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Groundbreaking Study Provides Important New Insights on Identity Issues in Adoption

NEW YORK, Nov. 9, 2009 – The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute today released a major study on identity formation for adopted persons, **a groundbreaking work that provides significant new information and insights that can be used to improve laws, policies and practices – as well as public understanding** – on a range of issues relating to adoption, particularly across racial lines.

The study, launched with funding from the Kellogg Foundation, is the centerpiece of a 113-page report entitled “**Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Positive Identity Formation in Adoption.**” It is the broadest, most extensive examination of adult adoptive identity to date, based on input from the primary experts on the subject: adults who were adopted as children. Central findings include:

- **Adoption becomes an increasingly significant aspect of identity for most adopted people – and race/ethnicity grows in importance for adoptees of color** – throughout childhood and into adulthood. These findings raise questions about some current attitudes, practices and policies predicated on the notion that these factors diminish in importance after adolescence.
- **Adoption-related teasing and bias are a reality for many adoptees**, but more so for Whites – who experienced the most negative behavior and comments from extended family and childhood friends. **Race trumped adoption for adopted persons of color**; i.e., a large majority experienced race-based discrimination rather than (or in addition to) adoption-related negativity.
- A significant majority of **transracially adopted adults reported considering themselves to be or wanting to be White as children** – a stark message to parents and professionals, though most eventually grew to identify themselves as members of their racial/ethnic group (in this case, Korean Americans). Even as adults, a minority have not reconciled their racial identity.
- The most effective strategies for achieving positive identity formation are “lived experiences” – in particular, **travel to native country and attending racially diverse schools** for the transracial adoptees, **and contact with birth relatives** for Whites adopted domestically. A majority of adopted adults in both categories said they had searched for their roots in some way.

Among the key recommendations, based on this research, are:

- Expand preparation and post-placement support for parents adopting across race and culture.
- Develop empirically based practices and resources to prepare transracially and transculturally adopted youth to cope with racial bias.
- Promote laws, policies and practices that facilitate access to information for adopted individuals.
- Educate parents, teachers, practitioners and the media about adoption’s realities to erase stigmas and stereotypes, minimize adoption-related bias, and improve children’s experiences.

“Tens of millions of people in our country are already directly connected to adoption, and tens of thousands of additional children are waiting for permanent families,” said Adam Pertman, the Adoption Institute’s Executive Director. “Our goal for this research is ambitious: to improve all their lives in practical ways today – even as we utilize the new information and insights from the findings to make adoption itself an increasingly knowledge-based, healthy and ethical institution into the future.”

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The survey at the core of this research was completed by 468 adult adoptees (making it, to our knowledge, the largest study of adoption identity in adults to date in the U.S.). For comparison purposes, we focused on the two largest, most homogenous cohorts within the total group: 179 Korean-born respondents and 156 American-born Caucasian respondents, all adopted by two White parents. **It is noteworthy that 1 in 10 of all Korean American citizens came to this country by adoption.**

While one cohort of transracial adoptees (Korean Americans) is at the heart of the study, it is important to note that an extensive Adoption Institute review of decades of relevant literature (Appendix I), as well as the Institute's examination of transracial adoption from foster care (see "Finding Homes for African American Children" at http://adoptioninstitute.org/research/2008_05_mepa.php), make clear that many of **the findings and recommendations in this new report apply to other domestically and internationally adopted persons and families as well.**

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute is an independent, nonpartisan, national nonprofit that is the pre-eminent research, policy and education organization in its field. Its mission is "to provide leadership and support to improve laws, policies, and practices – through sound research, education and advocacy – to enhance the lives of everyone touched by adoption."

For more information about "Beyond Culture Camp" or to schedule an interview with Executive Director Adam Pertman, email apertman@adoptioninstitute.org or call 617-763-0134. To read or download a copy of the Executive Summary or the full report, go to www.adoptioninstitute.org.

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