Treat Them Like

GOLD

A Best Practice Guide to Partnering with Resource Families

North Carolina Division of Social Services
Child Welfare Services Section
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Introduction

Treat your resource families like gold.

Though this guide provides many specific strategies that have proven effective in North Carolina and elsewhere, at its heart is one basic rule: if you want to successfully recruit, retain, and partner with resource families, *treat them* **like gold**. This rule must be the foundation of your resource family recruitment and retention (R & R) efforts.

Why should we treat foster, adoptive, and kinship families like gold? Because without them, life is harder for the families and children we serve, for individual workers, and for our agencies. Without them, we have a much more difficult time keeping siblings together and placing children in their communities. In truth, good foster, adoptive, and kinship families are worth more than gold—they're priceless.

This is strangely easy to forget. In child welfare we face a host of legal and policy mandates, complex procedures, and the ongoing challenge of discerning and pursuing the best interests of each individual child and family. Specialization helps agencies manage these challenges, but it can also obscure the connection between resource families and our ability to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanence of children. When this happens, some of us begin to see support and development of resource families as "someone else's job" and resource families themselves as almost a nuisance.

Recruiting, supporting, and partnering with foster parents and other resource families is a responsibility shared by everyone in the agency, from the director on down to transportation aides. We must all understand our responsibility to *treat them like gold*.

Treating resource families like gold can take many forms, including taking the time to get to know them, treating them as peers on the team serving the child and family, helping them develop their skills and knowledge to care for children, and simply showing them the respect they deserve for the pivotal role they play in our system.

This guide, developed by the NC Division of Social Services and the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work, seeks to give you tools and strategies you and your agency can use to build, refine, and sustain partnerships with resource families. We hope you find it useful.

Why We Say "Resource Families"

Foster families. Adoptive families. Relatives who provide kinship care. Legal guardians. In this guide and in an increasing number of agencies, all these are referred to as "resource families." The term refers to anyone who provides a safe, stable, loving home for a child when the child's birth parents are unable to provide one.

Why use this term? We need to think more broadly about potential families and children's needs. All kinds of families are needed for children in foster care. Sometimes children need families who can play multiple roles over time.

Instead of dividing families into categories, we are choosing to use a term that leaves the possibilities as open as possible.

About this Manual

In fall 2007 the NC Division of Social Services launched a resource parent recruitment and retention project based on the strategies recommended by best practice and research. This project concentrates on the application of broad but concrete steps that individual agencies can take to meet their specific needs, and it builds on the success of the North Carolina's Multiple Response System and reinforces the strengths of our state's child welfare system. Because recruiting and retaining resource families is fundamentally a community responsibility, counties or clusters of counties are encouraged to use existing interagency committees, collaboratives, and other groups to lead this effort on the local level. The Division has asked the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work to help implement this project.

Words of Thanks

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*"Treat Them Like Gold" in the title came from Jeff Olson—it's been his mantra for years. Thanks, Jeff!

Chapter I
The Fundamentals

1. Resource Families: Partners, Not Employees

A common assumption people make is that resource families—in particular foster parents—are ***employees*** of the agency that supervises them. This is understandable, since on the face of things foster parents might seem to fit the definition of an employee: someone hired to perform a job in exchange for financial compensation. After all, once they undergo the interviews and scrutiny of the licensing process and have children placed in their homes, foster parents receive a check each month. And, like other DSS employees, foster parents are bound by the same expectations of protecting clients' confidential information.

Resource families make a remarkable commitment when they decide to partner with child welfare agencies.

But this idea of foster parents as agency employees does not hold up. The money they receive each month is not wages but a partial reimbursement that enables them to meet the needs of the children in their homes. This is underscored by the fact that as a rule state and federal governments do not consider monthly foster care reimbursements as taxable income (NFPA, 2007). A few other characteristics that make foster parents different from other agency employees include:

- They do not get the same pay increases received by agency employees
- They do not get benefits received by agency employees (e.g., health insurance, paid time off and sick days, worker's compensation, unemployment benefits, pension, use of agency car, etc.)
- They are always on the job, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Resource families are not agency employees, nor are they temporary workers.

But if they aren't employees, what are they? The answer, of course, is ***partners***: people who join with others to pursue a common interest or goal. In their case—and ours—that common goal is the welfare of children and their families. If we explain things well enough in marketing materials, orientations, and pre-service training, foster parents and other resource families enter into partnership with our agencies voluntarily and fully-informed about the various roles they will play, which include one or more of the following:

1. Caring for and nurturing children in foster care until they can be reunited with their parents
2. Working as reunification partners with birth families (i.e., engaging in shared parenting and maintaining connections)
3. Serving as members of the team: working closely with county departments of social services to ensure child safety, well-being, and permanence
4. Becoming an alternative permanent family for the child, if reunification isn't possible (i.e., engaging in concurrent planning)

When you add all this up—the hours, the pay and benefits (or lack thereof), the multiple and complex roles they play—it is clear that resource families make a remarkable commitment when they decide to join in partnership with child welfare agencies.

To support resource families and fulfill their side of the partnership, child welfare agencies should:

- Ensure that all staff members understand the connection between the overall success of the agency and the agency's ability to attract, train, and support qualified resource families
- Apply North Carolina's family-centered principles of partnership when interacting with resource families:
  - Everyone desires respect
  - Everyone needs to be heard
  - Everyone has strengths
  - Judgments can wait
  - Partners share power
  - Partnership is a process
- Apply North Carolina's System of Care principles when interacting with resource families:
  - Individualized, strengths-based care
  - Cultural competency
  - Family and youth involvement
  - Accountability
  - Community-based services
  - Interagency collaboration

To be sure, doing this takes some effort, but it pays off.

Golden Nugget!

Starting Out on the Same Page

Another Choice for Black Children, a private child-placing agency based in Charlotte, NC, makes an effort to ensure its staff and current and prospective resource families are on the same page—literally! Another Choice has developed a two-sided handout: one side describes what the agency expects of families, while the other describes what families can expect of agency staff in return.

The handout is used during staff orientations, in parent orientation and trainings, and on an ongoing basis to ensure that each party remembers and lives up to its commitments.

Agencies may adopt these handouts (see Appendix A and B) for their own use.

2. Characteristics of a Successful Program

Like every person and every family, each agency's program to recruit, retain, and partner with resource families is unique. That said, it is also true that some of the most successful programs share one or more of the traits in the table below. Each row in the table describes a trait and lists the page where you can learn more about it.

Common Traits of Successful Resource Family R & R Programs

Program Characteristic	To Learn More Go To Page(s)
Everyone in the agency sees it as his or her job to contribute to the recruitment and retention of resource families.	5, 6, 67
The agency uses current resource families as much as possible in their recruitment and retention efforts.	72
The agency uses culturally-sensitive recruitment strategies to meet the needs of all children.	26
The agency uses data to regularly plan and evaluate recruitment and retention efforts.	10-14 (Chapter II)
The agency uses the media to enhance the agency's profile in the community.	31-42 (Chapter VI)
The agency partners with other agencies to collaborate across county lines to optimize outcomes.	43-44, 48-49, 78
The agency uses targeted recruitment efforts (e.g., to find homes for teens, African American children, American Indian children, etc.) to meet the specific needs and reflect the characteristics of children in care.	51-56 (Chapter IX)

Key Definitions

For key definitions of basic terms and concepts related to recruiting, retaining, and partnering with resource families, refer to Appendix C.

State and National Resources

You don't have to reinvent the wheel. In Appendix D you will find a list of recommended resources from across North Carolina and the nation that provide useful templates, short cuts, and suggestions.

3. Importance of Agency Leadership

In a child welfare agency, finding and supporting families for children in foster care is ***everyone's*** job. Yet some people have more important roles to play than others.

Agency leadership—especially the agency director—sets the tone for the entire agency. When it comes to recruiting and retaining resource families, the impact of the director's attitude can be profound.

What the director does and does not say and do sends a message to staff at all levels. If the director sees resource family recruitment and retention as central to the agency's success and communicates this belief through word and deed, most people come to see things the same way.

Here are some examples of concrete steps agency leaders can take to strengthen recruitment and retention:

Relating to Resource Families

- **Get to know the resource families** who care for the children in your custody. Be sure that you understand what foster, adoptive, and kinship families do, and make it clear to them that you understand the importance of their role.
- **Be friendly to resource families**. Model positive, respectful interactions with resource families when you see them in the building, at meetings, or in public.
- **Be available to speak with families upon request.** Front line workers should be responsible for most exchanges with resource families, and for building the trust that is necessary for a successful working relationship with them. However, it can be reassuring to both workers and resource families to know that directors are always available if outside brainstorming is needed or to help problem solve a specific situation. At the same time, avoid over involvement—if a director is too involved, a direct worker can be disempowered.
- **Give out your contact information**. Any time you have contact with a foster, adoptive, or kinship family, give them your contact information so they can reach you directly for help if necessary.
- **Consider resource families in all you do**, from writing policy to writing a memo. Include the foster, adoptive, and kinship family perspective in all materials you produce, all speeches you give, all meetings you have with those you supervise, and any time you interact with the community.

Relating to Your Staff

Make it part of your agency's culture to treat resource families like gold.

- **Send a clear and consistent message about recruiting, retaining, and partnering with resource families** at every employee's orientation, regardless of the person's role. Encourage everyone in the agency to attend resource family pre-service training. Regularly report your agency's strengths and needs related to resource families using posters, your agency's newsletter, presentations during general staff meetings, etc.
- **Make your priorities clear**. Demonstrate that support of foster, adoptive, and kinship families is an agency priority by including it in the job descriptions and evaluations of all staff; make it a factor in determining promotions and raises.
- **Financially support your agency's recruitment and retention efforts**. Doing so makes sense, given the costs of having too few resource families. Financial support can take many forms, including offering recruitment incentives to current foster families and agency staff, funding respite and in-service training programs, providing longevity payments to foster families, paying for ads and promotional materials, or other creative measures. Budget to support resource family retention. Consistently set aside money for appreciation events, snacks during training, thank you cards and other little demonstrations that the agency values resource families.
- **Encourage communication** among various agency programs about resource family recruitment, retention, and partnership issues.

- **Look for patterns in problems**. If you repeatedly hear the same problem scenario reported as occurring to different families, its likely there is an agency- or system-wide problem.
- **Speak positively about resource families**. Give them the credit they deserve publicly. Always remind others that your agency could not function without them. Do not allow staff to speak negatively about resource families.
- **Support the development and full implementation your agency's MEPA plan**.
- **Use your contacts** to help recruit and support families. If you have a friend or family member who can offer a reward to resource families (e.g., a discount at a store or restaurant, a free manicure, or a larger donation), use your personal influence to make it happen.
- **Insist that your staff treat resource families with dignity and respect.** Make it part of your agency's culture to treat resource families like gold.

Adapted from Goodman, 2008

4. How Agency Staff Can Contribute

Agency Social Workers (**EVERYONE**, including but not limited to those working in the areas of adoption, child placement, and child protective services)

Key Strategies for Supporting Resource Families

- **Return phone calls promptly!** Families need to have their calls returned in a timely fashion to provide excellent care to our children. Provide information resource families can use to contact alternative agency representatives (e.g., supervisors) in the event that you cannot be reached.

Families must have their calls returned in a timely fashion to provide excellent care to our children.

- **Give them information**. Provide full disclosure regarding the background and needs of the child. Keep resource families informed about the child's situation and provide updated information about the child's needs. Provide them with feedback.
- **Be flexible in making appointments with and for resource families**. Work with foster parents when planning home visits, meetings, or appointments for the child. Families have schedules, too!
- **Include foster parents in permanency planning for the child**. Foster parents should be included in discussions and meetings to share ideas about possible permanent families for the child. Invite them to court hearings, child and family team meetings, other meetings, and reviews.
- **Provide support and communication during CPS investigative assessments**. It may also be useful to cultivate a trained "allegation support" foster parent or other person to offer support to families, even if it is only listening. Providing resource parents with support and information during an investigative assessment can have a big impact on that family's willingness to continue fostering if the report is unsubstantiated.
- **Be sensitive to foster parents when a child is leaving**. Even if foster parents have decided not to adopt, they still care about the child.

- **Gather information about the child from the foster parents**. Foster parents are the best informants about the day-to-day needs of the child. Ask them to give you information that can help identify the best family for the child and make the child's transition smoother.
- **Help foster parents adopt if that is the plan**. Many children are adopted by their foster parents. They may need the help of the adoption worker in making that big decision.
- **Be responsive.** When there is a crisis or concern, be responsive. Return the call, go to the home, and find the service they need as soon as possible.
- **Follow up with interested families.** When a family expresses an interest in fostering or adopting, get back to them as soon as possible.
- **Promote stable placements.** Provide ongoing support, planned respite, and needed services to families to prevent a disruption or crisis from happening before it is too late!
- **Educate and support other agency staff.** Enhance the experience of resource families by contributing to efforts to ensure all agency staff are on the same page when it comes to resource families. Your contribution can be made in any number of ways—from short, formal training sessions with the people in your agency who answer the phones to informal exchanges in which you model and communicate the important role that resource families play and the respect they are due.

Adapted from Goodman, 2008

Administrative and Fiscal Staff

Key Strategies for Supporting Resource Families

- **Process paperwork and payments efficiently and without delay**. Help social workers complete forms correctly on the front-end. It is crucial to retention and placement stability that children get needed services and resource families get needed reimbursements.
- **Look for patterns and problems with paperwork**, eligibility and funding issues—these impact the services children and families receive. Problem-solve and troubleshoot to keep the system running smoothly!
- **Participate in resource family appreciation events**, make a nomination for "Foster Parent of the Year," help plan events.
- **Facilitate connections**. If you receive a phone call from a foster, adoptive, or kinship parent, transfer the call to someone who can help them immediately with their issue or need.
- **Pitch in**. Identify possible venues for recruitment efforts (e.g., churches, civic groups), participate in recruitment events, and distribute recruitment materials in your neighborhood.
- **Say "Thanks."** If you see a foster parent in your building or in the community, thank them for what they do for our children.

When resource families call, if at all possible, transfer them to a live person who can help them.

Adapted from Goodman, 2008

Agency Trainers

Key Strategies for Supporting Resource Families

- **Spread the word**. Inform relevant agency staff and families themselves of any training that would benefit resource parents. Give timely notice and good directions so foster parents can plan ahead.
- **Choose training sites carefully**. Use convenient facilities with free parking.
- **Be family-friendly**. Work with others in your agency and community to arrange or provide child care so that families can attend training.
- **Feed them**. Buy good snacks so foster parents feel special!
- **Listen and respond**. Take seriously the evaluations resource families complete. Follow up on their suggestions and requests.
- **Be a good host**. Be courteous to foster parents in your building, help them find the restrooms, specific staff members, or meeting room.
- **Promote conference attendance**. Encourage foster parents to attend the annual North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association conference.
- **Make training fun**. Create a welcoming atmosphere in the training room. Meet and greet foster parents as they enter. Help them have an enjoyable experience!
- **Ensure training matters**. Advocate for and arrange trainings you hear foster parents request/suggest or you think would benefit foster parents. Make sure the training is practical and offers concrete suggestions they can use at home.
- **Promote partnership and understanding** by encouraging social workers (child placement, adoption, CPS) to attend trainings with foster parents.

Adapted from Goodman, 2008

Chapter XI of this guide provides more information about what directors, program managers, and many other folks inside and outside the agency can do to support recruitment and retention of resource families.

Golden Nugget!

Improving Collaboration Within the Agency

Enhancing relationships with foster parents is crucial to getting and keeping them. This cannot be left solely to licensing workers. Many other agency workers have contact with families, and these interactions have a large influence on the families' feelings about the agency (AdoptUsKids, n.d.). Improving collaboration and communication across the agency can be done in a number of ways, including the following:

- Holding facilitated dialogues with agency staff and foster parents, in order to clarify misconceptions and determine what works well in current practice and what doesn't
- Providing training to all agency staff about confidentiality, since misconceptions about what can and can't be told to foster parents is a major contributor to foster parent dissatisfaction
- Including child-placing staff and supervisors in any foster parent recognition efforts

Source: Casey Family Programs, 2005; Rodger, et al., 2006

Chapter II
Assessing, Planning, and Evaluating Your Efforts

You can't decide where you're going until you know where you are. Take the time to assess your needs, plan your efforts, and evaluate how you're doing—it will pay off with more effective and lasting changes.

1. Use a Committee to Grow Your Recruitment Program

To sustainably recruit and retain families for children, you need a recruitment ***program***, not a recruitment person. A committee of agency and community stakeholders can most effectively grow your program. Here are some tips for forming and focusing your committee:

You can't decide where you're going until you know where you are.

- Include at least one program manager so the committee has enough clout to get things done.
- Include at least one current resource parent and one youth currently or previously in care and, if possible, one birth parent.
- Include community members who reflect the children in care.
- One of the committee's goals will be getting community members with expertise in relevant areas such as media relations, marketing, and fundraising to join the committee.

2. Step 1: Where Are You Now?

Here are some of the things you need to understand to begin assessing where your resource family recruitment and retention program is right now.

- Profile of children in foster care in your county, including:
  - How many there are
  - Demographic profile (consider age, ethnicity, sibling groups, etc.)
  - What neighborhoods or areas of the community (e.g., zip codes) they are from
  - Other characteristics, such as services needed or other special needs
  - Where they are placed
- Profile of your agency's resource families, including:
  - How many there are
  - Demographic profile
  - The neighborhoods or areas of the community in which they live
  - Kinds of children they are currently willing to care for (consider age, ethnicity, special needs, etc.)
  - Capacity of their homes
  - How many are currently in use

- Qualitative data on your agency's strengths and needs
  - What do your resource families think your agency does well?
  - What do resource families think are your agency's greatest needs or areas for improvement?
  - How can your resource families contribute to your agency's efforts?
  - What do agency staff members see as the agency's strengths and needs related to resource family recruitment and support?
  - How can staff outside the licensing/recruitment unit contribute to your agency's efforts?
- Data on what's working right now—your agency's successful recruitment and retention methods.

  Ask prospective resource families who call your agency
  - How did you hear about us? What made you decide to call today?
    - This tells you which methods generate the most calls.

  Ask your current resource families:
  - How did you hear about us? What made you decide to become a foster or adoptive parent?
    - This tells you which marketing approaches are most successful in recruiting people who make it through the licensing process.
    - See the Appendix E for a sample intake form for new callers and Appendix F for a sample table to track responses. You can also download Appendix F as an Excel file by clicking here.
  - What does our agency do to keep you working with us as a resource family?
    - This tells you which retention methods are most successful.

By gathering data from the experts in your system, and by comparing the profile of the children in foster care and to your current resource families, you can determine what your greatest needs are. This will determine how to prioritize your efforts and funding.

Eureka!

Developing Your Current Resource Families

Many licensed foster homes are empty or underused. A survey found that ***35% of licensed homes had no children placed*** in them (Cox, et al. 2002). Research suggests that a major factor in under-use of foster homes is that families who become licensed are ***often unable or unwilling to care for the majority of young people needing care***: school-age and adolescent children, and children with special needs (USDHHS, 2002). Anecdotal evidence suggests this is happening in North Carolina. Some families want only young children; some say they only want children of a certain race; still others are interested only in adoption.

Conversely, research shows that families who express a willingness to foster "difficult to place" children are more likely to have children placed with them, foster more children overall, and foster longer (Cox, et al., 2002).This raises important questions for your efforts:

- How many resource families in your county are unused? What are the reasons behind this?
- What training and support can you give to prospective and current resource parents so they feel more competent and willing to care for the children who need homes? Ask your licensed resource families who don't currently have placements: what training or support would make you feel more comfortable about caring for these children?
- In other cases, what training and support may be needed so that a*gency staff* can feel confident that your licensed families are competent and prepared to care for these children?
- What groups or communities can you target who might be willing to care for these children? What is the best way to do this?

Data Collection Resources

Here are some suggestions for sources you might consult or create to help assess your agency's recruitment and retention of resource families:

<u>Quantitative Data</u>

- **NC Child Welfare Program** (http://ssw.unc.edu/cw/). This site allows you to search a wealth of data on demographics and outcomes for children in care in your county, and to compare your county to others of the same size or to the state as a whole.
- **Simple Resource Family Tracking Spreadsheet**. Use a spreadsheet or table to maintain a profile of your current resource families (see Appendix F).

Qualitative Data

- Annual resource family survey (see Appendix G for sample)
- Annual staff survey
- Foster parent stay interviews (see Golden Nugget box below and Appendix H for tips and sample questions)
- Foster parent exit interviews (see Appendix I for tips and sample questions)
- Agency roundtable with resource families and staff

Golden Nugget!

What Is a Stay Interview?

A "stay interview" is a conversation designed to find out what makes a resource family stay in the program and what might make them leave. It is a way to proactively gather information about what is working well in the partnership and where improvements could be made. Stay interviews can help determine what kind of acknowledgement, training, support, or problem-solving can be done to keep families fostering and developing (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2005).

3. Step 2: What Are Your Greatest Priorities?

Once you've assessed where you are in terms of children needing homes and homes available, set specific recruitment and retention goals and priorities. This will help focus everyone's time and attention, and it will help you see what's working and what's not.

Your goals should be realistic, objective, and measurable.

Setting goals for a program requires the same rule of thumb as setting goals with a family: your goals should be realistic, objective, and measurable. If the goals are unrealistically high, people will get frustrated and give up. Ask yourself: if this is our goal, how will we know we've achieved it? How will we know we're making progress?

Of course, how much you can achieve also depends on the resources your agency and community can devote to the recruitment and retention of resource families. The table below includes some priorities for agencies of different sizes, sample goals, and where you can find related information in this guide.

Information for Developing Your Program and Setting Goals

If Your Priority Is . . .	Your Goal Might Be…	See Page
Creating a recruitment and retention committee	Committee of x# of people will meet monthly and recruit 2 community members in next 3 months	10
Gathering data to assess your program	Conduct survey of foster parents and gather profile data of youths and homes in next 3 months	10
Getting participation from others in the agency	All staff will be evaluated and given flex time for their participation in recruitment and support activities in 1 year	7, 11
Finding more families for teens	x# of additional families for teens in 1 year	52
Finding more families for children with medical needs	x# of additional families for medically needy children in 1 year	52
Finding more families for siblings	x# of additional families for siblings in 1 year	53
Licensing more families of any kind	x# of additional families in 1 year	10
Collaborating with other counties/ private agencies to pool resources	Convene regional planning meeting with agency directors/managers in 3 months	43-44
Developing and supporting current families to take children in need of care (teens, special needs, etc.)	Provide quarterly in-service trainings on relevant topics	62

4. Step 3: Develop and Apply Your Agency's MEPA Compliance and Annual Plan

As directed by federal law, the NC Division of Social Services asks each North Carolina county DSS agency to develop its own annual plan for complying with the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996 (MEPA/IEP).

Although in the context of a busy agency this requirement may sometimes feel unwelcome, it is actually a valuable opportunity. Your MEPA plan gives you all the data you need and outlines what you will do during the course of the year. Don't treat this as an exercise in creative writing. Instead, develop and use a workable plan to systematically enhance your resource family recruitment and retention efforts. Work your MEPA plan!

For a MEPA plan template that can be customized for your agency, see Appendix J.

Chapter III
Funding Your Efforts

If agencies are serious about resource family recruitment and retention they must develop a realistic plan and then adequately fund that plan. In some agencies, this will mean giving those in the agency charged with resource family recruitment and retention a definite budget.

1. Developing a Budget

Develop your own process or use the following table to estimate some of the costs associated with the most common methods for finding and supporting resource families.

R & R Method	Registration or display fee	Printing costs for informational materials (flyers, brochures)	Printing costs for marketing materials (posters, stickers, pens)	Materials for children's activities and/or child-care	Give-aways or door prizes	Advertising in local media	Food and paper supplies
Community Fairs	$1.00	$1.00	$1.00	$1.00	$1.00		
General Community Recruitment/Publicity		$1.00	$1.00			$1.00	
Community Education/Public Speaking		$1.00	$1.00				
Annual Resource Family Event		$1.00		$1.00	$1.00		$1.00
Resource Family Meetings/Trainings		$1.00		$1.00		$1.00	$1.00
Total	$1.00	$5.00	$3.00	$3.00	$2.00	$2.00	$2.00

In most agencies, the recruitment and retention budget will need to be supplemented by community donations and partnerships. Be creative in thinking about how civic organizations, businesses, churches, and individuals in your community might provide important materials, services, or funding. Below are some possible ideas.

2. Community Partnerships/Sponsorships

Even the smallest counties have numerous community groups with time, talents, and money to dedicate to a worthy cause. Here are some groups that could potentially help DSS agencies in North Carolina:

- **Businesses and Business Groups**: Chamber of Commerce, local business associations (e.g., Realtor's Association, Builder's Association, etc.), large and small retailers from Wal-Mart and Target down to your local main street shops

- **Civic Groups**: Lions Club, Ruritan Club, Kiwanis Club, fraternities and sororities
- **Religious Organizations**: Churches, synagogues, mosques, local clergy associations, and interdenominational service groups
- **Schools**: PTAs, faculty associations, sports teams and booster clubs, individual or group service projects

See Appendix K for a sample letter to community organizations and businesses to invite their involvement in your agency's efforts. While a letter is not enough by itself to begin an active partnership, it's an important first step.

