



Office of Children
and Family Services

REVITALIZING

RECRUITMENT

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

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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. Developed in 2015, and updated in 2018 with new, state-of-the-art resources, *Revitalizing Recruitment* was designed 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 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.

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 in the OCFS “Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care” (OCFS, 2015). 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 families act as healing agents for children in care. They are often the first step in helping children cope with the new reality of their lives. In turn, local social services districts (LDSSs) and voluntary agencies (VAs) 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 kinship, foster, and adoptive families.

Historically, recruitment has been focused on developing a pool of foster and adoptive parents who have not had previous connections to the child in their care. Now, practice and policy have evolved to prioritize placing children with kin.

“Kin” are individuals who have had previous, positive relationships with the child, including relatives, family friends or community members. Research confirms that placing children in kinship foster care helps them maintain important family and community connections. In addition to finding and keeping certified foster and adoptive homes, LDSSs and VAs must devote their resources to identifying, engaging, and supporting kinship homes. Placing children in traditional, non-relative foster and adoptive homes should be considered as a last resort when placement with kin is not possible.

“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

There continue to be unique challenges and opportunities in recruitment of non-relative foster and adoptive parents, such as finding homes where siblings can be kept together, homes for older youth, and homes for children with complex physical and emotional needs.

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.

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.

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. “In most states there are higher proportions of African American/Black and American Indian children in foster care than in the general population” (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2015). 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, 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. Tools have been created to help agencies take a closer look at how to overcome barriers in recruiting kinship, foster, and adoptive families to address racial disproportionality.

(See Appendix 1-2: *Racial Disproportionality Questions*.)

Kinship homes help meet common recruitment challenges. Kinship foster homes offer cultural continuity for children, may support children staying in familiar neighborhoods and school districts, and are more likely to keep siblings together. Identifying and engaging potential kinship foster homes decreases demand for non-relative foster homes, thereby reducing an agency’s need to maintain a sizeable pool of such homes.

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 pursue kin as the first option, and use more targeted and child-focused recruitment strategies, with less focus on general strategies, such as public service announcements and billboards.

A significant message that emerges from many of these resources is that good retention leads to good recruitment. Foster/adoptive parents who feel respected and valued for their work with children are more likely to continue fostering. Experienced, well-supported foster/adoptive parents become natural recruiters in their communities, leading to more qualified foster parents. Kinship foster parents who have positive experiences with the process may consider being certified as traditional foster parents for other children in need.

Although the priority is to place children with kin, kinship policy and practice may need to evolve to fully realize this goal. Many child welfare professionals have observed that the child welfare system was built around the process of finding and certifying non-relative foster care, and that its systems and processes may not fit neatly into an expanding kin-first culture and practice. Agency policies and business processes may need to be revamped to effectively shift practice into kinship care.



Many effective 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:

- Diligently seeking kinship foster homes among extended family members and friends
- Providing good support to prospective and current kinship, foster and adoptive parents
- Tailored and timely supports for kinship, foster and adoptive families

Other characteristics of successful programs include:

- Capturing and analyzing data to identify needs and trends
- Assisting prospective foster parents throughout the certification process, and continuing that support after certification and placement
- Involving foster/adoptive parents, youth, and community resources in the process
- Coordinating and communicating across units (e.g., Child Protective, Foster Care, Adoption, Homefinding, Preventive Services) to respond to kinship, foster, and adoptive parents’ needs (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, n.d.)
- 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.

Supporting children in foster care is also a community-wide responsibility. Engaging faith-based organizations, businesses, major employers, educational institutions, and other community partners strengthens an agency’s capacity to promote the safety and success of children in its care.

Additional resources

Foster/Adoptive Parent Recruitment and Retention Plan 2017-2019. NYS OCFS:
(<http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/RecruitmentandRetentionPlanTemplate2017to2019.pdf>)

Effective Practices In Foster Parent Recruitment, Infrastructure, and Retention: Case Family Programs December 2014. (<http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/EffectivePracticesinFosterParentRecruitment.pdf>)

Foster and Kinship Parent Recruitment and Support Best Practice Inventory. Redlich Horwitz Foundation: (<http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/FosterandKinshipParentRecruitment.pdf>)

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OCFS (2015). *New York State Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in Foster Care* (OCFS-2132, OCFS-2132-S)

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. *Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care, Fiscal Year 2015*. Technical Assistance Bulletin September 2017. <https://www.ncfcj.org/Disproportionality-TAB-2015>

National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment. (n.d.) *Using Integrated Recruitment and Support to Build a Strong Pool of Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families*. Retrieved May 30, 2018. http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/using-integrated-recruitment-and-support-102215.pdf

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? How are efforts to identify and engage kinship foster homes lessening the need to recruit non-relative homes? Would better outcomes be achieved if staff time and resources were redirected toward different recruitment activities?

It is critical that agencies also ask, how well are kinship foster homes being recruited and certified? National best practice shows that states should be placing from 30 to 50 percent of children in care in kinship foster homes. Placement with kin can reduce children’s trauma, increase stability, and support ongoing connections to family and culture. Recruiting kinship foster homes also maximizes an agency’s recruitment resources: the more relative foster homes an agency certifies, the fewer resources are required to find non-relative foster homes.

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

“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

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.

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

OCFS policy emphasizes that LDSSs and VAs must maintain information regarding foster and adoptive homes in the Foster and Adoptive Home Development (FAD) stage in CONNECTIONS. All of the information on prospective foster parent applicants acquired during the inquiry and orientation processes must be recorded in the FAD as early as possible, regardless of whether or not the home becomes fully certified or approved. This tracking helps agencies determine the proportion of inquiries that resulted in certified homes (OCFS, 2017).

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:

- The percentage of children placed in any kinship care arrangement
- The percentage of children initially placed in kinship foster homes (not in other kinship arrangements, such as 1017 direct placements)
- The percentage of children who transitioned into KinGAP (Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program)
- The percentage of children placed together with their siblings
- 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
- The proportion of 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.*)

An 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, ArcGIS Community Analyst, 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.

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>)

(See Appendix 2-3: *Using the Diligent Recruitment Navigator Effectively.*)

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Kin-First Recruitment

Kinship foster homes are key resources in the overall strategy for finding homes that best meet children’s needs. When children can’t live safely with their parents and are placed into care, child welfare policy prioritizes placement with relatives or someone with a positive prior history with the child. Nationally, 30% of children live in kinship foster homes, with high performing states placing up to 50% of children in care in kinship foster homes (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System [AFCARS], 2016).

Research confirms that children do best in kinship foster care. Kinship foster homes help children maintain important family and community connections, offer cultural continuity, lessen the trauma of removal, and improve the likelihood of keeping siblings together.

Placement with kin also leads to greater placement stability, which can have a significant impact on a child’s healing from trauma and ability to form attachments. When there are placement moves, this also affects the agency, compounding caseworker workload.

Recruiting kinship foster homes makes sense for an agency’s limited recruitment resources: the more relative foster homes an agency certifies, the less strain on an agencies’ non-relative foster care pool.

The fewer resources utilized to find non-relative foster homes, the more resources are available to retain and support both kinship and non-kinship foster homes. These are critical components of any comprehensive recruitment and retention plan.

Engaging kin

In some areas, the kinship family may be an underutilized 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 other family members, most family networks have members with functional strengths (Hillside Institute for Family Connections, 2014).

“Child welfare systems have increasingly come to value the role kinship caregivers have in achieving safety, well-being, and permanency for children. Placement with kin can reduce trauma, increase stability, and support ongoing connections to family and culture.”

— Laura Velez, Deputy
Commissioner, New York State
Office of Children and Family
Services

Spotlight on New York State



Staff specialize in kinship placements

In Suffolk County, kinship placements are a priority. The county LDSS has a dedicated worker that handles kinship applications and a team that expedites approvals of kinship families.

Suffolk LDSS Supervisor Brian Kennedy states, “In our county we see placement in traditional foster care as a last resort. If we are placing a child in traditional foster care it is because we have failed to stabilize the biological family and failed to find family and/or friends that can care for the child.”

