



*Dear
Prospective
Adoptive Parent:*

**A letter from the
Erie County Department of Job and Family Services**

Congratulations on planning to adopt child(ren) placed in your home! Adding a “forever” member to your family is always exciting, whether by birth or by adoption.



Different from adding a child to your family through birth, the adoption of a special needs child forms a unique partnership between you as the parent and this agency. As the parent of an adopted child, you have the same rights and responsibilities as any parent. Determining how to care for your child, educating, providing love, food, clothing and shelter are just a few examples of your role as parent in this partnership.

Our role in partnership with you is as involved as you want it to be. The agency will only assist if you ask us to. In the beginning, you may find parenting an adopted child easy. As the child ages, you may find issues of abandonment by birth parents, identity concerns or behavioral/physical concerns are discovered. Post adoption services are available to you, no matter how long ago the adoption. They are even available to you through your county of residence even if you move from Erie to another county. For example, you may ask us to help in planning and finding resources for your child's particular needs.

Another valuable service offered are the subsidies available to offset the cost of providing for your child's special needs. These subsidies from federal, state and local taxes can be in the form of monthly checks for ongoing services or as a one-time payment for costly services. Subsidies can be reevaluated every year and/or as your child's needs change.

The monthly subsidy or check is the most frequently requested service. This subsidy is different than your foster care reimbursement check. As a foster parent, you receive monthly reimbursement for the care of the Erie County child in your home. This money is not payment to you but reimbursement for food, child care, clothing, shelter, travel, school fees and other costs of caring for the child. These are costs that parents usually pay but since Erie County is the parent, county taxpayers provide reimbursement to you. The money you receive is not taxed as income because the IRS assumes you spend all of it for the care of the foster child.

The state's adoption rules allow the monthly subsidy or check for any Title IV-E eligible child to equal the amount of your foster care reimbursement, but not to exceed it. Title IV-E is a federal funding source that helps offset costs of care of children of poverty.

Across the state, some foster families with special needs children spend the entire amount of their foster care reimbursement on the child's special, not regular needs - ie. trips to appointments, special devices not covered by Medicaid and other similar costs. In these cases, the foster family pay from their own pocket the cost of food, clothing and shelter for the foster child. In these cases, the foster family may receive as subsidy an amount equal to their county's foster care reimbursement. Erie County tries to keep reimbursement rates at a level which does not require foster families to contribute much, if any of their own income toward the care of a foster child.



Family circumstances also can be considered according to the state's adoption rules. For example, the circumstances of a foster family in which the parents are disabled or elderly and on a fixed income would be considered. Since there is no ability for the parents to increase their income and without help, could not absorb the usual costs of parenting – food, clothing, shelter – their family's circumstances could be considered when determining the appropriate amount of subsidy.

Negotiating the costs of adopting special needs children is a difficult task for both the parents and the agency. What is special needs? What is usual parenting costs? That is why we ask you complete the Special Needs Subsidy Worksheet. It helps both of us to break down the cost of the child's special needs.

To qualify for the monthly special needs subsidy, the child(ren) must first be considered special needs. For example, a sibling group, a minority, older or handicapped child are among the state's category of special needs. Your agency worker will be happy to discuss all of the categories with you.

Determining a child is special needs qualifies the child to receive a Medicaid card to assist with medical expenses. It does not automatically insure a monthly special needs subsidy check. The negotiation process for special needs subsidies begins with a Medicaid card and \$0.00 monthly subsidy.

For example, a minority child is a special needs child under the state's definition. The child then qualifies for a Medicaid.

Now to exam what the special needs of the child cost the adoptive parent. Hair or skin care products may be different from the adoptive parents. That would be an allowable cost. Attending workshops or classes to learn about a different ethnicity would be an allowable cost.

Just having a child from a different ethnic background does not create "special needs" cost. The cost of feeding, clothing, educating and sheltering the child is the same whether the child is of your ethnicity or a different one. Yes, you may have to spend additional time comforting and teaching your child to deal with insensitive or crude

remarks from other people. But this would be the same type of support you would give if you were comforting your birth child due to insensitive remarks about their hair color, nose size or any other taunts which come from inconsiderate people.

