this makes you very uncomfortable you can choose not to participate.**
- **Explain to the groups that the person in the middle can only use their mouth, the person on the left can only use their left hand, and the person on the right can only use their right hand. As a group they have to blow up the balloon and tie it.**
- **The first group to finish wins a “prize”**
- **Once one group is finished ask everyone to stop – often times they don’t want to!**
- **Ask the group why we did this activity.**
  - **The most common answer is “teamwork”**

**Respond by saying:**

- **While it did take team work to do this the real reason I had you do this was because for the rest of the day you are going to want to tell other people about this fun balloon game you played but unless they were someone in this workshop with you, they are just going to look at you like you are crazy. They didn’t share this experience with you and they will not relate to it. It is similar to what we put siblings through every time we separate them and take away the one person that they share all of their memories and history with!**
- **Give the group that finished first three different full size candy bars and tell them that they can argue over who gets which one just like real siblings would!**
- **Thank the group for their enthusiasm.**
- **Have a participant pick a name from the “bravery bucket”, give the winner their prize.**
- **Answer questions.**
- **Participants complete evaluations prior to leaving.**

**Trainer Tip: If you find yourself with extra time give the participants one envelope and one notecard. Ask them to address the envelope to themselves. Ask them to write down 3 things that were significant to them today in the training and that they intend to utilize/ draw upon in the future. Have them put the note card in the envelope and you collect them and mail them to their home in about 3-4 weeks.**

# Reasons for Sibling Separation

## **Invalid Reasons Often Used to Separate Siblings**

- ◆ Sibling rivalry – they argue.
- ◆ The children’s needs are too great – workers project that no family could cope.
- ◆ One “out of control” sibling might sabotage the entire placement.
- ◆ Children are sexually reactive with one another.
- ◆ Children act “out of control” when they visit one another.
- ◆ Workers are overwhelmed with the complexities of managing sibling relationships on their caseload.
- ◆ Age differences – “the siblings don’t really know one another anyways”.
- ◆ Parentified child deserves a chance to have his/her “childhood” without caring for siblings.
- ◆ Therapist makes a recommendation based on only having contact with one member of the sibling group.
- ◆ Foster/ adoptive parents want to disrupt one member of a sibling group and keep others.
- ◆ Ineffective Management Information Systems that do not link siblings when they come into care sequentially.
- ◆ Higher worker turnover – new workers are not familiar with the case and may have different values and goals.
- ◆ Guardian Ad Litem’s, Magistrates, and other court representatives may not value the importance of the sibling relationship and may interfere in keeping siblings together.
- ◆ Poor communication between custodial agency and network foster care providers

## **Valid Reason to Separate Siblings**

- Safety – sexual acting out or violence that is not responsive to therapy or other interventions.
- Current foster parent want to adopt the sibling(s) in their care and there is a strong mutual bond.

# Benefits of Keeping Siblings Together

## **Benefits Experienced by Children:**

- Kids don't have to experience another loss
- Kids feel safer in new home when siblings are around
- Kids don't have to worry and wonder about their siblings
- Children tend to be capable of bonding to an adoptive family if the sibling bond has not been damaged.
- They have a life long bond to share
- They are allowed a sense of history
- They can recall the good and the bad from their past
- They can heal with their siblings
- They can learn to work through their problems rather than just running from them or giving up
- They learn how to share and communicate
- Siblings can maintain their birth order even if there are other children in the home
- Children don't have to ask the painful question, "Why were my siblings adopted and I wasn't?"

## **Benefits Experienced by the Agency and Individual Workers:**

- Fewer families are needed for all the waiting children
- Only have to visit one home – less travel time, less family visiting time, less time coordinating sibling visits
- Less paperwork – only one homestudy , one finalization packet (depending on local expectations)
- Caseloads are easier to manage – less staff burnout, increased worker morale, and less staff turnover
- Reduced time helping adult adoptees search for siblings
- Decreased risk of lawsuits

HO # 4

## **HOW DID GINA GET SO OLD?**

**by Barbara Holtan**

The two birth sisters had been apart for about two years when they met once again. They had been adopted together when they were about three years old and 18 months old. Even during their stint in foster care they had lived together, but when Gina turned eight, they were separated.

