

# MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT NATIONAL FAMILY SERVICES: FOSTER CARE in Trinidad and Tobago

*helping, empowering, transforming lives...*

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## Background

- Social services agencies addressing child and family issues have reported several types of abuse against children eg: abandonment, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation.
- Trinidad and Tobago has taken significant steps in an attempt to offer greater protection to children.



## Background Cont'd

- Trinidad and Tobago joined the international community in signing ( in1989) and ratifying (in 1991)the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**.
- Trinidad and Tobago agreed to the **UN Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children** (1990).
- In keeping with our obligations as signatory to these instruments:
  - In1992 an Inter-ministerial Committee was established to formulate a **National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children**.
  - The first NPA was completed in 1993
  - The Foster Care Pilot Project was implemented
  - The Foster Care Programme was formalized
  - And the Children's Legislation was reviewed



## Background Cont'd

- The revised NPA covers the period 2006-2010 and reflects the goals of the 2002 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS). The priority areas covered are:
  1. Promoting Healthy Lifestyles
  2. Providing Quality Education
  3. Protection Against Abuse, Exploitation and Violence
  4. Combating HIV/AIDS
- The Plan of Action details strategies for implementation of specific goals in each of the priority areas. These strategies are currently being implemented across the social sector in Trinidad and Tobago.



## Key Initiatives in the Area of Care and Protection of Children in Trinidad and Tobago

### LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

- *In an attempt to bring legislation in Trinidad and Tobago into conformity with provisions of the CRC, a “Package of Children’s Legislation” was first passed in 2000.*
- *The “Package” was recently reviewed, and now comprises the following seven (7) pieces of legislation:*
- **International Child Abduction Act 2008 (Act No. 8 of 2008).**
- **Children’s Authority (Amendment) Act 2008 Act Nol. 14 of 2008).**
- **The Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries (Amendment) Act 2008 (Act No. 15 of 2008).**
- **The Children Bill.**
- **Family Court Bill.**
- **Adoption Bill.**
- **Status of Children Bill.**



# Key Initiatives in the Area of Care and Protection of Children in Trinidad and Tobago

## LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

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- ➔ **The Children's Legislation advocates transformation of the current child protection system so that children can enjoy the same legal protection afforded other members of society.**
- ➔ **This will be done by improving the monitoring, licensing and regulating of community residences, foster care and nurseries in Trinidad and Tobago.**
- ➔ **The various pieces of the legislation are in different stages of the process between review and final passage.**
- ➔ **The Children's Authority (Amendment) Act 2008 was assented to in September 2008.**
- ➔ **The Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries (Amendment) Act 2008 was assented to in September 2008.**
- ➔ **The Children Bill was referred to a special select committee of the House of Representatives in November 2008**
- ➔ **The International Child Abduction Act was proclaimed in Oct. 2008**



## Key Initiatives (cont'd.)

### NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR CHILDREN

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- ➡ **A Revised National Plan of Action for children was completed in 2006.**
- ➡ **The document reflects the goals of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session 2002, in four (4) priority areas:**
  1. **Promoting healthy lives**
  2. **Providing quality education**
  3. **Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence**
  4. **Combating HIV/AIDS**
- ➡ **Strategies for the achievement of these goals are currently being implemented across the social sector in Trinidad and Tobago**



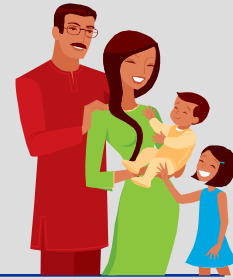
## Key Initiatives cont'd

**Programmes and other initiatives have been implemented throughout the social sector to support families and children at risk, and lessen the need for foster care.**





## Key Initiatives (cont'd.)



### INITIATIVES IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- ➔ **Increases in the family support programmes, special child grants, assistance for transport, clothing and/or books.**
- ➔ **Increases in counseling for children in need of special protection.**
- ➔ **Expansion of government subventions to non governmental organizations that address the needs of children.**
- ➔ **Annual parenting and community support programmes.**
- ➔ **Workshops that aim to sensitize children and parents in child rights and responsibilities.**
- ➔ **Distribution of written material to children, guardians and organizations concerning child rights.**





## Key Initiatives (cont'd.)

### INITIATIVES IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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- **Adoption of policies, plans and programmes for a restructured and decentralized education system from early childhood to adult education.**
- **Increases in the number of school social workers.**
- **Training in child rights issues/laws for all School Social Workers and Guidance Officers.**
- **Support for children with disabilities eg. Braille technicians and teacher aides have been employed.**
- **A draft policy on Inclusive Education has been developed.**