Golden Nugget!

Don't Know Where to Start with Fundraising in Your Community?

Why not start with your current resource families and staff? Develop a list of the churches, schools, and community groups where you have a personal connection through a resource family or staff member. Ask people to speak to their groups—or to introduce an agency recruiter—to encourage them to partner with DSS.

Often we think of doing community outreach only to recruit resource parents. This misses a large pool of people who might be able to help your recruitment and retention mission immediately in some other way—and who might have an experience that leads them to foster or adopt down the road.

As you plan your goals and activities for the year, think about specific ways community groups might help. Collaborate with other units in your agency who might benefit from community collaboration, such as foster care workers who need resources for birth families. If you can help find a source for volunteer mentors for teens in care, foster care or LINKS workers are more likely to help plan a training event with you on fostering teens. You could involve a panel of LINKS youth in community presentations, who could speak to the need for foster homes for teens and young adults on CARS agreements. The group SAYSO (www.saysoinc.org) is another source of young people accustomed to public speaking and willing and able to advocate for youth in care.

Some ideas might require collaboration within your agency on the use of volunteers. DON'T GIVE UP! This can create a resource pool for everyone's benefit. Volunteer Today (http://www.volunteertoday.com/) is a helpful resource for information and suggestions about using volunteers.

Ideas for Partnering with Community Groups on Your Program Goals

If Your Goal Is…	Community Groups Could Help by. . .
Committee of x# of people will meet monthly and will recruit 2 community members in next 3 months	Providing a representative on your recruitment and retention Committee
Conduct survey of foster parents and gather profile data of youth and homes in next 3 months	Providing an office volunteer to make copies and mail out surveys
x# of additional licensed homes in 1 year	Encouraging members of their organization to become resource families; writing an op-ed piece for a local paper about your agency's specific needs; manning an agency table at community events
x# of additional pre-service or in-service classes in 1 year	Providing donations of snacks, paper goods, child-care, etc.

See Chapter VII for more detailed ideas and resources for building and sustaining community partnerships.

3. Grants

DSS agencies can receive grants from a wide range of funders, often without completing lengthy applications. Here are some resources for finding grants:

- **The Foundation Center** (http://fconline.foundationcenter.org/)
  Provides a comprehensive directory of grant providers by state; also provides free and low-cost online training on finding and applying for grants.
- **National Network of Adoption Advocacy Programs: One Church-One Chil**d (http://www.nnaap-ococ.org/minigrantmain.htm)
  Provides mini-grants of $10,000 – $15,000 to child welfare agencies for new or existing One Church - One Child programs (see Chapter VII for more information). Also provides training and technical assistance on grant-writing.

Golden Nugget!

How to Find or Apply for a Grant

Look for someone in your agency or community who has experience with grant writing to serve on your recruitment and retention committee. Local nonprofit organizations and colleges often have this expertise.

4. Use of NC's Special Children Adoption Fund

North Carolina's Special Children Adoption Fund was created to find safe adoptive homes for hard-to-place children who are living in or likely to be placed in foster homes or institutions. The Fund is intended to secure adoptive homes for more children than would otherwise be possible within the limitations of existing financial resources and to enhance the adoption services program in this state. The Fund is performance-based: payments are only made after a Decree of Adoption has been issued.

The Special Children Adoption Fund can be used to recruit and train prospective adoptive families.

Allowable uses of the fund include the direct provision or purchase by contract of services included in the definitions of Adoption Services (code 010), Adoption Recruitment (code 011), Adoption Case Management (code 012), Child-Specific Recruitment, Assessment and Training of Adoptive Parents (code 013), and Post-Adoption Case Management (code 016). Examples of allowable uses are:

- Recruitment and training of prospective adoptive families for individual foster children or for foster children as a group
- Pre-placement assessments of prospective adoptive families, including assessments by private adoption agencies in other states
- Preparing children for adoption (preparation support groups, life books, etc.);
- Legal or court-related services to expedite the adoption process
- Post-adoption services for adoptive families
- Adoption service staff to expedite the adoption process for foster children and assure a timely response to all families who indicate an interest in adopting a child in foster care
- Child-specific recruitment, assessment, and training of adoptive parents, including relatives
- Cost-allocated share of equipment that will directly benefit the adoption program (note that the standard rules of purchasing equipment and vehicles apply)

To learn more about the use of NC's Special Children Adoption Fund, go to <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/dcdl/childrenservices/2001pdf/CS-41-2001.pdf>

5. Fundraising

Every little bit counts. If your agency has difficulty funding its resource family recruitment and retention plan, consider fundraising. Have you ever thought of working with your county foster parent association, a faith community, or a nonprofit organization in your community to hold a bake sale or yard sale to support resource family recruitment and retention efforts? In addition to raising funds, this can be a great way to build community ownership of your program and your outcomes and to highlight the good things your agency does for your community.

6. Where Should the Money Go?

Where should you spend the precious dollars you have at your disposal when it comes to recruiting and retaining resource families?

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2002) assessed the three main kinds of recruitment and concluded that they're all valuable, but they're not equally valuable. Here are their recommendations:

1. **General Recruitment**: events, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), billboards, foster care/adoption fairs, booths and events.
    - Least focused and least effective for bringing in likely resource parents
    - Gets some unsuitable applicants
    - Good for raising agency's profile, broadening community awareness
    - Spend 15% of your recruitment budget here
2. **Child-Specific Recruitment**: find a relative or close friend or canvas support groups, especially for children with special needs (e.g., hearing impaired).
    - Expensive. Should be 25% of recruitment budget
3. **Targeted Recruitment**: look at needs of the young people in your custody, then look at the pool of available homes.
    - Understand needs/traits of children (groups of youth entering care)
    - Assess your community: look at data, look at successful foster families you know
    - If you pitch the message right, Wednesday's Child can be targeted and effective
    - This should be 60% of your budget

Where Should the Money Go?

Recruitment Approach	Suggested Portion of Your R & R Budget
General	15%
Child-Specific	25%
Targeted	60%

Source: AECF, 2002

To learn more about general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment, consult Chapters VIII, IX, and X of this guide.

Chapter IV
Diversity

Federal law and best practice dictate that agencies should diligently recruit potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom homes are needed (P.L. 104-188).

When recruiting resource families for a targeted population, involve any agency staff who are a part of that population and/or are trained to address racial/ethnic/cultural barriers. Similarly, agencies should ask current foster, adoptive, and kinship families to help them learn about and connect with various cultures and groups in the community.

Use current resource families to learn about and connect with various cultures and groups in your community.

It is important to provide culturally appropriate materials, food, and personal products and to decorate lobbies, offices, booths at fairs, etc. with items which reflect the cultural heritage of the various communities from which you want to recruit resource families.

When families from diverse backgrounds express an interest in becoming a resource family, allow for flexibility; recognize the challenges different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups might face adjusting to rules and regulations to which they are not accustomed. One of the ways to help people feel comfortable in a new setting is to be aware of the language used.

1. Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is language which recognizes that:

- People's experiences differ.
- Our shared language makes the experiences of dominant groups more visible than those of oppressed groups.
- People are empowered by having a language with which to express their life experiences.
- Language changes as cultural and social conditions change.
- Our language choices have the power to hurt and exclude others and to damage or hinder relationships.

Culturally appropriate and non-gender-specific language should be used in professional documentation and advertising and educational materials.

General Principles of Inclusive Language

1. Choose inclusiveness over grammatical correctness or linguistic grace.
   - With a little thought, these need not conflict.
2. Call people what they want to be called.
   - Individual and group preferences can change over time. Keep up to date.
   - If you're not sure, ask.
   - Words do have the power to hurt. They also have the power to convey understanding and respect.
3. Take correction with grace. Your willingness to do so demonstrates partnership.
   - DON'T SAY: "I didn't mean anything by it" or "That's just political correctness."

        - Such statements convey that you weren't thinking about what you were saying, didn't care enough to think about how your words would affect the other person, or that you think other considerations are more important.
        - Our language says more about what we think than we are usually aware of, so choose language that reflects what you really mean.
    - DO SAY: "Oops…sorry. I won't say that again."
        - Then follow through. If you're not sure why someone took exception to something you said, ask.

Source: "Domestic Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Bisexual Communities," A curriculum developed for: HIV Education and Training Programs NYSDOH AIDS Institute, by NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence July, 2001, cited in North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

2. Non-English Speaking Resource Families

Although partnering with non-English speaking families can be a significant challenge for monolingual child welfare staff, families should not be discouraged from becoming a resource family because of this barrier. Being able to communicate with a child in his own language as you take care of him 24 hours a day is far more important than the ease with which resource families communicate with professionals serving the child.

The ease with which resource families communicate with a child is far more important than the ease with which they communicate with professionals serving the child.

Still, agencies have a responsibility to ask practical questions about working with current and prospective resource families who do not speak English, such as, who can conduct pre-service and other training in this family's language? Even if agencies have documentation forms available in the family's language, that does not mean there is someone in the agency that can read that language once the forms are filled out.

Professionals ask (and rightly so) what will happen once we get non-English speaking families licensed—how will the family communicate with other professionals? Interact with the schools? Administer medication? There are many possible obstacles.

If you face questions such as these, don't be discouraged. Solutions can be found. Indeed, the seed of many solutions may be found within resource families themselves—often at least one adult in the household speaks some English, which allows communication and facilitates problem solving.

That said, at present there is no single way to get answers to questions you may have about licensing/approving and partnering with non-English speaking families. The best approach is to reach out to other agencies to see if they have encountered and overcome obstacles similar to the ones you face. The NC Division of Social Services sponsors several e-mail listservs that can be used to query your peers at other agencies:

- **MRS listserv**. Subscribed to by county DSS child welfare practitioners, supervisors, program managers, directors, university partners, Division staff, and others. To join, send e-mail to MRS@lists.ncmail.net
- **Child Welfare Supervisor listserv**. Subscribed to by county DSS child welfare supervisors, Division staff, university partners, and others. To join, send e-mail to super-vision@resources.biglist.com.

- **Certified MAPP/GPS Leaders listserv**. Subscribed to by certified MAPP/GPS leaders and Division training staff. To join, contact the NC Division of Social Services' Child Welfare Staff Development Unit (919/334-1172).

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Eureka!

Resources for Working with Spanish-Speaking Families

- **Spanish-Speaking MAPP/GPS Leaders**. The Division maintains a list of certified MAPP/GPS leaders who speak Spanish and are willing to contract with agencies to lead Spanish-speaking MAPP/GPS groups. To obtain this information, call the Division's Child Welfare Staff Development Unit (919/334-1172).
- **Great Written Resource**. A resource on working with Spanish-speaking resource families is Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura: Promoting & Supporting Latino Families in Adoption and Foster Care (AdoptUsKids, 2008). Go to <www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/NuestraFamilia_NuestraCultura.pdf>

3. Interpreters

Children in resource families should not be used as interpreters. Asking a child to interpret for his parents can disrupt the family hierarchy—it gives the child the opportunity to change the meaning of what's being said and/or it may expose the child to information he is not developmentally ready to hear. Instead, use an adult interpreter.

Finding an Interpreter. Many social services agencies contract with people from the community to help interpret exchanges with non-English speaking families. If your agency does not, or if you need to communicate in a language in which your regular interpreters are not fluent, consider contacting the language department of a nearby college or university or your local hospital; these can be excellent resources for locating free or low-cost interpreters. Faith communities (churches, mosques, temples) that serve native speakers of a language may also have people willing to volunteer time as an interpreter. Finally, reach out to organizations that provide ESL (English as a Second Language) classes in your county for recommendations. Once you identify one person who is bilingual, he or she can help you find other potential interpreters in the community.

If You Cannot Find an Interpreter. If no interpreter is available, some guidelines for communicating include the following:

- Speak slowly in a calm, moderate voice.
- Address a person using his or her complete name or last name. Use a formal style, especially if you are not familiar the person.
- Use any word(s) you know in the person's language and act out words and actions while verbalizing them.
- Discuss one topic at a time; give instructions in sequence.
- Avoid asking questions or making statements in the negative.
- Avoid using pronouns.

If there are still difficulties communicating, you may wish to try communicating in writing or through a third language (i.e., you may not speak Russian and the Russian parent may not speak English, but you both may speak some French).

Translating Written Materials. Web sites such as <http://www.altavista/babelfish.com> can translate blocks of text into many languages from English and vice versa at no cost. However, it is a good idea to limit your use of this resource—use a qualified translator to ensure your materials say what you intend them to say.

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

4. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resource Families

Because most child welfare professionals have not worked with deaf or hard of hearing resource families, they may anticipate difficulties in partnering with them. However, deaf and hard of hearing families should not be discouraged from becoming resource families. Indeed, because of their experiences and knowledge of community services and resources, they can provide excellent care—especially to children who are themselves deaf or hard of hearing. Following are some guidelines for working with resource families who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- Do not use children to interpret. Instead, use interpreters. The interpreter and speaker should be positioned beside one another so the resource family member can see both persons easily.
- If the resource family is speech reading, ensure proper lighting so he or she can see the speaker's mouth easily. The speaker should face the speech reader and be positioned at the speech reader's eye level. The speaker should talk slowly yet naturally.
- Consider videoconferencing to provide services for clients with hearing impairments.
- Consider needs of clients with hearing impairments when purchasing alarm systems, alarm clocks, phone systems, televisions and other equipment that is typically utilized through hearing.

TTY Devices. A text telephone device (TTY) is a keyboard and text display device that can be connected to a telephone and is used by persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or who have speech impairments. Some social services agencies have a TTY with a dedicated phone line. TTY equipment should be tested regularly and all staff should be trained on its use and appropriate terminology. If the organization does not have TTY it may communicate with TTY users via the NC Relay. The NC Relay system allows an operator to translate for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing for people who do not have a TTY system on their end. There is also TTY compatible software and hardware for personal computers. Additionally, TTY might be set up as an answering machine to retrieve text teletype messages. If your agency receives TTY calls on a voice line, these are typically identified by a high pitched electronic beeping sound, by an announcer, or by silence at the other end. If an organization uses portable TTY units, it is suggested that these are located near the phone in order to reduce delays.

NC Relay is a service which can connect a TTY caller with a hearing caller. Access NC Relay by dialing 711 or 877-735-8200.

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

5. American Indian Resource Families

When working with American Indian resource families it is important to learn about their tribe and its traditions and history. Child welfare professionals should have a good understanding of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and resources available within the tribe. They must also demonstrate a strong respect for the tribe's cultural integrity. Resources for working with American Indian resource families include the following:

- **Working with American Indian Families**, *Children's Services Practice Notes*, vol. 11, no. 2 <http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/vol11_no2.htm>
- **Indian Child Welfare Issues** [Resource Page], National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/indian-child-welfare.html>

Recruiting American Indian Resource Families

American Indians often find it challenging to become resource families for the following reasons:

1. A value of non-interference in some tribes inhibits people from offering themselves to assist in someone else's business or problem.
2. It is likely that potential foster families may have experienced foster care themselves or had relatives who were in care: before 1978 as many as one out of every four Indian children were in some form of out-of-home care. Many Indian people do not want to expose their family to what they experienced.
3. Native Americans may not trust the child welfare system and what it represents. They also may have concerns how their family might be judged.
4. Many people have such a negative view of the child welfare system that they simply do not want to become part of the program that removes children.

Suggestions for Overcoming Resistance

Try using a door-to-door home-finding approach. In this approach, a resource family recruiter begins by going to respected elders and to community and spiritual leaders. The leaders are informed about the need for resource families and are asked to recommend families that would be good at taking care of children. Once a few names are gathered, the worker starts the process of visiting each recommended person's home. During the visit, the worker asks if she/he can tell them about the child welfare system and about the need for resource families, but the worker does not usually ask about their interest in actually providing foster care at this time. The worker may say "People around here say that you care about your kids. Do you know anyone who you think would also be good at taking care of kids?" The worker may come back several times before asking the family to consider becoming a resource family. This approach is considered polite and respectful.

Additionally, a worker might wait until a particular child needs a home and make a request in the context of that child's need. It is helpful if the worker is part of and knows the community. This must be done in a respectful way by a worker willing to take the time to develop relationships with the community members and tribal leaders.

From Terry Cross (1995) Heritage and Helping: A Model Curriculum for Indian Child Welfare Practice. National Indian Child Welfare Association. Reprinted from *Answering the Call: Getting More for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts, Practitioner's Guide* (n.d.)

Recruiting American Indians: It's All About Relationships

"Both of us are Lumbee, so we had a relationship starting out. We went to [tribal] board meetings to talk to them. Their concern is Native American children being placed with non-Native American families. But we explained to them our numbers, that Native American children far outweigh the number of Native American foster families. And that most recruitment comes from word of mouth, through churches, etc.

"We also adjusted our criteria. It used to be that you had to turn in an application before going to MAPP/GPS class. But we lost some people who didn't get their application in. Now, if someone calls and we have a MAPP/GPS class starting the next week, you're welcome to come. Just get us the application before the end of MAPP/GPS. We had five or six Native American families come to our last MAPP/GPS class."

— Anthony Maynor & Debra Bailey, Robeson County DSS

6. Training for Cultural Sensitivity

Stay in touch with demographic trends in the communities you serve. To find and prepare resource families who can meet the needs of the children in foster care, it is important to be able to answer the following types of questions about the children's racial, ethnic, or cultural groups.

- What are the roles of men and women in this culture? What is the role of children, elders and extended family members?
- What is the communication style of this culture? How does one show respect?
- How are children disciplined?
- What is the role of religion or spirituality in this community?

You can educate yourself through formal training, your own research and, most of all, by learning directly from someone who belongs to the group in question.

Building Affirming Relationships Across Lines of Difference

True partnership with prospective and current resource families depends on one-on-one relationships and building trust. Some guidelines for relationship building with people who are different from you include the following.

- Be flexible about time; different cultures view time differently
- Correct pronunciation shows respect: learn to pronounce each person's name
- Do not be offended if a client speaks to another person in their language
- Adjust your communication style as much as possible to the person's style in regards to tone, pauses, pace of speech, gestures, eye contact, personal space, and touching
- Understand the person's interpretation of their culture; it is critical to recognize that everyone has his or her own personal belief system

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

Eureka!

Using Culturally-Sensitive Recruitment to Meet the Needs of All Children

Recruiting families of color can pose a particular challenge when there is mistrust between agencies and communities (Casey Family Programs, 2005). The frequency with which children are placed with families of a different ethnicity can contribute to this sense of mistrust. In North Carolina, the high incidence of Lumbee children placed in non-Lumbee foster homes has caused concern (Jenkins, 2007), while the state's growing Latino population suggests a similar trend may develop if Latino foster families are not added to recruitment efforts.

Casey Family Programs' Breakthrough Series Collaborative (2005) has generated numerous interventions in this area. Agencies in other states have successfully undertaken recruitment campaigns among communities of color with similar interventions (Utah Foster Care Foundation, cited in ACF, 2001; Contra Costa, CA, "Kids Like Maria" campaign). Recommendations include:

a. Translating materials into Spanish or other languages of minority communities, including recruitment brochures, applications, flyers for schools, posters in community spaces, etc.

b. Certifying foster families of color as co-trainers of MAPP/GPS

c. Conducting joint recruitment efforts by families of color at fairs and other community events

d. Making joint contact (agency staff and foster parents of color) with prospective foster families

e. Having existing foster families of color contact prospective families who have dropped out or slowed in their momentum towards licensing

f. Conducting informational meetings in other languages and/or with other foster parents of color

g. Creating a recruitment video for specific groups of color

h. Implementing a dedicated line for foster family inquiries with a recording in multiple languages

i. Building relationships and focusing recruitment efforts in faith, ethnic, and civic organizations in communities of color

Chapter V
Engaging Families from the First Contact

1. When Families Initiate Contact

Many people think about fostering ***for a year or more*** and hear messages about foster care ***three or four times*** before making an initial inquiry call (Pasztor & Wynne 1995).

When people finally reach out to make that first call, your response needs to be warm, timely, and encouraging (AdoptUsKids, n.d.). From the beginning, each potential foster or adoptive family should be considered a precious resource, deserving personal attention and efficient service.

Remember, we need them much more than they need us.

2. Where Families Get Lost

Often potential resource families drop out of the licensing process because it drags on for too long, or because they feel forgotten or unsupported. One study found that out of 2,698 inquiries from prospective foster families, only 8% (n=227) resulted in new licensed/approved foster homes for the child welfare system (Wildfire, 2008).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation suggests that agencies can get more people successfully through to placement by making the process more efficient. They found that typically a lot of time is wasted between licensing steps:

Between	And
The First Call	Orientation
Training	Application
Assessment	Approval
Orientation	Pre-service Training
Application	Assessment
Approval	Placement

Consider the following questions to enhance your response to potential resource families:

- When do gaps occur between the first call and placement of a child in a foster home?
- Which steps take the most time?
- Where do you lose the most people?
- What are you doing or can you start doing to keep people engaged?
- What are you doing or can you do to speed up the process?

Source: AECF, 2002

3. Common Mistakes

Waiting Too Long

Some agencies wait until families complete all or part of MAPP/GPS training before meeting with them individually, starting the application process, submitting background checks, or doing a home visit. While this strategy may seem to help you focus your time on families who are "serious" about fostering, it may instead mean that people who could be serious become frustrated with the long wait and give up. The sooner people can make a personal connection with someone at your agency, the more likely they are to commit to the process. If instead they have to wait through a drawn out process before being personally engaged, they are more likely to quit before they really get started.

Being Too Hasty

Some agencies are too quick to screen individuals out of consideration if they do not meet certain requirements. Although some shortcomings cannot be remedied (e.g., a serious criminal history), others can. For example, someone may be perfectly willing to get her GED if it means being able to care for children who need it.

4. Winning Strategies

The Personal Touch

It's crucial to have standards for quick, personal responses to new callers. People who make a personal connection to an agency are much more likely to stay the course. At least one large public agency in North Carolina adopted a policy of **visiting families within one week** of that first phone call from a prospective resource family. While workers at first thought this would be too time consuming, it became part of a very successful recruitment and retention approach.

At a minimum, interested callers should receive a **follow-up phone call** within a few days to answer additional questions and be sure they received their information packet and orientation session date.

Another worker made a point of **personally calling** all interested families **before the orientation** session to give them her name again and let them know she would be at the welcome table at the orientation. Especially for single parents, having a person to look for—and who is looking out for them—can make all the difference.

Golden Nugget!

Partnering with Your Resource Families to Make that Personal Connection

Don't have enough staff to do home visits to all new callers? This can be a great role for experienced resource families. Or you can ask new callers if they would like a phone call from a current resource family to answer more of their questions.

Worried about what your current resource families might say? Think again. It's better for families to know the real story from the beginning, and to know your agency's going to be straight with them.

Tracking What Works

Collect information to help you assess which recruitment efforts are most effective. Be sure you ask "what made you decide to call today?" or "how did you hear about us?" every time someone new calls. See Appendix E for a sample intake form for new callers and Appendix F for a sample spreadsheet to track responses.

Other Ideas from AdoptUsKids for Engaging New Callers

- Have a special recruitment 800 number and a real person answering the phone; have access to a translator for return call.
- Prepare the person who answers the phone to answer most questions. Don't bounce the caller around from person to person.
- Make sure your orientation of prospective parents makes them feel welcomed, respected, accepted, and needed.
- Teach all who come into contact with resource parents how to handle the first call. In training, emphasize the best way to respond to cultural differences.
- Provide persons who have first contact and/or take first calls with talking points rather than a script and with answers to commonly asked question. See a sample of talking points in Appendix L.
- Provide new callers with information on the children who need homes:
  - Age and various racial ethnic backgrounds
  - Emotional needs of children
- Provide new callers with information on the pre-service training process.
- Send notes and meeting reminders at least a week before the first orientation or training session.
- Put the parents on a mailing list for newsletters.
- Periodically audit the agency's first contact approach:
  - Use a "secret shopper" method in which agency staff call in to personally experience the quality of response.
  - Auditors: use a checklist to rate the experience and give consistent feedback.
  - Ask: Do we encourage callers to bring friends to orientation?

Source: AdoptUsKids, n.d..

5. Screening Families "In" vs. "Screening Out"

Our underlying attitudes have a big influence on how we do our job and relate to people.

Everyone who recruits and licenses resource families must answer a fundamental question. When you begin a mutual assessment, is your underlying belief that you need to screen ***out*** inappropriate families, uncovering secrets or misconceptions that might make you reluctant to place a child in their home? Or is your underlying belief that you need to screen ***in*** families who show potential and interest by determining what support, training, or resources they would need to successfully care for a child?

Our underlying attitudes and unspoken priorities have a big influence on how we do our job and relate to people.

Of course our first priority is to find safe, stable placements for children in care. But no family or home is perfect. How do you decide which risks you can live with and which you can't? How do you decide which families you can develop and train, and which are not worth the effort?