Now, let's look at the form you are asked to fill out. Your adoption or caseworker will be happy to assist you in completing this, if you wish.

Example

Let's pretend you are adopting a sibling group of three minority children. One is a eleven year old sexual offender of young children, one is an infant in braces with milk allergies and the eight year old has developmental delays. Using the form:

SPECIAL NEEDS SUBSIDY WORKSHEET

For: Johnny

DOB: 6/1/94

Date form completed: 12/15/05

Special Need	Service	Cost	Completion of Service
Sexual offender	Transportation to therapist 2x week – Cleveland	\$.40/mile x 105 miles x 2x week = \$361.20/mo*	Age 18 – 6/1/12
“”	Child care for children while Johnny attends treatment	\$ 50/ week = \$215.00/mo*	same as above
“”	Sensors on all bedroom doors	\$250 installed = \$20.83/mo	1 time cost
“”	Respite for parents	\$150/mo	6/1/12
Sexual offender	Socialization – football uniform & fees	\$125 = \$10.42/mo	12/15/05
Educational delays	Tutoring	\$25/hr x 2 hrs/week = \$215.00/month*	8/30/06

Total monthly subsidy request:

\$ 972.45

*Please remember that the average number of weeks in a month is 4.3. So anytime you convert a weekly amount into a monthly one, multiply by 4.3 not just 4.

Now, let's complete the worksheet for Jane, the eight year old with developmental delays

SPECIAL NEEDS SUBSIDY WORKSHEET

For: Jane

DOB: 1/12/97

Date form completed: 12/15/05

Special Need	Service	Cost	Completion of Service
Developmental Delays	Transportation to weekly speech therapy	\$.40/mile x 30 miles x 1x/wk = \$51.60	1/1/07
Developmental Delays	Training for parents and educational toys	\$ 75.00/mo	1/1/07
Developmental Delays	Tutoring	\$25/hr x 2x/wk = \$215.00	1/1/07
Special Needs – abandonment issues	Therapy	\$.40/mi x 20/mi x 2/mo = \$ 16.00	Don't know
Special Needs	Respite	\$150/month	ongoing
Developmental Delays	Reading to, helping with homework	\$5.50/hr x 60/hrs/mo = \$330.00	1/1/07

Total monthly subsidy request: \$837.60

Now, for the worksheet for Mary, the infant with leg braces and milk allergies:

SPECIAL NEEDS SUBSIDY WORKSHEET

For: Mary

DOB: 5/05/05

Date form completed: 12/15/05

Special Need	Service	Cost	Completion of Service
Braces	Transportation - Adjustments at doctor's	\$.40/mile x 10 miles x 1x/mo = \$16.00	5/1/06
Braces	Rubbing legs and applying hot packs once a day	\$5.50/hr x 30 hrs/mo = \$160	"
Milk allergies	Formula – 5 extra cans a month	\$16.99 x 5 = \$84.95	1 st birthday
Milk allergies	Reading food labels & cans Preparation of milk free meals	\$5.50/hr x 30 hrs/mo = \$165.00	ongoing
Special Needs – colic	Middle of the night soothing/ rocking/calming	\$5.50/hr x 45/hrs/mo = \$247.50	ongoing
Special Needs	Respite	\$150	ongoing

Total monthly subsidy request: \$ 823.45

Johnny:



Now let's take a look at how the agency evaluates the worksheet. We will look at Johnny's first. He is special needs as a minority, a part of a sibling group and has sexual offending behavior.

He passes the first criteria. He is eligible for a medical card and the opportunity to look at a monthly subsidy.

The foster parents receive \$30 a day for foster care reimbursement for care of Johnny. The amount of subsidy request of \$972.45 is more than the foster care reimbursement. The next overall criteria did not pass since the state limits subsidies to the amount of foster care received.

Even if the request is less than the foster care payment, the next step that must be taken is reviewing the worksheet is to look at all the costs and determine what is a cost to the parents because of the child's special needs.

Johnny has sexual offending behavior so the cost of transportation to the therapist is a covered expense. Child care for the other children is also appropriate since it is tied to the cost of treatment of Johnny.

