

Site Spotlight

In past newsletters, we have highlighted George Washington University and the University of California at Davis. In this edition, we focus on the Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC), our Pacific Northwest site.

OSLC is a nonprofit, collaborative research center in Eugene, OR. Established in 1977 by a group of faculty and graduate students in the Psychology Department at the University of Oregon, OSLC has maintained a strong foundation in intervention, preventative treatment, and education for almost 30 years. OSLC currently houses more than 20 research projects aimed at increasing our understanding of the processes leading to healthy development and family functioning. These studies focus on research and interventions that strengthen children, adolescents, families, and communities. The Center employs more than 250 staff members, including research scientists, clinical psychologists, family interventionists, parent educators, statisticians, computer programmers, observers, interviewers, and support staff. Since 1990, OSLC has been funded as a Prevention Research Center dedicated to improving child well-being. Thus, many OSLC studies involve parent education, skills training, behavioral problems, foster care, adoption, and partnerships with community agencies/organizations with the collective aim of encouraging successful adjustment and discouraging aggressive behaviors within the family, the school, and the community. More information about OSLC is available online: <http://www.oslc.org/>

Stories from the Interview Team

In our last newsletter, we featured a segment called “A Day in the Life of an Interviewer,” in which interviewers recounted stories from road-tripping for the study. We received many positive comments about that article and, as a result, have asked one interviewer from each site to share some information about themselves and their experiences working for the project. You have all opened your homes and your lives to our study. In return, we want to share more about our team and the people who are traveling great distances to interview you.

Denise Ford, University of California at Davis

My name is Denise Ford, and I have been working with the Early Growth and Development Study for 3 years. I graduated from the University of Oregon in 1985 and worked for 18 years interviewing children and families at OSLC before moving to California in 2002.

I enjoy traveling from coast to coast and often do so as efficiently as possible. On a recent trip I had breakfast in Ohio, lunch in Pennsylvania, gassed up the car in Maryland, had dinner in Virginia, and traveled to North Carolina the next day! Through my job and personal travel, I have visited 47 states. This year, I hope to achieve my goal of visiting all 50. When I have a little free time on my work trips, I enjoy visiting botanical gardens.

It has been wonderful meeting participants at their local Starbucks, at restaurants, and in their homes, and I have thoroughly enjoyed facilitating each interview in the study. I admire the strength of each individual I meet and often wonder if I could handle the same circumstances with such grace. It has been a privilege to hear these incredible adoption stories, and I thank participants for sharing these amazing experiences with us!

Nooshin Sturdivant, George Washington University, Washington, DC

My name is Nooshin Sturdivant, and I have been interviewing birth and adoptive families for the Early Growth and Development Study for almost 2 years. I am currently pursuing my doctorate in clinical psychology with a specialty in child and adolescent therapy. My work with the study has been an important and invaluable complement to my studies, allowing me firsthand experience with families and a much more accurate view of the adoption process than anything I could learn in class.

I have enjoyed the study immensely and have come to appreciate the varied experiences of our participants and the warm welcomes that I receive in their homes. The many incredible individuals who take time out of their lives to help our study are clearly dedicated to the adoption process.

Through the study, I have traveled to Florida, Alabama, Oregon, Louisiana, and Rhode Island. In fact, I am now a regular at the nearest car rental agency, where I receive free upgrades from the employees who are always excited to hear my next travel destination. I have driven more these past 2 years than ever before and have accumulated a pile of MapQuest directions about 3 inches thick from my trips! I look forward to future travels and am grateful to our participants for their help in the study.

Erin Baldwin, Oregon Social Learning Center, Eugene, OR

My name is Erin Baldwin, and I have been working as an interviewer for the Early Growth and Development Study for almost 2 years. I recently graduated from the University of Oregon with degrees in journalism and psychology and hope to become a social worker in the field of adoption or foster care. This fall, I will begin my graduate study of social work at Portland State University and will be working for the child welfare division of the local Department of Human Services.

Working for the study has been an incredible learning experience for me. Through interviews with birth and adoptive families, I have grown to appreciate the complexities of the adoption process. The study has given me a unique opportunity to interact with individuals and families and to hear testimonials about the challenges of pregnancy and parenting. Hearing about such experiences has provided me a foundation of knowledge about the challenges affecting families and agencies, and I have learned to appreciate the time, thought, and love that goes into making an adoption plan. It is wonderful to hear that so many birth parents are pleased with their adoption decision and that, in turn, many adoptive families are able to start or expand their families.