Recruiting kinship families involves a slightly different approach than that 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 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].

Models for engaging kinship caregivers include *30 Days to Family* and *Family Finding*.

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. (http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/PM_ch3_30days.pdf)

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.” (http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/PM_ch3_famfinding.pdf)

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 painful 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.

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 have an impact on the supports and benefits kinship caregivers may be eligible to receive. It is critical that kin fully understand their options to make informed decisions in the best interest of the child and family, as well as in consideration of the financial implications of those decisions. Agency staff should be prepared to clearly explain the

full range of options to prospective kinship caregiver families, and to expedite approval processes. One of these options, formal kinship foster care, which provides a higher level of financial support than informal care, currently is underutilized in many counties in New York State (Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, 2018).

(For more information, see Appendix 3-1: *Kinship Chart*.)

If placement with kin is not possible, a kin-first philosophy recognizes that relatives or kin may have important relationships with the child that should be nurtured. Connections to kin help build a young person's sense of identity and provide access to important practical and emotional supports, such as a place to celebrate holidays, a listening ear, financial support, and guidance from a caring adult.

Older youth who have been in foster care for a long time may 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 Chapter 5, have developed systematic techniques to find and engage kin.

Breaking down barriers

Despite the increasing value of placing children with kin, major barriers still exist. There is widespread consensus that agencies must have these key principles in place in order to move this work forward:

1. Lead with a kin first philosophy
2. Develop written policies and protocols that make it easier to place children with kin
3. Identify and engage kin for children at every step
4. Create a sense of urgency for making the first placement a kin placement
5. Make certifying kin a priority
6. Offer all options for legal permanence for the child, including reunification and guardianship by kin
7. Create a strong community network to support kin families

From WikiHow for Kinship Foster Care (<http://www.grandfamilies.org/wikiHow-for-Kinship-Foster-Care>)

Spotlight on New York State



Commitment to kin

Starting with the belief that children have better outcomes and achieve permanency quicker when placed with kin, Onondaga County LDSS is increasing the number of children placed in kinship foster care. Onondaga County is bringing urgency to placing children with kin, with a focus on finding fathers and offering immediate supports to kin. At the moment of removal, Onondaga's "Triage Team" builds a bridge between the removing CPS worker and the permanency worker with the goal of meeting the needs of the birth family and kinship caregiver. While monetary support is important (Onondaga has a fund set aside to support kin), oftentimes services and getting answers to questions is the most important support for caregivers.

"We are aware that this whole effort of bringing more kinship families into this process is about trust," said Onondaga LDSS Deputy Commissioner James Czarniak. "We have to earn the trust of a community that does not trust us. We have to gain the trust of the staff that are approaching this work through a new lens. Lastly, we have to be diligent and honest about the challenges that kinship families face in this process and seek to support them through those challenges."

Spotlight on New York State



Marketing campaign for CPS staff

In an effort to increase kinship placements, the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) created an internal marketing campaign for child protective services (CPS) workers. CPS workers are the first agency staff who must seek family and friends when children cannot stay safely at home. The Find Family and Friends First campaign, uses posters to communicate the message with photos and quotes (click here to view one poster example, http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/V5_ACS_KINSHIP_campaign_2017.jpg) and to remind workers that caregivers may include godparents, friends of the family, or community members who have significant and positive relationships with the child in addition to maternal or paternal grandparents, aunts and uncles.

"Placing children with kin makes sense on so many levels. Children never have to spend a night with a stranger, and kinship placement:

- Keeps children connected to family and community
- Improves emotional health and overall being
- Increases placement stability
- Reduces trauma"

(The content above is from NYC ACS Find Family and Friends First 2017 campaign.)

ACS also provides a guide for workers, Kinship Care Myths and Fact Sheet (http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/Kinship_Care_Myths_and_Facts_Sheet.pdf), based on policy, best practices, and tips from child protective colleagues.

Streamlining connections with kin

Prioritizing kin is "embedded in our process," according to Elizabeth Myers, Director of Social Services for Tioga County. The "kin first" culture in the county created the expectation that children need to stay with family, and led to the development of tools to guide workers on the "who, what, and when" of engaging relatives in child welfare cases.

Prioritizing kinship foster care has been facilitated by streamlining the approval process and developing a protocol to support homefinders in approving relatives as foster parents on an emergency basis. If relatives are interested in fostering, homefinders connect with them within a day.

"Our ability to meet with people face-to-face has worked best," said Myers. Tioga caseworkers encourage prospective foster parents to be honest about their fears and concerns about becoming foster parents.

The county also has stepped up its exploration of fictive kin. "We had one case of a teenage girl with some serious mental health issues," Ms. Myers said. "She was very connected to her teacher, and we were able to emergency certify the teacher and her husband. They were not giving up on her."

As part of normal practice, kin resources are identified early during a CPS investigation with CPS workers asking children whom they can rely upon.

"Everyone is responsible," Ms. Meyer said. "If children do have to be removed, the initial engagement of families helps to have options in place and keep children connected to kin."

As in many counties, cases involving substance use disorder have put more demands on the system. In Tioga, parents abusing methamphetamines or who are cross-addicted have been a higher percentage of the caseload than those abusing opioids. Substance use disorder cases can present additional challenges in family dynamics. Ms. Myers indicated the county has had some successes: grandparents have come forward and said they want to be the resource for their grandchild, but they don't want to be the ones responsible for telling their own children what they can and cannot do. In these cases, the caregivers welcome the county's involvement in steering the case plan.

Put It Into Practice

Lessons learned in Tioga County

- If relatives are interested in fostering, connect with them face-to-face within a day
- Really listen to what kids and relatives have to say. Some may initially say “no” to fostering, but can come around with the right supports
- Be very clear with your expectations with the relative resources—don’t assume anything
- Have relatives assist you in recruiting other relatives
- Develop tools to guide workers on the “who, what, and when” of engaging relatives in child welfare cases
- Establish a protocol for homefinders to use to for emergency approval of relatives
- Teamwork is critical. Expanding kinship foster care is everyone’s responsibility

Practical tips to prioritize kin in Orange County

Supervisor Deb Pesola from Orange County shared these practical steps to complement and invigorate your current kinship process.

- “Our best chance of getting kids placed with kin is immediately. On Day 1, we need to identify a placement. The more time that goes by, the less likely a placement will be found.”
 - Orange has a Case Management Committee that convenes after a removal. This provides administrative support and helps move the process along. The group has rotating membership but always includes a senior supervisor and representatives of different program areas. “You don’t leave that room without explaining your efforts to find relatives.”
 - Once we place a child with family, ongoing support is key. “Honestly, this is an area we still all struggle with. What a relative needs is a little different than what other foster parents need.” Ms. Pesola said, “Once we make a placement, we do whatever we can to support it.” If a problem arises, the county tries to resolve rather than remove.
- “It all starts with better assessment,” Ms. Pesola said. Over 90 percent of the county’s relative placements come to certification now, a much higher percentage than in previous years. The homefinder is an accessible contact for the family. He or she can talk with the family about process. “Feeling like someone is there makes a difference.” Having an agency expert is key for not only the families, but the staff.
 - The county does refer to Kinship Navigator, which they find very helpful. They also want to strengthen the county’s connection to the Relatives Acting as Parents Program (RAPP). (<http://cceorangecounty.org/family/parenting-and-family-life/relatives-as-parents-program-rapp>)
 - “We struggle, as everyone does, with making connections to Dads and their families,” noted Ms. Pesola. Again, it is important to ask questions and ask them early. Orange County implemented the Engaging Fathers Toolkit, which helped raise awareness and provide strategies to work with paternal relatives. One suggestion is to “don’t just accept what the Mom is saying,” acknowledging that in some cases, there are many sides to a story.

Key Messages



Kin-specific recruitment

Kin-specific recruitment means exploring kinship homes first.

A kin-specific approach includes prioritizing the certification of kinship families. It also means engaging the biological parents to assess family connections and researching other supportive people in the life of the child such as teachers, coaches, and close family friends.

