NEW YORK STATE | Office of Children and Family Services

REVITALIZING RECRUITMENT

Practical strategies for finding and keeping foster, adoptive, and kinship homes

2015

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Inside This Guide

Revitalizing Recruitment is intended to be a practical, easy-to-read summary of promising and best practices currently used in recruitment and retention of foster/adoptive families. It was developed to help local districts and voluntary agencies meet the challenge of providing qualified, well-prepared foster/adoptive families that can meet the needs of children and youth coming into care.

Resources and connections to resources are provided in several ways:

- Where practices are described or highlighted ("Put It into Practice"), links and web page addresses are provided as sources for more information.
- A list of "Additional Resources" at the end of each chapter also provides web page addresses, if available, and a brief summary of the resource content.
- Some chapters include one-page descriptions of practice models and their evidence bases.
- An extensive Appendices section includes copies of fact sheets and guides related to topics described in each chapter.
- References are provided according to American Psychological Association (APA) style and are listed at the end of each chapter.

Revitalizing Recruitment was written and compiled as part of the *Innovations in Family Recruitment* program, funded by a diligent recruitment grant to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau. The current five-year effort builds on knowledge obtained from prior federally-funded programs related to foster and adoptive parent recruitment, including *New York State's Longest Waiting Children* and *A Parent for Every Child*. *Innovations in Family Recruitment* continues this work with an examination of best and promising practices related to recruitment and retention of foster/adoptive families.

CHAPTER 1

How Do We Revitalize Recruitment?

New York's children and youth who are placed into foster care have the right to live in a safe, nurturing, healthy, and suitable residence where they are treated fairly and with respect. This principle was reaffirmed when the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) released the "Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care" in December 2014. The majority of these children and youth are cared for by foster parents, including kinship foster parents, who are the key to making this "right" a reality.

(See Appendix 1-1: *Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care*.)

Foster parents take the responsibility to care for children who are abused, neglected, and traumatized. They are often the first step in helping children heal and cope with the new reality of their lives. In turn, local social services districts (local districts) and voluntary agencies are responsible for recruiting, training, and supporting foster parents. The system is expected to provide a pool of qualified foster parents who are able to accommodate the needs of children and youth in placement.

To meet that expectation, each agency must have a robust recruitment and retention program for foster/adoptive families.

"As a child or youth in foster care in the State of New York, I have the right to live in a safe, nurturing, healthy, and suitable residence, free from exploitation, where I am treated with respect and where I have enough food and adequate clothing. I have the right to the least restrictive, most homelike setting where I can safely live and receive services."

— New York State Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Challenges in recruitment and retention

Based on data and anecdotal evidence from service providers, there is a gap between the number of foster/adoptive families available and the needs of children coming into foster care. Many children coming into care have experienced repeated and long-term trauma in their young lives, resulting in a range of difficult behaviors and developmental problems. The needs of these children require that agency staff have the tools they need to serve children, foster families, and birth families. The system must be more strategic and innovative in its approach to recruitment and retention of foster/adoptive families.

Children of color continue to be disproportionately represented in the foster care system. Disproportionality rates show varying improvement in the United States, but troubling gaps remain. According to one report, "[Children of color] wait far longer than Caucasian children for adoption, and are at far greater risk of never experiencing an adoptive home (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, May 2014)." The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) and its associated amendments require that a pool of foster/adoptive homes be available to decrease the length of time children wait to be adopted. It requires that states must diligently recruit foster and adoptive parents who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children who need homes. It is the basis for New York State's requirement that local districts and voluntary agencies involved in recruiting foster/adoptive parents provide periodic recruitment and retention plans to OCFS.

Needs for specific types of foster homes vary among jurisdictions and fluctuate over time. It is important for local districts and voluntary agencies to collect and analyze data frequently to identify trends and reassess needs related to the availability of foster/adoptive homes for children with specific cultural and ethnic backgrounds, older youth, sibling groups, and children with special physical and behavioral needs.

Opportunities in recruitment and retention

This resource offers strategies for child welfare professionals in New York State and elsewhere who are looking for more effective ways to find and keep foster/adoptive families. It is a compilation of research, publications, and practice models that may be helpful in the process of reimagining recruitment and retention programs at the local level.

These summaries were prepared with the understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all model for agencies across the state. There are, however, promising practices that have resulted in successful outcomes, and a range of resource materials based on research and experience.

In general, the most successful programs use more targeted and child-focused recruitment strategies, with less focus on general strategies, such as public service announcements and billboards. These approaches require new techniques such as data analysis, social media, and "case mining" in order to succeed. However, they also emphasize long-held principles such as:

- Good customer service
- Responsiveness
- Need-driven support programs for foster/adoptive families

Other characteristics of successful programs include:

- Capturing and analyzing data to identify needs and trends
- Providing good customer service to prospective and current foster/adoptive parents

- Assisting prospective foster parents throughout the certification process, and continuing that pattern after certification and placement
- Involving foster/adoptive parents, youth, and community resources in the process
- Diligently seeking kinship homes among extended family members and friends
- Supporting foster/adoptive families with training, respite care, and peer assistance

Effective recruitment and retention practices are agency-wide responsibilities and they should be agency-wide priorities. Everyone on staff, from the receptionist to the agency director, should be committed to supporting prospective and current foster/adoptive families, and responding quickly and appropriately to their needs.

A significant message that emerges from many of these resources is that good retention leads to good recruitment. Foster/adoptive and kinship parents who feel respected and valued for their work with children are more likely to stay in the program. Experienced, well-supported foster/adoptive parents become natural recruiters in their communities. The ultimate benefit is high-quality, appropriate, and consistent care for children and youth in need.

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CHAPTER 2

Driving Recruitment with Data

Local districts and voluntary agencies invest significant resources in recruiting, supporting, and retaining foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. These families are critical in maintaining the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care.

But how do agencies know what works and what is being achieved from this investment of resources? What is the "return on investment" for specific recruitment strategies? Did the public service announcement or website announcing the need for foster/adoptive parents result in more certified parents? How long do foster parents remain active? If they stopped fostering, what was the reason? Would better outcomes be achieved if staff time and resources were redirected toward different recruitment activities?

How data strengthens recruitment

Until recently, much of the "knowledge" about effective recruitment and retention strategies was anecdotal and collected on a case-by-case basis, with little systematic data collection and analysis. For example, information may be collected in the form of sign-in sheets at foster/adoptive parent orientations and trainings, but is not entered into a database and analyzed. Even basic information, such as the number of inquiries received during the year and the way such callers learned about the need for foster/adoptive homes, is not often documented in a way that could be used to quantify and measure current performance or trends.

Systematic data collection and analysis provide baseline measures of performance that allow agencies to assess changes in performance and the effectiveness of specific strategies over time. This type of data analysis also supports the agency's assessment of gaps in performance and influences the planning of steps to close those gaps.

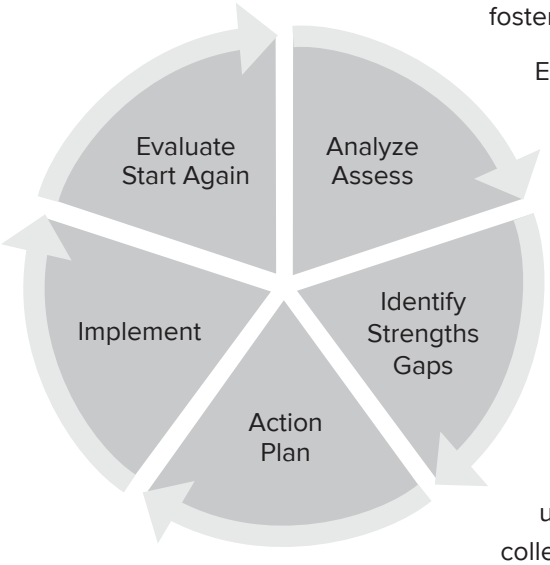
"Having useful data on prospective and current parents gives a child welfare system crucial insight into how effective their current approaches are in recruiting, developing, and supporting foster, adoptive, and kinship families."

— National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment

These steps are part of a continuous quality improvement approach to recruitment and retention that involves setting a baseline to assess performance; developing a theory of change and setting goals; monitoring feedback and performance to see whether the changes are working; adjusting the strategy; and reassessing performance (Wulczyn, 2007). This process helps the agency evaluate data, assess and identify needs, develop a plan to address the needs, and then reassess again.

Data collection and analysis

Recruitment of high-quality, committed foster/adoptive parents is fraught with challenges, but also presents many opportunities for new strategies and techniques. The term "diligent recruitment" has been applied to these efforts as "a more systematic approach to recruiting, retaining, developing, and supporting a pool of families that can meet the needs of children and youth in foster care (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, 2015a)."



Evaluating key data points helps agencies make informed decisions and drives their recruitment efforts to meet specific needs. Involvement of key stakeholders in the conversation is recommended to further evaluate the data, review recommendations, and facilitate cross-collaboration.

During this process, agencies may discover that they are not collecting all the data they need, or may be collecting it in a way that is not easy to analyze, such as the paper sign-in sheets at information sessions and trainings. Agencies may want to modify some practices to capture such data in the future. Training, supervision, and staff meetings are opportunities to help staff understand the importance of accurate, consistent, and timely data collection and entry.

Diligent recruitment requires an agency to collect and critically analyze data on at least three tracks:

- Strengths and bottlenecks in the recruitment process
- Characteristics of current and needed foster/adoptive homes
- Retention successes and challenges (e.g., homes that have continued to foster, families that have stopped fostering and the reasons why, etc.)

Data elements related to recruitment

When collecting and analyzing data about the strengths and weaknesses of the recruitment process, the goals are to identify the effectiveness of the current process and determine what changes can be made to increase effectiveness, including timeliness. Agencies should make sure that they are capturing the data needed to fully evaluate the process and look at each point

in the process as an opportunity to enhance or modify that point. Over time, trends can be identified and performance changes measured.

When collecting and analyzing data about key steps in the process, and the time it takes for the agency and applicants to complete each milestone, agencies should consider the following:

- The number of inquiries received in a given time period (e.g., past six months, past year, etc.)
- How inquirers learned about the agency's foster/adoption program
- Who responded to the inquiries and how quickly
- The number of families that attended orientation
- Whether those who attended orientation started and completed pre-service training
- Whether those who completed the training went on to be certified/approved
- The timeframe in which parents who were certified/approved had a child placed with them
- The percentage of inquirers who were certified/approved within a given time period
- The reasons given by families who dropped out of the process, including the reasons given most often

Data elements related to family characteristics

When collecting and analyzing data about the characteristics of current foster homes, the goals are to identify whether there is a gap between available homes and children needing placement, and the types and numbers of homes that are needed to fill that gap. To accomplish this, agencies should have at least the following data:

- Race and ethnicity of the foster/adoptive parent(s)
- The characteristics of the children the family is willing to foster (e.g., age, gender, sibling groups, children with special needs, etc.)
- The demographics of the children placed
- The location of foster parents in relation to where children came from
- The number and percentage of current families that are fully utilized
- Homes that have not had a placement in the past six months
- The current actual capacity of homes and beds, how it compares to the number of children currently in need of placement, and whether it is sufficient for anticipated placement needs

Data elements related to retention

Agencies can use data about retention successes and challenges to develop and implement innovative approaches to improve stability and permanency for children. It is recommended that agencies collect data in at least the following areas:

- The issues and needs identified by foster/adoptive families that contact the agency for support
- The number of families that stop the certification process or drop out of providing foster care
- When and why families providing care dropped out of the foster care system
- The reasons for placement disruptions (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, 2015b)

(See Appendix 2-1: *Data-Driven Recruitment – Key Data Elements on Foster and Adoptive Families*.)

A new approach to data analysis: Market segmentation

Market segmentation is a term used in the marketing field. It involves dividing a broad group of consumers into subsets that have common needs and priorities, and then designing and implementing strategies to reach them. Markets can be divided into segments according to factors such as age, geographic location, and buying history. For example, if a retailer knows that more than half of its customers are between the ages of 16 and 21, it will use marketing strategies that are most likely to reach that age group.

Some child welfare agencies have begun using market segmentation to better understand the characteristics and interests of successful foster/adoptive parents in their area and target recruitment efforts accordingly. Based on precise data collection and analysis, market segmentation divides the entire pool of potential foster parents into segments that are most likely to respond to recruitment efforts.

The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) used market segmentation to improve its recruitment process. After identifying current, successful foster families through focused data collection, DCF hired the Nielson-Claritas market research firm to analyze the families' lifestyle characteristics and consumer behaviors. The results allowed DCF to answer key questions:

- What are the general characteristics of our current, successful foster homes?
- In what neighborhoods do those households reside?
- What describes people in the market segment? Where do they shop? What type of music do they prefer? What types of media do they access?

The information was used to determine how to focus recruitment efforts with the best chance of high yield. Data was also entered into a Geographic Information System (GIS) program to generate maps that revealed the geographic areas for concentrated recruitment efforts.

The National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment reports that jurisdictions have used Nielsen's PRIZM market segmentation software to do market analysis. The basic package is available for about $10,000. GIS software also is available from companies such as ESRI, Inc. One such program, ESRI Tapestry Segmentation, has been used to direct recruitment efforts for foster/adoptive families (esri industries, n.d.).

(See Appendix 2-2: *Tips, Tools, and Trends: Geographic Information Systems (GIS) & Market Segmentation*.)

Additional resources

The National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment (NRCDR) offers a tool to help agencies embark on evaluating their recruitment and retention process. The Diligent Recruitment Navigator helps agencies move through the evaluation process to develop a customized plan of action. (See Appendix 2-3: *Using the Diligent Recruitment Navigator Effectively*.)

Customize a Diligent Recruitment Navigator. An online form for creating a Diligent Recruitment Navigator customized for individual child welfare systems. (http://www.nrcdr.org/diligent-recruitment/dr-navigator/customize-a-diligent-recruitment-navigator)

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CHAPTER 3

Targeted vs. General Recruitment

When people think about "foster/adoptive family recruitment," general recruitment is often what first comes to mind. Agencies may be most familiar with general recruitment strategies, such as broadcasting public service announcements, buying advertising space on billboards, or staffing a table at the county fair. However, targeted and child-specific recruitment strategies have been demonstrated to be more effective in attracting foster/adoptive families that are qualified and committed to their roles and are better matched with children in need of care.

With targeted recruitment, efforts are concentrated on narrowly defined, smaller groups of people in order to achieve a clearly defined objective. Targeted recruitment "routes the recruitment message directly to the people who are most likely to follow through to become foster or adoptive parents. It focuses on families in targeted communities where homes are needed, as well as on families with specific backgrounds that match the backgrounds and needs of children awaiting homes" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012).

Another approach, child-specific recruitment, focuses on finding a foster or adoptive home for a particular child. Chapter 4 of this guide describes the different types of child-specific recruitment in detail.

"Targeted recruitment focuses your efforts on specific families or communities that are best matched to care for the specific children and youth in need of homes. Developing a targeted recruitment plan fulfills your agency's [diligent recruitment] requirement; it also encourages you to focus resources and efforts in areas that are most likely to yield results."

— *Treat Them Like Gold,* North Carolina Division of Social Services

General recruitment

General recruitment uses methods that are designed to reach as many people as possible with a one-size-fits-all message. Volume is the key factor in this approach. While this approach can be helpful in reaching a wide variety of families, it is most helpful in setting the stage for more targeted recruitment.

Agencies have learned that general recruitment efforts, such as mass marketing campaigns, may draw a large response from the community, but do not yield families likely to complete certification or meet the needs of children in care. Although general recruitment

continues to play a role, agencies are encouraged to direct the majority of their available resources toward targeted and child-specific recruitment. In a recent best practices guide, the Annie E. Casey Foundation recommends agencies spend 60% of their efforts on targeted recruitment and 25% on child-specific recruitment (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). General recruitment efforts would involve only about 15% of an agency's recruitment strategies, which would represent a significant practice shift for most agencies.

General recruitment casts a wide net in the community, and builds awareness of the ongoing need for foster/adoptive families. General recruitment can also promote positive images of the foster care and adoption systems. Its value lies in helping create a local environment that is receptive to targeted and child-specific recruitment, rather than resulting in new foster/adoptive homes.

Develop low-cost, effective strategies

There are new ways to communicate that can make a small general recruitment budget go farther. For example, rather than using paid advertising, contact the local newspaper about doing a feature story on the need for foster families in your area. The article will usually appear in both the printed newspaper and the publication's website.

Other strategies include:

- Localize national or regional media campaigns, such as *You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Be a Perfect Parent* developed by the Ad Council in cooperation with AdoptUSKids and available on http://adoptuskids.adcouncil.org.
- Use business marquees. Ask churches or businesses, such as gas stations, oil and gas companies, and restaurants, if you can use their billboard for free advertising.
- Redesign general recruitment printed materials with messages and images that reflect the characteristics of children needing care and the types of families the agency is trying to recruit. Remember not to use information that would identify specific children.

(See Appendix 3-1: *General Recruitment*.)

Targeted recruitment: Filling the gaps

Targeted recruitment directs an agency's resources and efforts where they are mostly likely to yield results. As a data-driven technique, it requires agencies to collect data about their communities and current foster/adoptive homes and to have the tools to effectively analyze and interpret that information.

To develop a targeted recruitment strategy, start by analyzing local data to understand current recruitment strengths and gaps (see Chapter 2). Assessing the data identifies the problem that needs attention before pre-determining a solution. Data also

help to define the work that has been accomplished, identify areas that need more attention, and provide a launch pad for innovative solutions.

The general sequence of steps in analyzing and using local data include:

STEP 1 *Describe the children in foster care.*

Develop a profile of the children in care with the agency. How many are there in total? How many are in each category when broken down by age group, ethnicity, and special needs (sibling groups, healthcare needs, etc.)?

STEP 2 *Describe the homes currently available to them.*

Develop a profile of the foster homes and beds currently available to the agency. What is the total number? How many are in each category when broken down by ages of children accepted in the home, ethnicity, and willingness to care for special needs?

STEP 3 *Make a plan to fill the gaps.*

Identify and reach out to families who can care for the children who are most in need of homes (North Carolina Division of Social Services, 2009).

Promoting the best interests of the child, and finding a family that can best meet his or her distinctive needs, is at the heart of any recruitment effort. For example, based on their local trends of children coming into care, a community may need 30 African-American homes, but only have 10 available. Bridging the gap between needed and available homes is critical to all diligent recruitment efforts.

Develop partnerships with diverse communities

Targeted recruitment relies on engagement with diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural communities. In some cases, previous interactions with child welfare or other government agencies have engendered a climate of mistrust in communities where agencies are seeking to recruit foster/adoptive families. If this is the case, the first step in the recruitment process is to build trust. Establishing trust involves building relationships, often one at a time. Getting out of one's comfort zone is a natural part of the process. When needed, efforts to re-establish credibility in the community can set the stage for agencies to work effectively with diverse families and meet the needs of children in care.

(See Appendix *3-2: Working with African American Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Families and Appendix 3-3: Benefits for Children of Recruiting Latino Foster and Adoptive Families.)*

Build cultural competence

To build cultural awareness and competence, organizations and individuals must assess their attitudes, practices, and policies in relation

Key Messages

Targeted recruitment

If needed, take steps to build credibility and trust between child welfare agencies and the communities in which foster/adoptive families are sought.

Continue the ongoing journey of cultural competence, both within agencies and individuals.

Focus on communities that are known to respond well to the need for foster/adoptive homes.

Spotlight on New York State

Finder's fees

In New York State, policy allows local districts and agencies to offer experienced foster parents a "finder's fee" of $200 for recruiting new foster families. The payment is made to foster parents and local districts are reimbursed by the state after the new foster home is certified and receives the first child (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2006).

to the needs and preferences of the targeted community. The National Center for Cultural Competence has developed a guide for conducting an organizational self-assessment (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004). It includes key principles, such as:

- The purpose of self-assessment is to identify and promote growth among individuals and within organizations that enhances their ability to deliver culturally and linguistically competent services.
- A fundamental aspect of self-assessment is the meaningful involvement of community stakeholders and key constituency groups, including the forging of alliances and partnerships.
- The self-assessment process can lead to changes in organizational policies and procedures, staffing patterns, personnel performance measures, outreach and dissemination activities, composition of advisory boards and committees, and in-service training.

(See Appendix 3-4: *Moving Toward Cultural Competence: Key Considerations to Explore.)*

As agencies develop relationships in target communities, they can work with these contacts to develop a plain-language message that explains the impact of Disproportionate Minority Representation (DMR) on children and youth and describes the need for more foster/adoptive families in affected communities. Trust-building is also encouraged by taking advantage of opportunities to work alongside faith, ethnic and civic organizations. Other measures to try:

- Translate materials such as recruitment brochures, applications, flyers, and posters into Spanish or other languages of minority communities.
- Ask foster/adoptive families from minority communities to serve as co-trainers for pre-service training.
- Conduct recruitment efforts at local ethnic fairs and community events, with the assistance of families of color.
- Make joint contacts (agency staff and foster parents of color) with prospective foster/adoptive families.
- Ask existing foster/adoptive families of color to contact prospective families who have dropped out or have slowed in their momentum toward certification.
- Conduct informational meetings in other languages and/or with foster parents of color.
- Create a recruitment video for families of color.
- Implement a dedicated telephone line for foster/adoptive family inquiries with a recording in multiple languages.

- Support efforts of faith, ethnic, and civic organizations by co-sponsoring health events, conferences, community-based fairs, etc.

(North Carolina Family Support & Child Welfare Services Statewide Training Partnership, 2008)

The recruitment of foster/adoptive families for Native American children must conform to the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Since the passage of ICWA in 1978, many tribes have progressively built their own child welfare systems to handle child abuse and neglect concerns. The ICWA outlines foster/adoptive placement preferences. Specifically, agencies must seek placement with the extended family first and, only if unsuccessful, then with a tribal-certified foster home. Partnerships between non-tribal and tribal child welfare systems can be an important support for tribes in developing their capacity to certify foster homes (National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2015).

(See Appendix 3-5: *Recruiting Families for Native American Children*.)

Engage current foster/adoptive parents in recruitment

According to the Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), states are "underutilizing their most effective recruitment tool – foster parents" (Office of Inspector General, May 2002). In a nationwide survey, child welfare program managers in 20 states said that engaging foster parents in recruitment was one of the most successful methods of recruiting new foster families. This survey found that foster parents recruited by other foster parents are more likely to complete training and become licensed. Despite these findings, only seven states were using foster parents in their recruitment efforts.

Some states pay foster parents a stipend for participating in recruitment activities, such as staffing tables at community events. Others provide a financial reward to foster parents who recruit families that eventually become licensed.

Spotlight on New York State

Orange County faith-based partnership

In Orange County, New York, the Department of Social Services developed a close partnership with a local church to cultivate foster/adoptive parents. The church asks members of the congregation who are foster/adoptive parents to recruit others to become foster/adoptive parents. Orientations and MAPP trainings are held on-site at the church by department staff, with church members' support, to make the process more comfortable and ease the way for members to participate.

Targeted Recruitment: Engage high-response communities

As part of the effort to develop a pool of diverse, committed foster families, certain communities and subgroups have been found to be highly responsive to recruitment efforts. Two of these are faith-based organizations and the LGBTQ community.

Connect with communities of faith

It is widely recognized that faith communities are valuable partners with child welfare agencies. They often have a mission that is aligned with caring for vulnerable children and families, and are able to contribute essential local knowledge and access to important community leaders and community members. For example, one community organization in Oklahoma found that 60% of inquiries from people who were part of a faith-based community completed the approval process in comparison to the agency's typical 30% completion rate of traditional inquiries (Oklahoma Department of Human Services, 2011).

The One Church One Child (OCOC) program is designed to address the challenge of recruiting adoptive and foster families in African American communities. The program strives to find one family in every participating African American church to adopt one child. OCOC program activities include: familiarizing church members with the children waiting to be adopted, identifying families that are willing to adopt, and providing support services for adoptive families and children. See a detailed description of the One Church One Child model at the end of this chapter.

When first contacting faith-based organizations, agencies should establish what they are hoping communities of faith will help them accomplish. What is the "ask"? You might ask a faith community to:

- Hold an Adoption Service (a service set aside to raise awareness in the congregation about adoption).
- Host small group presentations about the foster care/adoption process.
- Promote joint recruitment activities by agency workers and faith volunteers.
- Place recruitment posters and brochures in the building.
- Donate items to children in foster care.
- Give financial support to children in foster care.

(National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, 2008)

Ongoing work with faith communities may result in successful outcomes, such as families being recruited, trained and certified, and foster and adoptive placements (Cipriani, n.d.). In addition, families from the faith community may report a high level of satisfaction with how they are being treated by the partnering agency, which builds the agency's reputation in the community. Personal connections are essential in developing relationships with faith-based communities. To begin this process:

Articulate intention: Begin with the belief that the involvement of this sector of the community is essential to your effort. Clearly articulate how a partnership with this sector would work, including specific possibilities for faith-based participation.

Gather information: Identify faith-based organizations in your community by making personal connections and establishing relationships.

Conduct a search: Begin your search with people you know; ask them whether they know of faith-based communities or leaders who might be interested in forming a partnership addressing the issues you want help with.

Initiate contact: Personal outreach is vital in initiating and maintaining relationships with faith-based organizations. When possible, begin with already-established relationships and contacts within the target community; relying on mutual acquaintances can make establishing new relationships easier. Consider asking a leader within the targeted faith-based community to sponsor a special gathering of his or her peers for you (Burke, 2011).

Welcome and engage the LGBTQ community

Reaching out to the LGBTQ community may be beneficial to ongoing recruitment efforts.

Definitions

LGBTQ is an abbreviation commonly used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning individuals.

Sexual orientation refers to a person's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to persons of the same or different gender.

Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of self as male, female, no gender, or another gender.

Gender expression refers to the manner in which a person expresses his or her gender through clothing, appearance, behavior, speech, etc. A person's gender expression may vary from the norms traditionally associated with his or her assigned sex at birth. Gender expression is a separate concept from sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, a male may exhibit feminine qualities, but identify as a heterosexual male.

Key Messages

Faith-based communities

Build relationships with faith communities through personal connections.

Establish the connection between the agency's work and the mission of the faith community.

Clearly articulate the agency's "ask" of the faith community.

Put It Into Practice

Make your message LGBTQ friendly

Review agency forms, interview protocols, and publications to make sure they are inclusive and affirming for LGBTQ parents. Avoid using expressions that reflect any assumptions that all prospective parents fall into particular groups. Even seemingly innocuous questions can send a message that prospective LGBTQ parents are not welcome. For example:

- In conversations with applicants about their relationships and/or marital status, avoid using gender-specific terms such as "husband" and "wife" and instead use terms such as "spouse" or "partner."
- Instead of using the words "husband" and "wife" on forms, use more neutral words such as "Parent 1" and "Parent 2" or "Applicant 1" and "Applicant 2."

Make sure that the photos and images used in recruitment materials and publications reflect the diversity of prospective families. Include same-sex couples and single parents in photography and graphic art. If prospective LGBTQ families don't see families like themselves in any of the agency's images, they may find it more difficult to trust the agency to consider their applications fairly.

(See Appendix 3-8: *Recruiting and Retaining LBGT Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families: Sending a Welcoming Message.*)

Lesbian refers to a female who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to other females.

Gay refers to a person who is emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to people of the same gender identity. Sometimes, it may be used to refer to gay men and boys only. It is preferred over the term "homosexual."

Bisexual refers to a person who is attracted to, and may form sexual and romantic relationships with, males and females.

Transgender may be used as an umbrella term to include all persons whose gender identity or gender expression does not match society's expectations of how an individual of that gender should behave in relation to his or her gender. For purposes of protection from discrimination and harassment, transgender refers to both self-identified transgender individuals and individuals perceived as transgender. Transgender people may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning.

Questioning refers to a person, often an adolescent, who is exploring or questioning issues of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression in his or her life. Some questioning people will ultimately identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or heterosexual.

Source: OCFS Informational Letter 09-OCFS-INF-06: "Promoting a safe and respectful environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning children and youth in out-of-home placement."

Many LGBTQ individuals express interest in adopting and/or fostering as a way to build their families. They often bring a set of strengths to foster care and adoption due to their own experiences (including an understanding of how it feels to be "different") and an ability to empathize with children struggling with peer relationships and identity issues.

Over 25 years of research on measures of self-esteem, adjustment, and qualities of social relationships shows that the children of LGBTQ parents have been found to grow up as successfully as children of heterosexual parents (Patterson, 2009). It has been noted that "without preconceived notions of what constitutes family, many LGBTQ adults are receptive to fostering or adopting older children, sibling groups, and children with special needs" (National Resource Center for Adoption, n.d.).

A recent study found that same-sex couples are three times more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be raising an adopted or foster child. Married same-sex couples are five times more likely to be raising these children when compared to married different-sex couples (Gates, 2015).

In addition, the LGBTQ community offers a diversity of homes in terms of socioeconomic levels, ethnicities, and racial groups. This supports agencies' efforts to have a pool of foster/adoptive homes that are of the same race and/or ethnicity and are located in the same geographic area as children being placed.

By reaching out to prospective parents who are LGBTQ, agencies can expand their pool of foster, adoptive, and kinship families. Although an agency may already be working with many LGBTQ parents, an ongoing assessment of the agency's capacity and readiness to recruit LGBTQ parents is helpful. Building agency capacity to send welcoming messages to LGBTQ individuals may be the first step in tapping into this community. Building community connections and relationships with LGBTQ ally organizations also supports the recruitment process and shows that efforts are being made to make inroads in the community of interest.

(See Appendix 3-6: *Frequently Asked Questions from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents* and Appendix 3-7: *Permanency Planning Today*.)

Additional resources

A Guide to Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act. Booklet published by the National Indian Child Welfare Association provides in-depth answers to frequently asked questions about ICWA, designed to help individuals better understand ICWA's requirements, including preventing unlawful removals to foster care and outlining placement preferences that put family first. (http://issuu.com/nicwa/docs/2015guide_to_icwa_compliance)

Finding Common Ground: A Guide for Child Welfare Agencies Working with Communities of Faith. Comprehensive resource which shares the art and science of building effective partnerships with communities of faith for the purpose of recruiting and supporting foster and adoptive families for children in out-of-home care. (http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-common-ground.pdf)

Strategies for Recruiting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families. A thorough examination of the value of recruiting LGBTQ families, plus proven strategies for success in this area. Adapted from material by Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, the Executive Director of the National Center for Child Welfare Excellence at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College in New York City. (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/strategies-for-recruiting-LGBT-foster-adoptive-kinship-families.pdf)

Media Toolkit for Child Welfare Leaders. Tips and strategies child welfare leaders can use to work effectively with the media and to increase the impact and reach of the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign and

Key Messages

Engaging the LGBTQ community

LGBTQ individuals may be a resource for child welfare agencies seeking to expand their pool of foster/adoptive parents.

Sending welcoming messages to LGBTQ individuals is an important first step.

Response Initiative, as a way to help raise awareness about adoption, both during National Adoption Month and throughout the rest of the year. (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/AUSK/NRCDR/media-toolkit-for-child-welfare-leaders.pdf)

AdoptUSKids Campaign Toolkit. This website lets you quickly and easily access the media materials that can be localized for your community. TV, radio, print, and outdoor materials are all available for localization and use at the local level. (http://adoptuskids.adcouncil.org/)

LGBT Issues and Child Welfare. Extensive resources related to working with LGBTQ adults and youth from the National Center for Permanency and Family Connections. (http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/lgbtq-issues-and-child-welfare.html)

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One Church One Child

One Church One Child (OCOC) was founded in Illinois in 1980 by Father George Clements. It was created to address long-standing gaps in recruitment of adoptive and foster families in the African-American community. The program is based on the idea that it is achievable to find one family in every participating church to adopt one child.

OCOC programs educate, recruit, and advocate for families to foster and/or adopt African-American children in the child welfare system. *One Church One Child* works in partnership with state and local social service departments and agencies to recruit potential foster/adoptive families and decrease the amount of time children are in foster care waiting for permanent placement. The relationships built between churches and child welfare agencies are key to the program's success.

OCOC programs are developed within the community that they serve. Local volunteers are trained to present at community churches and then engage church members to recruit foster/adoptive families. For example, the Texas OCOC program familiarizes church congregations with the children waiting to be adopted, identifies families in each church that are willing to adopt, educates the minority community about the need for adoptive homes, and provides support services to adoptive families and children. Programs also may provide orientation sessions for prospective adoptive families.

OCOC programs have operated in at least 32 states, including New York, Virginia, Idaho, Mississippi, Maryland, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Texas.

For More Information

http://www.nationalococ.org/

Resources needed for implementation

Agencies or organizations interested in becoming OCOC member programs undergo an intake process with the national office. Staffing varies among programs, but may include a program coordinator and board members of various religious dominations. A member of the congregation may serve as a liaison between the church and OCOC program. According to a 2004 survey that sampled a small number of OCOC programs, funding was predominantly from federal and state sources. Many programs reported receiving smaller levels of funding from private foundations and donations.

A manual is available for purchase from National OCOC's website (see below), and best practices for governance and implementation of programs are outlined in the OCOC Best Practices Document.

Evidence base

In 2004, the Children's Bureau funded the National Network of Adoption Advocacy Programs (NNAAP) to provide technical assistance and evaluation support to OCOC. No recent studies are available. *One Church One Child* has been reviewed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) and is listed in the CEBC registry.

CHAPTER 4

Child-Specific Recruitment

Child-specific recruitment strategies focus on finding a foster or adoptive home for a particular child. There are different types of child-specific recruitment: developing kinship homes, child-focused recruitment, child-specific publicity, and photolistings on websites and social media.

Kinship homes

Developing kinship homes was the "original" form of child-specific recruitment, and continues to be a critical strategy for finding homes that best meet children's needs. A kinship home can be ideal in that it provides continuity with the child's culture and creates permanency with family members.

In some areas, the kinship family may be an under-utilized or misunderstood resource. The old adage, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," has sometimes been used to justify why grandparents, other relatives, and family friends are not recruited or developed as foster parents. Current practice models focus on the strengths of family networks, recognizing that while some family members may be less functional and less capable of helping family members, most family networks have members with functional strengths (Hillside Institute for Family Connections, 2014).

Recruiting kinship families involves a slightly different approach than those used in recruiting non-relatives. Kinship families often enter the child welfare system during a family crisis. New York allows relatives of a child to be certified or approved as an emergency foster home if the child is being removed from his/her home by a court order or if the child's case record indicates a compelling reason to place him/her with a relative.

Under these circumstances, safety and risk assessments and home studies are done on an expedited basis. For example, within seven

"Child welfare agencies need strategies to attract or identify individuals who would be interested in the children who need families, who are able and willing to complete the logistical requirements of the adoption process, and who have the capacity to make a permanent commitment to a child."

— *The Impact of Child-Focused Recruitment on Foster Care Adoption: A Five-Year Evaluation of Wendy's Wonderful Kids*, Child Trends

Spotlight on New York State

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)

Kinship caregivers who serve as foster parents for a child for six months may be eligible for New York's Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP). The program is designed to allow a foster child to achieve a permanent placement with a kinship guardian. It provides financial support and, in most cases, medical coverage for the child, beginning with the child's discharge from foster care to the kinship guardianship. The level of financial support is similar to the maintenance payments received while the child was in foster care. Parental rights do not have to be terminated for the relative to assume guardianship of the child. (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2015)

days, the placement agency must submit a Statewide Central Register database form of each person 18 years of age or older in the home [18 NYCRR 443.7].

If the child is being placed with urgency, kinship families may need supports from the agency to complete their home study and a personalized orientation session focusing on their immediate needs. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). Recruiting kinship homes can also be a planful undertaking. Children who cannot be reunited with their birth parents need permanent homes, and kin may be explored as permanency resources. This also can include non-related "fictive kin" who have a significant relationship with the child, such as godparents or family friends.

Older youth who have been in foster care for a long time benefit from reestablishing connections with appropriate relatives for emotional or legal permanency. Internet-based search tools can be used to locate extended family members who might be willing to provide foster care to a child.

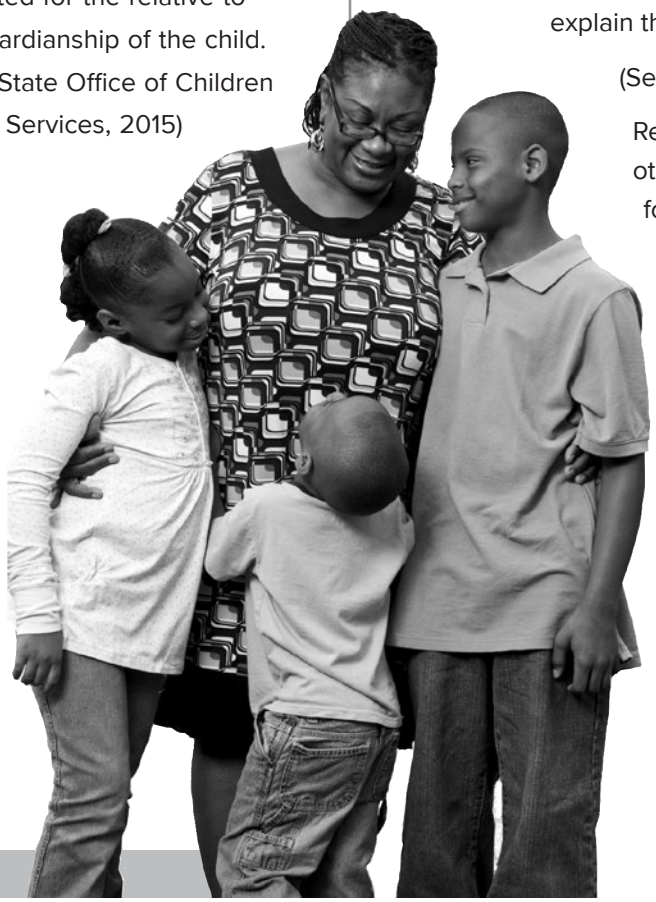
A variety of child-focused recruitment models, some of which are described in the following section, have developed systematic techniques to find and engage kin.

In New York State, relatives are engaged to care for children through a variety of arrangements: informal care, custody/guardianship, direct placement, kinship foster care, and adoption. These different types of arrangements impact the supports and benefits kinship caregivers may be eligible to receive, and agencies should be prepared to clearly explain this to prospective kinship caregiver families.

(See Appendix 4-1: *New York State Kinship Chart*.)

Relatives caring for children through arrangements other than foster care or KinGAP may be still eligible for a cash grant through Temporary Assistance (TA). Local districts or agencies may also refer to TA as a "child-only" grant, non-parent caregiver grant, or "kinship" grant.

Detailed information about the options for kinship caregivers is available at New York State's information and referral service, Kinship Navigator (www.nysnavigator.org).



Child-focused recruitment

Child-focused recruitment is a promising approach that uses intensive, tailored techniques to create permanency for youth for whom it has traditionally been difficult to find homes. Child-

focused recruitment models vary in their implementation approach, but share these components (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012):

- Building a relationship with the child and engaging the child in recruiting a family, as developmentally appropriate
- Exploring placement options with relatives and other connections by "mining" the case file to carefully search for information about people who have known and cared about the child who might be possible placement resources
- Creating a personal recruitment team for the child that includes interested people such as relatives, friends, school personnel, coaches, and current/past caregivers
- Exploring placement options outside of the child's family based on the child's strengths, needs, and background
- Establishing permanency through either an adoptive home or a committed network of caring adults

Models of child-focused recruitment include Wendy's Wonderful Kids, Extreme Recruitment®, 30 Days to Family™, and Family Finding.

The philosophy of **Wendy's Wonderful Kids** (WWK) is "Unadoptable is Unacceptable." The program's goal is to increase adoptions from foster care, focusing on children for whom it has been traditionally difficult to find families: older children, groups of siblings, and children with physical or emotional disorders. WWK adoption specialists employ exhaustive, aggressive and accountable child-focused recruitment activities, resulting in older children served by the program being three times more likely to be adopted.

Extreme Recruitment, also serving children for whom it has been difficult to find homes, has been described by its creators as a race to find permanency for a child in a fraction of the time it would normally take. During 12-20 weeks of intensive recruitment efforts, Extreme Recruiters utilize general, targeted and child-specific recruitment strategies concurrently. Unique to this model, a private investigator is hired to work alongside the recruitment specialist to find relatives through internet tools, court databases, and "old-fashioned detective work."

30 Days to Family operates on the philosophy that all families include members who are willing and able to care for children. 30 Days to Family specialists are expected to be relentless in their search for parents, grandparents, and siblings of children in care. The goal is to place 70% of children served with safe and appropriate relatives within 30 days of entering foster care.

Spotlight on New York State

The Adoption Album

The Adoption Album hosted by the New York State Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS) provides photos, narratives, and contact information for children and youth waiting for adoption in New York. In addition, there is an Adoption Video Gallery with videos of some of the waiting children. All of the photolisted children are legally freed for adoption. Narratives are intended to introduce children and youth while respecting their right to privacy. The narrative is not intended to provide a detailed description of the child's history or current needs. When it is determined to be in the child's best interest, the agency contact will share more detailed information about the child with individuals who may be able to provide a permanent connection and/or adoptive home for the child.

http://ocfs.ny.gov/adopt/photolisting.asp

Spotlight on New York State

Family Adoption Registry

OCFS maintains a database listing of families that want to adopt New York's children from foster care and have had a home study completed. This database includes families who live in-state and those from outside of New York who chose to register with the site and provide verification of a completed home study.

After receiving permission from OCFS to access the Family Adoption Registry search functions, a caseworker may enter information about a waiting child and search the system for families willing to consider adopting a child with characteristics that match those of the waiting child. This search feature is one more tool caseworkers have for the recruitment process. The agency can match the applicant's profile and preferences with photolisted children.

Prospective adoptive parents may also choose a family photolisting. The family photolisting, which is an optional part of the Family Adoption Registry, takes matching of children with parent(s) a step further by focusing on adoptive families and sharing their information among social service districts and voluntary authorized agencies.

Family Finding is based on the core belief that capable family members can be located and engaged to meet the needs of youth in care. Originally designed for older youth who have spent many years in foster care, Family Finding offers methods for discovering and engaging relatives to meet youths' needs for relational and/or legal permanency and help them build a "lifetime network."

See the end of this chapter for detailed descriptions of each model and its evidence base.

Mining case files

Utilizing data in child-focused recruitment efforts maximizes the chances of establishing permanency for children. In addition to collecting and analyzing all available case information to help focus recruitment efforts, child-focused recruitment has another key source: children and youth themselves. A skillfully administered child assessment tool can build a portfolio of data about the child, including relationships important to establishing permanency. Collecting information from children or youth, their families, and the people important to them uncovers connections that are more likely to lead to permanency. Child-focused recruitment models, summarized at the end of this chapter, have created sophisticated data collection tools and methods to maximize the depth and quality of information collected with the youth.

Case file mining (or "relationship mining") has been found by many jurisdictions to contribute to successful adoptions and other forms of permanency. Case mining includes an exhaustive review of a child's existing files to examine factors such as:

- The date and reason the child entered the system
- The child's most recent profile/assessment
- Placement history
- Significant services provided (current and past)
- Identification of needed services
- Significant people in the child's life, both past and present

Significant people could include child welfare workers, foster parents, attorneys, Court Appointed Special Advocates, teachers, therapists, relatives, mentors, faith-based representatives, and extracurricular activity leaders (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 2014). It could even include people like parents of other children in a child's class where the child went for sleepovers or after-school care providers who knew the child. Any connections the child has had, no matter how briefly mentioned in the case record or by the child, may be potential permanency resources or sources of information about other people who have been important to the child in their past.

The review should leave no stone unturned; even scraps of paper, letters, phone messages, and incomplete information may later lead to a potential adoptive family. A thorough case record review is best completed by a specialist in case mining (or child-focused recruitment) and may take several days.

Case file mining is labor intensive and therefore is primarily used by agencies for children for whom targeted recruitment and less intensive child-specific recruitment have not resulted in a permanency resource. Agencies typically assess their caseloads to determine which children would most benefit from child-specific recruitment strategies. For example, these could include children who have been in foster care for a long period of time (defined by the agency); children who have adoption or Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as their permanency goal, or children who have been legally freed without an adoptive or permanency resource.

Criteria should be flexible enough to allow the professional team to decide whether a child would benefit from exhaustive case mining or a diligent search for kinship placement, even if he/she does not meet the established guidelines.

Child-specific publicity

Child-specific publicity contributes most to an agency's general recruitment campaign by building public awareness about the need for foster/adoptive families. Although this approach may also generate an individual parent's interest in a particular child, it has been shown to be most effective in creating interest in foster parenting. Examples of child-specific publicity:

Heart Gallery of America, Inc., a traveling photographic and audio exhibit created to find forever families for children in foster care. The Heart Gallery of America is a collaborative project of over 120 Heart Galleries across the United States designed to increase the number of adoptive families for children needing homes in our community (www.heartgalleryofamerica.org).

Heart Galleries are used in many areas in New York State as adoption recruitment tools. Professional photographers donate their time to take high-quality photographs of waiting children. These photos are displayed in high-traffic public locations to help put faces to the statistics about children in foster care without permanent families.

Wednesday's Child, a weekly television news segment that features children who are waiting in foster care to be adopted, and shares success stories of families who have adopted from

Key Messages

Child-specific recruitment

Child-specific recruitment means first exploring kinship homes.

Different types of child-specific recruitment include child-focused recruitment, child-specific publicity, and photolisting.