Many families in North Carolina have been denied placements by one agency only to go on to successfully foster or adopt children from other agencies or even other states. Agencies who successfully place children—especially those considered "hard to place"—work collaboratively and creatively in partnership with families to address their needs and build on their strengths.

We talk about being strengths-based all the time. Sometimes the reality is that we don't look very hard for strengths, and we are quick to rule out families based on superficial needs.

6. Keeping Our Own Preferences in Check

For many of us, the ideal family looks a lot like our own. Of course, this kind of bias—often unconscious and unintentional—occurs in all professions and types of people. We tend to feel most comfortable with people who are most like us (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Phelps, et al., 2000). However, when making life-altering decisions about finding homes for children, this kind of bias needs to be brought into the light and challenged.

In North Carolina, some families who wish to foster or adopt may be so different from the social worker that it is hard to see their strengths. A family with limited formal education may seem lacking to a social worker from a middle class, college-educated background. A non-traditional family may seem inappropriate to a worker from a very traditional family. But are these really the characteristics that make for good families?

The relative wealth of a family can also be a big influence. True, we need resource families who can support themselves without an over-reliance on the small reimbursement provided for taking care of children from the child welfare system. Yet often there is a values-based decision about what is needed for a child to live happily with a family.

It's not that finances or beliefs shouldn't play a part in the mutual home assessment; it's just that we need to recognize our own biases about money, social class, and lifestyle. A family may not be just right for you personally, but they may be just right for a child in need of a home.

Golden Nugget!

Examining Our Assumptions about Money and Motivation

Some child welfare professionals are "put off" when one of the first questions a prospective resource family asks has to do with financial compensation. Although social workers may feel concerned—families' primary reason for wanting to foster should not be money (or they will be sorely disappointed!)—this is a good example of a time when it is important to keep one's biases in check. Given that many people deliberate a long time before calling the agency, it is possible that they may have answered many of their other questions (e.g., is their house large enough, how long is pre-service training, etc.). It may be that financial questions are among the few they have not yet answered.

The point? Even if someone's first question is about money, don't assume they are just "in it for the money." Remember the principle of partnership that says, "Judgments can wait."

Chapter VI
Community Education and Public Awareness

This chapter is based in large part on the NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Best Practices Manual (2006): special thanks for granting us permission to reprint and adapt this material.

Community education and public awareness efforts are essential to recruiting and retaining resource families—they increase the public's awareness of the need for resource families, create support for child welfare programs, and help us tap into existing community strengths and resources.

1. Community Education Planning

Every resource family recruitment and retention program should have a community education and public awareness plan. The plan should be simple yet creative, appeal to specific audiences and be culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate. Essential components of the plan include the goals and target audiences, messages, channels, timeline, and budget. Plans should incorporate as many types of educational activities as possible, including speaking engagements, development and distribution of materials, and media campaigns. The plan should begin with thorough research and end with an evaluation to measure success.

Eureka!

Things to Consider When Planning a Campaign

- Year-round campaigns are considered more effective than periodic campaigns.
- Many people think about fostering for a year or more and hear messages about foster care 3 or 4 times before making an initial inquiry call.
- The more frequently people are exposed to positive messages, the more likely they are to call.

Source: Pasztor & Wynne, 1995

2. Purposes and Target Audiences

The primary focus of most community education and public awareness efforts will be on encouraging people to consider stepping forward to explore becoming a resource parent. Education efforts should also inform potential volunteers and other community stakeholders (e.g., churches, civic clubs, etc.) about what they can do to support the good work of your agency. Messages for education campaigns should be carefully designed based on the needs of your agency and the needs of the children and families you serve. Chapters VIII, IX, and X of this guide provide more information about the audiences for general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment efforts.

3. Community Education Events

Child welfare agencies can enhance recruitment of resource families by participating in or sponsoring community education events. These events help build community awareness and advertise the mission and services of the organization. Community education events may also serve as fundraisers. (See Chapter III for more on fundraising.) Often agencies partner with other community organizations in outreach efforts, which increases the reach of their message and enhances interagency collaboration. Common community education events include the following:

- Bills with foster care/adoption inserts
- Book club focus on foster care/adoption themes
- Candlelight vigils to promote awareness of child abuse
- Celebration around anniversaries, facility expansions, or high profile visitors
- Celebration of appreciation to community partners
- Community picnic or potluck
- Interfaith gathering
- Child welfare issue forums
- Marches
- Newspaper pledge in support of foster and adoptive parents signed by members of community
- Participation in national campaigns, including Foster Care Month in May and Adoption Awareness Month in November
- Faith organization-sponsored prayer or meditation services
- Proclamation signing ceremony
- Shopping bags or other containers with resource family recruitment messages
- Panels of former/current youth in foster care and/or resource families

4. Speaking Engagements

Managing a Speakers Bureau

Resource families and former foster youth can be very effective speakers, especially if they tell their own story. Some child welfare agencies run a speaker's bureau that includes people trained and prepared to speak about the need for resource families, child welfare issues, and the organization. Speaker's bureaus should offer presentations in all languages spoken in the community. Typically, the organization maintains records on speakers including the following information:

Resource families and former foster youth can be very effective speakers.

- Name
- Mailing and e-mail addresses
- Telephone numbers (including mobile phone numbers)
- Scheduling preferences (day, night, week, weekend)
- Group preferences such as civic groups, youth, businesses, faith organizations, or other specific populations
- Geographic preferences
- Speaker's status as a resource parent or former foster child who will talk about personal experience, if applicable

A designated staff person or volunteer usually coordinates speaking engagements. They will contact the speaker who is the best match based on the information above and keep records of all speaking engagements.

SAYSO, which is North Carolina's organization of current and former foster youth, has members who have had experience making presentations that include "telling their story." Your county may have a local chapter of SAYSO, or you can contact them through their website at www.saysoinc.org.

Speaker's Bureau Records

It is important for organizations to keep records of all speaking engagements and to evaluate the speakers. Following the speaking engagement, an evaluation and thank you note should be sent or given to the group that requested the speaking engagement. Other speaker's bureau documentation may include the following information:

- Audience
- Contact person
- Mailing address
- Phone number and e-mail address
- Number of people in audience
- Volunteer time donated by speaker
- Date sent evaluation and thank you note to the group
- Date added group to mailing list, if requested

5. Printed and Electronic Education Materials

There are a variety of ways that your agency can educate the community through written materials. These materials may be created in-house with the help of desktop publishing software, contracted out to professional publishers, adapted with permission from a neighboring county or partner agency, or obtained from national or regional campaigns. To obtain posters, PSAs, and other promotional materials developed by the Ad Council in cooperation with AdoptUsKids and the US Department of Health and Human Services, go to http://www.adcouncil.org or http://www.adoptuskids.org.

When creating or reviewing drafts of printed materials it is important to consider the following types of visual elements to make the materials more appealing to readers:

- Boxes, borders, backgrounds
- Capital letters, bold, italics, underlining
- Colors
- Graphics
- Headings, subheadings and captions
- Justification
- Photos that reflect diversity
- Sidebars and white space
- Spacing
- Typefaces

The agency's logo should be placed on all printed education materials.

The following types of printed materials are commonly created and distributed by resource family recruitment programs.

Brochures

The brochure should be written from the public's point of view and be concise, action-oriented, and focused on success and the future. Brochures might contain the following information:

- Mission
- Statement describing the need, including basic information about the characteristics of the children and families served
- Information about who is eligible and the process needed to become a foster or adoptive parent
- Description of what the organization needs to fulfill its mission
- Description of how the reader may help
- Contact information

Golden Nugget!

Giving Resource Families Business Cards

Matt Davies, a board member of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, recommends that agencies provide business cards to foster and adoptive parents, who can then give them out to people interested in learning more about becoming a resource parent.

Fact Sheets

A fact sheet is a one-page document that offers statistics relating to foster care, adoption, other child welfare issues, and information about services provided by the organization. Information for fact sheets can be found at the Child Welfare Information Gateway (http://www.childwelfare.gov/), the NC Division of Social Services website (http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/), and the site "NC Child Welfare Program" (http://ssw.unc.edu/cw/).

Newsletters

Organizations may publish a single newsletter or separate newsletters for the volunteers, staff, and community. See Appendix M for a sample newsletter for resource families from Nash County DSS. It is also important to contribute articles about foster care and adoption to other organizations' newsletters. Newsletters should look professional and usually contain the following types of information:

- Mission statement
- Local and national information relating to foster care and adoption
- Program highlights and information about services offered
- Updates on adoption and foster care related statistics
- Recent and current events and projects
- Calendar of upcoming events
- Resource family, volunteer, or staff profiles
- Legislative information
- Information about partnerships with other organizations

- Organizational and individual honors received
- Hours of clothes closet, etc. (if applicable)
- Needs list
- New resources such as library materials
- Position announcements
- Contact information including the organization's name, mailing address, editor's name, phone number and e-mail address
- Statement requesting address corrections and notification if receiving multiple copies as well as a request for readers to contribute names and addresses for the mailing list

Promotional Items and Advertisements

Promotional items might include posters, bookmarks, stickers, bumper stickers, pencils, pens, T-shirts, mugs or other items with the agency's logo and/or recruitment theme. Additionally agencies may advertise on billboards, the inside and outside of buses, and other locations.

Distribution of Printed Materials

Printed materials may be distributed in person, by mail, or electronically. An important part of the program's annual community education and public awareness plan is where and how your materials will get distributed. Having this information discussed during the planning process will be helpful when decisions need to get made about how much material to have printed. It can also be helpful to discuss the production and distribution of materials to coincide with large speaking engagements or display events (such as community events, health fairs, etc.).

Personal Distribution

Written materials may be distributed through brochure stands at the agency, by handing out at speaking engagements, and by posting at other organizations and businesses. Some popular places to distribute information include the following:

- Apartment bulletin boards
- Businesses
- Doctors office waiting and exam rooms
- Grocery stores
- Information tables and booths at community fairs
- Laundry mats
- Post offices
- Public buildings
- Schools and libraries

Distribution by Mail

Printed materials may also be distributed by mail. Your community education plan should address mailing expenses and guide staff in decisions about mass mailings. It is important for mailing lists to be accurate, coded, and maintained on a database with names, titles, addresses, phone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and notes about previous contacts or conversations.

Electronic Distribution

All printed materials may also be distributed electronically through e-mail or web sites. It is important for recruitment and retention staff to work carefully with electronic

communications experts to ensure appropriate distribution. A quick way to distribute materials for public use is to format your documents as pdf files, through Adobe Acrobat. Storing files in Adobe Acrobat pdf format and keeping the original Microsoft Word document (doc) in a safe place ensures that the document cannot be edited unintentionally. Similarly, when distributing fliers or other announcements electronically, attaching them as pdf files instead of doc files ensures that they cannot be modified by the receiver.

Golden Nugget!

Working with PDFs

To download a free copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader, with which you can **read** pdf files, visit: http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html. Install this application once you download it.

There are two free software programs you can download to **create** pdf files:

- For PrimoPDF, visit: www.primopdf.com
- For Cute PDF Writer, visit: http://www.cutepdf.com/Products/CutePDF/Writer.asp

After you have downloaded the software, to convert a Microsoft Word document to pdf format, follow these steps:

1. Go to File menu
2. Choose Print
3. Next to "Printer Name," click arrow so drop down menu appears
4. Choose Adobe pdf[1]

6. Media Relations

It is important for resource family recruiters to understand the staffing of media organizations and to keep current lists of media contacts. See Appendix N for a sample format. The following positions are common contacts:

Television

- News directors
- Producers
- Editors
- Anchors
- Reporters

Radio

- Talk or Public Affairs directors
- Producers

[1] This only works AFTER you have installed PDF software.

- Hosts
- Reporters
- Bookers

Typically the structure at print media organizations includes editors and reporters who write for newspapers, magazines, or web sites in the following topic areas:

- National events
- City or metro events
- Editorials
- Features
- Special topics such as child welfare issues

When planning media efforts, it is important to be aware that local stories may be picked up by wire services and printed in state or national media outlets. Media pieces may take on a variety of formats, several of which are outlined below.

Editorials

Editorials highlight a specific current issue, are usually 700 words or less and are written in the format of a memorandum. Prior to creating an editorial, it is helpful to contact the newspaper to inquire about any preferred formats or methods of submission. When writing an editorial, it is important to express passion about the issue and use local, real life examples. It is also helpful to include information about relevant laws or policies, services and volunteer or donor opportunities in the local area. A strong editorial will end with a call to action. Information about the author, such as his or her background and affiliations, should accompany the editorial. A sample editorial from Guilford County DSS can be found in Appendix O.

Feature Articles

A feature is a non-news piece of general interest to the public. Features often tell someone's story. DSS agencies have countless stories to tell that can educate and motivate the public. Feature story ideas include:

- Volunteer opportunities for helping birth families and children in care (donations, mentoring, providing respite care, becoming resource parents, etc.)
- A family who has fostered for many years or fostered or adopted a large number of children
- A youth who found a family during his or her teen years
- The profile of a single foster mom
- A successful reunification that highlights shared parenting
- A family that has fostered more than one generation
- Available subsidies and supports for adopted children

Source: NACAC, 2001

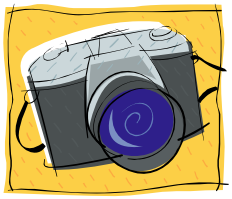
See Appendix P for a sample feature story that celebrates a successful foster family while also providing local statistics to highlight an agency's needs.

Media Advisories or Alerts

A media advisory or alert serves as a reminder that an event is approaching. It should be brief, with a headline, contact information, date, and details including the purpose, time, and place of the event. It is also helpful to include an offer to set up interviews and photo opportunities with key individuals.

Media Packets (Press Packets)
Media packets are distributed to media representatives who attend an event sponsored by the organization. Staff generally meet with media representatives before the event begins to discuss materials in the packet. Information that might be part of a media packet includes the following items:

- Copy of press release
- Biographies of presenters and contact information
- Brief talking points
- Statistics related to foster care, adoption, or child welfare (fact sheet)
- Story ideas
- Brochure
- Recent news clippings
- Photos that are labeled with a caption and names of persons in the photo (with their permission); black and white 5x7 photos are usually preferred



Press or Photo Opportunities
A press or photo opportunity is an event that is not planned specifically for the media but might be covered by the media. Examples include fundraisers, rallies, and other community events. It is important to be prepared for these opportunities and plan who will address the media and what points will be presented if the opportunity arises.

Press Releases
A press release highlights an upcoming event. Press releases are usually distributed the day before the event and are addressed to a specific person. A press release should describe who, what, why, when, where, and how in regards to the event being publicized.

Press releases are typewritten on letterhead and double-spaced with a wide left margin for editorial notes. These documents are typically 1 to 2 pages in length and one-sided rather than printed front and back. If the press release is two pages, write "Add one" on top of second page. If possible, provide suggestions for video or audio footage to accompany the story. Appendix Q contains instructions for writing a press release for a special event.

Public Service Announcements
Public service announcements (PSAs) typically offer information about the need for foster or adoptive parents or special events. The PSA should be clear, concise, and informational as well as emotional and answer who, what, why, when, where, and how.

A PSA is usually written by community education staff and forwarded to the broadcaster along with a cover letter. The media type, date, description, length, and contact information should appear on the top of the page and the PSA text should be typed in uppercase letters. Standard spots are typically 10 seconds, 20 seconds, or 60 seconds. Each block of 10 seconds will equal approximately 20-25 words. Several versions of different lengths might be created to accommodate different media spots. Many organizations secure a local personality to donate their time as a reader or submit pre-taped PSAs.

Golden Nugget!

Free Public Service Announcements

In partnership with AdoptUsKids, the Ad Council has developed free, high quality PSAs about adopting children from foster care. Available in English and Spanish, they direct viewers to the national AdoptUsKids hotline, which routes callers to NC Kids for support, follow-up, and referral to the appropriate county DSS. You can register for free with the Ad Council and then view and download all of their PSAs at http://psacentral.adcouncil.org/psacentral/signon.do.

7. What North Carolina Media Representatives and DSS Directors Say

The following excerpts, taken from interviews conducted by the Rural Success Project (UNC, 2005), reflect the experiences, concerns, and advice of editors, reporters, and rural child welfare agency directors.

The Media: Newspaper Editors and Reporters

"I don't think I've ever gotten a press release [from our local DSS agency]. They are good about responding to questions but don't initiate stories that might help the community."

"We're looking for stories that contain news and information which can help our readers. If we've informed people to help them relieve the stress of a crisis, then I feel like I've done my job. That is my mission—to help people."

"An overall discussion of the ground rules would be very helpful—especially when the relationship is just beginning or changing with a new reporter or director. Both sides are a little more cooperative when there is not a grenade already sitting on the table."

"The director at the DSS here is informative and cooperative if I take the first step. If I don't approach the agency, I don't get the information. It would be great if there was someone who would keep in close contact with me to keep me informed."

"If you want a good news story covered, you're going to have to think of a bad news angle. When writing a press release, talk about the problem and how the agency is dealing with that problem."

Rural Child Welfare Agency Directors

"I've learned that I have to make the news, I have to frame the picture, I have to shape the story. Otherwise, the only information that would get out about DSS would be the ugly stuff."

"You have to build a relationship with the media when there is not a crisis. Then when something does happen—and it will happen—you have a better chance of getting your side of the story out."

"If the only time you communicate with the media is when there is a crisis, you will be seen as a crisis agency. There's an old saying – if you don't create your image, one will be created for you."

Source: UNC, 2005

8. Media Interviews

When a Reporter Calls

All agency employees should receive basic training on taking media calls and directing these calls to designated staff members. Below are suggestions for staff who respond to media contacts.

- Be available and respond quickly since reporters are often under tight time frames.
- Determine the reporter's name and the media source that they represent and their contact information. You might offer to call back the reporter in order to verify the legitimacy of the caller.
- If you need extra time or want to gain more control over the interview, get a list of the reporter's questions and say you will call back. Be sure to give a time that you intend to call back and check with the reporter to make sure that the timing will still allow them to make their deadline.
- Determine the reporter's agenda including the story angle and know their deadlines so you can assist in a timely manner.
- It is critical to maintain confidentiality when working with the media. Ask media representatives to sign a confidentiality agreement before allowing them to visit your agency.
- If you are not available for the interview or do not want to be interviewed it is helpful to refer the reporter to another expert.
- If possible, meet with the reporter before the interview to discuss the story angle, who else is being interviewed, and the length of the interview.
- Know the demographics of your audience and use this knowledge to plan the most effective way to address them.

Tips for Interviews

During an interview it is important to convey a confident and helpful attitude and stay focused on the message. Below are additional tips for participating in an interview.

- Inquire about when the interview will air or be published. The best time slots for radio and television are typically the hours immediately before and after the work day. Also ask if the interviewer has prepared questions or if there will be questions from an audience.
- Review the program or other interviews by the same reporter before being interviewed.
- Conduct role plays before the interview. Practice with people who can offer support and constructive feedback.

- For television interviews, wear simple clothes and jewelry (solid colors are best) and pay attention to your posture.
- To reduce the likelihood of being misquoted by print media, you might provide a written statement summarizing your main points.
- For radio interviews, pay special attention to verbal punctuation—pace your speech and use pauses. This will help the audience to remember what they hear.
- Keep a glass of water nearby.
- Know the main message you want to convey and repeat it several times.

- Use everyday language rather than jargon or abbreviations.
- Remember what you say represents the organization and may be quoted—never say anything you do not want repeated and remember that you are never really "off the record."
- Keep responses short and to the point. Answers should be about 30 to 45 seconds in length. Tie your responses back to main points.
- Give real life examples of the points you make while maintaining confidentiality.
- Be prepared to offer your thoughts and analysis and state clearly what is fact and what is opinion.
- Use numbers rather than percentages, such as "one in four" rather than 25%.
- Do not introduce a topic you feel uncomfortable addressing.
- Never speak negatively about other organizations or individuals.
- If a reporter states incorrect information, restate the information correctly.
- If asked a question about a third party it is usually best to answer that you do not wish to speculate.
- If asked a question with specific choices, remember that your answer is not limited to those choices and offer a broader perspective if necessary.
- Never repeat a negative statement. Instead, replace it in your answer with a positive point.
- After you get the point across, stop talking. Don't ramble.

Maintaining Positive Media Relationships

Build ongoing relationships with the media and continuously thank them for their support because they are an important partner in child welfare. Below are ideas for creating and enhancing these relationships.

- Ensure the media is on your general mailing lists and invite them to attend activities sponsored by the organization.
- Keep updated lists of media contacts. These lists may be obtained from press associations.
- Ensure the media knows your organization's contact persons and keep them updated regarding any staff changes.
- Know the reporters in your area and their reputations.
- Inform yourself about local and national events and be prepared to present a statement or grant an interview when a high profile child welfare incident occurs.
- Provide relevant data from your agency to educate and motivate readers.

- Maintain a list of ideas for human interest stories involving the organization and encourage the media to contact you when they are in need of a story.
- Maintain a list of resource families and/or foster care alumni who are available to speak to the media.
- In case of a severe misquote or misprint, request a retraction or file a complaint with the media source.
- Encourage the media to assist the organization by sponsoring education campaigns.
- Invite media representatives to participate in volunteer training or other conferences or workshops.
- Encourage the media to spotlight foster care and adoption issues regularly rather than only covering the sensational cases.

Preparing for a Media-Covered Crisis

Usually the media will be on your doorstep as soon as a crisis or problem occurs. Below are some tips to help you prepare for a crisis before it happens.

- Written crisis procedures should designate persons responsible for investigating and managing a crisis and describe who is authorized to serve as the organization's spokesperson.
- Recognize when a minor problem may turn into a crisis and plan ahead.
- When the crisis occurs, identify and assess issues and develop action plan.
- Be prepared to create a press release outlining how the organization will respond to clients, staff, the public, funders, or others involved with the issue. Develop a plan for interviews or other follow up activities. The agency director should approve any formal statements before these are shared with the media.
- Try to anticipate specific questions from the media and prepare answers in advance.
- Keep a record of any requests for information and the organization's responses.

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

Celebrating Successes

An important part of community education is the celebration of successes and the many lives that are changed by the work of foster parents, adoptive parents, volunteers, and child welfare staff. Celebrations might take place at local, statewide, or national gatherings. Recognition categories might include any staff or volunteer positions as well as:

- Foster parents
- Adoptive parents
- Kinship parents
- Members of your speakers bureau
- Board or committee members
- Donors
- Funders
- Local and state government leaders
- Media companies or individuals
- Partner agencies, organizations, churches, etc.
- Statewide leaders
- Students or interns
- Visionaries

Chapter VII
Community Alliance Building

1. Community Relationships

When your recruitment and retention program is stretched for time and money, how can you develop productive community relationships? This is one area where time up front pays big dividends down the line. Here are some tips from social workers in North Carolina:

Investing community relationships today pays big dividends later.

- **Make it a win-win**. Figure out what you can offer to others in exchange for help with recruitment and retention. A business' name and logo on all your materials? A local mission activity for churches? Community service hours for local high school students?
- **Find one person who will champion your cause**. You need just one person in an organization to get excited about helping children in foster care, and that person will help you build the relationship over time. Is it the preacher's wife or the church secretary who knows how to get things done? Can you set up a meeting with the reporter or editor responsible for covering community events? Is there someone in a civic group who has personal experience with foster care?
- **Use the community education and public awareness material** from Chapter VI for your initial outreach to community groups. Be prepared to tell each group specifically what you are asking them for. Remember, think beyond "foster parents." Then make sure that someone—resource parent, staff member, or volunteer—will follow up and take the relationship to the next step.
- **Schedule time in your calendar** for building and maintaining community relationships. It may be one hour a week or every other week, or one day a month. In whatever way works for your agency, someone needs to have regularly scheduled time to make sure relationships bear fruit and continue year after year. It is not enough to send flyers to all the churches or schools in your county. It's the personal follow-up that makes the difference.

Thanks to Jeanne Preisler and Cumberland County DSS' Sandra Robinson for contributing ideas for this section.

2. The Regional Approach

Agencies, especially those that are smaller or in rural areas, can greatly benefit from a regional approach to recruiting, training, and retaining resource families. This will allow agencies to share resources and increase the pool of foster homes for everyone (USDHHS, 1995). Agencies can then make placement decisions based on the best match for a child, rather than placing children wherever they happen to have an open bed.

How might your agency collaborate with others in the same region?

- Offer joint MAPP/GPS classes (each agency hosts 1 or 2 classes per year that are open to families from the other agencies)
- Share information about available foster and adoptive homes on a regular basis (see information about existing collaborations below)

- Have a joint Recruitment & Retention Committee that funds and plans recruitment, in-service training, and appreciation events. You can use existing interagency committees, collaboratives, or other groups to lead this effort.

Who Should Be on a Regional R & R Committee?