Kin-focused recruitment uses intensive, family-friendly tailored techniques to create permanency for youth. Case file mining and involving older youth in recruitment are key strategies.

New York State's Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP)

The New York State Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) provides financial support to kin caregivers (see expanded definition of kin below) that some of the other options do not. While not all relatives desire to be kinship foster parents, agency staff should be prepared to clearly explain the full range of options to prospective kinship caregiver families, and to expedite approval processes.

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 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 (OCFS, 2018a).

In 2018, the definition of a "prospective relative guardian" was expanded to include an adult with a positive relationship with the child including, but not limited to, step-parent, godparent, neighbor or family friend; and an individual who is related to a half-sibling of the child through blood, marriage, or adoption, and where such person is also the prospective or appointed relative guardian of such half-sibling.

In addition, KinGAP payments may now be made to the kin guardian until a child's 18th birthday if the child entered a KinGAP agreement prior to age 16, or, upon consent of the child, until the child attains 21 years of age if certain criteria are met (OCFS, 2018b).

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 the non-parent caregiver 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) and OCFS' website (<https://ocfs.ny.gov/kinship/>).

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 (<https://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. (<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/pub5108.pdf>)

Know Your Options: Relatives Caring for Children. A booklet outlining the options for kinship care in New York State. (<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/Pub5120.pdf>)

Know Your Options: Kin Caring for Children. A brochure summarizing the options for kinship care in New York State. (<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/publications/Pub5175.pdf>)

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30 Days to Family®

30 Days to Family is an intense and short-term intervention that aims to 1) increase the number of children placed with safe and appropriate relatives within 30 days of their entry into foster care and 2) ensure natural and community supports are in place to promote stability for the child. Created by the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition in St. Louis, 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. 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.

For More Information

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[https://www.foster-adopt.org/
 recruitment-programs/#30days](https://www.foster-adopt.org/recruitment-programs/#30days)

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 2018, *30 Days to Family* was being conducted in 16 sites throughout Missouri, Virginia, Rhode Island, and Ohio. Additional replication sites are planned for 2018, including Northern Rivers Family of Services in Albany, New York.

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. Replication training costs \$4,000 and take place at the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition in St. Louis, MO.

Evidence base

A longterm study by PolicyWorks LTD was produced in 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318990679_30_Days_to_FamilyR_Theory_of_Change_Testing_Comprehensive_Report. The

study found, among other positive results, that the program was successful in achieving its primary goal of increasing placements with relatives: at 125 days after entering foster care, 65.2% of children served had experienced a relative placement compared with 44.3% of the not-served population. A summary of results is available at https://www.foster-adopt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2016_30DaystoFamily_Results_Updated.pdf. Additionally, program data from 2017 showed that 80% of youth were placed with relatives or kin by case closure. PolicyWorks is underway with another replication study of sites in Ohio. *30 Days to Family* is listed in the California Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) as a child welfare program with high relevance.

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

For More Information

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[https://www.hillside.com/wp-content/
uploads/2015/01/Hillside-FF-Brochure.
pdf](https://www.hillside.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Hillside-FF-Brochure.pdf)

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.

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

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 5 of this guide describes the different types of child-specific recruitment in detail.

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

“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

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.

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 4-1: *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 4-2: *Working with African American Adoptive, Foster and Kinship Families* and Appendix 4-3: *Benefits for Children of Recruiting Latino Foster and Adoptive Families.*)

Spotlight on New York State



Analyzing characteristics of foster homes

The leadership at The Children's Home of Wyoming Conference (CHOWC) sought to fill gaps between available and needed homes in the Binghamton, N.Y. area. They decided to review their existing data to determine if they were using their pool of homes in the best possible way to meet the needs of the children coming into care.

The CHOWC team, which included a supervisor and three homefinders, first reviewed the pool of foster homes to identify any unused or underutilized homes (those which had not had a placement in the last six months). The team reviewed each home one by one to identify which homes were being used, which were underutilized, and which were completely unused and why.

The analysis resulted in four categories. The first two categories included homes with a placement and those without a placement. Homes without a placement were further divided into two subcategories: those without a placement in the previous three months, and those without a placement in the previous six months. The team then engaged in a thorough discussion of each home, with the homefinders contributing relevant knowledge about the home, such as their understanding of why the home

Story continues on pg. 32 →

Analyzing characteristics of foster homes (cont'd)

was not accepting or being offered placements. Out of approximately 120 certified homes, 17 homes were identified as underutilized (could have accepted more placements) or unused (had no placements) – almost 15 percent.

The team thought that some of these homes might be ready to close. Team members contacted each family for an update, and confirmed or changed the home's status. There were various reasons why the homes were unused or underutilized. Some families said they only wanted to adopt, others were caring for other relatives, and others no longer had time to foster for other reasons. Following the conversations, eight foster families decided to discontinue fostering. The nine families that continued were “creatively redefined” by CHOWC. Some, for example, were certified to provide respite care during gaps in placements.

Alicia Gaucher, CHOWC supervisor, stated that, “The amount of time that we spent was negligible compared to the value that we gained from knowing how and why we are using our homes in certain ways. This data impacts our needs assessment, our ability to provide supportive respite services, and our ongoing efforts to meet the needs of children in care. We plan to do this analysis annually!”

Build cultural competence

To build cultural awareness and competence, organizations and individuals must assess their attitudes, practices, and policies in relation 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 4-4: *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 cosponsoring health events, conferences, community-based fairs, etc. (North Carolina Family Support & Child Welfare Services Statewide Training Partnership, 2008)

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

Recruitment of Native American foster homes

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 4-5: Strategies for Successfully Recruiting and Retaining Preferred-Placement Foster Homes for American Indian Children.)

In response to changes in state and federal regulations pertaining to ICWA, OCFS released a policy directive on “Implementing Federal and Corresponding State Indian Child Welfare Act Regulations” (17-OCFS-ADM-08). It includes three attachments: “Notice of Child Custody Proceeding for Indian Child,” “Mailing Addresses for New York State Indian Tribes and Nations,” and “Indian Child Welfare Act FAQ’s.”

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. For more information, see the NYS OCFS Standards of Payment for Foster Care Program Manual, Section G-1.

Foster Parents as Recruiters program

In New York State, the Foster Parents as Recruiters program incorporates the idea that foster parents are the best recruiters and are valuable partners with local districts and voluntary agencies in planning and implementing recruitment and retention activities. Foster parents are hired as consultants to conduct recruitment and retention tasks as defined in partnership with their certifying county or agency. Requests to utilize the program are submitted by a local district or voluntary agency to the OCFS Regional Office. Contracts typically pay the foster parent \$15/hour for about 30 hours during a defined timeframe. More information about the process counties and agencies can follow to utilize this funding stream can be found here. (<http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/FosterParentsasRecruitersProgram.pdf>)



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.

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. New York State does both (see Spotlights on New York: Finder's Fee and Foster Parents as Recruiters program).

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).

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

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.

Review agency forms, interview protocols, and publications to make sure they are inclusive and affirming for LGBTQ parents. In New York State, OCFS has made a great effort to change the application experience for all people, but in particular for those who may identify in different ways. The new universal application is all things neutral: gender neutral, marital status neutral and family neutral. (http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/NYS_Foster-Adoptive_Parent_Application.pdf)

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.”

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 4-8: *Recruiting and Retaining LBGT Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families: Sending a Welcoming Message.*

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.

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.

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 may feel to be ostracized) and an ability to empathize with children struggling with peer relationships and identity or their own sexual orientation and gender identity.

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 4-6: *Frequently Asked Questions from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents* and Appendix 4-7: *Permanency Planning Today*.)

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.

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. (<https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Guide-to-ICWA-Compliance-2018.pdf>)

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. (https://www.adoptuskids.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 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.

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 and best practices for governance and implementation of programs are outlined in the OCOC Best Practices Document.

For More Information

<http://www.nationalococ.org/>

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.

Child-Focused Recruitment

In addition to kin-first recruitment, agencies may adopt other approaches that focus on specific children coming into foster care. Child-focused recruitment 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:

- 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 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012)

Models of child-focused recruitment include *Wendy’s Wonderful Kids* and *Extreme Recruitment*[®].