Adoption is a true blessing for birth parents, adoptive parents, and (most of all) the child. I have enjoyed watching the children grow from babies to toddlers. It still surprises me how each child reacts differently to the toys and activities that we bring into the home. Although I do the same activities with all participants, each family brings a new experience.

As many adoptive families may already know, the most challenging part of the interview for me is getting all those bags up a steep driveway. (You should see me in an airport!) I have been able to travel to New Orleans, Chicago, Texas, Las Vegas, and all over the Pacific Northwest, inevitably forming close friendships with the staff of each local car rental agency and each local drive-through barista. I have become so accustomed to travel, in fact, that I was seemingly unphased by a 30-hour transit on a personal trip to India! Luckily, I love to travel and greatly enjoy exploring new cities and meeting our wonderful participants!

What We Are Learning

Adoptive families found the following five services provided by the agency to be the most helpful:

1. The counseling and support provided by the staff
2. Education: workshops, seminars, and informational sessions
3. Support groups and social gatherings
4. The matching process
5. Finding the birth parents/child

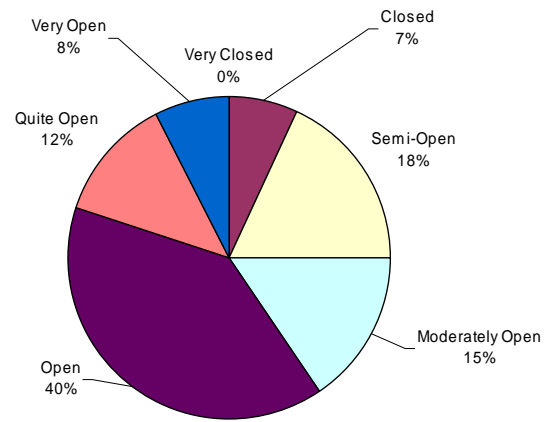
When asked about the services that adoptive families wished their agency had provided, 44% of families responded that there were *no other services* they wished their agency had provided. Of those families that desired change, the top five responses are provided below. These responses were gathered from respondents across the United States; although some agencies might provide the services listed below, some families felt that these services were lacking.

1. Providing support groups and other opportunities to meet other adoptive families. There was also a strong desire to have support groups designed for those families awaiting placement.
2. Counseling and support: Some adoptive families felt that the agency only cared about the needs of the birth parents. Other families expressed feelings of the adoption being about money. In general, these adoptive families felt that their emotional needs were not met.
3. Regular communication and providing updates throughout the various stages of the adoption process.
4. Informative classes and better education.
5. Providing support and assistance with the hospital process: Several adoptive families felt lost at the hospital and during the birthing process and did not know what their role was and where they should be.

What has been the most difficult aspect of the adoption process and becoming a father?

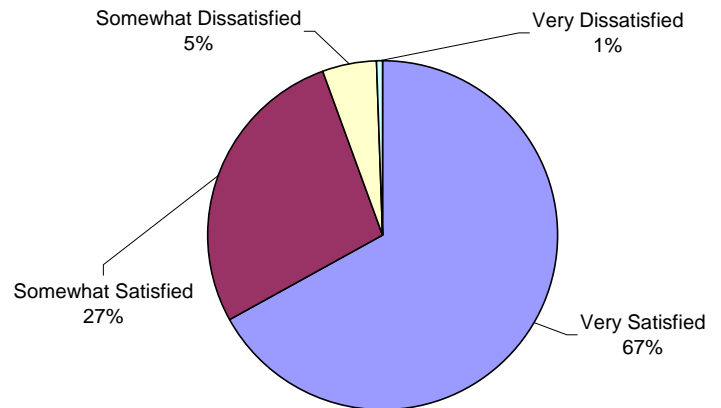
1. Adjusting to a new child in the home
2. Waiting to be selected and waiting for the child to be born
3. The process of making the adoption plan
4. Three-way tie: the financial burden, sleep deprivation, the infertility issue

