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## **Taking the "Special" out of Special Needs Adoption: Developing a Concept for the Future**

Presenters: Elizabeth Mertinko, Facilitator; Penelope Maza, Child Welfare Consultant; Nancy Hablutzel, Adjunct Professor, ITT Chicago-Kent College of Law; Kathy Ledesma, National Project Director, AdoptUSKids; Elbert.

**Elizabeth Mertinko:** [00:00:02] Great, thank you, Angela. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the last of 12 monthly webinars celebrating the Children's Bureau's Centennial year. Today's webinar -- Taking the "Special" out of Special Needs Adoption: Developing a Concept for the Future -- is the 8th of 8 topical webinars that ran between April, 2012, and today. Today's discussion focuses on the use of the term "special needs" in adoption, how it came into use, how it differs from its use in the education arena and other arenas, and how our concept of this population could or should be changed and redefined in the future.

Before we start our discussion, just a few housekeeping items. First, please note that we have muted all telephone lines to minimize background noise. We will open the lines at the conclusion of the presentation to allow questions and comments from our audience.

Also, your feedback on these webinars is very important to us. We will be asking for your comments at the conclusion of today's presentation and ask that you take a few minutes to share them with us.

Finally, the slides and a recording of today's presentation will be available at the Children's Bureau's Centennial Website at <https://cb100.acf.hhs.gov/>. We will share this information with you again at the conclusion of today's webinar.

Now I'd like to introduce our speakers for today. Our first speaker will be Penelope (Penny) Maza. Dr. Maza has been working in Child Welfare for over 30 years, primarily as a senior staff member and manager in the federal government. She has also served as the Research Director of the Child Welfare League of America. She currently works as a consultant to a wide range of adoption, foster care, and child welfare organizations. Her primary focus has been on work designed to facilitate the adoption of children from foster care. She is a recipient of the 2012 Centennial Adoption Excellence Awards, and holds a Ph.D. in sociology.

Our second presenter will be Nancy Hablutzel. Nancy is an attorney in Chicago who has spent her legal career representing children in child welfare and special education cases. She's also a former due process hearing officer and a longtime member of the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on Special Education. She was a speech therapist audiologist in school and hospital settings and a learning disabilities teacher. She taught on the faculties of Chicago State, Loyola, and the University of Saint Frances, and was an adjunct professor at Louis University. She has been an adjunct professor of law at IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law since 1981 and has taught disability law, mental health law, school law, juvenile law, and legal rights of children. She served as a supervising hearing officer for all the abuse neglect courts in Cook County and as an Education Advisor to DCFF. She is currently a standing GAL in Adoption Court representing minors in adoption proceedings by appointment, and serves as a consultant to law firms of

special education matters as well as maintaining a practice in education law. She is active in the Illinois State Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Association.

She is a member of the Child Law Section Council and the Judicial Evaluation Committee for Cook County, and is Chair of the Cable TV Committee and a former chair and a current member of the Standing Committee on Legal Education, Admission and Competence. She has a Ph.D. from Loyola University and a JD with Honors from Chicago Tech. She is married to Professor Phillip Hablutzel, and they have two grown children and two granddaughters. Her hobbies are cooking, travel, sailing, opera, and spectator sports including football and baseball.

Our third speaker today will be Kathy Ledesma. Since 2008, Kathy Ledesma has been the National Project Director for AdoptUSKids, which is administered by Adoption Exchange Association through a cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau. Kathy has worked in the field of child welfare since 1972 both in the public and private sector in Oregon and Washington states, Washington DC, and Chiapas, Mexico. She served as Oregon's statewide adoption manager for seven of those years, and was on loan to the Children's Bureau as the Acting National Adoption Specialist from 2005 to 2007.

Kathy has served as President of the National Association of State Adoption Program Managers (NASAP), on the Board of the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance, and a frequent speaker on adoption and the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families. She received her MSW from Portland State University.

Also speaking with Kathy this afternoon is a young man who's going to be sharing some of his personal experiences, and I'll let Kathy introduce Elbert when it comes time for their presentation.

But at this time, Penny, I'd like to go ahead and turn our discussion over to you.

**Penelope Maza:** [00:04:32] Great. Thank you so much, Elizabeth. I was asked today to provide some historical context in which the term "special needs" has been used in child welfare. In the course of this discussion, you're probably going to hear me use some terminology that currently is considered to be outmoded, and in some ways might be considered offensive. However, I will be using it, because that was how things were described in the good old days and the early days of the development of adoption from foster care. So please bear with me as I reminisce back to the time before I actually even entered this field.

The real impetus for the adoption of children from foster care, and course the use of the term "special needs," really gained prominence in the 1970s. There were a group of people during that period who I want to refer to as the visionaries of this whole issue because they challenged the boundaries of child welfare, and there were many of them -- some specific to adoption, others more generally associated with permanency planning. I want to refer to them as visionaries because it's so really easy to go back after 40 years and criticize what they did, and I don't mean to do that.

For the time in which they were operating, they were very cutting-edge in the way they conceptualized various things. And these folks really had to make great changes in the way they thought about child welfare. They were moving from long-term foster care as a very standard

foster care experience to the question of permanency for children, that children need permanent homes.

Permanency became more visible due to something called the Oregon Project which was a small demonstration project in Oregon, and it's been many years since I read it, but I doubt that they were dealing with any more than 20 cases in which they were able to demonstrate that you could take children who were in care for a long period of time -- which was the practice at the time -- and you could actually return them home. And you could -- if you couldn't return them home -- you could get them adopted. I mean, this was a great breakthrough during that period.

I do remember reading some cases in the early 80s where it was considered in some agencies standard practice where a child was removed from their home because of a "left alone" incident, where a mother went out to shop and left the child alone, the child was removed at age 3 and was now getting out of care at 18. They were amazingly common in some agencies. So this move to try to get children out of care and into permanent homes was really the cutting edge of the 70s and early 80s and on from there.

The adoption world also was moving from working with healthy white infants as children who needed homes to foster children. And this was a major move to consider that foster children who had some characteristics that made it difficult to find them homes could be adopted. And they had to develop, really, the strategies, they were the early stages of developing the strategies to move from healthy white infant clientele to foster children.

And they were also dealing with another issue, which we don't really talk about much. But with the healthy white infant adoption world, we were mostly dealing with voluntary relinquishments, or surrenders -- they're called surrenders in many states -- with foster children, usually to an involuntary court order termination of parental rights. And this generated a need to work very closely with the court, when many of which -- and even now -- are not really amenable to termination of parental rights. So moving from the healthy white infant clientele to foster children raised a lot of new barriers that began to be recognized by this group of visionaries.

