

Panel: General Magistrate Lieberman and Marcel Rivas (Our Kids).

- GM Lieberman embarked on a project this year to expedite the adoption process, make the adoption packet uniform for all agencies, meet with all involved in the process to better understand the issues delaying adoption finalization from the time a child is legally available for adoption. His project tracks adoptions based on the calendar year, and 265 adoptions have been finalized to date.
- Our Kids tracks are based on their fiscal year, and 426 adoptions have been finalized of the 483 children who are/were available for adoption.
- Prior to this endeavor, the agencies wouldn't even begin the adoption packet paperwork until after the TPR appeal process/final judgement. **THAT HAS CHANGED!!!** Now the time between TPR finalization and adoption is considerably shorter.
 - Delays will occur to this process if a Dade county child moves to Broward or if it is an ICPC (out of state) case. There is 1 international adoption case pending and that will have considerable delays.
- There is now a uniform adoption packet. All agencies require the same paperwork! It is on the Our Kids website:
http://www.ourkids.us/forfamilies/Documents/Combined_Adoption_Documents_216.pdf
Print out and complete the packet in its entirety. GALs can help the family with this!
- A disruption in an adoption is when an adoption has been finalized and down the road, the adoption fails and the parents give the adopted child back. This only occurs in 1-1.5% of adoptions.
- When matching a pre-adoptive parent with the child, there is full disclosure. This includes the medical background of the child and the history of the biological parent.
- 75- 80% of all adoptions are by relatives or non-relatives. Only 10% are by foster parents.
- The **adoption subsidy in Florida is \$5,000 annually (paid \$417 per month)** for the support and maintenance of the child until age 18. All who adopt children from the dependency system are entitled to the subsidy. It is rare that this is waived — even those who are financially well off usually accept the subsidy and save it for the child (college, car, etc.). All adopted children are also eligible for **tuition waiver at Florida State schools**. There is an adoption/ post-adoption unit at Our Kids to assist pre-adoptive families and post-adoption families.
 - If an adoption fails, the adoptive parents continue to receive the adoption subsidy until the child turns 18 unless their parental rights are terminated.
 - If a child has a condition, medical issue, etc. at the time of adoption, make sure that is noted on the final adoption. An adoptive parent can always ask for an enhanced adoption subsidy when their child needs more medical, mental health, or special services after the adoption was finalized. Enhanced subsidy requests are submitted to Our Kids – they then make the recommendation to DCF for approval/ denial.
 - There is no cost-of-living adjustment for the adoption subsidy, but adoptive families can always request an increase in the subsidy. (Example — many years ago, families received \$200 month, and now families adopting receive \$417).
 - There are post-adoption services available for families who ask and post-adoption support is also available, depending on need/urgency. (A 1-time payment; i.e., child needs operation.)
 - The adoption subsidy can never go down.

- There is a \$1,000 reimbursement for attorney's fees, birth certificates, physicals, etc.
- There is also a federal income-tax credit for families that adopt children from foster care.
- Pre-adoptive homes are usually relatives, non-relatives, or foster parents.
- Our Kids has an educational specialist and an education advocate to assist adoptive parents with educational issues.
- Pre-A.R.C and A.R.C. (Adoption Review Committee).
 - Pre-ARC- a committee of GAL, Our Kids, a representative from the agency, and the prospective adoptive parents (or all competing adoptive parents). The committee meets and reviews all competing applicants and the completed packets. They also review all cases where the background check of an applicant shows a criminal or abuse history. The GAL is invited to this meeting and asked for their recommendations!!! You should attend!!!
 - When there are competing applicants, the current placement, length of placement, attachment, siblings, and how the child(ren) is doing are all considerations for recommendation.
 - Pre-ARC recommendation is sent by Our Kids to DCF who makes the final determination. In the majority of cases ,DCF accepts the recommendation of the committee.
 - A denial letter is sent by DCF to the family not selected for adoption. The competing applicant has 21 days to appeal. If they choose to appeal, that delays the process as it then goes before the administrative judge, etc.
- **Placement review committee-** if the goal of a case plan is adoption and you know the placement is not appropriate — there is a negative home study, you have concerns, etc. — SPEAK UP!! You don't want a child forming an attachment if you know it won't result in a positive outcome.
- If a child is available for adoption and there is no family for the child, make sure the case manager has the child on the adoption information system and the Miami Heart Gallery.
- If someone wants to become an adoptive parent, Our Kid offers PRIDE classes for families willing to adopt from the dependency system.
 - Our Kids is no longer required to perform home studies for pre-adoptive homes if they have no children available for that particular family. (Example — the family only wants to adopt an infant and the youngest child available in the system is 5 yrs. old).

What can GALs do when the goal is adoption?

- Make sure child is in an appropriate placement;
- Reach out to Our Kids and make sure that no one has come forward with an interest in adopting;
- Make sure that the child is on the Adoption Information System and Heart Gallery;
- Get trained on completing the adoption packet so you can assist the family;
- Ask for a final adoption date if the case is dragging.