Level of Openness,

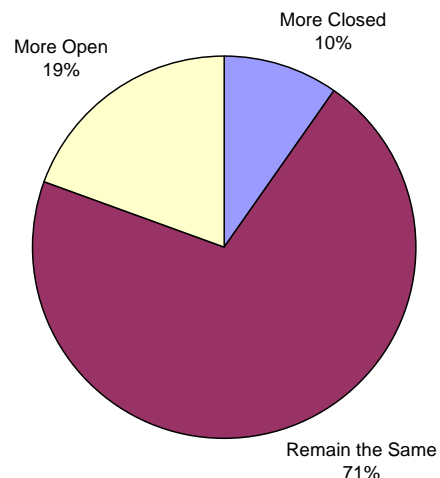


Very Closed: Adoptive parent (AP) has no information about birth parent (BP).
Closed: AP has only general info about BP, which was provided by the agency.
Semi-Open: All communication between AP and BP is through the agency.
Moderately Open: AP communicates by phone or email with BP, but there is no face-to-face contact.
Open: AP and BP have 1-3 in-person visits a year and communicate regularly.
Quite Open: AP and BP visit every other month and communicate often by phone or email.
Very Open: AP and BP visit at least once a month and communicate weekly by phone or email.

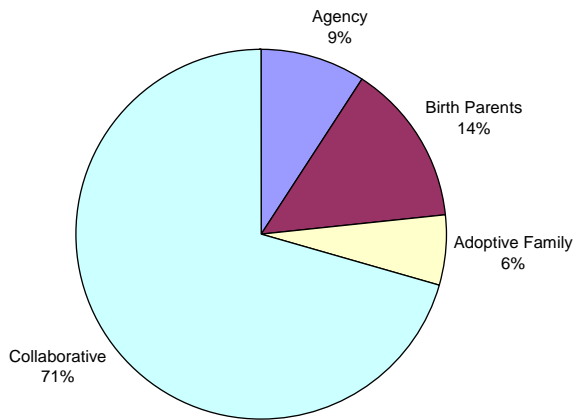
Satisfaction with Level of Openness



Desired Change in Level of Openness



Choice Regarding Level of Openness, as Reported by Adoptive Family



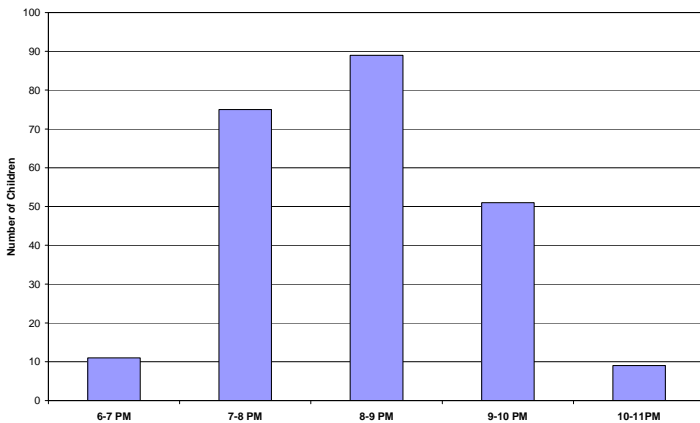
Agency: The agency had a pre-established policy on the level of openness.

Birth Parents: The birth parents decided on the level of openness.

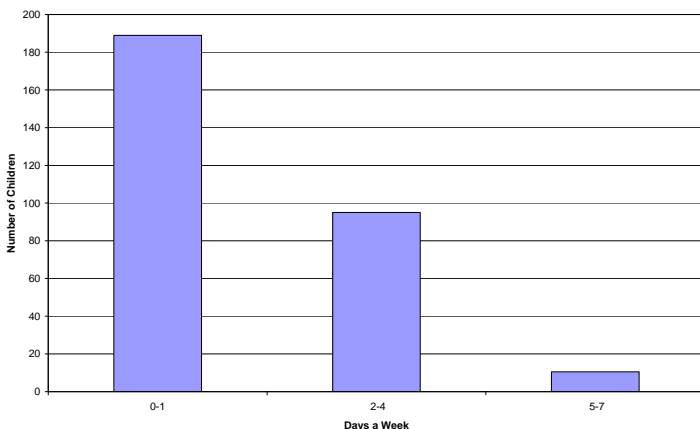
Adoptive Family: The adoptive family decided on the level of openness.