Even within this context, the underlying principle then and now is that every child is adoptable, the child's adoptability is a function of the agency's ability to find a home for the child. Therefore, the child is *not* hard to place, but is a child for whom it is difficult to find an adoptive placement.

This is a very important concept in adoption of children from the child welfare system. Because it is not that the child is difficult, but the impetus is on the agency to find a home or to create permanency for the child. So that was really a change in the way things were perceived with regard to children.

So how do we move ahead? There were many issues that were involved in doing this work, and there were two big ones that people wanted to deal with. One was providing financial assistance to meet adoptive children's needs; and the second was presenting children in a more positive light to potential adoptive parents.

I first want to talk a little bit about adoption subsidies and assistance, because this becomes a key to this term "special needs" adoption. By the beginning of the 1980s and certainly even in the

70s, many states had adoption subsidy programs to provide financial support to a subgroup of children adopted from the foster care system. In 1980, Public Law 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, established the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program. A non-means tested entitlement program based on the needs of the child. Rather, it wasn't that the adoptive family had a financial need, it was that the child needed something different or special in order to meet the child's needs.

This was a revolutionary concept at the time. Usually, an entitlement program, the big one that this was actually related to was AFDC at the time, the means testing would have been on the adoptive parents. And in this program it was really reversed: the means test -- and if you look at the other eligibility criteria for the adoption assistance -- you can see that whatever means testing there is, is on the child. Not on the parent and on the potential adoptive parent. This was really a revolutionary concept.

There was a paper published during this period that caused quite a bit of consternation among people working in this field. The title of the paper was something like: Paying to Parent. Rather, adoption assistance was seen as some sort of paying to parent program. And some people thought it had a negative feel to it. So there was a lot of fighting through these negative concepts to make the concept of adoption assistance more acceptable.

Well, people were working on this program virtually in the dark. Some of you may know me as a researcher who's worked in developing data in child welfare for the last 30 years. Well, these programs and the work that was being done in promoting the adoption of children from foster care was being done in the dark. There really was no data about who was really there, how many were waiting, what were their characteristics, so that the discussion was primarily based on people's clinical observations, whatever they might be. The kids that they saw, or that they were working with. The overall data just didn't exist. So there were no systematic data on how many children would be eligible for these funds. It was expected that it would be a very small percentage of a small number of adoptions. And I was involved with some of the discussions on the IV-E program, it was seen that just a very small percentage of the kids would qualify.

And one of the things to remember is: who was a child who was waiting, and who was considered a child who needed some kind of additional help back in these days. And I do remember one of these visionaries of the time who told me that early on in their work the kind of child who would have been considered a child for whom it was difficult to find an adoptive placement would be a healthy white infant born to a mentally retarded mother. And that was considered at that time a child for whom it was difficult to find a placement.

I do remember in the early 80s that we were quite surprised to hear that there were waiting lists for children with Down's Syndrome. For adoption of children with Down's Syndrome. And there were also waiting lists for African American infants for adoption. So groups that were perceived, before there was any data, that they might have been children for whom it would be difficult to find a placement, in fact, there was demand for them. This was really quite a surprise to those of us who were working in the field at that time.

Well, the other piece besides the financial support for children coming out of foster care for adoption, is the issue of labeling. Labeling has always been a major issue in the social work field

and other fields that provide services to clients, that people shouldn't be labeled. So the question was how to overcome this barrier to how the children were presented to potential adoptive parents. And the issue was in labeling. They needed to find a nice way to describe "hard to place" children. Because using the descriptive phrase "children for whom it is difficult to find an adoptive placement" was cumbersome. The visionaries decided on "special needs."

When I came into the field in 1980, I was drilled on how to say children for whom it is difficult to find an adoptive placement, so that I never said the concept of hard to place children. It was that important to those who were the visionaries in this field that we really change this conversation about who's responsibility it was with placing children.

The Federal Adoption Assistance Program forever linked the concept of special needs to adoption assistance eligibility. The statute let the states define special needs, but listed a number of categories as examples: member of a minority or sibling group, age, medical, physical, emotional handicap. And as with a lot of federal legislation, the suggestions, the "such-as's" became "musts" and became "only's" in many states. That you had to fall into one of those categories.

Now the states were flexible in setting what age, for example, might be considered a place where it was more difficult to find a placement, and some of the other categories. But basically, again, this happens with federal legislation, the such as's became the musts, and became the limiting factors in who would be eligible for adoption assistance.

The concept of a special needs child, in general, the label was not put on a child until the child was defined as waiting for an adoptive placement. And this varied from state to state as to who is the waiting child, whether or not they have to have a termination of parental rights, whether their goal changes, whatever that was, that usually was the time where the special needs label was put on the child at the point of waiting.

Generally, special needs are not used for regular foster children who are not in the waiting track. Unless possibly it's used as it is in other fields.

Well, we're now 40 years later or 30 years later, and so what are the challenges that we have today with regard to this concept. First of all, there's the issue of data and practice. Through both improved data and practice, it has become clear that almost all waiting children qualified as special needs. By Federal Fiscal Year 2011, 90 percent of approximately 50-thousand children adopted from foster care received either State or Federal adoption assistance. 90 percent. If we think back to what I said about the early 80s, the people of that period would be floored to hear that it's 90 percent. It was never assumed that it would be that large. But of course, the children who are being adopted today are really quite different than the children who were considered special needs back in the early 80s and the 70s.

Of course the question is who are the 10 percent that aren't being identified as special needs or getting some kind of an assistance. Some may not qualify because of the other eligibility requirements of these programs. And maybe we do have some healthy infants that are being adopted. But basically, it's virtually every child who's being adopted from foster care.

So this raises the question: is this a distinction without a real difference? The distinction between children being adopted from foster care or waiting for adoption from foster care, and those who are special needs and those who are not. That possibly there really is no difference at all.

When you think about the experience of children who are being adopted from foster care, they've been removed from their home, placed with strangers in many cases, and had a court say that they could not return to their parents. These children all have many challenges, and maybe really the distinction between special needs and non-special needs is really no longer meaningful, given the characteristics of children that are being adopted today.

Another issue -- and Nancy's going to be talking in more detail about this -- is there are differences in the meaning of the term special needs in child welfare versus education, health, and other fields. This because problematic as child welfare and other service systems began to do more collaboration and work together. There are times when you'd be working with someone from one of these other fields, having a discussion with them about special needs, and halfway through realize you're talking about totally different things. Or totally different categories of kids. And so this has been problematic. You always have to find when you're talking about this, everybody's got to lay out their definition, in order that you're not sharing inappropriate interpretations of what you're talking about.