Child-focused recruitment uses intensive, tailored techniques to create permanency for youth.

Case file mining and involving older youth in recruitment are key strategies.

foster care. The segments are hosted by local news anchors and highlight each child's special personality and interests (http://wednesdayschild.davethomasfoundation.org).

A number of organizations offer **photolistings** and profiles of waiting children. Nationally, the most well-known is AdoptUSKids (www.adoptuskids.org), a campaign that lists children's profiles provided by local and/or state agencies. The site has a success rate of 40 percent, even for hard-to-place children with special needs. Utilization of this service is less than optimal, however, with no state listing more than 17 percent of its waiting children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). In addition to photolisting on OCFS' Adoption Album, public and private agencies in New York can list their waiting children on the AdoptUSKids site at no cost, giving national exposure to waiting children.

(See Appendix 4-2: *Encouraging Your Staff to Use Photolistings in New Ways*.)

Additional resources

Having a Voice and a Choice. A handbook for relatives raising children published by OCFS and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. (http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/Pub5080.pdf) (En Español: http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/Pub5080-S.pdf)

Know Your Permanency Options: The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program. A complete guide to the benefits and options available through New York State KinGAP. (http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/pub5108.pdf)

Featuring Photolisted Children. Photolisting can be facilitated through websites and social media; this resource describes how to maximize your recruitment efforts. (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/featuring-photolisted-children.pdf)

Lasting Impressions: A Guide for Photolisting Children. Detailed information from AdoptUsKids about how to list effectively on its website. (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/lasting-impressions.pdf)

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30 Days to Family™

30 Days to Family is an intense and short-term intervention that aims to place children with safe and appropriate relatives within 30 days of their entry into foster care. Created by the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition in Missouri (also the developers of Extreme Recruitment®), and launched in 2011, the *30 Days to Family* program operates on the philosophy that all families include members who are willing and able to care for children. The timeline is driven by data that demonstrates that children are much better off when placed with a relative within 30 days.[1] The program's goal is to place 70% of children between the ages of birth and 17 years with relatives or kin within 30 days. Eligible children have entered foster care with no known relatives to provide immediate care for them.

30 Days to Family Specialists are expected to be relentless in their search for relatives of children in care. The initial search is for parents, grandparents, and siblings, but the goal is to identify and explore at least 80 additional relatives, both maternal and paternal. Specialists meet with relatives as many times as necessary to gather information, but also use online tools to locate relatives and kin of the children they serve. The specialists conduct an intense amount of work per case. For this reason, two open cases is considered to be a full caseload and caseloads are limited to *no more* than three open cases at one time.

As of early 2015, *30 Days to Family* was being conducted by two private agencies in St. Louis, MO and Kansas City, MO.

For More Information

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30 Days to Family
Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition

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melaniemoredock@foster-adopt.org

http://www.foster-adopt.org/carleen-goddard-mazur-training-institute/30-days-to-family/

Resources needed for implementation

30 Days to Family Specialists are specifically hired for this role. Funding sources to date have included both public and private entities.

A manual is available for all agencies' use (see below). In order to use the *30 Days to Family* name, agencies must receive training from the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition, and meet other fidelity requirements of the model. Training costs $2,500/day, plus travel costs for two trainers from Missouri. Most trainings can be completed in one day.

Evidence base

A longterm study by PolicyWorks is underway with early data expected by the end of 2015. Program data from 2014 showed that 82.9% of youth were placed with relatives or kin by case closure.

[1] Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition. (2015). *30 Days to Family™: A Manual for Replication*. St. Louis, MO: Soter & Adoptive Care Coalition.

Family Finding

Family Finding, originally developed by Kevin Campbell and colleagues at Catholic Community Services in Tacoma, WA, offers methods and strategies to locate and engage relatives of children living in out-of-home care. *Family Finding's* aim is to increase family connectedness for older youth who have spent many years in foster care. Reuniting them with biological family and friends creates relational permanency, or a "lifetime network." Depending on the youth's needs, legal permanency or adoption may also be intended outcomes. Recent interest has emerged in implementing the model with children new to out-of-home care.

Family Finding is characterized by the application of a systematic, intensive process comprised of six stages:

1. **Discover** at least 40 family members and important people in the child's life.
2. **Engage** multiple family members and supportive adults through participation in a planning meeting.
3. **Plan** for the successful future of the child with the participation of family members.
4. Make **decisions** during family meetings that support the child's legal and emotional permanency.
5. **Evaluate** the permanency plans developed.
6. **Provide** follow-up supports to ensure the child and family can maintain the permanency plans.

Family Finding operates on the core belief that every child has a family, and that family members with functional strengths (those capable of supporting the safety and well-being of the child) can be located and engaged to meet the youth's needs. It focuses on discovering at least 40 family members and natural supports for the youth, and then engaging at least 12 of those supports. Facilitated family meetings allow for healing and restoration of dignity for family members, and are also used to gain commitment from those able to be a part of the youth's lifetime network. Realistic, sustainable plans for meeting the youth's needs are maintained with follow-up supports.

Family Finding has been implemented in locations in New York State, as well as Wisconsin, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Iowa, Rhode Island, Maryland, Hawaii, Washington, Maine, Oklahoma, and California.

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Resources needed for implementation

Designating a worker to focus solely on *Family Finding* is recommended, rather than integrating the role into existing casework. The Hillside Family of Agencies in New York State created the *Family Finding* curriculum in collaboration with Kevin Campbell, and currently delivers *Family Finding* training and consultation for public and private agencies. In New York State, local districts interested in utilizing the model may call their OCFS Regional Office to determine availability of both training and possible funding sources for training. Training options and cost vary according to needs.

Evidence base

A 2015 report summarizing 13 *Family Finding* evaluations found the evidence was not sufficient to conclude that Family Finding improves youth outcomes above and beyond existing, traditional services. The study also states the evidence is not sufficient to conclude that *Family Finding* does not improve outcomes, and poses hypotheses regarding this finding, including lack of complete and consistent implementation.[1]

Family Finding has been reviewed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) and is listed in the CEBC registry.

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[1] Vandivere, Sharon and Karin Malm, Child Trends, January 2015, Family Finding Evaluations: A Summary of Recent Findings

Wendy's Wonderful Kids

The *Wendy's Wonderful Kids* program, administered by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (DTFA), aims to increase adoptions from foster care, focusing primarily on children for whom it has been traditionally difficult to find families: older children, groups of siblings, and children with physical or emotional challenges. The philosophy of *Wendy's Wonderful Kids* (WWK) is that "Unadoptable is Unacceptable." Children are eligible to be served by the program if they are in the public foster care system, have been freed for adoption, have a permanency plan of adoption, or a plan to be freed for adoption (this may be a concurrent plan). Children may also be in Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).

WWK adoption specialists (or recruiters) employ effective, aggressive, and accountable child-focused recruitment activities. They directly engage youth to explore their attitudes towards adoption and seek their input on prospective adoptive resources. Recruiters conduct an exhaustive search for people with whom the child has had a bond or positive relationship. The WWK model contains eight major components (illustrated on the following page). WWK recruiters manage a smaller caseload: 20-25 recommended, with active recruitment for 12-15 children.

As of 2014, there were 204 WWK recruiters working throughout the U.S. and Canada. There are several WWK grantees in New York State: You Gotta Believe (New York City, Long Island, Hudson Valley); Children Awaiting Parents, Inc. (Western NY); Children's Home of Wyoming Conference; Hillside Children's Center (Western NY); Jewish Child Care Association (New York City); New York Council on Adoptable Children (New York City). Due to common challenges with hiring policies in public agencies, only 1 in 10 grantees nationwide are public/governmental child welfare organizations.

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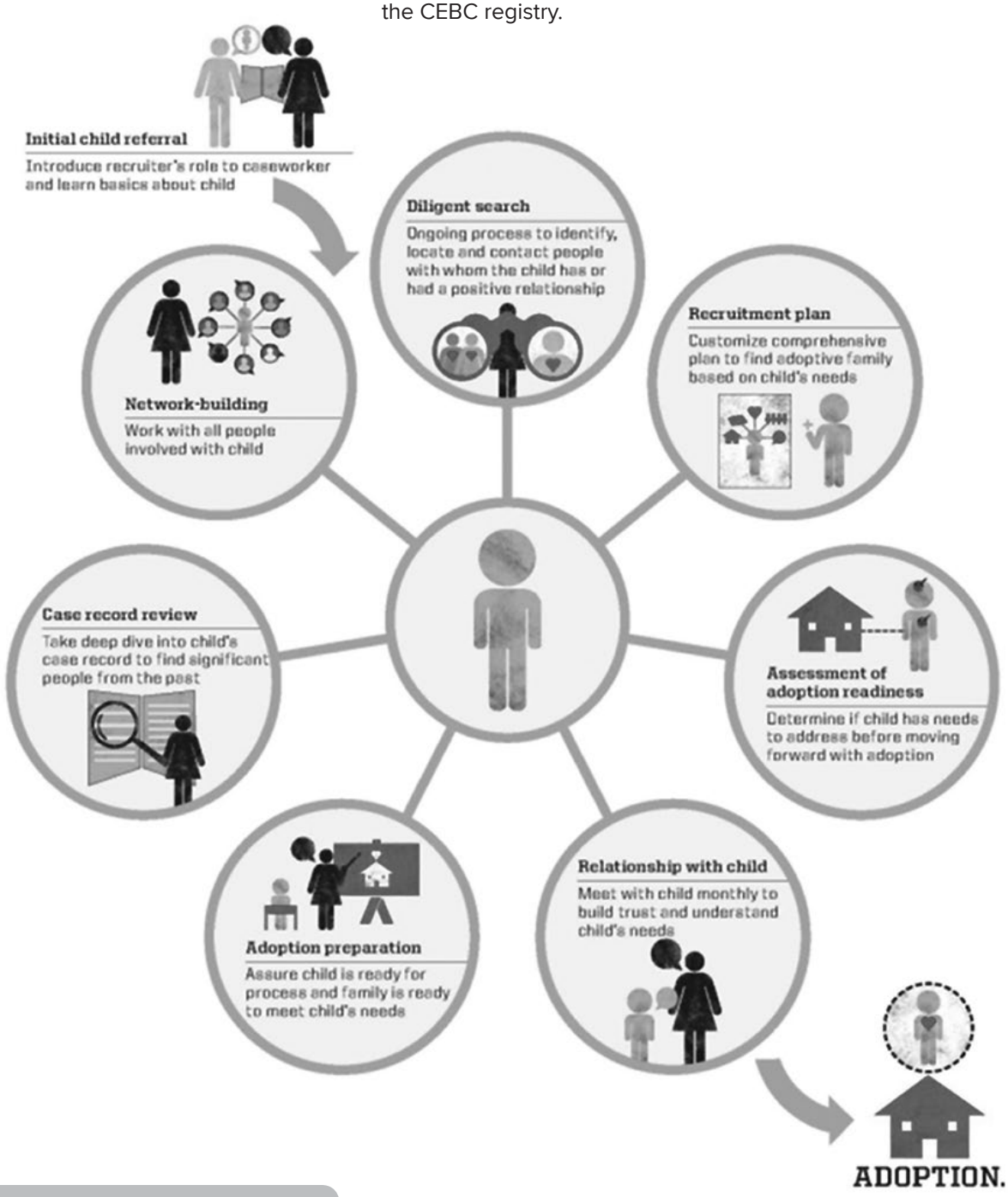
Resources needed for implementation

Local districts and voluntary agencies are eligible for grants from DTFA to hire WWK recruiters. These annual, renewable grants of approximately $70,000 provide salary, travel, and supplies for each WWK recruiter. The recruiters are housed within the offices of public or private agencies, with access to children and their case files. WWK program staff provide comprehensive training and coaching to each grantee. Another option for implementation is DTFA providing free classroom training and technical assistance to existing workers to implement the model in return for submission of evaluation data. DTFA also provides an online training module to introduce caseworkers to the model.

Evidence base

A rigorous, five-year evaluation by Child Trends found that when served by WWK, older children and those with emotional challenges were three times more likely to be adopted. Overall, children served by the program were nearly two times (1.7 times) more likely to be adopted. For the full report, see http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=the-impact-of-child-focused-recruitment-on-foster-care-adoption-a-five-year-evaluation-of-wendys-wonderful-kids-evaluation-summary. A video by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLP3pAfCHgo. WWK has been reviewed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) and is listed in the CEBC registry.



Extreme Recruitment®

Extreme Recruitment, created by the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition in Missouri, is a race against time to find permanency for youth in 12-20 weeks of intensive recruitment efforts and permanency preparation.

The program aims to reconnect 90% of youth served with safe and appropriate relatives/kin; and to match 70% of youth served with permanent resources for adoption or guardianship. The program works exclusively with the hardest-to-place children: ages 10-18, sibling groups, children of color, and youth with emotional, developmental, or behavioral concerns. A child younger than 10 may be served if the child meets certain criteria, such as being part of a sibling group being served, having documented elevated medical or mental health needs, or having been legally freed for adoption for six months with no permanent resource identified.

Extreme Recruitment's success relies on weekly, intensive meetings among the child's professional team members throughout the 20 weeks, and on simultaneously utilizing general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment strategies. Focus is placed on preparing youth for adoption, including their mental health and educational needs (see diagram on the following page).

Extreme Recruiters are dedicated to spearheading and expediting the recruitment activities of their teams. Unique to this model, a part-time private investigator, often a retired law enforcement officer, is hired to work alongside the Extreme Recruiter to find relatives through Internet tools, court databases, and "old-fashioned detective work." Recruiters carry a small caseload of 5-7, with an annual caseload of 14-17.

As of early 2015, *Extreme Recruitment* had been implemented in four private agencies in the states of Missouri, Virginia, and Connecticut.

For More Information

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Resources needed for implementation

Extreme Recruiters and part-time private investigators are specifically hired to implement the model. Some agencies have received funding to hire staff from state contracts, with *Extreme Recruitment* as a line item to the state budget. Other agencies fund the program using revenue from fundraising, United Way, etc.

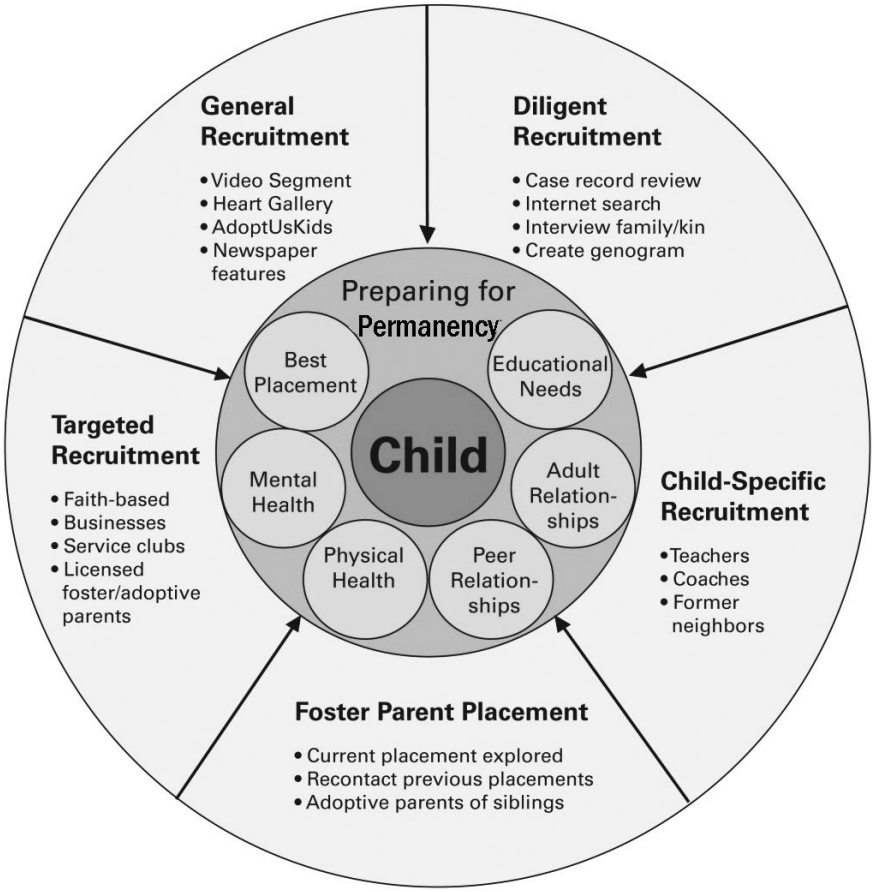
An *Extreme Recruitment* manual (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/DR-Grantees/year-one/MO_FACC-manual.pdf) is available for all agencies. In order to use the Extreme Recruitment name, however, agencies must receive training from the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition and

meet other fidelity requirements of the model. Training costs $2,500/day, plus travel costs for two trainers from Missouri. Most trainings can be completed in one day.

Evidence

Program data from 2014 showed that 69.6% of youth served were matched with permanent resources for adoption or guardianship (http://www.foster-adopt.org/about-us/reports-financials/reports/). An earlier report summarizing evaluation data from a quasi-experimental study concluded that, while the program showed increased permanency and well-being, the small sample size and non-randomness of the intervention and control groups did not prove replicable impact and that the program warranted further study (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/DR-Grantees/year-one-reports/Missouri-Diligent-Recruitment-Grant-FINAL-REPORT.pdf).

Extreme Recruitment has been reviewed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) and is listed in the CEBC registry.



Extreme Recruitment®

CHAPTER 5

Hard-to-Find Homes

Many agencies experience ongoing challenges in finding homes for older youth, sibling groups, children with behavioral or medical needs, and youth who identify as LGBTQ. The overall approach for recruiting hard-to-find homes may involve:

- Input from families that previously have cared for these children and youth
- Case file mining for children needing foster/adoptive homes
- Outreach assistance from older youth who are or have previously been in care
- Recruitment materials that reflect the need for certain types of homes

The majority of your efforts should employ targeted and child-specific recruitment strategies.

Recruiting for older youth

Until recently, certain myths have interfered with recruitment efforts for homes for older youth, such as "people don't want to adopt teens," "teens don't want to be adopted," or "placements of teens are unsuccessful (Louisell, n.d.)." When agency staff are not convinced of the eventual adoptability of a child in their care, this skepticism translates into reduced recruitment efforts on behalf of the child (Avery, 2000).

Such beliefs are being overturned, however, by innovative child welfare practitioners. Now, the approach to finding homes for older youth is "unadoptable is unacceptable." It is also hoped that, as child welfare agencies build their capabilities to find permanent homes for younger children, the pool of older children needing homes will shrink.

Recruiting homes for teens requires a child-centered approach. Older youth often have much of the information necessary to find a placement, as well as an emerging sense of their own destiny and capabilities. This contributes to achieving a successful placement in a foster or adoptive home, legal guardianship, or with a relative.

"All young people need the love and unconditional acceptance. Children need to be part of a family. They need loving adults to care for them and guide them through life. They must have a safe place to live and all the necessities life requires."

— Family Builders

Spotlight on New York State

Breaking down myths about fostering teens

At the Hillside Family of Agencies in central New York State, when a home-finding supervisor speaks with prospective foster families, she hears that many parents are hesitant about caring for older children.

The supervisor works to develop families that are open to welcoming teens into their home. She tells them, "In some ways, teenagers can be easier than younger kids, they process things better, and have a better understanding of circumstances." She creatively weaves this message, throughout every stage of her contact with a family—the initial face-to-face meeting, pre-service training, and even after first placement when foster/adoptive families meet for trainings and social gatherings.

Hillside also encourages people to think about caring for teens by placing older youth for respite care in homes that are awaiting placements or are in between placements. Respite care may be less threatening than a long-term placement. When families learn first-hand that there are a lot of myths about teens, they are more likely to be open to caring for them.

Promising practices include:

- Asking youth earlier and more often who matters most in their lives, before those connections dissolve
- Using eco-maps and genograms to identify connections and ways to maintain sibling groups and find older youth placements
- Engaging residential facilities to identify who is visiting the youth, who the youth is contacting, and who the youth is talking about (North Carolina Division of Social Services, 2009)

Recruiting any hard-to-find home involves persistence on the part of the child welfare agency. The need for homes for teens should be communicated throughout the recruitment and certification milestones, for example:

- Including photos that depict older youth and text that spells out the need for foster homes for older youth in both general and targeted recruitment materials (posters, brochures and websites)
- Explaining the need to prospective families during their first inquiry
- Highlighting the need in first mailings to prospective foster/adoptive parents, and during information and orientation sessions
- Continuing to explain the need for homes for older youth during pre-service training and home-study sessions, and once again during placement conversations

In essence, everyone across the agency should see recruitment as their business and should keep older youth in mind.

Explore connections

Teens in foster care usually have emotional attachments to others. They may have created their own "families." These families may consist of friends, parents of friends, current and/or former foster parents, teachers, coaches, cottage parents, maintenance staff, relatives, older siblings or friends who are now adults, neighbors, church members, Attorneys for Children, social workers, employers, counselors, etc. Ask youth to help explore these connections. There are often more than a dozen people currently in the youth's life circle that could be approached about offering a home to the youth.

Re-recruit among current foster/adoptive families

Raise awareness among your current foster/adoptive parents about the need for homes that will accept youth and older children by:

- Offering in-service training topics that will familiarize foster parents with teens and give them a chance to practice the skills needed to parent teens

- Including a panel made of teens currently in care at an upcoming in-service training to help parents overcome the "fear factor" and to begin successfully parenting teens
- Providing opportunities for already-certified families to provide respite care or to mentor teens to ease families into welcoming older youth
- Continuing to spell out the need for homes for teens in every communication with foster/adoptive parents; some parents may have never been directly asked, and yet would be open to accepting older youth (North Carolina Division of Social Services, 2009)

Utilize child-focused recruitment

A child-centered approach to finding homes for teens may include child-focused recruitment methods, such as those used by Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK). WWK employs an intensive and exhaustive search for placement resources. An evaluation of WWK found that older children served by the program were three times more likely to be adopted (Malm, 2011). Child-focused recruitment models involve youth in the process of identifying successful placements (see Chapter 4).

Engage community groups that work with teens

Targeted recruitment techniques are also well-fitted to recruiting homes for older youth. Focusing recruitment activities with groups that have experience with teens maximizes the chance that efforts will pay off. Such groups might include high school teachers, mental health professionals, or empty nesters. Engaging older youth and/or the families who care for them in recruitment and retention efforts can be a powerful method to find new families welcoming of teens, as well as persuading experienced foster/adoptive parents to explore caring for teens. For example, invite an older youth or his family to present at pre-service or in-service trainings (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012).

Once a foster/adoptive family welcomes a teen into the home, agency support is imperative. Staff should provide the family up front with as much information as possible about the teen's strengths and challenges, be available to support the family with practical support when questions or concerns arise, and provide connections with other families caring for older youth. It is also important to provide extra training to families on managing behaviors common with teens.

(See Appendix 5-1: *Going Beyond Recruitment for 11-17 Year Olds.)*

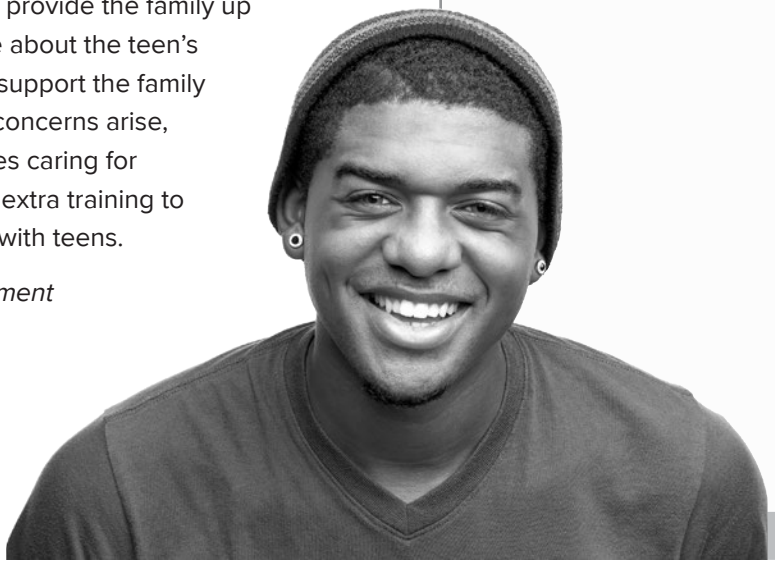
Key Messages

Recruiting for older youth

Older youth should be involved in the process of identifying their "extended family" of connections.

Use child-specific recruitment strategies and frequently communicate the need for homes for older youth.

Support foster families caring for teens through peer support and targeted training.



Spotlight on New York State

Summer camp for siblings in foster care

Camp to Belong-New York (CTB-NY) offers siblings in foster care and other out-of-home care the opportunity to create lifetime memories while reunited at camp. Parsons Child and Family Center hosts the five day camp at a YMCA camp in Lake George, NY. Campers come from all parts of New York State and are supervised by camp staff consisting of Center employees. Caseworkers, caregivers, and agency staff from anywhere in New York can submit an application for a group of siblings to attend the week of camp.

http://camptobelong.org/

Recruiting for sibling groups

Keeping sibling groups together in foster/adoptive placements is now well-recognized as best practice. In New York State, siblings may only be separated if placing them together is contrary to the safety, health or welfare of one or more of the children. Children's loss and trauma are reduced and they experience better outcomes, when they are placed with their siblings. Siblings may well be the longest-standing relationships people have throughout their lifetimes, and an important source of emotional support for children in foster care (Cohn, 2012).

Children in foster care have already endured painful loss and trauma from abuse, neglect and separation from their parents. Efforts to prevent them from also losing their brothers and sisters is a crucial priority for child welfare agencies, deserving attention equal to that given to meeting children's other needs, such as opportunities to heal from trauma. The importance of keeping siblings together is addressed in federal law by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 as well as in New York State law.

Recruiting homes for sibling groups can be a challenge for many agencies. However, finding homes for sibling groups may be easier than is commonly thought and may require breaking down some myths. Building a pool of families able to care for sibling groups involves these agency-wide principles:

Belief: infusing the philosophy and advantages of keeping siblings together throughout child welfare agencies

Mindset: an attitude of abundance of prospective families

Persistence: integrating the need for families for siblings throughout all contacts with prospective families. As foster/adoptive families are recruited, it is important to explore with them their ability to accept sibling groups (National Resource for Diligent Recruitment, n.d.).

(See Appendix 5-2: *Practice Principles and Seven-Step Process for Sibling Recruitment* and Appendix 5-3: *10 Realities of Sibling Adoption*.)

Investigate kinship placements

Recruitment of homes for sibling groups (or any child entering foster care) means seeking kinship placements first. Research shows that siblings placed with kin are more likely to be placed together, and that even if siblings are placed with separate kin, they are more likely to stay connected (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Adult siblings also may be placement options, provided that they can adequately care for younger siblings, with supports similar to those provided for foster and adoptive parents. When relatives are not available to care for sibling groups, or cannot care for them safely, care by non-relatives is the next choice. See Chapter 4 for more information on developing kinship homes.

Keep sibling groups in the spotlight

Attracting foster/adoptive families for sibling groups starts with implementing customer-friendly practices across the entire agency. An agency's interaction with a prospective family needs to be engaging and welcoming, communicating that families are valuable partners. With this foundation of respect, the agency can encourage prospective foster/adoptive parents to consider sibling groups. All agency staff should be prepared to describe the need for homes for siblings, the size of sibling groups in need of placement, their age ranges, etc. Information shared in orientation and pre-service training should highlight the importance of sibling relationships and the need for homes for sibling groups.

Several milestones in the certification process present opportunities to recruit and equip families to care for sibling groups:

- Mailings that go out to families include profiles of sibling groups awaiting placement.
- Pre-service trainings emphasize the need to keep sibling groups together. If parent panels are used, they include a family that has fostered or adopted a sibling group.
- Agency staff talk about sibling groups in a positive way and remind parents of the need for homes for sibling groups (Kupecky, 2001).

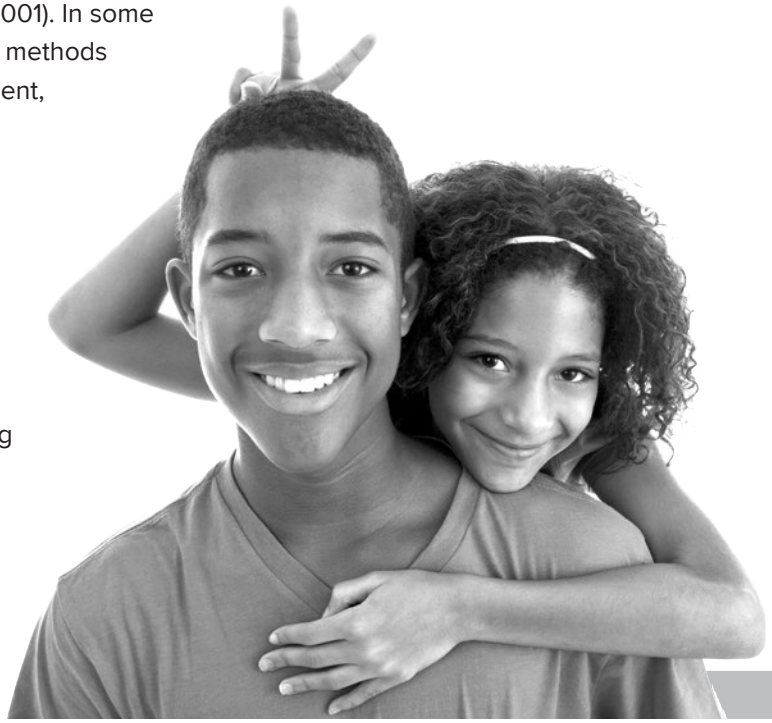
(See Appendix 5-4: *Sibling-Friendly Agencies and Practices Keep Children Together.)*

Use child-specific recruitment methods

Some recruitment of foster/adoptive homes for siblings, especially larger sibling groups, may come down to specific recruitment for specific situations. One expert notes, "No one wakes up one morning, calls an agency, and says 'Do you have a sibling group of four children that includes three boys, ages 8-14?' " (Kupecky, 2001). In some instances, recruitment of a home may require methods similar to those used in child-specific recruitment, resulting in a specific plan for that situation.

Train and reward foster families for sibling placements

The Neighbor to Family program developed by the Jane Addams Hull House Association in Chicago is a child-centered, family-focused foster care model. It is designed to keep sibling groups, including large sibling groups, together in stable foster care placements while working intensively on reunification or permanency plans that



Key Messages

Recruiting for sibling groups

Kinship placements are more likely to keep siblings together.

Communicate the need for sibling homes to current and prospective families.

Build support systems for foster parents of sibling groups that meet their specific needs.

keep the siblings together. The program uses a community-based, team-oriented approach, including foster caregivers and birth parents as part of the treatment team.

Trained and supported foster caregivers are key to the model's success. Neighbor to Family professionalized this key role by placing these trained foster caregivers on the payroll with salaries and benefits. Foster families, birth families, and children receive comprehensive and intensive services including individualized case management, advocacy, and clinical services on a weekly basis. See the end of this chapter for a more detailed description of Neighbor to Family.

Provide support and resources for families

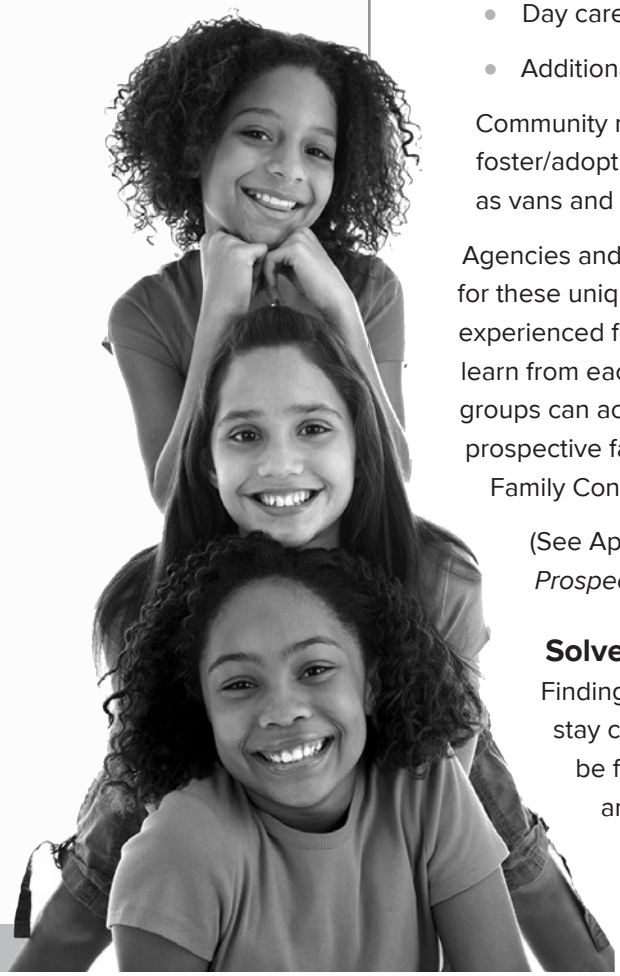
Successful recruitment and retention of homes for sibling groups requires building support systems for parents, including material and financial resources, and policies and procedures that make it easier for families to care for sibling groups. Some agencies have designated certain foster homes for large sibling groups, and offered incentives to hold them open for placements. Families caring for sibling groups need the "plus" version of the usual supportive services, such as respite. Ask families what they specifically need and respond effectively. These needs may include:

- Logistical support, such as transportation
- Assistance with tasks such as school registration
- Day care
- Additional material resources, such as household items

Community members and businesses can be asked to help support foster/adoptive families by donating or reducing the cost of items such as vans and bunk beds.

Agencies and local districts are instrumental in building support systems for these unique and valued families. Support groups of new and experienced foster parents allow foster/adoptive families to share and learn from each other. Families who have fostered or adopted sibling groups can act as mentors to newer families, as well as recruiters of prospective families (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections).

(See Appendix 5-5: *Engaging, Developing, and Supporting Prospective Families for Sibling Groups.)*



Solve issues related to space

Finding housing with enough room for all the siblings to stay can be a concern. However, creative solutions can be found for space issues. For example, New York State amended its regulations to allow flexibility in sleeping arrangements for foster homes with sibling groups,

specifying that siblings of the opposite sex over age seven may share bedrooms, and that over three children may share a bedroom if necessary to keep siblings together. Both exceptions must be consistent with the health, safety, and welfare of each sibling (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2010b).

Maintaining sibling connections

When it is not possible to place siblings together, there are other ways to keep siblings connected. Persistence and commitment from caseworkers and foster/adoptive parents are critical to sustain these key connections. Specific strategies include: placing siblings in the same neighborhood or school district, arranging regular visits, encouraging other forms of contact (e.g., texts, social media, phone calls), planning joint outings, camp experiences or respite care, and helping children work through the emotional toll of being separated from siblings.

Recruiting for LGBTQ Youth

LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the foster care system, and are more likely than other foster youth to be placed in group homes and other residential care facilities. Many have been the victims of violence and most have been the victims of verbal abuse. Between 25% and 40% of homeless and runaway youth identify as LGBTQ. They are at a higher risk of substance abuse than other youth in foster care (Family Builders, 2014).

In addition, LGBT youth are four times more likely, and questioning youth are three times more likely, to attempt suicide than their straight peers (The Trevor Project, n.d.). Children who are identifying as LGBTQ want homes where they feel accepted and safe to be themselves. Recruiting LGBTQ-affirming foster/adoptive homes serves that need. The recruitment effort has a two-pronged approach:

- All youth, including those who have already been placed in foster homes, will explore their sexuality as part of their normal adolescent development. For this reason, all foster/adoptive parents should be prepared to care for and support LGBTQ youth.
- Targeted recruitment efforts should include outreach to LGBTQ communities, which may be more likely to foster LGBTQ youth than other communities.

Prepare *all* families to foster LGBTQ youth

The need for homes for LGBTQ youth must be clearly articulated from the start of engagement and throughout the process. Reminding all prospective foster/adoptive parents of the critical needs of this population allows them to be actively involved in solving the problem.

Create training and learning workshops for prospective parents to challenge their own biases and to practice affirming language that will

Spotlight on New York State

Preparing families to foster LGBTQ youth

In New York City, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and its partner voluntary agencies are developing strategies to engage LGBTQ-affirming families for all youth. Their approach includes a fundamental shift towards equipping all foster/adoptive families with the tools needed to be prepared to parent LGBTQ youth in a healthy and stable environment. This shift includes changes to both training and engagement practices. As a rule, all prospective foster/adoptive families are required to attend ten weeks of MAPP training to prepare to become a foster parent. ACS' policy requires all prospective foster/adoptive families to attend an additional mandatory session that is focused specifically on engaging and supporting LGBTQ youth. The training policy also requires four additional hours of training for all foster home recertifications. The training emphasizes how parents can demonstrate both affirming behaviors and language for youth. After the training, parents take an LGBTQ Affirming Pledge to further solidify their commitment to this and other vulnerable populations.

http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/lgbtq/lgbtq.shtml

Key Messages

Recruiting for LGBTQ youth

Prepare *all* current and prospective foster families to care for LGBTQ youth as part of training and policy.

Engage with the LGBTQ community to identify foster/adoptive families for all children and youth in care.

help them support all young people through their sexual discovery, no matter the outcome. It also strengthens the parenting skills of the foster/adoptive parent and gives LGBTQ children in care a safer space to grow.

Prospective parents must be emotionally prepared for the many facets of sexual and gender identity exploration that any child may present, and should receive continued support throughout the foster/adoptive parenting process. Agencies can engage current foster/adoptive parents and LGBTQ youth in care to help illuminate what it is like to foster, adopt and to be fostered and/or adopted.

Engage the LGBTQ community

Recruitment of LGBTQ adults should be a natural extension of an agency's existing recruitment practices so that prospective LGBTQ foster/adoptive parents are not isolated or treated as a separate population, but rather are recognized as an additional community that your agency seeks to actively engage. As with any new effort to reach out to a community that has not been previously engaged, it is important to think about how to work in culturally competent, effective, and respectful ways. See Chapter 3 for targeted recruitment strategies for the LGBTQ community.

Although LGBTQ adults have been historically discouraged from fostering or adopting, changes in legislation and policy over the past 10 years in some states reflect a more open attitude towards them as parents. New York State law prohibits discrimination in adoption based on sexual orientation, as do five other states. New York State's recently issued Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care includes the statement, "[I have the right] to be treated fairly and with respect and to receive care and services that are free of discrimination based on race, creed, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, gender identity or gender expression, sexual orientation, marital status, physical or mental disability, or the fact that I am in foster care (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2014)."

Recruiting for children with special needs

Finding homes for children with special needs (those with exceptional physical, emotional, developmental or health care needs) requires understanding each child holistically: his/her interests, hobbies, connection to siblings, and experiences with trauma, etc. Although a child may have complex medical, developmental, or mental health needs, the goal is the same as for any other child: to reach positive outcomes for the child and family and to achieve a successful, permanent in-home living situation.

Effective recruitment strategies may include:

- Plan a targeted recruitment campaign, including materials that reflect the need for homes for children with special needs, with a realistic vision to recruit foster/adoptive families appropriate to care for these children.
- Contact and engage medical societies, nurses associations, community medical providers, and other organizations for healthcare professionals.
- Pediatricians may be helpful in identifying prospective families: those already caring for a child with special health care needs, foster parents of typically developing children, and parents who work in health care fields (Johnson, 2005).
- Use your website as a vehicle to emphasize recruitment for families to serve children with special needs.

Promote availability of support systems

Like most states, New York provides enhanced board and care rates for foster/adoptive families that are caring for children with special needs.

Foster families may qualify for a Special Rate if they are caring for a child with a pronounced physical condition that requires a high degree of physical care; a child that has been diagnosed as moderately developmentally disabled, emotionally disturbed, or with a behavior disorder requiring a high degree of supervision; or a child that entered foster care directly from inpatient hospital care within the past year.

Foster families may qualify for an Exceptional Rate if a physician certifies that a foster child requires around-the-clock care by a healthcare professional; has severe behavior problems involving violence, severe mental illness, severe developmental disabilities, brain damage, or autism; or has been diagnosed as having AIDS or HIV-related illness. (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2010c).

Provide ongoing support for families

Families need assurance that the agency is with them every step of the way, providing available and responsive help around the clock. An involved multidisciplinary team is critically important to reaching positive outcomes. Working alongside foster parents, a team may be made up of caseworkers, social workers, behavior specialists, medical, mental health and recreational staff. Connecting to other foster/adoptive families caring for children with complex needs strengthens foster/adoptive families.

Spotlight on New York State

Healthcare support for foster families of children with special needs

Another support to foster/adoptive parents, children, and families is the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services Waiver Program. This program, also known as "Bridges to Health" (B2H), became effective in 2008. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) designed a foster-care-specific B2H waiver program to serve children with serious emotional disturbance, developmental disabilities, and medical fragility. The B2H program provides family and community support services to children statewide that supplements existing foster care and Medicaid funded services. Benefits can involve multiple families, e.g., foster parents, biological parents, and pre-adoptive parents (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2010a). The child can continue to receive services after discharge from foster care and up until age 21 if she/he continues to meet the eligibility requirements.

Additional resources

Keep Siblings Together: Finding qualified homes for siblings might be easier than you think. Data and resources on keeping siblings together, with links to the AdoptUSKids photolisting. (http://www.adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/sibling-infographic)

Sibling Issues in Foster Care and Adoption. Explores research, intervention strategies, and resources to assist professionals in preserving connections among siblings when one or more are adopted or in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway).(https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/)

My brother, My sister: Sibling relations in adoption and foster care, a six-hour training consisting of trainer's notes, activities, PowerPoint slides and a video published by the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio, 12608 State Road, Suite 1, North Royalton, OH 44133.

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Neighbor to Family Sibling Foster Care Model

The *Neighbor to Family Sibling Foster Care Model* (NTF) was developed in 1994 by Gordon Johnson while he was President and CEO of The Jane Addams Hull House Association in Chicago, Ill.

Originally named *Neighbor To Neighbor*, the program began serving targeted communities in Chicago from which the majority of children came into foster care. The child-centered, family-focused foster care model is designed to keep sibling groups, including large sibling groups, together in stable foster care placements while work continues on reunification or permanency plans.

The model emphasizes staff and caregiver training, family team meetings, comprehensive services for birth families, and intensive permanency planning. Trained and supported foster caregivers are key to the model's success. The program professionalized this key role by placing foster caregivers on the payroll with salaries and benefits. Foster families receive 90 hours of initial training and then 50+ hours of training each year, significantly more than is typically required. Foster families, birth families, and children receive comprehensive services on a weekly basis, including individualized case management, advocacy, and clinical services.

In 2000, *Neighbor to Family Sibling Foster Care Model* was expanded into geographic locations beyond Illinois. Programs are currently operating in Florida, Georgia, Maryland, and South Carolina.

For More Information

Neighbor to Family, Inc.

866.467.5733
info@ntf.org
www.neighbortofamily.org

Evidence base

Evaluations of NTF were completed in 2003, 2007, and 2012. The most recent evaluation, which compared children who received NTF services with children who received other forms of foster care, found significant improvement in placement with siblings, stability of placement, safety during and after foster care, rate of reunification, and time and type of permanent placement. According to NTF performance measurements, children served by the program typically return to their own homes or alternative permanent placements, such as adoption, in about 9 months (the national average length of stay in care is 27.2 months).

NTF is listed in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) because the CEBC has determined that there is promising research evidence that supports a conclusion that NTF is an effective program.

CHAPTER 6

Customer Service for Retention and Support

"In child welfare work, responsive, helpful, respectful service to all of our key partners – including current and prospective families – should be a part of our work every day and every month."

— National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment

Customer service is the key factor in both recruiting and retaining foster/adoptive families. Customer service is built on the attitude that each participant in the child welfare system – from line staff; to the agency director; to the judge; to the foster, adoptive, or kinship family – must feel like a valued member of the team and be committed to providing good customer service.

First interactions

First impressions are critical in determining one's perceptions about a product or service. In child welfare interactions, how people are treated at the first point of contact sets the tone for how the relationship will move forward (Geen, 2004). When your agency responds to inquiries, is the first interaction a welcoming one, or does the caller feel interrogated, unimportant, or ignored? Is the agency employee that answers and returns the calls smiling on their end of the phone? Research has shown that a smile can be felt through the phone and improves customer satisfaction. It is standard advice in sales and customer service to smile while talking on the phone (Customers That Stick, n.d.).

It is also standard advice to use the words "thank you." Saying "thank you" both engages customers and makes them receptive to the rest of the conversation. Are prospective foster/adoptive parents thanked for their interest? A simple "thank you" in the first conversation tells them that their interest is both wanted and taken seriously.

How timely is a response to a prospective foster/adoptive parent? Best practice suggests that a timely response is within 24 hours. The NRCDR recommends, "Return all phone calls to prospective and current foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers within 24 hours. Even if you are waiting for more information and can't answer the caller's questions, call them back to let them know that you're working on their questions."

Key Messages

Customer service

Child welfare agencies should acknowledge foster parents as valuable customers.

Foster parents are partners in finding permanent homes for children in their care.

Everyone at the agency must buy in to the customer service approach.

(See Appendix 6-1: *Five Things You Can Do to Improve Customer Service – Phone Interaction with Families*.)

An attitude of respect

All future steps in the process should also be timely and respectful. Retention starts with recruitment, so every piece of the process sets the tone for how the prospective foster/adoptive parent and the agency will engage with one another.