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.

“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

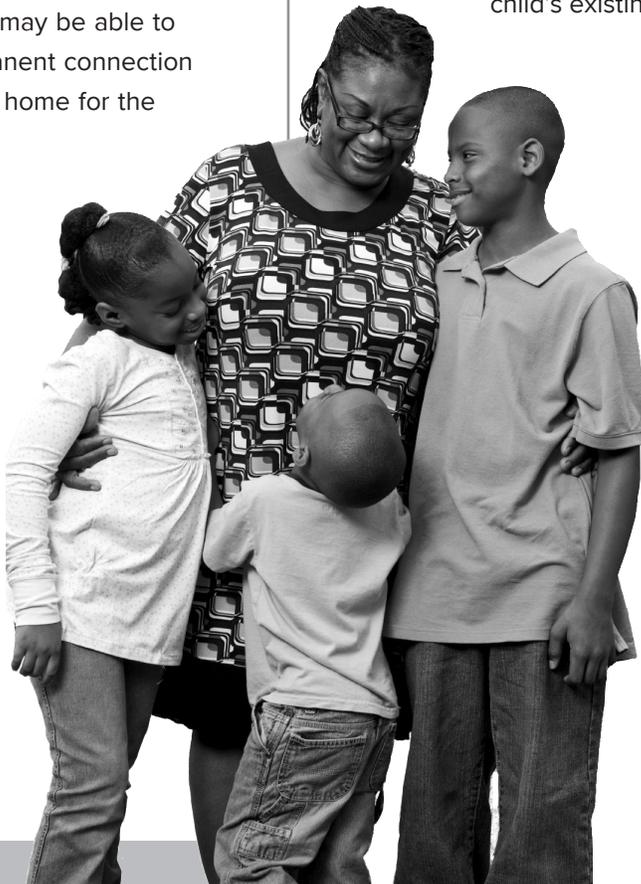
Spotlight on New York State



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.

<https://ocfs.ny.gov/adopt/photolisting.asp>



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.”

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).

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.

Key Messages



Child-focused recruitment

Child-focused recruitment means first exploring kinship homes.

Different types of child-focused recruitment include child-specific 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.

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, is 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 foster care. The segments are hosted by local news anchors and highlight each child's special personality and interests (<http://wednesdayschild.com/our-children/>).

A number of organizations offer photolistings and profiles of waiting children. Nationally, the most well-known is AdoptUSKids, which lists children's profiles provided by local and/or state agencies. 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 5-1: *Encouraging Your Staff to Use Photolistings in New Ways.*)

Additional resources

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://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/lasting-impressions.pdf)

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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).

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or in New York State, the OCFS regional offices.

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).

As of 2018, nearly 400 WWK recruiters have worked throughout the U.S. and Canada. In New York State, a collaboration between DTFA and the New York Office of Children and Family Services brought additional WWK recruiters to New York, expanding the number from less than ten recruiters to over 60 recruiters throughout the state. Forty three (43) of the WWK recruiters are located in New York City, and over 20 recruiters serve multiple upstate counties.

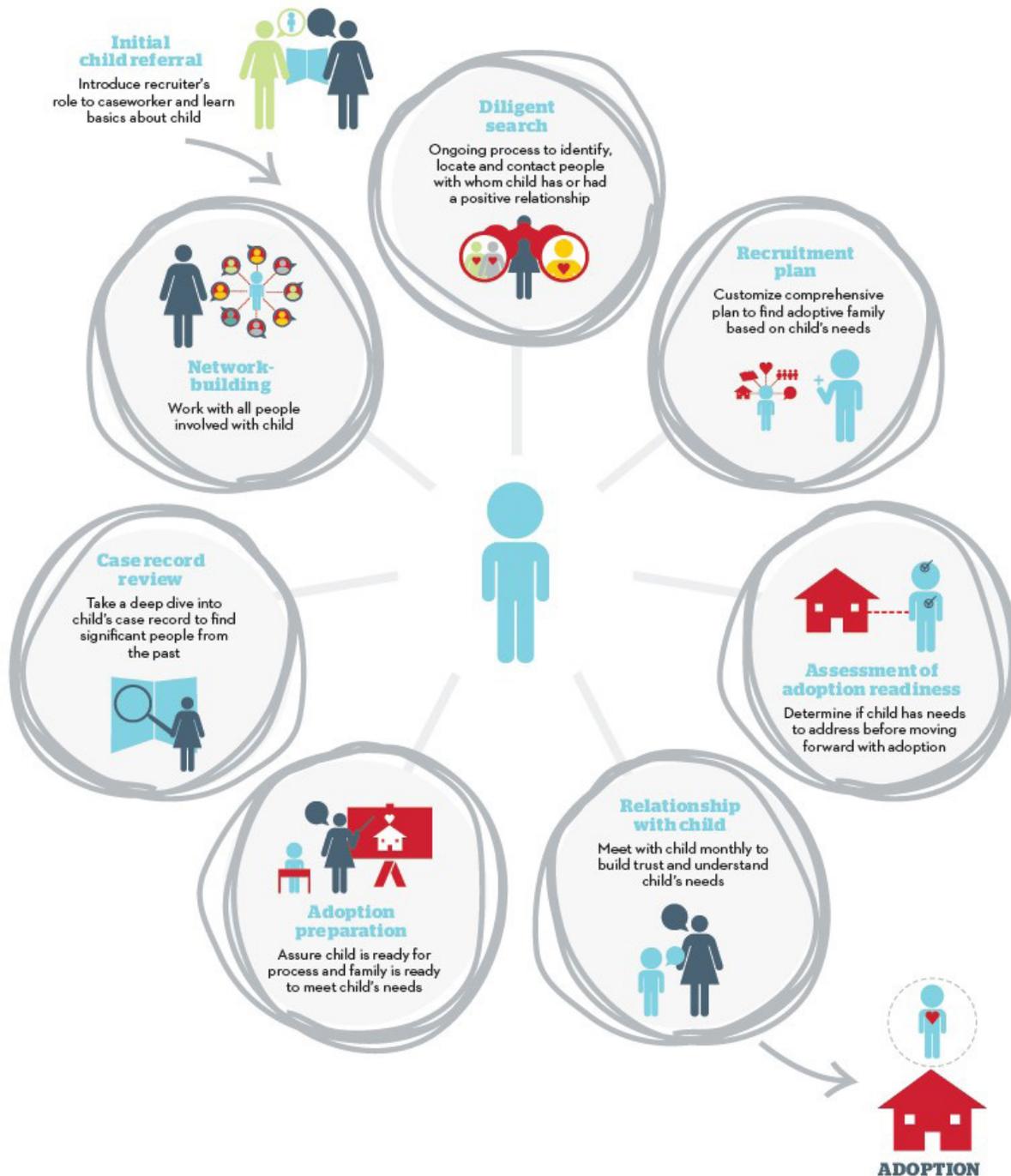
See WWK New York Overview for more information.
(<http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/WendysWonderfulKidsNewYorkOverview2018.pdf>)

Resources needed for implementation

DTFA is scaling up the WWK program nationally, with implementation in multiple states, and plans to bring the model to scale in all fifty states and Canada by 2028. Participating states are expected to make a financial investment in the program. DTFA provides training and other technical assistance to jurisdictions implementing the model. In some places, WWK recruiters are employees of public agencies, while in others they are employees of private agencies that oversee services including foster care. Jurisdictions interested in implementing WWK may reach out to DTFA for more information.

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 executive summary, see <https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/our-programs/wendys-wonderful-kids/>. 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 point-in-time 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.