Another issue, and I think a big one here, is that nobody ever asked those to whom it was applied whether or not they liked it. There was certainly a period politically where various groups got to decide how they were going to be called. What terms were going to be used to describe them. However, children who are waiting for adoption, or were adopted from foster care, never really had a vote in terms of what they wanted to be called.

Now in the period in the 70s and early 80s, we generally didn't really ask for client input. That has really changed now, and it's probably time that we listen very carefully to those who have been labeled in this way to see what it means to them and if they have suggestions for some alternative strategies. And I think Elbert might be able to inform us a little bit about that today.

Also, as it's currently used, and sort of the model of the Title IV-E Program, it's a stretch to apply the term to some child populations about which there is growing interest and need for adoptive homes to meet their unique circumstances. But these are groups that... not that they didn't exist, but they just weren't on the radar screen at the time that the law was passed in which the concept of special needs became so great; and the first one that kind of came to people's consciousness was early-on in the issues of in utero drug exposure where a child may not at the present exhibit some kind of need when they're adopted, but may be at high risk in the future to do so. Again, the restrictive way the characteristics of special needs were defined using the 1970s and 80s definition, it always was kind of a dare to figure out how to qualify children who's challenges may not appear at the time of the adoption, but may appear down the line, and how do you deal with them.

More recently there are some other groups, where because of their unique circumstances may need some other types of services to meet their challenges. For example, LGBT children and youth who do not qualify under the model of special needs from the 1980s. They don't have any of those characteristics. Non-English speaking children. Children from dissolved international

adoptions. And I'm sure that those of you out there in cyber land who I'm talking to have some other groups that you are trying to serve right now who just don't quite qualify under the old model for special needs. They just don't fit, the way it was laid out in the statute.

So here some things to think about with regard to this presentation. Is it time to develop a new term? Do we need one at all to describe waiting children, or are they just waiting children. If we need one, what should it accomplish.

In the first use of special needs it was accomplishing at least two things; one was: it was to have a more positive image for children waiting for adoption; and two: it's was not as cumbersome as a long descriptive phrase that could be used. And then, if we want to have a new term, what should it be.

So that's my speech for today, and I guess we send it on to Nancy.

**Elizabeth:** [00:27:14] Yes. Thank you very much, Penny. And Nancy, now I'm going to turn it over to you.

**Nancy Hablutzel:** [00:27:18] Thank you. Well, when I was asked to speak on the term "special needs," I thought: this is probably the most inappropriate terminology that's ever been used. And the reason is, first of all, it's absolutely amorphous, it becomes different in different settings, and certainly when you use "special needs" in the child welfare setting it's not anywhere near what it means in the special education setting; and the other is, it's really not defined in either place; and one of the biggest problems with this is that you have people sitting at the table talking about "a child," and speaking about that child, it's difficult to understand when someone says "this is a child with special needs" exactly what that means. And it could mean any of thousands of things.

It's particularly difficult when you have a caseworker sitting at a table at an IP meeting at a school, and the caseworker, the foster parent are talking about the child's special needs, the special education people are talking about the child's special needs, and they are talking apples and oranges. So next slide.

Special Education and Special Needs -- not the same. One of the things that is difficult for people in the child welfare system only to understand is that a child of special needs does not necessarily require a special education. And in fact, in the special education field, a child may be identified as having special needs, and there is, by the way, no identification for special needs. If a child has special needs in the education world, that means that he needs something special -- most children do in the education world at some point or another. But it does not equate to special education. Next slide.

The Special Education terminology is definite by the Federal Law and it's refined by Case Law. So we have the Federal Law that tells us what is Special Education. And it's limited to very specific instances. And then based on that, how it's provided, what may be provided, what's required to be provided and so on, comes down to us through Case Law. Next slide.

The term "special needs" is not used anywhere in the federal or state education laws. It's a euphemism. And the reason it's used that way, it's nicer than saying that the child has a disability; to me this is part of an evolution in terminology. I actually started working with special

education students in 1955. I know I'm aging myself there, but I was a child, and in those days there was no such thing as special education, actually. And when a child is said to have special needs, it doesn't define anything in terms of what the education world is going to give him.

So if you come to a meeting with educators and you say, "This is a special needs child in the child welfare system," they don't understand that. It's not the same as saying, "The child has a special need, which means it may be a disability." It's a euphemism. It's used because people think it sounds nicer than saying that this is a child with a disability. And the evolution here has been pretty significant, just like it was in the child welfare system.

Originally we talked about children, for instance, in the field of learning disabilities. There were children who had minimal brain dysfunction, was what they were called back in the 30s and 40s and 50s. And then it became specific learning disabilities, and learning disabilities, and so on. It's a wide variety of terms that all mean the same thing. We're seeing that in the autism world right now. The children who are being identified now as on the autism spectrum are the children who years ago we looked at and said: they have echolalia. They have aphasia. They have pervasive developmental disorder. We gave them all sorts of other terms. Children who were mildly mentally retarded.

Those names don't come up anymore. They're all on the autism spectrum. And it accounts in large measure for that fact that we're seeing greater numbers of children diagnosed as having autism, we're just really seeing a larger number of children who have been moved into the autism spectrum. Next slide.

A child may have a need in the education matters, and not qualify as being disabled. So you may have a child who has -- and this is true of a *lot* of children in the child welfare system -- children who have been moved around, who have been traumatized at one point or another, who have not been well cared for by their parents, etc.

Children coming in may have the inability to read, they may not know their letters, their numbers, in fact in many cases we see children who come into the school system not just through the child welfare system, but in many cases that way, who don't even know their full name. Don't know their parent's full names. So the easy questions that the kids get coming into kindergarten and first grade, they can't answer. So they clearly have a need, but they are not disabled. Next slide.

Certain disabilities only, will qualify a child for having special education services. Next slide.

The disabilities that will qualify a child are listed in the federal law IDEIA -- the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act -- and then they're copied or slightly modified and put into state school code so that they can comply with the federal law. Every state in the Union has a special education code that lists the disabilities that are accepted for services through the special education system coming from the federal code.

Now many of you will have heard -- and this is another terminology issue -- many of you will have heard people say over the years "Public Law 94-142;" many of you will have heard IDEIA, IDEA, without the "I" in it, and those are earlier versions of this law. The first one was actually

passed in '73, and then in '75 they passed the Public Law 94-142, which was the Education of all Handicapped Children Act.

