



Working With Military Families as They Pursue Adoption

Many military service members add to their families through adoption. Adoption workers who advise these families need to know of the many resources available inside and outside of the military support structure.

What's Inside:

- Benefits of using military families as adoptive resources for children
- Challenges and solutions in working with military families
- Military resources that assist families in adoption efforts
- Organizations with resources for military families



Benefits of Using Military Families as Adoptive Resources for Children

Military families can make excellent adoptive families for children in foster care. They have experience with adaptation and flexibility, are more likely to come from a variety of races and cultures, and have access to military benefits.

For a comprehensive view of what military families face in considering adoption, read *Wherever My Family Is: That's Home!* from AdoptUSKids at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourcecenter/militaryguide.pdf

Flexibility

Military families know how to be flexible and organized in multiple moves and how to deal with adversity and separations. They are experienced in adjusting to new surroundings, building new connections, and supporting each other all over the world.

Ethnic Diversity

Racial diversity within the military exceeds that of the general population.¹ Thirty-six percent of active duty military identify themselves as African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and other

¹ According to the 2000 census, minorities account for approximately 29 percent of the total U.S. population. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2001* (No. 15. Resident Population by Hispanic Origin Status, 1980 to 2000, and projections, 2005 to 2050).

racers.² The diversity of military communities and environments reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of children in foster care who need families.

Military Support Networks

Military installations have many built-in support networks for military families, including substantial health-care and housing benefits and “ready-made” communities. More benefits for adoptive families include adoption reimbursements (see page 5 for more information), Exceptional Family Member Programs for children with special needs (see page 5), and New Parent Support Programs (see page 6) on many installations.

Challenges and Solutions in Working with Military Families

Working with military families presents adoption social workers with distinct challenges:

- Possibility of a parent’s permanent change of station (PCS), deployment, or overseas assignment
- Increased involvement of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)
- Preconceptions about military families and lack of knowledge of available resources

² U.S. Department of Defense *Demographics 2008*.

Transfer or Deployment

If a family has already started the process of adoption and receives orders for a PCS or deployment, the family may be able to have their home study documents transferred to an agency near the new home or installation; however, many agencies require their own forms and protocols for the home study. In case of deployment, it is important that the military parent keeps his or her command informed about the adoption process to ensure that essential documents are completed and delivered.

If you're stationed overseas, licensed adoption agencies with social workers that can help U.S. military service members include the following nonprofit agencies:

- The International Social Service has social workers in 140 of the countries where the United States has military installations: www.iss-usa.org
- Adopt Abroad has representatives in Europe, Japan, Korea, and the Middle East: <http://adopt-abroad.com>
- VIDA (Voice for International Development and Adoption) is a not-for-profit agency with programs that span four continents: www.vidaadoptions.org

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)

Moving waiting children across State and county lines to join their adoptive families can add complexity to the adoption process. The ICPC establishes procedures for ensuring the safety and stability of placements across State lines. It is an agreement that applies when a child travels from one State to another for the purpose of adoption. All 50 States,

the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have signed this agreement, which requires an application for approval before a child can be transferred into the receiving State for placement. Parties must comply with the law of the sending State (the State where the child originated) before the sending State's ICPC office will approve the child's transfer. Also, home studies in the receiving State, where the family resides, cannot be initiated until ICPC receives the request from the sending State and gives permission to initiate the home study. For more information on interjurisdictional placement, go to: www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/preplacement/interjurisdictional.cfm

The Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA) officials will look at the State where the adoption is finalized to determine the appropriate receiving State (e.g., if a family is adopting a child from Kansas but is finalizing its adoption in Virginia, an ICPC referral would be necessary from Kansas to file in Virginia). AAICAMA has a map for users that shows how to access ICPC contacts, administrators, information, and more for each State. For military families stationed overseas, ICPC may not apply. Find out about specific States here: <http://icpc.aphsa.org/Home/states.asp>

Preconceptions and Lack of Knowledge of Resources

Working with military families may challenge some child welfare workers' beliefs or negative stereotypes about military families. The AdoptUSKids booklet *Answering the Call: Wherever My Family Is: That's Home! Adoption Services for Military Families* lists and refutes a number of myths having to do

with military life or characteristics that may prevent child welfare workers from viewing military families as good potential adoptive families.³

All families, military or civilian, should be evaluated on their abilities to meet a particular child's needs. Social workers can learn about issues in military families and the available support services by availing themselves of resources listed in this bulletin. To find services the Department of Defense (DoD) offers families, visit the Military HOMEFRONT website: www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/tf/adoption

Finding Solutions to Challenges

In the 1990s, the Children's Bureau funded five Adoption Opportunities grant projects exploring the recruitment of military families for the adoption of children from foster care.⁴ The grantees found the military to be a largely untapped resource for children waiting for families, and the benefits of placing children with military families included ethnic diversity, family structure, and the military support network available for families and children.

The grantees used creativity to overcome potential barriers to adoption by military families by:

- Training military personnel on installations (e.g., social workers, chaplains) to recruit families, complete home studies, and conduct postplacement follow-up visits for families stationed overseas

- Learning the cultural standards, protocol, and communication styles of military personnel to better appreciate the unique culture of many military families
- Offering flexibility in scheduling education and home study processes
- Providing the final court hearing by telephone after completing the postplacement services

Successful recruitment campaigns and adoption processes with military families depend on cooperative relationships among military services and agency personnel. Adoption workers need to understand and respect the military command structure and lifestyle, and military personnel may need to learn about the adoption process.