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

For More Information

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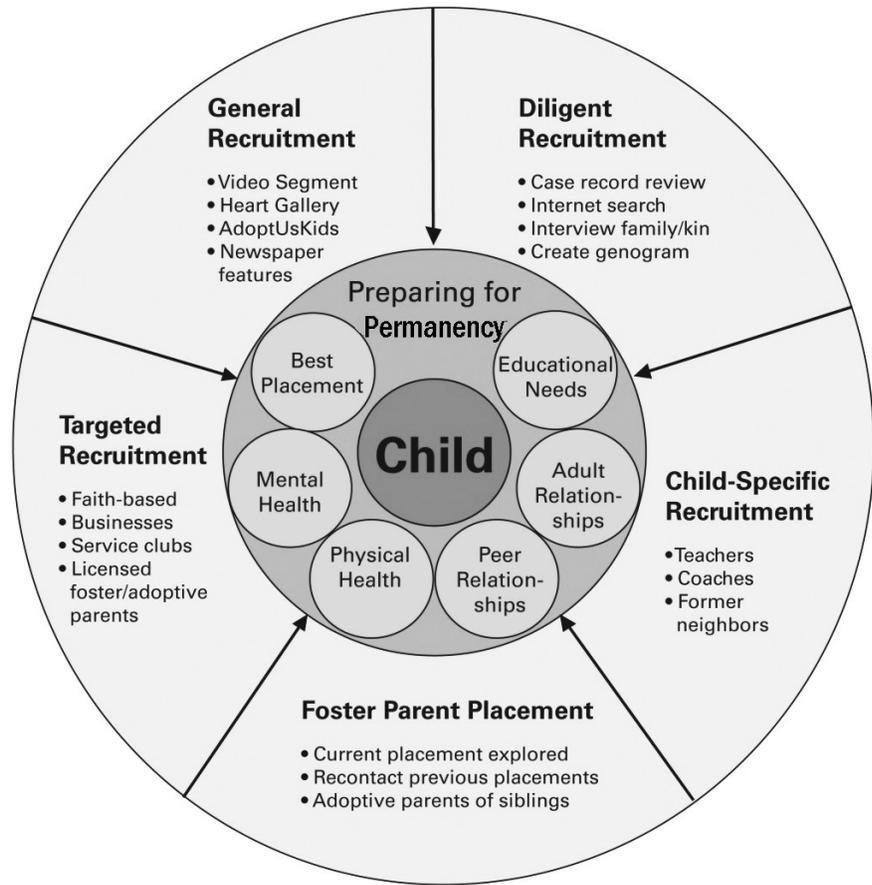
[https://www.foster-adopt.org/
recruitment-programs/#extreme](https://www.foster-adopt.org/recruitment-programs/#extreme)

must receive training from the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition onsite and meet other fidelity requirements of the model. Most trainings are completed in one to two days.

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®

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:

- Searching for and engaging kin at multiple stages throughout a case
- 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.

“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.

A common myth is that teens in foster care have difficult behaviors, yet in reality most youth in foster care simply exhibit typical adolescent behaviors, not any more difficult than other teens. When recruiting homes for teens, it is key to normalize those behaviors for prospective foster parents. And for teens that are struggling, it is important to provide supports to kinship and foster parents to help them navigate challenging behaviors.

(See Appendix 6-1: *Thirteen Reasons to Adopt a Teen*
<https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/overview/adoption-stories/story?k=reasons-to-adopt-a-teen>)

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.

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)

Explore connections

Teens in foster care usually have emotional attachments to others. They may have created their own “families of choice.” 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.

(See Appendix 6-2: *Asking the Right Questions of Youth.*)

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.

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 5).

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

Key Messages

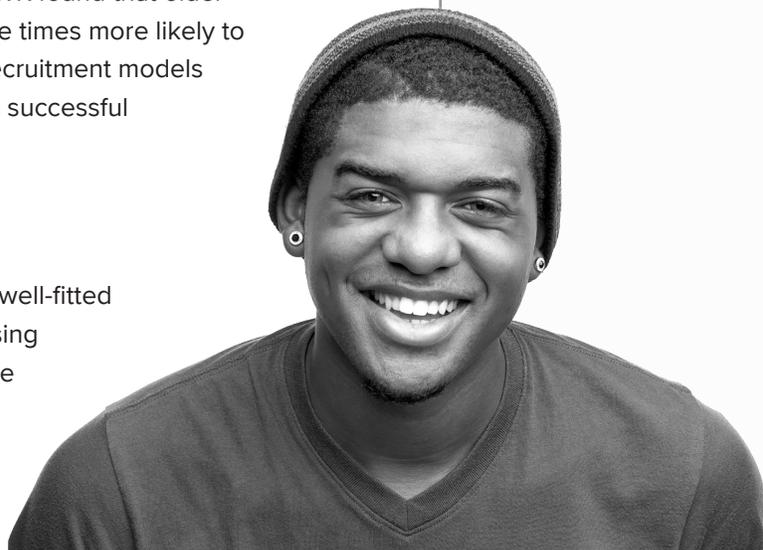


Recruiting for older youth

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/>



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 6-3: *Going Beyond Recruitment for 11-17 Year Olds.*)

Recruiting for sibling groups

Keeping sibling groups together in foster/adoptive placements is now well-recognized as best practice. Brothers and sisters need each other to thrive. Children's loss and trauma are reduced and they experience better outcomes when they are placed with their siblings. Siblings may well provide the longest-standing relationships people have throughout their lifetimes, and an important source of emotional support for children in foster care (Cohn, 2012). 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.

Recently enacted New York State law states that it is presumed to be in a child's best interest to be placed with his/her siblings or half-siblings [Family Court Act 1089 §(d)(2)(viii)(l)]. To separate siblings, agencies must be able to demonstrate to the court that placement or visitation with siblings is not in the child's best interests or impracticable geographically.

This supports the principle that, barring a real and relevant reason, siblings should be placed together. This also benefits the larger community because youth who exit foster care with family connections are more likely to grow into adulthood with greater stability. As stated in the memo accompanying the legislation, "it cannot be overemphasized that the maintenance of relationships with their siblings may be a vital lifeline."

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 also addressed in federal law by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

Pursue 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. See Chapter 3 for more information on developing kinship homes. When relatives are not available to care for sibling groups, or cannot care for them safely, care by non-relatives is the next choice.

Recruiting non-relative 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 6-4: *Recruitment and Retention of Kinship, Foster, and Adoptive Families for Siblings* and Appendix 6-5: *10 Realities of Sibling Adoption*.)

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.

Spotlight on New York State



Cluster Home model for JD/PINS youth

Youth identified as Juvenile Delinquents (JD) or Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) tend to be a placement challenge in most jurisdictions. Genesee County has been successful in using a Cluster Home Model for JD/PINS and other youth with behavioral issues who may otherwise be placed in a residential setting.

Cluster Homes are traditional foster homes that have demonstrated success in caring for youth with significant behavioral issues. The county currently has four homes that are certified to provide care for two to six youth in each home. These homes are earmarked to accept only youth that have higher-level behavioral needs. Foster parents in these homes have an additional five hours of training each year that focuses on the unique needs of the children in their care.

Cluster Home families receive a higher board rate and have access to enhanced in-home supports. Each home has an assigned child care worker in addition to a caseworker and case manager. The child care worker ensures that the youth attend all necessary appointments and facilitates

Story continues on pg. 58 

Cluster Home model for JD/PINS youth (cont'd)

visitation. This worker also coordinates communication among foster parents, caseworkers, school staff, and other service providers that are involved with the family.

Child care workers continue to work with all youth from the Cluster Homes who transition from foster care with a trial discharge. Genesee County has used its Cluster Home model for about 10 years and has successfully reduced its reliance on the use of residential care for youth with challenging behaviors.

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 6-6: *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 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. (http://www.recruit4fostercare.org/img/PM_ch6_neighbor.pdf)

Hold homes for sibling groups

Some agencies have designated certain foster homes for large sibling groups and offer incentives to hold them open for placements. While it may not be an option to keep a large number of homes available for this purpose, a select few could be earmarked by agencies.



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 6-7: *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.

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.



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.

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, LGBTQ 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 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 4 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)."