Later they decided that that was not politically correct. And we were back into terminology again. And they wanted "handicapped" out, and they didn't want it to precede children. Because it's not the handicapped that should be thought of first, it's the child. And so they passed what was called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA. And it's usually referred to now as IDEA even though it's been modified, and they put the individuals first, and then the put the disabilities later, and talked about education.

When the most recent recodification was done our Congress took it upon themselves to believe that they were improving things; most people dealing with children with special education needs do not feel it was an improvement, but they made it the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. And it's copied in state codes, and it provides all of the rules of what it is that the states must do and the school districts must do to provide special education for students. Next slide.

The disabilities which are *not* in the federal law, not listed as one of the 13 disabilities that qualify for special education, *may* qualify a child for accommodations or for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, but not Special Education Services. And these are two distinct things.

The child may have what we would see as a special need, and need something in the way of education services or accommodations in classrooms, but not need special education. In other words, they don't need education provided by a specially trained teacher in a specially trained setting using [special training] equipment. So the accommodations and services would come under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and that's the one that says that says that no otherwise qualified handicapped individual may be deprived of -- and then it goes on to define the services and so on.

That one is really important to keep in mind because that's where a lot of our special needs are taken care of. That would be extra time on tasks; extra time for testing; use of a computer -- one of my favorite moments was explaining to a school principal in Chicago that she did in fact have to provide a computer for the full-time use of a kindergartner because that was the only way that he could learn in his classroom. So those special needs can come under this without ever requiring special education. Next slide.

These are the lists of special needs that are special enough for special education. Autism -- that's of course obviously a biggie these days; some of the others: the mild cognitive disorders; deaf-blindness, which is fortunately relatively rare, deafness same thing; developmental delay; emotional disability; hearing impairments; multiple disabilities; orthopedic impairments; and then going to the next one is "other health impaired." That's the one we use when we are trying to get a child in for special education services and we don't quite have a way to fit him.

Sometimes, for example, a child with a physical disability, a child who's on a respirator, even children in comas, will qualify for special education services under "other health impaired." It

also is used in children with diabetes, for instance. Who may need some services or monitoring, but most children with diabetes come under Section 504.

Specific learning disabilities; language impairment; traumatic brain injury; and visual impairment. And this list is in the process of being revised. One of the things that's going to happen under autism, and frankly scares me, is that autism is being taken out of the DSM III diagnostic category, they're taking Asperger's out of autism. And that's a lot of your kids. That's a whole lot of your kids. So that when that happens, it's very likely that Asperger's will have to go under "other health impaired," or for some of them "specific learning disability," for some of them "speech language impairment." But you're going to have to be a little more creative with the Asperger's kids once that diagnosis is changed in the DSM. And obviously, the people providing special education services will be looking at the DSM for guidance. Next slide.

A child with a known disability must require special education services. They can be as special as you want, in fact they can have multiple disabilities; but if they can learn in a regular setting with regular materials with a regular teacher, no special education. They either go under 504 or nothing. Then they may not need services. We have a lot of children with specific disabilities who do just fine in a regular classroom. Next slide.

They may have accommodations for a disability. Access accommodations are very, very common. For children with hearing impairments it may be that all they need is an amplifier. They have some wonderful things that teachers can use with microphones and headphones for the child; it may be that they can work on an iPad, it just depends on the specific disability. But this is one of the times where you look at the child and say: okay, he's special, he does have special needs, but that's not necessarily special education.

It's hard for a lot of people who are not in this field to understand that you can have a lot of special needs and a lot of special things going on, and not need to have an IEP. That may not require an IEP. And that's interesting to use with a lot of your children waiting for adoptive homes. Because there are parents who are frightened by the fact that a child may need an IEP, but not the least bit worried about the fact that they may need an accommodation. And so sometimes sorting that out actually helps in finding permanency for a child. [Inaudible sentence; audio skips.]

I spent a good part of my life as Education Advisor to our State Department of Children and Family Services going to schools and explaining to them what the special needs issues are in child welfare and doing a lot of training, but also taking individual cases to individual schools. Child welfare workers may think that any child with a special need requires special education. But on the other hand [audio interference] a lot of our children start acting out as a normal response to their life traumas. And the first thing the school district is going to do is say: (gasp!) We've got to put them in a special room! Or: this is a behavior disorder, move them out into a special room. Not necessarily so. So you need to be very specific, you need to look at what other things you can do. And wherever possible, try desperately to get the accommodations.

The other is that school records are protected, and you may share information on a need-to-know basis. People worry about how much they can tell schools; but when you're dealing with a child and trying to get special accommodations, special needs met, it *is* appropriate to tell certain

things to the school. Even if you have to go to the child's legally appointed guardian in the state and get a waiver so to say "you can do this." Because in many cases the school can't deal with this.

One example, I had to corner a principal one day in her office and explain to her what it is when a child has been through torture, and how rare a finding torture is. But that makes them so much more willing to understand a special need and address the special things that the child has going on. And truthfully, if you can get the school to cooperate and the foster parents are having a good relationship with the school, the child is not being sent home and suspended on a regular basis, it's much more likely that you're going to find permanency for that child. Next slide.

So when in doubt, ask. Ask the other person on the other side of the table: what are the terms. What's specific. Making sure you're talking the same thing. Remember this euphemism concept. It's not defined. And ask the other person what *they* think when they say this child is special or he has special needs, ask them what it means. And explain what you're thinking in your terminology. What special needs are you look at. If you're looking at permanency, you'll do what's necessary to keep the child placed in a school setting that works, so that maybe this can be the permanent home for the child.

Is that the end? I think it is!

**Elizabeth:** [00:45:35] That is your last slide.

**Penelope:** Thank you!

**Elizabeth:** Thank you very much. And at this point, Kathy, I'm going to turn it over to you and to Elbert.

**Kathy Ledesma:** [00:45:40] Great, thanks. And I'm going to introduce Elbert in just a little while when I turn over the phone to him to talk. So I want to talk first this afternoon -- and welcome to all of you -- about AdoptUSKids, what we are and what we do, so you'll know where I'm coming from when I make my remarks.

So I call my presentation: The Use of "Special Needs," A Disservice to Youth and Misleading to the Public. So let's take a look at that first slide. AdoptUSKids has been operated by the Adoption Exchange Association since 2002. In October we just began our 3rd 5-year funding cycle, so we have 10 very good years under our belt. And I just want to give a shout-out to my good colleague Penny and friend who has helped us with a lot of the data that you're going to see in this presentation.

AdoptUSKids is a multifaceted project that is operated on behalf of the U.S. Children's Bureau. We have a two-fold mission, and that's to raise public awareness about the need for families. Many of you out there have seen the TV, radio or billboard ads that say you don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. So those are our ads.

