

## **Loss Intervention for Families in Transition (LIFT): The Need to Support Resource Parents who are Grieving the Loss of a Child due to Reunification**

The Loss Intervention for Families in Transition (LIFT) group is an innovative program at UCLA TIES for Families designed to provide resource parents with grief counseling during and/or following the reunification of a child with his or her birth family.

Concurrent planning practices have been adopted in child welfare settings to reduce the number of transitions in care and to expedite permanency for children in foster care (Andrade, Frame, & Berrick, 2006). In the concurrent planning model, efforts are simultaneously made to pursue reunification and adoption for children (Katz, 1990). Although concurrent planning focuses on the needs and best interests of children, concurrent planning practices simultaneously place increased emotional strain on resource parents who wish to adopt the child (Edelstein, Burge, & Waterman, 2001).

UCLA TIES has provided the LIFT group to grieving resource parents since 2007. Phone intakes are conducted with the resource family and referring social worker. An in-person intake occurs prior to the first group. Groups are co-facilitated by a licensed mental health professional (social worker or psychologist) and psychology postdoctoral fellow. They are conducted 2x/month with rolling admission to the group and participation as long as group members need.

Common themes and issues raised by resource parents are discussed, including feelings of disenfranchised grief regarding the loss of the child, hesitancy and anxiety about pursuing another placement, hopelessness due to multiple experiences of loss, negative attitudes towards child welfare workers and agencies, feelings of being misled and betrayed about the likelihood of permanent adoptive placement, and social expectations regarding how parents cope with the loss.

Pre and post-measures (i.e., Outcome Questionnaire, Inventory of Caregiver Grief) are administered along with a satisfaction survey at the end of services. Resource parents have reported positive feedback that the LIFT group provided a unique opportunity for families to process their experiences with couples and individuals who had similar experiences of loss. They have also reported feeling helped and supported by the group. Most families have expressed their willingness to consider another placement and many have decided to proceed with new prospective adoptive placements. We believe that loss intervention programs can play a valuable role in retaining resource parents who plan to adopt children from the foster system.

**Contact:** Eugenia Hsu Tsao, Ph.D., at (310) 206-7265 for additional information.

### References

- D'Andrade, A., Frame, L., & Berrick, J. D. (2006). Concurrent planning in public child welfare agencies: Oxymoron or work in progress? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28, 78-95.
- Edelstein, S. B., Burge, D., & Waterman, J. (2001). Helping foster parents cope with separation, loss, and grief. *Child Welfare*, 80, 5-25.
- Katz, L. (1990). Effective permanency planning for children in foster care. *Social Work*, 35, 220-235.