One way to encourage the LGBTQ community to become foster parents is simply by asking! Be sure that all of your promotional materials reflect the myriad of families that you welcome into your foster parent community. For example, in New York State, OCFS has made strategic efforts to modify the statewide application to reflect gender neutral language. In Ulster County, they developed their new webpage with pictures that reflect the LGBTQ community and chose language to encourage members of the LGBTQ community to become foster parents (Ulster County Social Services, n.d.).

<http://ulstercountyny.gov/social-services/children-and-family-services/foster-care-services>

The Human Rights Campaign's All Children - All Families Program (ACAF) serves as a clearinghouse for resources that child welfare agencies can use to improve LGBTQ cultural competency. Resources include an online agency self-assessment tool, comprehensive staff training, free technical assistance and more. Agencies across the country are using ACAF resources to improve practice with LGBTQ youth and families (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

<https://www.hrc.org/campaigns/all-children-all-families>

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>

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.

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.

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. (https://www.adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/sibling-infographic?utm_source=nrcdrTarRec&utm_medium=Infographic&utm_campaign=SiblingInfographic)

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.

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.

For More Information

Neighbor to Family, Inc.

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Customer Service for Retention and Support

Engaging foster parents as partners is the key factor in both recruiting and retaining foster/adoptive families. Partnership 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.”

“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

Key Messages



Engaging foster parents as partners

Child welfare agencies should acknowledge foster parents as valuable partners.

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 7-1: *Five Things You Can Do to Improve Customer Service – Phone Interaction with Families.*)

Earlier home visits

An early visit to the home of a prospective foster parent is another best practice that encourages foster parent engagement. Visiting a prospective foster parent's home early in the application process builds the foundation for an ongoing relationship. During the initial visit, the worker emphasizes to the family that they will be part of a team, advises them of the supports and training the agency will provide, assures them the worker will help them through the certification process, and shares the mission of the agency.

The home visit is an opportunity to provide face-to-face technical assistance and to answer lingering questions about fostering. This visit should be a positive experience for the prospective foster parent which will strengthen the likelihood of more inquiries, certifications, and ultimately a strong pool of foster parents.

The initial home visit also allows the homefinder to develop a sense of the home environment. The worker can observe the physical space and discuss any concerns related to safety, such as the number of bedrooms, the presence and placement of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and other environmental requirements.

Early identification of potential issues will allow prospective foster parents to start rectifying them at the front end of the process and makes it easier the agency to assist the family with these issues, when possible. Relatively small problems can delay certification and may be avoided with an earlier home visit.

“For the time invested in making an early home visit, the return is invaluable,” said Elizabeth Roberts-Laura, Schenectady County Department of Social Services Foster/Adoptive Home Finding Supervisor.

While they wait—things to do before the first placement

In some jurisdictions there may be a significant gap between the time that a family is certified and their first placement. This may become even more common as jurisdictions prioritize kin to care for incoming placements. How can an agency keep the family engaged and ready for that all-important first placement?

First, prioritize communication with waiting families. Frequent communication will help the foster parent remain engaged with the agency while waiting for a first placement. The agency may periodically send an email or postcard to say that the agency is aware of the family and will be



in touch as soon as a placement is available. Waiting families may also be invited to attend a social gathering or a special meeting to discuss their “open but unfilled” status.

While a lull in child welfare removals and placements is a good thing for all families and communities, foster families may need to be reminded about how the process works and the short turnaround time when a child needs a foster home. Agency staff also may reinforce the need to place siblings together and the supports available for families that take large sibling groups. Waiting families can also be encouraged to participate in required and optional trainings to keep their skills sharp and to be certified as respite foster homes.

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 7-2: 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. Technical assistance should be offered to all foster parents to help them complete their documents in a timely fashion.

An optional documentation tool, the “Foster Parent Paperwork Checklist” has garnered some positive feedback from homefinders and applicants. This tool allows all parties to know what document is required and when the document should be completed.

(See Appendix 7-3: Foster Parent Paperwork Checklist.)

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

Put It Into Practice

Stay connected

Stay connected with the families that have been newly certified by your county or agency. These families took all the necessary steps to commit to temporarily parent a child in need. Let them know that you appreciate their efforts and keep them up-to-date on the placement process in your jurisdiction.

Spotlight on New York State



Support with paperwork

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 7-7: *Every Month Is Customer Service Month.*)

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. It included activities such as 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.).

Volunteer opportunities

A person who is interested in fostering a child may not have the option to be a foster parent. This fact may become evident at any point along the path to certification. Despite this, people who opt out of fostering may choose to support the child welfare mission in other ways.

Many counties and agencies have found creative ways to provide volunteer opportunities for those who have left the certification process while continuing to keep individuals open to the possibility of fostering in the future. Some agencies develop a list of volunteer opportunities based on the actual needs of the children and foster parents in the local community. For example, older youth may benefit from part-time employment at a local business, job search assistance, career counseling, character references, and other services. Volunteers may also provide mentorship, transportation, educational assistance, cultural connections and activities, or sports and arts experiences.

Encouraging volunteerism also opens up opportunities for the agency to get support from the community. Volunteers can help contact community partners to meet an agency need, such as free or low-cost car seats. A creative approach to volunteering enhances the lives of the children, the foster parents, the agency, and the volunteers.

(See Appendix 7-4, *Generic Template for Volunteers.*)

First placement supports

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). Even if they are challenged by limited resources, it is recommended that counties/agencies provide intensive first placement supports,



which are critical in maintaining a robust recruitment and retention program.

A First Placement Protocol provides ways in which agencies can anticipate potential challenges for foster parents during the first weeks of the first placement and support them through these challenges. The protocol may include:

- Frequent, friendly check-in calls to see how things are going
- Regular reminders that respite care is available
- A thank-you card in consideration of their efforts
- A foster parent mentor who is “on call” to serve as a source of quick information and support
- Access to training

At the time of a first placement the new foster parents should also be reminded of any other supports available to them which may include:

- Access to agency staff 24/7, including primary caseworker and backup support
- Access to behavioral support interventions, such as consultation, role modeling, and skills training
- Availability of peer support groups with routine meetings or online exchanges which provide opportunities for comparing challenges/successes
- One-on-one mentoring from an experienced foster parent

Ongoing support for kinship, foster, and 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.

Supports to foster/adoptive parents increases stability of children in care and it a key strategy in recruiting new foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

(See Appendix 7-5: *Six Reasons to Offer Support Services to Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families*, http://nr cdr.org/_assets/files/NRC DR-org/6-reasons-to-offer-support-services.pdf)

It is especially critical to provide timely and tailored support to kinship foster homes. Kinship families have unique needs, as often they are faced with the unexpected arrival of children during a moment of family crisis. While early material supports are crucial (beds, car seats, clothes, food), emotional supports are equally important, as families attempt to manage feelings of guilt, loss, and ambivalence at finding themselves in this caregiving role. Kinship families need help navigating “the changes in their relationship with the child and other

Spotlight on New York State



OCFS recommendations for support

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) distributed an informational letter, “Supporting the Needs of Foster Parents: Recommendations” (05-OCFS-INF-03) that summarized OCFS’s 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 for the child’s family and caseworker,” the policy stated.

members of the family; coaching families to maintain safe boundaries with the child's birth parents; and managing expectations regarding the child's return home" (Redlich Horwitz Foundation, 2017). <https://www.rhfdn.org/resources/FosterandKinshipParentRecruitmentandSupport/>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation offers practice tips for caseworkers on addressing the complexities of the dynamics within kinship foster care placements. They have a short video training series which can be found here: *Engaging Kinship Caregivers* (<https://www.aecf.org/blog/engaging-kinship-caregivers-with-joseph-crumbley/>).

The **Kinship Center**, which is a member of Seneca Family of Agencies in California, offers specialized Adoption/Permanency Wraparound services for families who are adopting or have adopted children from the foster care system, relative caregivers, and legal guardians. Since its inception in 2001, the program has preserved 95% of the highest-risk participating adoptive families. In particular, the relative caregiver support program helps to ease the transition that many caregivers encounter as they move from retirement to full time parenting or from one child to multiple children. This time can be very challenging for most caregivers. Through tailored education and support, the Kinship Center's Wraparound model helps relatives stay connected through these difficult transitions and remain willing to provide long term supportive care for the child.