The second part of our mission is to provide systems changing tools and technical assistance to states and territories and tribes to help them with their efforts to recruit the kind of families that

they need, that reflect the needs of the children who are in foster care who either need temporary homes or permanent homes.

Let's go to our organizational slide. This is how AdoptUSKids is organized. I'm not going to bore you by going through the whole thing, but I want to point to three areas on the slide. First of all, at about 7 o'clock I think that would be, 8 o'clock, is the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign. The Campaign has been in existence since 2004, and each year we, in collaboration with the Children's Bureau and the Ad Council produce a new set of advertisements, public service advertisements that target the recruitment of adopting families for a different portion of the children who are waiting in foster care.

For example, this year's campaign targets the recruitment of families for 14 to 16 year olds, and as you'll see as I advance through these slides, every single one of those 14 to 16 year olds under most definitions would be considered youth or children with special needs. So families respond to those ads and they also respond to word of mouth and just go out surfing on the Internet, and then they call us or email us. We talk calls from about 20 thousand families a year; the large majority of those families are first-time inquirers, they're wondering what they need to do to become approved as a foster parent or adoptive parent, and we assist them.

Then we have another set of parents who already have their home studies, and now are very interested in using the services of AdoptUSKids to search for children that would fit into their families.

So then let's go over to about 1 o'clock, we have the Waiting Child Photolisting and the Approved Family Registration. Since the start of AdoptUSKids more than 30 thousand families with approved home studies to adopt the children who are in foster care have registered on the AdoptUSKids website and have used it to search for children to adopt. In the last 10 1/2 years we have photolisted about 45 thousand children who are waiting for adoption, and every single state in the union and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have photolisted children and youth on our photolisting website. So that's one of the places where families get connected with kids.

Let's go to the next slide. So when we answer the phone or when we get an email from a family, what do they know about the kids who need families. Where do people go these days to get their information on what terminology means. I went to Wikipedia, which I believe is a place that you have first-time families seeking to adopt children from foster care might go when they stumble upon that term special needs. This is what I found on Wikipedia. Special needs is a term used in clinical diagnostic and functional development, and it's about individuals who require assistance for disabilities that are medical, mental, or psychological. That's the general definition.

The second definition is very troublesome, because it assigns this to the child welfare system in the United States. It says: a legal term applied to foster care in the U.S. derived from language out of ASPA; a diagnosis used to classify children as needing *more* services than those children without special needs. It's a diagnosis based on behavior, childhood and family history, usually made by a health care professional.

Well... I'm not real sure who wrote that definition for Wikipedia, but that really isn't fitting with the definition that Penny talked about earlier, and that Nancy just talked about, and it certainly is

not the definition that I'm going to talk about today. And it's very troublesome that that's what families who come upon that term, and they think that they want to adopt a child from foster care and they see that that child wears that label "special needs." That this is what they believe what the children will be like that they will encounter.

So the next one... As Penny explained earlier, each state has developed out of the Federal framework for qualifying children to receive ongoing adoption assistance, each state has developed out of that its own fairly unique definition of special needs. And as Penny said earlier, that includes older, and each state defines what older means -- I remember looking at one state where older meant over the age of 4; children of color; children who are a part of a sibling group who need to be placed together -- either it be their need to stay together moving from foster care to adoption, or if they were separated in foster care they need to be reunited in adoption; and they are children who have one or more physical, medical, emotional, mental "handicapping" conditions -- and as Penny said earlier, some offensive language here.

So it's any one of those things, in most states, would qualify a child to bear that label "special needs," which in turn would qualify them for receiving either Federal or State adoption assistance. Of the 45-thousand children who have been photolisted, just about 20-thousand of them have been reported back to us as having been placed for adoption. Of those children, 61 percent of the children who have been placed for adoption are children of color, and that includes children who are of one or more race; 2/3rds were age 8 or over at the time they were photolisted; 3/4s are age 8 or over at the time they were placed for adoption, and 44 percent needed to be placed or they were photolisted with one or more sibling.

So all of those children, if they had nothing else going on, all of those children would qualify as children or youth with special needs. But 50 percent, less than half of the children who had been placed for adoption after being photolisted on AdoptUSKids, had an identified disability. So already you can see the discrepancy.

So today, or as of the end of March, about 47 hundred children were actively photolisted on AdoptUSKids to recruit families for them, and about 38 hundred families were photolisted. So let's take a look at what those children look like today.

Over 60 percent of the children are boys, and even though gender does not fall within a definition of special needs, we do know from many years of experience that boys, especially older boys from foster care, there are more challenges to finding adoptive families for them.

Race and ethnicity, as you can see, more than half of the children currently listed on our photolisting site are children of color or they are racial minorities. Only 41 percent are white children. So all of those, over 51 percent of those children, would qualify having special needs just on the basis of their race or ethnicity.

Age. This is a very interesting chart, I think. I would say that virtually every state -- and if you're listening out there and this is not the case for your state, please correct me -- that virtually every state would identify a child of age 9 or older as being an older child, and thus qualifying them for adoption assistance and to be special needs. So as you can see, well over 85-90 percent of children who are waiting on our photolisting website are age 9 and older.

Penny wrote a beautiful paper some years ago about how difficult it is finding adoptive families for children when they reach that 9 year age mark. So all of this 90 percent would qualify just on the basis of age for being a child with special needs.

And then when we look at disabilities, 51 percent had multiple disabilities, so over 65 percent total had one or more disabilities. So the children who have identified disabilities could be infants, they could be younger children, white children, children that don't need to be placed with siblings. So again, discrepancy.

And we'll go to the last slide that has some charts on it -- just over a fifth of the children who are photolisted on our site are photolisted with one or more of their siblings, and of those children who are listed with siblings, obviously the vast majority are with two siblings, but we do have several sibling groups that are five or more children. And just by virtue of being photolisted with your siblings would in most cases qualify you as special needs.

So in summary, of the 47 hundred children who are currently photolisted on our website, 59 percent are children of color; 65 percent are age 13 or older; and 22 percent are photolisted with one or more siblings. So even if these children and youth had no physical, medical, emotional or mental handicapping condition, they would qualify for wearing that label, a child with special needs.

So the good news is that we did a scan of our website which is actually thousands of pages, as you can well imagine, and these are the only mentions of term special needs that we are able to find. Out of those 47 hundred children currently photolisted, 160 individual children and 13 sibling groups use the term somewhere of special needs. So that's less than 5 percent of all the photolistings. I think that's really good news. I think that's a clear indication that that term, as used to publically describe children, is really on the decline.