The cost of sensors on the doors is an approved cost since it was recommended by the therapist. Since the total cost was a one time cost – it was divided into a monthly cost to be included in the monthly subsidy.

Respite for parents would be an allowable cost due to the severity of the child's behavior.

The cost of socialization may not be an allowable cost. All children need socialization and football fees and uniform may be a usual parenting cost. This area will require further discussion between the agency and parents.

The tutoring for educational delays will not be an allowable cost. Tax dollars are already available through public education. The agency can assist the parent in obtaining an individual education plan (IEP) through the school to ensure Johnny's education.

The overall monthly subsidy allowable would be \$747.03, rounded to \$747.00 month.



Jane:

Now, to review the subsidy request for Jane. She is special needs due to being a minority, part of a sibling group and having developmental delays. She passes the first test for eligibility. She would be approved for a medical card which would take care of treatment cost. Now, we will begin to look at her special needs cost to her parents.

The foster parents receive \$20 a day for foster care reimbursement for care of Jane. The amount of subsidy request of \$837.60 is more than the foster care reimbursement. The next overall criteria did not pass since the state limits subsidies to the amount of foster care received.

Even if the request is less than the foster care payment, the next step that must be taken is reviewing the worksheet is to look at all the costs and determine what is a cost to the parents because of the child's special needs.

Now to look at specific costs:



Transportation for her braces adjustment would be an allowable cost. Please note for developmental delays, the completion date of service is 1/1/07. The therapists have determined Jane should be on target for her age when treatment ends.

The miscellaneous cost of training for parents and the educational toys are an allowable cost since they assist in the child's therapy.

Tutoring for the developmental delays is not an allowable cost. Again, just as with Johnny, assistance for educational issues is already provided for with tax dollars. This agency would be happy to assist the parents in securing the needed service through an educational plan with the school system.

Therapy for abandonment issues is a qualifying service. Payment for the therapy is available through the Medicaid card. Transportation costs are an allowable expense to be reimbursed through the monthly subsidy.

The respite for the parent is an issue for negotiation between the agency and parents. More information is needed since the issue of intense parenting and thus a need for respite is not obvious in this case. Most parents need respite occasionally from their children. This is normal. Discussing your needs with the agency will assist in determining whether the need for respite is a need all parents feel or if it is related to the child's special needs. We strongly encourage you to seek extended family to provide an evening out. This gives the opportunity for family members to get to know the newest member and for Jane to get to know everyone who loves her.

Compensating parents to read to their children or help with homework is not an allowable cost. That is something that all children, even nonspecial needs can expect from their

parents. The total subsidy which can be approved for Jane is \$142.60, rounded to \$143.00 per month.

Please note on Jane's subsidy worksheet, the completion of service will be 1/1/07. During the annual evaluation of the subsidy or as circumstances change, the amount of monthly subsidy may go up or down, depending upon need.

Mary:

Now, to review the subsidy request for Mary. She is special needs due to being a minority, part of a sibling group and having braces and milk allergy. She would be approved for a medical card which would take care of treatment cost. She passes the first criteria for a special needs subsidy.



The foster parents receive \$20 a day for foster care reimbursement for care of Mary. The amount of subsidy request of \$823.45 is more than the foster care reimbursement and can not be approved since the state limits subsidies to the amount of foster care received.

Even if the request is less than the foster care payment, the next step that must be taken is reviewing the worksheet is to look at all the costs and determine what is a cost to the parents because of the child's special needs.

Now, we will begin to look at her special needs cost to her parents.

Cost of transportation for the adjustment of the braces. That is an allowable cost. The cost of the braces would be covered under the Medicaid card.

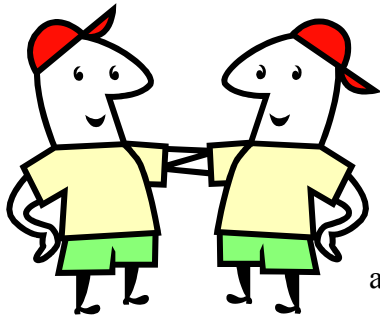
Rubbing her legs and applying hot packs once a day is not an item immediately approved. This issue would have to be discussed between the parent and the agency. The question will be how does this cost the parent? Yes, it is related to a special need but is it a cost? And is it so different from rubbing a child's sprained ankle while healing – something that is normal within the course of parenting?

