



# Building Bridges

The Newsletter of the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities

Spring 1999

## The TIES that Bond

A pilot program helps to ensure the successful adoption of children with prenatal substance exposure.



▲  
TIES staff counselors use play therapy to help ease children's transitions into their adoptive homes.

At first glance, Casey did not appear to be a typical 3-year-old. The charming and intelligent boy was exhibiting severe tantrums, hitting and biting behaviors, both at preschool and in his adoptive home. In reality, though, Casey's situation was not unusual for a child who was being adopted from the Los Angeles County foster care system.

He was intense, fearful and angry—reacting to the loss of his foster parents and testing his new parents. And like the vast majority of children adopted from the county's adoption division, Casey had been prenatally exposed to alcohol and/or other drugs.

A wide range of health and developmental patterns have been observed

among infants and children who were prenatally substance-exposed, varying from severe to mild to no apparent effects. While uncertainty remains about the long-term consequences of such exposure, the most dire predictions have not materialized. This much is clear: Stable, consistent, and nurturing postnatal environments optimize the considerable potential for these children.

At the same time, their biological vulnerability is all too frequently compounded by environmental factors such as separation from birth parents, living with family members who are chemically dependent, being abused and/or neglected, and experiencing multiple placements. Recently enacted national and state policy directives have determined that those children who cannot be reunified safely with biological parents in a reasonable time frame must be placed with well prepared, well supported adoptive families. This should occur as early as possible in order to meet the children's needs for nurturing, attachment, consistency, structure, and early intervention.

That was the rationale behind Training, Intervention, Education and Services (TIES) for Adoption, a program developed and implemented by the Adoptions Division of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, and the UCLA Department of Psychology. TIES for Adoption seeks to promote the successful adoption of children with prenatal substance exposure by reducing barriers to their adoption. The first component of TIES began with a set of services designed to fully prepare prospective adoptive parents, support the children and their adoptive families at the time of the child's transition from foster care into adoption and in the months following placement, and educate the professionals working with them.

TIES began in 1995 as a model demonstration project funded by the Federal Adoption Opportunities Program. In early 1998, the Stuart Foundation began funding a more fully developed model, and additional funding was provided by DCFS, in

*continued on next page*

### INSIDE

2  
TIES for Adoption

3  
Breastfeeding Program;  
PISCS

4  
Report Cards; People

5  
Children's Policy; Briefly

6  
In Print; Calendar