- DSS and private agency recruitment, licensing, and foster care professionals
- DSS and private agency supervisors and program managers
- Resource families
- Youth in care
- Community members with experience and connections in relevant fields such as:
  - Media relations
  - Marketing/public relations
  - Fundraising
  - Local government
  - Local business/chamber of commerce
  - Local churches
  - Cultures and communities that reflect children in care in your region (for example, members of tribal organizations or Latino advocacy groups)

Existing Regional Collaborations

- **The Recruiter's Network**
  Includes a listserv of well over 100 professionals from public and private child-placing agencies in central North Carolina. Meets quarterly in the central region of the state for training and matching of families and children. To contact this group, send e-mail to: Jon.Hunter@rowancountync.gov.
- **WAFCA (Western Area Foster Care Association)**
  Serves professionals from public and private child-placing agencies in western North Carolina. Meets quarterly in Western North Carolina for networking, policy and practice updates, and training. To contact this group, send e-mail to: JMillican@nazch.com or jgrindstaff@aohealth.com.
- **Local System of Care Collaboratives**
  Many communities already have a foundation for interagency collaboration. Consider other ways these professional networks could support your agency's efforts. Do they serve families that fit your targeted recruitment needs? Could they help a Child and Family Team consider permanency options for a child? Can you develop a joint community education campaign? Whether your network is new or well-established, efforts like this can strengthen relationships.

3. One Church – One Child Initiative

In many communities in North Carolina, churches and other religious organizations are one of the strongest and most reliable resources for families in need. While there are countless ways to involve religious communities in your agency's efforts, Once Church – One Child is a popular and successful model.

In this model, you maintain a personal connection with a congregation, and rely on them for ongoing support. While originally this program developed to have churches provide support for a specific foster or adoptive child, it has now broadened in scope to providing a wide range of financial assistance, donated materials, volunteer hours, and

supportive relationships for youth in care and resource and birth families. In Appendix R you will find contact information and a sample newsletter from Rowan County's One Church – One Child Program. See also *Best Practices for One Church, One Child Model Programs* (Talley, 2008), which can be downloaded free of charge from <http://www.nnaap-ococ.org/documents/OCOCBestPractices.pdf>.

4. NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network

The NC Division of Social Services established NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network in 1999 through a contract with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. NC Kids provides recruitment services to each of the 100 county departments of social services in North Carolina free of charge.

Whether you utilize their services for your recruitment campaigns, your prospective waiting parents, or your waiting children, you will be meeting the MEPA requirement for diligent recruitment efforts and increasing the likelihood a waiting child will be matched with his or her forever family.

The team at NC Kids is committed to partnering with each public and private child-placing agency in North Carolina to ensure timely placement of children. This includes working with legal risk children and waiting families. Please review the list of services below and contact them with any questions.

Let NC Kids Help You!

- **NC Kids is a partner, not a competitor**. It is a state-sponsored organization that recruits foster and adoptive parents and supports child-placing agencies.
- **Register your children.** Remember all children must be registered within 30 days if there is no identified home. You can register legal risk children anytime for possible pre-adoptive matches.
- **Encourage prospective adoptive parents to register with NC Kids**. By registering, these families may have a better chance of finding the child they seek.
- **Request Heart Gallery Portraits of your legally free child**. You can specify where the children you are working with are featured. We have Heart Gallery exhibits all across the state.
- **Plan an adoption promotion event**. NC Kids' provides consultation to help you plan and put on a successful adoption promotion event.
- **Publicize your events**. NC Kids can provide publicity for all of your adoption and foster care related events. You can target a particular group to receive your announcements or send it to our entire database.
- **Use the NC Kids hotlines**. Social workers: call 1-888-NC KIDS-5 to place a child on the adoption registry. Families: call 877-NC KIDS-1 to get information about foster care and adoption.
- **Tell them what you want!** NC Kids strives to provide individualized support to every social worker when it comes to recruitment, matching, and referrals.
- **Reach out to the media**. Do you have a good relationship with a newspaper or TV station in your area? Let NC Kids know and they will contact them to request periodic features on waiting children across the state.

Chapter VIII
General Recruitment

1. Purpose

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. General Recruitment Ideas

Many of the following ideas come from USDHHS, 1995.

No Cost/Free General Recruitment Ideas

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

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

Golden Nugget!

Using Community Marquees

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

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

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

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

Low-Cost General Recruitment Ideas

- Posters, flyers, and brochures could be developed for distribution throughout communities through churches, clubs, and other organizations and to doctors' offices, hospital and clinic waiting rooms, libraries, beauty parlors, barber shops, laundromats, community centers, etc.
- Business cards. In addition to providing each DSS employee with a business card, some agencies also provide generic business cards to foster and adoptive parents, who can then give them out to people interested in learning more about becoming a resource parent.

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

Mid-to-High Cost General Recruitment Ideas

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

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

3. Use of Regional Approach to Recruitment

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

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

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

4. Common Mistakes

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

Starting Before You're Ready

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

Speaking Off Message

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

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

5. Winning Strategies

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

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

Sources: Pasztor & Wynne, 1995; AECF, 2002

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

Adoption Day at the Mall

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

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

Source: AdoptUsKids, 2008

Wristbands Raise Awareness & Fund Scholarships

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

Source: AdoptUsKids, 2008

Chapter IX
Targeted Recruitment

1. Purpose

Targeted recruitment focuses your efforts on specific families or communities who are best matched to care for the specific children and youth in need of homes. Developing a targeted recruitment plan fulfills your agency's MEPA requirement; it also encourages you to focus resources and efforts in areas that are most likely to yield results. As explained below, there are three crucial steps to success in targeted recruitment.

2. How to Do Targeted Recruitment

STEP 1: Describe the children in care

Develop a profile of the children in care in your agency: how many are there in total? How many are in each category when broken down by age group, ethnicity, and special needs (sibling group, medical, educational, or emotional needs, etc.)?

STEP 2: Describe the homes currently available to them

Develop a profile of the foster homes and beds: how many are there in total? 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 gap

Identify and reach out to families who can care for the children most in need of homes. Here are some questions to guide you in identifying where to focus your efforts:

a. Where might you find people who reflect the children in need of care? Use census data for your city or county to inform your efforts (www.census.gov/index.html). Consider neighborhood schools, day cares, faith communities, businesses, voting precincts, and civic or community organizations where you could focus your efforts.

Golden Nugget!

Your Current Families Can Help

In many cases, you can engage successful resource families in targeted recruitment simply by saying, "We appreciate all you do, and we need more resource families like you! How can we find them?" Resource families can:

- Reach out to their own friends, family and neighbors
- Advise you on how to be culturally sensitive in your outreach
- Tell you about the newspapers they read, radio and TV stations they tune in to, and places they shop so that you can target your community education efforts

b. What professional or civic organizations might be well suited to caring for the children in need of care? For example, schools, hospitals, and medical and mental health associations have people experienced in caring for special needs or medically fragile children. Area support groups and advocacy organizations have people motivated to care and lobby for children with special needs.

c. What current resource families might do well caring for these children with additional encouragement, training, and support?

Here are some questions to guide you in planning **how to reach out** to the groups identified:

- What agency staff or resource parents are from the targeted community or belong to the targeted group? A community member can help you decide where and how to target your message, and can help with follow up over time.
- What specific data can you use in your recruitment materials to highlight the need for resource families? For example, how many children are placed in foster care from that particular community and how many licensed homes are currently in that community? How many teens are in need of care and how many are placed out-of-county or in group placement due to a lack of family foster placements?
- How will you do your initial outreach/public information? What materials will you use (posters, brochures, flyers, business cards, etc.)? Where will you place them?
- What follow up will be done and who will do it? Will a staff person make follow up calls to select churches or schools? Will a resource parent speak to their civic group or PTA? Who will be responsible for maintaining contact with groups that agree to partner with you in recruitment and/or volunteer efforts? Remember that it's not just about a one-time effort: targeted recruitment often requires maintaining ongoing relationships with important leaders or organizations.

Source: Casey Family Programs, 2002

3. Examples of Targeted Recruitment for Teenagers

1. Develop current resource parents:
    a. Have licensed families provide respite or mentoring for teens in care so they can develop relationships with them
    b. Have teens and their resource parents speak to MAPP/GPS classes and participate in activities and events for resource families
    c. Provide or refer families to training that prepare them for parenting teens, such as managing common teen behaviors and adolescent development
2. Target community groups that have experience with teens, including:
    a. High School groups: PTAs, athletic events, teachers associations, etc.
    b. Community groups: Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, church youth groups, teen community service organizations
    c. Professionals: group home staff, mental health associations, etc.
    d. Senior groups: civic and church organizations that have high numbers of empty-nesters or retirees

3. Ask teens:
    a. Have ongoing discussions with teens individually and in groups about permanency: a goal of long-term support, stability, and a "home base" for every youth
    b. Ask teens to talk and write about related questions, such as: Who do you consider family? What does family look like? What would you look for in a family? What would you bring to a family? How can you combine birth and adoptive family connections in your life? What do other teens in foster care need from foster families?

4. Examples of Targeted Recruitment for Sibling Groups

Siblings can be comforters, caretakers, role models, spurs to achievement, faithful allies, and best friends. No matter how close they are, most brothers and sisters share years of experiences that form a bond, a common foundation they do not have with anyone else (Viorst, 1986). If parents are unable to provide the necessary care, sibling attachments can be even closer (Banks & Kahn, 1982).

North Carolina policy directs us to place siblings together whenever possible.

Brothers and sisters separated from each other in foster care experience trauma, anger, and an extreme sense of loss. Research suggests that separating siblings may make it difficult for them to begin a healing process, make attachments, and develop a healthy self-image (McNamara, 1990). Indeed, because of the reciprocal affection they share, separated siblings often feel they have lost a part of themselves.

For these and other reasons, child welfare policy in North Carolina directs child welfare agencies to place siblings together whenever possible, unless contrary to the child's developmental, treatment, or safety needs. To do this successfully, agencies must recruit and prepare resource families willing to take sibling groups. The following suggests ways child welfare agencies can ensure they are sibling-friendly.

Sibling-Friendly Agencies and Practices Keep Children Together

By Regina M. Kupecky, LSW

Reprinted, from the June 2001 issue of Recruiting News, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114; 651-644-3036; info@nacac.org; www.nacac.org

Although the child welfare field emphasizes birth family reunification and kinship adoption, the significance of sibling ties is often glossed over.

However, when a joint placement is in the children's best interests, placing siblings together not only reduces the children's losses and preserves kinship ties, it also reduces stressed agencies' adoption costs. Siblings can help each other process the past, remember experiences, and move into the future together.

Creating a Sibling-Friendly Agency

Part of recruitment is having a sibling-friendly agency. First, educate the *entire* staff about the importance of sibling connections—everyone from the adoption recruiters and workers to the pre-service trainers, supervisors, intake workers, subsidy staff,

administrators, foster care departments, and support staff. A clear understanding of sibling connections could eliminate problems that result from separation and lack of visitation in foster care. Everyone must be on board, whether from a sense of child-centered practice, or simply from the fact that placing four children in one home is cheaper than recruiting, educating, and providing post-placement services to four families.

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?"

Next, recruit for siblings all through the adoption process:

- **Intake:** That first telephone call from a prospective parent is key to setting up a friendly working relationship. The staff person should mention siblings as an option. Families need time to process new ideas.
- **First mailing:** When information packets go to families, do they mention siblings? Send a few child-specific flyers, at least one featuring a sibling group. For later education packets, the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (www.calib.com/naic or 888-251-0075) has a useful article or Three Rivers Adoption Council (312-471-8722) can share a pamphlet I wrote, called *Siblings are Family, Too*.
- **Pre-service training:** If you don't have a section on siblings, fold it into sections about loss, birth families, or attachment. Be sure that parent panels include at least one family that adopted or fostered a sibling group.

Also consider these ongoing sibling-friendly practices:

- If your office displays posters of waiting children, are some of them sibling groups? Newsletter articles should also mention the need for homes for siblings.
- Do all staff members recruit, including secretaries, administrators, and janitors? If they go to churches, YMCAs, stores, or libraries, have they hung sibling-friendly posters?
- When recruiters go out to malls or fairs, do they always post pictures of sibling groups on their display?
- Are workers who complete family assessments talking about sibling groups in a positive way? Do they remind parents that few people adopt one child—families usually come back for more? By taking two or three at once, families eliminate extra paperwork.

No one wakes up one morning, calls an agency, and says "Do you have a sibling group of four children that includes three boys, ages 8–14?" The only way to successfully recruit families for specific children is specific recruitment.

- Siblings need a recruitment plan. List who is doing what and when. Ensure the plan's timely execution.
- A great picture of the sibling group together is a powerful tool. When separate pictures of each child are shown, it gives parents a feeling they can pick and choose whichever child they want (usually the youngest).
- Sibling groups almost always get the most calls when presented in the media. Feature sibling groups often in newspapers, television features, agency newsletters, posters, or wherever your agency recruits.
- Pre-service training groups are a great place to recruit homes for siblings—all the parents are there because they want to care for children. Ask the trainer if

you can have five minutes to present a sibling group. Pass out flyers and show a video of the children together.

- Don't eliminate singles or childless couples. They don't disrupt any more than married or repeat parents.
- Make sure recruiters know about available subsidies. Many parents feel they can't adopt a group because of costs and are reassured to learn of financial assistance.
- When an event such as a recruitment picnic is planned, buy each sibling in the group the same shirt so that prospective parents can spot them all in the crowd. Make sure they eat at the same table or play together.
- Measure success in terms of events, not time. Agencies separate children because "we haven't found a family in five months." But have you tried every recruitment idea once, then again? If so and still no response, then reassess the recruitment plan.

Some sibling groups cannot be placed together. Prior to recruitment, sibling groups' attachments to each other and their primary caretakers as well as their safety when in the same home should be assessed. But with lifebook work and careful pre-placement preparation, many more sibling groups can be together than are presently. We have 117,000 children waiting in the United States. If we place them two by two that is only 58,500 homes—if three by three only 39,000 homes. So make your life easier and the children happier. Create a sibling-friendly agency and recruitment practice.

Ms. Kupecky has spent more than 25 years in the adoption field and frequently presents workshops about siblings, attachment, and preparing children for adoption. She co-authored Adopting The Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special Needs Kids and works at the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio. Contact her at 440-230-1960 ext. 5 or reginaku@msn.com.

Source: http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/targeted.pdf

5. Common Mistakes

- Sometimes agencies think that **big ticket items** such as billboards and ad campaigns will get the best results. In fact, such expensive general recruitment efforts are very unlikely to attract families willing to accept those children most in need of care. You will never get enough people calling your agency asking for a teenager to come and live with them. Once you know the specific children most in need of homes, it is much more efficient to focus your efforts on specific individuals and groups who are likely to respond to those specific needs.
- **Not using teens enough** in targeted recruitment efforts. Consider involving teens through speaker's bureaus or as panelists during resource family pre-service training. Continually seek to provide ways for resource families to meet teens.

6. Winning Strategies

The following winning strategies for targeted recruitment can be found in the "Recipe Cards" portion of the Appendix:

1. Using Foster Parents and Teens as Recruiters
2. Recruitment Parties

7. Sponsorship Ideas for Targeted Recruitment

Community organizations can play a vital role in supporting targeted recruitment efforts. The key is to identify organizations that are located in or involved with targeted communities, such as a Catholic Church that serves a large number of Latino families, a service sorority that has a large number of African-American members, or a school in a neighborhood from which a large number of children have been removed from their homes. Organizations can lend support to your efforts in countless ways:

- Hanging up posters
- Sending flyers or brochures to their mailing lists or listservs or home in students' backpacks
- Inviting someone periodically to speak to their group
- Manning tables at community events
- Hosting an informational meeting

Local businesses might pay for printing, promotional materials, or other expenses related to targeted recruitment. If a potential business sponsor won't do it for free, they might provide these things in exchange for a mention in the printed materials or another marketing plug.

Sources: Goodman, 1999; Zemler, 2001

Chapter X
Child-Specific Recruitment

1. Purpose

Child-specific recruitment "means developing an individualized plan for a particular child based on the child's background" (Goodman, 1999). It is often used for children that can be more difficult to place through traditional recruitment techniques, such as older children or those who are medically fragile. To the greatest possible extent, the youth should play a central role in deciding on the recruitment materials, methods, and targets.

Eureka!

First You Have To Believe

A study of the longest-waiting children in New York State (Avery, 1999) found that caseworker attitudes and practices may play a significant role in the failure to find permanent placements for some children. Forty-one percent of caseworkers responded "no" and 26% responded "maybe" when asked "Do you think this child is ultimately adoptable?"

Avery concludes from this that workers' skepticism "appears to be translated into reduced recruitment efforts on behalf of the child."

Furthermore, over one-third of caseworkers indicated that they believed some types of placements (gay/lesbian, transracial, or single-parent) were inappropriate; presumably these workers would not be actively recruiting parents in these categories.

For 70% of the children in the study, none of seven identified standard recruitment tools (newspapers and other print media, television, radio, national and state photolisting books, Internet and other, such as special events and local/regional exchanges) were used.

Excerpted from Casey Family Programs. (March 25, 2003). *Individualized and targeted recruitment for adoption*. Online: http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/targeted-recruitment.pdf

2. Selecting and Preparing Youth

Workers Must Carefully Select and Prepare Children for Child-Specific Publicity

Reprinted from the June 2000 issue of Recruiting News, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114; 651-644-3036; info@nacac.org; www.nacac.org

For a child who has been neglected and abused most of her life, finding a permanent family can be one of the most terrifying yet important events she will ever experience. Her worker plays a crucial role in deciding if publicity will be a part of the efforts to find a home for her, and helping to prepare her for the exposure if it is.

Selecting a Child

When selecting children for publicity with the dual goals of family recruitment and heightened public awareness in mind, choose those who are representative of children in care. Publicity for a healthy infant would undoubtedly find a family for the child and inspire lots of calls, but would not generate appropriate resources for other waiting children. After selecting a child, workers must explore the child's situation before continuing. Essential questions include:

- **Will the child be safe?** If a child comes from a violent birth family, public exposure might be risky. If publicity could lead an angry relative to find and endanger the child, the risks outweigh the benefits.
- **Are relatives or foster parents adopting?** Routinely publicizing children who are going to be adopted by people they know undermines a recruitment campaign. Families respond to publicity because they perceive that children need help. If they are taught otherwise, they may lose interest and tell their friends not to bother.
- **Is the child's caretaker supportive?** Caretakers' cooperation has a direct bearing on children's perceptions about public exposure. If the child's caretaker cannot nurture her during the publicity campaign, select another child—especially for higher-profile venues.
- **Is the child ready for placement?** Although crises are impossible to predict, a child who is completely unprepared for life in a family setting is not well served by public exposure. Hold off on publicity if the child needs intensive therapy instead of an adoptive home.

Nonetheless, placement in a treatment program should never exclude a child from recruitment efforts—if the child needs a family to be involved in a slow transition toward adoption, don't be afraid to ask for that.

Preparing the Child

A selected child should be developmentally and age-appropriately informed of the benefits and risks of publicity. Share the goals of the exposure—emphasize that the right family may or may not come forward and that the publicity is part of a larger effort to find a home. Preparation must include an honest discussion of what it will be like for the child to see himself on flyers or on television.

One key to successful recruitment is getting workers and children committed to using publicity alongside other techniques until a family is found—with the understanding that months or years of diligence and patience may be required. Unless the child is unable to understand, always work to secure her cooperation before public exposure. If a child does not feel good about being publicized, the chances for successfully finding and placing her with a family are greatly reduced. Once the child is on board:

Be clear that even if the publicity does not immediately find a good match, it is no reflection on the child. Moreover, it does not mean a home will never be found.

- **Share samples of previous efforts.** Give the child an opportunity to view materials about other children of similar age and background. This can reduce fears, spur honest questions, and minimize feelings of isolation.
- **Talk about helping other children.** Tell the child, "We are asking you to appear in publicity because we think you are [articulate/charming/mature/funny/ outgoing/ energetic]. We know that with your help, we can really promote adoption." Frame selection for public exposure as a compliment so the child can take pride in helping others—even if it doesn't find a family for him.
- **Discuss realistic expectations.** The child must understand that months may pass before the right family comes forward, completes a home study, and commits to adopting. Be clear that even if the publicity does not immediately find a good match, it is no reflection on the child's attractiveness, personality, or lovability. Moreover, it does not mean a home will never be found.
- **Alert adults in the child's support network.** Children may experience anxiety when publicity efforts begin as well as renewed anger at past abuse and fears about adoption. The child's teachers, therapists, and mentors must be prepared to lend extra encouragement.
- **Explore possible reactions.** Help the child to understand that neighbors and classmates may see the publicity. Explain that some don't know much about adoption. Role-play what the child will say in response to positive and negative comments from adults or peers.
- **Rehearse what to do or say.** If publicity efforts include an interview, rehearse potential questions and answers. Help the child brainstorm ideas about her interests, best qualities, biggest accomplishments, and desire for a family. If possible, make a practice tape and review it together, giving compliments and making suggestions.
- **Let the child contribute.** Give the child ownership—even a small child can select a favorite location for videotaping or taking photographs. Older children can help with descriptions. If appropriate, ask the child to share the things a prospective family should know.
- **Physically prepare the child.** Help the child pick comfortable, clean clothes that make him feel confident. Make certain he is fed and rested, avoid scheduling the session during any favorite activities, and select a time when medications are most effective.
- **Accompany the child to the session or event.** When possible, the person who prepared the child for publicity should be present for support. A trusted adult

can reduce the child's anxiety and advocate for the child should the interviewer or photographer ask any inappropriate questions.

Source: *http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/ChildSpecificPublicity.pdf*

Golden Nugget!

One Perspective on Preparing the Child

One child-placing agency in North Carolina shares the following:

Young people are VERY sensitive about what materials are used, and WHERE they will be distributed! Their social worker or current foster parent should take the time to be very specific with the child about "what if" questions such as:

- What if one of your friends sees this information?
- What if someone from your church asks you about the flyer they saw?

We often turn to the child's therapist for insight on just how involved the child should be with recruitment efforts. Age, developmental readiness, and other factors are all important to consider.

3. Examples of Child-Specific Recruitment

There are different types of child-specific recruitment.

1. **Child-Specific Publicity**: Agencies provide to the public a photo and written profile of a child free for adoption. NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network can provide assistance to agencies on writing profiles. "Child-specific publicity has two goals. First…it stimulates prospective parents' interest in a child and results in adoption. Second—and more commonly—it builds public awareness about the need for parents and generates resources for other children in the system" (Zemler, 2000). Following are some common venues for child-specific publicity:
   - **Photolisting Book** of Waiting Children*
     In North Carolina, this service is provided by NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network through the Photo Adoption Listing Service (PALS)
     http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/adopt/pals/NC KIDSLINKBUTTONS.pdf
   - **Internet Listings***
     NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network photolisting website (http://www.adoptuskids.org/states/nc/index.aspx) and many individual agency websites feature photographs and brief descriptions of waiting children, along with agency contact information. As more people turn to the Internet as a primary source of information, such listings become more and more important.

*Under the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA), all children free for adoption must be registered with NC Kids to participate in these recruitment efforts.

- **Print and Television Campaigns** such as "Wednesday's Child"
  Each week a child or sibling group is featured, with photograph, description, and agency contact information. Suggestions for how to begin (Ortiz, 2001; cited in Casey Family Programs, 2003) include the following:
  - Send a press kit that includes a fact sheet and press release about your agency, a sample campaign item (photograph and profile of a child) and a letter to the features editor or the editor of the section most appropriate for the column.
  - Follow up with a phone call.
  - Pitch your idea: for example, a front-page feature profiling a child, a foster family, and a successful adoption that leads to announcing the regular column.
  - Meet with the reporter you'll be working with.
  - Be sure to make their deadlines so the column is not a burden for them.

  NC Kids can help you develop a Wednesday's Child program. Call them toll free at 1-888-NC KIDS-5.
- **Heart Galleries**
  Professional photographs of waiting children become part of a traveling exhibit at high-profile locations. A description of the child and agency contact information accompanies each photograph. NC Kids has a list of professional photographers around the state willing to provide this service for free to county DSS agencies. See Recipe Card 3 in the Appendix for details on a very successful Heart Gallery in North Carolina.
- **Adoption Parties/Matching Events**
  Waiting children and potential adoptive families come together for organized activities and, in some cases, facilitated conversations. The families are able to review children's profiles before and after the events. See Appendix S for more on holding an adoption party.

2. **Child-Centered Recruitment:** Youth take a leading role in deciding how to describe their strengths, needs, and interests, and in designing recruitment materials. This process often helps teens in resolving concerns about adoption and preparing them to accept new permanency goals. For a specific example, refer to Recipe Card 4 in the Appendix for a description of how to create slide shows with teens in care.

Golden Nugget!

A Youth-Directed Recruitment Resource

Under One Sky, a nonprofit based in Western North Carolina, has developed a new program to help North Carolina's children find adoptive families. What makes its approach unique is the extent to which it is directed by the youth themselves.

At the core of Under One Sky's efforts is Passages, a two-year, co-educational, camp-based mentoring village for youths aged 12 to 18 who are in foster care and free for adoption. The camp provides a supportive, honest, respectful place to explore the possibility of adoption.