## Key Initiatives (cont'd.)



### INITIATIVES IN HEALTH

- ➔ **In compliance with Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, early breastfeeding is now promoted at the Sangre Grande Regional Hospital and Mt Hope Maternity Hospital.**
- ➔ **Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (P.M.T.C.T.) of HIV/AIDS is offered at the Port of Spain General Hospital and all Health Centers providing milk for a period of one year.**
- ➔ **Comprehensive ante-natal services that include regular health checkups by health professionals, testing for anemia , HIV and other infections are provided free of charge at public maternal and child health clinics throughout the country.**





## Key Initiatives (cont'd.)

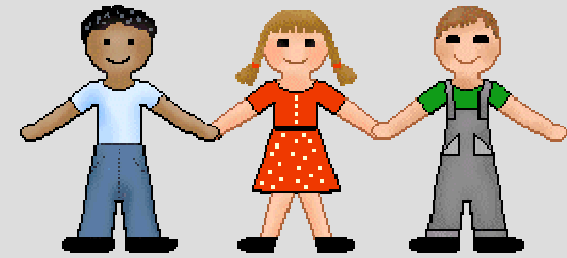
### INITIATIVES IN THE MINISTRY OF SPORT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

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- **The National Youth Policy of Trinidad and Tobago was approved by Cabinet in 2004, and is currently being implemented.**
- **The Division of Youth Affairs conducts services in the following areas: Counseling, Referral Services, Adolescent and Reproductive Health Education, Drug Abuse Education and HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention Programmes.**



## THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM



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### MISSION STATEMENT

**To advocate for the protection of children who are unable to live at home due to situations of child abuse, neglect and abandonment.**



## CURRENT FRAMEWORK FOR FOSTER CARE

**Guided by the Principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC (best interest of the child, respecting the views of the child...)**

- @ Foster Care originated as a pilot project in July 1994.**
- @ This spoke of the formal fostering of children under the age of 18 for a period of one (1) year under administration of a Cabinet appointed Committee.**
- @ It was officially launched in 1995**
- @ The project was subsequently expanded and improved, thereby formalizing Foster Care in Trinidad and Tobago.**
- @ From 2007 to date, the programme has been continuously developing to include new initiatives with some increases in staff.**