For example, prospective foster/adoptive parents are invited to attend an orientation or information session. Are there current foster parents at the session to answer questions and give advice? While it is not normally considered to be "customer service," providing opportunities for prospective foster parents to interact with current foster parents sends a strong message that the agency values its foster/adoptive families.

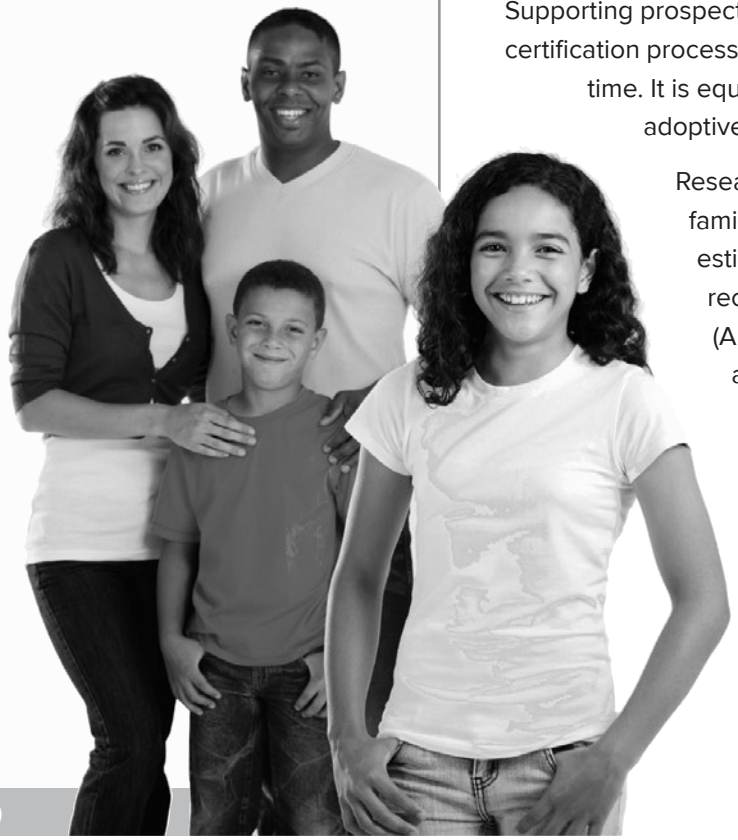
(See Appendix 6-2: *10 Things You Can Do to Improve Customer Service – Prospective Parent Orientation Sessions*.)

Streamlining paperwork is another way to respectfully engage prospective foster/adoptive parents. Review your current documentation to identify duplicative paperwork, unnecessary paperwork or hard-to-understand paperwork. Thoughtfulness and consideration in the application process help prospective foster/adoptive parents to fully embrace the process. Some agencies schedule paperwork days, when prospective foster families come to the agency for help in completing documentation.

Ongoing support for foster/adoptive families

Supporting prospective foster/adoptive parents throughout the certification process improves the retention of foster/adoptive families over time. It is equally important to provide essential supports to foster/adoptive families after children are placed in their homes.

Research has shown that up to 25% of foster/adoptive families discontinue providing foster care each year. It is estimated that 40% of these families left because they received inadequate support from the certifying entity (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012). These include activities such as: organized peer support; timely responses to concerns; flexible respite care; and relevant, accessible training. Agencies are advised to periodically survey their foster/adoptive families to determine their unique needs and then find ways to best meet those needs. Sample surveys can be found on the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment site, http://www.nrcdr.org; search on the term "survey".



24/7 response

Timely and responsive communications between agencies and foster/adoptive families is critical in keeping and sustaining foster parents. This is never more important than when a situation arises in the middle of the night, and the foster parent needs the agency for support. It is essential that the agency be available 24/7 for its foster/adoptive families.

It is recommended that agencies develop a crisis response protocol and that everyone is aware of how it applies to them and their role and responsibility. Agencies may develop their own 24/7 phone trees of internal contacts or assign this role to a subcontractor. An emergency number can be staffed by agency employees during the day and by a contracted answering service after normal business hours.

Involvement in the process

Foster/adoptive families are members of the treatment team and should have an opportunity to provide input along with other team members throughout the time of the child's placement. Foster/adoptive families have tremendous responsibility in their role within the foster care system. Having a voice in decision making can lead to successful and positive outcomes for the child in their temporary care.

Peer support and mentoring

Organized support can be used to both engage and retain prospective foster parents while they await the availability of a MAPP class. Peer support is a key factor throughout the entire certification process, which can take up to six months. The negative effects of this lengthy process can be mitigated by facilitating and supporting connections between a prospective foster parent and current foster/adoptive families. These types of initiatives support both recruitment and retention, because the agency is showing prospective foster parents that it values them enough to connect them to the "pulse" of foster parenting. Current foster parents are given the message that their contributions are valued.

Developing a culture of support also enables new foster/adoptive families to adjust to their roles. Mentoring programs match a "seasoned" foster/adoptive family with new foster parents. The current foster/adoptive family can provide valuable insights and share successful techniques they have used in dealing with difficult situations. A viable mentoring program may decrease the need for agencies to respond to crisis situations in new foster families.

In a survey conducted by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), foster/adoptive families indicated that peer support groups were very helpful to them. They provide opportunities to network and be engaged with others experiencing similar challenges. Peer support groups can help foster parents feel less alone in dealing with a problem, provide helpful information from others who have

Spotlight on New York State

The Suffolk County Department of Social Services provides guidelines and due dates for paperwork from Week 2 through Week 8 of MAPP training. This breaks the paperwork down into more manageable pieces, with short term due dates to keep prospective foster parents from being overwhelmed. (See Appendix 6-3: *Every Month Is Customer Service Month.)*

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) distributed an informational letter to all local district commissioners and directors of voluntary (private) foster care agencies in May 2005. The letter (05-OCFS-INF-03) summarized OCFS' recommendations on supporting the needs of foster parents, based on a statewide assessment. Among other recommendations, OCFS encouraged agencies to maximize foster parents' participation in permanency planning for the foster children in their care. This might involve inviting foster parents to participate in family meetings, case planning meetings, service plan reviews, permanency hearings, and visitation planning. "Foster parents want to be seen as partners and a resource to the child's family and caseworker." (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2005)

Put It Into Practice

Mockingbird Family Model

The Mockingbird Society in Seattle, WA, has implemented the Mockingbird Family Model, a unique model that includes Hub Home providers. The Hub Home is the lead home for six to 10 foster homes that make up a "constellation." The Hub Homes are experienced foster parents who help families in their constellation navigate resources in the community and create an extended network of support. Constellation members share experiences and actually become an extended family. This model provides a resource that allows families to solve problems before crises occur.

See the end of this chapter for a one-page summary of the *Mockingbird Family Model*.

had similar experiences, discuss ideas for dealing with a problem, allow foster parents to express their feelings, and bring about change. Agencies may assist foster/adoptive families to establish support groups by providing meeting space at convenient hours for foster/adoptive families and providing contact information. Agencies can also proactively encourage new foster/adoptive families to join existing associations and support groups.

Nonprofit, community-based programs can play a role in supporting foster children and foster/adoptive families.

The Next Door, Inc. in Oregon is a provider of foster care services. To support and enhance services for its foster families, the agency reached out to the local community. As a result, businesses are providing a range of benefits to foster families and children in care, such as free gym time for the children and pro bono medical and dental care.

Fostering Hope in Colorado recruits, trains, and coordinates teams of volunteers from faith communities. The teams provide support to foster families on an as-needed basis, such as minor household maintenance and repairs, babysitting, and tutoring or help with homework. The program reports that it has reduced stress and burnout among foster parents and provided community connections for foster children and youth.

A similar program, Fostering Futures NY, was recently launched in New York's Capital Region.

(See Appendix 6-4, *Fostering Futures NY.*)

A key component of **Roots and Wings** in Santa Cruz County, California, is the contract position of Outreach and Recruitment Coordinator. The coordinator supports and guides applicants through the certification process by helping them to access, complete, and submit applications and other required paperwork. Prospective foster families have one consistent person to help them navigate each step to certification. The county also created the role of Resource Family Liaison to augment the work of casework staff within its service delivery system. The liaisons are paraprofessionals hired by and paid by a community-based organization to provide intensive support to foster parents and relative caregivers. Their activities included, but weren't limited to: maintaining contact through home visits, making referrals to support groups and mentors, identifying training needs, and either providing or referring families for training (County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department, n.d.).

Respite care

Respite care provides planned, temporary, periodic relief to foster parents from foster care responsibilities. No single model program or blueprint is preferred – each agency provides this service in a way that best meets the needs of its foster/adoptive families. In general,

however, respite care programs meet a specific need, promote teamwork and trust, use trained respite providers, and are flexible to meet changing needs (Office of Inspector General, 1994).

Respite care is especially beneficial for foster parents who are caring for children with special needs. Research indicates that, after receiving respite care, caregivers reported reduced stress levels, improved family relationships, and a more positive attitude about fostering (Owens-Kane, 2006).

Providing effective respite care involves assessing and understanding the needs of foster/kinship families in the community. Families' needs vary widely. Some families prefer only in-home respite care, while others do not like people coming to stay in their home. Some families like sending children to camp, while others feel uncomfortable sending their children away. It is also important to understand the barriers families may encounter in accessing respite. Are respite services provided by someone they know and trust, conveniently located, and available at needed times of the day or week? Can families trust that the providers are trained and capable of caring for the special needs of their child? Providing high-quality respite care requires taking the pulse of the community of foster and kinship families to understand their true needs (AdoptUSKids, 2013).

Some popular respite options elsewhere include:

- Camps for the children to attend while the parents stay home and take a break
- Recurring or regularly scheduled respite, e.g. the last weekend of each month, allowing the parents to count on it and plan for it
- Drop off events, e.g., free two-hour, supervised programs at the local YWCA, utilizing staff who already meet required background clearances (AdoptUSKids, 2012)

Training

Providing training opportunities for foster parents confirms their value in the child welfare system. Training that helps caregivers deal with the realities of foster parenting, especially equipping them to manage the behavior of children they are caring for, is highly sought after in many jurisdictions, both during the pre-certification period and as an ongoing support. Today's foster parents are juggling

Spotlight on New York State

New York State Social Services regulations specify that respite care must be provided in a foster family boarding home or emergency foster family boarding home. Respite care may also be provided in an agency boarding home, a group home, a group residence, or an institution if the child in care requires additional services. (18 NYCRR 435.4(g)).

Key Messages

Ongoing support for foster/adoptive families

Surveys of staff and foster parent satisfaction can be useful in determining service gaps.

Develop and provide new supports in small, easy-to-implement steps.

A child's well-being is inextricably tied to the supports provided to the foster/adoptive caregiver.

multiple responsibilities and have hectic schedules. Agencies need to bring relevant training to the foster parents by making it accessible through a variety of formats: in-person education, online courses, live webinars and other distance learning modalities.

Pre-certification training

Prospective foster/adoptive families are required to complete training before certification or approval. In New York State, local districts frequently use GPSII/MAPP or *Deciding Together* for prospective foster parents and *Deciding Together or Caring for Our Own* for kinship families. The success of the pre-certification training experience depends on training being provided fairly soon after orientation, at a time and location convenient for prospective foster parents, and in a training environment conducive to engagement and openness. Each participant should have an opportunity to complete an evaluation after each training session and at the end of the entire training.

In-service education

While the education of foster parents starts with MAPP and may include recertification trainings, it does not have to end there. In the business world, when a company offers professional development opportunities to its employees, it is demonstrating their importance to the organization by investing in them. Providing similar opportunities to prospective and current foster parents shows them that the agency recognizes their importance to the work of the organization and wants to invest time and money in their growth. Training in topics such as communication, parenting, and stress management, as well as attendance at conferences and other large-scale educational events, can be useful to foster parents. It can also be an opportunity for foster parents to develop as trainers. For example, if they attend a conference, they can be asked to share what they learned in a staff or support group meeting. It is another reminder that they are part of a larger team and their contributions are critical to overall success.

Most agencies are able to use local community experts for in-service training. For example, agency staff may conduct a training on permanency; Child Protective Services supervisors may do an overview of reporting procedures, the investigation process, rights of the subject and child, and standards of proof; a Family Court Judge may summarize the Family Court process; the fire department could provide home safety training; or the local police department could conduct a session on home safety or avoiding cyber crimes.

Distance learning

In addition to traditional classroom training, other training modalities such as webinars and live-streaming learning sessions are becoming more available. In New York State, free online training is delivered to the home computers of foster and adoptive parents by iLinc, a service created by the Center for Development of Human Services (CDHS) at Buffalo State College in partnership with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. Other online educational programs are available, but it is suggested that trainings not conducted by CDHS or OCFS should be previewed by the agency before recommending them to foster parents.

Cross-training

Cross-training between agency staff and foster/adoptive families is also becoming more common. For example, some states conduct joint training for foster/adoptive families and the child welfare staff. This approach enhances communication opportunities, helps both groups to have the same knowledge base, and encourages mutual respect. In New York State, the mini-MAPP curriculum can be accessed by child welfare staff through CDHS, and offers a condensed curriculum that introduces child welfare staff to the philosophy, concepts, activities, terminology, and tools provided to foster parents during the full MAPP training.

Higher levels of support

Families caring for children with special needs often require higher levels of support. While training and support groups are important, other systems should be in place to adequately engage families around challenging situations that may disrupt a foster home.

Trauma-informed care

As the needs of children in foster care become more complex, supports for foster/adoptive families must expand. For example, foster parents need additional resources when caring for children and youth who have been affected by trauma. Trauma-informed care is part of MAPP training for foster parents, and is an approach for managing behavioral issues and other needs stemming from trauma. In some cases, additional support and resources may be needed beyond MAPP training.

Complex trauma involves the repeated or long-term exposure to traumatic events. It is widely accepted that the majority of youth placed in care have been in some way traumatized by direct abuse, witnessing the abuse of other family members, long-term neglect, and/or being removed from family and community due to placement in foster care. Foster parents should be well-equipped to recognize behaviors resulting from trauma, to make the connection between the behaviors and trauma, and to adequately address the behaviors without further traumatizing the children in care by having them removed from the foster home.

Put It Into Practice

Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Trained and Supported (KEEP)

KEEP was developed by the Oregon Social Learning Center and has been effective in increasing foster parent retention and preventing placement breakdowns. It functions as both a training and a support group for foster and kinship families with children in care between the ages of 4 and 12. KEEP groups typically include seven to ten foster parents who attend 16 weekly 90-minute sessions that focus on practical, research-based parenting techniques. While the facilitators draw from an established protocol manual, they tailor each session to the specific needs, circumstances, and priorities of participating parents and their children. Each week, the facilitators gather specific information about the children's current behaviors by telephone. This information is then incorporated into the weekly sessions to make sure the group is both current and relevant.

See the end of this chapter for a one-page summary of the KEEP model.

Key Messages

Higher levels of support

Trauma ranges from the impact of separation from the parent, to witnessing verbal or physical abuse, to being the victim of abuse or chronic neglect.

An angry outburst is often a symptom of trauma. Foster/adoptive parents must have the necessary tools to support children through such disturbances.

There is no expectation that foster/adoptive parents should become trauma experts, but they should be trauma-informed. According to the Trauma Informed Care Project, "becoming 'trauma-informed' means recognizing that people often have many different types of trauma in their lives. People who have been traumatized need support and understanding from those around them. Trauma survivors can be re-traumatized by well-meaning caregivers and community service providers. Understanding the impact of trauma is an important first step in becoming a compassionate and supportive community." (Trauma Informed Care Project, n.d.)

Youth need to be engaged and educated about the trauma in their lives and about how it may affect their behavior. At the same time, the foster/adoptive parents need the training and skills to recognize the connections between current behaviors and past events in children's lives. This requires varied types of agency and community support.

When a child's behavior is indicative of trauma, agencies should provide timely, strategic, and appropriately balanced support to keep foster/adoptive families intact, encourage relationship building, and limit further victimization of the youth in care.

Multidimensional treatment foster care

Multidimensional treatment is designed to be an alternative to group or residential treatment, incarceration, or hospitalization for adolescents who have problems with chronic antisocial behavior, emotional disturbance, and delinquency. Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO), formerly Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, is a widely used model of support for troubled youth, their birth parents, and foster parents. Foster parents are an integral part of the treatment team, which also includes program supervisors, the birth family, individual therapists, and behavioral skill trainers. With the support of the team, the foster/adoptive family implements a structured, individualized program for the youth in care. TFCO program supervisors are available to foster/adoptive families around the clock for consultation, support and supervision.

See the end of this chapter for a one-page summary of TFCO

Additional resources

Customer service

Using Customer Service Concepts to Enhance Recruitment and Retention Practices. An overview of customer service concepts that can help with recruitment and retention of foster, adoptive, and kinship families. It also serves as a guide for agency leaders in assessing, developing, and implementing relevant policies and practices to support good customer service (NRCDR). (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/using-customer-service-concepts-to-enhance-recuitment-and-retention-practices.pdf)

Support Matters: Lessons from the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families. This AdoptUSKids publication highlights successful family support services, provides data about the value of support services, offers tools and guidance for assessing the needs of adoptive, foster, and kinship care families, and discusses research findings about implementing support services, including forming public/private partnerships, accessing funding, and conducting program and service assessment and evaluation.

Support groups

Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System. Slide presentation on supporting foster children to develop strong "roots" in their families, communities, and cultures; and providing them opportunities or "wings" to thrive (County of Santa Cruz, CA). (http://www.slideshare.net/AdoptUsKids/dr-grantee-santa-cruz-county)

Parent Support Groups. Summarizes proven activities and resources for parent group projects/programs (New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children). (http://nysccc.org/family-supports/parent-groups/)

Training

Foster/Adoptive Parent Resource Center. Live, online training for foster parents on a variety of topics. Offered at no charge through the iLinc system; usually offered September through December and April through June (Center for Development of Human Services). (http://www.bsc-cdhs.org/fosterparenttraining/)

Treat Them Like Gold: A Best Practice Guide to Partnering with Resource Families. The State of North Carolina's findings and practices for the recruitment and retention of resource families. (http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/publications/docs/Partnering_with_Resource_Families.pdf)

Building Successful Resource Families: A Guide for Public Agencies. A practice guide of recruitment and retention strategies (Annie E. Casey Foundation). (http://www.aecf.org/resources/building-successful-resource-families/)

Trauma-informed care

Trauma-Informed Practice with Young People in Foster Care. An issue brief summarizing the prevalence of trauma in foster care youth, its effects and symptoms, and the provision of trauma-informed care (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative). (http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/trauma-informed-practice-young-people-foster-care)

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Mockingbird Family Model

The *Mockingbird Family Model* (MFM) was first implemented in 2004 by the Mockingbird Society of Seattle, WA. It establishes constellations of six to ten foster and kinship family homes in close proximity to a Hub Home. The Hub Home is led by an experienced, certified foster care provider. The Hub Home provides 24/7 support, as well as planned and emergency respite to the families within its constellation. The Hub Home also provides peer mentoring and coaching, convenes monthly support group meetings, and hosts social activities to facilitate the development of a sense of community among children and caregivers. The constellation is designed to function as an extended family (see diagram on following page).

MFM operates on the philosophy that caregivers deserve the support they need and its model is designed to provide those supports in a timely manner. Families that receive these resources and supports tend to feel less isolated and are more able to provide a stable, loving, and supportive environment for children and youth in their care.

At one point, MFM constellations were operating in Washington State, Washington, D.C., and Kentucky.

For More Information

The Mockingbird Society

mfm@mockingbirdsociety.org

www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Resources needed for implementation

The primary cost of this model is support for the Hub Home provider. For example, in Washington State, Hub Home providers are paid by the host agency as a self-employed contractor, typically between $30,000-$50,000 per year, depending on the level of care they provide (e.g., regular vs. therapeutic foster care). This fee covers the retainer for maintaining two open beds in the home for respite care, providing support services to families, and concrete resources such as food and activities related to the constellation. The Mockingbird Society operates on the principle that the funds for Hub Homes can be generated by cost savings in other areas, such as transporting youth, supervising sibling visits and respite.[1]

[1] Casey Family Programs (2014). Effective Practices in Foster Parent Recruitment, Infrastructure and Retention.

Evidence base

MFM was evaluated annually between 2004 and 2009 by the University of Washington's Northwest Institute for Children and Families. The most recent evaluation stated that of the MFM youth that exited foster care, 90% were discharged to permanent homes. Caregiver retention rate was 88% (compared to Washington's state average of 69%), and there were no founded CPS reports for caregivers in MFM constellations.

The *Mockingbird Family Model* has been reviewed by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) and is listed in the CEBC registry.

Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Trained and Supported (KEEP)

Program overview

Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Trained and Supported (KEEP) is a model for providing structured training, supervision, and support for kinship and foster parents caring for children ages 4-12. Developed by the Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC), KEEP's objective is to give foster and kinship parents effective tools for dealing with a child's behavioral and emotional issues and to support parents as they implement these tools. Training is provided in a group setting once a week for 16 weeks; child care and snacks are provided.

KEEP groups are led by two trained facilitators who are supervised as they implement the program. Foster/kinship parents are taught methods for encouraging child cooperation, using behavioral contingencies and effective limit setting, and balancing encouragement and limits. There are also sessions on dealing with difficult behavioral problems, covert behaviors, promoting school success, encouraging positive peer relationships, and strategies for managing stress brought on by providing foster care. While the facilitators draw from an established protocol manual, they tailor each session to the specific needs, circumstances, and priorities of the participating parents and their children. KEEP groups are interactive and participatory, with the curriculum content integrated into the group discussion.

Facilitators make one 10-minute phone call per week to participating parents to troubleshoot problems parents may be having and to collect data on children's behaviors. If a foster/kinship family misses a group session, the material from the missed session is delivered during a home visit at a time convenient for the parent.

KEEP programs are supporting families in Oregon, Washington, California, Maryland, Great Britain, Sweden, and New York City.

Resources needed for implementation

KEEP offers several implementation options. The basic option costs approximately $40,000, which includes organizational preparation, a readiness assessment, five days of training for the facilitator and co-facilitator, and weekly consultation throughout implementation. This phase includes a fidelity review/certification of the facilitation team. After they conduct three 16-week groups with intensive support from the KEEP implementation team, facilitators can become KEEP-certified facilitators. Certified facilitators can run KEEP groups with bi-annual fidelity checks conducted by the implementation team.

For More Information

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Evidence base

KEEP has been found to be effective in increasing foster parent retention and preventing placement breakdowns. KEEP is listed in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) because the CEBC has determined that there is promising research evidence that supports a conclusion that KEEP is an effective program.

Treatment Foster Care Oregon™

The *Treatment Foster Care Oregon* (TFCO), formerly *Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care*, model was established in 1983. There are three versions, each serving a different age group. TFCO-A serves adolescents (12-17), TFCO-C serves childhood (7-11), TFCO-P serves preschool (3-6). Children are typically placed for approximately 6-9 months; sometimes siblings are placed together in the same home.

The treatment team includes the foster parents, program supervisors, the birth family, individual therapists, behavioral skills trainers, and foster parent recruiters. The team develops an individualized treatment plan for each child that builds on the child's strengths and establishes rules, expectations, and limits to manage behavior. Foster parents are integral members of the team, as successful outcomes are dependent on them to provide close supervision, monitor academic progress, and provide a structured environment for the child. Concurrently, the birth family or permanency resource receives family therapy and parent training on topics such as consistent discipline, supervision, and encouragement, with the goal of reducing conflict and increasing positive relationships in the family when the child returns home.

TFCO program supervisors are available to foster parents for consultation, support, and supervision at weekly meetings. In addition, supervisors contact foster parents daily for feedback about the previous 24 hours. Foster parents have 24/7 access to backup program staff.

TFCO is currently being used in New York City and in counties outside of NYC, California and over 40 other locations, including North Carolina, Maryland, Maine, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Minnesota, plus locations in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

Resources needed for implementation

Agencies that adopt the TFCO model are supported by TFC Consultants, Inc. TFC recommends specific staffing and training processes to maintain fidelity of the model and provides consultation, training, and technical assistance to new and existing TFCO programs. TFC also certifies and supports existing TCFO programs.

For More Information

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Evidence base

Eight randomized trials and other studies have shown that the TFCO-A program model can prevent escalation of placement disruptions, emotional problems, delinquency, and other problem behaviors such as violence. Placement in a TFCO program has been found to be more effective and less costly than placement in group care.

TFCO is listed in the California Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC); the CEBC has determined that there is well-supported research evidence for TFCO-A as an effective program.

CHAPTER 7

Social Media: A New Way to Communicate

"[In 2014], fully 52% of online adults used two or more social media sites, a significant increase from the 42% who did so in 2013 … Facebook remains the most popular site among those who use only one – fully 79% of those who use just one site report using Facebook."

— Pew Research Center

The term "social media" refers to a range of Internet-based programs and applications that allow individuals to interact with one another. While social media first emerged as a personal means of communication, over the past decade it has become a tool used by all types of organizations to reach out to potential members or customers and stay connected with them. As a widely used and low-cost method of communication, social media can play an important role in recruitment and retention of foster/adoptive families.

The use of social media is not in itself a new model for recruitment and retention. It is, however, a new and powerful tool that can be integrated into an agency's strategy or approach in these areas. Social media is a fairly recent development in child welfare practice, and little or no research has yet been published regarding its effectiveness.

(See Appendix 7-1: *Social Media Considerations: Should My Office Be in There?*)

Two-way conversations

In mainstream marketing, social media is used to engage people and to inform them about a product or service. Social media services can also be used to gauge interest and to gather information about prospective customers. While it has an almost unlimited potential for use in child welfare, social media comes with its own set of challenges that must be considered in order to implement and utilize an effective social media practice.

One of the most significant features of social media is that it is a two-way conversation. The success of a corporate Facebook page, for example, is measured by the number of "likes" it receives. The owner of a Twitter account can see who its

"followers" are. In addition, the number of people who see a social media message can extend dramatically as it is shared, forwarded, and retweeted.

Social media provides an opportunity for people to share their thoughts, questions and experiences with others in real time. This can also have negative results, however. Visitors to an interactive website, Facebook, or Twitter can post questions or complaints.

A "Terms of Use Policy," which is usually published on the website or Facebook page, defines appropriate behavior for visitors who wish to post comments. In general, such policies prohibit remarks that are defamatory, racist, or otherwise offensive to the organization. Agency staff that monitor its social media outlets can delete inappropriate comments and even block individuals from posting if they consistently violate the policy.

(See Appendix 7-2: *Developing a Terms of Use Policy for Your Agency's Facebook Page*.)

Legal protections and social media policies

Before undertaking a social media effort, agencies should develop social media policies for staff and agency clients. A good social media policy will provide clear direction as to what can and cannot be posted or shared on the agency website, Facebook page, or Twitter feed. A policy is also likely to help leadership feel more comfortable with the less-formal nature of social media by establishing boundaries for its use (IdealWare, 2012).

Protecting the confidentiality of children and families

The primary legal concern when child welfare agencies use social media is the legal requirement that no information can be released that would violate confidentiality requirements. This means that nothing can be released concerning the social history of a child in foster care (see box on this page). Nothing can be shared that could identify the child or his/her family.

Any social media policy developed by an agency should include clear direction regarding confidentiality for both official communication on the agency's website or Facebook page, and communications by agency staff and foster parents.

Use of social media by foster parents

Agencies must assume that foster parents are likely to use social media to communicate with agency staff, friends, and other family members. Unlike phone calls or texts, Facebook posts, and Twitter "tweets" are accessible to a much wider audience. Policies should clearly outline what information can be shared by foster parents and what information is to be considered confidential. It also would be a violation of confidentiality requirements for a foster parent to post photographs of foster children in their care on Facebook, Instagram, or other media-sharing applications.

(See Appendix 7-3: *Facebook 101 for Child Welfare Professionals and Appendix 7-4: Facebook 201 for Child Welfare Professionals.*)

Social media in practice

Using social media requires a commitment by agency management to assign staff to this function on an ongoing basis. Best practice standards suggest that one full-time person be assigned the sole responsibility to monitor and update social media interactions. However, in the absence of that, it has been recommended that an agency give one or two staff persons the responsibility of updating, monitoring, and responding to visitor comments on social media, in addition to other job responsibilities.

While there are multiple ways that social media can be used agency-wide, the ideas below focus on using social media to recruit and to retain foster parents.

Blogs

A "weblog" is a log or diary that is written by an individual and posted on the Internet. If the blogger chooses to enable a comment feature, readers can share comments, advice, or ideas for the blog. Blogs generally are maintained by agency staff and accessed from the agency website.

If the foster/adoptive parents have a blog on the agency website, their contributions should be reviewed by agency staff for consistency with the agency's social media policy and legal restrictions. Kid Hero (kidhero.chw.org/), a foster/adoptive parent blog sponsored by the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, features entries created by foster and adoptive parents and includes stories describing their experiences. The blog offers supportive content for foster and adoptive parents, and also promotes positive images about the work of foster and adoptive parents in the community.

Facebook

Agencies and foster parent organizations create Facebook pages to promote a sense of community and share experiences. As with all corporate Facebook pages, when the page administrator posts an item, a notice is sent to all individuals who "like" the page. When setting up a Facebook page, agencies must be prepared to:

Post regularly. To engage with the public, an agency must provide valuable content regularly and frequently (one or two posts a day).

Respond promptly. If people post comments or questions, acknowledge them as soon as possible. Someone on staff should monitor the Facebook page throughout the business day.

Be respectful. Remember that anyone and everyone can see what is posted on your page.

Spotlight on New York State

Confidentiality requirements

According to state law, foster parents must keep a child's and family's social history and personal information confidential [SSL §372(4)]. Confidential information includes information furnished by the agency, the caseworker, the child, the child's birth family, or the foster parents. It may concern the family background of the child, child and family's medical history and condition, and/ or the services being provided to the child. These matters cannot be discussed with the foster family's friends, neighbors, or other relatives who are not part of the foster parent's household, or with any other professional who is not specifically authorized to receive the information. These legal requirements also apply to communications via social media (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2010).

The Foster Parent Association of Eastern Washington [www.facebook.com/fpaspokane] has more than 1,400 "likes," and uses its page to send inspirational messages, tips about parenting, and news about upcoming events and trainings. You must have a Facebook account to view the page.

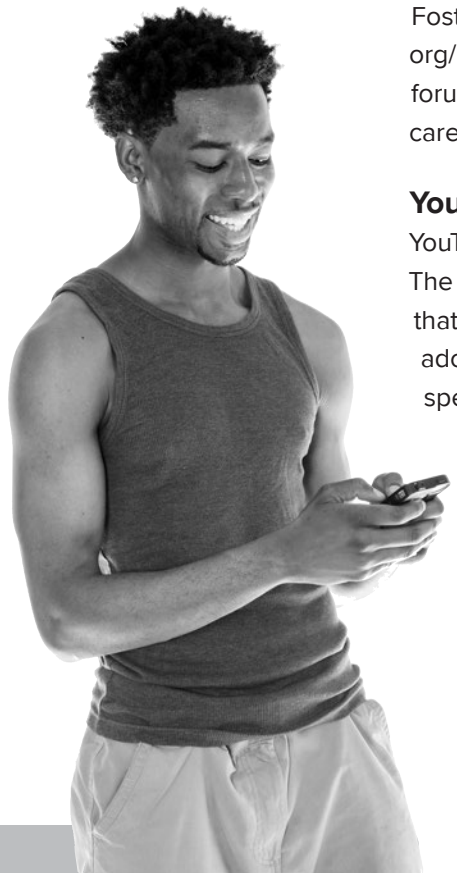
Twitter

Twitter is best used for frequent, short (140-character limit) messages to "followers." It can be used to highlight photolisted children, announce training sessions, and provide links to current news coverage. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services has a Twitter account for the entire department, and uses the hashtag "#ChildWelfare" for topics related to foster and adoptive care [https://twitter.com/OKDHS]. The hashtag makes it easy for Twitter users to search for information related to that topic.

Message boards and forums

Message boards and forums are website features set up by an agency that allow participants to share questions and information on certain topics or categories. Assigned agency staff can start new categories/conversations, submit comments, and answer questions. The messages appear in a chronological "thread," with the most recent comment at the top. Individuals must register the first time they post a message, so the forum administrator (the agency) will have a current e-mail contact for them. Forums can be password protected so only agency foster parents can participate. This peer-to-peer communication is effective in providing post-placement and post-removal support.

There are several national forums that are open to all foster parents. The Foster Care Support Group at DailyStrength.com [http://www.dailystrength.org/c/Foster-Care/forum] serves foster parents throughout the country. Another forum offers provides interaction on a wide range of topics related to foster care and adoption [http://forums.adoption.com/foster-care-adoption/].



YouTube

YouTube can be used by agencies to broadcast videos on their own channel. The channel can offer videos with testimonials, training, and other information that may be of interest to prospective and current foster parents. Foster/adoptive parents can subscribe to the YouTube channel to access the agency-specific videos and will be notified when new videos are uploaded. The videos can be designated "private" to restrict viewing of the video content to an invited audience.

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University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work. (2011). *Technology in the Workplace: Legal and Ethical Ramifications*. Retrieved March 27, 2015, from Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center: http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Curriculum/701%20Technology%20in%20the%20Workplace/Hndts/HO01_PwrPntPrsnttnHndt.pdf

Appendices: Chapter 1

Appendix 1-1: New York State Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) released the New York State Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care in December 2014. The document, which was developed through a collaborative effort by young New Yorkers in foster care and OCFS staff, empowers children and youth in foster care by explicitly listing their rights to safe, nurturing, and healthy environments.

NEW YORK STATE
OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

As a child or youth in foster care in the State of New York, I have the right:

1. To live in a safe, nurturing, healthy, and suitable residence, free from exploitation, where I am treated with respect and where I have enough food and adequate clothing. I have the right to the least restrictive, most home-like setting where I can safely live and receive services.
2. To be treated fairly and with respect and to receive care and services that are free of discrimination based on race, creed, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, gender identity or gender expression, sexual orientation, marital status, physical or mental disability, or the fact that I am in foster care.
3. To visit with my birth or adoptive parents, unless the court has determined that it is not in my best interest or my parents' rights have been ended or given up. If I have had children of my own while in care, I have the right to live with my child(ren) and to make decisions for my child(ren), unless the court or agency determines that I cannot.
4. To live with my brothers and sisters unless the court or my agency has determined it is not in my best interests or those of my brothers or sisters, and to visit with my brothers and sisters regularly if we do not live together, unless the court or a case worker has determined it is not in my best interests or those of one of my brothers or sisters, or their distance from me prevents visitation.
5. To know the name and the contact information for my caseworker, my caseworker's supervisor, and my lawyer (Attorney for the Child). I have the right to have at least a monthly visit with my caseworker, and to contact my caseworker or my lawyer (Attorney for the Child) as I need to in private if I request it and to have my caseworker and/or my lawyer (Attorney for the Child) respond to my attempts to contact them. I have the right to have my records and personal information kept private and only given to people or agencies who have a legal right to see them.
6. To be free from cruel, harsh or unnecessary punishment, including but not limited to being hit, bullied, locked in a room or separated from others as a means of discipline, being made to do work unfairly and being denied water, food, sleep or contact with my family as a means of discipline. I have the right to be disciplined in a manner that is appropriate to the reason why I am being disciplined, how mature I am, my developmental level, and my medical condition. I must be told why I was disciplined. I may not be restrained for punishment or for the convenience of staff.
7. To have a voice in determining my permanency goal, including, depending on my age or ability, to participate in Service Plan Review meetings and Permanency Hearings, to give input into the development and review of my service plan. When I am 14 years or older, I have the right to receive services that will help me to become a healthy and successful adult and when I am 16 years of age or older I have a right to receive without cost a copy of my credit reports each year until I am discharged from care. In some cases after leaving foster care, I have a right to continued contact from a caseworker and possibly to return to foster care.
8. To receive dental, medical, vision, mental and behavioral health services regularly, and more often as needed. I have the right to receive guidance on family planning and to consent to reproductive health care services regardless of my age, if my doctor or other medical professional determines that I am able to make these decisions. When I am discharged to my own care, I have a right to my birth certificate, social security card, health insurance information, medical records and a driver's license or state issued identification, if eligible.

9. To receive a free and appropriate education until I receive a high school diploma or IEP diploma. I have the right to request assistance in applying to colleges and vocational programs that are in or out of state.
10. To participate in activities that are appropriate for my age and development, such as after-school activities, summer activities, work experience, to attend or not to attend religious services in my faith, and to practice my religion, if I have one. When I am at least 16 years old, I have the right to apply for my driver's license. I have the right to ask for and to receive guidance in getting a job.

Who should I talk to if I feel that my rights are not being respected?

You have the right to report anyone who does not respect your rights, and you do not need to fear being punished for reporting them. Please follow these steps:

1. Explain what is happening with your caseworker, parent or guardian and possibly the judge at your court case. You can ask to talk with your caseworker in private.
2. If you continue to be treated unfairly, contact your caseworker's supervisor and explain the situation. You can ask to talk with your caseworker's supervisor in private.
3. If you still feel you are being treated unfairly, contact your lawyer (Attorney for the Child). Your conversations with your lawyer (Attorney for the Child) are completely private. Your lawyer (Attorney for the Child) cannot tell anyone else what you talk about with him or her, except if he or she has your permission, or if your safety is at risk (talk to your lawyer about this).

I have received a copy of the New York State Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care and I have discussed it with my caseworker, my parent(s) (birth or adoptive) or guardian(s), and my foster parent(s), if applicable.

Child/Youth Name (print)	Child/Youth Signature	/ / Date
Caseworker Name (print)	Caseworker Signature	/ / Date
Supervisor Name (print)	Supervisor Signature	/ / Date
Parent/Guardian Name (print)	Parent/Guardian Signature	/ / Date
Foster Parent Name (print)	Foster Parent Signature	/ / Date

Appendices: Chapter 2

Appendix 2-1:
Data-Driven Recruitment: Key Data Elements on Foster and Adoptive Families

This resource outlines the needs and steps required for a data-driven process to improve and complement an agency's diligent recruitment efforts. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 2-2:
Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Market Segmentation

A fact sheet on the use of market segmentation techniques in child welfare. (National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data & Technology)

Appendix 2-3:
Using the Diligent Recruitment Navigator

Tip sheet to learn how and when to use the Diligent Recruitment Navigator, a tool from the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment to help guide jurisdictions through their own process of developing a comprehensive, multi-faceted diligent recruitment program.

DATA-DRIVEN RECRUITMENT

Key Data Elements on Foster and Adoptive Families[1]

Using data effectively is a key part of conducting diligent recruitment. Most child welfare systems have good data on children in foster care and their characteristics. One of the most important — and often most lacking — areas of data is on prospective and current foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. Having useful data on prospective and current parents gives a child welfare system crucial insight into how effective their current approaches are in recruiting, developing, and supporting foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

We know that collecting, tracking, and analyzing data can be challenging for child welfare systems. There are often barriers and significant delays involved in adding new data elements to data systems; many child welfare systems also report challenges in making it possible for staff to collect and enter data consistently and in a timely manner. Recognizing that child welfare systems may only be able to track a few new pieces of data on foster and adoptive families, we have prioritized key data elements below that will help inform your efforts to recruit and maintain a pool of families and help you assess the effectiveness of your strategies and efforts.

Data Elements on Current Families

Key Question to Ask Your Data: Are our current families being fully utilized?

1. **Where are our current families located in relation to where our children come from?**
   - Are our children being placed in close proximity to their birth families?
   - Are siblings being placed together?
   - What are the trends in this data?
2. **How many homes have not had a placement in the past six months?**
   - Why have they not had a placement?
   - Do these families need specific training, develop ment, and support to help them be able to be a resource to children in need of placement? If so, how can you help the family develop their capacity to meet the needs of these children?
   - Do these homes need to be either closed or referred to an agency that might be more appro priate to their interests and capabilities (e.g., the family wants a healthy infant but that is not the type of placement the agency has). If your child welfare system is not going to place children with the family, you may want to refer them to a more appropriate agency or have a discussion with the family about developing their ability to meet the needs of children needing placement or closing their home.

Exploring this question helps your child welfare system begin to focus on whether current recruitment strategies are targeted to building a pool of families that can meet the needs of the children and youth needing placement. It can also indicate if any work needs to be done to close or refer to other agencies homes that are not utilized, freeing staff time to recruit, study and support families willing to accommodate the needs of your children/youth.

You may be able to use AFCARS data, CFSR outcome data, and possibly data from your data systems to look at this question.

1 For this tip sheet, when referring to families we are referring to non-relative or non-fictive kin homes.

Data Elements on the Licensure/Approval Process

Key Question to Ask Your Data: How is our process working for getting families licensed/approved?

1. **How many families have made inquiries in the past six months?**
2. **How many families have attended an initial orienta tion or participated in an initial orientation discussion with a worker?**
   - Of those, how many families have attended pre-service training?
   - Of those, how many were certified/licensed?
3. **How long does the process take?**
   - How long was it from point of application to final certification/licensure?
   - How long was it between the milestones of the process:
     - Time from inquiry to initial orientation or discussion?
     - Time from orientation to first pre-service training?
     - Time to get all paperwork in?
     - Time for the study to be completed?
     - Time for the worker to write it up and get all needed approvals (e.g., supervisor, review team)?

Examining this question will help you determine whether there are any significant barriers or delays in the licensure/approval process. By reviewing this data, you can identify any parts of the process that might need to be changed in order to keep families moving through the process at an appropriate pace (e.g., policies that create barriers to licensure, lack of consistent good customer service and support). Answering this question also helps you identify whether you need to develop new strategies to keep families engaged during the licensure/approval process.

You may want to look in your data system to see if this information is already being collected and simply needs a query or data warehouse report generated; if it's not already being collected, you may want to track in the future.

Data Elements on Placement Capacity

Key Questions to Ask Your Data: What is our current actual capacity? Is that capacity sufficient to meet the need for appropriate placements for children currently in need of a placement and for our anticipated placement needs?

1. **What is the true bed capacity of our homes?**
2. **How many openings do we currently have?**
3. **If a home is available to accept children:**
   - What behaviors and special needs is the family trained, developed, supported, and equipped to accept?
   - Will they accept sibling groups? How large of a sibling group can they accept?
   - What ages of children will they accept?

Examining these questions will help your system determine your true capacity of placement options for children in foster care. By "true capacity" we mean the realistic number of children that each family can care for at any given time and have been approved to take. Tracking data — both quantitative and qualitative — on your true capacity will help you determine what kinds of placements options you need to increase (e.g., families that can take sibling groups of three or four, families that can take teens, etc.). This data further helps you determine if available families are in locations that will enable children to remain in or near their communities.

We recognize the reality of the shortage of foster homes that many child welfare systems face and that having a shortage can lead to overplacing children in homes. However, to accurately understand your needs for recruitment, you must have a clear picture of your true capacity of placement options, even though you may be placing more children in a home than the home's true capacity.

You will need to work with your data system to determine the best ways to analyze your true capacity for placing specific groups of children and youth (e.g., sibling groups, teens, medically fragile children). You may also want to review your licensing/approval documentation processes to determine whether you are collecting the information you need for understanding the true capacity of approved homes, including understanding how well you are preparing, developing, and supporting families to help them be equipped to care for children with specific needs.

Data Elements on Effectiveness of Recruitment, Development, and Support Strategies[2]

Key Question to Ask Your Data: Are our recruitment strategies effective in finding appropriate families for our children and keeping those families engaged both before and after children are placed with them?

1. **What brings families to our agency? How many openings do we currently have?**
2. **What are the characteristics of families that are good at meeting the needs of the children entering care? How do we define "successful families" to guide our recruitment efforts?**
3. **How many families have left our agency in the past six months?**
   - What are their real reasons for leaving? Do we understand and capture the real reasons why families end their relationship with our agency (e.g., families who adopt might have wanted to continue as foster parents but end the relationship with the agency because they don't feel supported)? Do we allow families to define their reason for leaving or do we make them fit their answer into one of our pre-defined reasons?
   - What are the characteristics of families who leave?
   - What is their average tenure?

This question is helpful to determine the allocation of resources and focus of efforts to keep families engaged with your system. If recruitment strategies are not bringing in the families you need, you may need to re-evaluate those strategies and invest your resources differently to maximize resources. This may also help you determine what strategies you need to use to continually develop and support families to help them meet the changing needs of the children and youth in need of placement.

You may be able to obtain this data by conducting short periodic surveys in appropriate formats for your communities (e.g., using online surveys, distributing paper surveys, getting input at community events). You might also be able to use existing data from your data system to answer some of the questions.

2 We encourage child welfare systems to focus on actively developing and supporting both prospective and current foster and adoptive families, rather than focusing on the idea of "retention." By meeting a family's needs, you increase their ability to address each child's unique needs, while also strengthening their relationship with your child welfare system. The traditional view of retention suggests passively holding onto families, whereas developing and supporting involves building and nurturing a relationship with families so that they continue to feel equipped to meet the needs of children and youth. See our resources on developing and supporting families.

Additional Resources

Developing a more data-driven approach to recruitment is an ongoing process for child welfare systems and aligns well with your other efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. We have many other resources available to support child welfare systems' use of data to guide family recruitment, development, and support. Our website, www.nrcdr.org, provides resources on how to use data as you build and sustain a pool of families for children in foster care and waiting to be adopted. Our customizable Diligent Recruitment Navigator offers multiple suggested discussion questions to help you examine your data on recruitment, customer service, and family engagement and support. We also provide tailored technical assistance to States, Tribes, and Territories to help you develop and implement data-driven diligent recruitment programs.