Youths who choose to pursue adoption create their own promotional materials. Working with experienced professionals and their instructor-mentors, youths develop recruitment plans that may include a video, written profile, and radio public service announcement. The youth themselves act as creative directors of these projects and decide how the materials will be used.

The written profiles developed at Passages are 12-page booklets called 'Zines. Youths control each development stage. After pictures are taken they choose which shots to use. After the interview is transcribed, they select excerpts to appear in the 'Zine. They also do the final layout. As you can see by clicking here, the result gives prospective adoptive parents a vivid impression of the child's interests and spirit.

Youths participating in Passages also get to say where their promotional materials will be used. For example, one girl requested that her photograph not be shown in her community's newspaper.

Under One Sky is not itself a child placing agency. Instead, it works with public and private agencies to provide a community of support for youth.

For more information about Passages, including eligibility guidelines, costs, and registration information, contact Under One Sky (828/251-9703; e-mail: info@under1sky.org; www.under1sky.org).

3. **Identifying Potential Caregivers from a Child's Life**
   a. Children and teens are asked specifically and repeatedly about important people in their lives, even before they come into care. As the Casey Breakthrough Series Collaborative (Casey Family Programs, 2005) recommends, "**Ask early and ask often**."
   b. **Case records** are reviewed in detail to identify significant support people in the child's or birth family's history.

c. Every **Child and Family Team Meeting** is an opportunity to identify, engage, and support potential caregivers for a child. Be sure to include professionals from other systems who are working with the child or family, such as schools, mental health providers, or juvenile courts. They may know of additional support people to bring into the planning.

Sources: Casey Family Programs, 2003; Zemler, 2000

Golden Nugget!

Making the Most of Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTs)

Carrie Lauterbach from Appalachian Family Innovations' Adoption Plus program uses a team approach to help with child-specific recruitment. Here are some suggestions based on what has worked for them:

- **Cast a wide net to build your team**. The core team of agency staff generates a contact list of other folks who know and care about each specific child. Invite them all to team meetings. The more people spreading the word in their own personal communities, the better.
- **Share leadership on the team**.
- **Do "in-team training."** This is critical, as it ensures all team members are using the same language, know how a recruitment plan is built and implemented, are sharing appropriate information, and have clarity about follow-up.
- **Identify who the contact person will be** for any interested families that come forward. Families can get lost in the process without clear guidelines.
- **Immediate follow up** is critical.
- Teams **review all outreach materials** for accuracy and the right message.
- **Never say** "We are going to find your forever family." Don't make promises you not sure you can keep!

4. Family Finding Project

Family Finding, developed by internationally known youth permanency expert Kevin Campbell, is a set of strategies being used throughout the United States and in the Province of British Columbia to find lifelong supports for children and young people in foster care. The premise of Family Finding is that youth in care can make or reestablish appropriate biological family connections, when given the opportunity and the time for personal maturation and changes in family situations.

Family Finding's process of connecting and reconnecting youth with their families includes an extensive search and discovery process to identify and then engage family members. Internet-based search tools, such as US Search, are used to identify and locate

family members we did not know where to find. Therapists and children fly throughout the country to connect with family members or find relatives who live as close as next door. The family leads the planning process to ensure they remain engaged and can potentially provide lifelong support for the young person. The support offered by newly found family members may include inviting the child to spend the holidays with them or, in some cases, providing a permanent home in which the child can grow and flourish (CFFYC, 2008).

In 2008 the NC Division of Social Services received a grant from The Duke Endowment to pilot Family Finding in six North Carolina counties: Buncombe, Catawba, Gaston, Mecklenburg, New Hanover and Wake. Each site anticipates serving about 25-30 youth per year. The grant includes training with Kevin Campbell, national evaluation by Child Trends in Washington DC, on-site coordinators for each county DSS, and a state consultant. The Division hopes the pilot will last between 2-5 years, depending on continued funding.

The premise of Family Finding is that youth in care can make or reestablish appropriate biological family connections.

In November 2008 participating counties had hired their respective coordinators who will do Family Finding work. They had also determined the youth/child eligibility criteria and referral criteria and begun practicing Family Finding techniques on sample cases with a hope of being fully implemented in early 2009. Kevin Campbell will provide training for participating North Carolina counties in 2009.

Tamika Williams (Tamika.Williams@ncmail.net), Permanency Coordinator for the Division, is the primary contact for information about this project.

5. Winning Strategies

See the following in the Appendix:

- **Recipe Card 3—Child-Specific Publicity: PowerPoint Slide Shows** (with teens in care)
- **Recipe Card 4—Child-Specific Publicity: Creating a Heart Gallery**. Using this strategy, Gaston County DSS found adoptive homes for 7 out of 12 highlighted children in SFY 2006-2007. In the first six months of the following year, 6 out of 10 highlighted children were adopted.
- **Seek families among groups of people who share a common interest with the child**. One agency in North Carolina shared this example: we have a 10-year-old girl who needs an adoptive family. Her current foster family discovered that she loves caring for farm animals, and the child is currently an active member of 4-H. We have asked the 4-H Leader if he will let us talk to the adults in this local 4H about the needs of this child in finding a family. Hopefully that outreach will generate more ideas on where else we might go.

Child-Specific Adoption Promotion and Post-Adoption Support

Many public agencies have had successful collaborations with private agencies that provide specialized adoption recruitment and support. These specialists establish relationships with the children and teens, and with prospective adoptive families. They provide assessment, preparation, matching, and ongoing support services to the youth and the families. Some programs have had high levels of success with teens and special

needs children considered the hardest to place. Please refer to Recipe Card 5 in the Appendix for details of one successful model.

Every year the NC Division of Social Services contracts with private agencies to help county DSS agencies recruit adoptive families for specific children (called adoption promotion) and provide post-adoption support. Children and families receive the services at no cost to the family or the referring agency.

For adoption promotion, agencies can refer any child in their custody. Generally the child is legally free for adoption. In SFY 2008-09 providers for adoption promotion are:

- Appalachian Family Innovations, Adoption Plus (828/236-2877; www.biabh.org/pp_adoption.html)
- Another Choice for Black Children (704/394-1124; www.acfbc.org/)
- Children's Home Society of North Carolina (800/632-1400, www.chsnc.org)
- Lutheran Family Services (919/832-2620; http://www.lfscarolinas.org/)
- Methodist Home for Children (888/305-4321; http://www.lfscarolinas.org/)

Families can be referred for post-adoption support at any time after the final decree and the vendor will provide post-adoption services based on the needs of the referred family. Services can include crisis management, behavioral strategies, family preservation services, information and community referral, and specialized training. The providers for this contract cover specific geographic areas. The Division sends out a Dear County DSS Director letter each year listing the providers and the counties where they will provide services. For the most recent list of providers and regions, visit the Division's Dear Director letter website at http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/dcdl/.

To obtain additional information about adoption promotion, contact the Division's Amelia Lance (919/334-1096; Amelia.Lance@ncmail.net). For information on post-adoption support, contact the Division's Tamika Williams (919/334-1090; Tamika.Williams@ncmail.net).

6. Sponsorship Ideas for Funding Child-Specific Recruitment

Community groups can support child-specific recruitment by providing direct funding for a child's recruitment materials, organizing or hosting a Heart Gallery, or publicizing waiting children in their own publications or venues. For other ideas, see Chapter III.

Chapter XI
Key Players in Resource Family Recruitment and Retention

1. Agency Directors

Why Should Directors Focus on Resource Family Recruitment & Retention?

Outcomes for Children. Most of the outcomes that we seek for children in care are directly related to having a pool of well-trained and well-supported resource families. These outcomes all center around the best interests of the child.

How Resource Families Affect CFSR Outcomes

CFSR Item	The Resource Family Role
Safety Outcome 1: Children are protected from abuse and neglect	Resource families provide safe, nurturing homes for children in care.
Permanency Outcome 1: ***Children have permanency and stability in their living arrangements***	Resource families maintain children in their homes despite great challenges and sometimes minimal services. They provide crucial stability and support while children and birth families work towards reunification. They are the most likely to adopt children in foster care whose parental rights are terminated (60% in FY 2006, AFCARS Report #14).
Permanency Outcome 2: ***The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children***	Resource families facilitate contact with family members, often provide homes for sibling groups, and maintain life books and important parts of children's histories.
Well-Being Outcome 1: ***Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs***	Resource families can provide crucial modeling and mentoring for birth parents. Their efforts with children and birth families are crucial in achieving more timely and successful reunifications.
Well-Being Outcome 2: ***Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs***	Resource families often identify educational problems and serve as front-line responders for children and schools.
Well-Being Outcome 3: ***Children receive appropriate services to meet their physical and mental health needs***	Resource families often identify medical and emotional problems and serve as front-line responders for children and treatment providers.

Money. Your agency will also spend far more on out-of-home placements if you do not have an adequate pool of well-trained and well-supported resource families. Specific costs include:

- Increased travel expenses for children placed out-of-county (social worker visits, meetings, birth family visits, CFT meetings, etc.)
- Higher board rates for clinically unnecessary group home or therapeutic placements
- Staff time and resources devoted to disrupted placements if unable to match children and families appropriately pre-placement, or provide agency-wide support post-placement

Golden Nugget!

Core Messages to Send about R & R

1. Finding and supporting resource families is **everybody's** job.
2. Resource families are essential partners in achieving good outcomes for children and families. We need to **treat them like gold**.

What Directors Can Do to Build a Successful Program

- **Fund it**. Every year, provide a specific and adequate budget to support your agency's resource family recruitment and retention program.
- The sense of **mission** has to come from the top-down. Talk about the core messages in the box above:
  - At staff meetings
  - At management team meetings
  - With county supervisors
  - With community members and community organizations
- **Ask** the workers and supervisor with primary responsibility for recruitment and retention:
  - What should our **top 3 priorities** be in this area?
  - How can our agency support you in this?
- Start a **Recruitment and Retention Committee** to develop your agency's program.
  - Read **Chapter II** to help guide their efforts.
- Create an **expectation** that all child welfare staff will participate in finding, training, and/or supporting resource families.
  - Provide **flex time** to staff who participate in R & R activities
  - Make resource family recruitment and retention part of every child welfare staff member's **performance evaluation**

2. Supervisors and Program Managers

Golden Nugget!

Whose Problem Is It?

In some child welfare agencies there is an unspoken cultural divide: if you license and recruit foster homes, then resource families are your business. If you do family assessments or foster care placements, then the children are your business, not the resource parents.

Unfortunately, this split means that many resource families do not get the information, support, and follow-up they need to maintain placements and continue to foster or adopt. The direct result: resource family turnover, more disrupted placements, greater negative impact on children, and fewer homes available for them.

As a supervisor or manager, you set the tone for your units. Workers won't know that everyone is expected to partner with and support resource families unless you talk about it and model it.

How CPS & Child Placement Units Can Support Resource Families

- **Be creative** in how you might partner with resource families. Are they part of agency committees? Do they help to train social workers or orient new staff? Are they invited to and prepared for Child and Family Team Meetings? What expertise, strengths, or community connections might a resource family have that could further the agency's work?
- Institute a **24-hour call-back policy** for responding to resource families. Make sure workers have their supervisor's name and number on their outgoing voicemail. All the retention efforts in the world won't matter if resources families can't get a foster care worker to call them back.
- Have all child welfare staff attend **Mini MAPP** and/or **Shared Parenting trainings**. This will give them a greater understanding of the resource family role and how they can support it.
- Encourage and provide incentives for all staff to **participate in recruitment and retention events**: community speaking, orientations, in-service training, foster parent meetings, recognition events, etc.
- **Consider collaboration on training and support a win-win**: your agency can meet long-term outcomes better for children if everyone is developing good homes for them. For example, if a foster care worker participates in a training on managing difficult behaviors, she may end up with someone willing to foster a teen currently placed in another county or in group care. One agency is working on setting up a respite program for families caring for teens: the resource family gets time to rejuvenate, and the respite provider may be more likely to accept teen placements in the future.

3. Child Protective Services Workers

Any level of maltreatment in foster care is unacceptable, which is why North Carolina's federal Program Improvement Plan includes reducing our state's foster care maltreatment rate. That said, the rate of maltreatment for children in foster care in North Carolina is quite low. Of all children in foster care during FY 2007-2008, less than a quarter of one percent (0.21%) were substantiated as being abused or neglected by a foster parent or other substitute care provider (Duncan et al., 2008). Few children experience abuse or neglect while in foster care.

How investigative assessments are handled by the agency has a major impact on whether foster parents continue or quit if the report is unsubstantiated.

At the same time, foster parents themselves are at high risk of ALLEGATIONS of child maltreatment. In North Carolina foster parents are more than twice as likely as other people to be reported for child abuse or neglect (NCDSS, 2002). As a result, every year many innocent foster parents endure the anguish of an investigative assessment.

How investigative assessments are handled by the agency has a major impact on whether those foster parents continue or quit fostering if the report is unsubstantiated. While children's safety is always the first concern, CPS workers also play a critical role in minimizing unnecessary placement disruptions and trauma for children in care, and in keeping good foster homes available. Some critical tips: just as we strive to do for all families, maintain open communication, gather all the facts before making judgments, and keep foster parents informed about the process, their rights, and your agency's plans. Fortunately, the foster family's licensing worker can help inform and educate foster parents about the process in partnership with you.

For detailed explanations of the policy about CPS investigations in foster homes, and for related practice suggestions, see Chapter 8 of "A Supplemental Guide to Foster Home Licensing" on the Division's web site:
http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/licensing/docs/Guide-09-26-07a.pdf

To read the full policy go to: http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-45/man/Chapter_V-05.htm#P717_76072

4. Children's Social Workers

Perhaps no other team member has more impact on resource family satisfaction than the child's placement social worker. The placement worker plays a crucial role in keeping resource families informed, valuing their unique insights and knowledge about each child, and responding to problems that could lead to placement disruption. In fact, foster parents often cite the following issues among their top reasons for leaving the system (Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007; NCFC, 1991; Rhodes et al., 2001):

- Poor communication with a caseworker
- Inadequate consultation and support from workers
- Poor agency response to crises
- Disrespect, not being treated as team member/partner

Eureka!

The Core of Concurrent Planning

Resource families are critical partners in pursuing all of the possible permanency goals for children in care:

- Resource families play the central role in preserving family ties, supporting children during separations, and coaching birth families to enable **reunification**.
- About 60% of children adopted from foster care are **adopted by their foster family** (AFCARS Report 12).
- After children themselves, resource families are the best source for **child-specific recruiting**: identifying important support people in a child's life who could provide a permanent placement.

What Placement Workers Can Do to Support Resource Families

- **Return phone calls**. All the banquets and gift certificates in the world can't compare with having someone respond when you need help. Whether the caregiver is handling a crisis, hoping for respite, or just needing to vent, the few minutes you devote to a timely response can save you many hours down the road trying to preserve a placement that's falling apart.
- Invite them to **Child and Family Team Meetings**, making sure they know what to expect and have a chance to give their input.
- **Keep them informed** about the case plan, Court happenings, and other important events in a child's case. Be creative about how to do this when you have a large caseload: ask families to call you for updates after Court dates or use e-mail, for example. If resource families understand the full picture of a child's case plan and the birth family's goals, as well as how case decisions are made by DSS and judges, they are less likely to be blind-sided and distraught about changes. Resource families don't get to decide what happens to children in care, but they deserve to be kept informed and prepared.
- Foster parents now have the right not only to be informed about Court dates but to speak in Court. **Advocate** for your resource families to receive training about this and exercise their rights in an appropriate way.
- **Behavioral challenges** of children in care was found to be the number one reason for case disruption in North Carolina's 2007 Federal review. Participate in finding, planning, and providing appropriate training for resource families to manage behavioral problems. Empower and assist them in finding appropriate resources for all of their family members. It's not "someone else's job" to maintain safe, stable, well-trained resource homes for children—it's everyone's job.
- Use the **Monthly Foster Care Contact Record** as a tool for keeping lines of communication open, identifying needs, and offering support to everyone in the home. For training on the use of this tool, visit http://www.ncswLearn.org.

5. Other Agency Staff

- Realize that every person you encounter in your work could be a current or potential foster or adoptive parent. The tone you help set for the agency through your **customer service** and attitude influences whether resource families feel respected and welcome.
- Keep a stack of **brochures or agency business cards** handy to give out to people during your work day and around the community. You never know what seeds you plant that could bear fruit for a child in need of a home.
- **Participate** in agency events to recruit and acknowledge resource families whenever possible. Another smiling face and pair of helping hands can make all the difference in whether an event is successful.
- **Recruit and build support** for foster care in your own community. You may belong to a place of worship, civic group, or club that could provide essential support to your agency's efforts to care for children. Check with the person with primary responsibility for recruitment in your agency to see how you can help build bridges in your community: recruiting resource families or volunteers, hanging posters, arranging a speaker, heading up a drive for clothes or school supplies, etc.

Golden Nugget!

Share the Passion

You have an important role to play in finding and supporting foster and adoptive homes, whatever your job title!

- Professional staff in Adult, Medicaid, Work First, Nutrition, and Child Support Services
- Clerical staff
- Custodial staff
- Transportation staff
- Everyone at DSS!

Children in foster care need everyone working on their behalf.

6. Youth in Foster Care

Agencies should engage youth in care to play an active role in recruiting resource families for themselves. Building partnerships in this area can have additional benefits for youth such as enhancing their relationships with workers and building feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

- Child-centered recruitment: Ask children or teens to list all the people who have been important to them in their life. Use that list to begin recruiting individuals to re-connect or strengthen their connection with the child in unthreatening ways. Youth can also help develop recruitment materials for themselves. See examples of winning strategies in this area in Chapter X.
- Public speaking: Youth who have been cleared for adoption and adequately prepared can share their stories with current or prospective foster parents at

MAPP/GPS or in-service trainings, or at recruitment or community outreach events. Please refer to the Recipe Card 6 in the Appendix, which talks about using teens for recruitment.

- Connecting with current resource parents: Give youth a chance to interact informally with licensed families. You can do this at social events or trainings for foster families, or by having families who are waiting for placements mentor youth in care or provide respite.

7. Current Resource Families

Satisfied resource parents are the single the best tool for recruitment. This statement is worth repeating—your best recruiters are your current foster, adoptive, and kinship parents.

Satisfied resource parents are the single the best tool for recruitment.

- One state reported in a federal survey that more than 50% of its successful foster parent recruits are referred by other foster parents, compared to a 10% recruitment rate for general recruiting (USDHHS, 2002).
- Another study of 650 foster parents found that only 21% had found out about fostering through media sources, while 58.5% did so because of the connections they had with other foster parents or children in foster care (Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006).

Working in collaboration with foster parents to increase recruitment should improve retention as well:

- Numerous studies have found that retention is significantly affected by how valued foster parents feel and how much they are treated like partners by their agencies (cited in Rhodes et al., 2001; Rodger et al., 2006; NRCSNA, 2003). Creatively involving foster parents in an agency's efforts to find and keep other foster parents can build a collaborative, mutually respectful relationship.
- Support by other foster parents also plays a crucial role in foster parents' decision to continue fostering (Seaberg & Harrigan, 1999). When you involve foster parents in recruitment, they are able to establish supportive relationships with each other from the very beginning.

Foster parents can aid recruitment and retention in many ways (USDHHS, 2002; NRCSNA, 2003):

- Sharing experiences and allowing newly-licensed foster parents to meet children in care before they have a placement
- Helping prospective foster parents complete applications
- Providing parts of pre-service and ongoing trainings
- Following-up with new contacts with an in-person visit or phone call
- Providing support groups or foster parent associations
- Organizing recognition/appreciation efforts and events
- Providing individualized mentoring for new foster parents

8. The North Carolina Division of Social Services

The Division of Social Services provides the following resources to county DSS agencies to help them with their resource family recruitment and retention efforts:

- **Children's Program Representatives (CPRs)**. Your CPR can help you develop and implement your MEPA plan, collaborate with neighboring counties, and encourage involvement by staff of all levels. To obtain contact information for your agency's CPR, go to http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/team/CPRList.html.
- **The Regulatory and Licensing Services** team can answer questions, help problem-solve, and consult with you about foster home licensing; the phone number for the Black Mountain office is 828/669-3388. Train-the -trainer opportunities are provided for therapeutic foster care training by the Regulatory and Licensing Services Team.
- **http://www.ncswLearn.org** is a portal website you can use to learn about and register for classroom-based and online training opportunities for staff and resource families. If after visiting this site you still have questions about Division-sponsored child welfare training, contact the leader of the Division's Child Welfare Staff Development Unit by calling 919/334-1175.

Chapter XII
Training as a Recruitment and Retention Strategy

There are two kinds of training typically provided to resource families: pre-service and in-service/ongoing. Each has a powerful impact not only on the recruitment and retention of resource families, but on these families' ability to meet the needs of children, which is ultimately what training for resource families is all about.

1. Pre-Service Training

Training has a powerful impact on the recruitment and retention of resource families.

In North Carolina, all prospective resource parents are required to receive 30 hours of pre-service training. The purpose of this first level of pre-service training is to ensure that each prospective resource family makes an informed decision about whether fostering and/or adopting is right for them.[2] To prepare them to make this decision, pre-service training teaches them about the needs of children in the child welfare system and the expectations child welfare agencies have of resource families, including the ability to engage in concurrent planning and shared parenting.

Over the course of the 30 hours of pre-service training, agencies have an opportunity to get to know prospective families so that they can:

(a) Encourage those who seem well suited to and prepared for fostering and adopting
(b) Identify those families who, with additional support and training may make excellent resource families, and
(c) Identify those families who, though they may be able to help children in some other way, would not appropriate resource families.

For families in this latter category, agencies should praise family members for their desire to help children, discuss in a kind but candid way why the family is unsuited, and explore other ways that they might contribute to the lives of children in foster care (e.g., volunteering). For more on this, see the box on the next page.

Using information gained during the pre-service process, agencies can enhance retention by encouraging and supporting families who already are or who can become successful foster parents. At the same time, gently discouraging families who are unsuited can help reduced the likelihood of resource family turnover down the road.

Therapeutic Pre-Service

In addition to the 30-hour pre-service, therapeutic foster parents in North Carolina must receive 10 hours of specialized pre-service training. To learn more about this consult "A Supplemental Guide to Foster Home Licensing" on the Division's web site:
http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/licensing/docs/Guide-09-26-07a.pdf

[2] The 30-hour pre-service training is not designed to give families the skills they need to adequately care for children in foster care. It focuses wholly on helping families decide whether becoming a resource family is right for them.

Golden Nugget!

Talking with Prospective Resource Families: What to Say When the Fit's Not Right

The MAPP/GPS process is designed to help agencies and families come to a mutual agreement about whether fostering or adopting is right for them. Thankfully, most families realize it when the fit isn't right and elect to bow out of the process. When they don't, it is up to the agency representative to break the news to them. How should you break that news? Here are four strategies for doing the job with empathy and professionalism:

- **Tell the truth**. Put the situation into perspective for the family. Give as much information as you can about why your agency has made this decision.
- **Empathize**. Families will be frustrated or even angry. Let them vent. Negative emotions must be dealt with before they can be replaced with acceptance and a positive plan of action.
- **Suggest Next Steps**. Recommend a specific plan of action based on what you know about this family that will enable them to make a positive contribution to the welfare of children.
- **Follow up**. If the family expresses a desire to contribute to the welfare of children in some other way, follow up after a short period of time (e.g., one week) to thank them for their interest in children and the investment they made in exploring becoming a resource family. If appropriate, discuss again ways that they might help children by volunteering with your agency or another community organization.

Adapted from Berkley, 2002

2. In-Service Training

In North Carolina, licensed foster parents are required to receive 10 hours of in-service training each year. The purpose of this training is to ensure that foster parents have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to meet the needs of the specific children in their care.

In-service training can have a significant impact on resource family retention. One of the most common reasons foster parents give for quitting is the failure of the agency to provide adequate support (Gibson & Wildfire, 2007; NCFC, 1991; Rhodes et al., 2001), and providing quality in-service training on topics that can help them succeed is a very important form of support. Failure to train and support foster parents in a timely way can also have a negative impact on children in care.

Training needs of resource families should be identified and included in the out-of-home family services agreement. Child-specific training is important for the resource family to meet the needs of the child placed in their home.

This was confirmed during North Carolina's 2007 Child and Family Services Review. Federal reviewers concluded that foster care placements were disrupting due to behavior problems that caretakers were unable to address, and that agencies were making insufficient efforts to address the problems before the disruption (USDHHS, 2007).

Golden Nugget!

Advice about In-Service Training

Use of in-service training to teach foster parents how to be more skilled parents. Teach families about things they consistently ask about, including how to:

- Deal with defiant children
- Avoid power struggles
- Motivate children to use good social skills (e.g., follow instructions, accept consequences, ask permission, etc.)
- Make a plan to deal with any problem behavior
- Use consequences

3. Targeted In-Service Training Topics

As mentioned above, one of the primary goals of in-service training is to ensure that foster parents have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to meet the needs of the specific children in their care. Agencies can also use in-service training to develop current foster parents and prepare them to care for children who need foster placements. For example, if there are teens in your agency's custody who are placed in group homes because you do not have enough foster families who are willing to care for them, you may wish to offer in-service training topics that will familiarize foster parents with teens and give them a chance to practice the skills needed to parent teens. Having a panel made up of teens currently in care is another way that some agencies have helped foster parents overcome the "fear factor" and begin successfully parenting teens.