Military Resources That Assist Families in Adoption Efforts

In addition to the suggestions listed above, adoption professionals can help families draw on the resources available to military families. These include:

DoD's updated Adoption Reimbursement Policy (Instruction 1341.9) describes the policy and responsibilities for the reimbursement of qualifying adoption expenses. Up to \$2,000 per child or up to \$5,000 per year can be reimbursed for qualifying expenses and is available to military families whose adoptions were arranged by a qualified adoption agency. Benefits are paid after the adoption is complete. Find the Instruction here:

³ McKenzie, J. K., McKenzie, J. L., & Jackson, R. (2006). *Answering the Call: Wherever My Family Is: That's Home! Adoption Services for Military Families*. www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/militaryGuide.pdf

⁴ Humerickhouse, S. (1996). *Adoption: A Guide for Military Family Service Center Staff and Civilian Social Workers*. www.adoptea.org/Publications/index.html#military

www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/134109p.pdf

The Exceptional Family Member Program

helps families with a special needs family member before, during, and after transfer or PCS orders. It should be noted that the military defines “special needs” to mean “physical or mental disabilities or severe illness.” This differs from what adoption professionals often refer to as “children with special needs”—more broadly defined to include children who may be healthy but are older than 3 to 8 years, members of sibling groups, or children of color. For information on how “special needs” is defined in adoption, read Information Gateway’s *“Special Needs” Adoption: What Does It Mean?*: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/specialneeds

More details about the Exceptional Family Member Program are provided on the MilitaryHOMEFRONT website: www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF_DETAIL_1?section_id=20.40.500.570.0.0.0.0¤t_id=20.40.500.570.500.20.0.0.0

Affordable child development centers provide child care at many DoD locations. DoD requires the centers to provide high-quality services that are consistent from one installation to another, although not all services are available at all installations. More information is available on the Military OneSource website: www.militaryonesource.com/MOS/FindInformation/Category/Topic/Issue/Material.aspx?MaterialTypeID=9&MaterialID=16232#section_3

Family service centers are located on most major military installations and provide military families with information about adoption reimbursements and other familial benefits.

Each branch of the service has a different name for these centers.

Medical Care, Benefits, and Eligibility

Medical care is available to military families at military treatment facilities. Health-care benefits are provided under TRICARE in civilian medical facilities if access to care is not available at an installation.

An adopted child, including a child placed in the home of a service member by a placement agency, is eligible for benefits after the child is enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) (800.538.9552).

Specific information on access and eligibility is available by calling the DoD Worldwide TRICARE Information Center at 888.363.2273 and online at www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/index.jsp.

Each branch of the military has a Family Advocacy Program, which provides individual and family counseling services for military families. Most of the programs are geared toward spousal and child abuse prevention as well as the development of a healthy lifestyle. New Parent Support Programs at some installations are one component of the Family Advocacy Program. DoD Instruction No. 6400-05 and MilitaryHOMEFRONT provide more information: www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/640005p.pdf; www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/sp/fap

Adoption Tax Credit

Military families are eligible for an adoption tax credit. For more information, go to the Information Gateway webpage that lists grants, loans, and tax credits for adoption:

www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/grants_loans.cfm

Organizations With Resources for Military Families

AdoptUSKids

www.adoptuskids.org

The Children's Bureau funds AdoptUSKids, a comprehensive multifaceted project that houses an online photolisting service that provides pictures and brief descriptions of U.S. children in foster care waiting for families as well as a registry of waiting families. For answers to questions about adoption and the military, go to: www.adoptuskids.org/resourcecenter/rrtpackets/military.aspx

American Academy of Adoption Attorneys (AAAA)

www.adoptionattorneys.org

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

Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA)

www.aaicama.org/cms/

AAICAMA is a source of technical and legal assistance, training, and information

on interstate and intrastate adoption. The website is designed for State and local agency adoption professionals to work effectively with families who have adoption assistance agreements and move from one State to another.

Intercountry Adoption, U.S. Department of State

www.adoption.state.gov

The Office of Children's Issues formulates, develops, and coordinates policies and programs and provides direction to Foreign Service posts on intercountry adoption. Caseworkers can refer families to the website, which offers notices, alerts, statistics, and information about the Hague Convention and visas.

International Social Service (ISS), United States of America Branch, Inc.

www.iss-usa.org

ISS is a network of social workers in 146 countries. It is a nonsectarian, nonprofit agency that expedites sociolegal communication among social service agencies internationally. Services include arranging home studies and home study certifications, background checks, repatriations, and more. Social work professionals can find out if ISS can serve a family in a particular country.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)

<http://icpc.aphsa.org/Home/states.asp>

ICPC is a membership organization that does not work directly with families. From its website, caseworkers can access names

and contact information of the compact administrators who facilitate activities and placements under ICPC in their States.

Military Adoption Support Group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AdoptionSupportGroupForMilitaryFamilies>

This is an example of an online support group for military families at some stage of the adoption process.

MilitaryHOMEFRONT

www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil

The MilitaryHOMEFRONT web portal is a central, trusted, and up-to-date source for service members and their families to obtain information about all DoD Quality of Life programs and services. The Troops & Families section offers information and resources about adoption, children, teens, and parenting.

Military OneSource

www.militaryonesource.com

Military OneSource is an online, phone, and face-to-face resource for military members, spouses, and families. The Children & Youth section offers general resources on parenting and on adoption.

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

www.militaryfamily.org

NMFA is dedicated to identifying and resolving issues of concern to military families through education, information, and advocacy. It offers information on benefits for adoption reimbursement and health care but not on placement.

U.S. Department of Justice, Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

www.uscis.gov

USCIS administers the nation's immigration laws, including laws about adoption from foreign countries. Its website provides a list of USCIS offices, online forms, and answers to frequently asked questions about adoption.

For the latest resources in adoption issues that apply to military families, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway:
www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/military_families.cfm

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