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR
DILIGENT RECRUITMENT
at AdoptUSKids

More free resources at:
www.nrcdr.org

AdoptUSKids is operated by the Adoption Exchange Association and is made possible by grant number 90CQ0003 from the Children's Bureau. The contents of this resource are solely the responsibility of the Adoption Exchange Association and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau, ACYF, ACF, or HHS. The Children's Bureau funds AdoptUSKids as part of a network of National Resource Centers established by the Children's Bureau.

Children's Bureau

Tips Tools & Trends

NRCCWDT

National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data & Technology

A Service of the Children's Bureau & Member of the T/TA Network

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) & Market Segmentation

Market segmentation and GIS allow child welfare agencies to better understand and visualize the spatial distribution of consumer driven data in maps. This is accomplished by utilizing geospatial methods within a GIS and established marketing techniques. Market segmentation to determine the characteristics of a community can be a powerful tool for agencies to use when recruiting foster parents since it has been shown that prospective foster and adoptive parents within a community are likely to share values, characteristics, and interests.

"Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things."

-Tobler's First Law of Geography

Market Segmentation

Market segmentation is used to accurately predict the needs of "customers," or in the case of child welfare, adoptive or foster parents, to improve our understanding of the community and where prospective adoptive or foster parents reside.

Combining geospatial methods with conventional marketing techniques enables the users to visualize the spatial distribution of data within maps as well as statistical graphs and diagrams. This provides the user a tool to identify people living within the same geographic area who will often share similar characteristics and tendencies, i.e., "birds of a feather flock together."

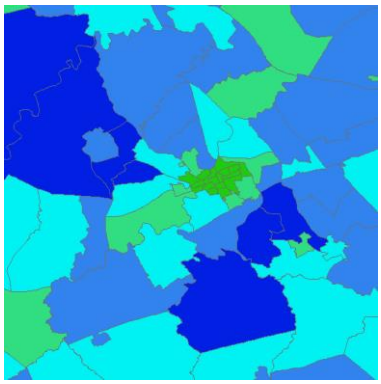
Variables Used in Market Segmentation:

- Demographics – Age, gender, education, income, and home ownership
- Geography – State, county, city, and zip
- Psychographics – Lifestyle, attitude, beliefs, personality, and buying motives
- Brand Loyalty

GIS and Market Segmentation

By examining the marketing data in a GIS, a mapping software program, it creates a new understanding of the demographics and psychographics that allow the user to examine the geographic limitations of an area. Segmenting markets based on geographical boundaries can lead to

more specialized and focused marketing approaches that will allow the similarities in demographic and psychographic characteristics of residents to be shown.



Questions that market segmentation can answer are:

- Who are the target audiences?
- What are they like?
- Where are they?
- How can they be reached?

The maps that are developed with consumer driven marketing data show the geographic location and the population density where potential foster or adoptive parents are located based on similar buying and consumption patterns. This information can then be used to identify the locations of businesses or organizations that are located within a geographic proximity to where the potential foster or adoptive parents reside and likely to shop. Once these businesses are identified, the child welfare agencies can perform outreach and marketing to help with recruitment efforts.

Along with understanding where prospective foster and adoptive parents could be located, it is important to have accurate information about the address where the child was removed, in order to foster connections and promote educational stability. Child welfare agencies can focus recruitment efforts in areas in geographic proximity to the child's location of origin so that the child can remain in their own school and maintain relationships with family and friends.

Market segmentation techniques and GIS can be cost effective tools for a more efficient use of agency and family time and resources. It will also determine more viable family and placement resources.

Technical Assistance

This document is part of the Tips, Tools, & Trends series provided by the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT) developed in partnership with the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids (NRCDR). Readers may obtain technical assistance from this Children's Bureau's Resource Centers by emailing nrccwdt@cwla.org or donna@adoptex.org. More information can be found on www.nrccwdt.org and www.adoptuskids.org. If you wish to request onsite technical assistance from the NRC-CWDT or NRCDR, contact your ACF Regional Office.

NRCCWDT
National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data & Technology
A Service of the Children's Bureau & Member of the T/TA Network

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR
DILIGENT RECRUITMENT
at AdoptUSKids

Using the

DILIGENT RECRUITMENT NAVIGATOR

Effectively

Who should use the Diligent Recruitment Navigator?

The Diligent Recruitment Navigator is designed to be used by child welfare leadership staff in States, tribes, and territories to help you guide your own process within your child welfare system to develop and implement a comprehensive, multi-faceted Diligent Recruitment program. One of the features of the Diligent Recruitment Navigator is that it provides suggestions for key people to include in your discussions about each of the elements of Diligent Recruitment, so ultimately the Diligent Recruitment Navigator should be a resource to multiple stakeholders in your child welfare system in addition to staff in leadership positions.

What can the Diligent Recruitment Navigator help me do?

The Diligent Recruitment Navigator can help you have a framework for going through your process of developing a comprehensive, multi-faceted Diligent Recruitment program. The Diligent Recruitment Navigator helps guide you through some discussion questions to consider related to each element of a comprehensive Diligent Recruitment program and provides suggestions for key people to include in your discussions. The Diligent Recruitment Navigator is a tool that you can use however it works best for you; you may want to use it as a discussion guide to help you and other stakeholders in a strategic, data-driven process to develop your comprehensive, multi-faceted Diligent Recruitment program.

When should I use the Diligent Recruitment Navigator?

The Diligent Recruitment Navigator can be useful to child welfare systems at many times and stages. Ideally, you'll use it while developing your Diligent Recruitment plan due to the Children's Bureau as part of the Child and Family Services Plan due in June 2014. Using the Diligent Recruitment Navigator at that time will help you develop a Diligent Recruitment plan that provides a very clear course of action for implementing your comprehensive, multi-faceted Diligent Recruitment program and gives you a framework for reporting progress on your Diligent Recruitment plan in your Annual Progress and Services Report each year.

The Diligent Recruitment Navigator can be helpful for your child welfare system at many other times, including the following.

- If your child welfare system has been awarded a Diligent Recruitment grant from the Children's Bureau, you may find it helpful to use the Diligent Recruitment Navigator to inform the development of your workplan for your grant activities.
- If a new legislative initiative or lawsuit requires your child welfare system to change your foster or adoptive parent recruitment practices or to increase your system's number of approved families, the Diligent Recruitment Navigator will help you look at not just the number of families you current have or need, but also at the types of families that you have and need to recruit to meet the needs of children in out of home placement.

- When child welfare leaders want to develop data-informed messaging for the press, legislative testimony, or other purposes regarding your agency's foster, kinship, and adoptive parent recruitment and retention programs and strategies.
- When your child welfare system wants to explore ways to have your recruitment, retention, and family support efforts be more data driven and to apply a Continuous Quality Approach to your recruitment, retention, and support strategies.

Will the Diligent Recruitment Navigator tell me everything I need to know about diligent recruitment?

No, the Diligent Recruitment Navigator is a robust tool, but it is only one tool you should use as you develop your Diligent Recruitment plan and program. The Children's Bureau is the only authoritative source of information and guidance on the required elements of a comprehensive, multi-faceted Diligent Recruitment plan and the expectations for States, tribes, and territories as they implement their Diligent Recruitment plans and programs.

A truly comprehensive, multi-faceted Diligent Recruitment program requires an integrated approach to family recruitment, engagement, development, preparation, and support. The Diligent Recruitment Navigator can help a child welfare system explore the multiple elements involved in developing and implementing a robust Diligent Recruitment program, but in order the truly build a comprehensive approach to Diligent Recruitment, a child welfare system will need to address its unique systemic and organizational factors that either facilitate or create barriers to comprehensive Diligent Recruitment.

If I use the Diligent Recruitment Navigator, will that help me get my Diligent Recruitment plan approved (as part of the Child and Family Services Plan due in June 2014)?

The Diligent Recruitment Navigator provides useful suggestions and questions to consider as you go through the process of developing your Diligent Recruitment plan and program. The Children's Bureau is the only entity that can approve your Diligent Recruitment plan (as part of the approval for your Child and Family Services Plan) and using the Diligent Recruitment Navigator does not provide any assurance that your plan will be approved. The Diligent Recruitment Navigator is designed to help guide you through a thoughtful, strategic, data-driven approach to developing your Diligent Recruitment program. Using the Diligent Recruitment Navigator may help you identify strategies and approaches that you want to include in your Diligent Recruitment plan, but the Diligent Recruitment Navigator does not provide any guidance or interpretation of guidance from the Children's Bureau on the requirements for Diligent Recruitment.

AdoptUSKids is operated by the Adoption Exchange Association and is made possible by grant number 90CQ0003 from the Children's Bureau. The contents of this resource are solely the responsibility of the Adoption Exchange Association and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau, ACYF, ACF, or HHS. The Children's Bureau funds AdoptUSKids as part of a network of National Resource Centers established by the Children's Bureau.

Children's Bureau

Appendices: Chapter 3

Appendix 3-1
General Recruitment

Free and low-cost general recruitment strategies from *Treat Them Like Gold: A Best Practice Guide to Partnering with Resource Families.* (North Carolina Division of Social Services)

Appendix 3-2
Working with African American Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Families

Guide developed to assist child welfare staff in their work with prospective and current African American foster, adoptive and kinship families. Emphasizes that there is no "one size fits all" description of African American families which are diverse with various beliefs, values and socioeconomic categories. (AdoptUSKids)

Appendix 3-3
Benefits for Children of Recruiting Latino Foster and Adoptive Families

Benefits for children of recruiting Latino/a foster and adoptive families, overview of diversity within Latino/a communities, the importance of language within Latino/a communities, and tips from foster and adoptive families and specialists. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 3-4
Moving Toward Cultural Competence: Key Considerations to Explore

Resource to assist child welfare staff in building their capacity for effective, culturally competent recruitment and retention efforts with diverse communities. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 3-5
Recruiting Families for Native American Children

This publication provides ideas and suggestions for specific strategies state and county child welfare systems can use to recruit families for Native American children in foster care. It highlights the importance of effective recruitment strategies as a way to support a child welfare system's efforts to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 3-6

Frequently Asked Questions from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents

Specific challenges face LGBT prospective adoptive parents; the answers vary, depending on where they live and whether they adopt as single persons or a couple. (Child Welfare Information Gateway)

Appendix 3-7

Permanency Planning Today **Newsletter**

The Summer 2010 of the newsletter focuses specifically on inclusive child welfare practice with LGBT populations and provides in-depth information and helpful resources. (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections)

Appendix 3-8

Recruiting and Retaining LGBT Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families: Sending a Welcoming Message

Highlights the importance of using appropriate language and images to convey that your agency welcomes LGBT prospective parents in order to help improve recruitment and retention outcomes with LGBT individuals and offers specific suggestions for using welcoming, inclusive language as you work with LGBT prospective parents. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Chapter VIII
General Recruitment

1. Purpose

General recruitment efforts raise awareness of the need for parents to care for children involved with the child welfare system. They are also a good way to promote a positive picture of foster care and adoption and child welfare in general, and of broadening awareness of the valuable contributions social services agencies make to their communities. This, in turn, can enhance the success of other recruitment strategies.

General recruitment efforts typically convey a single, simple, unfocused message such as "help a child," "change a life," or "foster, adopt, volunteer."

Use general recruitment efforts as an appetizer, not a main dish.

Research suggests that on the whole, general recruitment efforts are overused. Because they broadcast a single message to a large part of the population, they are more likely to produce unsuitable applicants than other recruitment efforts.

General recruitment efforts should always be used in combination with and as a complement to other recruitment strategies—as an appetizer, not a main dish. In its analysis of recruitment methods, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2002) recommends agencies spend no more than 15% of their recruitment budget on general recruitment.

Sources: AECF, 2002; Pasztor & Wynne, 1995; Barbell & Sheikh, 2000; USDHHS, 2002a

2. General Recruitment Ideas

Many of the following ideas come from USDHHS, 1995.

No Cost/Free General Recruitment Ideas

- Television public service announcements or community interest stories. For more on PSAs, see Chapter VI.
  - To obtain posters, PSAs, and other promotional materials developed by the Ad Council in cooperation with AdoptUsKids and the US Department of Health and Human Services, go to http://www.adcouncil.org or http://www.adoptuskids.org.
  - The Dave Thomas Foundation has also made available a host of materials that can be used in the recruitment of adoptive parents. Go to http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/Adoption-Resources/Free-Materials.
- Information booths at events, foster care/adoption fairs, and events.
- Ask select churches to put a short announcement in the worship service bulletin each Sunday in the months of May (Foster Care Month) and November (Adoption Month) about the need for families. Include your contact information in the announcement and then be available after one or more services to answer questions about fostering, adoption, and volunteering.
- Speakers' bureau, scheduling presentations at churches, civic groups, etc.
- Notices in community bulletins
- Television and newspaper feature stories

- Adoption day in court (a ceremony to celebrate children's formal adoptions)
- Messages on business marquees
- Adoptive mother and father of the year
- Door-to-door canvassing
- Appearances on interview programs, including your county's public access TV station
- Surveys or flyers in shopping malls
- Write an ongoing newspaper column concerning the plight of children and the need for adoptive and foster families. This should include both major daily newspapers and local weekly newspapers. Ongoing columns have been effective because of their predictability.
- Provide information about fostering and adopting on web sites

GOLDEN NUGGET!

Using Community Marquees

Laura Chintapalli, from Chatham County DSS, has this to share:

My favorite pastime is scouting out roadside marquee signs. It's great free advertising. A billboard would cost us $800 for six months. I have had success with churches, community message signs, and local businesses such as oil and gas companies, gas stations, etc. If someone has a marquee, I will go and ask if we can use it. We usually ask to have the sign up for two weeks, but will take a week if this is more plausible. One company had it up for a month.

Our messages were simple: "Foster Parents Needed! Please call 642-6956" and "Be a Foster Parent! Call 642-6956." You want your message to be short, eye-catching, and easy to read as someone is driving by.

As for tips I would pass on to other agencies: don't be afraid to ask businesses for their help. The worst thing they can say is "no," and that's OK. Recruitment of resource families is not only an agency need, it's a community need. If agencies can involve the community, you not only find folks who want to help, but your recruitment efforts will be more effective.

Low-Cost General Recruitment Ideas

- Posters, flyers, and brochures could be developed for distribution throughout communities through churches, clubs, and other organizations and to doctors' offices, hospital and clinic waiting rooms, libraries, beauty parlors, barber shops, laundromats, community centers, etc.
- Business cards. In addition to providing each DSS employee with a business card, some agencies also provide generic business cards to foster and adoptive

parents, who can then give them out to people interested in learning more about becoming a resource parent.
- Banners hung on main street or a prominent building; perfect for annual events such as National Adoption Awareness Month (November) or Foster Parent Month (May)
- Host a table at local farmers' markets
- Decals
- Theme night activities
- Puppet shows
- Give-aways: place slogans or themes with your agency name and phone number on bookmarks, pencils, balloons, key chains, rain hats, t-shirts, seed packets, bottles of cold water, travel mugs, sewing kits, bandage kits, beach balls, balloons, pens, bandanas, fold up flyers, paper fans, etc.
- Displays in store windows and libraries
- Placemats in restaurants
- Flyer attached to pizza boxes
- Flyer attached to drug store bags
- Bill inserts
- Calendars
- Newsletters
- Special events, carnivals, or fairs
- Picnics and ice cream socials
- Welcome wagon packets for new residents distributed through the appropriate organization (e.g., Chamber of Commerce)
- Awards programs
- Appreciation nights and banquets
- Open houses
- Radio spot announcements

Mid-to-High Cost General Recruitment Ideas

- Bus and taxi cab placards
- Direct mailing and ad coupons
- Display ads in the phone book
- Recruitment videos/films
- Ads in newspapers
- Customized videos
- Billboards
- Rent space at a local mall or shopping area where you can leave posters and adoption information for everyone passing by

Sources: The Rural Adoption Recruiter (Adoption Exchange, 2008)

3. Use of Regional Approach to Recruitment

The NC Division of Social Services strongly encourages public agencies to take a "regional approach" to recruiting and retaining resource parents, one that involves working closely and collaboratively with other public agencies, jointly offering foster parent pre-service training, and freely sharing information about available foster and adoptive homes.

Through regional collaboration, counties can pool scarce resources for recruitment materials and training, license families in a more timely manner, and potentially have access to more foster and adoptive homes that fit the individual needs of the children.

Joining forces with nearby agencies can bring more expensive general recruitment strategies within reach and produce positive results for the whole region.

4. Common Mistakes

Make sure you are ready for the response BEFORE you start your recruitment efforts.

Starting Before You're Ready

Although enthusiasm and a sense of urgency are good, be careful not to launch your general recruitment efforts until you are sure you are prepared to respond to an increased volume of calls, able to offer additional orientation sessions, etc. Get ready before you begin.

Speaking Off Message

Avoid using language and themes in your general recruitment efforts that appeal to values and worldviews that are not what we want to see in foster and adoptive parents. For example, since our expectation is that all foster parents will engage in shared parenting and/or maintain connections with the birth family, it would not be appropriate to use language that invokes a child rescue mentality (e.g., rescuing "good" children from "bad" parents).

Similarly, when using images of children in your recruitment materials, take care to use images that accurately reflect the children for whom you need foster and adoptive families. This will help the public understand who it is that needs their help.

5. Winning Strategies

In picking a message for general recruitment materials, consider the following top five messages recommended by foster parents

1. You help change someone's life
2. You are helping a child
3. You are considered a professional parent
4. You receive financial assistance
5. It's a short-term commitment

Sources: Pasztor & Wynne, 1995; AECF, 2002

A report from the Urban Institute (2005) suggests that in future campaigns it would be productive to send a message that encourages those interested and able to adopt a foster child to actually take steps toward that end. They recommend a shift from telling prospective parents that anyone can adopt to telling interested adopters ***how*** they can adopt.

Adoption Day at the Mall

In Rhode Island, the idea to hold an adoption fair at a local mall came about through a recruitment taskforce where one person's connection with a local mall led to a great public information-sharing event. Malls present high traffic, family-oriented locations ideal for recruitment events. Held in conjunction with Rhode Island's first National

Adoption Day, the event included 17 licensed foster and adoption agencies from around the state. Each agency staffed booths with representatives to field questions and distributed program and event information. Face painters helped lend a fun family atmosphere.

Source: AdoptUsKids, 2008

Wristbands Raise Awareness & Fund Scholarships

After seeing the popularity of the yellow wristbands promoting cancer awareness and funding cancer research, board members of the Arizona Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents thought the same principle might work to support foster children. In conjunction with May's National Foster Care Month, they ordered 10,000 blue wristbands, one for each of Arizona's 10,000 foster children. The bands were sold for $2 each and included a card informing the wearer what the band symbolized and directing them to additional information on the Association's webpage. All 10,000 bands were sold and the proceeds donated to Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation to fund scholarships for college-bound children in foster care.

Source: AdoptUsKids, 2008

Working with African American Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Families

Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

Appendix 3-2

about this guide

This guide was developed to assist public and private child welfare staff in their work with prospective and current African American foster, adoptive and kinship families. It is important to remember that there is no "one size fits all" description of African American families. Rather, African American families, like all families, are diverse with various beliefs, values and socioeconomic categories.

Acknowledgements

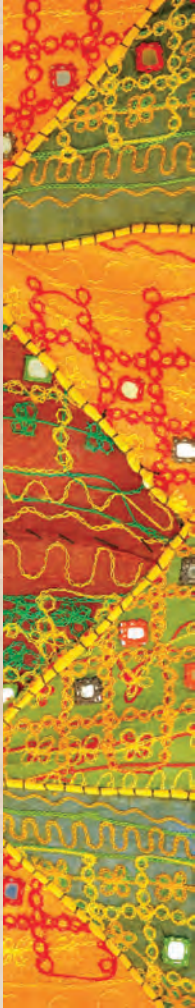
This guide was developed through interviews with public and private agency staff, as well as through focus groups held with African American foster, adoptive, and kinship parents throughout the United States. The authors of this guide wish to thank the families and agency staff who contributed their time and feedback to the creation of this guide.

a historical perspective

The term "African American" or "Black" refers to United States citizens of African descent. African Americans share a common historical tie to Africa, to experiences of slavery, indentured servitude, discrimination, and most importantly, a long tradition of resiliency. Additionally, African Americans represent those of different cultural backgrounds, specifically immigrants from the Caribbean Islands and African nations.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 13% of the United States population identify themselves as Black or African American. Over half of African Americans live in the South (53%), while 37% live in the Northeast and Midwest, and 10% live in the West. The majority of African Americans reside in metropolitan areas, with only 15% of African Americans residing in rural areas.

Although African American children were excluded from the public child welfare system until the mid-20th century, informal networks of caring for children have always existed within the African American community. For instance, in many African American communities, informal adoption was and continues



to be more commonly practiced than legal adoption. In an informal adoption, a caregiver may take over childcare responsibilities while still acknowledging the role of the biological parent. Likewise, kinship care is very common in the African American community. In kinship arrangements, a relative may take over the day-to-day care for a child temporarily. Today, an estimated two million African American children are raised by grandparents, aunts or uncles, brothers and sisters, cousins and others who are not formal relatives.

strengths of african americans

For many years, the African American experience included episodes of discrimination and hardship; however, it is also characterized by individual and collective strengths that have enabled many African Americans to survive and prosper, often against enormous odds. According to Robert Hill (1999), these strengths include:

- **Strong Kinship Bonds**
  Strong kinship relationships with extended family members provide an important source of strength for many African American families. Kinship networks for some African Americans may extend beyond "traditional" bloodlines and may include those not directly related to the family.

- **Strong Religious Commitment**
  For many African Americans, religion is an important sustaining element in their lives. Religion provides for the spiritual needs of many African Americans and has traditionally provided a source of socialization, education and social support.

- **Adaptability of Family Roles**
  Historically, African Americans have demonstrated a great deal of flexibility and adaptability in regards to family roles. Rather than having specific roles, family members fill whatever role is needed at the time, whether it be working outside the home,

doing chores to maintain the home, or caring for the children while a parent works. This adaptability may become particularly evident in times of crisis, such as when a parent is hospitalized or becomes ill, or when a parent must be separated for other reasons.

- **Strong Achievement Orientation**
  Within African American culture, there is a great emphasis on self-improvement and achievement, not only for individual gain but also for the advancement of African Americans collectively. Traditionally, African Americans have viewed education as the most respected and effective mechanism for achieving upward mobility.

In addition to these strengths, another very important strength which can especially impact work with prospective foster, kinship, and adoptive families is "individual and community self-reliance." Many African American families are accustomed to being independent, doing things for themselves, and making their own way. This resourcefulness could play an important role in making it possible for foster, adoptive, and kinship families to find the support and services they need to care for their children.

tips to remember

Cultural competency is a journey to embrace, versus a destination to be reached. As you work on increasing your awareness of the history, strengths and characteristics of African American families, it will be important to keep the following tips in mind:

First—Remember, your job is to listen, support, and coach prospective parents to help them succeed as foster and adoptive parents. Recognize that parents, not social workers, are responsible to care for the children 24-7, and your job is to empower them to be the best they can be.

Second—Engage experienced resource families as team members in recruitment, training, family preparation, and post-placement activities to support and nurture new families through the system. This will lift your burden somewhat and you will feel supported as well.

Third—Be vigilant about recognizing your own cultural, racial, social class, and personal biases. We all operate out of our unique perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and value systems. Preconceived notions and attitudes may cause us to be less effective and create barriers to forming positive, productive relationships with those who differ from us in terms of race, class, culture, etc, including African American families.

Fourth—Be a team player. Establish and maintain strong peer relationships, so that handoffs and case transitions can occur with seamlessly for families. Do your own part in a timely manner so parents are not delayed in the process of fostering and adopting. Advocate for regular cross-functional meetings to reinforce the organization's mission and beliefs and plan better processes and handoffs to achieve the right goals.

Finally—Simply try to do your best. When you develop good rapport and respectful relationships with your resource parents, consider them part of the team and help them grow in autonomy and competence, you are more likely to reap more satisfaction from your work and have the results you desire.

additional information

For additional information about the diverse history, strengths and characteristics of African American families, see the following resources:

Coach, M.E. (2007). Child welfare perspectives and approaches with African American children, youth, and families. In N.A. Cohen, T.V. Tran, & S.Y. Rhee (Eds.) Multicultural approaches in caring for children youth and their families (p.75-113). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Cole, E.R. & Omari, S.R. (2003). Race, class, and the dilemma of upward mobility for African Americans. Journal of Social Issues, 59, 785-802.

Harris, M. & Skyles, A. (2005). Working with African American Children and Families in Child Welfare Systems. In Barret, K. and George, W., (Eds.), Race, Culture, Psychology and Law (p. 91-104). Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hill, R. B. (1999). The strengths of African American families: Twenty-five years later. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

McAdoo, H.P. (Ed.) (2007). Black Families. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2001). Profiles of general demographic characteristics. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/dp1/2kh00.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2003).Answering the Call: Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts, Practitioner's Guide. Retrieved from http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/practitionersGuide.pdf

For more information:

888-200-4005

WWW.ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG

AdoptUSKids is operated by the Adoption Exchange Association and is made possible by grant number 90CQ0002 from the Children's Bureau. The contents of this resource are solely the responsibility of the Adoption Exchange Association and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau, ACYF, ACF, or HHS. The Children's Bureau funds AdoptUSKids as part of a network of National Resource Centers established by the Children's Bureau.

Children's Bureau

Benefits for Children of

RECRUITING LATINO FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

WHO ARE THE LATINOS ?

The Importance Of Language In

SERVING LATINO FAMILIES

Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

Benefits for Children of

RECRUITING LATINO FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

The following material is adapted from AdoptUSKids' publication *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura (Our Family, Our Culture): Promoting and Supporting Latino Families in Foster Care and Adoption* (2008).

Latino foster and adoptive parents and bicultural child welfare specialists offered the following insights about the benefits of recruiting Latino foster and adoptive parents:

- Latinos have a long history of helping raise children in need of temporary or permanent families through informal foster care and adoption.
- Latinos often exhibit a great willingness to help other families, based on a strong value of community.
- The Latino culture places great emphasis on the importance of family.
- The Latino concept of family goes beyond blood relatives, encompassing friends, neighbors, and *compadres* (honored friends and godparents involved in mentoring and raising the child). This mindset of inclusiveness bodes well for adopted children to be truly claimed and incorporated into the family.
- Latino families who are of modest educational and economic accomplishments may be more accepting of children who face academic challenges.
- In general, Latinos are accustomed to large families, so they may be very accepting of sibling groups. It is not unusual for a Latino couple to want to adopt two or three siblings.

- Many Latinos have strong family and community rites and traditions that can help children develop attachments and positive identities.
- Latino families who still parent in the traditional way put emphasis on teaching their children the importance of respect of what is right and proper and tend to hold their children accountable for these values.
- In general, Latino families offer life-long connections, assistance, and support through the family value of inter-dependence.
- Those Latinos who place a high value on inter-dependence may exert less pressure on older youth to leave home.
- Children raised in Latino families may be given the opportunity to become bilingual.

This last benefit of being given the opportunity to become bilingual was mentioned by every youth interviewed for AdoptUSKids' *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura* guide. Even those not of Latino origin by birth expressed appreciation of their growing bilingual skills. One teenager, an African-American not of Latino origin, reported the awe with which his peers and teachers regard his ability to "speak perfect Spanish."

WHO ARE THE LATINOS ?

Latinos* comprise the largest minority population in our nation. With about 16.3 percent its population self-identifying as being of Latino origin, the U. S. ranks second only to Mexico in the number of Latinos. In the continental U.S., Latinos come from Puerto Rico and 20 different countries, each with its own culture and history. The island of Puerto Rico—part of the U.S.—has a population of more than 4.6 million with a 90 percent majority of Latinos. Puerto Rico has a child welfare system and an adoption and foster care program similar to those found elsewhere in the U.S. As U.S. citizens at birth, Puerto Ricans are migrants, not immigrants, when they move from the island to the continental U.S.

Some Latinos trace their roots to Spain, and the Spanish heritage that includes Greek, Roman, Celtic, and Moorish influence. Many Latinos identify more closely with ancestral First Nations people, and their sophisticated civilizations that were in place prior to contact by the Europeans. Latino culture in the U.S. is rooted in the traditions, language, beliefs, and customs of the Latin American nations. The Latinos are "a unique people who combined old world and new world customs, values, and traditions."[1]

Population Trends and Projections[1]

By 2050, the Latino population in the U.S. is projected to hit 132.8 million — and the Latino population in the mainland U.S. is projected to comprise 30 percent of the total population. Having surpassed African Americans, Latinos are currently the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the United States.

On average, Latinos are a young segment of U.S. population. The U.S. Hispanic* population has a median age of 27.4 – nearly 10 years less than the median age of the population as a whole. About one-third of the Hispanic population is under age 18, compared with one-fourth of the total population.

- The 10 largest Hispanic origin groups in the U.S. trace their roots to Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Columbia, Honduras, Ecuador, and Peru.
- 52 percent of the nation's 16 million Hispanic children are now second generation, meaning they are U.S. born children of at least one parent born in Latin America
- 11 percent of Hispanic children are first generation, meaning they were born in a Latin America country
- 37 percent are third generation or higher, meaning they are U.S. born children of U.S. born parents

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*The terms Latino and Hispanic are often used interchangeably. We use "Latino" to refer to persons who trace their roots to one of the Spanish or Portuguese speaking nations in the Americas. We use "Hispanic" when quoting from the U.S. census or other sources.

[1]Spaulding for Children. (1995). video: Cultural Competency in Child Welfare.

[1]Pew Research Center 2008 and the U.S. Census 2010 (available online at: http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=58)

The Importance Of Language In
SERVING LATINO FAMILIES

The following material is adapted from AdoptUSKids' publication *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura (Our Family, Our Culture): Promoting and Supporting Latino Families in Foster Care and Adoption* (2008).

Language and Identity – A Caution About Assumptions

Spanish may not be the primary language of every Latino person approaching your agency as an adoptive or foster care applicant. While many Latinos in the U.S. are bilingual, some do not speak Spanish at all. Many of the second generation and all of the third generation Latino adoptive parents interviewed for AdoptUSKids' *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura* publication listed English as their first language.

- Do not make assumptions about language. Instead ask each family their language preferences.
- Make allowances for individual differences within a family or extended family. One English-speaking adoptive family requested a Spanish-speaking caseworker to explain particular information to the family's grandmother.
- Remember that fluency in speech in a language does not guarantee full comprehension of written materials. One prospective foster father, fluent in spoken English and active in the preparation class discussions, asked for written handouts and articles in Spanish. If a person speaks English, it isn't safe to assume that they can read it as well, or even read at all in any language.
- Clarify with each family member which language they are most comfortable using and make diligent efforts to accommodate the preference of each to the best of your ability.
- Note that almost every State has laws requiring public agencies to accommodate the communication needs of people with limited English skills.

Meeting the Language and Cultural Needs of Families

AdoptUSKids has noted that jurisdictions are often challenged to find ample Spanish-speaking staff to respond in a timely fashion to individuals and families who only speak Spanish and express interest in taking the next steps towards becoming foster or adoptive parents. Sometimes families may feel pressured to bring a neighbor or relative – or even a very young son or daughter -- to translate, and this may compromise their confidentiality or result in their lack of participation in the process.

A group of adoption and foster care professionals shared the opinion that the best choice is to have an adequate number of bicultural and bilingual staff. Bicultural social workers, who are "fluent" in both Latino and dominant American culture, can provide the bridge to help Latino families work within systems that may seem confusing or threatening, and bilingual staff, who may or may not be bicultural, can reduce the need for relying on interpreters. Some felt that an interpreter can sometimes add to the confusion, or that crucial information can be lost or misstated. The group recommends that if interpretation is needed, the agency can show its respect for the Latino applicants by hiring a top level, professionally trained interpreter.

10 Things Top Level, Professionally Trained Interpreters Do

1. Respect the fact that every person has a different language ability, educational level, personality, and life experience and will do all they can to convey the meaning of the spoken message.
2. Interpret for the speaker rather than the listener, conveying the intent, ideas, mood, and spirit of what the speaker is communicating.
3. Translate complete thoughts from beginning to end.
4. Have knowledge of the culture of the person who is speaking.
5. Be able to maintain objectivity and have enough experience, maturity, wisdom, and good common sense to know how best to communicate sensitive information.
6. Demonstrate confidence in their interpretations, minimizing hesitation, stumbling, and uncertainty.
7. Be aware that their own facial expressions, mouth movements, tone of voice, and body language are communication, and do their best not to draw attention to themselves. Instead, interpreters see themselves as messengers or relayers of communication between the person speaking and the listener.
8. Concentrate on the speaker through eye contact and body position so they are clear that the speaker's communication is the primary focus.
9. Present themselves as trustworthy, respectful, responsible, amenable, approachable, and welcoming.
10. Be open to criticism and constantly seek new ways to improve themselves.

AdoptUSKids has found that a number of families who inquire on our Spanish language phone line have basic English skills, but are more comfortable conversing in Spanish. A Latino family specialist explains why offering adoption or foster care classes in Spanish is more beneficial than providing an interpreter:

"The training is a process where parents are introduced to new material. They need time to understand the material, to process it, and to be able to extrapolate information relevant to their situation. They also need time to ask questions and get clarification. This is often difficult when one is in the minority and may not want to hinder the flow of the conversation. Parents also raise concerns about being unable to contribute to the conversation due to language barriers."

Overwhelmingly, the Latino foster and adoptive parents interviewed for the Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura publication by AdoptUSKids confirmed the primary importance of speaking Spanish. After all, language expresses more than what people think; it also conveys how people feel. When asked what caseworkers can do to work successfully with Latino families when it comes to adoption, one adoptive parent summarized the sentiment of many:

"Saber hablar español es primordial." (Knowing how to speak Spanish is fundamental.)

Offering services in the language of clients is not only an effective approach, but also one that is legislatively mandated. The federal Civil Rights Law of 1964 requires states to offer services in their native language to persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The law prohibits excluding persons from participation in federally funded programs due to language barriers. "Such exclusions, delays, or denials may constitute discrimination on the basis of national origin."[1]

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has issued policy guidance with specific suggestions on how to comply with federal requirements related to providing services to people with limited English proficiency ("Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons"). [2]

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[1] Suleiman, Layla. (2003). Beyond Cultural Competence: Language Access and Latino Civil Rights. Child Welfare. Vol. LXXXII #2. P. 190.

[2] http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/laws/revisedlep.html

Tips From Foster and Adoptive Parents and Specialists

- Offer all written work and preparation classes, as well as any additional requirements such as a First Aid class, in both languages.
- Understand that in some heavily populated Latino communities, the need to learn English may not be as crucial because the majority of community members speak Spanish and the community is fully self-sufficient. Look at this as a strength-based model.
- Evaluate each family and family member individually. Do not automatically equate a lack of English dominance with a lack of ability to communicate with schools or counselors or an inability to advocate for a child's needs. Families often will already have a relative or family friend to help them navigate the English-speaking world.
- Be ready to fully explain details about the adoptive and foster parent process for Spanish-speaking families to ensure they receive as much written information and an equal number of hours of adoption or foster care preparation as English-speakers receive.
- Develop a list of Spanish-speaking families who have adopted and fostered through your agency who can speak about their experiences during the orientation and training.
- Maintain a list of professionals who can train in Spanish on varied adoption, foster care, and parenting topics.
- Be creative! Consider alternative methods of transmitting information including audio tapes, DVDs, CDs, PowerPoint presentations, podcasts, and videos. Diligent efforts should be made in this regard and should reflect an understanding of adult learning and effective training techniques.

Understanding and Insight

The availability of Spanish-speaking staff to provide orientation materials, answer questions, teach foster care and adoption preparation classes, and conduct interviews and home visits is a huge step towards cultural competency. However, staff fluency alone does not guarantee that Spanish-speaking clients will be well served. Staff members need to be aware that the process goes beyond the literal translation and includes a cultural translation. This will help minimize communication and cultural misunderstandings.

For example, a pre-certification trainer re-contacted several families who had completed her preparation class series after finding out they had later withdrawn from the process. The families explained that even though they were assigned bilingual caseworkers, they did not feel that the workers really understood them even though they spoke Spanish. In one case, the worker spoke a formalized Castilian style of Spanish learned in college, which can be quite different from the style of Spanish spoken by persons from Mexico, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, or other Spanish-speaking countries. Even more of a barrier than the language style differences was the lack of insight into Latino family culture. Education about cultural expectations might have avoided losses of potential adoptive or foster parents.

AdoptUSKids
Together we hold their future

More free resources at:
www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment

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Children's Bureau

Moving Toward CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Key Considerations to Explore

Key Attitudes and Approaches

Increasing your own cultural competence requires: **a belief** that it is important to become more culturally competent; **an acknowledgment** that you don't—and can't—know everything about every culture, including your own; and **a recognition** that becoming more culturally competent is a perpetual journey, not a destination to be reached.

As you work on moving toward cultural competence, keep in mind:

- Regardless of the various groups that someone belongs to, each person is an individual with unique preferences, strengths and perspectives and wants to be treated as such. Each of us wants to be respected and understood as an individual, not just as a member of some demographic group or category.
- Erring on the side of being more respectful and formal, rather than less, is a good starting point.
- It's okay to admit that you don't know something and to ask to be taught.
- Flexibility and adaptability are key in working effectively with diverse populations.

Questions to Consider

As you continue on your journey toward becoming more culturally competent, there are some key areas to explore and questions to ask yourself regardless of the population with which you are working. These questions are intended to help you:

- Increase your awareness of others' worldview.
- Gain knowledge about others' practices, understandings, interpretations, culture and worldviews.
- Value the particular culture that you seek to understand better.
- Build skills to understand, communicate with, relate to, and value that culture.

The topics and questions below are by no means exhaustive, but they provide a basic framework to use as you seek to increase your competence in working cross-culturally. These questions and considerations are aimed at helping you think about ways to increase your own understanding and ability to work effectively and respectively with other cultures. **Note: these are not questions to ask directly of the families with whom you work.**

A great first step is to reflect on these questions as they apply to your own life. By increasing your own self-awareness and understanding of how being part of certain groups and communities has shaped your experiences and attitudes, you will be better equipped to gain a richer understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

Self-Identification

- How do members of the group refer to themselves and members of their group?
- What terms are considered most respectful? Which terms are disrespectful or inappropriate?
- How can you find out from individuals the terms that they prefer?

Cultural Identity

- How do you think members of the group view their cultural connections?
- Might they identify themselves as members of sub-groups rather than, or in addition to, broad groups?

Language

- Do members of the group share a language?
- Do they face any language barriers?
- How formal or informal do members of the group prefer to be with language?

Communication Styles

- Are there common communication styles and approaches that should inform your interactions?
- How much importance does the community place on nonverbal communication, directness vs. subtlety, humor, eye contact, etc.?
- What potential conflicts or misunderstandings may arise due to differences between your communication style and that of members of the group? How can you try to avoid these misunderstandings?

Family, Relationships, and Parenting

- Are there key patterns in relationship roles and family dynamics among members of the group?
- How do members of the group define the concept of "family" (e.g., Is family thought of as nuclear family, or is there a more expansive, inclusive concept of family?)?
- Do members of the group have common approaches to parenting and disciplining children?

Religion and Spirituality

- What role, if any, does spirituality or religion play with the group?
- What holidays, if any, are important to members of the group, and how are those holidays celebrated?
- Do members of the group tend to view religion and spirituality as something that can be discussed publicly, or is it a private topic?

Traditions

- What traditions and shared experiences are highly important to the group?
- What key life events and experiences are celebrated or otherwise marked by the group?
- Does the group have unique or rare traditions that may be misunderstood by others outside of the group?

Key Strengths

- What strengths (e.g., humor, extended family networks, resilience, connections to community, tribal affiliation, relationship with elders, etc.) does the group celebrate and rely upon for success?
- Do members of the group identify key sources of resilience and empowerment, either individually or for the group as a whole?
- Are there attributes that members of the group see as strengths, but that others may view as challenges or barriers (e.g., interdependence—a shared sense of supporting and sharing resources; having a close network of trusted confidants—strong relationships that have been established by building a rapport and a commitment to share information with only those who have been proven to be trustworthy; etc.)?

Discrimination and Barriers

- What forms of discrimination and barriers—both historical and current—does the group experience?
- Are there areas of particular sensitivity that you should be aware of related to discrimination and challenges (e.g., legal, financial, social, etc.) that members of the group experience?
- Are there ways to discuss—and provide strategies for overcoming—potential challenges that members of the group may encounter?

Taboos

- What subjects, topics and issues are off-limits for discussion?
- Are there topics that are deemed private and only discussed within groups of trusted family or friends?
- Are there respectful ways that sensitive or taboo subjects can be approached if information is needed for family assessment, etc.?

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Children's Bureau

Recruiting Families for Native American Children

Strengthening Partnerships for Success

As state[1] child welfare systems serve Native American children, it is crucial to have a strong understanding of both best practices and the laws that govern policies and practices for serving Native American children and coordinating with tribes. It is also valuable to recognize the essential tribal relations of Indian people and the cultural and social standards prevailing in Indian communities and families. This publication provides a brief overview of relevant laws, best practices, tips, and considerations for partnering effectively with tribes and recruiting families for Native American children in foster care. We encourage you to review additional resources to ensure that your child welfare system is following both the spirit and specific requirements of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and other relevant laws as you recruit and support foster, adoptive, and relative homes for Native American children to make it possible to follow ICWA placement preferences.[2]

Recruiting Families for Native American Children and Implications of the Indian Child Welfare Act

In order to build a pool of foster, adoptive, and kinship families and comply with federal and state laws and agreements with tribes, many states are finding it necessary to recruit more families for Native American children in foster care. An important starting point for thinking about effective ways to recruit, develop, and support families for Native American children is to understand ICWA.[3] Understanding ICWA and ensuring that your child welfare system is conducting good practice based on ICWA's principles and requirements will help you have a clearer picture of your recruitment needs and partner effectively with tribes on behalf of Native American children. In addition to the federal ICWA law, your state may have incorporated ICWA requirements into state statutes, policy, or direct agreements with individual tribes.

Some of the key requirements from ICWA to understand when working with, and on behalf of, Native American children are:

- Notification of Indian parents and tribes of state proceedings involving Indian children and their right to intervene
- Placement preferences of Indian children in foster care, pre-adoptive, and adoptive homes

1 In this publication, we refer to "state child welfare systems" in order to differentiate between state systems and tribal child welfare systems. Information for state child welfare systems also applies to other non-tribal child welfare systems, such as county or territorial child welfare systems.

2 See page 2 for additional information about the placement preferences required under ICWA.

3 Please note that this publication is not intended to provide specific guidance on ICWA requirements or compliance or to interpret any federal or state policy.

- Active efforts to prevent the breakup of the Indian family when parties seek to place a child in foster care or for adoption
- Tribal right to intervene in state proceedings, or transfer proceedings to the jurisdiction of the tribe

Implications for Recruiting, Developing, and Supporting Families

Complying with these ICWA requirements may have an impact on your system's specific needs and strategies for recruiting, developing, and supporting families for Native American children. For example, by notifying tribes of proceedings involving Native American children, you may transfer some cases to tribal child welfare systems, meaning that your system may not make placements and placement decisions for some children. For all children in your foster care system for whom ICWA applies, you will need to follow the ICWA placement preferences for Native American children and the specific placement preferences of individual tribes whose children are in your foster care system. Each tribe may have different placement preferences; the only way to know a tribe's placement preferences is to ask. This means that you may find it necessary to increase your capacity to recruit and support Native American families for the Native American children in foster care. Beyond your child welfare system's overall need for a pool of foster and adoptive families who are able to meet the needs, your system will likely be looking for ways to identify placement options that align with the ICWA placement preferences and each tribe's placement preferences.

As described in ICWA:

> ***(b) Foster care or preadoptive placements; criteria; preferences***
> *Any child accepted for foster care or preadoptive placement shall be placed in the least restrictive setting which most approximates a family and in which his special needs, if any, may be met. The child shall also be placed within reasonable proximity to his or her home, taking into account any special needs of the child. In any foster care or preadoptive placement, a preference shall be given, in the absence of good cause to the contrary, to a placement with—*
>
> *(i) a member of the Indian child's extended family;*
>
> *(ii) a foster home licensed, approved, or specified by the Indian child's tribe;*
>
> *(iii) an Indian foster home licensed or approved by an authorized non-Indian licensing authority; or*
>
> *(iv) an institution for children approved by an Indian tribe or operated by an Indian organization which has a program suitable to meet the Indian child's needs.*[4]

Adoption and Safe Families Act

Another key federal requirement that has the potential to affect child welfare systems' efforts to recruit Native American foster, adoptive, and kinship families for Native American youth is the requirement in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) to conduct criminal background checks for foster and adoptive families. Some potential resource families—including Native American families and non-Native families—may be discouraged from even responding to recruitment efforts because of their concerns or misconceptions about the criminal background check requirements. As your child welfare system seeks to recruit families, you may be able to engage families more effectively by providing clear information in your recruitment messages about the specific background check requirements and where there is flexibility.

4 25 U.S. Code § 1915 - Placement of Indian children

Strengthening Your Recruitment, Development, and Support of Resource Families for Native American Children

The following suggestions offer ways to build your child welfare system's capacity to recruit, develop, and support Native American families for children in foster care. Many of these recruitment strategies will be strengthened by conducting them in partnership and with input from tribes. In the final section of this publication, we provide more detailed suggestions on ways to engage and partner with tribes to support your work with Native American children.