Golden Nugget!

Spread the Word about NC Reach

One concern that makes some families reluctant to adopt or foster teens is the question of paying for college. Be sure that your pre-service and in-service training events speak to this concern by sharing information about NC Reach, a truly sensational program that provides college funding and support services to young people adopted from North Carolina DSS foster care after the age of 12 or who have aged out of the system at 18. Thanks to NC Reach, these students will be able to graduate debt free from any North Carolina public community college or four-year school!

For further information visit www.ncreach.org or call 1-800-585-6112.

4. Developing a Strong In-Service Training Program

This section has been adapted from Caroline Crocoll's Inspiring Volunteer Development: A Resource Book for Training Senior Volunteers in Intergenerational Programs (2001).

To develop strong in-service training programs, child welfare agencies must understand what their current foster parents need to know to strengthen their ability to care for the children in their homes. To get this information, agencies should regularly assess foster parent training needs through one or more of the following methods:

- *Surveys*. Survey data can be used to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made and to analyze trends across time.
- *Interviews* represent an effective method for collecting in-depth information about a topic or issue. They can also be used after a survey to explore specific results in more detail and greater depth.
- *Focus groups* are a good way to collect qualitative data from group discussions.

Additional information about foster parent training needs can be obtained from observations recorded on the Monthly Foster Care Contact Record (DSS-5295).

Once you have information about the training needs of your resource families, you are ready to design your in-service training program. Appendix T, "Training Design Worksheet," will help you with this process. Additional steps in this process include the following:

Identifying In-Service Training Ideas

- Decide what sources to use in generating ideas for in-service training programs (e.g., former and/or current resource families, policies and laws, etc.)
- Determine the best ways to identify these ideas for training (e.g., formal needs assessments, observations, interviews, conversations with colleagues, etc.)

Sorting and Prioritizing Training Ideas

- Determine which activities are the best ways to respond to the ideas generated
- Develop a process to prioritize training ideas for which in-service programs should be planned

Developing Training Objectives

- Write program objectives that reflect both what resource families will learn and the effects of that learning, as well as the operational aspects of the program
- Check to see that training objectives are written clearly so that they can be understood by all parties involved

Preparing for the Transfer of Learning

Transfer of Learning (TOL) is the application of skills and knowledge learned in one context being applied in another (Cormier & Hagman, 1987).

- Decide when the transfer-of-learning strategies should be employed
- Determine the key players who need to be part of the transfer-of-learning process (e.g., agency child welfare staff, instructors, resource families, etc.)
- Choose transfer strategies that will be the most useful in helping resource families apply what they have learned (developing individualized or group learning plans, providing mentors or peer coaches, self-help or support groups)

Determining Formats and Schedules

- Choose the most appropriate formats for the training activities (individual, small-group, large-group, or distance-learning)
- Devise a training schedule that best fits the format chosen and the resource families' needs

Preparing Budgets and Materials

- Develop clear learning objectives for each instructional session
- Select and sequence the content based on what the participants already know, the nature of the content itself, and instructor preference
- Choose training delivery methods that match the focus of the proposed learning outcomes that you are capable of using (lectures, case studies, skills-practice, story telling, games, etc.)

Formulating Evaluation Plans

- Specify the evaluation approaches that will be used
- Determine how the evaluation data will be collected (e.g., observations, questionnaires, etc.)
- Think through how the data will be analyzed, including how to integrate data collected through any informal evaluation processes
- Develop recommendations for current and/or future training directions

Source: Crocoll, 2001

Taking a Collaborative, Regional Approach to Training

Collaborating with other child-placing agencies in your region to provide training is a fiscally responsible, efficient way to make sure you are meeting the educational needs of resource families.

5. Training for Kinship Caregivers

To be licensed, kinship caregivers are required to receive the same training as non-relative applicants. Standards for licensing are also the same regardless of whether an applicant is related to a child. However, it is important to recognize that kinship care providers may face unique challenges in adapting to their role.

Often relative caregivers are assumed to know the child and birth parents well, and thus to require less training and support. The caregivers themselves, many of whom have already been a primary or secondary caregiver for the child, may also view the training requirement as an unnecessary burden (Cawthon, 2008). In addition, unlike non-related foster care applicants who may have researched agencies and the foster care system, kinship providers may have less knowledge about the child welfare system, and may have feelings of distrust or intimidation about working with the agency.

It is important to recognize the special difficulties faced by kinship caregivers, as well as the valuable connections and support system they can offer the child.

Further, kinship care providers often have to negotiate difficult changes in roles and boundaries within the family, such as denying visitation to a family member (Cawthon, 2008), reporting on a family member's progress or family conflicts at team meetings, and discussing permanency options for a relative's child whom they agreed to care for on a temporary basis. It is important that agencies recognize the special

difficulties faced by kinship caregivers, as well as respecting the value of the connections, loyalty, and support system they can offer the child. See Appendix U for a checklist to help develop training to meet the needs of kinship care providers.

Golden Nugget!

Foster Parents Comment on In-Service Training

- "Foster parents need to know how to better handle the grief process children go through both at removal from the home and then again when the child is to be adopted and they realize that, indeed, they are not ever going back home."
- "At each age group we should know what's available (e.g., services, recreation, community resources) for children. The more we keep them busy on positive things the less time they have for negative things."
- "Foster parents need training that's tailored to the children placed in our home. It needs to be give us the information and skills to care for a specific child."
- "Find out what foster parents would like to have training in that is meaningful to help foster a child."
- "Help arrange childcare or provide childcare during training and meetings."
- "Provide an agenda or synopsis of training to help parents pick learning events that will benefit them. (For example, not all 'cultural issues' classes are the same.)"
- "Provide information on alternative training options, i.e., books, tapes, correspondence courses."
- "Let foster parents know about trainings other agencies are doing."
- "If a worker is knowledgeable, valuable training can take place at visits."
- "Use knowledgeable families to train other families."

6. Using Conferences for Training

Each year the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NCFAPA) holds a training institute for resource families. Encouraging your agency's foster parents to attend these events demonstrates support for their learning and provides them with great opportunities to network and build their knowledge and skills. These conferences often inspire foster parents to recommit to the work they do with families and children. Some agencies perceive such value in this annual event and the "retention dividend" it can pay that they help to cover costs of foster parents' travel and registration. To learn where and when the next NCFAPA conference will be held, go to <www.ncfapa.org>.

That said, agencies should understand that foster parent conferences alone are not enough. To ensure children receive the care they deserve and to provide the level of support that makes resource families want to stick around, agencies need to assess and

respond to families' training needs all year long. Foster parent conferences should never be more than a complement to an agency's resource family training program.

7. Using *Fostering Perspectives* for Training

Fostering Perspectives, a newsletter by and for North Carolina's foster and adoptive parents and child welfare professionals, can help resource families obtain in-service training. Foster parents who read an issue cover to cover and take the quiz on that issue can present their answers to their licensing professional for 30 minutes credit toward relicensure. To receive notification when new issues appear online, send a message with "Subscribe FP" in the subject line to johnmcmahon@mindspring.com. Read *Fostering Perspectives* online at <http://www.fosteringperspectives.org>.

8. Using Support Group Meetings for Training

Support groups provide a place to give and receive information, validation, advice, and emotional support, all of which can have a positive impact on resource family retention. In some agencies, time foster parents' spend participating in support groups is counted in their hours of training.

Please note that low attendance does not necessarily signify the failure of a support group. Low attendance can be due to many factors, including insufficient marketing efforts and the natural ebb and flow of group membership and parent needs. Agencies should be careful in judging the value of support groups based on attendance—even groups with low attendance can make an important contribution to placement stability, which can have a huge, positive impact on children.

The NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association can be a great resource for agencies that want to start or revitalize local resource family support groups. To learn more, e-mail the Association at office@ncfapa.org.

Chapter XIII
Retention of Resource Families

1. Purpose

Keeping resource families in your program is an essential part of every agency's foster care and adoption efforts. Some natural attrition is to be expected due to adoption, moves, and other life changes, but you can never bring enough people in the front door if you are losing people out the back door due to dissatisfaction.

In fact, attempting to address recruitment without improving retention "may be potentially self-defeating for an agency….The satisfied, experienced foster parent is the foundation for any recruitment strategy" (USDHHS, 1995).

The entire agency must participate in order to retain a pool of engaged, well-trained, and well-supported resource families.

Eureka!

Retention Facts and Figures

- As many as 60% of foster parents withdraw from the program within the first 12 months (National Commission on Foster Care, 1991).
- In a study of retention rates in 3 states by Gibbs (2005):
  - At least 1 in 5 foster homes leaves the system each year
  - Length of service: 8 to 14 months (vs. 5-8 years for earlier studies)
- Surveys of foster parents repeatedly find that the ***primary reason*** foster parents leave is a ***lack of agency responsiveness, communication, and support*** (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001).

2. The Foundation of Retention

A. Good case management – "TLC"

- Develop a **personal relationship** with resource parents and offer **ongoing support**, especially in times of crisis. Remember that just after a new placement and just before a change in placement are times when families need extra support.
- Be **responsive** to resource families. Encourage or implement a policy of returning calls within **24 hours**. Have workers give their supervisor's name and number on their outgoing voice mail, and update it to let callers know when they'll be out of the office.
- Develop a strong **respite care program**. Some agencies rely on families to let them know when or if they "need" respite, which limits consumers of respite to those who are burned out or are going out of town. Those agencies that

require respite once a month or every six weeks do much to promote retention and avoid crisis situations. Recruit resource families to serve as respite providers. This is a way to engage families in MAPP/GPS classes who may not feel ready to make a commitment to fostering a child full-time. It is also a way to give resource families experience before a child is placed with them on a more long term basis. Respite providers must also become licensed foster parents.

Golden Nugget!

A Respite Building Resource

The Collaboration to AdoptUsKids has developed *Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Respite in Your Community.* This manual is a comprehensive and practical guide, covering virtually everything needed to create and manage a respite program.

The first three sections outline step-by-step guidelines for designing and implementing respite services: exploring the benefits of respite, exploring respite options, and developing your respite program. The final section contains a large array of sample documents which may be freely adapted to meet the needs of local programs. The forms available include Respite Billing, Emergency Service Authorization, Parent Checklist, Event Evaluation, Respite Provider Agreement, and many more. Available online at <http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/TakingABreak.pdf>

- Show your **appreciation** to resource families in whatever way you can: annual dinner, picnic, birthday cards, gift cards, holiday party, Christmas presents, social events, etc. Child placement workers, supervisors, and administrators should participate as well as licensing workers.

B. Quality training and professional development

- Have **foster parents co-trainer** for pre-service (MAPP/GPS). This not only improves the training for participants, but sends a clear message of partnership and respect. Agencies are strongly encouraged to pay foster parent co-trainers for providing this beneficial service.
- Provide an ongoing assessment of strengths and needs – **a resource family development plan.**
- Conduct annual **stay interviews** with foster parents, and **exit interviews** with those who leave. (See Appendix H and Appendix I for more information.)
- Provide support for a local **foster parent association**, and participation in state and national foster parent associations.
- Offer relevant, helpful trainings/meetings on a regular basis, or provide foster parents with other **resources for training**. Ask resource parents for their ideas

and involve them in planning and delivering events. Include child placement workers and other agency staff as much as possible.

- Establish with resource parents training and practice protocols for prevention and intervention in cases of **foster parent abuse allegations**.

Golden Nugget!

Five Things Your Agency Can Do To Support a Local Foster Parent Association

1. Help recruit speakers for association meetings and events
2. Provide funding for refreshments, child care, and/or mailings
3. Update members on important legislation or policy changes
4. Involve the association in agency decision-making whenever possible
5. Contact the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (www.ncfapa.org) for help in starting or growing a local association

Special thanks to Janice A. Spencer, MBA, Director, Stokes County DSS

C. Collaboration as partners in serving children

- Provide resource families with regular **supervision, monitoring, and consultation**.
- Include resource families in **decision-making**, including Child and Family Team meetings, Treatment Team Meetings, Court hearings, etc.
- Introduce resource parents to **other members** of the professional team serving the children in their care.
- Update them regularly on **court dates and decisions**.
- Provide foster parents access to their own **file**. State law [10A NCAC 70E .0902 (b) (10)] gives foster parents the right to review their record and receive copies of their foster care licensing record.

D. Collaboration as partners in the agency

- **Survey** resource parents annually on their needs and ideas.
- **Involve** resource parents in the development of agency policies, programs, and practices that affect foster care.
- Involve resource parents in **recruitment efforts**.
- Clarify the resource parent's role in service delivery with an up-to-date, **realistic job description**, including:
  - The goal of the foster care program
  - The specific responsibilities of foster parents in meeting that goal
  - The competencies and qualifications required
  - Guidelines for teamwork throughout a child's time in care
  - The rights of foster parents

3. Retention Efforts for Resource Families Before the First Placement

- Make sure they receive an agency newsletter to keep them feeling connected
- Invite and encourage them to provide respite care
- Connect them with other foster parents and your local foster parent association
- Resource families could help by:
  - Contributing to community awareness events
  - Helping with child care at MAPP/GPS classes or support groups
  - Volunteering at the office, helping to return phone calls
  - Attending and observing at Court
  - Connecting with the LINKS program to see what kind of adult support they can provide
  - Soliciting business partnerships and sponsors within the community

4. Retention Efforts for New Resource Families

- Provide mentors: partner new resource families with experienced ones. This helps new caregivers learn the ropes faster and with less frustration, recognizes the mentors for their longevity and wisdom, and builds a natural support network for families and children.
- Make use of North Carolina's post-adoption support resources to retain adoptive families.

5. Common Mistakes

The single most common mistake agencies make with regard to retention is considering only one person responsible for it, without recognizing the role that others in the agency must play. Others common retention mistakes include:

- Assuming that experienced parents don't need you any more
- Not fully disclosing information
- Not treating resource families like gold

Eureka!

Benefits of Improving Resource Family Retention

- Reduces cost of recruitment
- Reduces time consuming activities related to recruiting and pre-service training
- Improves quality care for children
- Reduces placement moves and disruptions
- Fewer moves means less trauma for children

Source: AECF, 2002

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A. Expectations of Families

We understand that adoption is a lifelong commitment to a child. We understand that our family will need to make sacrifices and be flexible in order for a child to remain a part of our family. Therefore, as adoptive or foster parents of Another Choice, we agree to:

1. Be spiritually connected. Understand the power of and the need for prayer.
2. Accept children unconditionally.
3. Work as a team/accept help and follow through with suggestions.
4. Develop (have) a strong support system.
5. Do not embarrass easily.
6. Advocate for the child.
7. Participate in therapy.
8. Provide transportation to appointments and visits.
9. Be responsible for child's care and welfare by keeping medical, therapeutic, or educational appointments.
10. Be honest and forthright in sharing information including changes in household, employment, and medical.
11. Use funds (foster care board or adoption assistance) appropriately.
12. Develop (have) a sense of humor.
13. Recruit other families to become adoptive or foster parents.
14. Maintain licensing standards.
15. Expect an adoptive worker to be assigned once you receive your criteria letter.
16. Respect and abide by the state and agency's policy which prohibits the use of corporal punishment on children in the foster care system.

B. Expectations of Staff

Our motto is, "When you adopt through Another Choice, Another Choice adopts you." We are committed to being there for you. To that end, we promise:

A. Respect

B. Prompt follow up with concerns or actions

C. Confidentiality

D. Be available for (to) you

E. Be honest in sharing and forthcoming with information

F. Inform you of services available

G. Provide quality and responsive services, including post-adoption services

H. Advocate for families (we will hold your hand throughout the process)

I. Will maintain open communication with you and your family

J. Recruit families for available children

K. Return phone calls within 24 hours

L. Start and end meetings on time

M. Ensure your home continues to meet licensing standards

N. Have fun, be informed and professional

We will live our mission, which is "Building and Sustaining Families."

Let's Shake On It!

C. Key Definitions

Recruitment of Resource Families. Recruitment is much more than placing an ad in the newspaper. We believe that recruitment of resource families must be defined broadly, inclusively, and in a way that encourages us to measure the effectiveness of our efforts in terms of our bottom line—finding families for children in foster care. Accordingly, we encourage you to think about recruitment in the way that it is defined by AdoptUsKids (2005):

Recruitment is much more than placing an ad in the newspaper.

> Recruitment includes all outreach, educational and supportive activities that an organization uses to interest and help an individual and/or family become a foster and/or adoptive parent. This includes all activities from outreach and/or first contact to placement of a child with a licensed and/or approved parent.
>
> This definition includes some activities that others may call "retention" or family preparation. The AdoptUsKids definition is comprehensive, as it is promoting a definition of recruitment that is results-based and inclusive of all persons (practitioners) in the agency who have a hand in helping a prospective parent become a foster or adoptive family. The intended result of recruitment is the placement of a child with a prepared and committed foster and/or adoptive family.

Retention of Resource Families. Retention of resource families must be defined broadly, inclusively, and in a way that encourages us to measure the effectiveness of our efforts in terms of our bottom line—supporting and sustaining families for children in foster care. Accordingly, we encourage you to think about retention in the following way:

> Retention includes all outreach, educational, and supportive activities that an agency uses to sustain existing/licensed/approved resource families.
>
> This definition seeks to include all persons in the agency who interact with and have the opportunity to support resource families. The intended result of retention is the continued presence of prepared, committed resource families who are willing and able to care for children in foster care.
>
> *(Adapted from AdoptUsKids, 2005)*

For more detailed information about key retention concepts and strategies, see Chapter XIII of this guide.

Training of Resource Families. According to many social workers and foster parents, children in foster care today have more complex problems, come from more challenging backgrounds, and require more from resource families than children have in years past. To ensure they have the skills and knowledge needed to care for these children, resource families must be provided with special instruction.

During the pre-licensing phase, resource family training should take the form of timely orientation and pre-service training. Course content must be grounded in reality

so prospective families know what they can expect once children are placed in their homes. Having the entire pre-service training co-presented by an experienced resource parent is an excellent way to achieve this. Including panels of youth in care during pre-service training is another good way to help families know what to expect; these panels can inspire prospective resource families to care for the kinds of children who need homes (e.g., teens).

Give resource families a major role in choosing training topics and monitoring training quality.

Training remains essential after licensing. Through one-on-one contacts with agency representatives, surveys, and other methods agencies should regularly assess resource families' training needs. It is important for resource families to have a major role in choosing training topics and monitoring training quality. The out-of-home family services agreement should outline child specific training needs. Please remember it is the responsibility of the agency, not the foster parents, to arrange this training.

Chapter XII of this guide provides a more detailed description of resource family training requirements and strategies.

D. Links to State and National Recruitment Resources

Data Sites

- **North Carolina Child Welfare Data**
  Arranged by county, with comparisons to other counties of similar size and entire state.
  http://ssw.unc.edu/cw

- **U.S. Census Bureau**
  North Carolina census data, with easy link to data for each county
  http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37000.html

Recruitment and Retention Resources

- **AdoptUsKids Public Service Announcements (PSAs)**
  - To see sample material: http://www.adcouncil.org/default.aspx?id=17
  - To download PSAs: http://psacentral.adcouncil.org/psacentral/signon.do

- **AdoptUsKids Recruitment and Retention Committee Workplan**
  http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/develRecruitWorkplan.pdf

- **Answering the Call: Getting More for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts Practitioner's Guide**
  http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/practitionersGuide.pdf

- **Answering the Call: National Adoption Month 2008 Toolkit**
  http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/2008NAMToolkit.pdf

- **North American Council on Adoptable Children National Adoption Awareness Month Guide**
  http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/adoptionmonth.html

- **Annie E. Casey Foundation Family to Family Resources Page**
  Includes recruitment, training, and support of foster parents; guide to finding permanence for older children; child welfare media guide, etc.
  http://www.aecf.org/Home/MajorInitiatives/Family%20to%20Family/Resources.aspx

- **Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services Page**
  A good example of using a web page for community education. Includes series of videos on the foster care recruitment process, adoption recruitment process, and understanding foster care.
  http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/DSS/Youth+and+Family+Services/home.htm

- **Foster Parent College**
  Provides on-line training and educational materials for resource families, social workers, and Guardians ad Litem. http://www.fosterparentcollege.com/

R & R Groups / Listservs

- **AdoptUsKids E-Notes**
  To sign up, go to http://www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/eNotesSignUp.aspx

- **Nat'l Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning Weekly Update**
  To subscribe, visit http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/update-subscription.html

E. New Caller Intake Form

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE RESOURCE FAMILIES AND VOLUNTEERS

1. Name of Caller: _____

2. Date of Initial Call: _____ 3. Date Call Returned (if applicable): _____

4. Home Address: _____

5. Phone: _____6. E-mail: _____

7. Date of Birth: _____8. Marital Status: _____

9. Employment: _____ 10. Work Hours: _____

11. How did you hear about the need for resource parents/volunteers?

12. Do you know what you are interested in doing? If so, what would you like to do?

13. What can I do for you?

❑ Send more information ❑ Arrange an interview ❑ Accept a donation of goods

❑ Accept a donation of money ❑ Other:

INFORMATION ON OTHERS IN THE HOME *(if applicable; use back of sheet if additional space needed)*

Name: _____

Relationship to caller: _____ Date of birth: _____

School or employment: _____

Name: _____

Relationship to caller: _____ Date of birth: _____

School or employment: _____

NOTES FROM CALL

TRACKING INFORMATION

If no follow-up is planned, list reason:

Invited to Orientation Meeting to be held _____ Attended: ❑ Yes ❑ No

Date Information Packet Sent: _____ Sent by: _____

Date of Follow-up Letter or Visit: _____ Completed by: _____

Staff Member Completing Form: _____

Adapted from: National Foster Parents Association, 2000; Barbell & Sheik, 2000

F. Sample Tracking Table

Inquiry Type*	Name & Address	Contact #	F/A	How did they hear?	Date Packet Sent	Date of FU call	Orientation	MAPP/GPS	Approval Date

*Key: PC = Phone Call, IP = In-person visit, CE = Community Event (list which one)

Source: Stephanie Grischow, Nash County DSS

G. Annual Resource Family Survey

Please read each item carefully and circle the number that most accurately represents your level of satisfaction with the service you have received in the past year in the area described.

1. In-Service Training						
a. I am very satisfied with the in-service training offered through my agency.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
b. To improve my skills as a foster parent, I would like training or information on the following topics: _____						
2. Pre-Placement Arrangements						
a. Prior to placement, I was given complete and accurate information on the child(ren) being placed in my home.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
b. I am satisfied with the arrangements the agency made for pre-placement visits before the child was placed in my home.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
c. The agency and others did a great job identifying and addressing the child(ren)'s behavioral needs before the placement occurred.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
d. The agency did a great job preparing me to work with the child(ren).	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
3. Staff Consultation and Support						
a. Program staff visit my home often enough.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
b. When they visit my home, I want my visits with program staff to be longer.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
c. Program staff visits to my home are helpful to me in working with the child(ren) in my home.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
d. I am satisfied with the extent to which program staff reach out to me (e.g., through phone calls) to see how I am doing or to follow up regarding the care of the child(ren).	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
e. Program staff generally return my phone calls in a timely manner.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
f. I am very satisfied with my agency's on-call crisis support services.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
g. In general, I get excellent help/guidance from program staff.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
h. Program staff fully understood and responded to the needs of the youth(s) I have worked with this year.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
i. Program staff demonstrate genuine concern for me, my family, and for my success as a foster parent.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A

j. Program staff demonstrate clearly that they genuinely value my skill and effort as a foster parent.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
k. Program staff do an excellent job supporting me as I work with others (schools, Courts, birth families, etc.) regarding the child(ren) in my home.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
l. I am satisfied with the amount of the monthly reimbursement I receive as a foster parent.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
m. I am satisfied with the promptness with which I receive my monthly reimbursement payments.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
4. Support Services Overall						
a. The agency is meeting my overall needs as a foster parent.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
b. The agency is sensitive to issues of race and culture in working with me and the child(ren) placed with me.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
c. The agency is meeting the needs of the child(ren) in my home.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
d. I am satisfied with my overall experience as a foster parent.	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree	N/A
e. List three ways the agency could improve its support to you in your work as a foster parent. _____ _____ _____						
f. List the biggest challenge you currently face as a foster parent: _____						
5. About this Event						
a. Would you have been able to attend tonight's event even if child care was not offered?	❑ Yes		❑ No			
b. Given the choice of a catered meal here at the agency or going to Golden Corral, which would you prefer for next year's banquet?	❑ Catered meal at agency				❑ Golden Corral	

6. Other Comments:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND FEEDBACK!

Adapted from Schooler, J. & Jorgenson, K. (2000.) A system in transition: examining foster parent recruitment and retention in the new millennium. Gig Harbor, WA: National Foster Parent Association.