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.

Survey foster parents

Agencies are advised to periodically survey their foster/adoptive families to determine their unique needs and then find ways to best meet those needs. Guidance for conducting surveys may be found here: <http://recruit4fostercare.org/retention.html> (go to “Taking the pulse of your foster parents”. Sample surveys may be found under Tools.)

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 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.

Fostering Futures NY (FFNY), a program of Welfare Research, Inc., recruits and trains small teams of volunteers from the community that offer natural and practical supports to foster families, including kinship families. The NY model is based on a similar program spearheaded in Colorado. Serving as an “extended family” for foster parents and children, the FFNY 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.

(See Appendix 7-6, *Fostering Futures NY*.)

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 this one-page summary of the *Mockingbird Family Model*.

Intergenerational Communities

Innovative, intentional communities are being designed to support families who are fostering and adopting children from the public foster care system. These models draw elders into the community to be a part of the support system available to children and their families.

The first such community, established in 1994, was Hope Meadows in Rantoul, Illinois. Since then, other communities have been established, such as the Treehouse Intergenerational Community in Western Massachusetts in 2006 and another community, Bridge Meadows, in Portland Oregon in 2011. At this time, three new communities are in the planning phase, one in MetroWest Boston, one in the San Francisco Bay Area, and one in the Capital Region of New York State. The New York intergenerational community will also include adults with developmental disabilities.

The primary goal of such an intergenerational community is to bring children, families, and elders together in an economically and culturally diverse setting, to meet the unmet needs of children and youth placed in foster care, their foster/adoptive parents, and elders. Research has shown excellent outcomes for children and youth living in the Treehouse Intergenerational Community, including educational attainment, placement stability and other measures of wellbeing, which extend to the elders. To learn more about this model, visit *The Treehouse Foundation* (<https://refca.net>).

Coping with grief and loss

Separation and loss are part of the foster parent experience, and should be acknowledged and addressed with care. Foster parents are expected to develop relationships with children in their care. When those relationships end, foster parents may experience grief and pain (Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition, n.d.). <http://affcn.org/fostercare/shared-parenting/going-home/helping-foster-parents-grieve/>

These are profound feelings that should be recognized and supported to allow a healthy transition for both children and foster parents. Counties/agencies may choose to start grief and loss support groups for foster parents and are

encouraged to conduct brief interviews with foster parents after children leave their care. Interviews provide critical information on how foster parents respond to separation and loss. Support can help mitigate those feelings, as can offering parents a short term break from fostering to help them recharge and prepare for the next child in their home.

The Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, in partnership with the University of California at Los Angeles Department of Pediatrics and Psychology, has developed grief support group counseling for relative and foster families who are facing loss associated with a child or youth leaving their home for reunification with his or her birth family. To learn more about this innovative approach to grief and loss please see *Loss Intervention for Families in Transition (LIFT)*.

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).

Other respite options include:

- Camps for the children to attend
- Recurring or regularly scheduled respite, e.g. the last weekend of each month
- Drop off events, e.g., free two-hour, supervised programs at the local YWCA, utilizing staff who already meet required background clearances (AdoptUSKids, 2012)

Spotlight on New York State



Respite care

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.

Fresh ways of approaching respite care are emerging. For example, some counties/agencies utilize newly certified foster parents as short-term providers of respite care prior to their first placement. This approach gives a new foster parent a glimpse of caring for a foster child in their home and also gives the county/agency an opportunity to see how the family integrates a foster child into their day-to-day life. The experience of providing respite to another foster family may encourage new foster parents to broaden the range of characteristics of children for whom they are willing to provide care.

Agencies also may be able to increase the number of respite foster homes by analyzing their unused and underutilized certified homes. This exercise may lead to a subset of providers that are able to solely provide respite services.

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 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.



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.

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.

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 from the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment 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. (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/using-customer-service-concepts-to-enhance-recruitment-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. (https://ncwwi.org/files/Data-Driven_Decision_Making__CQI/Support_Matters_-_Lessons_from_the_field_on_services_for_adoptive_foster_and_kinship_care_families.pdf)

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. (https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/publications/docs/Partnering_with_Resource_Families.pdf)

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

A Movement to Transform Foster Parenting. A report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that explores ways for public agencies to ensure that children receive the care they need by enlisting more volunteers to step forward as foster parents and by encouraging the extraordinary individuals who have already answered the call to continue their commitment to care. (<https://www.aecf.org/resources/a-movement-to-transform-foster-parenting/>)

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.

Grief and loss

What I Wish Others Knew About How Foster Parents Grieve. An article by a foster parent originally published by the Huffington Post. (<https://www.adoptioninstitute.org/news/what-i-wish-others-knew-about-how-foster-parents-grieve/>)

Loss Intervention for Families in Transition (LIFT). Description of the Loss Intervention for Families in Transition (LIFT) group, an innovative program at UCLA TIES for Families designed to provide resource parents with grief counseling during and/or following the reunification of a child with his or her birth family. (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/DR-Grantees/year-two-2/CA-HHS-UCLA-TIES-LIFT-Program-Summary.pdf)

Partnering with the Community and Volunteers

Public Agencies Don't Need to Do It Alone: Eight Reasons to Use a Partnership When Providing Support Services to Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families. This fact sheet from the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment explores the specific benefits public agencies may see from partnering with family-support organizations and other nonprofit partners. (http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/8-reasons-to-partner-with-others.pdf)

Support Fostering: You Don't Have to Become a Foster Parent to Support Fostering. Summary of volunteer opportunities provided by the Florida Department of Children and Families. (<http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/foster-care/support-fostering>)

Current Foster Volunteer Opportunities. A webpage sponsored by the City of San Francisco, CA with links to volunteer opportunities that support foster families and children. (<http://sfcaresforkids.org/volunteer/>)

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 (Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York). (<https://affcny.org/programs/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/>)

Trauma-informed care

Helping Young People in Foster Care Heal from Trauma and Build Resilience. Blog posted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation with links to information from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and other resources. (<https://www.aecf.org/blog/helping-young-people-in-foster-care-heal-from-trauma-and-build-resilience/>)

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). (<https://www.aecf.org/resources/trauma-informed-practice-with-young-people-in-foster-care/>)

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Mockingbird Family™

Mockingbird Family is a groundbreaking, human-centered approach to delivering foster care. With an emphasis on family-based care, the model empowers communities to put children and families at the forefront.

Mockingbird Family was first implemented in 2004, by The Mockingbird Society of Seattle, WA. It establishes a micro-community of six to ten foster and kinship family homes connected to a Hub Home (called a Constellation). The Hub Home is led by an experienced, certified foster care provider. Hub Home parents facilitate a network of support for foster families, providing relevant and child-specific trainings, easily accessed respite care from a known caregiver, and peer supports from a community that knows them. They also provide mentoring and coaching, convene monthly support group meetings, and host social activities to develop community with and among children and caregivers.

Mockingbird Family operates on the philosophy that caregivers deserve the support they need and is designed to provide those supports in a timely manner. Families in Constellations feel less isolated and are more able to provide a stable, loving, and supportive environment for children and youth in their care.

As of 2018, The Mockingbird Society, in partnership with foster care organizations, is operating Constellations in Washington State, New York City, California, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

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 \$35,000-\$60,000 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 care.