Collaborative: The adoptive family had some choice and negotiated with birth parents and/or agency regarding the level of openness.

Child's Bedtime



Child Resists Bedtime



What has been the most difficult aspect of the adoption process and becoming a mother?

1. Waiting to be selected and waiting for the child to be born
2. The process of making the adoption plan
3. Adjusting to a new child in the home
4. Failed placements and worrying that the birth mother might change her mind
5. Time management: balancing the demands of work, family, and personal life

What is the nicest or most important thing someone did for you during the adoption process and becoming a parent?

1. Practical support: throwing showers, loaning money, babysitting, making meals, and purchasing gifts
2. Emotional support, love, and prayers from family and friends
3. The birth parents choosing the adoptive parents and giving the gift of a life
4. Talking to other adoptive families about their experiences
5. Family and friends treating the new child as a biological child

The top five characteristics that birth parents were seeking when choosing an adoptive family:

1. They would provide educational opportunities for the child
2. They were financially secure
3. They had a close marital relationship
4. They had the type of family that the birth parents would have liked when they were growing up
5. One of the adoptive parents would stay at home with the child

The five most common difficult child behaviors, as reported at 12 months:

1. Child got into stuff that s/he is not supposed to
2. Child got dirty and needed clothes changed
3. Child has been clingy or whiny
4. Child interrupted adult activities or conversations
5. Child displayed noisy behavior such as screaming loudly or crying

The five most common difficult child behaviors, as reported at 22 months:

1. Child got into stuff that s/he is not supposed to
2. Child got dirty and needed clothes changed
3. Child has not been minding: saying no, breaking standing rules, or ignoring parent
4. Child displayed noisy behavior, such as screaming loudly or crying
5. Child interrupted adult activities or conversations



EARLY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT STUDY

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



EARLY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT STUDY

2006 Newsletter

Study Update

We are now in the middle of the 4th year of our study and are excited to report that we have reached our recruitment goals. We have completed enrolling new participants, and there are 528 birth mothers, 145 birth fathers and 357 adoptive families actively participating in the study. We will continue to visit and interview participants through the spring of 2008.

Given the success of the study, the investigators have developed several new research projects, including two projects under consideration for funding by the National Institutes of Health. If funded, the first project would allow us to enroll additional birth parents and adoptive families into the study through 2008, resulting in a larger sample size and the ability to learn more about the roles of birth parents and adoptive parents in the development of adoptive children. The second project would continue to follow the participants of the current Early Growth and Development Study. This project would allow us to visit some of the birth parents again and to visit some of the adoptive families through the preschool and school-entry periods. Both studies have received initial praise and positive reviews. We are very excited about the future of the study and will keep you up to date about these pending projects.

Recently, a few members of the study team attended the Second International Conference for Adoption Research in Norwich, England. The conference attendees included adoption researchers and professionals (social workers, counselors, etc.) from all over the world. Our study's lead investigator, David Reiss (at George Washington University), gave a presentation on rearing children in the adoptive family environment. Leslie Leve at Oregon Social Learning Center and Amy Whitesel at George Washington University gave a workshop on working together with adoption agencies to conduct research with birth parents and adoptive families. Our study team hopes to present at many future conferences as more data are collected and analyzed.

Please Keep in Touch!

Keeping in touch with you is very important to us. We understand that you might move or get a new telephone number. Even if you move to another state, you can still participate. If any of your contact information changes—for example, a new telephone number or address—please call or write to us using the information below. When you contact us with your new information, we will send a \$10 thank-you payment.

Speaking of new contact information, please note our new address!

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What We Are Learning

Some of you have been participating in the study for more than 3 years, and nearly all of the participants that are currently enrolled in the study have completed at least one in-person visit or phone interview. Therefore, we are finally at a stage where we can share some of our preliminary data. In this edition, we focus on demographic information about adoption and highlight your experiences with adoption agencies. Later this fall, this type of information will be shared with the participating adoption agencies nationwide. We hope that this information will help adoption agencies learn from your experiences throughout the adoption process and will help future birth and adoptive parents have positive adoption experiences. We have also included some information about adoptive families' relationships with the birth parents and about parenting and child behaviors.

Please take time to view some of our results in the insert of this newsletter.