Gina was acting out behaviorally and the adoptive family went from concern to frustration to fear. They didn't understand her. They couldn't imagine why she would have turned into such a terror. Gina was placed in a psychiatric facility and while she was there the family decided to relinquish her. Missy, the younger sister was then about six. The family would keep her. Missy was no problem. She was so different from Gina.

Tressler was contacted at this point to see if we could find a new family for Gina. We could and did. We counseled against splitting up the sisters. We told the relinquishing family that, in our experience, once the "bad" child departs, another child steps into this role. We reminded the family that Missy came from the same abusive background as Gina and was probably going to act out her anger and fear at some point.

The family was determined. Gina was replaced.

We did not hear anything more until very recently. The call came. Missy is now eight. She is acting just like Gina did. We've tried counseling. Nothing helps. Can you place her with the same family as Gina is in?

The family was approached and agreed readily. It has been a long haul with Gina, but she was now 10 and doing well. This was her birth sister. Of course, they would take Missy. The arrangements were made. It had been two years since the sisters had been together.

On that day Gina and Missy stared at one another. They hugged and started talking a mile a minute doing "catch up."

We adults moved away to the "business" part of all this and while papers were being signed and histories shared, Missy came up to her new Mom. She looked up in her face and asked, "How did Gina get so old?"

How could we answer? How could we explain why they had missed two years of each other? How could Missy know that this poignant question reaffirmed our longstanding belief that splitting up birth siblings is bad business? It is bad enough that kids lose their birth parents, their homes, and familiar surroundings, their genetic ties. How can we as professionals condone their losing their brothers and sisters, too?

(This article originally appeared in the Newsletter of Tressler-Lutheran Services Associates, York, Pa. It is reprinted by permission of the author.)

Barbara Holtan can be reached by mail at: 700 Light Streer, Baltimore, MD. 21230  
or by phone (410) 230-2840

HO # 5

# Maintaining Sibling Bonds

## **When Siblings Must be Separated Strive for the Following:**

- If siblings must be separately initially in foster care, make every effort to move them together as soon as possible.
- Place all of the siblings within the same foster care network.
- Place the siblings in a close of geographical proximity as possible.
- Plan respite/ recreation activities in which all of the siblings can be together (i.e. have the families be the regular respite provider for the siblings).
- Make sibling visits an expected responsibility of foster/ adoptive parents.
- Have all of the siblings see the same therapist if counseling is necessary.
- Encourage siblings to stay connected through:
  - Pictures
  - Phone calls (provide phone cards if needed)
  - E-mail
  - Letters/ cards (provide pre-addressed and stamped envelopes)
  - Celebrating birthdays/ holidays together
  - Attending each others school functions
  - Attending each others staffing/ Semi Annual Reviews when appropriate
- When children cannot be in contact with their sibling (i.e. closed adoption, unsure of whereabouts, etc.) the following can be done:
  - Consistently add pictures and reflections to the lifebook
  - Celebrate the missing siblings birthday in some way
  - Write letters to the missing sibling in the event that contact is re-established in the future
  - Display a picture(s) of the missing sibling in the home
  - Discuss the sibling regularly (i.e. how old they are currently, etc.)



Siblings  
Are  
Forever

OH - 1

**There is often a lack of  
value for sibling  
relationships resulting in  
invalid reasons for  
separation.**

# Some Reasons for Separating Siblings

**Invalid:** Sibling Rivalry  
Parenting Sibling  
Lack of Available  
Homes  
Sexual Reactivity

**Valid:** Safety  
Attachment

# **Benefits of Staying Together**

- **Don't have to experience another loss**
- **Feel safer in new home**
- **Don't have to worry and wonder about their siblings**
- **Capable of bonding to an adoptive family if the sibling bond is not damaged**
- **Have a lifelong bond to share**
- **Allowed a sense of history**
- **Can recall the good and the bad from their pat**
- **Can heal with their siblings**
- **Can learn to work through their problems rather than running from them or giving up**
- **Learn how to share and communicate**
- **Can maintain birth order**
- **Have someone they look like**
- **Have a medical/ health connection**