Use your quantitative and qualitative data:

- Examine your data on prospective Native American families who have gone through the licensure or approval process to identify any key trends, including points in the process where families are more likely to drop off.
- Gather information from current and prior Native American resource families about why they wanted to be a resource for Native children, what held their interest in continuing to be a resource for Native children, and if they left what the reasons were. By evaluating these answers—looking at both strengths and challenges—you may be able to gauge how to develop or enhance your recruitment, development, and support approaches.

Understand local tribal communities:

- Understand the community from which Native children and their families come. If you are unfamiliar you can make inquiries with the tribe(s).
- Understand the available resources within the tribal community, including formal and informal services and supports. These culturally relevant resources can be particularly helpful when meeting the needs of the children and their resource family.
- Respect tribal customs, values, and beliefs so that children receive these cultural teachings while in your foster care system. By encouraging tribal child welfare programs to participate and assist with the family finding and case planning, you can facilitate culturally relevant services and enrich your own understanding of that tribe's culture and people.
- Talk in a language of strengths and concerns, giving families the appropriate tools to help them make informed decisions. These can include developing a family tree, making genograms, creating service plans that are culturally and family specific, and identifying mentors.

Recognize and address barriers Native American families may face in recruitment and licensure processes:

- Take a critical look at your recruitment, response, family preparation, and licensing or approval processes and materials to see if your messages are welcoming and culturally appropriate. Consider ways in which your system's recruitment and response messages may not be welcoming or appropriate for Native American prospective resource families. Identify areas in which you can be flexible.
- Use feedback from tribal partners and Native American resource families about elements of the family licensure/approval and preparation processes to identify areas that may prevent Native American families from continuing through the process. For example, some licensing requirements may not apply well

to housing arrangements in some tribal communities or may ignore important community customs and supports. In addition, the practice of having younger workers conduct a licensure process that includes asking personal questions of Native Americans who are older may be contrary to important cultural norms.

- Explore ways to provide clear information about the licensure and approval processes, including background check requirements, so that Native American families—and all prospective families—can make an informed decision about whether they will be able to be a resource for a child.

Specific Strategies for Planning and Implementing Family Recruitment, Development, and Support Programs

- Use input from valuable resources such as tribal elders and Native American resource families (both current and past) to help your system develop effective targeted recruitment, development, and support strategies.
- Understand customer service principles for child welfare work and how this affects the recruitment and family development efforts when staff are engaging prospective resource families or those resource families who may need support.[5]
- Review your current data on foster and adoptive families and children in need of foster or adoptive placements to ensure that you understand your recruitment needs for Native American children.
- Use available resources in your community that reach Native American families and tribal communities (e.g., tribal radio stations, tribal newsletters, nonprofit organizations that serve Native American communities).
- Ask questions of each tribe to find new ways to coordinate or partner on recruitment efforts and support for children and families:
  - Are there any tribal/cultural events coming up so you can invite Native children and their resource families to the event? Would it be appropriate to do recruitment activities at the event in partnership with the tribe?
  - What services and resource families do you have available in your community? How can we make referrals for your children in your community?
  - Can you partner with them to do relative searches, license families, place children and support them in their placements, etc.
- Find out if the tribe has its own foster care licensing program. If so, does this program meet the state and federal requirements for licensing? What impact does the tribe's approach to approving or licensing foster, adoptive, or kinship families have on how your agency works with Native American families?
- Ask if the tribe would be interested in partnering in joint efforts for family recruitment, development, and support efforts so the costs to the tribe are minimal but beneficial to both the state child welfare system and to the tribe.

5 For more information on applying customer service principles to child welfare work, including recruitment, development, and support of families, see our publication *Using Customer Service Concepts to Enhance Recruitment and Retention Practices*.

- Conduct community forums or workshops to raise awareness and understanding of the need for Native American resource families.
- Partner with tribes and organizations that serve Native American communities to hold a recruitment fair.
- Map where Native American children in your foster care system come from when they enter foster care, noting whether the children were on reservation or off reservation so you can target your recruitment and family support efforts to the appropriate geographic areas.
- Develop and support all of your resource families so they have the skills to care for the children in their home, including Native American children.

Consider hiring Native American staff or a staff person with expertise in working with Native American families to build internal expertise, or contracting with organizations that serve Native communities to recruit, develop, and support Native families.

As your child welfare system works on strengthening your recruitment, development, and support of families for Native American children in foster care, keep in mind the role that your contracted providers and partner agencies play in your efforts. Consider whether your agency's contracts and contract management approaches hold contracted providers accountable for complying with ICWA, as it applies to their work, and for working with tribal communities in culturally appropriate ways.

Partnering with Tribes and Tribal Child Welfare Systems

The strategies in the previous section provide ideas for steps that your agency can take to reach prospective Native American families for children in foster care. Partnering with local tribes will help your child welfare system be the most effective at recruiting families for Native American children and youth and complying with ICWA placement preferences and each tribe's placement preferences. The suggestions below provide ideas for ways to establish and strengthen your partnerships with tribes and their child welfare systems.

Key Considerations

Although there are some broad suggestions and key things to keep in mind when working with tribal child welfare systems and tribal governments, one of the most important ideas to note is that each tribe is unique and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to working with tribes. In order to build truly effective and sustainable relationships with tribes, you'll need to focus on building each relationship based on the specific dynamics, governmental structure, and culture of each tribe.

Many state child welfare systems share that they face challenges in engaging tribal leaders and Native American families and have trouble figuring out how to build new relationships with people and communities. It is important to understand that tribal leaders have many good reasons for being reluctant about engaging with state child welfare systems, including significant historical distrust. Even if your system is currently interested in building strong partnerships in good faith, tribes have likely experienced being excluded, misunderstood, or marginalized by state governments and so may have concerns about investing time to respond to new outreach efforts. Below we provide suggestions for approaches and possible strategies that may help your child welfare system build new relationships or strengthen existing relationships with tribes, in order to support your goal of finding families for Native American children in foster care.

Recognizing and Respecting Sovereignty

A crucial foundation for understanding requirements and best practices for working with tribes is truly recognizing and respecting tribal sovereignty. Tribes are independent governments and each tribe has its own governing laws to oversee their tribal membership and community. Tribes' status as sovereign governments means that your system shouldn't expect to have your partnership with a tribe be the same as partnerships with community groups, counties, or cities. It may be helpful to keep in mind that the relationship between a state and a tribe is actually a government-to-government relationship, and both entities will need to be interested in developing the relationship in order for it to work. As you approach this intergovernmental work, keep the following ideas in mind.

- No two tribes are the same. Expect to develop a unique relationship with each tribe.
- Avoid using cookie-cutter agreements and contracts; if you think it would be helpful to develop formal agreements or contracts, your system should explore negotiating individualized agreements and contracts with each tribe. The process for negotiating these agreements may differ as you work with each tribe, based on the differences among tribes and the relationship that they are interested in having with your agency.
- Respect each tribe as the sovereign government it is, and honor any contracts or agreements that you establish with a tribe. Your child welfare system can help build a strong relationship with a tribe by consistently following through on your commitments and obligations in the agreements you have with the tribe. A key part of this follow-through is ensuring that your staff are complying with the terms of the agreement.

Suggestions for Partnering with Tribes to Support Recruitment

The following ideas apply to all levels of child welfare staff, from front-line staff to leadership. The way you apply these ideas may differ slightly depending on your role, but the work of building and sustaining partnerships with tribes should occur across all levels of a child welfare system.

Take responsibility for learning about tribes in your state and reaching out to them:

- Go to the tribes' websites to learn about the tribes' demographics and history and to find out about their social services programs and structure.
- Contact each tribe's Indian child welfare (ICW) director or tribal social services director.
- Make the effort to connect with each tribe. If you don't receive a response from the tribe, call or go meet with them directly. One call does not rise to the level of having made a good faith attempt to make contact.
- If someone in your agency has an existing relationship with someone in the tribe, build upon that relationship.
- Call and ask questions. It might help to list your questions ahead of time so you can be sure that you're asking the questions that are most important for building your understanding.
- Understand the reasons that tribal leaders may not respond to you right away—including historical distrust, past challenges with your agency, and extremely high workloads. Focus on attempting to build a relationship beyond just making a few efforts to make contact with tribal leaders.

- Bring humility to this work and seek to understand each tribe and their priorities, governmental structure, history, and other key information.

Communicate, coordinate, and collaborate:

- Ask each tribe about the best way to contact them and to engage in case management for: joint permanency planning, placement, ICWA notices, family finding, service plan development, etc.
- Communicate with and include tribes at the beginning of new initiatives and changes (e.g., change in legislation, state policy or practice; plans to address cultural competency; development of new staff training approaches; creation of initiatives on improving or monitoring ICWA compliance). Don't wait to just inform tribes after a change or initiative has occurred.
- Correspond in person and ask the tribe if they would like to be added to your system's email lists and other communication vehicles.
- Review our Diligent Recruitment Navigator tool to identify key discussion questions to explore together with leaders from tribes, particularly tribal child welfare systems.
- Arrange and participate in regularly scheduled meetings (e.g., monthly, quarterly).
  - Meet consistently; don't cancel or let meetings get pushed aside for other priorities.
  - Alternate the meeting locations (between the tribal ICW office and state office).
  - Share or rotate facilitation roles between state and tribal agency leaders.
  - Develop the agenda for each meeting together.
  - Have a lunch together, as a way to build relationships and network.
- In all of your communication with tribes, including meetings, be ready to listen:
  - Key leaders need to be involved.
  - Plan for a long meeting with no interruptions so there is sufficient time to discuss important issues.
  - Do not interrupt.
  - Be open to hearing concerns about your child welfare system and how it currently serves Native American children and prospective and current Native American foster, adoptive, and kinship families.
  - Be ready to have a difficult discussion without getting defensive.
  - Ask what can be done differently and how to make it work for both tribes and the state child welfare system. Respect tribal representatives' expertise on what works best in their tribal communities.
  - Ask how the relationship between the tribe and your child welfare system can help meet the tribe's needs and support the tribe's goals for children and families.
- Invite tribes to participate in relevant advisory committees or planning teams that work on recruitment, licensing, and placement issues.

- Share information on what is happening at the state level that might affect the work you and the tribe are doing together (e.g., changes in leadership or key staff positions, organizational restructuring that affects recruitment or placement work, etc.). Ask tribes about any changes in their tribal government, key staff, or programs that might affect your partnership.
- Invite tribes to events your child welfare system hosts, including foster parent training, staff training, recruitment events, policy-planning meetings, etc.
- Determine whether your materials and trainings are in appropriate languages and are culturally applicable to tribes and Native American families.
- Take the time to meet with tribal contacts one-on-one at their offices to continue learning about tribal programs and services, the needs of the community, and new ways that you could work together on solutions.

Moving Forward

Child welfare systems can and do experience success in recruiting, developing, and supporting families for Native American children in foster care, often through dedicated efforts to build and sustain relationships with tribes and leaders in tribal communities. By seeking new recruitment strategies and strengthening your existing strategies for recruiting, preparing, and supporting families, your child welfare system can expand the pool of families who are able to meet the specific needs of Native American children in foster care and can build your system's capacity to comply with both the spirit and the requirements of ICWA.

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Children's Bureau

Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

FACTSHEET FOR FAMILIES

January 2011

Frequently Asked Questions From Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents

The landscape for LGBT adoption is changing, with an increasing number of LGBT individuals and couples choosing to build families through adoption. Many agencies, both public and private, welcome the LGBT community. Leading child welfare organizations believe that prospective LGBT parents are an excellent resource for children and youth in need of a permanent family.[1] However, specific challenges continue to face many LGBT prospective adoptive parents; they vary depending on where you live and whether you adopt as a single person or a couple.

[1] *Human Rights Campaign: All Children—All Families Promising Practices Guide, 2010,* at www.hrc.org/issues/parenting/adoptions/8941.htm

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Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
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The adoption process can seem daunting for anyone, straight or gay, and it can require a significant commitment of time, emotional energy, and financial resources, depending on the path you take. To make the experience as positive as possible, do your homework before getting started. Being informed is the first step in the process. The following answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) can help you in this early stage of your journey in adoption.[2]

Q: How do I find a welcoming agency?

A: Finding an agency that is genuinely welcoming and affirming is the key to a successful adoption experience. Begin by asking other LGBT adoptive parents for feedback on the agencies they used and whether they would recommend a particular agency. Conduct your own Internet research by reviewing agency websites for images and language that speak to the LGBT community, for example, photos of two-mom or two-dad families, or client nondiscrimination statements. You can call an agency directly and ask about its policies or request an in-person meeting with a staff person to learn more about the agency's track record with LGBT families and to get a sense of how open they are. If you live in a jurisdiction that has laws restricting LGBT adoption, ask the agency how it navigates those challenges. Be sure that the agency can verify that it has placed children with LGBT families, and ask to speak to some of their LGBT clients.

Other topics to explore with agencies are:

- The number of LGBT families the agency has worked with, what percentage of all families that represents, and how long LGBT families wait to be matched with a child or children
- How the agency, if the agency places infants, represents LGBT families to expectant parents considering adoption for their infants
- How the agency's intercountry program, if it has one, works with LGBT families

Q: What States allow LGBT individuals or same-sex couples to foster or adopt?

A: Most States do not have laws or formal policies that address the eligibility of LGBT individuals or couples to adopt or serve as foster parents. Instead, child welfare professionals and judges make placement decisions that should be in the best interests of the child. A few States have laws that restrict adoption or fostering by gay people (for example, Mississippi). In States where same-sex couples can marry legally they can also adopt. In many other States, sexual orientation or same-sex relationship status does not exclude couples from adopting.

Some States will allow *singles* to adopt but will not allow same-sex or unmarried *couples* to adopt. If one member of a couple chooses to adopt as a single parent because the State won't allow second-parent adoption, the parents may want to find a way to complete a second-parent adoption in order to provide the child with legal protection.

Before you begin your adoption process, you should research the laws in your jurisdiction. Seek consultation from your

[2] See Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Adoption: Where Do I Start?* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_start.cfm

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State equality organization or a national LGBT organization if you are unclear. See Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Who May Adopt, Be Adopted, or Place a Child for Adoption? Summary of State Laws:* www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/parties.pdf.

Q: Should I disclose my sexual orientation or transgender status? If so, when?

A: This is perhaps the most daunting aspect of the adoption process, particularly if you live in a State with restrictive laws or if you are not sure of your agency's policy. Full disclosure in adoption is optimal and advised, whether it's regarding sexual orientation, family history, or other aspects of your personal life and background. LGBT adoptive parents often worry that disclosure may disqualify them as adoptive parents or lead to greater scrutiny as applicants. For single LGBT adults, it may seem irrelevant or unnecessary to disclose this information. Because the decision to place a child with you is made by someone else—a birth parent or agency professional—it is important and most ethical that the decision be based on a full, honest picture of who will be raising the child.

It is best to disclose early in the process, perhaps by calling an agency and stating that you are a gay man, or a lesbian couple, or a transgender woman—whatever the situation is—and gauging the response over the phone. If you do not disclose right away, talk with your social worker during the home study or family assessment about your sexual orientation and relationship status, whether you are single or in a committed relationship. In States where joint adoption is not allowed, you may need to identify one person to be the primary applicant and one to be the "other member of household." Ideally, the agency, and the home study social worker in particular, should be aware of your sexual orientation, gender identity, and relationship status to help you navigate the particular challenges in the city, county, or State where you reside.

If there is a compelling reason why you are not able to disclose—for example, you live in a State that bans gay adoption, or you are pursuing intercountry adoption from a country that will not place with LGBT families—consult with an LGBT family law attorney or LGBT advocacy organization before moving forward. There are often ways to resolve these difficult scenarios.

There can be irreversible consequences if you do not disclose your sexual orientation. For instance, withholding information or not being truthful could exclude an applicant from the process no matter how good the reason. Also, it is vital that you and your partner have the benefit of the best adoption preparation possible. Without an honest relationship between you and your agency, you could miss essential information or a preparation opportunity. Effective preparation and postadoption support offer the most promising basis for a successful placement for the child and the parents.

Q: What should I expect from the home study or family assessment?

A: All types of families may find the home study intrusive; however, this assessment allows the agency or social worker to best

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match your family's strengths to the needs of a particular child or children. It's good to keep that thought in mind when preparing for your home study.

The home study can create added anxiety for LGBT individuals and couples, particularly when there are concerns about the agency policies and questions about disclosure. Again, by sharing early on that you are an LGBT individual or couple, there is a greater likelihood that the home study social worker will be better prepared to conduct your family assessment.

Many LGBT applicants wonder if they should "straighten up" the home before the social worker visits by taking down certain photos or artwork or removing some books from view. These thoughts are normal for all prospective parents, straight or gay, in an effort to make the best possible impression on the social worker and prepare the home environment for the arrival of a child.

The goal of the home study or family assessment is to learn about you as an individual and as a couple, if applicable, to assess the strengths and capacities you would bring to parenting a child or children needing a family, and to help prepare you for the transition to parenthood. It is also the process through which the social worker determines that the home is safe and secure for a child. The home study process can feel invasive and overwhelming. It is important to remember that it's like that for all adoptive parents, regardless of sexual orientation, and that the best approach is to be honest, open, and authentic. If you feel at any point that your home study social worker is asking inappropriate questions, is uncomfortable with you, or is being biased in the assessment, contact a supervisor or agency administrator.

Q: What do I do if I think an agency is discriminating or being unfair?

A: As noted above, if you feel at any time that a particular agency staff person is being unfair, disrespectful, or discriminatory, you should share your concerns first with that person. There may be a simple misunderstanding that can be corrected immediately. If you do not get a reasonable response, go to the supervisor or agency administrator.

Keep in mind that while there is still discrimination, and the potential for being treated unfairly definitely exists, what you might perceive as discrimination or homophobia may be something else. For example, you may feel that you are not getting calls returned because you are gay, or that as a same-sex couple you are waiting longer for a placement than the heterosexual couples in your support group. What may be true, however, is that the social workers at the agency do not return *anybody's* calls quickly because there is a high workload for the staff and that the heterosexual couples are waiting just as long as the same-sex couples. This would be a good opportunity to join a support group or form one to interact with other couples who are waiting, find out about their experiences, and prepare for the type of child or children you hope to adopt.

It is important to speak up when you feel something is unfair, to report up the chain of command, and to be open to the possibility that you may be wrong. In cases

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of explicit discrimination, contact an LGBT advocacy organization.

Q: How do I find support during the waiting process?

A: Many agencies have support groups for waiting families, so the first step is to ask for a referral to those groups, ask if other LGBT families are currently in the group, and find out if the facilitator is LGBT-competent and friendly. In addition, there are many LGBT parent support groups across the country, and you can find adoptive and preadoptive families to connect with. The waiting period is a great opportunity to begin networking with other LGBT and adoptive parents who can help you build a support network as you transition to parenthood. If you are not able to find a group in your local community or through your local agency, you can explore online discussion forums for waiting families and for LGBT families in general. You may even consider starting a group if one does not exist.

Q: What do experienced LGBT parents have to offer as advice?

A: Most LGBT parents say that they benefit from being part of a larger community of LGBT parents and that it is important for their children to see other families like theirs, especially as they get older. LGBT adoptive parents often have networks that overlap, some of which are tied to the adoption community and some to the LGBT community, but there is a lot of common ground. Experienced parents recommend that you research the LGBT policies of your local day care facilities or schools and identify pediatricians and other service providers who are LGBT friendly. If one member of a couple has to adopt as a single parent because your State won't allow second-parent adoption, you may want to find a way to do a second-parent adoption to provide your child with legal protection. Finally, experienced parents recommend that you think about how you will talk to your family, friends, neighbors, teachers, and others about your family and how you will answer challenging questions that may arise.

Adoption professionals can find more information and resources in Child Welfare Information Gateway's *Working With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Adoption:* www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_profbulletin

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Summer 2010

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR PERMANENCY AND FAMILY CONNECTIONS
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

A Service of the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS and Member of the T&TA Network

Permanency Planning Today

From the Desk of THE DIRECTOR

Gerald P. Mallon, DSW

As a service of the Children's Bureau and member of the T&TA network, in our new cooperative agreement, NRCPFC has committed to ensuring that our work is attentive to the needs of young people and families that fall outside the average and sometimes live within the margins. In this issue, we will explore the theme of Inclusive Child Welfare Practice with LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning) Populations. We hope that the information we provide will be a useful resource to those working to achieve permanency and family connections for children and youth in the child welfare system, and that it will encourage approaches that are inclusive and supportive of all children, youth, and families, including LGBTQ people. This issue includes several articles that focus on how agencies can become more welcoming, inclusive, and supportive in their work with LGBTQ resource families.

Since our last issue of Permanency Planning Today, we've begun working on some exciting new initiatives – one of these initiatives is highlighted in the article on our work with Family Connections grantees. NRCPFC also recently launched a new website featuring Digital Stories from the Field; in this issue, we provide information on this project and how NRCPFC has used digital stories in our work with States, Territories, Tribes, Tribal Organizations, Tribal Consortia and Children's Bureau grantees to promote continuous improvement in the delivery of child welfare services.

NRCPFC continues to offer on site training and technical assistance to States, Territories, Tribes, and other publicly supported child welfare agencies on a wide range of issues which promote sustainable systemic reform in child welfare. NRCPFC is particularly focused on working with states throughout all stages of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs), including the development and implementation of the States' Program Improvement Plans (PIP). You can learn about the T&TA we offer by visiting the NRCPFC website at: http://nrcpfc.org. Additionally, part of our ongoing commitment continues to be to support Foster Care Managers and the work of the National Association of State Foster Care Managers and to be involved as an active partner in organizing National Foster Care Month, which takes place every May. Through the provision of information services, resources, training, and technical assistance, NRCPFC aims to support those involved in child welfare in achieving positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Best Regards,

Gary

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NRCPFC T&TA & INFORMATION SERVICES PERTAINING TO: WORKING WITH LGBTQ CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

SAMPLE AREAS OF TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR STATES & TRIBES INCLUDE:

- Engagement, retention and support of LGBTQ resource families and dual licensure issues for LGBTQ foster and adoptive families
- Working with Family Support and Preservation Workers to support LGBTQ youth remaining in their families of origin
- Promoting practices to insure placement stability for LGBTQ youth, the underpinning of which are sound LGBTQ-affirming practices in assessment, case planning, active engagement of families and case management
- Promoting the practice of family search and engagement strategies to identify all family members, including LGBTQ family members, for children and youth separated from their birth families
- Working with States and Tribes to develop LGBTQ affirming policies and practices
- Promoting practices that build relationships between Tribes and States and LGBTQ community-based resources

For a full list of sample T&TA focused on LGBTQ issues available through NRCPFC, visit:
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/TAforStatesandTribes_LGBTQ.pdf

RESOURCES ON LGBTQ ISSUES & CHILD WELFARE:

The NRCPFC LGBTQ Issues & Child Welfare webpage offers:
Resources on LGBTQ Children and Youth
Resources on LGBTQ Parents
Resources from the States
Resources on Legislation
NRCPFC Information Packets
PowerPoint Presentations
Bibliographies
Links to relevant websites

To access these resources, visit the NRCPFC website at:
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/lgbtq-issues-and-child-welfare.html

LGBT Parenting Resources

VIDEOS

Living Adoption: Gay Parents Speak, 2010
A new training and recruitment DVD for adoptive families and the professionals who work with them.
Photosynthesis Productions.
http://www.photosynthesisproductions.com/

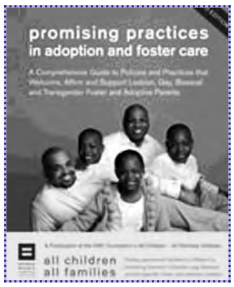
Daddy & Papa:
A Film About Gay Men Becoming Parents, 2002
An intimate look at the issues faced by gay men who become parents. ITV Productions.
http://www.daddyandpapa.com/

INTERNET RESOURCES

Human Rights Campaign
The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve LGBT equality. The Parenting section of the Human Rights Campaign website provides current resources that address the many potential paths to parenthood for LGBT-headed families, as well as issues around LGBT youth and families in schools.
http://www.hrc.org/issues/parenting.asp

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG)
PFLAG is a national organization dedicated to providing information, education, and support for the parents, families, and friends of lesbians and gays. You will find a list of local chapters, their mission statement, and general information about sexual orientation at the PFLAG site.
http://www.pflag.org

CenterKids
Center Kids, Center Families is the NY LGBT Center's family program for LGBT parents and their children, for those considering parenthood, and for all LGBT people in the context of their families - of origin or of affinity. Founded in 1989, Center Kids gives children ongoing opportunities to befriend others from similar families, while their parents have a chance to meet, socialize and build their own support network. Center Kids, which advocates at state and local levels for the rights of alternative families, has become a national and regional model for LGBT family organizing.
http://www.gaycenter.org/families



ALL CHILDREN–ALL FAMILIES:

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN KAHN

by **Tracy Serdjenian**
NRCPFC Information Services Coordinator

Ellen Kahn is the Family Project Director at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

WHAT IS ALL CHILDREN–ALL FAMILIES?

All Children–All Families is a program for, and an approach to, creating long term systemic change in child welfare agencies so that LGBT individuals and families are seen as a valuable resource, welcomed, and given the opportunity to go through the process of becoming foster/adoptive families without experiencing bias and double standards. All Children–All Families supports agencies in working toward ensuring that LGBT resource families are treated with dignity and respect, and that the entire agency– particularly everyone who interfaces with resource families– is knowledgeable and has the basic skills and awareness to work competently with LGBT families.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF ALL CHILDREN–ALL FAMILIES?

Ultimately, the goal is to increase the pool of qualified resource families– that's the main motivation for this process. There are lots of folks out there in the LGBT community who, if they knew they were welcome, would be interested in becoming resource families. This would mean that we would have many more families and therefore, better permanency outcomes.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR AN AGENCY TO PARTICIPATE IN ALL CHILDREN–ALL FAMILIES?

We've created a framework for how agencies can participate. Agencies that are committed to LGBT capacity-building and cultural competence can start by signing a pledge of commitment, which is a way of publicly saying, "We are inclusive in our approach. We aim to implement these practices." The next step is to complete an agency self-assessment. The online agency self-assessment allows administrators who are overseeing this work to get a good measure of where their agency stands in terms of some of the criteria we have established. For example, the self-assessment covers:

- Are written policies with regard to non-discrimination explicitly inclusive of LGBT people?
- Does the agency convey this policy to the community through its website and print materials?
- Are LGBT issues addressed in staff training?
- What is the attitude and comfort level of agency staff in working with LGBT people?

The self-assessment provides a baseline measure related to 10 benchmarks that we've created based on years of experience and observation, as well as conversations with folks all over the country, including both child welfare professionals and LGBT families. The assessment tells an agency how many of the benchmarks it has met and provides a roadmap for where it needs to focus its resources in order to improve. We have a consultant who works with agencies and provides technical assistance. So let's say there's an agency that has met 8 of 10 benchmarks. Perhaps they need to meet the benchmark around staff training, for instance, so that their clinical staff can conduct non-biased, helpful home studies with LGBT single people or couples. We have a training curriculum that covers this topic, and our consultant would work with the agency director(s) to explore how to offer this training– considering things like when in the current fiscal year it can be offered, how many staff will attend, and other logistical issues. We have trainers identified who customize the training based on the agency's needs. Training is a big piece of this program.

Our Promising Practices Guide offers real, concrete information that agencies can use to help work toward the 10 benchmarks. It covers topics such as how agencies have been transformed, how they dealt with staff who were resistant, how people in the agency responded to changes– it's a guide for walking through these changes and sustaining them. When agencies achieve all 10 benchmarks, we present them with a seal of recognition, which means that they've really made a commitment to working effectively with LGBT people and expended all kinds of resources to change and improve their practice. We've issued seven seals so far. LGBT community members often look for something that says, "It's ok for you to come here." Agencies can put the seal on their website or recruitment materials to send that message. The seal is an incentive, but it's not the driving incentive for agencies to participate in the program: The comprehensive approach we have developed and the support around ensuring that all the different components of the agency are on board are really important.

What I've described so far is the formal engagement process: taking the pledge, completing the assessment, utilizing technical assistance, and working toward achieving the benchmarks through an ongoing relationship with All Children–All Families. A lot of agencies and professionals aren't yet formally engaged in All Children–All Families, but have realized that they need to do basic cultural competence training, and are using the guide and having conversations with us about their work to improve practice at their agency. For instance, we have been working with folks in one city, where they are utilizing the guide, and we've provided them with consulting on an ad hoc basis to support them in making improvements. Although they are not in a place where they want to sign the pledge and be identified as part of All Children - All Families, they have found that our tools and resources are useful and have opened the door for people to talk about these topics.

WHY IS TRAINING SO IMPORTANT?

As we embarked on this rather challenging journey, we knew that we would learn a lot as we went along. We learned rather quickly, after the first year, that most agencies need training to fulfill the criteria of the benchmarks and to have a comprehensive approach to working with LGBT individuals and families. Sometimes the lack of training is due to budget limitations. Some agencies have considered themselves welcoming to LGBT people for a long time and never thought they needed to do training. However, some agencies have told us that as they started to formalize their approach to working with LGBT resource families, they realized that people on their staff had varied opinions, comfort levels, or experiences with the LGBT community. Training really moves people to a new level.

When we realized the need for training and professional development was so great, we took a pause, and invested the better part of 2009 in developing a comprehensive training curriculum, which matches the structure of our Promising Practices Guide. The approach to training delivery includes doing things experientially, talking about case situations, and making it relevant to the practice environment. We tested it out with a few agencies and then did a training of trainers in September 2009. The curriculum focuses on how you recruit, retain, and support LGBT foster and adoptive families across the spectrum of your agency practice. There are a lot of resources available to agencies around supporting LGBT youth; however, we're really talking about best practices with LGBT adults (single or in relationships) who are potential resource families. Our training includes raising awareness and also focuses on practice with resource families. It covers issues that come up with licensing, homes studies, and matching– for example, how to have a conversation with an eleven year old about different kinds of families. Before you even begin to do recruitment with the LGBT community, you have to ensure that you are ready: Staff need to be comfortable, fair, respectful, and unbiased in the way they work with and assess families. It needs to be ensured that the things that are being said and heard in the agency are affirming, welcoming things. We can help agencies that want to work toward institutionalizing their approach to inclusion.

WHAT ARE SOME STEPS THAT AGENCIES CAN TAKE TO ACHIEVE CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN WORKING WITH LGBTQ FOSTER & ADOPTIVE FAMILIES?

Here's a really concrete thing that agencies can do (which is covered in assessment and built into our benchmarks): An agency can tour its own website, considering, "What does this say to members of the LGBT community? Are sexual orientation and gender identity mentioned in the non discrimination policy? Is the focus on married couples (particularly in states where same-sex couples cannot be legally married)? Are there only pictures of moms and dads together or are there a range of photos of different kinds of families?" There are lots of ways that an agency can convey a welcoming and inclusive environment, or as we say, "roll out the welcome mat."

Kinship work presents another aspect of being LGBT-competent and supporting all prospective families. A child or youth might have a gay or transgender uncle or aunt, whose name might not come up at first if some people in the family don't like the idea of that person being a caregiver for the child. However, that person might be a great resource. Being open and fair in considering LGBT family members is important. You may need to have a conversation with children of a certain age about this, but kids are quite comfortable with LGBT foster/adoptive parents and caregivers if they are given honest and factual information.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SPECIFIC ACTIONS THAT AGENCIES SHOULD TAKE, OR WHAT DO THEY NEED TO KNOW, TO WORK COMPETENTLY WITH TRANSGENDER OR GENDER NON-CONFORMING PROSPECTIVE PARENTS?

We have about 20-25 years of research and real life experiences of lesbian/gay-headed families– it was probably about 20 years ago that people who were "out" as lesbian or gay began starting families. Now, 20 years later, many young gay people say, "Of course I am going to have kids or adopt." Although a lot of people in the LGB community might be gender non-conforming, generally folks who are LGB-identified have pushed through that first ceiling in terms of being viewed as good parents, with it being accepted that our children are fine. Folks that have undergone a gender transition, whether they identify as transgender or not, and are now considering becoming a parent as a single person or part of a couple– they are the pioneers at this moment. There isn't the same body of research to fall back on. However, it is rational to think that one's gender identity would not preclude anyone from having the capacity to parent. It is sometimes said that LGB people might have some insight and empathy around being marginalized from one's family of origin and/or experiencing discrimination. This is sometimes true, and the folks I know who have transitioned have such amazing resiliency, tenacity, and clarity, and face more discrimination than people who are LGB. If folks have been able to live in a way that is whole and are where they need to be and are in a place to start a family– their children are going to have a strong advocate. I'm not saying this across the board– everyone needs to be assessed independently– but I'm just saying that in terms of understanding life experiences and strengths, we do not want to overlook the transgender community. Staff should assess transgender people just like anyone else in terms of their capacity to parent. Additionally, they can support transgender or gender non-conforming resource parents in discussing anything they want to cover– how you talk about your family, what children need to know, or practicing a narrative for talking to your child about your own childhood. These things may or may not even be an issue.

WHERE CAN PEOPLE GO FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ALL CHILDREN–ALL FAMILIES?

To learn more about All Children–All Families and to access the Promising Practices Guide, 3rd Edition, visit the Human Rights Campaign website at: www.hrc.org/acaf

Using Respectful Language

An important part of
cultural competence
is using respectful language.

The glossary included in the
All Children–All Families Guide
explains:

The LGBT
[Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender]
"community is as diverse as
the general population and
includes people who are
liberal and conservative
urban and rural,
white, black, Latino, Asian,
rich and poor,
"closeted" and "out,"
and everything in between.

This diversity means that
not all LGBT people
will use the same terms
to define themselves or
their families,
and not all will have the
same comfort level with
certain words or labels.
This glossary, however,
provides a good overview of some of
the terms commonly used by and familiar
to LGBT people."

It can be considered a starting point
for becoming familiar and comfortable
with these terms.

Access the guide and glossary at:
http://www.hrc.org/issues/parenting/
adoptions/8941.htm. (See pages 85-88.)

LGBT

American Bar Association's
OPENING DOORS PROJECT
Improving the Legal System's Approach to
LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care

The Opening Doors Project aims to:

- Increase the legal community's awareness of LGBTQ youth in foster care and the unique issues they face
- Provide the legal community with advocacy tools to successfully represent these youth

Visit the Opening Doors Project website to access the following publications:

It's Your Life *by Krishna Desai, Mimi Laver and Andrea Khoury*
This booklet is designed to help LGBTQ youth understand what to expect in the child welfare legal system. It explains the child welfare legal process; the legal and other professionals who can help LGBTQ youth navigate the child welfare system; typical child welfare placements; the rights and expectations LGBTQ youth should have while in the child welfare system; available supports and services; and guidance for LGBTQ youth who are emancipating from the child welfare system.

Opening Doors for LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care: A Guide for Lawyers and Judges *by Mimi Laver and Andrea Khoury*
This guide aims to increase the legal community's awareness of LGBTQ youth in foster care and the issues they face. It provides tools for lawyers and judges to aid their advocacy and decision making on behalf of LGBTQ youth. Special attention is given to helping lawyers and judges understand the unique needs and risk factors of LGBTQ youth, forming positive attitudes and beliefs about LGBTQ youth, developing strong attorney-client relationships, and using effective advocacy strategies.

http://www.abanet.org/child/lgbtq.shtml

Making Changes in L.A. County

by **Tracy Serdjenian**
NRCPFC Information Services Coordinator

an interview with

Diane Wagner

Division Chief, County of Los Angeles Department of Children & Family Services, Adoption & Permanency Resources

Diane is a member of the All Children–All Families (AC-AF) National Advisory Council and has provided guidance and consultation to her peers across the country regarding the AC-AF tools and resources and the importance of LGBTQ capacity-building.

What prompted your decision to work to make the L.A. County child welfare system more welcoming and inclusive for LGBTQ resource families? What was the goal?

This initiative came about because I heard that the Human Rights Campaign All Children–All Families (AC-AF) initiative had funding for recruitment of resource families, and as a public agency we're always looking for resources. I started to explore it further and talked to Ellen, who explained what AC-AF offered, and that while there might be some assistance with recruitment, that is not really what this work is all about. Talking with Ellen and learning about the work of AC-AF was really inspiring, and I thought about how we could be doing a better job in our work with LGBTQ families. In Los Angeles, for as long as I've been working in adoption, which is many years, we've always worked with LGBTQ families. However, although we already work with the LGBTQ community, I realized that there were things we could do to be more competent and welcoming.

Back when I first heard about AC-AF, they were primarily working with relatively small agencies, with 30 or so people. In L.A. County, changes would have to take place on a much bigger scale, as there are close to 500 people in my Division. We knew that the process would have to be different in some respects. We asked ourselves, "How are we going to do this?" Even though we weren't sure how we were going to do it, it seemed like a good idea, and the need became more apparent the more I thought about it. I talked with our management team, and they were on board. We set the goal of becoming more competent and earning the AC-AF seal.

What steps did you take?

The first step, after deciding to earn the AC-AF seal, was to establish a work group that included both internal and external participants. It was really helpful to have the AC-AF benchmarks, as they identified specific areas for our work group to look at, as well as a work path to follow. We began by looking at our non-discrimination statements for clients and staff. We needed to change them to include gender identity. It was easy to identify the change that needed to be made, but getting the statements changed was a more difficult process. However, we were able to get changes made and these statements do now include gender identity.

What were some of the challenges you faced?

The major challenges were not having data, not knowing staff attitudes, and the need for staff training (without the availability of additional funding).

Data: One challenge was getting data because we don't track LGBTQ applicants, although, we know anecdotally that we are working with LGBTQ individuals and families. In order to address this issue, we did a survey of staff asking them to account for LGBTQ clients they had worked with during the last 12 months.

Staff Attitudes: Another big challenge was that, as a large agency, we didn't really know the attitudes of our staff about working with LGBTQ individuals and families. We knew that some of our staff worked really well with LGBTQ clients, and some we really just didn't know. With a smaller agency, managers probably know each and every staff member well, including their strengths, weaknesses, and training needs. It is different in a larger agency. That was one of the areas where it was helpful to get guidance from Ellen at AC-AF. Out of that discussion came the development of a survey that, in the future, we are planning to use to help us get a better sense of where staff are in terms of working with LGBTQ clients.

Training: Our work group faced the challenge of figuring out how to train a large number of staff without additional funding. We had approximately 475 staff members, of which 250 were social workers, and then there are also supervisors, managers, and support staff. We felt it was important to train staff at all levels so that they would know that we do work with LGBTQ clients, we do adoptions with LGBTQ individuals and families, and that this is in accordance with the law. We thought it was important that everyone on our team understood the mission of the Adoption and Permanency Resources Division, even if they don't work with clients directly. The key to this was having two trainers from the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center's Family Services Program participating in our work group.

They had a grant for some training and were willing to work with our staff to train everybody. They spent a lot of time preparing this training with a sub-group of staff from our Division. They came up with a curriculum and then shared it with Karey Scheyd, our consultant from AC-AF. She provided input on the curriculum and also observed the first training. The involvement of trainers from the LA Gay and Lesbian Center and AC-AF were key. It was also really critical that there were staff from our Division who were willing to go the extra mile to make this happen – they took this project on in addition to their regular workloads. The training was good, and at the same time, it wasn't as comprehensive as I would have liked, given some of the challenges we faced. We provided a one day mandatory training. In the morning, we offered a sort of LGBTQ 101, including things like basic terminology, and relevant history and laws. The afternoon was devoted to adoption-specific information, like home studies, placements, and challenges families may face. The AC-AF program includes a longer training, and we are hoping to have technical assistance from a National Resource Center, as well, so that we can do a "train the trainers" workshop. I thought I would get pushback from our staff because I mandated this training, but I didn't hear a word. The only feedback I got was about other important areas that we need to cover: Why isn't there mandatory training specifically on working with African American or Latino clients, for example? I was able to address this by explaining that working with LGBTQ clients is one area that we are looking at now, and we certainly will look at other areas as well. In terms of the success of the training, it was important that this was a team effort and that a work group, including staff, developed it.

You've talked about the size of your agency. How is making changes on the county-wide level different than making changes within a smaller agency?

Initially, we had to decide whether our focus would be on the entire agency of over 7,000 people, or on the Adoption and Permanency Resources Division. We realized that we couldn't get the whole agency up to that level [to earn the AC-AF seal] in a timely manner. Our Division holds the adoption license, rather than the entire agency, so we determined that our Division would be the entity that would work to earn the seal. In our Division, we have staff who recruit, train, and assess resource parents (to be foster and/or adoptive parents), and who provide post adoption services. Once we decided to focus on the Division, our next step was to figure out how we were going to approach it. We gathered a work group of internal and external folks to figure this out.

With a smaller agency, or with a private agency, depending on the size, perhaps there might be more control. In the County, I report to a Deputy Director, who reports to the Director, who reports to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and so, I had to get the Deputy Director and Director's buy in to move forward, which we did.

There were some considerations in terms of the political realities that come in to play – in terms of people's opinions and comfort levels – and we had to work with those realities. In California, our laws are pretty supportive of LGBTQ families, which made it easier for us than it might be somewhere else, as laws and regulations do impact an agency's work. At the same time, laws are one element, as even in an area with relatively supportive laws, not everyone may be on board politically. You need to be aware of this and work with it.

Visit the links below to view these "Parent Perspectives" stories. The NRCPFC Digital Stories website includes Youth, Parent, Legal & Family Partner Perspectives. Go to page 16 of this newsletter to read more about the NRCPFC Digital Stories initiative.

Sherry
shares her life experiences on both sides of the child welfare system.
http://www.nrcpfc.org/digital_stories/Tomlinson_S/index.htm

Through **Sandra's** story we learn about the importance of family voice and the ability to make system change.
http://www.nrcpfc.org/digital_stories/Jimenez_S/index.htm

What outcomes have you seen as a result of your efforts?

We earned the seal last April. Since the training, our staff is more open to talking about challenges or questions they might have about working with LGBTQ clients. Before that, people didn't really talk about these issues much. We are spread out across the county – we have staff in 18 different offices. Members of our staff raised the following issue: What if someone has a question related to LGBTQ issues and their supervisor isn't sure how to respond? Can we have a team of people they can call about questions they may have about working with LGBTQ clients? Based on this idea, we developed a group of LGBTQ Liaisons in our Division. They had all been through training and had experience with the LGBT community and really wanted to serve as a resource for their colleagues.

We also have realized that we need more training and more information about working with transgender and gender nonconforming clients. In our training, we touched on this topic a little bit, and now we are working on getting more training about working with transgender resource parents. The training we had brought people up several notches in terms of comfort level and awareness, and it also let everyone know we aren't done – this is an ongoing process.

What did you learn that you can share with other agencies that are beginning to make these types of changes?

Don't go it alone. Having a work group is key. Bring in community partners and other folks outside your agency or division to try to get things done. Especially with resources being tight, a team effort can go a long way in helping you to achieve your goals. I recommend using the supports that HRC AC-AF can provide. Ellen and her team were really instrumental and helpful in getting us through it. They assigned a consultant to our agency who made suggestions and brought up things that we didn't think of, which was really helpful. I also recommend asking the National Resource Centers for training and technical assistance. Training is a big challenge if you don't have the funds to hire trainers and don't have the internal capacity to do the trainings. With the HRC AC-AF curriculum and the possibility of getting technical assistance through the provision of training for trainers through the National Resource Centers – there is a lot of opportunity.

In the future, what steps could LA County take to build on these successes?

It is great that our Division achieved the AC-AF seal, but staff in other departments also need to know the laws. Social workers get that training in academy when they are first hired, but as time goes on, people tend to forget. The work that we did energized people around this issue. Mitch Mason, who is Division Chief, Government Relations, and is responsible for training and formulating the Department's strategic plan, pulled together staff from several different entities to address LGBTQ-related issues, and they have been meeting regularly for the last year or so. I just went to an excellent training that his work group had arranged on LGBTQ issues and how to work with families when their kids are coming out.

In order to do truly effective work, it is important that everyone is on board, comfortable, and trained. It is important that our adoption workers have been trained, but we also have workers that provide family reunification services who could benefit from additional training, and there is dual case assignment (involving an adoption worker and line worker sharing responsibility for a child). Many of our placements are with private foster families, and a private agency may have a contract that says they can't discriminate, but they may not be required to provide training or may not know how to create a welcoming environment. We've invited private agencies to join us in this initiative. We've encouraged them to work toward earning the seal and we've offered to help them. It is important that everyone is competent in terms of working with LGBTQ children, youth, and families. We don't want to end our work group after achieving the seal, because there is so much more to be done.

The best part is we're getting some great homes for our kids. We have lots of kids who need safe, permanent, and loving homes, and we don't want to exclude anybody.

Becoming a Father: A Conversation with Joe

by **Tracy Serdjenian**
NRCPFC Information Services Coordinator

Joe is the father of Julienne, age 2, and is a member of the LGBTQ community.

Can you tell us about your family?

I adopted Julienne when she was four months old – it was me, as a single dad, and Julienne. I used to teach first and second grade, and have a lot of experience with kids. I always wanted to be a father, but I didn't know how to make it work. I never had the right job, the right relationship, or was in the right city… I finally realized: If I am going to become a father, I just have to do it. So I went ahead. I have a lot of family members and friends who support me. Julienne is two and a half now. It took a long time to convince my grandmother that she wasn't my biological child, because she looks and acts just like me. It has been a great experience. My extended family – my parents, sister, and grandmother – and my friends have given me a lot of support. My best friend lives in the same city, and is married with three sons. They were ecstatic to have a girl in the mix. My other best friend – he is my inspiration – he adopted three boys on his own. They're teenagers now. I've seen them all grow up and I've been part of their lives.