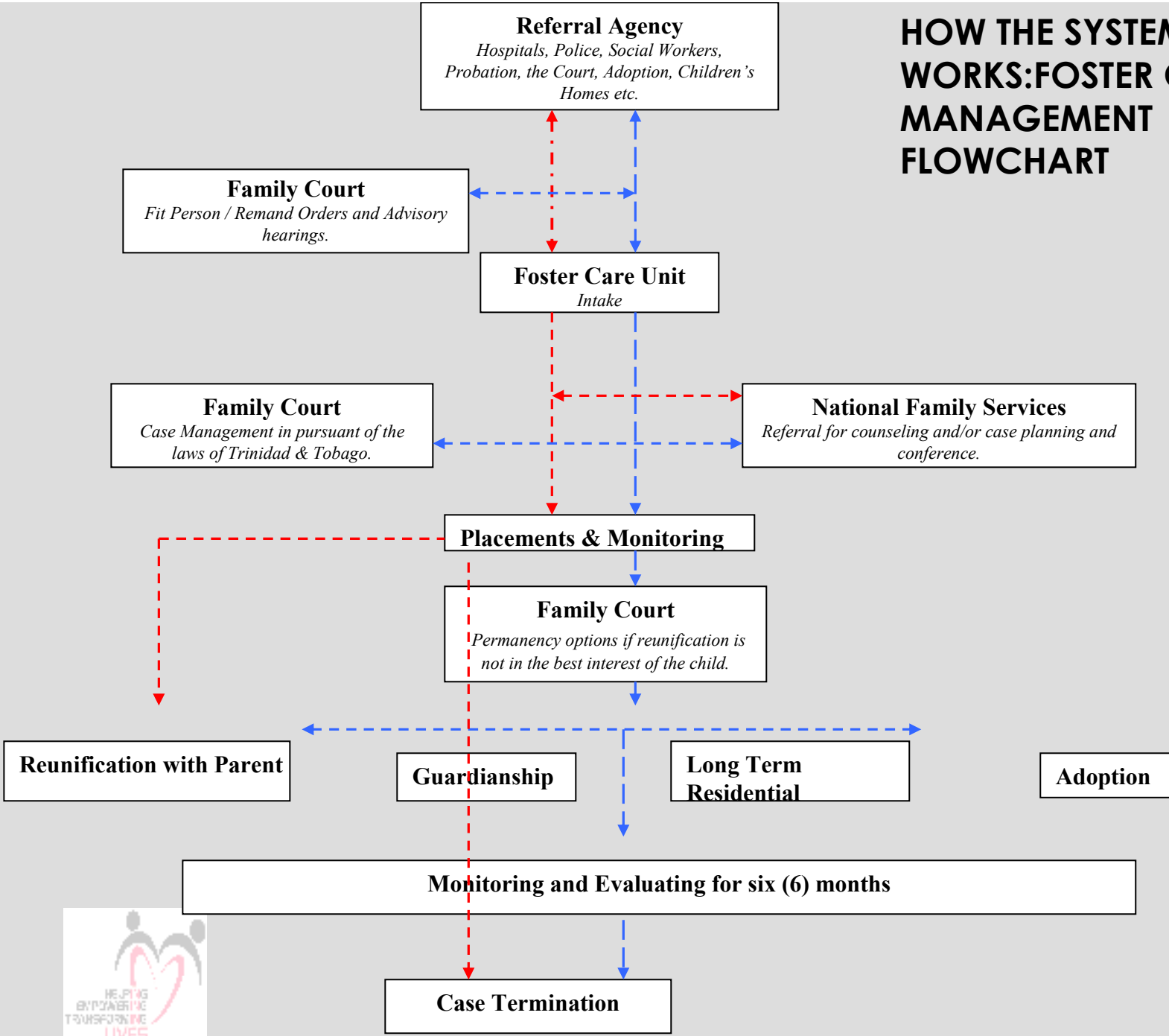
## HOW THE SYSTEM CURRENTLY FUNCTIONS

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- Referrals are received from hospitals, the police, the court, private children's homes, social workers and National Family Services and The Adoption Unit.
- A Foster Care Officer is assigned.
- The case is evaluated and managed by the Foster Care Officer. Further referrals are made where necessary, (e.g. counseling).
- Frequent visits are made to the foster home by the Foster Care Officer.
- Assessment is made for reunification or permanency.
- Where reunification is not possible, child is referred to the Adoption Unit.
- Case is terminated.



# HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS: FOSTER CARE MANAGEMENT FLOWCHART





## TYPES OF PLACEMENT



1. **RELATIVE PLACEMENT**
2. **RESPIRE CARE PLACEMENT**
3. **TRADITIONAL FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT**
4. **SPECIALIZED OR THERAPUTIC FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT**
5. **GROUP HOME/RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT**
6. **ADOPTION PLACEMENT**

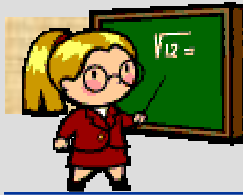


# APPLYING TO BE A FOSTER PARENT:

## THE PROCESS

1. Intake
2. The Home Study (detailed interview and home inspection).
3. Support Documents (police certificates, medicals and references).
4. Evaluation of application.