The extra cans of special formula would be an allowable cost to roll into a monthly subsidy. Reading food labels and cans or preparing milk-free meals would not be a cost outside of normal parenting.

Soothing and rocking a colicky baby at night would not be an allowable expense. Many parents spend sleepless nights attending to infants. This is within the course of normal parenting.

Respite for Mary is an issue of finding time for yourself, not because of the demands of her special needs. We strongly encourage you to seek extended family to provide an evening out. Not only will you feel refreshed, it gives the opportunity for family members to get to know the newest member and for Mary to get to know everyone who loves her.

The total monthly subsidy which can be approved for Mary is \$ 100.95 rounded to \$101.00 per month. Note some of Mary’s services are not ongoing. During the annual evaluation of the subsidy or as circumstances change, the amount of monthly subsidy may go up or down, depending upon need.



Another Example

Lets do another example – pretending you are adopting Billy, an infant born to a crack addicted mother and Anne, a sixteen year old with identity issues.

Let’s complete the subsidy request for Billy, the infant born to a crack addicted mother.



SPECIAL NEEDS SUBSIDY WORKSHEET

For: Billy

DOB: 7/3/05

Date form completed: 12/15/05

Special Need	Service	Cost	Completion of Service
Born to crack addicted mother			
Asian-African American			
In our home since birth			

Total monthly subsidy request: \$600.00

Billy was born to a crack addicted mother so he qualifies for the special needs services. He will be approved for a Medicaid card.

Now to look at the monthly subsidy request. The amount requested is equal to the foster care per diem paid for Billy’s care. That amount is possible.

The agency looks at the cost of Billy’s special needs. Right now, Billy’s cost of care is no different than any non-special needs infant. Yes, he was born to a crack addicted mother and has the potential of developing problems later on. He is not showing any concerns at this point and not in need of services. The fact that he is Asian-African American causes not additional cost to the parents at this time. Being placed within the home since birth can be a factor of his special needs if he remains there for a year – an attachment to the foster parents, but not a cost. The monthly subsidy for Billy would be \$00.00 a month at this time with a medical card. Should he develop special needs which have a cost to the parents, his subsidy amount could be renegotiated at that time.

Let’s look at what the subsidy worksheet might look like for Anne, the sixteen year old.



SPECIAL NEEDS SUBSIDY WORKSHEET

For: Anne

DOB: 7/3/05

Date form completed: 12/15/05

Special Need	Service	Cost	Completion of Service
Older child who has been in placement for 3 years			
Identity Issues – defiant, disrespectful			
Attached to our family			
Needs Independent Living skills	Life Skills classes	\$ 75.00 a month	

Total monthly subsidy request: \$900.00

Being an older child and attached to the foster family qualifies her as a special needs child. She is eligible for a medical card. The monthly amount requested is equal to the monthly foster care per diem so it passes that standard.

Now to examine costs of Anne's special needs. In reviewing the worksheet, we find the only cost to the parents would be that of life skills training. Because Anne had a difficult past, no one took the time to teach her the skills needed to be an independent adult. In order to have her "catch up" the life skill classes are necessary and are an allowable cost. Anne's subsidy amount is approved for \$75.00 per month for the classes.

Even though the parents did not ask for it, an additional \$25.00 was added to the subsidy to offset transportation to the classes, for a total monthly subsidy of \$100.00 for Anne.

Now that we have worked through subsidy worksheets together, please be thinking of any costs which may pertain to the child you are adopting. Your worker will be happy to assist you in this process.



Most frequently asked questions regarding special needs monthly subsidies:

What if we have to have additional services down the road?

You have two opportunities to reassess the cost of your child's special needs.

Each year, you will be asked by the agency if you want to change your request for reimbursement. Generally, it is the anniversary date of the first agreement on the child's subsidy. At that time, you and the agency can reevaluate if the reimbursement should go up or down.