H. Resource Family Stay Interviews

Purpose:

- Discover what individual resource families value and what motivates each person to continue fostering
- Help develop individualized strategies to increase satisfaction and motivation
- Convey that the agency cares and that each resource family is valued and important

What the interviewer needs:

- Desire to establish trust with the family
- Willingness to listen and thank people for their input
- Willingness to respond with empathy

When to do stay interviews:

- When someone begins fostering
- On a regular basis, such as at an annual resource family development meeting
- When concerns arise

Source: Jordan Institute for Families. (2008). *Staying Power! A Supervisor's Guide to Child Welfare Retention*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

Possible Questions:

1. You are a valuable part of our team. What will it take to keep you working with our agency? What might make you stop working with us?
2. What would be the one thing that, if it changed, would make you consider no longer fostering?
3. Based on your experiences so far as a resource parent, what have you learned about your strengths?
4. How are things different than you thought they would be?
5. Of all the things you have done so far as a resource parent, what has been the most challenging?
6. What is confusing for you at this point?
7. What talents or skills would you like to develop more?
8. Given what you know about fostering, what appeals most to you? What concerns you most?
9. How is your relationship with our agency? What could make it better?
10. How can we involve resource families more in our agency?

Sources: Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2005; JIF, 2008

I. Resource Family Exit Interviews

Tips for Exit Interviews

1. **Be objective**. It's important that someone who can be neutral conducts the interview. Keep an open-mind about what the parent might say, without taking it personally or trying to "set the record straight."
2. **Give the person time to prepare**. Provide a list of questions for the parent to consider ahead of time. This can focus the discussion on constructive feedback.
3. **Prepare yourself**. Think about the resource family's time with the agency: what were their strengths and needs? What specific ideas or issues have they had that might be worthwhile to discuss for the benefit of the agency?
4. **Be appreciative**. Acknowledge the parent's service to the agency and to the children for whom they've provided a home. End on a positive note. Families may refer others if they leave with a good opinion of the agency. Sometimes you can even set the stage for a later return to the agency.
5. **Act on the information**. In general, review exit interview feedback over a six month or one year period, so that you can differentiate between outlier comments from a single disgruntled person and more systemic patterns. Of course, in some cases you may hear information that it's appropriate to act on sooner, such as an innovative idea or helpful feedback for a worker or supervisor.

Source: Beagrie, 2005

Possible Questions:

1. Why are you leaving our agency?
2. What might have prevented you from leaving?
3. What did you like most about being a resource parent?
4. What did you like least?
5. What suggestions do you have for:
   - Recruiting more families to foster or adopt?
   - Preparing and training resource parents?
   - Supporting resource families?
   - Training/development of agency staff?
   - Anything else about our agency?
6. How might we improve our communication and partnership with resource families?
7. What might make you foster or adopt with us again in the future?
8. Would you recommend a friend to foster or adopt with our agency? Why or why not?
9. Would you be willing to continue to work with our agency as a volunteer or community supporter? If so, how would you like to help? (If possible, provide list of volunteer or community support opportunities, based on your agency's goals.)

Source: UCAC, n.d.

J. MEPA Plan TEMPLATE

Multiethnic Placement Act /Interethnic Adoption Provision

Protection from Racial Discrimination in Adoption and Foster Care

Purpose The specific intentions of MEPA-IEP are to:

1. Decrease the length of time youth wait to be adopted,
2. Facilitate the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents who can meet the needs of waiting youth,
3. Eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin of the child or the prospective parent.

Policy "Agency Name" is subject to MEPA-IEP and complies with all its provisions as required by law.

A. No "Agency Name" personnel or agent delays or denies the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved.

B. No "Agency Name" personnel or agent denies an individual the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent on the basis of the prospective parent's or the child's race, color, or national origin.

C. "Agency Name" diligently recruits foster and adoptive parents that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children under our placement responsibility.

Procedure

The following policy outlines specific practices and standards that "Agency Name" has established to ensure MEPA-IEP compliance. However, the prohibitive practices listed below are not a comprehensive list. Should a "Agency Name" team member be faced with a situation that requires professional judgment for which they are unsure, they should seek the guidance from their supervisor.

A. No "Agency Name" personnel or agent delays or denies the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved.

- "Agency Name" provides MEPA-IEP training during new employee orientation and new foster/adoptive parent training.
- "Agency Name" does not delay or deny placement based on biological parent's preferences.
- If the referring agent (ex. county DSS staff, the child, or biological family) asks "Agency Name" to place a child with a home of a specific race, color, or national origin, then the social worker will complete the questionnaire in Attachment A and give it to their supervisor for approval. This is done prior to placement or placement change. This questionnaire outlines the child's

distinctive needs that warrant consideration of the child's race, color or national origin and serves as the documentation required in these rare occasions.

- "Agency Name" will not use race or the cultural capacity of prospective parents when making placement decisions or when differentiating between potential placements except as stated above.

B. No "Agency Name" personnel or agent denies an individual the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent on the basis of the prospective parent's or the child's race, color, or national origin.
    - "Agency Name" has a no discrimination policy with regards to an individual's opportunity to become a foster/adoptive parent. This includes race, color and national origin as well as race-neutral factors such as income, age, education, family structure and ownership of housing unless Medicaid or licensing required.
    - "Agency Name" recognizes that such opportunity is a privilege rather than a "right."
    - "Agency Name" makes placement decisions based on the distinctive needs of the child and the skill set and willingness of particular families to meet those needs.
    - "Agency Name" does not routinely assess a prospective foster or adoptive parent's cultural capacities.
    - "Agency Name" does not asks parents directly what race, color or national origin they would like to parent. Should the parents initiate that conversation, "Agency Name" will have that discussion and will assist in the development of foster and adoptive parents to broaden the types of children they are able to parent.

C. "Agency Name" diligently recruits foster and adoptive parents who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children within our placement responsibility.
    - "Agency Name" has a recruitment plan that is reviewed at least annually, and that focuses on developing a pool of potential foster and adoptive parents willing and able to foster or adopt the children needing placement.
    - "Agency Name" monitors the racial and ethnic demographics of the youth we serve as compared with the foster and adoptive parent pool and modifies its recruitment plan to diligently develop strategies that reach communities of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of waiting youth accordingly. "Agency Name" recognizes that any targeted recruitment cannot be the exclusive means to identify families for particular children. Efforts should also be inclusive of all other racial and ethnic groups.
    - "Agency Name" Resource Family Recruitment and Retention Committee monitors outcome and placement data for each race and for transracial placements to assess any disparities and make adjustments as needed.

MEPA Attachment A:
Race, Color or National Origin Consideration Questionnaire

This questionnaire outlines the child's distinctive needs that warrant consideration of the child's race, color or national origin in placement decision and serves as the documentation required in these rare occasions. Any use of race, color, or ethnicity in placement decisions is subject to the *strict scrutiny standard of review* and consideration of such factors is permitted only in exceptional circumstances where the special or distinctive needs of a child require it and where those needs can be documented.

Any consideration of race, color or national origin must not be predominate to the other needs of the child—such as the child's age, child's preferences, ties to siblings and other relatives, health or physical condition, educational, cognitive, psychological needs, and cultural needs including religious, linguistic, dietary, musical or athletic needs.

If "Agency Name" is asked to place a child in a home of a specific race, color, or national origin (by county DSS staff, the child, or biological family), then the social worker will answer the following questions and give the completed questionnaire to their supervisor for review. This is done prior to placement or a placement change. The supervisor, in conjunction with the Child and Family Team and PCP when available, will then determine if such consideration is justified.

Please answer the following questions in writing and submit to your supervisor for review prior to placement.

1. What are the child's special or distinctive needs based on race, color, or national origin?
2. Why is it in the child's best interests to take these needs into account?
3. Can the child's needs related to race, color, or national origin be taken into account without delaying placement and placing the child at risk of other harms?
4. Can these needs be met by a prospective foster or adoptive parent who does not share the child's racial or ethnic background?
5. Can these needs be met only by a same race/ethnic placement?
6. If so, is some delay justified in order to search for a parent of the same race or ethnicity, if an appropriate parent is currently not available within the agency?
7. In a foster care placement, can the child's special needs be taken into account without denying the child an opportunity to be cared for in a readily available foster home?
8. What are the child's other important needs?

MEPA Attachment B: "Agency Name" Recruitment Plan

1. **A description of the characteristics of waiting children.**
   Our YEAR analysis revealed that X% of our youth are age five or under; X% are age 6-10; X% are age 11-15; and X% are 16 years old or older. X% of the youth served through "Agency Name" in NC are Caucasian; X% are African American; and X% are bi-racial or other. X% are female and X% are male.

   X% are traditional foster care placements; X% are in therapeutic foster care placements, and X% are receiving other services such as community supports or Multi-Systemic Therapy. X% were part of a sibling group. X% our youth have one or more mental health diagnosis.

2. **Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community.**
   "Agency Name" recruitment strategies for foster and adoptive families include, but are not limited to, the following: slogans on promotional items such as bookmarks, pens, cups, etc., information booths at meetings or gatherings, flyers, handouts, notices in congregational and community bulletins, newsletters, special events, presentations in community, newspaper feature stories, community and neighborhood canvassing, and current foster parent incentive programs.

3. **Diverse methods of disseminating both general and child-specific information.**
   "Agency Name" uses the above strategies to disseminate both general and child-specific information.

4. **Strategies for assuring that all prospective parents have timely access to the home study process, including location and hours of services that facilitate access by all members of the community.**
   "Agency Name" notifies the community via postings at the agency, newspaper publications and radio announcements of upcoming foster/adoptive parent training. Once prospective parents have contacted "Agency Name" a communications log is created, detailing date information sent, phone calls placed, and follow up made to ensure prompt attention to inquiries.

   "Agency Name" varies its pre-service training hours based on the needs of the community. Additionally, each social worker is available to families to complete their home study during hours that are convenient to the family. Preplacement adoption assessments are completed within 90 days after the application for adoption has been approved and the request for the assessment has been received.

5. **Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial and economic communities.**
   Each "Agency Name" team member shall receive cultural diversity training during pre-service training and during ongoing annual training. Cultural issues are also addressed during clinical supervision.

6. **Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers.**
   "Agency Name" strives to hire staff that reflect the diverse background of the communities we serve including bilingual staff. Should the situation arise where we have a family

interested in becoming a foster/adoptive who does not speak English, "Agency Name" arranges for an interpreter for pre-service training.

7. **Non-discriminatory fee structures.**
   There is very little cost involved in becoming a foster/adoptive parent with "Agency Name". Should a parent be unable to absorb the cost of pre-service training materials, "Agency Name" will discuss options with that parent and will try to accommodate the parent's needs.

8. **Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a waiting child include the use of exchanges (such as NC Kids) and other interagency efforts. Such procedures ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.**

   If the permanency plan for a child is adoption, the social worker ensures the child is registered with the North Carolina Exchange (NC Kids) and assists in gathering information or photographs as needed. The social worker explores possible permanency options with current or former connections the youth has such as relatives, teachers, coaches, former foster parents, etc.

K. Participation Letter to Community Supporters

Excerpted from *Answering the Call: National Adoption Month 2008 Toolkit*. http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/2008NAMToolkit.pdf

Print on Your Organization's Letterhead
[DATE]

Contact Name
Title
Company
Address
City, State ZIP

Dear [CONTACT]:

This Thanksgiving season, remember the 114,000 children who are in need of adoption. They have no permanent family with whom to celebrate the holiday.

Many of these children are teenagers and children with physical, emotional, behavioral or learning challenges. Some have been neglected, abandoned, abused and/or exposed to drugs and alcohol. Others are brothers and sisters who want to remain in the same household. Of the children in need of adoption, 36 percent are African-American and 45 percent are over the age of 8.

All of these children need your support.

November is National Adoption Month. [STATE/COUNTY/CITY/AGENCY] is asking you to join thousands of individuals, government agencies, and child advocacy organizations across the nation in promoting the National Adoption Month 2007 Campaign. Named "Answering the Call: You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Be a Perfect Parent," the campaign's goal is to spread awareness of the needs of children waiting to be adopted and to increase the number of foster and adoptive parents in our community and nation.

It would be a great benefit to the campaign if you would agree to [MAKE SPECIFIC REQUEST HERE].

Enclosed is background information about the campaign. We thank you in advance for your consideration of this important national observance. We are confident that increased awareness will help find loving families for all children in foster care. Every child deserves a permanent home. Your participation in this effort will greatly contribute to the accomplishment of this worthwhile goal.

For more information about National Adoption Month or to confirm your support, please call us at [AGENCY NUMBER].

Sincerely,
[YOUR NAME]
[TITLE]
Enclosures

L. Talking Points for Engaging New Callers

You are giving the family their first impression of your agency. It is crucial to be warm, enthusiastic, helpful, and positive about the call and about the program.

- Thank you for calling! I'd be happy to tell you about our foster care program and answer any questions you might have." Make them feel appreciated and welcome.
- Tell them you'd like to learn a little bit more about them, and ask questions on Intake Form.
- Give the applicants a chance to ask questions, explain how they came to contact your agency, and share some of their expectations for the process.
- Provide a brief description of your program:

    i. Age ranges, needs of the children in care

    ii. Basic licensing requirements

        1. Age (over 21)

        2. Health (all family members in good physical and mental health)

        3. Number of children in the home (**family foster homes** may have a total of 5 in the home, including the family's own children; **therapeutic foster homes** may have a total of 4 children in the home, no more than 2 of whom may be foster children)

        4. Criminal history checks (all adults over age 18 must agree to fingerprinting for background checks; state determines whether a particular history may make someone ineligible for a foster home license)

        5. Agreement to work in partnership with agency

        6. Training requirements (30 hours of pre-service training plus 10 hours/ year once licensed)

iii. Steps and time involved in the application and licensing process

1. Orientation meeting
2. Application
3. Criminal background check
4. 30 hours of pre-service training
5. Mutual home assessment: other steps in this process for your agency

iv. Date of next orientation

- "Do you have any other questions I haven't answered?"
- Tell them what the next steps are. Ideally this will be:

  i. An information packet will be mailed to them.

  ii. A staff member or foster parent will call them to schedule a home visit at a convenient time for the family, to meet in person and answer any additional questions.

  iii. "We would love you to come to our next Orientation meeting on _____ to get more information and meet some of our foster parents."

You are also beginning the mutual home assessment with this first call. How receptive is the caller to taking the time to complete the assessment and training? How open are they initially to the variety and needs of children in foster care? As you learn the answers to these and other questions, you will begin to get a sense of how these parents communicate, why they want to foster, and their strengths and needs.

Source: National Foster Parent Association, 2001

M. Sample Newsletter for Resource Families

Nash County Foster Parent Newsletter

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER, 2007

WELCOME ABOARD!

We would like to welcome to our foster parent family:

Darrell and Teresa Hopkins
licensed as of Aug. 30, 2007

They live near Bailey and enjoy spending time together as a family. They have two daughters, Daisha (10) and Samantha (8) and look forward to the opportunity to parent additional children.

UPCOMING TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

CPR/First Aid/Universal Precautions
Saturday, November 17.

This class is full and no additional people can be included. We will make arrangements to offer it again after the first of the year - Ginny will keep you informed when its scheduled.

Foster Children's Christmas Party
Saturday, December 15
11:00 AM - 2:00 PM at the Red Barn.
Directions are enclosed.

Mark your calendars now and please plan to come!

Round Table
Tuesday, January 15, 2008
6:30 - 8:30 PM at DSS

This is your opportunity to tell us how we can assist you and give suggestions for training opportunites. Please plan to attend. Light refreshments will be served and child care will be provided.

Going the extra mile...

We encourage all of our foster parents to participate in Child and Family Team meetings. It 's a great way to know what is going on in the child's life and to participate in their planning as well as shared parenting. Mr. Hoggard made himself available to participate in a CFT on speaker phone while vacationing at Disney World. We appreciate the extra effort. Job well done!

Brent Hoggard

Brent and Marcy Hoggard are holding a Christmas Tree auction at the Red Barn on November 24, 2007. Proceeds will benefit the needs of children in foster care. Please share information about this event with family and friends. See the enclosed flyer.

GET TO KNOW YOUR SOCIAL WORKER:

Shea Neal

Shea has been a foster care social worker for 10 years. She graduated from East Carolina University in 1997 with a BS degree in Family and Community Services. Shea began working in the foster care unit in January 1998 and has been with us since that time. She really enjoys working with the children and trying to make a difference in their lives. Shea reports that "it's seeing the smiles on the children's faces, or seeing their eyes light up" that makes this job worthwhile and "knowing that we are helping to keep them safe and healthy".

She married Jeremy Neal in May of 1998 and they reside in Franklin County. They have a six year old son, Jackson, and are expecting a baby GIRL in March!!!! Her family stays very involved with Jackson's activities as he plays soccer, basketball and baseball. He is also very active in 4-H and participates in chicken, goat, sheep and heifer shows through the Franklin County 4-H program.

Shea and her family are very involved in their church, particularly in the Children and Youth Programs. Shea's favorite hobby...when she can find time...is scrap booking and she also enjoys photography. Her favorite place to visit is the beach, where you can find her most weekends from May through September!

EXTRAORDINARY STAR:

GLORIA COX, an adoptive parent, as well as a licensed Nash County foster parent, has been a wonderful asset to the Nash County Foster Parent team. Her dedication and devotion to children can only be described as "extraordinary". She gives tirelessly and loves deeply. Her heart is truly in providing the best possible care for all children. A child in Gloria's home is treated as her very own! What she does for her own child, she readily does for the foster child. Since the adoption of her nephews, Gloria has fostered one Nash County teen. For nearly three years, she worked very hard with this young man, who at times exhibted some difficult behaviors. She worked side by side with his social workers in an effort to address the behaviors and attempt to resolve school disciplinary issues. She acted as his parent in every way, to the point that school officials thought that she was his biological parent and were unaware of DSS legal status. Due to the emotional attachment that had formed, Gloria as well as the teen, was saddened by the decision made to try a different type placement. Despite the move, she continued to be supportive of this teen during this period, volunteering to become his visitation resource which allowed their bond and connection to remain intact. This young man has since left the foster care system but remains a "member" of her family. He continues to visit her home regularly and she is supportive of his current caretaker in ensuring that his needs are being met. Gloria Cox...an extraordinary woman doing an extraordinary job! Gloria, we salute you for a job well done!

RESOURCES:

Please read these helpful attachments:

Six ways to Help Foster Kids Express Anger Constructively
Child Development and Attachment
Grief and Loss for Children in Foster Care

Banquet

We had an excellent turn out for our annual foster parent banquet. We are growing so much that we may need to look at another location. Thank you to all who participated!

Pumkin Festival...

First it rained, then the temps rose into the 90's, but we hung in there on Oct.6th at the Spring Hope Pumpkin Festival. We hope we were successful in spreading the word about the need for foster and adoptive parents.
Please talk to your church members about fostering/adopting - or perhaps your minister would consider having a representative come and talk to your congregation. We love every opportunity to get the word out and can speak to your civic groups as well. We need more people like you!

STATS:

Ages:

0 - 5: 17 children in care
6 - 12: 5 children in care
13 - 18: 15 children in care

Of these children, 3 are cleared and available for adoption. Ages range 12-17

In September, we had 3 children enter care and found permanence for 5.
In October we had 1 child enter care and found permanence for 2.

LINKS news

The 2007 Budget Bill approved by the North Carolina Legislature provided state funding to match Federal Medicaid dollars for young adults who aged out of North Carolina DSS custody. This means that all young adults who were in NC DSS custody as of their 18th birthday are eligible for extended Medicaid coverage without regard to income or assets until their 21st birthday. Please contact Cindy Lewis, Links coordinator, if you have any questions regarding this matter.

A Hundred Years From Now...

... it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove...but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a CHILD

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH:

Nash County Department of Social Services sponsored a Conference on Saturday, November 3, 2007 as part of their National Adoption Awareness Month activities. "Open Homes - Open Hearts" was held at the Dunn Center for the Performing Arts on the campus of NC Wesleyan College. Jo Ann Lamm, Deputy Director for the NC Division of Social Services, was the keynote speaker. Workshops provided information on adoption assistance benefits, post adoption services, therapeutic supports and a light hearted look at life and parenting.

A complimentary deli lunch buffet was provided for the approximately 81 people who attended. NC Kids, Children's Home Society, Christian Adoption Services and Nash County DSS provided displays and information about their agencies and adoption programs for interested individuals. Foster parents who attended received 6.5 hours of training credit.

MAPP

Orientation will be on Jan. 7, 2008.
Nash County will teach the next MAPP class: January 22-February 21. Classes will be held on Monday and Thursday nights with exception to the first week. Due to the MLK holiday, classes will be held on Tuesday and Thursday

Nash County Foster Parent Mentors

Need to talk with someone who has actually "talked the talk" and " walked the walk"? The following is a list of foster parents who have agreed to participate in the foster parent mentoring program. They will support new foster parents and have agreed to answer any questions that you may have regarding fostering. As always, Ginny Cobb and your child's assigned social worker can help with any questions you may have as well.

Mentors:

Gloria Cox (252) 450-6989
Henry and Linda Hedgepeth (252) 478-3968
Brent and Marcy Hoggard (252) 459-3812
Charles and Ethel Metters (252) 437-0465
James and Mable Woodard (919) 269-0775

GREAT NEWS

College Funds

Youths aging out of foster care and youths with special needs adopted from foster care after age 12, now have access to funding to help them attend public colleges and community colleges in NC.

What's covered?

**Tuition/fees normally assessed a student carrying the same academic workload as determined by the institution, including costs for rental or purchase of equipment, materials, or supplies required of all students in the same course of study

.

**An allowance for books, supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous personal expenses, including a reasonable allowance for the documented rental or purchase of a personal computer, for a student attending the institution on at least a half-time basis, as determined by the college

.

**An allowance (as determined by the college) for room and board costs incurred by the student

Adoption Tax Credit

An individual who is allowed a federal adoption tax credit for the taxable year is also allowed a NC tax credit

.

**The credit is equal to 50% of the amount of the federal tax credit

.

****Effective for the tax year beginning Jan. 1, 2007; it will expire after the 2012 tax year unless it is extended**

Hear those sleigh bells jingling...

Foster parents, Marcy and Brent Hoggard, have graciously volunteered to host our next annual foster child Christmas party which will be on Saturday, December 15, 2007 at the Red Barn in Nashville. (Directions included with Newsletter) They will be providing pizza and of course, Santa will be there!

The Hoggards felt it would be FUN to have a talent show this year and hope you will encourage any children in care that are in your home to participate in this wonderful opportunity to showcase their talents. Maybe they'd like to sing a song, do a dance, read a poem or show off a picture they drew. This is their time to "be a star". Please contact Ginny Cobb if you have a child who would like to participate in the talent show.

It is our wish that each of you will have a blessed and joyous holiday season.
We count you and the great job you do for our children among the many blessings we are thankful for.

N. Media Contact List (Sample Format)

Media	Contact Name	E-mail	Phone	Address	Date(s) Contacted	Purpose	Result
Local Newspapers							
1. Details:							
2. Details:							
3. Details:							
Television Stations							
1. Details:							
2. Details:							
3. Details:							
Local Area Radio Stations							
1. Details:							
2. Details:							
3. Details:							

O. Editorial

Open Your Heart to a Foster Child

By Hildagene Reid

Imagine being forced to pack your few belongings and move to a new home and a new family. Imagine that you are not making the move with your brothers and sisters, who are being placed in different homes, with different families.

Also imagine, for a moment, that you are the new family taking in a child who is confused, displaced and upset.

Very little imagination is required if you are one of the 395 children in foster care in Guilford County, one of 11,000 children in foster care in North Carolina. Or one of the too few foster families who open their hearts and homes to children in desperate need of stability.

My mother was 4 years old when her parents died. She had two sisters, a 1-year-old and a 6-year-old. A cousin in California wanted the baby girl. An aunt in Philadelphia wanted the oldest girl, and every relative in my hometown wanted the middle girl, my mother.

When telling the story to her children, my mother remembered knowing even at age 4 that something terrible had happened and something worse was about to happen. She was going to be separated from the only two people she loved.

Another aunt, a widow with four children of her own, and struggling to make ends meet by taking in washing and other domestic work, stepped in. She would not allow her brother's children to be torn away from each other. Since the relatives who did not have children couldn't take them all, they couldn't have any. So the widowed aunt ended up rearing seven children.

My mother was eternally grateful she and her siblings were not separated, but were able to grow old together along with cousins who became like sisters and brothers. I am eternally grateful to my mother for teaching her seven children the priceless value of what it means to be family.

May is National Foster Care Month, when we turn our attention to the children and youth in care, as well as honor the dedicated foster families, relative caregivers, volunteers and child welfare professionals who serve them.

Children in foster care feel more secure and are likely to do better in school and life overall when they are able to stay in their own communities. The larger the pool of qualified foster parents, the easier it will be to ensure that children can remain in their own neighborhoods and schools and that siblings can remain together.

Being a foster parent is not the only way to have an impact on the life of a child in foster care. You can become a volunteer, community representative or a mentor. You can support foster youth attending college and vocational school. You can offer older youth job-skills training or employment or tutoring. You can consider becoming a "secret pal" to foster families and send them coupons for free pizzas or movie tickets or offer them services through your business.