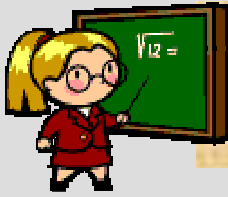




## CURRENT STATISTICS

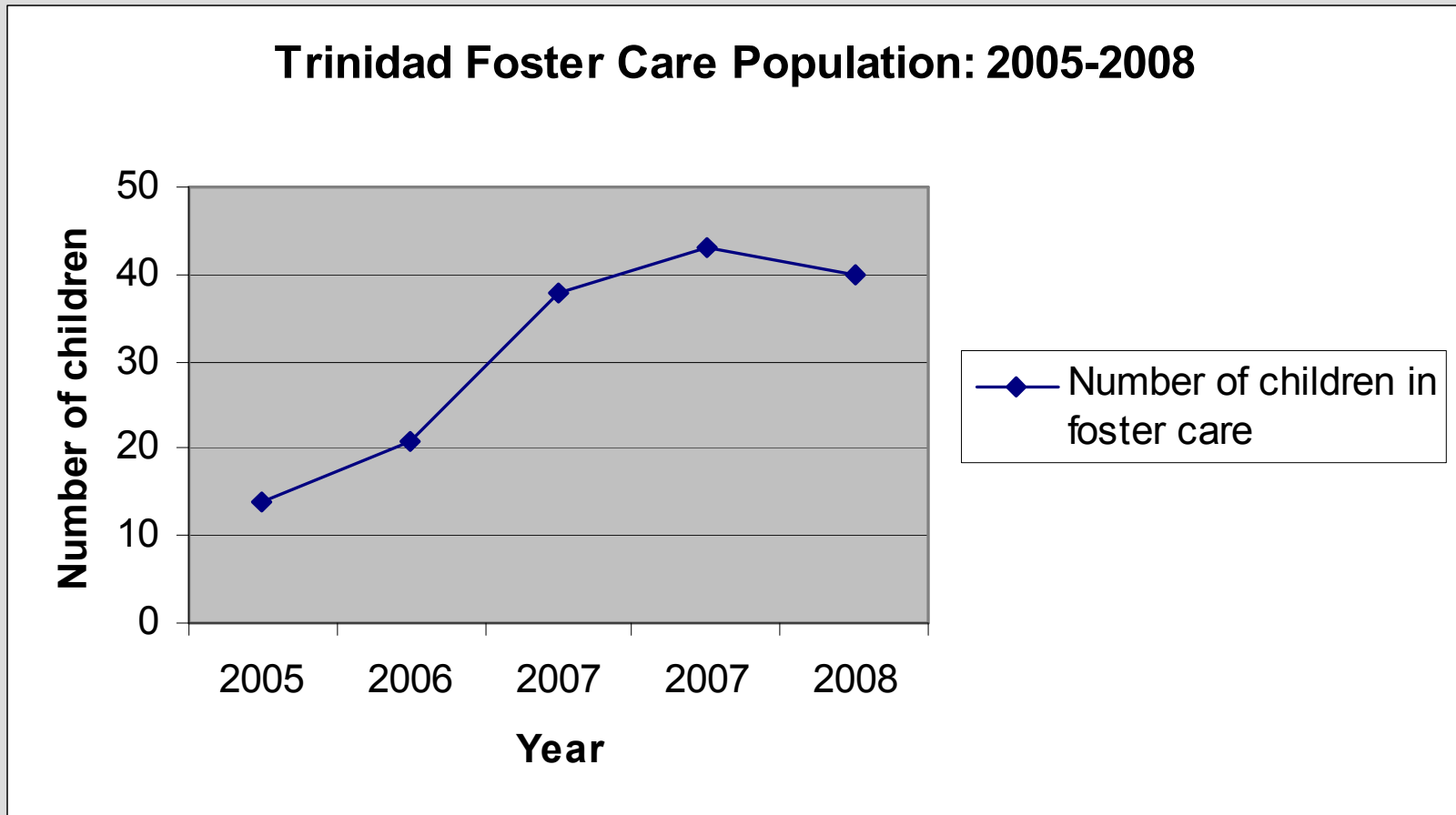
- The total population of children under the age of 18 in 2007 was 357,000 (UNICEF 2008)
- There are currently fifty-one (51) children in foster care up to this date (2009).
- Of these fifty-one (51) children, nineteen (19) are either physically or mentally disabled or both.
- There are currently nineteen(19) foster parents/homes operating in Trinidad from an initial population of five(5) at the start of the program.
- These homes are located in the Northern, Central and Southern parts of Trinidad. There are none in Tobago.
- Two (2) of these homes have been reserved for special needs children.
- There has been a proposal for the foster care program to eventually support approximately two hundred (200) children.  
(Foster care committee report, 2008)





## CURRENT STATISTICS (cont'd.):

Chart showing steady increase in number of Foster Children from 2005-2008



## WAY FORWARD



- ❖ Establishment of a Foster Care system that will be managed by the Children's Authority.
- ❖ Maintenance of a register of approved foster parents.
- ❖ Annual reviews of all foster parents.
- ❖ Cancellation of the registration of an approved foster parent.
- ❖ Notification in writing, the cancellation of registration to an approved foster parent.
- ❖ Training of foster parents, and all members of his household in the roles, functions & duties involved in foster care.

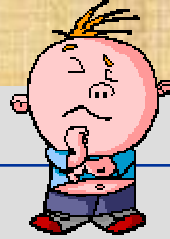


## AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT IN FOSTER CARE

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- ② **Improvement in the situation of the nation's children through legislation.**
- ② **Improvement in Service Delivery following revised policy and procedures.**
- ② **Additional recruitment of foster parents.**
- ② **Expansion of public awareness and sensitization to our stakeholders.**
- ② **Expanded staffing of the Unit.**





## CONSTRAINTS

- ④ How do we address ageing out: Foster children are only allowed to be cared for under this system until the age of 18. (Possibly strengthen network with NGO and other partners at community level for follow up care/mentoring of young adults)
- ④ Training for foster parents.
- ④ Distinction in types of foster care placements.
- ④ Effects of the nations' growing social problems on our children.
- ④ Parents who abscond and leave their children 'stuck' in the foster care system.
- ④ Cooperation from the various agencies (e.g. hospitals, schools, etc.) that play an integral role when a child is taken into care.





**THE END**