In addition, out of those hundreds, thousands of pages of text on the website, there were less than 60 mentions of the term special needs: 10 appeared in stories about caseworker work; 11 were in family stories; and 22 states mentioned the term special needs on their state pages. I didn't go in and look, but I'd be willing to be that those were all mentions in connection with qualifying children to receive adoption assistance.

So that's what I really wanted to share with you today. What I really want to share with you, though, is Elbert. And I want to give a big, big shout-out to the National Resource Center for Youth Development. They worked with me to identify Elbert for this webinar -- what an outstanding young man he is. Elbert's 22 years old, he was born into Kentucky's foster care system and he spent 21 years in care. And he grew up with the polished truth that his mother was a severe alcoholic and unable to take care of him or his siblings. He moved repeatedly throughout his childhood from home to home; however, he was fortunate enough to remain with all of his siblings. He was adopted at the age of 12, but that adoption dissolved 4 years later.

He entered an independent living program when he was 19, he got his GED, and he's currently a student at Blue Grass Community and Technical College and he plans to continue his education majoring in social work. So I'm guessing Elbert had some pretty good social workers along the way.

He serves on both the Kentucky Youth Leadership Council and the Kentucky Foster Care Council, and he is an advocate. And as you'll hear him speak today, he has a strong voice for foster youth. In addition, and most remarkably I think, is he's a marathon runner, a fabulous writer, and he's here to share with you some of his story and to talk about the term special needs and what it means to him. Elbert?

**Elbert:** [01:02:21] Thanks a lot, Kathy. I also wanted to say thank you to the NRCYB for surfacing my name, and also to the Children's Bureau and AdoptUSKids for assistance in preparing me for this webinar, and I'm definitely honored to be a part of it.

**Kathy:** Okay. So it's all yours, Elbert.

**Elbert:** [01:02:44] Absolutely. I wanted to maybe start off by addressing questions that were presented to me by Kathy or others in emails, and those questions were: Were you ever informed of being a special needs adoption case, and if so, how did that make you feel.

And in all honesty, I was never informed of being a special needs adoption. However the adoption was unfortunate, it was an abusive situation and [I was] placed back into care. It was years later I was becoming a Foster Club All Star in Seaside, Oregon that I learned about case plans such as reunification, legal guardianship, kinship care and also [unclear], and it was then that I was informed through talking with Kathy just this morning about learning about special needs adoptions.

And I want to say that I believe there should be a more direct communication and informed knowledge to the child involving their case plan, and I also believe that there should be a better definition of special needs. I believe that it has evolved into labels, stereotypes and stigmas.

I also believe the child experience throughout care is traumatizing, and there shouldn't be an added focus on the limitations of the child beyond their control. I also believe that when it comes to race, ethnicity, sexuality, or siblings, it should not affect being a part of a forever family.

We do not refer to college graduates as special needs students. If there is a title given to special cases involving adoptions, it should take the focus off the child and the experiences they cannot control.

I believe that proper placements with trained, ready, adoptive parents should be mandatory, and I believe that this would decrease transitions from home to home; misdiagnosis as far as medications and psychotropic drugs; also that behavior that is completely normal isn't expected, and they believe that its the behavior of the child instead of the traumatic experiences that they've faced.

That's what I have so far.

**Kathy:** [01:05:24] Thanks, Elbert. Are we ready for questions? Are you ready for questions, Elbert?

**Elbert:** [01:05:32] Yes, absolutely. I wasn't entirely sure the direction we were heading with that, so I kind of spilled out what I had, but I'm willing to go on and answer any other questions that are necessary.

**Kathy:** Great, thanks.

**Elizabeth:** [01:05:44] Okay, Angela. Could you remind our audience then how they need to queue up to either ask questions or any comments that they might like to make.

**Angela:** [01:05:52] Thank you. We will now begin the question and answer session. If you would like to ask a question please press Star 1 and record your first name and state only. Once again, please press Star 1 and record you first name and state only. Thank you.

**Elizabeth:** [01:06:10] And while we're waiting for participants to queue up with questions, I'm going to go back to the slide that Penny closed on. Because, Penny, I think you really set us up nicely for some commentary. And so again, we're happy to talk questions for any our four speakers, but I'm also curious to know if anyone in our audience has comments or thoughts on the questions that Penny posed. So I'm going to put those back up for reference as well.

And while we're waiting for a question I do just want to thank our four presenters again. Each of them are very busy in their personal and in their professional lives, and Elbert in particular I know is about to go into final exams; so I do want to thank all four of you for joining us today to share your insights.

This has been really interesting, I think. The whole point of language is for us to be able to communicate clearly with one another as people and as professionals. And in this case it seems like that term "special needs" is really hindering communication more than it is fostering communication. So it's been a really interesting discussion to see how that evolved and to think about if this is maybe the time to move in a different direction.

Angela, do we have any questions on the line?

**Angela:** [01:07:20] Yes. Our first question comes from Yvonne with Washington State.

**Yvonne:** [01:07:30] Oh, hi. I am working with an Indian reservation known as [unclear], and I have also been a foster parent for the last 14 years and we've adopted 5 children. Two are labeled as special needs. And my question is: when you adopt a child and you feel that you are adopting the child whose only basis of being defined as special needs is because of their ethnicity, how can they later take that label off of them. Because it's all throughout their records, and it hinders people. So is there a way to take that label off of them later?

**Kathy:** Penny, what do you think?

**Penny:** [01:08:24] You know, I really don't know. Is that label in the state records? Is that what you're talking about?

**Yvonne:** [01:08:33] Yes. And it hinders them because in their state records if they are defined as special needs they automatically go with an IEP, or people label them thinking that they could

possibly be developmentally delayed, or behaviorally challenged, or just a lot of question marks start to come up.

**Penny:** [01:08:56] That's the confusion between the various fields and how its defined. That you've gotten caught in that. Where it's being narrowly defined as it's used say in special education or... Nancy can go into more detail

**Yvonne:** [01:09:13] Yes, that's exactly what I'm talking about is... oh, for goodness sake, do not let them think that a child needs an IEP just because he's labeled special needs in the child welfare system. And this is why it's absolutely mandatory to explain to these people that special needs and special education are not the same.

**Kathy:** [01:09:38] I also think that you as a parent are probably the strongest tool there is to change that perception. The language that parents use is very important. It's as important as the language that professionals use. And I know that it's probably very important to you to say, "This is my child," not to present your child as, "This is my adopted child," but "This is my child." And it's the same thing. And I really think that we need to support parents to be brave and speak up and to refute. And to expect offense when that term is applied to their child.