For More Information

The Mockingbird Society

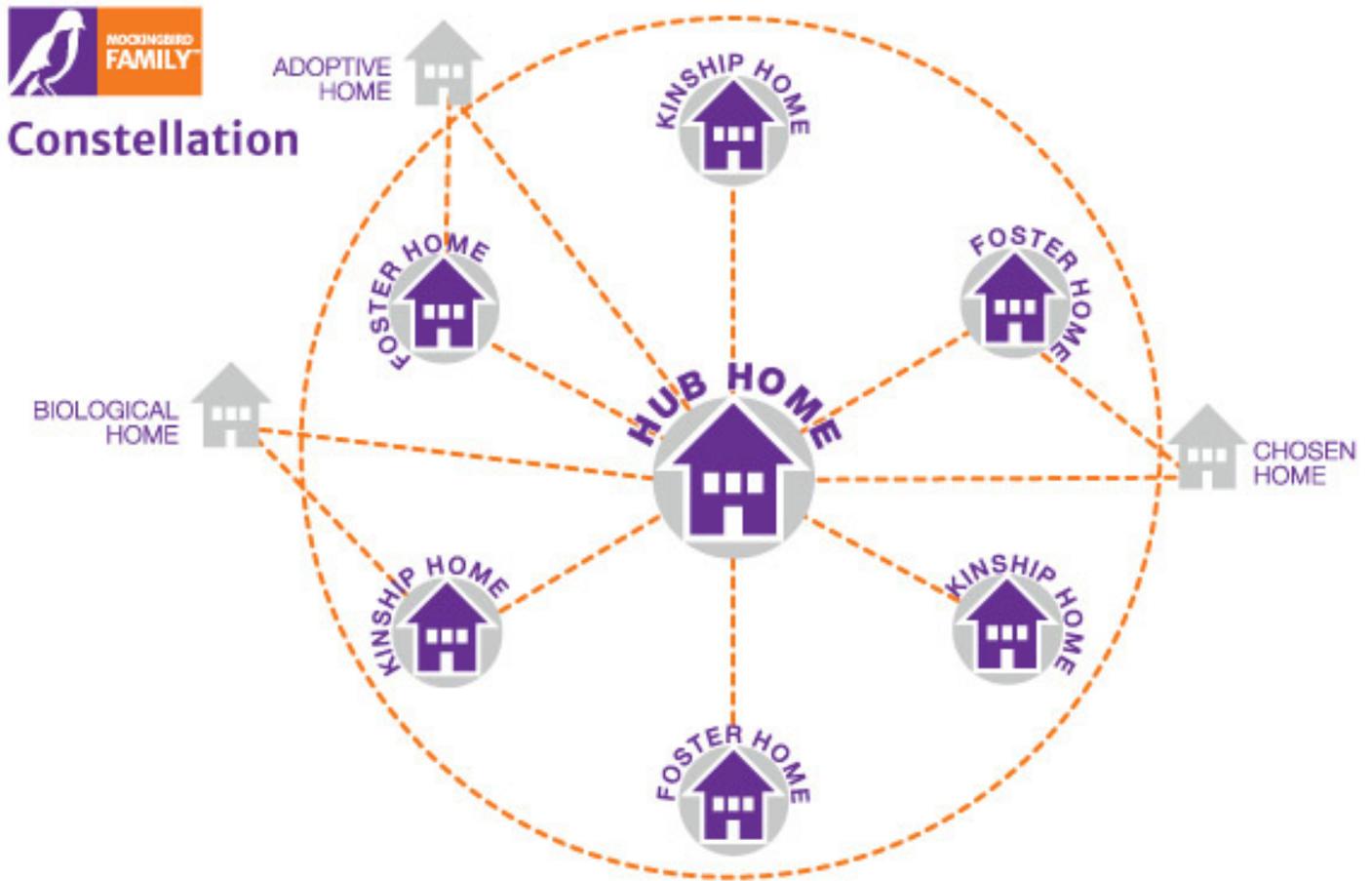
information@mockingbirdsociety.org

www.mockingbirdsociety.org

To replicate *Mockingbird Family*, an agency must be a family support, foster parent licensing, or child placement/adoptive agency. Agencies interested in replicating the model may contact The Mockingbird Society at 206.323.KIDS to learn more about the technical assistance and training process that is required to replicate *Mockingbird Family*.

Evidence base

Mockingbird Family was evaluated in 2017, by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP), evaluating *Mockingbird Family* from 2004 to 2016. WSIPP's evaluation found that children and youth experienced significantly better placement stability than traditional care. And caregiver retention for *Mockingbird Family* was also found to be 92% after two years of fostering (compared with 63% retention in Washington State.)



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, Tennessee, 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

For More Information

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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.

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. Last reviewed by CEBC April 2017.

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 State in New York City and in counties outside of NYC, California, and over 40 other locations, including Colorado, Illinois, Rhode Island, Virginia, Ohio, and Minnesota, plus locations in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Australia 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 TFCO programs.

For More Information

John Aarons
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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 last reviewed January 2017.

Seneca Center Wraparound Services

Program Overview

The focus of Seneca Center Wraparound Services Program in California is to offer family-centered, individualized, and culturally relevant support to biological, foster, kinship, and adoptive families to prevent the placement of children and youth into group care settings.

The program works in close partnership with social services, mental health, juvenile probation, other service providers, and consumer organizations to provide an alternative to group care placements for children and youth with complex and enduring needs.

Seneca’s service philosophy is built around the concept of “unconditional care.” No youth served by the program will be dismissed from the program due to challenging behaviors or service needs. Treatment and support services are tailored to address those behaviors and meet those needs as they change over time.

Seneca has developed a clinical practice model that integrates ideas and methodologies from three intellectual traditions: attachment theory (building healthy relationships), learning theory (replacing negative behaviors with positive ones), and systems theory (addressing environmental factors).

A Child and Family Team is put in place for each child. The team includes the child, family members and other adults connected with the child, the county representative who referred the child for Wraparound, and Seneca staff (a facilitator, support counselor, and family partner). The team builds consensus and leverages the strengths of its members to identify and meet needs to make it possible for the youth and family to reaching their long-term goals.

Resources needed for implementation

Wraparound services are provided by a team of trained professionals that include: wraparound facilitator (master’s level clinician); family therapist (master’s level); support counsellors; and parent partners.

Locations of implementation

San Francisco, Santa Clara, Sonoma, Solano, Marin, Contra Costa, and Orange Counties

Evidence base

Seneca’s Wraparound program was recently added to Sonoma County’s Upstream Investments Portfolio as a Tier One Evidence-Based Practice.

For More Information

info@senecacenter.org

<http://senecafoa.org/wraparound>

Social Media: A New Way to Communicate

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 8-1: *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.

“I so love this group and the support given so freely even though everyone has their own dilemmas to solve. Sometimes all you need is to know that you are not walking alone.”

— Adoptive parent member of Facebook group

Spotlight on New York State



Creating a Facebook page for foster parents

The Children’s Home of Wyoming Conference in Binghamton, N.Y., has a private, invitation-only Facebook page for their foster parents. To set up the page, they:

- Created the page based on an existing Facebook Account (such as the agency’s Facebook account)
- Named the Page
- Set up a private invitation-only Facebook account with necessary constraints, including a rules and

Story continues on pg. 93 →



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 8-2: 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 8-3: *Facebook 101 for Child Welfare Professionals* and Appendix 8-4: *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.

Creating a Facebook page for foster parents (cont’d)

conduct page that must be acknowledged before any foster parent can post on the site.

- Included a reminder that the page is to share information and not to complain about staff or practices. They provided a contact name and number should a grievance or issue need attention.
- Included a reminder that posting pictures of youth in care is strictly prohibited
- Assigned five staff members as account administrators or moderators so the page was monitored regardless of schedule and attendance. (At some agencies, experienced foster parents may share this role with staff.)

Supervisor Aliscia Gaucher said that the private foster parent group Facebook page “has created a virtual community of foster parents that share information, recipes and support one another” and has enhanced retention.

The agency’s public Facebook page also has served as a recruitment tool. Prospective foster parents report that they discovered the agency because current foster parents re-posted the orientation announcement on their own personal Facebook pages.

Put It Into Practice

AdoptUSKids offers support to starting a Facebook Group

AdoptUSKids offers support and consultation to agencies who are starting or reinvigorating a Facebook Group for foster/adoptive parents. Contact: consultation@adoptuskids.org.



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. See Spotlight on New York State: Creating a facebook page for foster parents for more information.

Twitter

Twitter is best used for frequent, short (280-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 serves foster parents throughout the country. Adoption.com also sponsors a forum for interaction on a wide range of topics related to foster care and 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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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).