To be honest, I was looking to adopt a two or three year old, not an infant. But I could see in Julienne's eyes she was right for me when I met her. My parents helped me to get adjusted when I first adopted her. A lot of my friends are really involved in her life now, too. They will help by picking her up if I have to work late, for example, or just hanging out with her. Friends get mad if I don't call every week to plan a play date, and even my neighbors have gotten in the mix. My neighbor and her husband have three kids, and every Monday, Julienne goes over to their house for dinner. Julienne is very independent and strong willed. Recently, my grandmother was showing her how to play piano. At first Grandma showed her how to play, then after a little while, Julienne said, "No, Grandma, that's wrong." She began to show Grandma how she should play. She likes to do things for herself and to figure out how to do things. I have to give her things she can do, because she loves to help out around the house, and to be part of everything I am doing.

Everyone thought I was a little crazy for deciding to raise a child on my own. You really don't need to have a partner to become a parent, but what you do need to have is a plan and a routine. We definitely have a plan, and not a tight routine, but Julienne knows her schedule. She knows what she needs to do when she wakes up in the morning. I lay out her clothes the night before. She goes potty, puts her clothes on, has breakfast, brushes her teeth, and then plays with the dogs and the cat for a little while. And we can do it all in 45 minutes. It is the parent who makes this work, and it is the child, too, because she is very bright. People think she is three or four years old because she really talks to you and is so engaged. I have been very fortunate because she was exposed to drugs, but I believe with the right environment and support, a child can overcome almost anything.

You spoke about your family & friends. What other supports or resources were important to you in this process?

My social worker was wonderful – she listened to me on both good and bad days. I could ask her anything. I had an incident at Julienne's preschool, and even though I hadn't talked with her in months, I still felt I could contact her to talk about the situation. She helped me think it through and told me, "Your instinct is telling you that it is not right." I wanted to make sure I was not being overly cautious or protective. Our conversation helped me to decide what I wanted to do in this situation. She is phenomenal – it's really nice to have that relationship.

I know a lot of other families, both straight and gay, who adopted through private agencies or overseas. My biggest piece is that, I am adopted, and there are so many kids in the system who need homes – I want to extend that family onwards. People don't know I am adopted, especially because I am just like my dad, exactly like him. I encourage everyone to look into state systems. I talk about this a lot when I go to adoption meetings. You never know what your experience will be as a parent – whether you're an adoptive or birth parent. My father has always said to work in your own back yard, to start in your community.

What are the adoption meetings about?

The meetings are for new people considering becoming parents – a sort of orientation. I bring Julienne to the meetings. I talk to other people about my experience and why I opted for this route to becoming a parent. I had considered all different options and gone through all different thought processes, weighing the pros and cons of each one. I had thought about going the surrogate route (which is very expensive) and had also considered adopting a child from Ethiopia. I had started looking into adoption through a private agency. I knew I wanted an African American child and thought about going through an agency in a different state, such as Michigan, Texas, or New York, where there are higher numbers of African American children in the child welfare system. When I was asking about the process at one agency, I was told that there

were different fees for adopting children based on their race/ethnicity, for example, with a higher fee for White children than African American children. I said, "You're telling me you put a different price on different ethnicities? Do you realize that I am African American?" They became apologetic about it, but it was quite disturbing. I was going through a private agency because I thought that, in some ways, it would be a better experience and reduce some of the risks potentially involved in adoption, but it is really about the parents and what you do as a parent. After that experience, I decided to go through the public system. One of the things you find out as you go through the process is that you can have a lot of support through the public child welfare system. I tell prospective parents, if they need help, they can talk to a social worker. My social worker was really helpful to me as I was thinking about and deciding what I was comfortable with and what I could handle. My social worker helped me deal with things as they came up; for example, at first, Julienne had trouble crawling and I was a little worried about it. But about two weeks after she moved in, she was crawling! After she moved in, she had a huge jump in terms of her mental growth, and she was walking at about 9 or 10 months.

Based on your experience, what would you want services providers to know about working with the LGBTQ community?

My sexual orientation was discussed in my home study, but it was not an issue. The process was very open, and it wasn't the focus of the home study: It was more about having a conversation about my life and what was going on with me.

I would ask child welfare workers to be sensitive about the types of questions they ask and to think about why they are asking them. I would like them to understand that there are many different types of healthy families and family structures. One of the questions I was asked by a social worker (at another agency that I decided not to go with) was whether there are female influences in my household. Yes, I have female friends and family members, but I was taken aback by the question. They were coming from a more traditional idea of family, based on the idea that there is a need for a male and a female in the household to raise children. It is important to know that there are so many single moms and single dads, and there are families with three dads, or two dads and two moms, or two dads and a mom. The social worker didn't understand this and wasn't thinking about different types of families. Like I said, at first, I was taken aback. I thought about it more, and later took offense, because that question was not really necessary.

What would you want other members of the LGBTQ community to know about your experience as a parent?

When you're ready, you can decide what your own family is going to look like, and who will make up your family group. You don't need someone else to define this for you. Some of my friends are thinking of adopting. They see that my life hasn't stopped since I became a parent. It has changed and moved in a new direction, but I still go out, see my friends, go to parties, and play sports. I bring her with me. You do have to be with your child, but there are options. A lot of people are scared about being a parent. I was, too, at first, but you inherently know what to do – it comes to you.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

As part of the LGBTQ community, I have a different perspective on life than a straight person or couple might. I have dealt with oppression based on my sexuality. I also deal with oppression based on my race. In some ways, these experiences make me better equipped to deal with certain issues that may arise for my child, in terms of what she might deal with at school, or what people might say. The most important thing is that she has a great home and environment, and lots and lots of love. Everybody loves her. When we were at my grandmother's house for Easter, it was so hard for Grandma to see Julienne go. When I was in another room, I could hear them playing, Julienne asking her great grandmother questions: They were just enjoying being together.

I would be open to LGBTQ people who are thinking of becoming parents contacting me to talk about the experience. I don't think it gets out enough that this is going on. When I traveled on the plane with Julienne, everyone was so amazed, saying things like, "I can't believe you are coming out here – just you!" I think the word needs to spread about different types of families – yes, there are single dads, two dads, three dads – all different family make ups.

Sometimes people ask, "Would I do it again?" Yes I would. In fact, I am thinking about doing it again.

Joe has offered that LGBTQ people who are considering becoming resource parents can contact him. Please write to tserdjen@hunter.cuny.edu if you are interested in being put in touch with Joe.

LGBTQ Resource Families: A Discussion with Terry Boggis

by **Tracy Serdjenian**
NRCPFC Information Services Coordinator

Terry Boggis is the Director of Family Programs at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center ("The Center") in New York City. Terry was one of the founders of Center Kids, Center Families, the Center's family program for LGBT parents and their children, for those considering parenthood, and for all LGBT people in the context of their families– of origin or of affinity

You were one of the founding members of Center Kids in 1988, & have been working on LGBTQ family issues for over 20 years. How have things changed over time?

From the very beginning, adoption and foster parenting was a key pathway to parenting, and we've always wanted to support people in that pursuit. To go way back, the system really opened to LGBTQ people during the boarder baby crisis and AIDS (at least, that's my perception), when the child welfare system was thinking, "Who will take these HIV positive, immune-compromised babies? Maybe gay people!" I think that was the crack in the door for us in foster care. Before that time, a lot of LGBTQ people felt the system was hostile– and by-and-large, it was. There was sometimes an attitude of acquiescence in terms of what workers were required to do, but if you were an LGBTQ person or family, your application would never get to the top of the pile. Additionally, there was sometimes an acceptance of LGBTQ people becoming parents, but for LBGTQ teens, not for babies.

A lot of people worked hard to bring about change. For example, John Mattingly came in as New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Commissioner in 2004 and established LGBTQ issues as a priority for ACS. In 2000, we started the LGBT Foster Care Coalition, which included people from the New York State Office of Children and Families (OCFS), advisor groups, provider agency representatives such as parent recruiters, (and other LGBTQ groups, at first). The Coalition grew and became very established. A staff member from one of our provider agencies, Talbot Perkins Children's Services, got a job at ACS working with Wednesday's Child, and advocated on behalf of LGBTQ people from within ACS. Pre-dating our coalition, there was The LGBTQ Action Group, which brought together lawyers from advocacy organizations like the Urban Justice Center and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and representatives from Gay Men's Health Crisis and other groups, and met within ACS. They focused on issues impacting LGBT youth in care and are still active today. ACS eventually put together a strategic plan for LGBT inclusion and they work hard to make it real and hit their benchmarks. At one point, they had a full-time LGBTQ Liaison within ACS. Unfortunately, budget limitations have sometimes presented challenges for ACS in meeting some of their goals for working with LGBTQ children, youth, and families, but because we all work together so closely, the work is getting done.

Meanwhile, our little coalition kept chugging along. We focused a lot of our energy on caseworker training. Training is very important for a number of reasons. One reason it is necessary to provide regular trainings is high caseworker turnover rates. This means that there are always new staff people coming in who need to be trained. We came across some child welfare workers with faith-based objections to parenting by LGBTQ people, as well as people who didn't think they'd ever known a gay person, and in these instances, training was really needed for these workers to fulfill their responsibilities in working with LGBTQ prospective resource families. We also hosted recruitment events for LGBTQ people interested in becoming foster and adoptive parents through the child welfare system. We eventually secured grants to pay staff people, and we are now developing a model agencies program focusing on creating significant lasting change within foster care agencies through training and technical assistance around LGBTQ issues. We will certify these model agencies as LGBTQ-friendly and LGBTQ-competent. At the same time, we also provide large scale trainings in each borough to reach larger numbers of child welfare professionals and agencies.

Another way things have changed is that now greater numbers of people are giving foster care a second look. The system is much better than it used to be for LGBTQ people. At the same time, international adoption has moved toward greater constriction and constraint, and there are fewer international adoptions now than in past years – which accounts in part for the increase in adoptions through the foster care system. But regardless of the challenges, I can honestly say (and do, to any competent person who talks to me about wanting to adopt), if they want to parent a child, they will.[1] Their sexual orientation can still sometimes be an impediment, but it is not going to stop them from parenting if they're determined and patient. In the past, adoption by LGBTQ people was considered a revolutionary

[1] As long as they are assessed to be safe, appropriate caregivers, in the same way that all resource parents must be assessed.

thing to do, unheard of, and strange. At the very beginning, LGBTQ people trying to become adoptive or foster parents were sometimes closeted about their sexual orientation, as much as they could be (perhaps presenting a partner as a roommate) because of discrimination within the system. In New York City, at least, those days are over.

"We've made tremendous progress, and at the same time, we still have a lot of work to do."

What other type of progress has been made in terms of child welfare & LGBTQ families?

Over the last generation, there has been a steadily growing body of reliable research on the competency of LGBTQ families, including the capacity of LGBTQ people to parent and the well-being of children raised by LGBTQ parents. This research has helped to dispel myths and disabuse old, false conflations (for example, wrongly associating child sexual abuse with LGBTQ people). This research has proven that children are safe with LGBTQ people. While this seems fundamental, it's a big step. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association (among other professional associations) endorse LGBTQ parenting, and the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute has published extensively on LGBTQ adoption. It is not just that practitioners must do the fair thing in terms of allowing LGBTQ people to become adoptive or foster parents: There is evidence-based practice grounded in solid social science research around LGBTQ parenting which can help shape child welfare policies and increase opportunities for permanence for kids in the system.

What is an area where we still have work to do in terms of engaging LGBTQ people as resource families?

One area where we are really lacking is around adoption and foster parenting by transgender and gender non-conforming people. The whole narrative around transgender parenting has been around loss, including the complete loss of custody of biological children (and often even visitation). We recently had an event at the Center focused on transgender parenting and families with a transgender family member. ACS and foster care agencies came and provided information and were affirming about inviting transgender parents. Based on both historic and current discrimination, a lot of transgender people have reason to believe that they won't be well-received as prospective parents. The system should do much more outreach to transgender people and staff training on gender identity and expression. I know from our training that gender non-conformity and other gender-related issues are areas that folks have the most trouble understanding.

What are examples of ways that agencies can support LGBTQ individuals or couples in becoming foster & adoptive parents?

Inclusive paperwork. It sounds trivial but it isn't – paperwork speaks loudly to prospective parents. Inclusive paperwork sends the message that the agency notices LGBTQ families and diverse families in general, and has made accommodation. This is of enormous importance. Inclusive paperwork means using gender neutral language (not specifying mother and father, for instance, when talking about parents). Additionally, it is important for agency websites to be bold about depicting same sex household images, and that whatever they say that relates to straight people is also inclusive of LGBTQ people. For instance, if they have a newsletter that tells adoption stories, it would be important that LGBTQ family stories are included. Basically, it is important that agencies don't just talk about LGBTQ families when gay people come in, but instead, LGBTQ families should be made visible and embraced when speaking to any audience, whether in the room, on the website, or in recruitment materials. Agencies should also develop recruitment materials that are specifically targeted to LGBTQ prospective parents.

It is also important that agencies understand and communicate their understanding that LGBTQ people are not only interested in LGBTQ teens. While finding homes for queer teens is critically important, LGBTQ prospective resource families should not be limited in this way. They are not different from straight people in the sense that, while some prospective parents may be interested in fostering or adopting older youth, many want to foster or adopt babies or younger children.

You mentioned that you do LGBTQ awareness & anti-bias training. Can you tell us about the training?

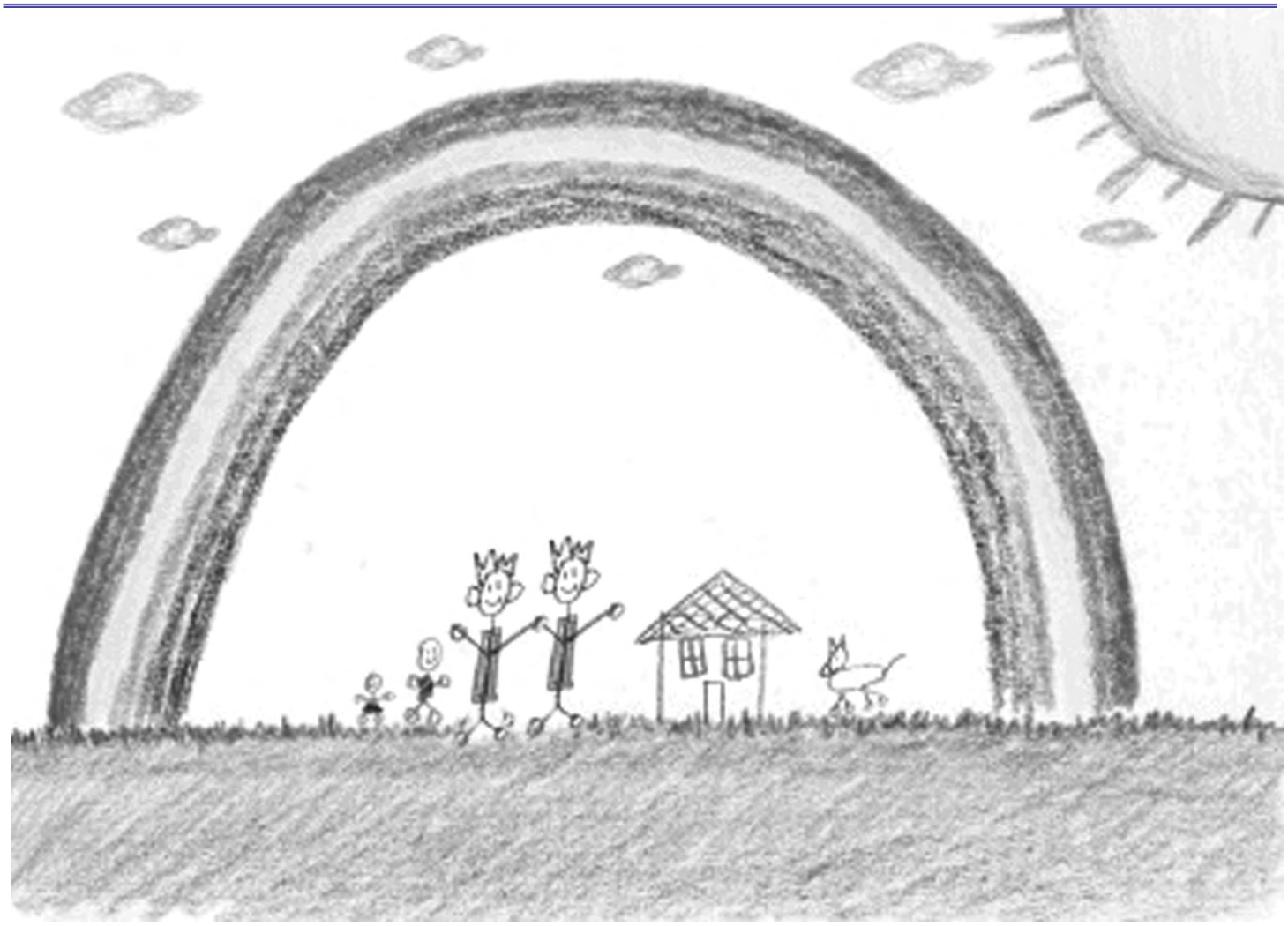
The training I provide is pretty much "Homophobia 101." There are a number of good trainings out there, for example, those developed by NASW with Lambda Legal, Child Welfare League of America, ACS, and the Human Rights Campaign. [See the interview with Ellen Kahn from Human Rights Campaign, also in this issue of Permanency Planning Today.] We are not trying to reinvent the wheel. We work with these trainings, and I also adapt trainings that I have developed for schools, because the issues are similar. We help people to understand the difference between sex and sexuality and the difference between sexuality and gender, as well as how homophobia and transphobia hurts all of us (regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity). Some of the topics covered are basic LGBTQ terminology and statistics about the vulnerability of LGBTQ youth, particularly in the child welfare system. We also familiarize people with the applicable laws. Sometimes our Coalition provides training in a panel format, and we always include LGBTQ young people, as well as LGBTQ parents who have adopted through the system. These trainings typically take place in the context of a fair, and participating agencies are invited to share information. For the last year or so, we have also offered MAPP trainings at the Center every Saturday, provided by staff

from You Gotta Believe! The staff member includes LGBTQ content so that the trainings are inclusive and meet LGBTQ participants' needs for relevant information. We recently partnered with ACS and held a Meet and Greet Event with LGBTQ young people and prospective parents. The efforts are still a work-in-progress, but they're certainly coming along. The New York City system allows for innovative work to be done and really, genuinely wants to be inclusive of LGBTQ people, not just because it's the law.

What resources do you feel would be useful to LGBTQ families or those working with LGBTQ families across the country?

In addition to the resources on the Center's website (www.gaycenter.org), the Evan B. Donaldson Institute offers a variety of resources (www.adoptioninstitute.org). Adoptive Families (www.adoptivefamilies.com) magazine is fantastic, and addresses some of the tougher issues. The adoption community shares a lot of issues with those involved with reproductive technologies, and each of these areas can educate and inform the other– making this connection is a relatively new development.

One of the most valuable and informative resources available is people who are willing to share their experiences. Adults who were raised in trans-racial and trans-cultural families are talking about what are, for them, "the best interests of the child", and helping shift adoption practice toward being more child-centered, rather than adult-centered. These insights can help to improve practice related to openness in the adoption process, access to information, and what cultural competence really means if you are parents adopting or fostering a child or youth of a different race. For example, for white families who adopt a child of color, this means shifting their identity to a family of color, rather than thinking of themselves as white parents with a child of color. It is important to explore what that paradigm shift really means. The first generation of young people who were raised in LGBTQ households are now young adults, and they are also beginning to talk about what they themselves define as "best practices." There is now so much information coming from adoptees– it's a big deal.



Recruiting and Retaining

LGBT FOSTER, ADOPTIVE, AND KINSHIP FAMILIES

Sending a Welcoming Message

Many child welfare agencies are recognizing the importance of engaging with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) prospective families as a way of partnering to find stable placements and achieve permanence for more children in foster care. Recruiting and retaining LGBT families, however, requires much more than just breaking down institutional, formal barriers between a child welfare agency and LGBT prospective parents; it requires creating a welcoming, inclusive environment and finding a way to express welcoming messages to the individual people the agency wants to engage. With the many barriers that LGBT families have historically faced—and often continue to face—in pursuing foster and adoptive parenting, child welfare agencies who wish to work with LGBT families should be intentional about building trust and creating a welcoming atmosphere and organizational culture. Taking these steps can help your agency build your capacity to reach out to LGBT families and retain them. The tips below highlight key considerations to keep in mind and provide suggestions for specific ideas you can use as you seek to create a welcoming environment.

Always keep in mind the power of language and specific words.

Words can be very emotionally loaded, both positively and negatively. Words can also play a key role in communicating the fundamental values and priorities of an agency and setting the tone for interactions between an agency and prospective parents. For instance:

- Find resources in your local LGBT community to help you determine appropriate and respectful terminology for diverse populations that you serve.
- Avoid using the word "homosexual" when referring to gay or lesbian people, as it is considered a clinical word that has a connotation of pathology.
- Review terminology that your agency uses that might be misinterpreted by prospective parents. For instance, LGBT prospective families might interpret terms such as "traditional families" as meaning that they are not welcome even if an agency simply uses the term to refer to foster and adoptive families who come to the agency through traditional routes.

Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Review the photos and images your agency uses in recruitment materials, publications, and around the office to ensure that the families in the photos reflect the diversity of prospective families you wish to engage, including same-sex couples and single parents. If prospective LGBT families don't see families like themselves in any of the images your agency projects, they may find it more difficult to trust the agency and feel welcome.

Look for ways to frame statements in inclusive and affirming ways.

Avoid using forms, questions, and words that reflect any assumptions that all prospective parents fall into particular groups. Even seemingly innocent questions can send a message that you aren't welcoming to LGBT prospective parents. For example:

- Instead of asking if an applicant is married—whether on a form or in a conversation—you can ask if someone has a partner or will be co-parenting.

- Instead of using the words "husband" and "wife" on forms that prospective or current parents must complete, use more neutral words such as "Parent 1" and "Parent 2" or "Applicant 1 and 2."

Be congruent.

Using welcoming words and images can help your agency make a positive initial impression as you reach out to new LGBT prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families. Once you have prospective families engaged, be sure that your agency will continue to be welcoming and culturally competent. If your agency sends mixed messages about whether or not LGBT individuals are welcome, your recruitment efforts may do more harm than good in trying to build new community connections.

SPECIAL THANKS

and Recognition

Special thanks and recognition go to the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's All Children – All Families initiative.

This tip sheet was informed extensively by the content and approach of the All Children – All Families materials, including the All Children – Training Curriculum and the Promising Practices in Adoption and Foster Care guide.

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Appendices: Chapter 4

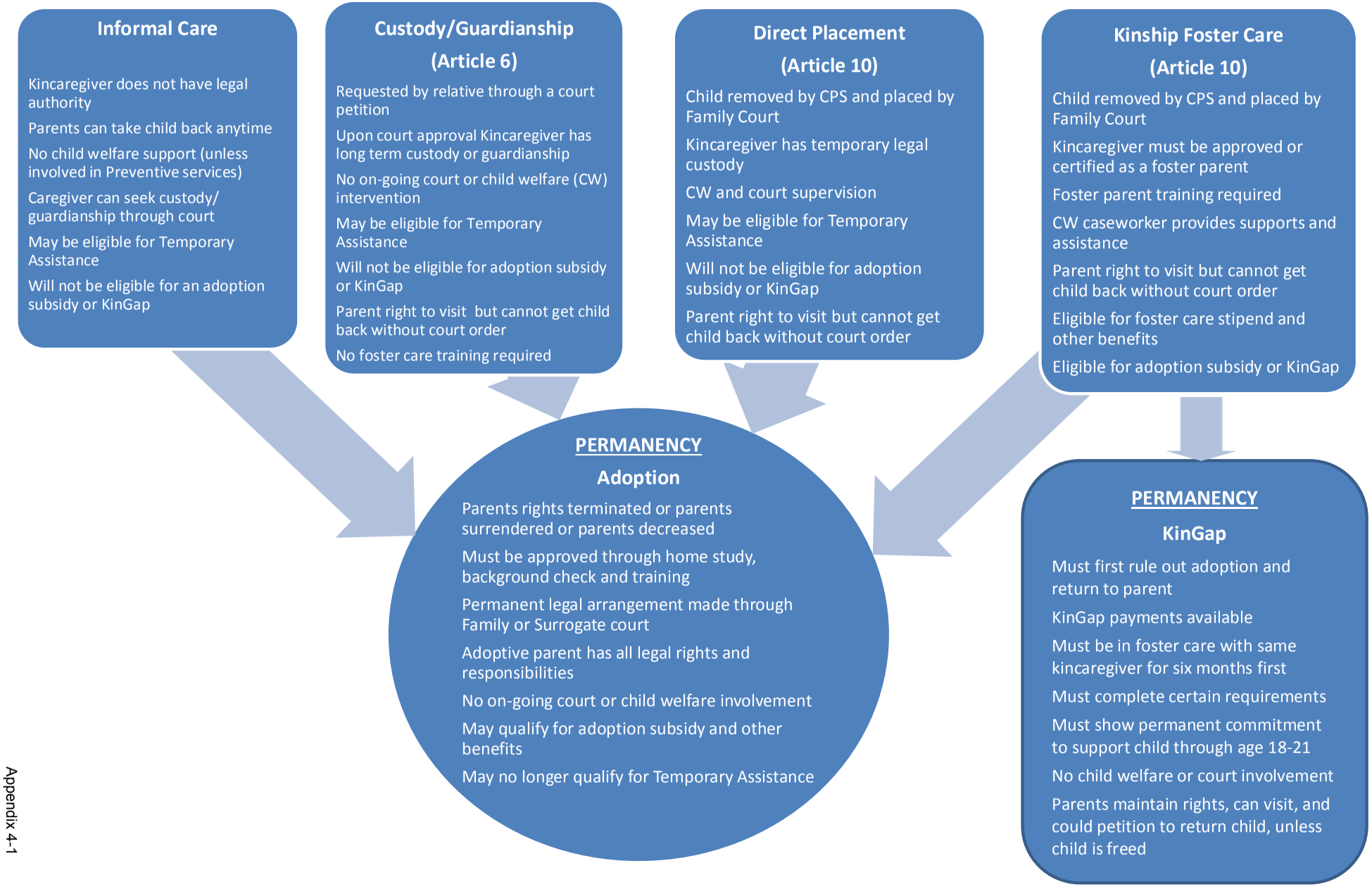
Appendix 4-1
Kinship Chart

A flow chart showing the placement options and benefits available to relatives caring for children. (New York State Office of Children and Family Services)

Appendix 4-2
Encouraging Your Staff to Use Photolistings in New Ways

A tip sheet for child welfare agency leaders and managers on how to encourage staff to actively use AdoptUsKids photolistings to search for families for children and youth on their caseloads. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Kinship Chart



Encouraging Your Staff to

USE PHOTOLISTINGS IN NEW WAYS

Child welfare system leaders and program managers are often looking for ways to encourage their staff to use new strategies and approaches to find permanent families for children who are waiting to be adopted. Our photolisting service is a powerful tool to find permanent families for children—more than 18,500 children previously photolisted on the AdoptUSKids website now live with permanent families—and child welfare systems can achieve even more benefits by using our photolisting service in new ways.

Benefits of Using AdoptUSKids' Photolisting Service

Whether you work for a public or private child welfare agency, you can register for free on our website to manage cases and give national exposure to children and families on your caseload. We have an extensive database with thousands of profiles of children waiting to be adopted and almost 4,000 families who are home studied and approved to adopt. Registering on our site gives you the ability to:

- Create multi-media profiles of children and families using photos, video, and text
- Create worker accounts with different levels of access so they can easily search and build lists of children and families that are possible matches
- Find hundreds of possible family matches in seconds by cross-matching children's needs, characteristics, and preferences with those of families in our photolisting database
- Receive and respond to inquiries from families who are home studied and interested in children you have photolisted
- Follow-up with families more readily by being able to suggest children to them and view children they are interested in
- Create and manage multiple locations and accounts within an agency for the ability to pull reports and easily reassign cases while keeping all information about a child or family intact

New Ways to Use the AdoptUSKids Photolisting

The AdoptUSKids photolisting includes tools that you and your staff can use to increase the effectiveness of using our photolisting beyond only photolisting children. Our *Find a Family* and *Search for Families* tools offer ways to use the photolisting proactively to identify families that may be good matches for children who are waiting to be adopted, whether your agency has photolisted them with AdoptUSKids or not.

For children who your agency has photolisted with AdoptUSKids, you can use our *Find a Family* web tool to find hundreds of possible matches in seconds with a simple click of a button. You can also create and save lists of possible family matches for the children you have photolisted so that you can go back at a later date to inquire about them for a specific child.

For children who are not photolisted with AdoptUSKids, you can use our *Search for Families* tool to find home studied families that meet specific characteristics you're looking for, such as family type, location, pets, and more.

How to Give Your Staff Access to AdoptUSKids' Photolisting Service

Accessing our free photolisting service and giving your staff the ability to use all of its powerful tools is simple! All your agency needs to do is be registered on our website. Once your agency is registered, individual staff members can use an online form to request their

own account to search for families and photolist children. We can also help you and your staff through the process of creating accounts, including highlighting effective strategies for using all the tools available through our photolisting service.

You can register your agency for free on our website at *http://adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/register-your-agency/form*. Once we receive your registration form, we will contact you within five business days to complete your registration and provide helpful information for setting up your account.

Helping Your Staff Use AdoptUSKids' Photolisting Service

Once you have registered your agency on our website, you can introduce your staff to the valuable tools available to them for developing and implementing new strategies to find adoptive families for waiting children. In particular, you can help your staff use proactive strategies for using the photolisting service that go beyond just adding profiles of children and waiting for families to inquire about them. You can encourage your staff to:

- Take a few minutes on their own to explore the profiles of children and prospective adoptive families on the website
- Identify children on their caseloads who are not currently photolisted and pursue adding photolisting to the strategies used to find a family for those children
- View our brief slideshow on how to use our *Find a Family* tool at *http://adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/how-to-photolist-and-manage-cases/finding-families*
- Take time during a team meeting to explore the AdoptUSKids website and try out the *Search for Families* tool to see how many families show up that might be a good match for children on your staff's caseload, such as entering in characteristics for a fictional child (e.g., a 15 year old boy with moderate special needs) and see how many of the registered families are approved to adopt such a child
- Once your staff has photolisted children on the website, have them use the *Find a Family* tool to automatically generate a list of families who could be a potential match for an individual child or sibling group
- Share the handout included on the last two pages of this tip sheet, *Finding Families for Children: Using AdoptUSKids' Photolisting* Service, with your staff and encourage them to learn more about the tools that we have available to help them find adoptive families for children who are waiting to be adopted.

Your staff can get even more value from our photolisting—and other AdoptUSKids services—by registering for our free email newsletters:

- *Find a Family*—a monthly newsletter with tips, tools, and resources geared toward frontline staff working in the field with children and families
- *E-Notes*—a monthly newsletter geared toward program managers and agency administrators from the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids that highlights effective and promising practices in recruitment and retention

You can subscribe to any of these free newsletters by emailing *professionals@adoptuskids.org*.

Seek Your Agency's Guidance Before Implementing These Ideas

The guidelines in this document apply equally to both public child welfare staff and the staff of private agencies that provide services on behalf of the public agency.

Child welfare systems across the country are in varied stages of exploring and using social media. The ideas included in this document are general suggestions for ways to use social media in child welfare work and are intended for agency leaders and managers as they decide if and how social media can support their communication, outreach, and engagement efforts. As with all new approaches, you should consider how these suggestions might work within the context of your jurisdiction and your State's public child welfare agency's policies, guidelines, and best practices. The ideas and tips included here should not be used if they conflict with any policies of your State's public child welfare agency, regardless of whether your relationship with the agency is that of employee-employer or contractual, and should only be implemented with the support of the public agency's leadership.

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FINDING FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN

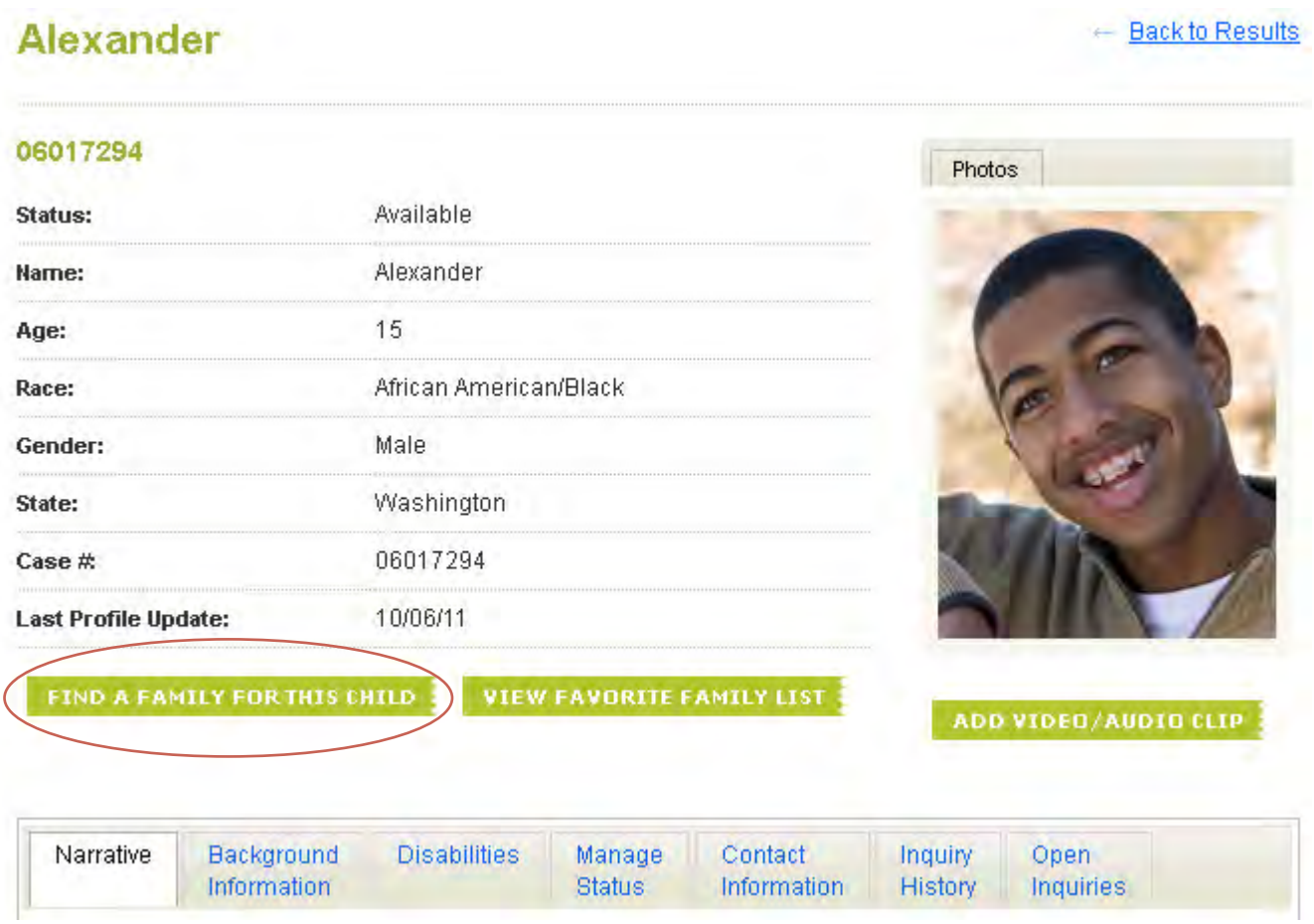
Using AdoptUSKids' Photolisting Service

On any given day, almost 4,000 home studied families who are licensed to adopt from foster care have active profiles on AdoptUSKids. Whether or not you photolist children on our site, you can use our search tools to find possible family matches for children on your caseload.

Please note that the family finding tools below are only available once you have registered on our site. Registration is free whether you work for a private or public agency.

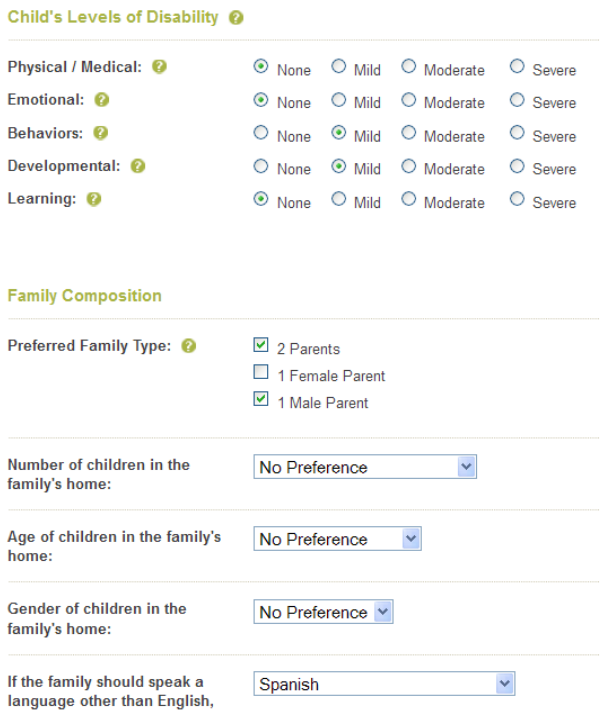
1 Finding families for children photolisted on AdoptUSKids.

For children registered on AdoptUSKids, you can use our **Find a Family** web tool that allows you to find hundreds of possible matches in seconds with a simple click of a button. You can also create and save lists of possible resource families for the children you have photolisted so that you can go back at a later date to inquire about them for a specific child.



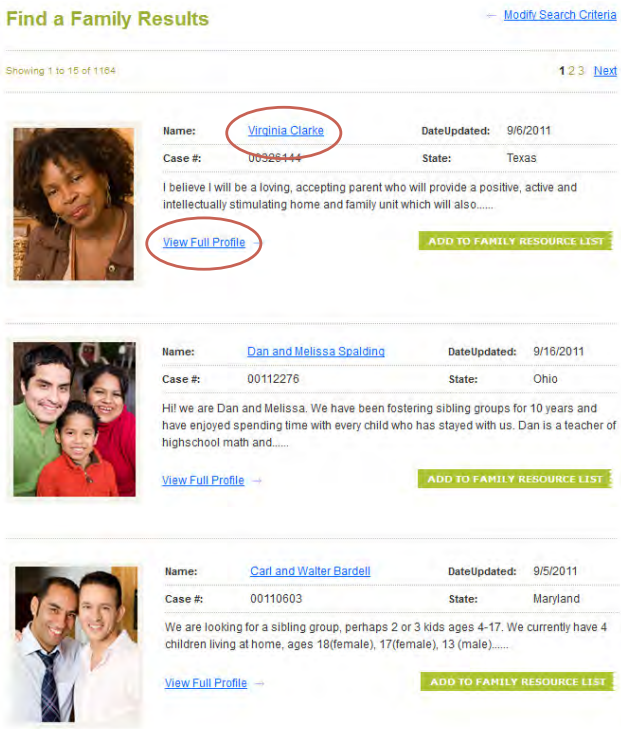
2 Finding families for children who aren't photolisted on AdoptUSKids

For children not registered on our site, you can use our **Search for Families** tool to find home studied families that meet specific characteristics you're looking for, such as family type, location, pets, and more.



3 How to use the results from both searches

Once you find a family you want to learn more about, click on the family's name or the **View Full Profile** link in the results list to learn more about them and get the contact information for them, their agency, and their worker.



AdoptUSKids
Together we hold their future

Toll-free 888-200-4005 *Email* INFO@ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG

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Appendices: Chapter 5

Appendix 5-1
Going Beyond Recruitment for 11- to 17-Year-Olds

Provides information about strategies, resources, and key steps for building child welfare systems' capacity to recruit and retain families for older youth and to prepare older youth for adoption. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 5-2
Recruitment and Retention of Kinship, Foster, and Adoptive Families for Siblings

Highlights key considerations and practice tips for keeping siblings together or connected through foster, adoptive, and kinship placements. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 5-3
10 Realities of Sibling Adoption

Highlights 10 key realities about the importance of keeping siblings connected and the benefits of placing siblings together to support children's well-being. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 5-4
"Sibling-Friendly Agencies and Practices Keep Children Together"

Article by Regina M. Kupecky in the June 2001 issue of *Recruiting News,* published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children.

Appendix 5-5
Engaging, Developing, and Supporting Prospective Families for Sibling Groups

Highlights the importance of providing good support to families interested in adopting sibling groups beginning at their first contact with your agency and provides specific tips for ways to engage and develop families to help them build their capacity to adopt sibling groups. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR
DILIGENT RECRUITMENT
at AdoptUSKids

Increasing Your Agency's Capacity to

RESPOND TO PROSPECTIVE PARENTS AND PREPARE OLDER YOUTH FOR ADOPTION

Going Beyond Recruitment for 11- to 17-year-olds

INTRODUCTION

As your agency seeks to recruit adoptive parents for 11- to 17-year-olds[1] in foster care, you can increase your likelihood of achieving permanency by building your agency's capacity to prepare these youth for adoption and to respond to, retain, and prepare prospective adoptive parents as they consider adopting older youth. Prospective parents for older youth may need assistance from your agency to explore the special considerations involved in adopting older youth and to identify information and resources to help meet the youth's needs. Additionally, while being part of recruitment efforts on their behalf, older youth in foster care may need your help being open to the idea of adoption and addressing their normal developmental needs.

Like all children waiting to be adopted, 11- to 17-year-olds are best served by having professionals pay careful attention to the basics of effective pre-adoption practices, including:

- Thoughtfully targeted family identification and recruitment
- Preparation for permanency of both the child and prospective parents
- Development of a quality assessment profile for the child to guide placement decisions

The materials in this packet are intended to help support your agency in leveraging the Children's Bureau's National Adoption Recruitment Campaign that focuses on recruiting adoptive parents for 11- to 17-year-olds in foster care. This packet gives you and your staff useful tools that can both inform your work and be shared with prospective adoptive parents who are considering adopting older youth.

Additional Resources

In addition to the information and tools in this packet, your agency may find these other resources useful as you recruit, retain, and prepare prospective adoptive parents for older youth.

- ***Finding a Fit that Will Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Adoptive Families with Waiting Children*** (PDF – 402 KB): An AdoptUSKids publication that provides helpful information about conducting youth assessments and profiles.[2]
- ***Adoption Competency Curriculum:*** A comprehensive curriculum from the National Resource Center for Adoption that gives more information about conducting youth assessments.[3]
- The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections has an extensive list of youth permanency resources.[4]
- Child Welfare Information Gateway has multiple resources that can support your efforts to find adoptive families for older youth, including:
  - ***Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care*** (PDF – 258 KB): This bulletin addresses the specific challenges of permanency planning with older youth and highlights successful models and activities.[5]
  - ***Building Trauma-Informed Systems and Policy Issues:*** A list of resources to help administrators and managers implement changes in policies and procedures and to work collaboratively with other service providers to make systems more trauma-informed.[6]
- The North American Council on Adoptable Children has two resources available specifically on how to achieve adoption for older youth:
  - ***"Successful Older Child Adoption: Lessons from the Field"***: An article from the summer 2010 issue of the council's Adoptalk newsletter that highlights examples from multiple States about how they have found adoptive families for older youth.[7]
  - ***It's Time to Make Older Child Adoption a Reality: Because Every Child and Youth Deserves a Family*** (PDF – 1 MB): A publication that highlights existing policies and programs for helping more older children find permanency through adoption.[8]

[1] In this publication, we use "11 to 17 year olds" and "older youth" interchangeably. This publication was developed to support the Children's Bureau's National Adoption Recruitment Campaign, which focuses on recruiting adoptive families for youth in foster care who are ages 11 to 17, but the principles, practices, and resources included in this publication can also be useful in work with and on behalf of all teens in foster care who are waiting for permanent families and the families who express interest in them.

[2] *http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf*

[3] *http://www.nrcadoption.org/resources/curriculums/home/about-acc*

[4] *www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/youth-permanency.html.*

[5] *www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/enhancing.pdf*

[6] *www.childwelfare.gov/responding/building.cfm*

[7] *http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/OlderChAdoptions.html*

[8] *www.nacac.org/adoptalk/MakeOlderChildAdoptionReality.pdf*

Working Within and Across Systems to

PROMOTE PERMANENCY FOR OLDER YOUTH

Many older youth in foster care are served by multiple agencies and systems, including local or state mental health systems, educational systems, juvenile courts, health care systems, and congregate care providers. Child welfare systems[9] working to achieve permanency for older youth face an important task in ensuring that the services provided by multiple agencies are well-coordinated and delivered in a way that supports each youth's permanency goal.

Child welfare administrators have crucial roles in establishing and supporting interagency and intersystem coordination at the agency level with other partners in the child welfare system so child welfare staff can support coordination at the case level for individual youth. One way that some States already promote and support this intersystem coordination is by creating interagency councils, workgroups, and agreements aimed at improving the coordination on behalf of youth who are served by multiple agencies. The following strategies may be helpful for child welfare agencies that are either expanding these coordination efforts with other agencies or are just beginning to address the need for a unified approach to serving the needs of older youth.