**Penny:** [01:10:21] The other thing is, if you're talking about being in the Special Education System, the parent has an absolute right to refuse to sign anything that the parent feels is inappropriate for the child, and if necessary, to go to a due process hearing to fight it. And should. And it depends on what state you're in. Each state has free and low-cost legal services available to help you if you need them. But if they try to put a child in special education based on the special needs terminology, I would fight it like crazy.

**Yvonne:** [01:11:01] Right. That's what we're doing right now, but when you start to fight them, then they consider you being a problem, and then that's a whole other can of worms.

**Remark:** [01:11:14] What state are you in.

**Yvonne:** [01:11:15] Washington State.

**Remark:** [01:11:19] I'm kind of surprised. I would have thought they would be smarter, but okay.

**Elizabeth:** [01:11:27] We have a question that's come in through "go to webinar." Is there an effort being made to change legislatively and on the state or federal level to change or get rid of this term.

**Kathy:** [01:11:40] None that I'm aware of; Penny, again, I defer to you.

**Penny:** [01:11:45] I'm really not aware of any either, but I'm not sure I'm up with it. I don't know if there's anybody from policy from the Children's Bureau on the line. They might know something. I've not heard of any movement. I think it's time to have a movement to get rid of it. And it's in a lot of different pieces of legislation on the Child Welfare side. It's not just ASFA.

I was looking through-- well, it could have been on an amendment from ASFA. I looked through the legislation last night, just skimmed it, and found there are a number of places under IV-E. You know, it's shorthand for whatever. For the 90 percent of the kids. I mean, that's a...

**Elizabeth:** [01:12:27] Yeah, I really liked your comment about: are we creating a difference here that doesn't really exist. I thought that was really interesting, the way you said that.

**Penny:** [01:12:36] And I really wonder, I guess because I come out of research, if 90 percent of the people have a characteristic out of 100, do you really have a variable that's varied. And so maybe it's time to say: look at who we're getting adopted out of the child welfare system; 40 years ago people would be just shocked at the kinds of situations that we're practicing in today. You know, back to my example that a special needs adoption was a healthy white infant of a mentally retarded mother. I mean, we wouldn't even flinch at that today, given the great strides that have been made to find families for children. So do we really need a new term? Or do we just call them waiting children, or something else, and not even mess with these kinds of terms. I don't know.

And I really don't know what's happening in legislation. I have not heard anything. Now Elizabeth, you may know, because somebody raised this question to have this webinar. I don't know where that came from.

**Elizabeth:** [01:13:45] Sure. I can tell you the background for the webinars was that we were asked to develop a long list of topics. And I think we started with 22. And this was one that the Children's Bureau selected I think just feeling that it was an emerging issue in the field and it was something that we were increasingly caring about. So I don't think that there was necessarily any particular legislation that sparked the discussion, but definitely an awareness that it is a topic that has continued to come up in the field as something that people do want to talk about, and that we need to be talking about to move the field forward.

Angela, do we have other questions on the phone?

**Angela:** [01:14:23] Yes. My next question comes from Margaret with Texas.

**Margaret:** [01:14:30] Yes, hello. I also put my question in through writing. But I'm the Cost Authority in ad Litem for a 7-year old boy who has a severe speech impairment, and he also has probably a severe emotional disorder. He was abused and neglected the first two years of his life, then adopted by his paternal grandmother, who then threw him away to CPS about a year ago, and he's been in foster care.

We are trying to place him for adoption with his maternal grandmother, but she unfortunately is financially unable to take him unless she gets assistance. Texas is claiming they pay only \$450 a month subsidy, even though they're currently paying about \$1,500 a month to the foster care givers because he's at a specialized level of care.

How can this be possible? This boy is going to require life-long care.

**Penny:** [01:15:45] I suggest Kathy try and answer that, because she's worked at the state level. I mean, I know that they are not required to pay the same amount of money. We know that. But Kathy, do people have an ability to appeal that in some way in most states?

**Kathy:** [01:16:04] Yes, absolutely; and we aren't really authorized to go into all of the adoption assistance policy, but I do want to just mention one of the provisions, and that is that the state is supposed to enter into a negotiation about that. And so I think that that is the approach I would take. And Nancy, you've probably run into this yourself.

**Margaret:** [01:16:34] And I mean, who does the negotiating.

**Kathy:** [01:16:37] Well, it's with the identified adoptive parent, and whoever administers the adoption assistance in the state.

**Margaret:** [01:16:50] Okay. So it would be between the grandmother I guess then, and the state.

**Kathy:** Correct.

**Margaret:** [01:16:56] There's a second part to that question, because we recently had what we call an "ARD," which I guess this is the same as an IEP on this boy in school, and he's pretty much non-verbal. We had requested that he be evaluated for a communication device. And they denied him, stating that they want him to talk. Well, we all want him to talk, but he doesn't talk. So foster care givers haven't been getting him to speech services.

So we have requested at a court hearing yesterday that he be put in a different home, which the judge approved. But in this case, can we actually do something about going back to the school and saying: look, you're not listening to us?

**Elizabeth:** [01:17:59] Kathy, I'm wondering if there are -- and I know the AdoptUSKids website has quite a lot of information on advocating for the needs of foster youth and adoptive youth, and I'm wondering if there are some resources maybe that we can point people to, to help guide them in figuring out how to address some of these issues.

**Margaret:** [01:18:16] Okay, that would be terrific.

**Kathy:** [01:18:21] Yes. So if you go to our website, there are lots of resources for parents there. Some of that is cross-referenced with the Child Welfare Information Gateway that is operated as we are, on behalf of the Children's Bureau. So those would be your two sources. Gateway is [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov); and AdoptUSKids is [adoptuskids.org](http://adoptuskids.org). And we have state pages, and so you might want to go to your state pages, and that would give you some additional insight into how they operate and what you can do.

**Kathy:** [01:19:09] I'll just jump in and say the same thing for education resources. If you need special education resources, every state Department of Education has by mandate special education information on their website. And most of them are really good.

**Margaret:** [01:19:28] He's in a Special Ed classroom with a terrific teacher. If he weren't placed in the classroom that he's in, we probably would have asked for him to be moved a long time ago. But we almost hesitated because the teacher is so good.

**Kathy:** Yeah, and that makes all the difference.

**Margaret:** So we have hesitation, because what's the classroom going to be like in a different school. But anyway, I appreciate those pointers. Thank you very much.

