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The Center for Adoption Support and Education™ (C.A.S.E.) to launch a National Demonstration & Teaching Clinic for Adoption Competent Mental Health Therapy

BURTONSVILLE, MD — **The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)** announces plans to launch a National Demonstration & Teaching Clinic for Adoption Competent Mental Health Therapy. **C.A.S.E.**'s vision in undertaking this bold new strategic direction is to make all clinical therapy for the families of children who have been adopted, are experiencing foster care, or guardianship, adoption competent, so that all families have access to this specialized support.

Due to traumatic life experiences and compromised beginnings, many children who are adopted or experiencing foster care have higher risks for developmental, health, emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges. In addition, there are often complex racial, ethnic, and cultural issues inherent in families who adopt transracially/transculturally. Understanding and addressing the impact of these experiences is vital to positive outcomes. Yet, most professionals who work with these youth have not been trained in adoption competent mental health therapy.

Currently in concept development, **C.A.S.E.** is in the process of identifying the resources and external partners needed to successfully launch this endeavor in fall 2023. "Embarking on this new, exciting chapter in **C.A.S.E.**'s history is the culmination of decades of training in best practices and a rigorous strategic planning process launched in fall 2020 involving both internal staff and external stakeholders," said Debbie B. Riley, LCMFT, C.A.S.E. CEO and co-founder, "The

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learnings revealed during that process were both extensive and transformational and clearly pointed us in this direction.”

C.A.S.E. is at the forefront of innovation through training, evaluation, and program development with the focus on providing therapy to adoptive, foster, kinship, and guardianship families and bolstering the skills of professionals who support them. **C.A.S.E.** has developed two nationally recognized adoption competency trainings for professionals: The accredited and evidence-based **Training for Adoption Competency™ (TAC)** which has trained over 2,000 clinicians nationwide since 2009, and the web-based **National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative™ (NTI)** funded by the Children’s Bureau and evaluated in 2018 with over 10,000 professionals across the country.

TAC is a comprehensive, 72-hour classroom-based and rigorously evaluated training for post-master’s licensed clinicians accredited by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence. It is the only accredited, assessment-based certificate program on adoption competency in the country. **NTI** is 20–30-hour, web-based, self-paced training to provide child welfare and mental health professionals the foundational understanding of the needs and mental health challenges for children and their foster, adoptive, and guardianship families. Both trainings are embedded in **C.A.S.E.**’s current clinical service delivery, providing their therapists with the skills, insight, and experience to help families navigate the many challenges they face.

To lead this first of its kind National Demonstration & Teaching Clinic for Adoption Competent Mental Health Therapy, **C.A.S.E.** has named Laura Ornelas, LCSW, as Director. A licensed clinical social worker with a master’s degree in social work from the University of Southern California, Ms. Ornelas has specialized in the field of foster care and adoption for over 25 years and has been instrumental in the startup of multiple adoption placement and adoption specialty mental health programs throughout California.

She has been immersed in all aspects of child placement in public and private adoptions, has been running mental health clinics for nearly 15 years, and has worked with children of all ages and with widely diverse families. She has been training professionals on best practice nationwide for the last two decades and brings her unique combination of experiences to launch this important effort. “I am so excited to join the **C.A.S.E.** team for this one-of-a-kind

endeavor,” said Ms. Ornelas, “It feels like the perfect match for my background, and I am so honored to be asked to contribute to the field at such an important time in our nation.”

C.A.S.E.’s investment in building this national cadre of adoption competent mental health professionals is doubly important, given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country’s youth, many of whom will sadly become more vulnerable to involvement in the nation’s child welfare system. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that to date, more than 140,000 children have lost a primary caregiver due to COVID-19. Children’s Health Advocates and the American Psychological Association have made it clear that lawmakers need to invest in more long-term solutions to build the pediatric mental health workforce and **C.A.S.E.** is answering the call.

“Providing adopted children and their families access to quality mental health services is key to supporting their long-term happiness and stability,” said Maryland Senator Chris Van Hollen. “For decades, **C.A.S.E.** has delivered these crucial services to families in Maryland and across the country. This new Demonstration & Teaching Clinic for Adoption Competent Mental Health Therapy will help continue their incredible work by developing the next generation of therapists to support the mental health needs of foster and adoptive families. I am proud that **C.A.S.E.** calls Maryland home, and that their leadership promotes improved outcomes for thousands of children and families.”

The Center for Adoption Support and Education is a nationally recognized leader in mental health services for the adoption, foster care, and guardianship community. The nonprofit organization’s mission is to improve the lives of children who have been adopted or in foster care and their families through counseling, lifelong education, advocating for adoption-competent enhancements in child welfare and mental health systems, and a growing national network of trained professionals. **C.A.S.E.** has trained over 17,000 mental health and child welfare professionals in 31 states. With offices in the Baltimore-Washington metro area, **C.A.S.E.** has provided clinical services for more than 6,800 clients and their families since its founding in 1998. Visit www.adoptionsupport.org to learn more.

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