Using the above example, Johnny's therapist is recommending that Johnny begin therapeutic riding classes twice a month effective 1/1/07. Since this is a relatively new therapy, the Medicaid card won't cover the expense. At the annual review, you request those costs be covered at \$50 an hour, 2 times a month for a monthly cost of \$100.00 plus travel expenses of \$32. Since the other services are continuing, the subsidy can be increased to \$877.00 per month, an amount still less than the monthly foster care amount.

Likewise, since the doctor has determined treatment of Jane's developmental delays should be completed by 1/1/07, at the annual review, reimbursement for special needs may be decreased to the reimbursement of transportation to the therapy.

In the annual review, since Mary's leg braces will be off by the annual review, her monthly subsidy can be reduced by the transportation cost. Since the doctor predicted

her milk allergies would be outgrown by her 1st birthday, Mary no longer needs the additional formula, the subsidy is reduced to \$0.00 per month and a medical card.

If you do not wish to have an annual review of subsidy, this agency assumes everything is the same. This agency will not initiate the annual review process unless you request it, or if there is an significant change – ie we become aware Johnny goes to live with a relative.

The second opportunity comes at any time during the year, when the child's needs change. For example, once off the special formula, in April, 2007, the doctor finds Mary should continue the supplement until she is older. You contact us and the subsidy is increased from the annual review amount of \$0.00 to \$84.95, rounded to \$85.00 monthly to cover the cost of the additional formula.

At the same time, you discover Jane is sexually acting out with Mary and other children. Jane's therapist increases her therapy to once a week include treatment of this behavior. Reimbursement of the additional transportation is included in Jane's subsidy. No longer can you have relatives or others with young children watch Mary when you take respite. Respite costs would then be added into the monthly subsidy. Additionally, because Mary and Jane share a bedroom, you need to separate the two at night. The cost of an addition to your home to build a separate bedroom for Jane will cost \$339 a month. This can be an allowable subsidy cost and would be rolled into the monthly subsidy.

Here is what the subsidy would look like for Jane:

Beginning subsidy on 12/15/05 is \$143.00 per month.

At the annual review of 12/15/06 – reduction in need of services reduces subsidy to \$16.00 per month.

In April, 2007, sexual acting out issues came to light so the subsidy was increased to add transportation for the additional counseling - \$ 34.40 for travel, \$150.00 for respite care and \$339 for the monthly payment on the bedroom addition for a total monthly subsidy of \$523.40, rounded to \$524.00.

But I am spending my time doing things, isn't it worth something?

Yes, it is. Unfortunately, in our society people are not paid for the most important role they will ever have! Taking on the role of parent means you take on the care and nurturing of your child.

This agency is very cautious the impression is not given that special needs adoption means you are being paid to take a child no one would want. Also, sometimes the media or the general public believe adoptive parents adopt for the money they receive. Adoptive parents such as you take children into their hearts and homes because you love them, can provide a good home and help them grow into good adults. Many believe it is their mission or their contribution to the future.

Children should be loved and wanted. They should never be expected to be perfect. We all come into this world and into families with both challenges and potential, no matter whether birthed or adopted.

My adopted child, now a teen, is really acting out. Can I come to the agency for help even if I adopted her in another county?

Of course. Each county is to provide post adoption services for their residents, even if they lived in a different county. Just call the children services unit for help.

What if the agency and I don't agree on the amount of subsidy necessary to take care of my child?

If a monthly amount cannot be agreed upon during negotiations, there is a state appeals process available to both parties. You will be given notification of your right to a state hearing. Although the state can not determine what amount the county should provide for a monthly subsidy, the hearing process can determine other factors in the subsidy determination process.

What if I have just a one time major expense? Can the agency help with that?

There is an assistance program, called Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy – PASSS for short. Agency staff can explain the program and help you with the application. Over the years, the program criteria and amounts have changed somewhat so it is best to speak with your worker about this program.



We know this can't answer all your questions or address every special services subsidy situation. That is why we strongly encourage you to discuss your questions and concerns with agency workers. Just ask. We will help you find the answer. We are here to assist if, when and as long as you need us.

Call us at 419-626-6781, ext. 6500

Or

Visit us at 221 W. Parish, Sandusky, Ohio 44870