**Elizabeth:** Angela, do we have other callers on the line?

**Angela:** Yes, we have another question. Phyllis with Virginia.

**Phyllis:** [01:20:10] Hi, this is Phyllis, and it's nice to hear Penny and Kathy on the line. Penny, it's so nice to hear your description kind of, of what- how it's evolved. And you talked about visionaries back in the 70s and 80s, and I would argue that you're a visionary by posing some of these questions. Both you and Kathy, and I don't know Nancy as well. But some of these questions I think are so helpful. And I don't know what the answers are, but I think the answers are going to come from the youth, like Elbert, and like the youth that have had these labels of special needs... they may be able to help us come up with these answers.

And I'm actually with Child Welfare Information Gateway. Some of the resources that you talked about and the cross references that Kathy just talk about. Adoption Assistance by State is a database on Gateway that points to the definition of special needs in every state, and questions can specifically talk about the fair hearing process. So the caller that was wondering about that, that may be one of the references that you can get to through AdoptUSKids and Gateway. So thanks, this has been an incredible discussion. Thank you.

**Elizabeth:** [01:21:21] Sure. And Phyllis, I'll just tack onto that and say for those of you who come to Child Welfare Information Gateway, if you're a first time visitor, if you're having difficulty finding what you're looking for, please use our 800 number or our Live Chat. We do cover quite a lot of information on the site; and so if you're really looking for some of the resources which are specific to the topics we've discussed today and you can't find them easily, don't get frustrated trying to find them, just take advantage of our Live Chat or our 800 number, and our associates would be happy to help you find what you're looking for.

Angela, do we have another caller on the line.

**Angela:** No questions at this time.

**Elizabeth:** [01:21:58] Elbert, I didn't know if you had any additional comments, I knew you had been typing something sent to the Chat Box, but I did want to come back to you and maybe give you an opportunity if you had any other thoughts that you wanted to share with the group.

**Elbert:** [01:22:09] Excellent, I really do appreciate that and I thank you. I wanted to mention that I believe that we should take the focus off the title of special needs and allow that child to have a better possibility of being adopted. I believe that later on along the adoption process, then you can inform the possible parent of the special needs that the child may carry along with him.

I also, in talking with Kathy this morning and being informed on really what it means to be a special needs adoption and recognizing that I fit every one of those descriptions except that I'm a white Caucasian male, I understand that in doing this, it's a disgusting taste in my mouth knowing that I'm labeled as something that I can't control or help, and placed with a negative stereotype, with my attitude and outlook as far as in the foster care system.

I also believe that the title special needs should be replaced with just adoption. Being that is what we are focusing on is just adoption; and like I said, in the adoption process, inform possible parents with the special needs that that child may have. And that's all that I have.

**Elizabeth:** [01:23:35] Thank you, Elbert. I think that absolutely goes right back to what Kathy said in her presentation, is that when people come, just people who are interested in fostering or adopting children, they don't come from a child welfare background in most cases. And so where they get their information about what special needs means is by looking on the Internet, or what the popular media might present. And that's so different from how the term has evolved in child welfare.

Kathy, I'm wondering if you sense is that that's off-putting or frightening to parents who may actually provide really wonderful homes for children who need them, but come in kind of-- either don't come in at all, because they're put off by this term, or come in really with some fears and trepidations that aren't really reflective of reality.

**Kathy:** [01:24:22] I think that's absolutely correct, Elizabeth. Parents tell us that it's off-putting for them, they're scared away by the term "special needs," and where most parents go or perspective parents go automatically is special education. Special needs equals special education. It's very off-putting, it's very scary. They are coming forward to do something that even with a child who is perfect is difficult at best. Adoption is challenging to parents, a child who has known his or her parents from a relationship and then moving that child into a family... so it is very, very off-putting.

On the other hand, I think that we need, and AdoptUSKids is moving in this direction in this funding cycle, is to be more forthcoming on first contact with perspective interested families about the experiences that children who are in foster care have had. The kinds of things that Elbert experienced in his birth home and in his adoptive home. We need to be forthcoming about the impact that those experiences can have on children, but not to label them.

Special needs, I think really ends up being a label, and again, so offensive, comes to mean "damaged." That these are damaged kids, and they're not. They're kids who by no fault of their own need families.

**Elizabeth:** Exactly what every child needs.

**Kathy:** Absolutely.

**Elizabeth:** [01:26:05] And Elbert, I just have to thank you for being so candid and honest with us. Because I think of all the wonderful information we've heard today, to hear you say that when you learned this label had been one that would have been applied to you, what your gut-level reaction was to it, that's to me, as somebody who's worked in the field, that's really instructive to

know. And whether it was ever meant to be a term that would be so negative to the people that would be wearing it, I don't know that that was ever the intention, I don't think that was ever the intention. But knowing that that's kind of the end result, that's just very instructive to me. So I really want to thank you for your candor.

**Elbert:** [01:26:43] Absolutely, I really appreciate it. And I want to say that that was a very great point, Kathy. And also, I would love by maybe closing as far as on my end in saying, or referencing what I was saying earlier: when it comes to rights, ethnicity, sexuality, or siblings, it should not affect being a part of a forever family.

**Elizabeth:** [01:27:04] Absolutely. I can't think of a better point to close on, and we are right at 2:30 and I want to be respectful of people's time.

We've had multiple questions about whether or not the slides will be made available, there are several ways that you'll be able to get them. They will be posted to the Children's Bureau's Centennial website, which is shown on your screens right now. We also will be preparing and posting a recording of this webinar, it just takes us a little bit of time to make it compliant, so keep your eyes peeled on that site for the slides and also for a recording of this webinar.

The second place that you'll be able to access the slides is everyone who registered today by about midday today should have received an invitation to join a LinkedIn discussion group, Children's Bureau Centennial webinar's discussion; there is a thread within that that is specific to today's webinar. It definitely encouraged this group to go to that site, join and continue. I think this is a wonderful conversation that has started today and I would really love to see our participants use that online space to continue to discuss this.

I also will make sure that the slides are posted there as well, and will post information to the LinkedIn group when the recorded webinar and the slides are posted to the Children's Bureau website.

Finally, I would like to extend a request that's actually more of a plea. As you all exit the webinar today there will be a webinar evaluation survey that will appear on your computers and I would ask that you go ahead and complete that. It will just take you a few minutes. We really do use that feedback. Somebody had asked earlier today how we chose topics, and through are participant feedback is really where we've gotten a lot of the information that we then transmit to the Children's Bureau to help them think about topics going forward and what the best way is to present that information to you. So I would definitely ask that you go there, as well as complete that survey.

I'd like to close again with just thanking our four wonderful presenters today; I know you all are very busy individuals. But I think this has been a fantastic discussion, I hope that it's been beneficial to our audience. But I do want to thank you all for sharing your talent and your time and your expertise with us today.

So that concludes our webinar for today.

[End webinar.]