

IL-D900

DAILY NEWSPAPER

THE NEWS SUN

Waukegan, IL

Evening Circulation - 20,782
Daily

JULY 3, 2006



Disabled foster children face additional risks

By Allan Appel

SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

Children with disabilities have it rough enough. Children with disabilities in foster care are faced with additional risks.

United Cerebral Palsy and Children's Rights teamed up to issue a report, "Forgotten Children: A Case for Action for Children and Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care." It is touted as a first-of-its-kind review of how foster care systems serve (or fail to serve) children with disabilities. It is available at www.ucp.org and at www.childrensrights.org.

Of the more than 500,000 children in foster care, it is estimated at least one-third of them may have disabilities.

The report characterizes the problems faced by children with disabilities in foster care as systemic in nature. Caseworkers are not provided with the tools necessary to identify and assess

disabilities. And foster parents lack basic information concerning the special needs of the children placed in their homes. As a result, the children themselves are prevented from gaining access to the health care services needed to address their special needs.

The report then suggests a number of strategies to deal with these problems and to improve services for children with disabilities in foster care.

One such strategy would be to adopt standards for health care so that those vital services can be delivered to the targeted children in foster care.

Another strategy would involve the implementation of a rigorous timeline to screen and assess all children entering foster care. Special focus should be placed on all physical, emotional and cognitive areas.

The handling and processing of medical records need to be standardized. This could im-

prove the exchange and sharing of information among medical professionals, caregivers and other decision-makers.

Expand the scope of services and training that incorporate special intervention for children with disabilities. This would also include support and services for the period of transitioning when children with disabilities are ready to exit the foster care system.

Training and data collection need improvement as well. Comprehensive systems should be developed to coordinate the work of caseworkers, investigators and other child welfare professionals. By infusing the disability factor into the mix of medical evaluation and data collection, services stand a better chance of reaching the children in need. Children with disabilities in foster care are often forgotten. They usually lack a loud voice so their needs can be met. As a result, their health care tends to be neglected and their educational opportunities are usually limited.