- Each partner organization in a child welfare system can develop clear and consistent messaging that foster care is temporary and all youth deserve a permanent family by creating mission and vision statements, recruitment campaigns, and other messaging that reflect this belief. Child welfare agencies can support this message by implementing a practice model based on best practices in working with youth, families, and agency partners to improve permanency outcomes for youth.
- Agencies can provide training for child welfare professionals, foster and adoptive parents, partner agencies, and others who provide support for youth about the unique needs of older youth in the foster care system and strategies for coordinating services and service plans across multiple systems. Agencies can also increase their ability to meet the needs of older youth by including youth in developing materials and delivering training to educate and inform support providers. Developing cross training with other agencies and systems can provide great opportunities for shared learning and networking between child welfare agency staff and agency partners.
- Child welfare agencies can explore pursuing joint funding with partner organizations and other child- and youth-serving agencies to improve service delivery, minimize duplication of efforts, and enhance collaboration and coordination in serving older youth. Interagency collaboration and coordination can take many forms, including working in shared office space, sharing agency data to the extent allowable by law and policy, and seeking opportunities to apply for federal grants or other funding that encourages cross-system collaboration, such as the "Child Welfare - Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability" grants from the Children's Bureau issued in 2012.
- Agencies can collaborate with other policymakers to develop policy—and to the extent possible, suggest legislative changes—to improve the ways that systems meet the unique needs of older youth. Many older youth in foster care report experiencing challenges in accessing services and supports simply by being in the foster care system. Legislation and agency policies can empower systems and agencies to assist youth in accessing direct services such as financial and medical assistance, available both while a youth is in foster care and during and after transitioning out of foster care. Examples of these services include crisis intervention, counseling, residential treatment, educational services, and support networks.

[9] For the purposes of this publication, we use the term "child welfare system" to represent the multiple agencies and entities that, along with the child welfare agency, work on behalf of children in foster care, including courts, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Citizen Review Boards, and others.

Exploring Family Characteristics that Contribute to

SUCCESSFUL OLDER YOUTH ADOPTION

Child welfare professionals responsible for recruiting, assessing, and preparing prospective adoptive families for older youth should consider and explore with interested families the unique skills and characteristics they will need to support a successful transition in adopting an older youth. Your agency can work with adopting families to identify the skills and characteristics that they possess—both as individuals and as a family—that will help them parent older youth.

It can be challenging to parent any youth during the teenage years since adolescence is a time when youth may struggle to develop a sense of identity, responsibility, self-respect, and adequate communication skills to support them in becoming a happy and productive adult. For the adolescent who has experienced loss, grief, and trauma, these challenges may be even more difficult and complex. The way an adoptive family perceives and responds to the adolescent's behaviors during this time can have an impact on the success of an older youth placement.

The following list highlights some family characteristics that can help contribute to the successful adoption of older youth and can serve as helpful discussion topics as your agency assesses, trains, and prepares prospective adoptive families. As always, agencies should assess families on a case-by-case basis for their strengths and readiness to parent older youth; this list of characteristics is not comprehensive or definitive for identifying families that can meet the needs of older youth. Many adopting families who succeed in parenting older youth from foster care:

- Know the strengths and needs of their family as a whole and of each individual family member so they can identify how they will impact an older youth coming into the home
- Communicate openly and effectively through clear messages, being good listeners, and using a tone of voice that is respectful
- Recognize and build on the strengths and needs of others and focus on the positives
- Are self-assured and not easily embarrassed, angered, or threatened
- Are able to work in partnership with the youth, birth families, the agency, the youth's educational, medical, and social service providers, and the community to help identify and create solutions
- Have had experience as adults with older youth in various settings
- Have an understanding of the effects of trauma from being abused, neglected, abandoned, or emotionally maltreated
- Understand loss and attachment issues older youth may have experienced and possess skills that will help manage the behaviors of older youth in dealing with these issues
- Have a network of social support they can turn to for recreation, guidance, emotional support or other assistance as needed
- Are agreeable to helping older youth maintain and develop relationships that keep them connected to their pasts.
- Believe in building self-esteem by encouraging a positive self-concept and a positive family, cultural, and racial identity
- Have realistic expectations of older youth adopted from the foster care system
- Seek out resources, information, and training when they need help

Helping Prospective Parents

CONSIDER AND PREPARE FOR ADOPTING OLDER YOUTH

Child welfare professionals have a critical role in assessing the strengths of potential adoptive families who may be interested in adopting older youth. As with any child-specific preparation of families, professionals can help prospective parents understand and explore the specific considerations that may be involved when adopting an older youth. Child welfare agencies should explore the following topics with prospective parents to help both the agency and family determine whether it is a good fit for the family to adopt an older youth.

Important Discussion Topics

- **Parents' understanding of brain development, what is normal for pre-teen and adolescent behavior, and what may be the response to past trauma the youth has experienced**—It will be important that prospective parents have a strong understanding of the developmental stages of children and youth and the effects that trauma, grief, and loss can have on those developmental stages. Your agency can provide prospective parents with information about available training and reading materials that will help them learn more about how to respond appropriately to the behaviors that a youth might present, recognizing that youth's developmental needs may not match their chronological age.
- **The family's expectations for an older youth and the importance of setting realistic expectations based on a clear understanding of the youth's abilities**—Working with the family to develop a list of initial expectations that are non-negotiable will be helpful in matching a youth to the home. Many families may believe that if they have raised birth children they know what to expect from an older youth based on normal developmental stages. They may base their expectations on the chronological age of the child and not consider where the youth is in emotional development. Many older youth have physically have matured, but because of life experiences may be delayed in emotional maturity. This will make it difficult for them to meet the normal expectations for their chronological age, especially when experiencing stress or fear. The parents should be supported to recognize when physical maturity and emotional maturity are in conflict.
- **The likelihood of older youth having been in congregate care and the effects of living in a group setting**—Older youth are more likely than younger youth to have been in group or congregate care placements; those youth who are transitioning from congregate care to a family placement may need special help making all of the adjustments required for the transition. These youth may struggle with the adjustment to being in a family setting, including being uncertain about, or resistant to, developing emotional connections. Youth who are transitioning from congregate care may also need additional help navigating normal family rules, dynamics, expectations, responsibilities, and consequences. For example, these youth may be accustomed to receiving payments or other rewards for performing tasks in a group home (e.g., cleaning their room, helping prepare meals, etc.) and may expect similar rewards for those tasks, even if the family expects youth to do these tasks as a regular part of being in the family. Additionally, families adopting youth who have been in congregate care may need to develop specific strategies for enforcing consequences for youth while ensuring that youth understand that receiving consequences does not mean that they will lose their family.
- **The importance of talking with their biological children (and other children) who are living in the home about their feelings and acceptance in adopting an older youth and how adoption will affect the family's functioning**—Birth children living in the home may experience a change in their birth order within their family, attention received from parents, living space, and the manner in which behaviors are addressed once an older child enters the home. Preparing for and exploring birth children's feelings can help minimize sibling conflicts and the frustrations the family's birth children may feel with a new family member.
- **The importance of connections and how the family can develop ways to help older youth maintain those connections**—It will be important that the youth's social summary and assessment contain information about the specific connections the youth may have such as family, friends, pets, recreation activities, clothing, pillows, videos, pictures, etc. that will remain important to the youth and serve to support the youth's transition.
- **Opportunities and creative ways to get to know a youth**—Transitioning an older youth into an adoptive family may require special ways for a youth and prospective parents to become familiar and comfortable with each other prior to placement. To gain a greater understanding and appreciation of a youth's existing connections, your agency can encourage families to participate in a youth's life and activities in addition to involvement in a youth's community.

Using Preparation of Prospective Parents to

ADDRESS OLDER YOUTH ADOPTION TOPICS

As child welfare agencies seek to recruit adoptive parents for older youth in foster care, they should examine each part of their response, training, and parent-preparation systems to ensure that these systems include appropriate information specific to parenting older youth. Although there are many topics that your agency should address with all prospective parents—regardless of the age of the youth they are considering adopting—your agency can help prospective parents for teens explore the specific topics and issues that are involved in adopting older youth.

Families who are considering or are already approved to care for older youth in the foster care system can benefit from specific training on topics that will help them understand and address the unique needs of adolescents who have experienced abuse and neglect. Your agency can use your parent training activities to provide valuable opportunities to prepare families prior to placement, helping prospective parents to deepen their understanding of special issues involved in parenting older youth and to develop skills and techniques for managing any –challenges they may encounter.

Your agency may want to consider covering the following training topics specific to understanding and caring for older youth:

- Adolescent brain development
- Normal adolescent behavior versus behavior resulting from past trauma
- Techniques for communicating with adolescents
- Identity and sexuality
- Signs of substance abuse or gang-related activity
- Understanding teen decision-making
- Preparing a youth for college and employment
- Helping a youth develop healthy relationships
- Depression in youth
- Building self-esteem in older youth

Your agency may also find it helpful to seek feedback from adoptive families and older youth in foster care about additional topics and issues that would be valuable to cover in parent preparation sessions.

Providing Valuable Tools and Information to

EMPOWER FAMILIES ADOPTING OLDER YOUTH

Child welfare agencies and individual workers are often the first point of contact for prospective parents who are considering the specific issues and questions that may arise when adopting older youth. Prospective parents of older youth often have questions about logistics and resources specifically relevant for parenting youth who are in high school, wanting to obtain their driver's license, and preparing to apply for college admission. The following topics and brief information about resources may be helpful as your agency compiles information to share with prospective parents to help prepare and support them as they address special considerations involved in parenting older youth.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Caseworkers are often asked to participate on an IEP team for students in foster care or those who are entering adoptive placements. The IEP is a plan created to provide appropriate services and education to the student. Caseworkers can refer youth for an IEP review if they think the youth needs additional services. The U.S. Department of Education provides ***A Guide to the Individualized Education Program*** to assist educators, parents, and state and local agencies regarding IEPs. [10]

Contact for additional information: The Child Find program, a component of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that requires States to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities, aged birth to 21, who are in need of early intervention or special education services.[11]

Obtaining School Records

Caseworkers might need to provide support in obtaining and transferring school records when helping youth transition out of their current placement and into an adoptive family. This process is governed by the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).[12]

Contact for additional information: The school district's director of special education can assist in requesting records from the school the student previously attended.

Obtaining Health Records

Youth in the child welfare system will likely have a file containing their medical and health records that is accessible to their caseworker. When youth are transitioning out of foster care into an adoptive family (or when they turn 18), caseworkers can advise them about their rights regarding access to their records under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).[13]

Contact for additional information: Caseworkers can play an important role in transitioning youth by explaining how to contact health care providers for additional records.

Driver's License

Laws regarding obtaining a driver's license vary by each State's Department of Motor Vehicles. Many States provide youth in foster care or an adoptive placement with financial assistance for driver's education classes and to obtain a driver's license. Some States also allow a caseworker, mentor, foster parent, or advocate to act as a youth's guardian for the purpose of obtaining a driver's license.

Contact for additional information: Your State's Department of Motor Vehicles, which can be found using DMV.org's interactive map.[14]

10 *www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html*

11 *www.childfindidea.org/*

12 Find more information on these laws here: *www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html and at http://idea.ed.gov/*

13 *www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/*

14 *www.dmv.org/teen-drivers.php*

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Caseworkers can help transitioning youth who are interested in attending college understand their designation as an "independent student" when filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid that must be completed by or for every student entering college. Foster parents and legal guardians are not considered "parents" for the purpose of this application. However, students in foster care who are emancipated minors or under legal guardianship are legally defined as "independent" and do not need to provide information about parents.

Contact for additional information: For further assistance with a financial aid application, a caseworker and student can contact the financial aid office of the school a student wishes to attend. In addition, Voice for Adoption has a fact sheet on ***Expanded Access to College Financial Aid for Former Foster Youth*** (PDF – 258 KB) about how children adopted from foster care any time after their 13th birthday can apply for federal financial aid without having to list their parents' income.[16]

Scholarships

Families who are adopting teens as they approach their college years might contact their caseworker for information on financial resources specific to youth who are adopted or have been in the foster care system. Caseworkers can direct families to join organizations, such as the National Foster Parent Association, that offer scholarships to member families.[17] Additionally, large organizations such as the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption provide lists of national scholarship resources.[18]

Contact for additional information: The financial aid office at a youth's high school or a college they wish to attend might have further information on scholarships.

Federal Adoption Tax Credit

A request for the federal adoption tax credit is filed with the adoptive parents' taxes and is governed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Because the eligibility requirements and credit amount change every year, caseworkers can be a support to parents by providing accurate and current information about this financial resource, especially if a family's tax preparer is not knowledgeable about this credit.

Contact for additional information: The IRS provides information about the adoption credit and adoption assistance programs.[19] You can also find information about grants, loans, and the adoption tax credit through Child Welfare Information Gateway.[20]

State Statutes on Older Youth Consenting to Adopt

The majority of States and U.S. Territories require that older youth consent to their adoption. Caseworkers should be aware of their State's statutes when transitioning older youth, especially if a youth is expressing hesitancy about being adopted.

Contact for additional information: Child Welfare Information Gateway provides links to each State's adoption consent statute.[21]

Assets, Savings, Support, and Education (ASSET) Initiative

The ASSET Initiative is a collaborative effort within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families seeks to provide financial education and information about building and managing financial assets. This initiative can offer valuable information for youth who have been in foster care and those currently in foster care who are transitioning out. The staff in each Administration for Children and Families regional offices can provide additional information about the resources available through the ASSET Initiative.[22]

Contact for additional information: The Assets for Independence Resource Center has more details about the ASSET Initiative.[23]

15 *www.fafsa.ed.gov/*

16 *http://voice-for-adoption.org/sites/default/files/FAFSA%20factsheet_updated2010.pdf*

17 *http://www.nfpainc.org/Default.aspx?pageId=1116723*

18 *http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/about-foster-care-adoption/faqs/are-scholarships-available-for-adopted-children/*

19 *http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html*

20 *http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/grants_loans.cfm*

21 *http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/consent.cfm*

22 *www.acf.hhs.gov/about/offices*

23 *www.idaresources.org/page?pageid=a047000000DgGSy*

PREPARING OLDER YOUTH FOR ADOPTION

Agencies can tap into a valuable resource by engaging older youth in foster care to advocate for permanency both within their community and as part of their own adoption planning. Agencies can promote the value of permanency for older youth by involving the youth themselves in raising awareness through public outreach and recruitment efforts, but also by involving them in their own child-specific recruitment.

Preparing both prospective parents and older youth for the transitions involved in adoption is a crucial element for achieving permanency. Transitioning from temporary out-of-home care to a permanent adoptive family can be more difficult for older youth who have started going through important stages in establishing their identity and understanding social norms outside of a permanent family setting. Child welfare professionals can promote successful placements by creating and implementing programs and agency initiatives that not only address the unique considerations of transitioning youth, but also enlist the participation of youth in decision-making on multiple levels.

Engaging Youth in Your Recruitment Efforts

When recruiting potential adoptive parents for older youth in foster care, agencies can develop strategies to help the general public— who are all potential permanency resources for youth—know and understand who the older youth in foster care are and what their needs are. Involving youth themselves in recruitment efforts, providing outreach, and raising awareness is an important strategy that is sometimes underused. Bringing awareness to the dynamic personalities, talents, and skills of youth while creating opportunities for them to be visible and have a voice will help demonstrate that older youth in foster care are and can be successful.

The following strategies provide ways for your agency to help raise awareness and increase understanding of the needs and strengths of older youth in foster care, including by engaging youth in some of your events and activities.

- Develop a panel of young adult foster care alumni from various backgrounds who have been successful in achieving permanency. Create opportunities for them to speak at various forums such as child welfare conferences and educational settings such as in-service meetings, civic organizations, etc.
- Invite youth currently in foster care to participate at foster and adoptive parent preparation sessions and child welfare conferences, education summits, and judicial forums by helping with registration, handouts, monitors, etc. This provides the opportunity for them to interact with advocates and prospective families that might be a good match for them.
- Create and use video stories of youth who wish to be adopted or who were adopted as a way to introduce their voice in various meetings and other forums. For examples, see the Digital Stories from the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections.[24]
- Develop recruitment brochures, pamphlets, and posters that show older youth involved in realistic, everyday activities. Consider including quotes from parents who have adopted older youth, or quotes from older youth themselves, describing what it means to have a permanent family.
- Establish policies that distinguish between the needs of younger children and older youth. This helps ensure that policies address the unique needs of older youth, such as visitation and living arrangements with family or other permanent connections, clothing and spending allowances, or their ability to participate in and have access to activities that support normal adolescent experiences.
- Have older youth help with dinner meetings and trainings for approved and potential foster and adoptive parents hosted at local community centers and other community gathering places. Older youth can participate by helping with preparing and serving the meal, which allows time for social interactions.Recruit in youth-friendly environments where youth advocates are present such as educational settings (e.g., teacher in-services, college campuses, vocational programs, etc.), parks and recreation centers (e.g., YMCA's, after care programs, camps, athletic associations, etc.), and faith community events (e.g., Sunday school classes, church or synagogue services, retreats, etc.).
- Explore opportunities with your local television and radio stations for a special interest segment featuring older youth in foster care to highlight their strengths, personalities, and needs.
- Have older youth in foster care participate in developing and reviewing policies on permanency. Involving them in these processes helps ensure your agency's policies are responsive to their needs and perspective.

[24] *http://www.nrcpfc.org/digital_stories/_youth/index.htm*

In addition to promoting older youth permanency by increasing public awareness, agencies can also engage older youth in more specific recruitment efforts. As your agency recruits prospective adoptive parents for older youth, consider using the following strategies to engage youth in their own child-specific recruitment:

- Conduct intensive case-file mining for youth whom you haven't identified a permanent family. As part of this effort, talk with older youth to explore past connections and important relationships with supportive adults who might be able to provide permanency now, even if they weren't able to in the past.
- Use FosterClub's Permanency Pact tool developed to formally establish lifelong, kin-like relationships with caring adults.[25] A permanency pact is a pledge created between a youth and a caring adult to provide specific supports to the young person in foster care who is preparing to transition to adulthood without a permanent family. You can also use this tool as a helpful resource for discussions with youth regarding the value of identifying and developing permanent connections, and with prospective adoptive families because it provides a comprehensive list of the kinds of supports their adopted youth will need from them.
- Feature youth on photolisting services such as AdoptUSKids that approved foster and adoptive parents can use to learn about—and inquire about—youth on your caseload.[26] Have youth develop a profile that they would like to use for the photolisting.
- Work with youth to create presentations using technology such as PowerPoint and iMovie that can bring their personalities and stories to life in their own words, pictures, and graphics. Your agency could use these presentations at recruitment events and on your website.
- Help youth who are interested prepare for ways to share their thoughts and personal experiences in public speaking settings. Provide opportunities for these youth to speak at recruitment events, conferences, and other appropriate gatherings about the needs of older youth in foster care.

Additional Resources

1. Some of the information in this tip sheet is excerpted from the AdoptUSKids publication ***Finding a Fit that Will Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Adoptive Families with Waiting Children***, available online at: http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf.

2. To learn more about how to prepare children and youth for adoption and other forms of permanency, see the ***Adoption Competency Curriculum*** from the National Resource Center for Adoption, available online at: www.nrcadoption.org/resources/curriculums/home/about-acc/

3. The AdoptUSKids publication ***Lasting Impressions: A Guide for Photolisting Children*** (http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/lasting-impressions.pdf) contains some tools that can be used in preparing children for adoption, including:

- *Worksheet #2-A: A Child's Eco-Map*
  This tool helps children to consider the important connections they have to people, systems and other resources.
- Worksheet #2-B: The Loss-Line, An Example
  The lifeline can be used to assist children in identifying and processing their losses and other traumatic events.

[25] *www.fosterclub.com/_transition/article/permanency-pact*

[26] *www.adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/register-with-adoptuskids*

Strategies to

HELP OLDER YOUTH CONSIDER ADOPTION

As your agency recruits prospective adoptive parents for older youth, you should also explore your strategies for working with older youth in foster care to help them understand what adoption is and explore any concerns or questions that they may have about being adopted. In some cases, older youth will say that they don't want to be adopted, so you may need to be prepared to talk with them about why they're saying "no" to adoption. The chart below shows some common concerns or perspectives older youth may have that drive them to say that they don't want to be adopted; the chart also lists some possible strategies for you to use to help them consider being adopted.

Youth's Perspective	Strategies to Help Youth Be Open to Adoption
They may not understand what adoption means.	• Spend time talking candidly about what adoption means for a youth in terms that they can understand. Many youth hear the word adoption and think that means they will be placed with an adoptive family and will have to forget about their biological family. • Train and provide tools to foster parents to use in having ongoing conversations with youth about what adoption means. • Provide opportunities for youth in foster care to speak with other youth who have been adopted about what happens during and after the adoption process.
They may not believe anyone would want to adopt them and lack hope in being adopted because of their age, history of behavioral issues, or being part of a sibling group.	• Share case examples about youth who have been adopted in the area and who are of the same age. • Provide opportunities for youth to talk with prospective adoptive parents who are interested in adopting older youth. • Share statistical information about youth who have been adopted in terms the youth can understand and that explain the numbers and characteristics of older youth who have been adopted.
They may feel there is a chance they can return home and that saying "yes" would prevent them from ever being able to think about or contact their biological family.	• Provide youth with accurate and ongoing information on their birth families while also acknowledging and respecting the loyalty they may feel towards birth families. • Concurrent with other recruitment efforts, discuss with youth whether they have any extended family members who might be able to provide permanency. • Explain that in some situations youth are able to maintain contact with their birth family after being adopted.

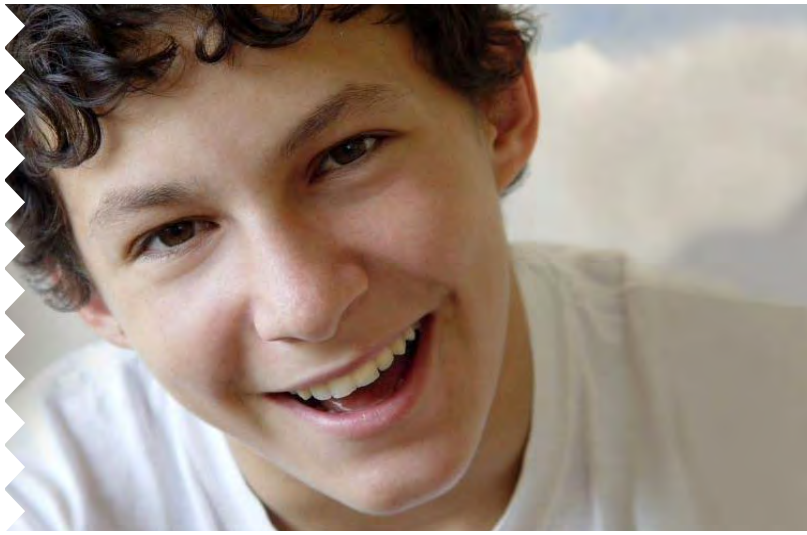
They may feel disloyal to their birth family by considering adoption and calling someone else "mom" or "dad."	• Coach the birth family and foster family on how to help a youth understand that they have permission and support to consider adoption. • Explore with youth how the agency can help them maintain their loyalty in various ways. This can include helping the youth to maintain connections with relatives when possible, and talking openly with adoptive parents about their birth family and desire to honor those relationships. • Explain that youth may choose to refer to their new adoptive parents as something other than "mom" or "dad."
They may worry about changing their last name.	• Help youth understand that in some adoptions they are able to keep their last name.
They may fear being separated or losing contact with siblings.	• Explain that in many adoptions, siblings are placed together or are able to stay connected even if they aren't placed together. • Explore and discuss with youth ways they can safely maintain connections with their siblings, such as through planned visitation, celebrating special occasions, and communication through cards, email, phone calls, and texting. • Provide examples of how other sibling groups have stayed connected and opportunities to talk with youth and adoptive parents who have been able to maintain connections with a youth's siblings.
They may be concerned about leaving everything that is familiar to them by being placed in another town or State.	• Provide details about the recruitment process and involve youth in the recruitment of a family by having them identify potential permanent connections from people they already know. • Share with youth detailed information about specific prospective adoptive families, including where the families live, what the families' interests are, and how the families could be a good match for them (e.g., through shared interests and activities, having pets that they would like, etc.).

The Essential Role of YOUTH ASSESSMENT

Child assessments (sometimes called "social histories" or "child profiles") are critical to the process of making placement decisions in adoptions. A thorough child assessment makes clear the child's strengths and needs and provides important information on which to base the consideration of prospective adoptive families for the child.

The child assessment is a primary tool in the matching process and is an essential resource for prospective adoptive parents. A quality child assessment provides a multifaceted picture of the child that can assist a family and the family's caseworker to thoughtfully consider whether the family can meet the child's needs. While there is no uniform format for a child assessment, there is general consensus about the following:

- Each child should be made fully aware of the contents of his or her assessment, and be involved in preparing it to the extent that his or her age and abilities permit. The assessment or portions of the assessment could be shared with the child so that he or she can check the contents for accuracy and add any additional material.
- Child assessments should be written in clear, plain language without social work jargon. They should also be written in a way that the child could read it and not feel embarrassment, shame, or discomfort.
- As many people as possible should be spoken to in developing the assessment, including foster parents, birth parents (if possible), teachers, counselors and, importantly, the child.
- The child assessment should make clear what information is known to be factual and what is uncertain or a matter of speculation.



- The child's strengths should be highlighted and emphasized, along with information about the child's challenges.
- All child assessments should contain the following basics: a chronological history beginning from birth, including both developmental history and placement history; birth family history including a genogram and medical information; child's social, medical, and educational information; information about the child's birth parents and siblings, including their current whereabouts and the nature of any recent or current contact; and current functioning (including a detailed account of the child's daily and weekly routine) and readiness for adoption.

Additional Resources

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Practice Principles for the

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF KINSHIP, FOSTER, AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

for Siblings

The Importance of Keeping Siblings Together

In defining the term "sibling," agencies may use a broad definition to embrace the traditions, faith affiliations, and unique family structures of various cultures and extended families. Therefore, "sibling" can include those who share a birth parent or legal parent, step-parent and/or others who have lived together in a family and identify themselves as siblings.

Maintaining and supporting sibling relationships is essential to the healthy development and well-being of all children, and it is especially important for children in out-of-home care.

When children experience parental losses, neglect and abuse, they depend on one another to survive. In the absence of ? reliable parental care, children turn to siblings for support, leading to strong sibling bonds. Being with siblings in placement helps to mitigate the impact of separation and loss and offers continuity, support and a sense of safety and security for children.

Practice wisdom and research support the premise that children experience better permanency outcomes when placed with their siblings. These outcomes include greater placement stability, fewer emotional and behavioral difficulties, fewer placements and fewer days in placement. Most older youth who age out of the system originally came into care with one or more siblings.

Preserving the bond between brothers and sisters is an essential part of their long-term emotional well-being. Placing siblings together, or enabling them to maintain contact when they are separated, preserves their connections with one another and to their family. This results in improving long-term safety, well-being and permanency, whether the ultimate plan is reunification, adoption, or permanent placement with kin.

For the child welfare agency to be successful in keeping siblings together, all participants in the child welfare system need to be educated and supported in maintaining siblings together and facilitating contacts and visits through legislation, policy, practice and resources. Training in the philosophy and advantages of keeping siblings together can include all agency staff, foster and adoptive parents, attorneys, judges and others involved in child welfare, e.g., therapists, residential staff and mental health providers.

Accurate data and accountability systems will need to be in place to track siblings in care and continuously evaluate services provided for them.

Applying Principles to Practice

Effective recruitment of families for siblings is driven and supported by an attitude of abundance regarding the availability of families to keep siblings together. This includes having a belief that kinship, foster and adoptive families are willing to step forward to assist the agency in keeping siblings together.

The following principles—which grow out of, and align with, these attitudes—are offered to frame an agency's recruitment and retention practices related to siblings:

1. The agency will train all staff in the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be effective in finding and supporting kinship, foster and adoptive families to parent siblings.
2. The agency will proactively pursue placing siblings together with kinship and/or fictive kin, including paternal kinship families, whenever possible.
3. The agency will diligently recruit and prepare a sufficient number of quality homes for siblings coming into care, who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children in care.
4. The agency will use best practices and consider non-traditional families and innovative ways to recruit and retain families to keep siblings together. These practices include:
   - Accurate data regarding children in care and current foster and adoptive families will be made available to staff to assist in planning and targeting recruitment for siblings.

- Community-based organizations, including faith-based communities, will be engaged to help recruit and support families to foster and adopt siblings.
- Existing foster, adoptive and kinship families who care for siblings will be involved in finding and supporting new resource families for siblings.
- Evaluation of methods will be used to inform planning.
- Technical assistance and training will be utilized to improve methods as needed.

5 Licensing and/or approval standards will encourage placement of siblings together and be applied flexibly to qualify families to care for siblings together, except when safety precludes placements.

6 Special funding and resources will be available for concrete items and/or services, such as beds, transportation, arranging sufficient space to help families qualify to care for sibling groups.

7 All foster and adoptive families will be offered training to help them provide care for sibling groups. Mentoring, orientation, and ongoing training will be strengthened to highlight the importance of keeping siblings together.

8 Support services will be provided to help resource families keep siblings together, e.g., respite care, supportive counseling, community-based support and other incentives.

9 Families who are parenting different members of a sibling group will be supported and encouraged to use natural means to bring siblings together, e.g., going to temple or church together, going to sporting events, holiday events, family gatherings and reunions.

10 If siblings are not placed together, the agency will make all reasonable efforts to provide for frequent visitation and ongoing contact among the siblings. When siblings are separated in placement, efforts will be made to place children in homes that are in close proximity to one another.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-351)

Guidance on Sibling Placements

The title IV-E agency must:

- Make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, adoption or guardianship placement.
- Facilitate frequent visitation or ongoing interactions for siblings who cannot be placed together (as determined by the agency).
- Make exceptions when the agency determines that placement together or visitation/ongoing interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.

The title IV-E agency has discretion to:

- Define siblings or sibling groups.
- Set standards for visitation and contact (a minimum of monthly).
- Determine appropriate settings and supervision of visits.

The Children's Bureau encourages an agency to:

- Develop standard decision-making protocols for workers.
- Conduct periodic reassessments of situations in which siblings are unable to be placed together or have frequent visitation.

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR
DILIGENT RECRUITMENT
at AdoptUSKids

More free resources at:
www.nrcdr.org

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Practice Principles for the

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF KINSHIP, FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Sibling Group Considerations at Every Step

Do all families have equal access and staff responsiveness at all steps in the process without regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, socio-economic status, language, age, sensory impairment, disability or other factors such as literacy?

Targeted Recruitment

T.1 To what extent is keeping sibling groups together a priority for your agency and staff?

T.2 Does your data tell you the number and characteristics of the families you need to recruit for sibling groups?

T.3 How can you be successful in searching for relatives to keep siblings together?

T.4 How are community based resources engaged in recruiting families for siblings?

T.5 How do you recruit across jurisdictions to keep siblings together?

T.6 What policies, strategies, and incentives are and/or need to be in place to support recruiting and retaining families for siblings?

First Contact

1.1 How do you insure consistency and quality of the intake process?

1.2 How do you insure that all of your staff are aware of and sensitive to the need for foster and adoptive families for siblings? How is this trained throughout the agency?

1.3 How do you involve families who already have siblings to support new and inquiring families?

1.4 What do you do to create a welcoming atmosphere for families?

Initial Orientation

2.1 How do you promote the need for families for siblings during orientation?

2.2 How do you include experienced families of siblings to encourage support and interest?

2.3 What materials are provided at orientation regarding sibling placements?

2.4 What else could you do at orientation to promote the need for families for siblings?

Pre-Service Training

3.1 How do you train prospective families about the importance of sibling relationships; the myths; the challenges; the rewards of parenting siblings?

3.2 How do you include the need for continuous birth parent involvement?

3.3 How do you emphasize the agency's philosophy and beliefs about keeping siblings together?

Application Process

4.1 How do you encourage and handle applications from relatives/kin of siblings?

4.2 What supports are available to help relatives qualify?

4.3 What else do you do to help encourage and qualify non-kin foster and/or adoptive families to provide care for siblings?

4.4 What do you do to assure that all families have equal access to the application process?

Mutual Assessment /Home Study

5.1 How are staff trained to do effective home studies and prepare families to care for and support siblings?

5.2 How are staff trained to do effective home studies with relatives/kin?

5.3 How do you explore a family's interests, myths and fears about fostering and/or adopting siblings?

5.4 How do you help a family prepare to foster and/or adopt a sibling group?

Licensing and Approval

6.1 How are staff trained to know about and utilize the agency's policies, such as exception policies, for placing sibs together?

6.2 Can your procedures be simplified and time-bound to assure timely approval of exceptions?

6.3 How are staff supported in completing their work in a timely way?

6.4 Is there a way to expedite licensing and/or approval for relatives and/or others qualified for sibling placements?

Placement

7.1 Does the agency have clear and consistent policies, procedures and accountability for keeping siblings together in placement?

7.2 How are siblings kept together when they come into care sequentially?

7.3 How do you assure that siblings are reunited in care?

7.4 How do you assure that when a child has to move that sibling reunification is seriously re-considered?

7.5 How do you insure that siblings who could not be placed together are connected in meaningful ways?

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Children's Bureau

10 Realities OF SIBLING ADOPTION

Sibling relationships are likely to be the longest-lasting relationships people will experience throughout their lives. For children in foster care and who are waiting to be adopted, remaining connected with siblings provides meaningful, powerful opportunities to experience strong relationships that can thrive throughout their lives. It is possible and crucial to keep siblings connected and placed together whenever possible. The realities described below offer hope and key approaches for countering some of the common reasons given for separating siblings.

1 Children experience better outcomes when they are placed with their siblings.

Keeping siblings together is often in the best interest of children and should be a priority. Many of the common concerns that may be used to justify separating siblings (e.g., concerns about older siblings taking on a parental role) can be addressed, avoiding subjecting children to the additional trauma of being separated from their siblings. By preparing adoptive families to meet the needs of sibling groups and by keeping siblings connected and placed together, child welfare systems can promote improved emotional and behavioral outcomes and overall well-being for children.

2 Sibling rivalry is a normal occurrence in sibling relationships.

Separating siblings who are experiencing sibling rivalry removes the opportunity for them to work through their issues and may teach them to walk away from conflict. The separation will likely increase the trauma they already feel from being separated from all that is familiar to them. Keeping siblings together in a healthy and supportive family environment will give the children an opportunity to learn to resolve differences and develop stronger sibling relationships.

3 You can keep siblings safe from each other without separating them.

Protection from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse between siblings is important; however, it is also important to understand that often this is a learned behavior and a result of past traumatic experiences. Professionals will need to distinguish between true abuse and all other forms of sibling hostility while considering measures other than separation to prevent further abuse. Simply removing a child from his/her sibling does not guarantee that the abuse will not continue in another setting. Having adoptive parents who are well-informed about trauma, aware of the abuse, and understand the dynamics of abuse will help in developing safety measures to address the behaviors while being able to keep siblings together.

4 Child welfare systems should view a child's need to be placed with siblings as a key need. This need to be placed with siblings should carry equal weight as a child's other needs as child welfare systems consider families who can meet the specific needs of children.

Children who are waiting to be adopted may have emotional, behavioral, or other challenges and needs as a result of the trauma they have experienced.

The adoptive family that is well prepared to meet the specific needs of a child will be able to keep the siblings together while also meeting each child's other needs.

5 A child may have a very different, more inclusive definition of "sibling" than the one used in law or policy.

Children who experience life in the child welfare system often form a variety of "sibling like" relationships with non-related brothers and sisters they have lived with both in their biological families and in foster care. Professionals placing children should take into consideration the child's definition of who is and is not a sibling before making adoption placement decisions.

6 Although there is a need for families for large sibling groups, most sibling groups waiting to be adopted consist of two or three children.

The majority of waiting children with siblings on the AdoptUSKids photolisting are in sibling groups of two (66%) or three (23%) siblings. Fewer are in sibling groups of four to six siblings (11%). (McRoy and Ayers-Lopez 2014)

7 There are many families who are interested in adopting sibling groups.

Most waiting families registered on the AdoptUSKids photolisting (84%) are interested in adopting more than one child. (McRoy and Ayers-Lopez 2014) Many families who express the desire to adopt a sibling group are interested in "ready-made" families. Others have had positive experiences as being part of a sibling group or having previously cared for siblings. Policies and procedures that provide exceptions and incentives for families to adopt sibling groups are essential.

8 Targeted recruitment efforts specifically designed for sibling groups are critical – and can be very successful – to identifying potential adoptive families that can keep siblings together.

Strategies including tapping into resource families who have raised siblings to recruit and talk to potential families, using media to publicize the need for families willing to adopt these sibling groups, and featuring recruitment pictures of the children taken as a group have proven most effective in placing brothers and sisters together.

9 Siblings have a unique bond that, when nurtured through placement together, can be an important source of emotional support for each other.

Research indicates that siblings placed together benefit from the sibling bond in ways that do not present problems to the parent/child relationship. Older children in the sibling group are thought to provide emotional support to their younger siblings. There is evidence to suggest that siblings who are placed separately in adoption have more anxiety and depression than those who are placed together. (Groza 2003)

10 Placing siblings together can reduce emotional and behavior problems that children and youth might otherwise experience if they were separated.

Siblings who are placed separately are more likely to demonstrate greater emotional and behavioral problems. Research indicates that when siblings are placed together, they experience many emotional benefits, fewer moves, and a lower risk for failed placements. (Leathers 2005)

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-351)

Guidance on Sibling Placements

The title IV-E agency has discretion to:

- Define siblings or sibling groups.
- Set standards for visitation and contact (a minimum of monthly).Make exceptions when the agency determines that placement together or visitation/ongoing interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.
- Determine appropriate settings and supervision of visits.

The Children's Bureau encourages an agency to:

- Develop standard decision-making protocols for workers.
- Conduct periodic reassessments of situations in which siblings are unable to be placed together or have frequent visitation.

The title IV-E agency must:

- Make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, adoption or guardianship placement.Set standards for visitation and contact (a minimum of monthly).
- Facilitate frequent visitation or ongoing interactions for siblings who cannot be placed together (as determined by the agency).
- Make exceptions when the agency determines that placement together or visitation/ongoing interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.

10 REALITIES OF SIBLING ADOPTION

Resource List

Realities 1-4

Concepts taken from:

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning. *NRCFCPP Sibling Practice Curriculum*. Hunter College School of Social Work. New York, NY.

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Reality 5

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Realities 6-7

McRoy, Ruth, Ph.D., and Ayers-Lopez, Susan, M.Ed. (2014). Ad Hoc Report: *Characteristics Analyses of Children and Youth Photolisted with Siblings on the AdoptUSKids Website and Prospective Adoptive Families Registered on the AdoptUSKids and Open to Adopting Two or More Children*. The University of Texas at Austin, Center for Social Work Research.

Reality 8

Northeast Ohio Adoption Services. (2001). *The Sisters and Brothers Together Project: Final Project Report for Federal Adoption Opportunities Grant #90 CO 0821*. Warren, Ohio.

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Groza, V., Maschmeier, C., Jamison, C., and Piccola, T. (2003). "Siblings and Out-of- Home Placement: Best Practices." *Families in Society, 84*, 480-490.

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Sibling-Friendly Agencies and Practices Keep Children Together

By Regina M. Kupecky, LSW

Although the child welfare field emphasizes birth family reunification and kinship adoption, the significance of sibling ties is often glossed over. However, when a joint placement is in the children's best interests, placing siblings together not only reduces the children's losses and preserves kinship ties, it also reduces stressed agencies' adoption costs. Siblings can help each other process the past, remember experiences, and move into the future together.

Creating a Sibling-Friendly Agency

Part of recruitment is having a sibling-friendly agency. First, educate the *entire* staff about the importance of sibling connections—everyone from the adoption recruiters and workers to the pre-service trainers, supervisors, intake workers, subsidy staff, administrators, foster care departments, and support staff. A clear understanding of sibling connections could eliminate problems that result from separation and lack of visitation in foster care. Everyone must be on board, whether from a sense of child-centered practice, or simply from the fact that placing four children in one home is cheaper than recruiting, educating, and providing post-placement services to four families.

Next, recruit for siblings all through the adoption process:

- **Intake:** That first telephone call from a prospective parent is key to setting up a friendly working relationship. The staff person should mention siblings as an option. Families need time to process new ideas.
- **First mailing:** When information packets go to families, do they mention siblings? Send a few child-specific flyers, at least one featuring a sibling group. For later education packets, the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (www.calib.com/naic or 888-251-0075) has a useful article or Three Rivers Adoption Council (312-471-8722) can share a pamphlet I wrote, called *Siblings are Family, Too.*
- **Pre-service training:** If you don't have a section on siblings, fold it into sections about loss, birth families, or attachment. Be sure that parent panels include at least one family that adopted or fostered a sibling group.

Also consider these on-going sibling-friendly practices:

- If your office displays posters of waiting children, are some of them sibling groups? Newsletter articles should also mention the need for homes for siblings.
- Do all staff members recruit, including secretaries, administrators, and janitors? If they go to churches, YMCAs, stores, or libraries, have they hung sibling-friendly posters?
- When recruiters go out to malls or fairs, do they always post pictures of sibling groups on their display?
- Are workers who complete family assessments talking about sibling groups in a positive way? Do they remind parents that few people adopt one child—families usually come back for more? By taking two or three at once, families eliminate extra paperwork.

No one wakes up one morning, calls an agency, and says "Do you have a sibling group of four children that includes three boys, ages 8–14?" The only way to successfully recruit families for specific children is specific recruitment.

- Siblings need a recruitment plan. List who is doing what and when. Ensure the plan's timely execution.
- A great picture of the sibling group together—especially if the children are touching—is a powerful tool. When separate pictures of each child are shown, it gives parents a feeling they can pick and choose whichever child they want (usually the youngest).
- Sibling groups almost always get the most calls when presented in the media. Feature sibling groups often in newspapers, television features, agency newsletters, posters, or wherever your agency recruits.
- Pre-service training groups are a great place to recruit—all the parents are there to adopt. Ask the trainer if you can have five minutes to present a sibling group. Pass out flyers and show a video of the children together.
- Don't eliminate singles or childless couples. They don't disrupt any more than married or repeat parents.
- Make sure recruiters know about available subsidies. Many parents feel they can't adopt a group because of costs and are reassured to learn of financial assistance.
- When an event such as a recruitment picnic is planned, buy each sibling in the group the same shirt so that prospective parents can spot them all in the crowd. Make sure they eat at the same table or play together.
- Measure success in terms of events, not time. Agencies separate children because "we haven't found a family in five months." But have you tried every recruitment idea once, then again? If so and still no response, then reassess the recruitment plan.

Some sibling groups cannot be placed together. Prior to recruitment, sibling groups' attachments to each other and their primary caretakers as well as their safety when in the same home should be assessed. But with lifebook work and careful preplacement preparation, many more sibling groups can be together than are presently. We have 117,000 children waiting in the United States. If we place them two by two that is only 58,500 homes—if three by three only 39,000 homes. So make your life easier and the children happier. Create a sibling-friendly agency and recruitment practice.

Ms. Kupecky has spent more than 25 years in the adoption field and frequently presents workshops about siblings, attachment, and preparing children for adoption. She co-authored Adopting The Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special Needs Kids *and works at the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio. Contact her at 440-230-1960 ext. 5 or reginaku@msn.com.*

ENGAGING, DEVELOPING, AND SUPPORTING PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES

for Siblings Groups

As your child welfare system recruits families to adopt sibling groups, you will likely consider the starting point in the process to be when the family first contacts you. From the family's perspective, however, they have almost certainly been thinking about building their family through adoption for a long time before they make their initial inquiry. As your system responds to families inquiring about adopting sibling groups, it is crucial that you provide a welcoming, engaging approach to helping the family explore the possibility of adopting. Your system's response to prospective families sets the tone for how engaged and supported families feel as they work with you. The information you share with families from the beginning can help them in developing their understanding of the needs of children and youth who are waiting to be adopted, assessing their capacity as a family, and identifying what skills they will need to develop in order to meet those needs.

When prospective families begin orientation and training, your agency can support families who are interested in adopting siblings by helping them develop their understanding of the importance of sibling relationships and the effects that trauma and separation resulting from abuse and neglect can have on the relationships and behavior of children adopted from the foster care system.

By partnering with prospective families to help them assess their ability to parent sibling groups and helping them develop skills, strategies, and support systems for parenting sibling groups, you can build a pool of families who will be able to meet the unique needs of sibling groups waiting to be adopted. In the process, you will build a relationship with the families, demonstrating to them that your agency will be an active partner with them to help them continue to develop and strengthen their ability to meet the needs of children.

Tips for Engaging and Developing Prospective Families for Sibling Groups Beginning at Their First Inquiry

- Make families' interaction with your agency supportive and engaging starting at their first point of contact by implementing an agency-wide customer service approach. Demonstrate that families are a valuable partner with the agency in meeting the needs of children and youth who are waiting to be adopted. See our resources and publications on how to improve family development and support through customer service.
- Ensure that staff who are responding to inquiries from prospective parents are skilled and knowledgeable about the needs of children and youth in sibling groups who are waiting to be adopted. Provide these staff with clear information, talking points, and answers to common questions from prospective parents. This information should cover the effects of trauma on children in foster care; the skills and qualities that families find most helpful in parenting sibling groups adopted from foster care; and the support structures and services available to families who adopt sibling groups.
- Share information about the number and characteristics (e.g., sizes of sibling groups, age ranges of children in sibling groups, etc.) of sibling groups waiting to be adopted in your area to help prospective families become more familiar with the sibling groups who are waiting to be adopted.