# **Stages of Grieving**

- **Shock/ Denial**
- **Anger/ Protest**
- **Bargaining**
- **Depression**
- **Resolution**

# MATRIX

**OH #6**

It is important to maintain  
sibling bonds even  
though siblings may be  
separated

OH-7

# **Appendix I**

NP No Problem  
 NVS Not Very Severe  
 S Severe  
 VS Very Severe  
 ES Extremely Severe

## 1998 Value Congruence Results

	NP	NVS	S	VS	ES	Total Responses
How big a problem is it for you to keep siblings together who enter care?		7	11	10	7	35
How big a problem is it for you to keep siblings connected who enter care and are placed separately?		7	8	11	9	35
How big a problem is it for your colleagues (people at your same rank in the organization) to keep siblings together who enter care?		5	12	12	3	32
How big a problem id it for your colleagues (people at your same rank in the organization) to keep siblings together who enter care?		3	8	11	5	27
How big a problem is it for the workers you supervise to keep siblings together who enter care?		3	3	4	3	13
How big a problem is it for the workers you supervise to keep siblings connected who enter care and are placed separately?		1	4	4	3	11
How big a problem is it for the people who supervise you to keep siblings together who enter care?	1	9	5	10	2	27
How big a problem is it for the people who supervise you to keep siblings connected who enter care?	1	6	7	11	1	26
How severe a problem is collaboration of DCFS workers with other systems and private providers about siblings?	1	6	13	11	2	33
How severe a problem is gathering and sharing information about siblings within CDFS?	1	11	8	10	4	34
How severe a problem is gathering and sharing information about siblings between DCFS & other agencies?		14	7	9	4	34
	4	72	86	103	43	

NP No Problem  
 NVS Not Very Severe  
 S Severe  
 VS Very Severe  
 ES Extremely Severe

## 2000 Value Congruence Results

	NP	NVS	S	VS	ES	Total Responses
How big a problem is it for you to keep siblings together who enter care?		7	7	7	1	22
How big a problem is it for you to keep siblings connected who enter care and are placed separately?		5	6	10	5	26
How big a problem is it for your colleagues (people at your same rank in the organization) to keep siblings together who enter care?		7	8	7	2	24
How big a problem id it for your colleagues (people at your same rank in the organization) to keep siblings together who enter care?		6	7	13	1	27
How big a problem is it for the workers you supervise to keep siblings together who enter care?			2	4		6
How big a problem is it for the workers you supervise to keep siblings connected who enter care and are placed separately?			1	5		6
How big a problem is it for the people who supervise you to keep siblings together who enter care?		7	6	8	1	22
How big a problem is it for the people who supervise you to keep siblings connected who enter care?		6	8	8	1	23
How severe a problem is collaboration of DCFS workers with other systems and private providers about siblings?	1	3	13	6	5	28
How severe a problem is gathering and sharing information about siblings within CDFS?		6	10	8		24
How severe a problem is gathering and sharing information about siblings between DCFS & other agencies?		6	10	4	6	26
	1	53	78	80	22	

# **Appendix J**

## NORTHEAST OHIO ADOPTION SERVICES

### **SIBLING POLICY**

Northeast Ohio Adoption Services (NOAS) believes that, unless there is a strong identifiable reason to the contrary, siblings should be placed together in adoptive/ foster homes whenever possible in order to maintain existing ties and supports and to minimize the degree of loss experienced by the children. Tools such as the Sibling Decision-Making Matrix may be utilized to evaluate the need for separation.

NOAS encourages agencies to refer siblings as a group when requesting adoption services.

If all siblings are not referred to NOAS, NOAS will attempt to coordinate contact between the siblings (if living apart) through sibling visits, pictures, phone calls, etc.

NOAS will inform prospective adoptive/ foster families of all known siblings and their status for a child(ren) that they express an interest in, as the law allows.

Once a family is selected for a child(ren), NOAS will attempt to facilitate contact between the selected family and the caregivers of the other sibling(s).

Should a family experience a disruption, high priority will be placed on keeping the entire sibling group together in placement. Tools such as the Sibling Decision-Making Matrix may be utilized to facilitate decisions regarding moving siblings.

Approved: Board of Trustees Meeting, 2/8/01