

## HB 1534

The largest (and most important difference) between the foster care and adoption home assessment is the lens that is utilized to assess two different type of placements (temporary foster care placement and a long term adoptive placement).

While there may be similarities in topics of conversation, an adoption professional must assess an applicant's ability to not only meet a child's needs temporarily, but ensure that the developmental, emotional, physical, spiritual, educational, and financial needs of a child will be met for a lifetime without the supports of the child welfare system.

In a recent article published by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (a service of the Children's Bureau), contributing factors to discontinuity in an adoption can include caregiver(s) unrealistic expectations of an adoption and a diminished commitment to an adopted child especially when difficult behavioral circumstances arise.\* When a foster parent intends to provide temporary care for a foster child, these factors are understandably not at the forefront of assessment due to the temporary nature of a foster parent's role. However, with an adoption trained lens, these factors are discussed at length. Additionally, there are vast differences between the two processes, some outlined below:

### Professional Trainings/Specialization

- Adoption workers receive specialized training to understand the unique complexities of children in foster care and ensuring they are equipped to prepare adoptive families. In addition to several North Dakota and agency specific trainings, they also receive the following adoption specific trainings:
  - o 30 hour National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI)
  - o 14 hour CORE Teen curriculum (through Spaulding for Children)
- The adoption agency is accredited through the Council on Accreditation (COA) in adoption standards. COA is national organization that sets the "gold standard" for how to provide the best services based on researched methods of practice.

### Assessing for Temporary Care vs a Lifetime Commitment

- Supports
  - o Foster care focuses on assessing a family's ability to provide for a child on a temporary basis WITH day to day supports from the child welfare system.
  - o Adoption focuses on assessing a family's ability to provide for a child on a long term basis WITHOUT day to day supports from the child welfare system.
    - The North Dakota Post Adopt Network is available to all adoptive families but is only accessed on a voluntarily basis by adoptive families.
    - After an adoption finalization, no child welfare professionals are required to be involved in order to support the family through challenges. Adoption is assessing for a family's long-term ability to problem solve, handle conflict, access services, and advocate on behalf of the child without child welfare professional support and in the best interest of the child

- Questionnaires
  - o Adoption home assessments require prospective adoptive parent couples to engage in a questionnaire to help assess strength and growth areas within communication, conflict resolution, financial management, stress, affection, marriage expectations, social and relationship roles, and parenting and adoption expectations. All applicants engage in a parenting inventory to assess an individual's attitudes and beliefs towards parenting. Through these assessments, an adoption worker is able to engage in extensive discussion around strength areas and areas in which further exploration or referral might be necessary. Education and training is continuous throughout these discussions.
  
- References
  - o Per NDAC, adoption home assessments require a minimum of 5 references to speak on behalf of an adoptive applicant. Additionally, references are obtained by all adult birth children of the adoptive applicant(s) to provide insight into parenting techniques, relationship dynamics, and strength and growth areas. References can validate information received and can also provide insight into areas that may need further exploration or referral.
  
- Education
  - o Throughout the adoption home assessment, information gathering is only one piece of the process. A large portion of the process is providing education and preparing adoptive applicants for long-term success during challenging times. Engaging in "what-if" scenarios and talking through how to handle difficult situations independently is a natural part of the adoption home assessment process that is equally as important. Adoptive families do not have the support of the child welfare system after a finalization so preparing, educating, and providing resources is necessary to assess and ensure a family can maintain a stable and healthy family unit now and in the future.

#### Understanding a Family Unit

- Another important component of an adoption home assessment is gathering insight into immediate family member's attitudes and feelings about adoption and committing to a non-biological child for a lifetime. Ensuring members of the family unit are in support of an adoption plan is vital to the long-term commitment of adoptive parents and immediate family members.

NDAC 75-03-36-31 (4) addresses minimally what needs to be assessed and included in an adoption home assessment in North Dakota. All requirements are not assessed in a foster care home assessment so would not suffice under NDAC.

It is important to view the adoption home assessment process as a specialty practice. For example, if a child went in for a check-up and their primary pediatrician indicates they determine the child is experiencing speech delays, that provider is not going to treat the child on their own. They will make a referral to a speech pathologist who will assess the child, educate the parents, and offer specific tools for success. In this scenario, consider adoption as the speech pathologist. Engaging with a professional who specializes in the field and can adequately equip adoptive parents to be the most successful in their family unit is what is necessary.

\*Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2021). Discontinuity and disruption in adoptions and guardianships. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s-discon>