- Build in approaches in your early contact with prospective families to help families self-assess their own capacity to parent a sibling group so that they can make an informed decision about whether to move forward in the licensing or approval process.
- Tell families about resources where they can learn more about specific sibling groups available for adoption both locally and nationally, such as state and regional adoption exchanges and the AdoptUSKids national photolisting.
- Connect prospective families with a parent liaison or mentor who can help them navigate the process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent, including both completing the procedural steps and addressing their concerns and questions.
- Provide pre-service training that contains specific information on the importance of sibling relationships and the impact of sibling separation. Help families explore special considerations involved in adopting sibling groups, including: the likelihood of siblings having been separated in foster care; the possibility of older siblings having taken on parental roles with their younger siblings; the effects of siblings living apart and potential challenges as they learn to live together again; and the possibility of children having a sibling connection with children who may not fall under the child welfare system's definition of "sibling."
- Connect families with educational resources providing information about important topics such as: trauma, grief and loss; attachment issues; and older siblings taking on parental roles with younger siblings. Understanding these issues will enable prospective parents to assess their skills and capacity to parent sibling groups.
- Help families assess their own individual and family strengths and concerns and how those strengths and concerns will affect their ability to meet the needs of a sibling group. This will help them to be better prepared, have realistic expectations, and know when and how to seek assistance with parenting siblings placed in their home. Work with families to identify specific strategies for developing their strengths and skills based on each family's self-assessment.
- Develop a pool of spokesfamilies from approved foster or adoptive families who have parented siblings from the foster care system and can share their real life experiences with prospective families to help to them understand what might be experienced by newly adopting families.
- Help families explore their network of social support that they can turn to for recreation, guidance, emotional support, or other assistance as they prepare to adopt a sibling group.
- Connect families to opportunities to become involved with or to support siblings waiting to be adopted while they wait to be matched with a sibling group. These opportunities can help families deepen their understanding of the importance of keeping siblings connected and identify skills they have or need to strengthen in order to meet the needs of sibling groups.
- Give families a list of community resources that can provide helpful support (e.g., camps, family support groups, resources for getting larger vehicles, etc.). Families who have adopted sibling groups can be a valuable source of suggestions for this resource list, based on their own experience identifying their needs and accessing support.
- Create a "buddy" network for the family made up of foster and adoptive parents who have or are currently parenting sibling groups as a means of support and ongoing learning and development and who may be able to provide respite care.
- Provide ongoing training and learning opportunities to families on helpful topics identified by other families who have parented sibling groups.

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www.nrcdr.org

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Appendices: Chapter 6

Appendix 6-1
Phone Interaction With Families

Suggests simple steps for improving customer service as you interact with current and prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families.(National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 6-2
Prospective Parent Orientation Sessions

Offers simple ideas for creating a more welcoming and encouraging climate at orientations for prospective parents.(National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 6-3
Every Month Is Customer Service Month

Offers ideas for partnering more effectively with prospective and current parents by integrating customer service principles in your daily work. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 6-4
Fostering Futures NY

Summary of Fostering Futures NY, which recruits teams of volunteers from faith communities to support local foster families.

Improving Customer Service

PHONE INTERACTIONS WITH FAMILIES

5 Things You Can Do

For prospective and current foster, adoptive and kinship parents, much of their interaction with the child welfare agency takes place by phone. Although these interactions may sometimes seem minor, it is important to remember that each interaction with a family makes an impression—either positive or negative—and may affect the likelihood that the family will remain engaged with the agency. As you work to recruit and retain families for children, you will see more success if you find ways to strengthen your relationships with prospective families at every chance you get.

1 Answer the phone with a positive attitude.

Foster and adoptive parent retention is everyone's business. Having a welcoming attitude is the basis of good customer service.

2 Call back promptly.

Return all phone calls to prospective and current foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers within 24 hours. Even if you are waiting for more information and can't answer the caller's questions, call them back to let them know that you're working on their questions.

3 Be responsive even when you can't answer the phone.

Make your outgoing voicemail message warm and friendly, and state that you'll return messages within 24 hours. Make sure that your voicemail message is current and accurately describes whether you are on vacation or are currently in the office.

4 Avoid using jargon and acronyms.

Parents are likely not familiar with a lot of the terms that are commonly used within child welfare agencies and it's not their responsibility to know all of the agency-speak. Be plainspoken and explain things in ways that your friends and family would understand, but don't speak down to anyone or be condescending.

5 Help the caller get what they need.

Your job isn't to answer the phone, it's to be helpful. If a parent (or prospective parent) is calling with one question, they likely would benefit from other related information but may not know what to ask. You're the expert, so think about that additional information would be helpful to the caller. If you can't help the caller, don't hang up until you have either made a plan to get an answer and get back to them or connected the caller to someone who can answer their questions.

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Improving Customer Service

PROSPECTIVE PARENT ORIENTATION SESSIONS

10 Things You Can Do

For many prospective parents, orientation sessions provide their first in-depth introduction to the adoption process and your agency. This interaction lays the groundwork for prospective parents' relationships with your agency. The experience that prospective parents have at the orientation session will send important messages about how welcoming, supportive and encouraging your agency is. Focusing on ways to incorporate good customer service principles into this session can help make sure that the messages parents receive about your agency are positive.

1. Provide clear, detailed directions to the location—including directions for where to park and where to enter the building—to everyone who expresses interest in attending the orientation session. Providing this information helps reduce parents' concerns about finding the location; it also sends a nice message that you're anticipating their questions and wanting to help them navigate the adoption process from the very first step.
2. Reserve the best parking spots at the orientation location for the prospective parents. Arrange to ask staff and speakers to park farther away from the front door.
3. Hold the orientation session in a room that is welcoming, clean and friendly. You can help create a positive environment in the room by displaying youth artwork, pictures of youth and photos of diverse families.
4. As part of your presentation at orientation sessions, be clear about the agency's nondiscrimination policy and the diversity of families that you welcome (e.g., single parents, same-sex couples, people who rent rather than own homes, etc.). Being explicit about seeking a wide variety of families—and your agency's commitment to encouraging and supporting them throughout the process—will help make prospective parents feel welcome, accepted and valued.
5. Provide prospective parents with a map or outline of the adoption process in your agency so they can see where they are in the process and understand the expected timeframes for completing upcoming steps in the process.
6. Provide national, State and local data on the number of children in care, the children who are waiting for adoption and what the needs of the agency are.
7. Ensure that trainers and presenters are well informed and can speak well to a public audience.
8. Have PowerPoint presentations, notebooks and handouts that are easy to read, accurate and consistent, so that families get the same information no matter what office or trainer provides the information.
9. Presenting videos, pictures and scenarios or actual people who can give a sense of the children in foster care as well as what the agency is looking for in terms of foster and adoptive parents makes the situation more real for those attending.
10. Provide clear information about costs, fees, reimbursements and other details that families will need in order to make an informed decision about whether to pursue foster care or adoption.

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Every Month is...

Customer Service Month

In child welfare work, responsive, helpful, respectful service to all of our key partners—including current and prospective families—should be a part of our work every day and every month. These daily tips offer simple ways to infuse customer service principles into your work.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 Ask the families you work with what "respect" means to them and how they like to have respect shown to them.	2 Schedule a time in your day each day to return phone calls and e-mails to current and prospective parents. Make it a priority!	3 Think about your favorite place to shop or your favorite restaurant. What do they do to provide great customer service? What tips could you borrow from them to apply in your work with families?	4 Ask to have time in a staff meeting to discuss the importance of providing good customer service to families and colleagues.	5 Type up detailed, clear directions (by car and public transportation) to the location(s) for your parent orientation events. Distribute these widely to all relevant staff to share with prospective parents.
8 Greet everyone today by name,and with a genuine smile.	9 Think about the terminology you use in your work that might be confusing for families. Brainstorm alternative terms to use to be more plainspoken and clear without being condescending.	10 Browse your agency's website and test the links for important information to make sure the links are all working correctly and that families would be able to access the information they need. Report any problems to the appropriate colleagues right away.	11 Take a look at the room(s) where you hold parent orientation and training sessions. Find some ways (or solicit a local service organization) to make it more welcoming and friendly—consider adding kid artwork and photos, painting the walls and other warm touches.	12 Answer your phone right away when it rings. Answering quickly sends a message to callers that they are important and that you value them and their time.
15 Think about the questions that prospective foster and adoptive parents ask you. Develop a short document with answers to these questions to share with all prospective parents.	16 Make sure your voicemail greeting is friendly and current, updated daily, as appropriate.	17 Start a conversation with your coworkers over lunch about their best customer service experiences. Brainstorm ways that you can each incorporate those ideas into your work.	18 Try out a new customer service idea of your own!	19 Has one of your colleagues been particularly helpful to you recently? Send them a quick thank you note by e-mail and copy their supervisor. You can help create a culture that recognizes great customer service, even among colleagues!
22 When talking to foster, adoptive, or kinship parents today, ask them, "What's something my agency could do to help you feel like you're being served well?" Share the feedback you get with your colleagues.	23 Take a few minutes to celebrate your successes in providing good customer service and support to families.	24 Include clear directions and a map with the invitation to agency or community-based trainings and meetings. Also include parking and building entrance instructions.	25 Get a few parking spots at your agency's parking lot designed as "Parking for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families only" as a way of showing that your agency values these families.	26 To whatever extent possible, provide basic refreshments for trainings and meetings with foster, adoptive and kinship families, or solicit a local service group to do this as a community service project.
29 If your agency surveys your current foster, adoptive and kin families, take time to read the results—especially the comments—and brainstorm ways to keep the results in mind as you do your work.	30 Search online for "great customer service" and spend a little time reading about how various companies and organizations approach customer service. Take note of ideas that you could try out in your own work.	31 Move beyond the Golden Rule; think about practicing the Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as they want done unto them." For the next level, move on to the Double Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as they would want to have done, but don't even know to ask for or expect."		

Fostering Futures NY

Supporting foster families in building better futures for children and youth

The challenge of foster parenting

Foster parenting is a difficult job. Many of the children and youth who are placed with foster families have experienced high levels of trauma in their young lives, often due to abuse and neglect. Many have developmental problems and some are medically fragile. Even strong, experienced foster parents say that sometimes it's more than they can handle on their own.

While foster care is intended to be temporary, in reality there is a cohort of foster children and youth for whom permanent homes are difficult to find. Those who have been in and out of a succession of foster homes lack the stability, normal developmental experiences, and caring connections they would have in a stable family setting.

Fostering Futures NY provides needed support for foster families and vital community connections for children and youth in foster care.

The power of an "extended family"

Fostering Futures NY (FFNY) recruits and trains small teams of **volunteers from the community** that offer natural and practical supports to foster families. Serving as an "extended family" for foster parents and children, the teams provide stability, enriching experiences, and vital community connections. Team members pitch in when foster parents ask for help, affirming the value of what foster parents do and encouraging them to keep on doing it.

Foster families are referred to the program by local Departments of Social Services or private agencies. In general, these foster families:

- have at least one year of experience as licensed caregivers
- are strong functioning
- have developed some specialization (sibling groups, teens, or children with behavioral/social/attachment issues or physical/developmental challenges)
- are open to accepting help from faith-based organizations

Team volunteers are evaluated, trained, and coached by the FFNY **Program Director,** an experienced child welfare professional. All volunteers undergo state and federal criminal background checks, including clearance by the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles and the Statewide Central Registry. They receive training in the basics of the child welfare system, confidentiality, and reporting abuse or maltreatment. They do **not**:

- serve in the capacity of social workers or therapists
- proselytize or promote religious beliefs
- attend Service Plan Review meetings, court, etc.
- formally monitor the foster home

The Program Director also works with agencies to determine which families will receive teams, educates foster families about the program, assesses their needs, and facilitates monthly meetings between the foster parents and volunteers. The director plays a key role in advising, monitoring, and troubleshooting to support trust building between team members and families.

The team acknowledges that foster parents are the experts in caring for the children in their home and take the lead from them in lending the assistance that foster parents need, such as:

- Emotional support
- Minor household maintenance and repairs
- Meal preparation
- Childcare, allowing a night out
- Transportation to appointments
- Homework help or tutoring for children
- Helping youth develop life skills such as budgeting, job hunting, cooking, etc.

The types of assistance are different for each family, based on the needs expressed by the foster parents.

Improved outcomes for foster families

Fostering Futures NY is designed to support foster parents and promote better outcomes for children and teens, such as:

- Lower stress levels for foster parents and families
- Reduced burnout and increased retention of high-quality foster parents
- Placement stability for children and youth
- New connections between foster families and resources in the community
- Increased contact with supportive individuals and groups
- Youth having access to knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to be successful in life
- Safe, stable, nurturing relationships between children in care and team members

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Growing in New York State

Fostering Futures NY is a program of Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI), a nonprofit agency and an experienced provider of technical assistance to human services agencies.

FFNY began as a pilot program in the Capital Region in July 2014 with support from the **Innovations in Foster Parent Recruitment** initiative of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. The initiative is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau.

Over the past year, FFNY has developed key relationships with local Departments of Social Services, voluntary foster care agencies, and the community in the Capital Region. Volunteer teams have been formed and are being matched with local foster families referred by agencies.

During its startup period, FFNY was supported through grant funds. With the end of public funding, FFNY will seek support from private sources to sustain and expand this innovative program.

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WRI
Serving the human services community

Appendices: Chapter 7

Appendix 7-1
Social Media Considerations: Should My Office Be in There?

A series of questions for agencies to ask before planning a social media strategy. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

Appendix 7-2
Developing a Terms of Use Policy for Your Agency's Facebook Page

This tip sheet provides some ideas about why agencies might want to create a "Terms of Use" policy, and includes the AdoptUSKids' Facebook page "Terms of Use," which can be adapted for agencies' use. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 7-3
Facebook 101 for Child Welfare Professionals

An introduction to using Facebook to reach foster, adoptive, and kinship families, providing an overview of Facebook pages and how they could be used in the context of child welfare agencies. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Appendix 7-4
Facebook 201 for Child Welfare Professionals

Strategies and best practices for using Facebook to reach foster, adoptive and kinship families, including tips and best practices to get the most out of a Facebook page. (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment)

Social Media Considerations: Should my office be in there?

Audience & Mission

Analyze your Audience

Identify importance audience segments that you specifically want to reach.

- Who is or should be interested in your program?
- Why should they care about your program?
- How do they currently obtain information online and offline?
- What does the online conversation currently look like?
- What barriers may exist that prevent you from reaching your target audience segments?

Deliver Value

Identify the value you will bring to your audience and to your program.

- Does this further your agency & program's mission?
- Are you duplicating existing resources or filling a void?

Be Strategic

Dissemination vs Engagement vs Collaboration

- What would the interaction look like if fully successful?
- Does this align with overall communication plan & objectives?

Strategic Use

Choose the Right Tool

Every platform has a different culture that requires a different style of messaging.

- What tools does your target audience use?
- What experience do you have with the different platforms?
- Do resources in your office help determine which platform you should use?

Manage with a Plan

Determine the roles and responsibilities required to get started and keep going.

- Who will be responsible for managing content and moderating engagement?
- Will you need to develop and clear new content?
- What voice/personality will you have?
- How will you be responsive to your audience?
- What's the criteria for when to say what?

Leverage Others

Chances are there are others out there doing something like what you want to do.

- What other organizations and/or Gov offices are doing similar activities?
- Are there opportunities to partner and/or merely support them?
- How will this integrate with your traditional media or in-person efforts?

Practical Considerations

Requirements

Availability

Has the Department signed a TOS agreement with the tool you wish to use? Visit http://www.hhs.gov/web to find out.

Accessibility

Is the platform you plan to use accessible to those with disabilities? If no, then the content must be available elsewhere.

Records Management

How will you capture posts/comments? Will you be able to respond to a FOIA request?

Resources

How often will you post? Who is has to be involved in the carrying out your strategy?

Promotion

How will your target audience find out about your new effort? Through what avenues do you already have their attention?

Ongoing Quality Assurance

What mechanisms will you have in place that provide feedback (internal and/or external) on your activities? How regularly will you monitor & report on the efficacy of your efforts? What metrics are available and which will you use?

Goals/ Evaluation

How will you measure "success"?

Visit http://www.hhs.gov/web

Facebook for Child Welfare Professionals:

DEVELOPING A TERMS OF USE POLICY

for Your Agency's Facebook Page

Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

Benefits of Having a Terms of Use Policy

In most cases, people who interact with your agency through your Facebook page will post comments and information in courteous and polite ways. Most of your agency's fans on Facebook will likely be current and prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families who are seeking information or are genuinely interested in what your agency is doing, and their conduct will reflect a desire to interact with you accordingly.

However, there may be times when people commenting on your agency's posts or posting to your agency's Facebook page behave in a way that is inappropriate or aggressive, or otherwise creates a hostile environment for other people who interact with your agency through Facebook. In order to be prepared for those rare instances, we advise agencies to have a Terms of Use policy as part of their Facebook page. You can use this policy to offer guidelines for what is acceptable behavior by those who use your Facebook page; it should cover instances such as the use of profanity, threatening language, spam posts, confidentiality of children in care, etc. Your agency can define what constitutes a spam post within your Terms of Use policy; we recommend including in your definition: comments or posts on your agency's page that promote products or services that are irrelevant to the topics typically discussed on your Facebook page. Or, you might decide to use a stricter definition, and prohibit all posts or comments that promote any goods or services.

Best Practices for Enforcing Your Terms of Use Policy

Your agency should not use a Terms of Use policy as a rationale for removing posts or comments that offer criticism or complaints. Social media best practices call for allowing these types of posts, when they are expressed appropriately, and making a concerted effort to address the person's concerns. Given the public nature of social media conversations, it will reflect well on your agency—to everyone who witnesses the interaction—when you make a sincere attempt to resolve these issues.

Below is the AdoptUSKids' Facebook page's Terms of Use policy. We modeled ours, in part, after one of the Facebook pages for the U.S. Department of State, with some minor changes and additions specific to our communications. We encourage child welfare agencies to use this as a template for your own Terms of Use and modify it as appropriate.

AdoptUSKids Facebook Page Terms of Use

1. Acceptance of Terms

Welcome to the AdoptUSKids page on Facebook! As you will note on our Facebook page, AdoptUSKids is a service of the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, within whose regulations all AdoptUSKids activities, including the AdoptUSKids Facebook page (the "AdoptUSKids Page"), are operated. AdoptUSKids provides this service to you, subject to the following Terms of Use ("TOU"), which may be revised or updated by AdoptUSKids at any time without notice. You can review the current version of the TOU here at any time.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the AdoptUSKids Page is to engage audiences on issues related to adoption from U.S. foster care, and to provide relevant resources to adoption professionals and families who have adopted children from foster care or in the process of pursuing adoption from foster care.

3. Security

Your use of the AdoptUSKids Page is voluntary. You are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of your login, and are fully responsible for all activities that occur under your login. AdoptUSKids cannot and will not be liable for any loss or damage arising from your failure to comply with this Section.

4. Member Conduct

We reserve the right to monitor the AdoptUSKids Page. That means all user comments and posts and all other information provided by users ("User Content") may be reviewed after being posted. In addition, AdoptUSKids expects that users will treat each other, as well as AdoptUSKids employees, with respect. AdoptUSKids may remove User Content that contains vulgar or abusive language; personal attacks of any kind; offensive terms that target specific people or groups (ethnic, racial, religious, etc.); or other material that is unlawful, defamatory, invasive of another's privacy or otherwise deemed objectionable by AdoptUSKids in its sole discretion. AdoptUSKids may also remove User Content that is spam, is "off topic," or that promotes services or products.

Any references to commercial entities, products, services, or other organizations or individuals posted by Facebook users (and not deleted by the AdoptUSKids Page administrators) are provided solely for the information of individuals using the AdoptUSKids Page. These references are not intended to reflect the opinion of AdoptUSKids or its representatives or employees concerning the significance, priority, or importance to be given the referenced entity, product, service, or organization. Such references are not an official or personal endorsement of any product, person, or service, and may not be quoted or reproduced for the purpose of stating or implying AdoptUSKids' endorsement or approval of any product, person, or service.

5. Copyright Information

The AdoptUSKids Page is intended for personal, noncommercial use. All materials posted or made available on the AdoptUSKids Page by AdoptUSKids (the "Content") are protected by copyright and other intellectual property laws, and are owned or controlled by AdoptUSKids or the person credited as the provider of the Content. You shall abide by all additional copyright or other notices, information or restrictions appearing in conjunction with any Content accessed through the AdoptUSKids Page. The AdoptUSKids Page is protected by copyright as a collective work and/or compilation, pursuant to U.S. copyright laws, international conventions and other copyright laws. Except as expressly set forth herein, you may not modify, adapt, translate, exhibit, publish, transmit, participate in the transfer or sale of, reproduce, create derivative works from, distribute, display or in any way exploit any of the Content in whole or in part. You may download or copy the Content and other downloadable items displayed on the AdoptUSKids Page for personal, noncommercial use only, provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained in such Content. Copying or storing of any Content for other than personal, noncommercial use is expressly prohibited without the prior written permission from AdoptUSKids or the copyright holder identified in the individual Content's proprietary notices including copyright notice. In addition, please note that Content within child or sibling group profiles may not be copied or displayed publicly without first obtaining the express written consent of AdoptUSKids, which may be requested at *info@adoptuskids.org*.

6. Information Quality Guidelines

Every effort is made by AdoptUSKids to provide accurate and complete information. However, we cannot guarantee that there will be no errors in information that we post on the AdoptUSKids Page. If you have questions about original information created by AdoptUSKids posted on the AdoptUSKids Facebook page, please contact us at *info@adoptuskids.org* or 888-200-4005. For questions about information linked to but not created by AdoptUSKids (such as news articles, external blogs, etc.), please contact the originating source.

You acknowledge and agree that AdoptUSKids may preserve User Content and may also disclose such User Content if required to do so by law or in the good faith belief that such preservation or disclosure is reasonably necessary to: (a) comply with legal process; (b) enforce the TOU; (c) respond to claims that any User Content violates the rights of third parties; or (d) protect the rights, property, or personal safety of AdoptUSKids, its users and the public.

Seek Your Agency's Guidance Before Implementing These Ideas

The guidelines in this document apply equally to both public child welfare staff and the staff of private agencies that provide services on behalf of the public agency.

Child welfare systems across the country are in varied stages of exploring and using social media. The ideas included in this document are general suggestions for ways to use social media in child welfare work and are intended for agency leaders and managers as they decide if and how social media can support their communication, outreach, and engagement efforts. As with all new approaches, you should consider how these suggestions might work within the context of your jurisdiction and your State's public child welfare agency's policies, guidelines, and best practices. The ideas and tips included here should not be used if they conflict with any policies of your State's public child welfare agency, regardless of whether your relationship with the agency is that of employee-employer or contractual, and should only be implemented with the support of the public agency's leadership.

You understand that the technical processing and transmission of the AdoptUSKids Page, including User Content, may involve: (a) transmissions over various networks; and (b) changes to conform and adapt to technical requirements of connecting networks or devices.

You agree that if you post User Content that contains statements or depictions of violence against any person, group of people, or organization, AdoptUSKids may report this incident and any such User Content to the appropriate law enforcement agencies.

7. Content Submitted or Made Available for Inclusion on the AdoptUSKids Page

AdoptUSKids does not claim ownership of User Content that you post on the AdoptUSKids Page. AdoptUSKids only claims ownership of Content that we generate. AdoptUSKids takes no responsibility for, nor does it endorse, represent or warrant the accuracy of any User Content. AdoptUSKids takes no responsibility for the inclusion of third-party links or other third-party content such as articles in User Content. You agree that you are responsible for securing any necessary consent, waiver, release, license or permission for your reuse or inclusion of any third-party links or other third-party content in any User Content that you post on the AdoptUSKids Page.

You grant to AdoptUSKids an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use, reproduce, modify, adapt, publish, create derivative works from, distribute, transmit and publicly display User Content (in whole or part) that you post on the AdoptUSKids Page in any media, without compensation, notification, approval or other obligation to anyone, including you.

8. Indemnity

You agree to indemnify and hold AdoptUSKids, and its officers, employees, independent contractors, agents, representatives, affiliates and other partners, harmless from any claim, demand, action, damages, losses or costs, including reasonable attorneys' fees, made by any third party in connection with, related to or arising out of any User Content that you submit, post, transmit or make available through the AdoptUSKids Page, your use of the AdoptUSKids Page, your connection to the AdoptUSKids Page, your violation of the TOU, or your infringement upon or violation of any copyright, trademark or other intellectual property rights of another.

9. Modifications to Service

AdoptUSKids reserves the right to, at any time, modify or discontinue, temporarily or permanently, the AdoptUSKids Page (or any part or Content thereof). You agree that AdoptUSKids shall not be liable to you or to any third party for any modification, suspension or discontinuance of our presence on or Content posted to Facebook.

10. Links

The AdoptUSKids Page will at times provide external links solely for our users' information and convenience. When you select a link to an external website, you are leaving the AdoptUSKids Page and are subject to the terms of use, privacy policies and security policies of the owners or sponsors of such external website. AdoptUSKids may provide, or users or other third parties may provide, links to other websites or resources through the AdoptUSKids Page. In addition, Facebook may contain links to other websites or resources. You acknowledge and agree that AdoptUSKids shall not be responsible for the availability of such external sites or resources, and does not endorse and shall not be responsible or liable for any content, advertising, products, services or other materials on or available from such sites or resources. You further acknowledge and agree that AdoptUSKids shall not be responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for any damage or loss caused or alleged to be caused by or in connection with your use of or reliance on any such content, advertising, products, services or other materials available on or through any such site or resource. AdoptUSKids shall not be responsible for the terms of use or the privacy or security policies or practices of the owners or sponsors of other websites. When you leave the AdoptUSKids Page and navigate to any other website, you should read the privacy statements of each such website.

11. Facebook's Privacy Policy

By using or accessing Facebook, and the AdoptUSKids Page, you are accepting the practices described in Facebook's privacy policy. For more information on Facebook's privacy policy, go to *http://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/*.

Contacting AdoptUSKids

If you have any questions about the TOU, please contact AdoptUSKids via email at *info@adoptuskids.org* or by phone at 888-200-4005.

Toll-Free
888-200-4005

Email
INFO@ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG

WWW.ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG

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FACEBOOK 101

Facebook 101 for Child Welfare Professionals:

AN INTRODUCTION TO USING FACEBOOK

to Reach Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families

Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

What is social media?

Social media encompasses a wide range of online networks that connect people. There are many well-established social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) and other new ones being developed and gaining in popularity (e.g. Pinterest, Tumblr, etc.). Although there are some similarities across social media networks, most have distinct functions and styles. For example:

- Facebook is commonly used for more informal, social interaction
- Twitter uses short blurbs of information and brief conversations
- LinkedIn is for professional networking
- Flickr is for sharing photos and blogging
- YouTube is for sharing videos

Many more social media networks exist and tend to ebb and flow in terms of popularity and usage.

How does Facebook differ from other networks?

Facebook offers many features and has functionality that differentiates it from other social media platforms. Understanding these differences can help child welfare agencies assess whether Facebook is an appropriate tool to use as part of your agency's work. Here are just a few of Facebook's features and functionality:

- Facebook gives you the ability to share many different types of information including photos, links, and videos
- There are great ways for those who are following your agency's Facebook page (i.e., "fans") to engage with your agency and with others through the use of comments and "Likes"
- Your agency's Facebook fans can share your agency's posts, creating the possibility of significantly extending the reach of the information your agency distributes on Facebook
- Fans can communicate with your agency through private Facebook messaging

How could my agency use Facebook?

There are many possibilities for how child welfare agencies can use Facebook to support outreach, recruitment, retention, and efforts to communicate with prospective and current parents. For example, agencies could use Facebook to:

- Share information about upcoming foster and adoptive parent recruitment events, orientation sessions, and other events for prospective foster and adoptive parents. *Note: Using Facebook should not replace other ways of sharing this information, but should instead supplement your agency's other outreach efforts.*
- Share information about upcoming awareness-raising events, supplementing your agency's other dissemination and outreach methods
- Feature profiles of children who are waiting to be adopted to help prospective parents learn more about children in foster care who are available for adoption from your agency. *Note: You should only do this with the child caseworker's approval and on a case-by-case basis with appropriate preparation of the child. More information on this strategy can be found in our* ***Facebook 201*** *guide.*[1]

1 **"Facebook 201 for Child Welfare Professionals: Strategies and Best Practices for Using Facebook to Reach Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families"** – available on the AdoptUSKids website at *http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/facebook-201-for-child-welfare-professionals.pdf*

- Make it easier for families to find out about the resources your agency has to offer by sharing information and links to resources for foster, adoptive, and kinship families about parenting children with special needs; participating in parent support groups; accessing services and support from the agency; and other information that will be helpful to families
- Provide answers to common questions from prospective foster and adoptive parents—this provides both a service to families currently working with your agency and to prospective parents who see the information as well
- Post success stories about foster, adoptive, and kinship families, and youth who were formerly in foster care, which can help in your recruitment and retention efforts. *Note: You should only do this with permission from the families and youth involved, following best practices for protecting individuals' privacy.*
- Connect with youth who were formerly in foster care, including providing easy ways for youth and young adults to reconnect in an informal way with your agency for support and resources
- Keep in touch with youth who are in independent living arrangements through two-way communication via Facebook's private messages function
- Have an additional opportunity to find out about youth who are in independent living settings or who have aged out of foster care, including getting updated information about their location, living situation, and emerging needs for support, assuming they share this information publicly on Facebook
- Link to commonly needed forms and information for foster, adoptive, and kinship families, including details about foster care, adoption subsidy, or guardianship payments; respite care providers; parent group meetings; and other information that will be helpful to families. *Note: It is becoming more common for people to ask for these kinds of information via Facebook instead of looking on your website or contacting your agency by phone or email.*

How to Request Training and Technical Assistance in Social Media

We offer free training and technical assistance (T/TA) to public child welfare agencies to help you build your agency's capacity to use social media as part of your recruitment and retention efforts. You can access our T/TA services in any of the following ways:

- Connect with us online at *adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment*
- Contact your Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Office staff to initiate a request for T/TA
- Contact us to discuss your needs by calling 303-726-0198

Seek Your Agency's Guidance Before Implementing These Ideas

The guidelines in this document apply equally to both public child welfare staff and the staff of private agencies that provide services on behalf of the public agency.

Child welfare systems across the country are in varied stages of exploring and using social media. The ideas included in this document are general suggestions for ways to use social media in child welfare work and are intended for agency leaders and managers as they decide if and how social media can support their communication, outreach, and engagement efforts. As with all new approaches, you should consider how these suggestions might work within the context of your jurisdiction and your State's public child welfare agency's policies, guidelines, and best practices. The ideas and tips included here should not be used if they conflict with any policies of your State's public child welfare agency, regardless of whether your relationship with the agency is that of employee-employer or contractual, and should only be implemented with the support of the public agency's leadership.

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FACEBOOK

201

Facebook 201 for Child Welfare Professionals:

STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR USING FACEBOOK

to Reach Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families

Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

GETTING READY

Initial Steps

Facebook: Personal Profiles vs. Organizational Pages

There are two distinct types of pages on Facebook – personal profiles and organizational pages. Personal profiles, which Facebook recently started referring to as "Timeline," are ones created by individuals to interact with their family and friends. Organizational pages are created to represent businesses, agencies, organizations, or public figures such as celebrities and politicians.

If your agency is going to establish a presence on Facebook, you need to establish that presence as an organizational page, not a personal profile. Using a personal profile for an agency violates Facebook's Terms of Service, and will likely result in your page getting deleted at some point.

Laying the Foundation

Once your agency makes the decision to create a Facebook page, you may need to coordinate with your information technology staff. This is particularly true if your agency's employees are currently restricted from accessing social media sites on work computers, because you will need to get this restriction lifted for staff involved in managing your agency's Facebook page.

Assign Staff

One of the first things you should to do is identify which staff member will be responsible for posting content and responding to comments and questions on your agency's Facebook page. This person should serve as the primary administrator for your agency's page. Some key things to think about when making this decision include:

- Remember that this person will be communicating with the public in a public forum much like a spokesperson in a press conference does. Make sure the person speaking on behalf of your agency on Facebook is knowledgeable about your agency, including its policies and practices; can communicate clearly and effectively in writing; and is skilled at knowing when to handle comments and questions on their own versus seeking input from someone in a supervisory capacity.
- The person who serves as your agency's Facebook page administrator should also have a strong understanding of how to respond to sensitive situations that may arise through posts people may leave on your agency's Facebook page.
- Age has nothing to do with ability to manage social media well, so do not make the assumption that a young person is automatically the best person to handle social media for your agency.

Final Considerations

When your agency is ready to establish a Facebook page, you should think about two key considerations for actually creating the page:

1. The person who creates your agency's page must have a personal Facebook profile already, since organizational Facebook pages can only be created by someone who is logged into a personal Facebook account. This person's personal profile will not be linked to your agency's page publicly, but the only way—under current Facebook requirements—to establish an organizational page is to have someone with a personal Facebook account create the page.

2. The person who creates your agency's page should be someone who will be an administrator of the page, at least initially, because the act of creating the agency's page will automatically give this person administrator status.

Once you have created your agency's page, you can assign additional people—each of whom must have a personal Facebook profile—as administrators for the page. Here are some suggested guidelines for assigning administrators to your agency's Facebook page:

- Your agency should have more than one person set up as an administrator.
- Your agency should assign as administrators anyone who will be posting and responding on behalf of the agency, and anyone directly supervising them.
- Your agency should have clear guidelines about who is posting content or responding to comments at any given time. For example, at AdoptUSKids, we have assigned a social media specialist to handle all posts and comments on our page. Additional administrators provide back-up when the primary administrator is out for vacation or sick days, or in case of emergencies. By having a clear plan for who has primary responsibility for managing your agency's Facebook content, and who will provide back-up support, your agency can avoid duplicating messages or missing responses to posts.

It is critical to remember to remove people as administrators for your agency's page when it is no longer appropriate for them to have administrator status (e.g., when they change positions, leave the agency, are no longer authorized to speak on behalf of the agency, etc.). Your agency should have a clear protocol in place to ensure the list of people who have administrator status for your Facebook page is current.

Have a Plan

Plan Your Content

In any given month, your agency likely plans to communication with the public in multiple ways. These efforts might include emails to foster, adoptive, and kinship families; ads to run in local news publications; and much more. These communication efforts might also include events such as recruitment events and matching parties.

As you begin to plan how to implement social media communications within your agency, it is important to coordinate with your agency's communications staff—or program staff if they are responsible for distributing announcements to the public—to ensure that your agency's communication through Facebook aligns with broader communication plans and strategies.

Seek Your Agency's Guidance Before Implementing These Ideas

The guidelines in this document apply equally to both public child welfare staff and the staff of private agencies that provide services on behalf of the public agency.

Child welfare systems across the country are in varied stages of exploring and using social media. The ideas included in this document are general suggestions for ways to use social media in child welfare work and are intended for agency leaders and managers as they decide if and how social media can support their communication, outreach, and engagement efforts. As with all new approaches, you should consider how these suggestions might work within the context of your jurisdiction and your State's public child welfare agency's policies, guidelines, and best practices. The ideas and tips included here should not be used if they conflict with any policies of your State's public child welfare agency, regardless of whether your relationship with the agency is that of employee-employer or contractual, and should only be implemented with the support of the public agency's leadership.

Integrating your agency's Facebook presence with other communication efforts will have multiple benefits, including:

- Increasing the effectiveness of your messages by reinforcing them through multiple channels. For example, emails your agency sends will be more effective if they are supported and reinforced by posting similar content to your Facebook page at about the same time your agency sends out the email.
- Helping to ensure consistency in messaging across channels, by coordinating what your agency says through each communication channel. Your agency's emails, ads, and Facebook posts should contain the same critical information points, in order to increase your audiences' understanding of your messages.
- Maximizing attendance of public events by cross-promoting them using your agency's Facebook page.

In addition to coordinating your Facebook posts with your agency's other messaging and communications, you should also consider what other resources and information you want to share with both current and potential foster, adoptive, and kinship families, and any other major audiences that interact with your agency through your Facebook page. Keep in mind that not all of these resources need to be—or even should be—directly from your agency. You should seek to share anything you think will be useful and helpful to your audience on Facebook and is consistent with your own agency's message and goals.

Your agency will likely find it beneficial to plan out the majority of the content that you intend to post on Facebook in advance, probably a month at a time, leaving a little room for flexibility to respond to new situations or take advantage of new information as it becomes available.

Have a Response Plan

Some of the information that you post on your agency's Facebook page may prompt negative responses and reactions. Additionally, there will be times when people post their own messages on your agency's page that are either complaints or some other type of negative or highly sensitive comment. Your agency should be prepared for these occurrences and have a plan to deal with it.

Based on best practices for social media, AdoptUSKids recommends including or addressing the following elements in your agency's response plan:

- Do not delete the negative comment or post unless it uses profanity or is threatening to any person or organization. *Note: It is a good idea for your agency to have a Terms of Use policy for your Facebook page to help make your guidelines clear about what kinds of posts will be deleted. AdoptUSKids has a template for Terms of Use that you are free to use and modify as needed: http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/developing-a-terms-of-use-policy-for-your-agency-facebook-page.pdf*
- Have a clear protocol for how to decide which posts your agency will delete from your page, including which supervisor or team of Facebook page administrators will make the final decision about whether to delete a post.
- If a comment or complaint is at all legitimate, acknowledge it and determine how you might be able to address the issue in a constructive and positive way. Defensive positions are almost always met with backlash, especially in social media. Remember, the conversations on your Facebook page are not just between you and the person posting, but with every person who sees your agency's Facebook page.
- When possible, the person typically in charge of handling your agency's Facebook posts and responses should also be in charge of responding to negative comments and complaints. This person should either need to know the appropriate response or know who to ask when they need additional help.

Prepare the Staff

Once your agency decides to use Facebook, your agency leadership should communicate this decision with all agency staff and specifically address:

- Why your agency has decided to begin using Facebook
- What goals your agency plans to achieve through the use of Facebook
- Which staff will be responsible for managing the agency Facebook page
- Ways that other staff might be able to be involved, whether that's through providing suggestions for content or other ideas they might have for enhancing your agency's presence on Facebook

If your agency's staff is not allowed to access social media sites at work, you may need to be prepared to answer questions about whether or not this policy will be changing to give staff who aren't involved in managing your agency's Facebook page access to social media sites.

Creating Your Agency's Facebook Page

To create a Facebook page for your agency, go to *https://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php* and follow the guidelines there. As you do this, keep in mind the following tips:

Figure 1. AdoptUSKids' cover photo includes our tagline, "Together we hold their future"

- Pay attention to the guidelines provided by Facebook for image sizes for your profile image and the cover photo. These images are part of your agency's branding and should be of good quality, just as you would use on your agency's website.
- The cover photo can be almost anything, but take note of Facebook's policies regarding not using the cover photo for "advertising." Facebook prohibits promotional messages here, although a tagline or relevant statistic is probably fine as a way of raising awareness.
- Provide complete information in the "About" section for your agency's page. Include information about ways people can contact your agency, including your street address, website, and phone numbers.
- You can create a custom Web address for your Facebook page, which will make it easier to publicize than if you use the default Web address Facebook uses for pages. Default addresses start with *facebook.com* and are followed by the name given to a page and a string of numbers such as *http://www.facebook.com/your-agency-name/35716871548*.
- When you make a custom address for you page, you can make it align with other Web addresses for your organization, such as the one for your website. For example, the AdoptUSKids custom address for AdoptUSKids' Facebook page is *www.facebook.com/adoptuskids*, and it coordinates with the website address of *http://www.adoptuskids.org*. It's important to note that once you create your custom Web address, it is unlikely you will be able to change it in the future.
- You can find additional help on setting up your page directly from Facebook at: *https://www.facebook.com/help?page=255100294550008*

GETTING STARTED

Promoting Your Page

Promote Your Page Through Your Website

Once your agency has created its Facebook Page, you will likely want to promote it and get the word out so people can follow it (or "Like" it, as the terminology of Facebook currently calls it). In order to have your agency's Facebook posts display in the "News Feed" of people's personal Facebook page, people have to click the "Like" button when they go to your Facebook page.

One of the primary ways to inform people that your agency has a Facebook page is by linking to it from your agency's website. The most common way to do this is to put links to your Facebook page on the homepage of your website, typically in top and bottom navigation. Making this addition to your agency's website will likely require coordinating with your agency's website administrators.

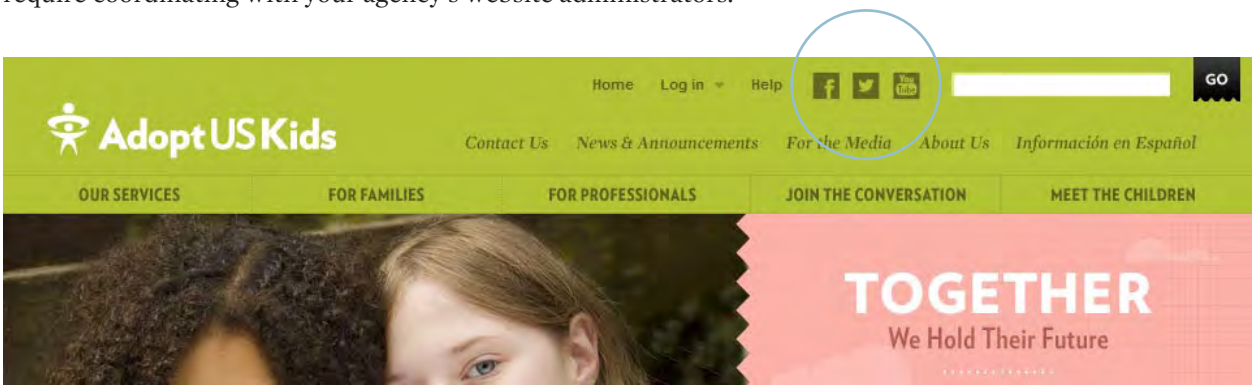

Figure 2. AdoptUSKids includes links to social media networks in the top right side of our website pages. They are also included with links in the footer on our website pages.

Promote Through Other Communications

Your agency probably already communicates with families, community partners, and the general public in a variety of ways. Many of these communication channels can be used to promote your agency's Facebook page, especially if you created a custom Web address (see the previous section "Creating Your Agency's Facebook Page"). Examples include:

- Email campaigns and newsletters—adding a link to your agency's Facebook page in the email template you use for your email campaigns and newsletters is an easy way to promote your page on an ongoing basis
- Posters, banners, and other promotional materials created for special events
- Anywhere else where you list your agency's website address and other contact information

Provide Consistently Good Content

One of the best ways to gain and keep followers for your agency's Facebook page is to provide them with valuable information. If you regularly post good content that people want, actively engage with people who follow your page, and respond promptly to questions or complaints, these activities will go a long way toward growing and maintaining your Facebook page's following.

MANAGING YOUR AGENCY'S PAGE – BEST PRACTICES

Communicating With Your Followers

Best Practices: What You Should Do

These tips are important reminders of what you should do when communicating with the followers of your agency's Facebook page:

- **Post regularly.** A Facebook page that only has content added to it every few months is not serving you or your audience very well. Social media is for you and the public to engage with each other, and part of that engagement requires making sure you're providing valuable content on a regular and somewhat frequent basis. How often is often enough? Opinions vary, but one to two posts per day is probably ideal. We do not recommend posting fewer than two to three times per week, nor should you post more than three to four times per day.
- **Respond promptly.** When people post comments, it's good to acknowledge those comments, and to do so in a timely manner. The acknowledgement could be as simple as clicking the "Like" button on their comment, or commenting in response. If someone posts a question or concern, it's even more important that your agency respond to it as quickly as possible. To that end, your agency should have someone monitoring the Facebook page for comments and questions regularly throughout the day during business hours.
- **Remember that communication on Facebook is public**. Always treat people with respect, kindness, and professionalism, just as your agency does in all other communications. Always be as honest as policies and best practices will allow. Everything you post on Facebook is public for the world to see, just as if you were on live TV.

HOW TO REQUEST TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

We offer free training and technical assistance (T/TA) to public child welfare agencies to help you build your agency's capacity to use social media as part of your recruitment and retention efforts. You can access our T/TA services in any of the following ways:

- Connect with us online at *adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment*
- Contact your Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Office staff to initiate a request for T/TA
- Contact us to discuss your needs by calling 303-726-0198

Toll-Free
888-200-4005

Email
INFO@ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG

WWW.ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG

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NEW YORK STATE | Office of Children and Family Services

Capital View Office Park
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, NY 12144

Visit our website at:
ocfs.ny.gov

For child care, foster care and adoption information, call:
1-800-345-KIDS (5437)

To report child abuse and maltreatment, call:
1-800-342-3720
TDD/TTY: 1-800-638-5163

For information on the Abandoned Infant Protection Act, call:
1-800-505-SAFE (7233)

New York State Adoption Service
1-800-345-KIDS (5437)
ocfs.ny.gov/adopt

". . . promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of our children, families, and communities . . . ."

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services will make this information available in an appropriate format upon request.