Use National Foster Care Month as an opportunity to help change the perception that children in foster care are the responsibility of someone else. Their well-being is dependent on the willingness of our entire community to care for and about them.

Many states are celebrating National Foster Care Month with a blue-ribbon campaign. I hope Greensboro will show foster families and children they deserve first-place status by tying blue ribbons around trees. Put a blue ribbon on the door of your business; place one on the car antenna; wear one on your lapel.

The 395 blue ribbons representing Guilford County foster children will be on a tree in the Department of Social Services lobby. But there will be only 130 white ribbons representing the current licensed Guilford County foster parents.

Together we can help change that by bringing positive awareness to National Foster Care Month.

Hildagene Reid is a family recruitment social worker for the Guilford County DSS.

P. Feature Article

Fostering Care

By Michael Barrett
February 4, 2007

The scars of neglect in foster children can be as boundless as the number of kids in foster care nationwide.

Chris and Sandi Maners were reminded of that a year ago, after their 4-year-old foster daughter came to live with them in Belmont.

"She didn't even know how to play," Chris said. "There are things you expect an almost 4-year-old to do naturally, but she was content to just sit.

"It was almost like people had fed her and done basic things for her, but there hadn't been any child development."

Such deficiencies are inherent in many children who come under the care of the Gaston County Department of Social Services. But too few worthy adults are willing to help them by adopting or providing foster care, said Sherry McKinney, adoptions and foster care recruiter.

Of the children placed in foster care in Gaston County each year, around 10 percent are adopted on average, McKinney said.

Though adoptions here have mostly been on the rise since 2002, officials say the success rate has not risen as high as needed.

"You can do the math," McKinney said. "The number of homes is nowhere meeting our demand."

The system has actually improved by leaps and bounds in the last decade, McKinney said. Courts began fast-tracking custody cases to address parents who were making no progress in getting their children back, she said.

"There was a realization that a lot of children were languishing in foster care," she said.

An average of 200 to 220 children are under the legal and/or physical care of Gaston County DSS every day, McKinney said.

That number was up in the 400s as recent as five years ago, she said.

Once DSS begins supervising a child, parents or legal guardians now have a year to work toward reclaiming them. If that begins to look unlikely, efforts begin to find the child a new home, said county adoption supervisor Rita Ferguson.

DSS commonly turns to foster homes and other facilities before custody issues have been resolved.

Some licensed foster parents provide short-term care for children who may end up back with their parents or elsewhere. Other foster parents are long-term providers.

"I think people have their different reasons (for foster parenting)," Ferguson said. "Some are interested in adopting themselves and believe fostering will allow them to see if it's what they really want."

Foster parents must be state certified. That includes attending a mandatory weekly class that runs 2½ months.

The state pays a moderate, per-child stipend to assist with needs such as food and clothing.

McKinney said the Maners exemplify everything that is great about foster parenting.

"They're wonderful," she said. "They're just good-ole' people who do this out of the goodness of their heart."

The Maners, of Belmont, said many things influenced their decision to become foster parents more than three years ago, but the strongest motive was their religious faith.

"Growing up in church, you always want to reach out and help others," Sandi Maners said.

The couple "fell in love" with the second foster child to come through their home, who they quickly nicknamed "Half-pint." They adopted the girl, who is now 14, after she was legally cleared for adoption in 2005.

"With Half-pint, we knew we wanted to adopt her the day we got her," Chris said.

The Maners have since become foster parents for two Hispanic siblings — a 7-year-old boy and 4-year-old girl. They hope to adopt them as well if they are legally cleared.

McKinney said foster parents and adoptive parents are hardest to find for teenage children. Spanish-speaking foster parents are also in high demand, she said.

Foster parenting and adoption are two of the most significant things people can do to help children in need, Sandi Maners said.

"If you love children and want to help, this is probably the most personal, one-on-one way you can do it," Chris said. "But it takes a 100-percent effort."

You can reach Michael Barrett at (704) 869-1826.

Reprinted from the Gaston Gazette <http://www.gastongazette.com/articles/foster_3797___article.html/parents_children.html>

Q. Instructions for Writing a Press Release

Awareness

Step by Step

Writing a Standard Press Release

[Organization's name
Address
City, State/Province, Zip/Postal code]

FOR RELEASE: ***[Date]*** CONTACT: ***[Name, phone number]***

Photographs and interviews with families who have or are in the process of adopting waiting children are available upon request.

Calling Out Ceremony Will Draw Attention to Children Who Need Families

During a Calling Out ceremony at ***[place, time]*** on ***[day of the week]***, November ***[date]***, ***[an adopted child/your group representative, etc.]*** will read names of some of the children in foster care who need adoptive families and light a candle in honor of every child who is waiting for a permanent home. "These are real children," says ***[group representative name, title]***, "who desperately need families of their own. Because the public is so often unaware of these kids and their needs, we would like to draw special attention to waiting children during National Adoption Awareness Month in the hope that we can unite many of these boys and girls with permanent, adoptive parents."

In ***[state/province]***, approximately ***[number]*** children live in some type of foster care setting. Many have spent most of their lives in this "temporary" situation, and have moved within the child welfare system more times than they care to remember. ***[A number or percentage]*** will never return to their birth families. ***[A number or percentage of those]*** are legally free for adoption.

These waiting children come from a variety of backgrounds. Some have physical or mental disabilities; some are part of a sibling group; many are of African American or Native American or Latino heritage; and many are older children or adolescents. Advocates from organizations such as ***[your group name]*** are working hard to prove that there is no such thing as an unadoptable child.

This Calling Out for Those Who Wait is part of National Adoption Awareness Month, and is just one of many special November events planned throughout the country to focus attention on adoption.

Those who are thinking about adoption should know that, according to ***[name]***, adoption has changed significantly over the last 30 years. "You don't have to be married, childless, under 40, rich, or own a house to adopt," ***[the representative]*** says. "You *do* have to provide a stable, loving home, and be able to help your child work through issues raised by his or her past."

[Organization name] provides specific information about waiting children and the adoption process in ***[state/province]***. To learn more, contact ***[name, address, and/or phone number]***.

###

Adapted from "Sending Effective Press Releases" by John Hewitt, the Writer's Resource Center, 2001.

Prominently display contact information for your organization as well as the the person who will work with the media.

Set a release date for the information or write "For Immediate Release."

Mention photos at the top of the first page, but only if you have high quality images that add to your story. Never tape or paperclip photos—if damaged they cannot be published.

Include a succinct, enticing title.

The first paragraph includes the most important information—what, when, where, and who.

A quote by a dignitary or organizational representative adds credibility to your release.

Use standard 8 1/2" by 11" paper, an easy-to-read font, and 1 1/2" to 2" margins.

Unless speed is essential, mail your press release rather than faxing it.

Fold your press release so that the headline and date are visible as soon as the editor opens the envelope.

If the release continues onto a second page, include a page number, a two- or three-word description of the story, the contact person's information, and the release date at the top of each page.

Write paragraphs in news style, using short words and sentences.

Never use exclamation points.

Consult either the *AP Stylebook* or the *Chicago Manual of Style* to learn the general guidelines for abbreviating words, writing numbers, and capitalizing names.

Repeat contact information in the text of the final paragraph.

End with three centered number signs.

R. One Church – One Child Program Newsletter

The Message

VOLUME VI SUMMER 2008

Rowan

One Church

One Child

Ministry

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

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Advisory Board 4

The Director's Pen

As we closed out our fiscal year on June 30, we looked back at the ROCOC activities over the past twelve months. We thought of all the prayers, donations, and time that our member churches provided. We thought of the car washes and hot dog sales you sponsored, the clothing drives, the school tool collections, and the Christmas Star trees you hosted. We thought of the money you gave and how it was used to pay for summer camp, a family's rent, a bicycle, and other things. We thought of the prom dresses you gave and the birthday parties you hosted. The children in foster care, separated from their families because of abuse or neglect, have received a great blessing from the generous spirit that moves among our ROCOC partners. You have been and continue to be a blessing not only to these children but also to the DSS staff who work to find permanent and loving homes for them.

During the year, we welcomed eight new churches to the program.

As we begin fiscal year 2008 – 2009, we welcome new ROCOC Advisory Board members: Mrs. Martha Baker, Rev. Regina Dancy, Mrs. Marion Melton, Mrs. Darlene Murphy, and Mr. William Peoples. They join current board members attorney Jeff Morris and Rev. John Tucker, along with several DSS staff members.

With a grateful heart, we look forward to working together, churches and DSS, to enrich the lives of children who need our care.

Rowan County Department of Social Services

Sandra Wilkes—Director

Tom Brewer— Children's Services Program Administrator

ROCOC Coordinator

I am thankful for God's blessings and gifts that you are sharing with our children and families. The families and children that we serve are blessed because of your bounteous generosity. It is a joy to work with each of you in this ministry. God takes the smallest mustard seed of service and makes it multiply. That has surely happened as we now have thirty-one churches in this ministry with four joining since the last newsletter. Our newest members are listed on page two.

Our Advisory Board has worked very hard this year. Thank you for the leadership, service and direction that you give to this program. Our thanks also goes to Stanley Price and Kevin Williams who are RCDSS Foster Care Social Workers for moving and loading furniture and other items and delivering these items to the families that we serve. Way to Go!!! Kevin and Stan.

Beverly Mobley and I were honored to represent the Rowan One Church One Child Ministry at a National Conference in Richmond, Virginia from July 9-11, 2008. The National Network of Adoption Advocacy Programs sponsored the Conference.

People attended the Conference from One Church One Child Programs throughout the United States. Rowan One Church One Child Ministry was one of eight programs nationally to receive an award for "Best Practices." It was my honor to receive this award on your behalf.

Together We Are Making a Difference in Children's Lives!

ROCOC COORDINATOR

The recognition would not have been possible without your time, dedication, generosity, and love for our children. WE ALL should be proud of this honor. The ROCOC Ministry is also one of twelve ministries featured in a document entitled "Best Practices for One Church One Child Model Programs" compiled by Mrs. Jane C. Talley which was submitted to the National Network of Adoption Advocacy Programs in March 2008. Again, this recognition was due to what each of you is doing here in Rowan County. Finally, I was honored to represent our ministry on a National Speakers Panel entitled "OCOC Best Practices in Recruitment and Services" at the conference.

On behalf of our Advisory Board, DSS Staff, foster parents, relative caretakers, and the children and families that we serve, I want to express our deepest praise and gratitude for the difference that you are making here in Rowan County. Our prayer is that God will continue to richly bless all of you.

Please call if I can assist you in any way. I look forward to speaking at some of your churches in the fall. Continue to share this blessing and ministry with your sister churches.

Let us keep multiplying God's mustard seed in Rowan County.

We look forward to meeting with you at our next Church Coordinators Meeting on Monday, October 13, 2008 at the Mt. Tabor United Methodist Church.

Jon

Together we grow. Since the last newsletter we are happy to welcome the following new member churches:

- ***Bethel Lutheran***
- ***Dorsett Chapel UCC***
- ***Soldiers Memorial AME Zion***
- ***St. Matthew's Lutheran***

Christmas Star Tree

Last year was the first year that One Church One Child took on the challenge of providing Christmas presents for the children, not only in foster care, but also those children that we are serving in protective services or in-home services. The response on your part was overwhelming. Thank you so much for that.

We are getting started earlier this year so you have more time to plan and let your congregations know about this opportunity. Please follow the steps below if your church is interested in participating.

- Let Jon Hunter know if your church is interested and the number of children you could take on. After we get this number we will divide the children among the churches. Please do this by 9-30-08.
- We will pass out the list of children and the stars at the meeting on 10-13-08. This will give your church two months to get your stars passed out and the gifts back to us.
- Peggy will pass out a set of guidelines with the stars so everyone is doing the same thing and there is uniformity.
- At the time you receive your stars you may also receive a list of suggested items to purchase for children that will be coming into foster care or will be involved in one of the other service areas between 9-30-08 when we make out the list and Christmas day, so that those children will not be left out.

We hope beginning the process earlier and having more guidelines in place will help those who wish to participate. Bring any questions to the coordinators meeting on 10-13-08.

Peggy Thorneburg

Contributions Made by One Church One Child Churches

- End of school party for foster children and families at Dan Nicholas Park.
- $100 gift card for Josey and Stormi.
- Chest of drawers and dresser for Alivia and Caleb.
- New girls outfits size 4T
- Four bags of clothes, business suits and dresses for teens.
- $45 gift card to Sears to purchase new-born clothes.
- Birthday Party for teenagers in the Links program, eleven $20 gift cards for teens with birthdays, fifty-eight $5 gift cards for all teens who attended, cakes, drinks, and ice-cream.
- $360.17 for the ROCOC Account.
- One bag of clothes.
- $100 for the ROCOC Account.
- $25 gift card to Toys R US for Stormi and Josey.
- Six box springs and mattresses, twin bed frame, sleeper sofa, love seat, two chairs.
- Two pairs of girls shoes and two bags of girls socks.
- Two boxes of boys clothes, woman's shoes and sweaters, two leather coats, prom shoes, pocket book, and bag of clothes.
- New Alpine Extreme Green Bike, new pair of Nike tennis shoes, 2 pairs of shorts and four shirts for Ja'Darrius.
- Crib, mattress, crib sheet and child protector.
- $50 for Betty to buy school clothes.
- Pink book bag, markers, crayons, colored pencils and Kleenex for Stormi.
- Shoes, suits, ties, cups and plates for teenagers.
- Two boxes of women's and girl's clothes.
- School Supplies, children's clothes, shoes, baby blankets and food.
- 2 small children's bikes and two tri-cycles.
- Kitchen table with six chairs, six plastic chairs, twin cot and mattress, full size mattress, end table, patio chair, clothes and school supplies.
- Two book bags, three ring binder notebooks, and report folders.
- Little Tikes Rocking Horse.
- Notebook paper, crayons, glue, glue sticks, pencils, three ring binder notebooks, report folders and notebook dividers.
- Notebook paper, composition books, notebooks, ten book bags, packages of socks and report folders.
- Sixteen book bags
- Notebooks, composition books, pencil holders, book covers, packs of pencils, crayons, bags of erasers, glue, pencil sharpeners, packs of index cards, packs of note book paper, report folders, rulers, scissors, and glue sticks.
- Notebook paper, packs of pencils, rulers, packs of erasers, crayons.

ROCOC

Advisory Board Meeting

Friday

September 12 2008

12 P.M.

Conference Room Rowan DSS Children's Services Building 165 Mahaley Avenue Salisbury, NC

Church Coordinators Meeting

Monday, October 13, 2008
Mt. Tabor United Methodist Church
Fellowship Hall
4520 Old Mocksville Road, Salisbury, NC 28144
Salisbury, NC
12—1 p.m. (Lunch provided)
Or
5:30—6:30 p.m. (Dinner provided)

Rowan
One Church—One Child
Ministry

Rev. Jon Hunter
Coordinator
310 N. Main Street (office)
165 Mahaley Avenue (mailing address)
Salisbury, NC 28144
Phone: 704 - 216 - 7914
E-mail: jon.hunter@rowancountync.org

For a free Ministry Portfolio Packet or to schedule Jon Hunter to speak, please telephone or email Jon.

The Rowan County One Church—One Child program is a mission/outreach program between Rowan County Department of Social Services and local churches that is designed to make a difference in the lives of children and families by:

- **Identifying families in congregations who may be interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents.**
- **Helping to meet the needs of children and families served by DSS.**
- **Supporting families who are caretakers for Rowan County's children in foster care.**
- **Educating worshippers about the needs of Rowan County children and families who need assistance and support.**

Member Churches and Advisory Board Members

Bethel Lutheran
Cedar Grove AME Zion
Church of the Word of God
Coburn Memorial UMC
Dorsett Chapel UCC
First Presbyterian—Salisbury
First UMC – Salisbury
Freedom United Church of God
Gethsemane Missionary Baptist
Grace UMC
Grace Worship Center International
Lebanon Lutheran
Main Street UMC - Salisbury
Maranatha Bible Church
Milford Hills UMC
Mount Olive Full Gospel Baptist
Mount Tabor UMC
Mount Zion Missionary Baptist
New Life In Christ
Oak Grove UMC
Park Avenue UMC
Providence AME Zion
Providence UMC
Refreshing Springs Christian Ministry
San Mateo – St Matthew's Episcopal
Second Presbyterian
Shiloh UMC
Soldiers Memorial AME Zion
St. Matthew's Lutheran
The Tower of Power United Holy Church
Thyatira Presbyterian

ROCOC Advisory Board Members

Jon Hunter
Sandra Wilkes
Tom Brewer
Beverly Mobley
Frances Gallimore
Micah Melton
Peggy Thorneburg
Stanley Price
Kris Sapper
Johna Wiseman
Jefferson Morris
John Tucker
Martha Baker
Regina Dancy
Marion Melton
Darlene Murphy
William Peoples

S. Adoption Party Resources

A. How to Have a Successful Adoption Party

1. The best parties are relaxed, unstructured, and have a sense of spontaneity. Youth should have enough games and activities to keep them busy, without feeling pressure to "find a family" or be "interviewed." You want the young people to forget why they're there, and just have fun! Some ideas to include:
    a. Music (of course!)
    b. Food (of course!)
    c. Manicure and pedicure stations
    d. Face painting
    e. Games
    f. Basketball/kickball/volleyball/softball, etc.
    g. Arts & crafts (anything from making a group mural to bead bracelets to coloring for smaller children)
2. Prepare young people individually before the event. Let them know when, where, what, and whom to expect. Attendance should be strictly low-pressure and voluntary: no child should be forced or pressured to attend. You can encourage kids before and during the party that the idea is to have fun – there are no other expectations. For some youth, that might be helping you out, or watching over the younger kids, rather than feeling pressure to meet families. There are lots of creative ways to build on young people's strengths.
3. Families should also have an orientation before-hand. Provide some guidance on appropriate questions ("What kinds of things do you like to do?") and inappropriate questions ("Do you think you would like to live with us?"). Encourage families to have fun, and to see the party as a chance to get to know some wonderful young people.
4. The party should be a chance for youth to shine: when they are relaxed and having fun, they are their own best recruiters. It is an opportunity for the young people's strengths and interests to take center stage – beyond what would be in a typical "waiting child" description or case file. It should feel like a party, not a job interview or test.
5. You may want to have a list of the first name, age, gender, and caseworker for the children you expect to attend. This can help families prepare for who they might meet, and follow-up afterwards. **However: be sure families know not to consult their "cheat sheet" or make notes on it during the party!**
6. Have name tags for everyone, possibly with different colors for youth, social workers, and families. This makes it easier for people to introduce themselves and know who is who.
7. Encourage families to introduce themselves to social workers, not just to the youth. They never know what children might be free for adoption in the near future, and giving social workers a sense of who they are beyond what is on their application can only help with the matching process.
8. Have enough staff on hand to help engage youth or families who look uncomfortable. Try to connect with people as soon as they arrive to welcome them. Help with introductions, especially when you know of similarities between youth or adults, or a possible good fit between a youth and a family.

Source: Lumpe, 2008

B. "Cheat Sheet" for Families Attending Adoption Parties

Sample Questions Adults Can Ask Young People

- Ask them about school – what grade are you in? What are your favorite subjects and why? What else do you like about school? What do you wish you did better in school?
- If I told you that you could do whatever or go wherever you wished tomorrow, what would you wish?
- What is something that you would like to learn to do? Why?
- What do you hope to be when you grow up? Why?
- If you had three wishes – what would you wish for and why?
- What do you like best about yourself? (If siblings, ask what they like best about their siblings.)
- Talk to them about your likes/interests (i.e., "I like to bake cookies, do you?" Or "Here in (your town) we like to do _____, do you like to do that?" Or, "What do you do for fun?"
- If siblings – what is something that your brothers/sisters do that always makes you laugh or smile? (then ask that child to do that if appropriate)
- Ask them about their summer plans

These are only guidelines. Feel free to ask your own questions. Remember . . .

HAVE FUN and

MAKE THE KIDS LAUGH!

Please Don't

- Refer to your "cheat sheet" when talking to the kids
- Ask children about their birth family or their background
- Ask children their last names
- Talk about adoption unless they bring it up

If you are potentially interested in a child, rather than ask if they want to move, tell them about some of the fun things you like to do in your area of the state and ask if they like to do those things, too!

Source: Lumpe, 2008

T. Training Design Worksheet

1. From the results of the needs assessment, what are the topics selected for in-service training?

2. What are the goals and objectives for the topic(s) selected for training?

3. What are the previous levels of target audience involvement with this topic?

4. What do we wish the target audience to have at the end of the training in terms of the following categories?

   Knowledge:

   Skills:

   Attitudes:

5. In what order does the material need to be presented in order to be useful and understandable?

6. What are the available formats for delivery of the training?

7. What format best matches the training needs identified?

8. What resources are available to support this training?

9. Who should be involved in designing and delivering each component of the training?

10. Who else needs to be involved or informed to make this training relevant?

11. What approach, if any, will be used to evaluate the training?

12. How and to whom will the results of the training evaluation be communicated?

Adapted from: Caffarella, 1994; McCurley & Lynch, 1996; Crocoll, 2001

U. Checklist for Developing Training for Kinship Care Providers

Training Kin to be Foster Parents: Best Practices from the Field

MOVING FORWARD: A CHECKLIST FOR MAKING TRAINING RELEVANT TO KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

Child welfare agencies can develop new approaches to encourage kin to participate in training. By making the training a positive and helpful experience for kinship caregivers, agencies can help kin become more effective partners in permanency. The following questions are designed to help agencies assess whether existing foster parent training approaches are relevant for kin and, if not, how current training might be adapted to better meet relative caregiver needs:

- ☐ Does training present topics that are relevant to the kinship care experience, such as:
  - ☐ Grief and loss
  - ☐ Family issues around reunification
  - ☐ Shifting gears from spoiling to parenting
  - ☐ Role conflict
  - ☐ Boundary issues
  - ☐ Working with the child welfare system
  - ☐ Visitation within the kinship triad (birth parent, caregiver and child)
  - ☐ Responsibilities in permanency planning
  - ☐ Legal status
- ☐ Does the agency use the phrase "educational support" to convey the idea that kinship caregivers will be provided with useful information, as opposed to "training," which can be intimidating to some kin caregivers and cause resentment among others?
- ☐ Does the agency share information that kin caregivers need, as opposed to giving them information they already know, such as information on challenges that are unique to kin caregiving arrangements, including family dynamics and boundaries?

Source: Chawthon, 2008

- ☐ Is training flexible enough so that caregivers who need more information about child development can get it, either from traditional foster parent training or other forums?
- ☐ Do kin have opportunities to be in educational programs separate from non-kin so that their unique needs can be addressed in a more comfortable setting?
- ☐ Is training presented in a support group format to create a more relaxing, flexible and supportive environment than a traditional classroom setting?
- ☐ Do current and /or former kinship caregivers assist in education programs so that new kinship foster parents can hear from someone who has shared similar experiences?
- ☐ Is education conducted at a convenient time and location? Are child care and transportation provided?
- ☐ Are training hours sufficient to convey information caregivers need, rather than being set at exactly the same hours as training for non-kin?
- ☐ Are caregivers provided with an opportunity to move flexibly between workshops or training modules so that they can access a full range of educational support options without fear that they will be penalized if they do not complete sessions in a specified order?

Source: Chawthon, 2008

V. Recipe Cards for Your Resource Family Recruitment and Retention Program

1. Using Foster Parents and Teens as Recruiters

2. Recruitment Parties

3. Child-Specific Publicity: Heart Gallery

4. Child-Specific Publicity: PowerPoint Slide Shows Created by Teens

5. A Successful Model of Adoption Support

6. Teen Panel at MAPP/GPS Classes

Recipe Card 1

Using Foster Parents and Teens as Recruiters

This strategy has been used successfully by a number of agencies in North Carolina. Here's what Another Choice for Black Children has to say about it:

Approximate budget for strategy: Refreshments = $40 per month combined with donated items. Donations may include beverages, chips, pastries, and other items.

Approximate staff hours for strategy: 3.5 hours (1.5 hrs. Information Meeting; 1 hr. Speakers Bureau; 1 hr. MAPP/GPS Panel)

We have used this strategy to:

☒ Review our data/set measurable goals
☒ Collaborate with other counties or community organizations
☒ Generate positive media attention
☒ Improve agency's support of/partnership with foster parents

Successfully Find Families:

☒ For teens
☒ For minorities
☒ For children with special needs
☒ For sibling groups
☒ From specific neighborhoods
☒ For all children in foster care

What steps did you take to implement this strategy?

The key to implementing this strategy is to have buy-in to the philosophy that everyone connected to the agency is a recruiter. (It is not difficult to have foster/adoptive parents steer others like themselves to your agency when they have received respectful and equitable treatment.)

- Written Expectation document (see Appendix A in this guide) signed by prospective families during Orientation indicates that recruitment is an expectation
- Provide a platform for them to share their information. (Monthly information meetings serve this purpose, along with adoption panels, church engagements, community events, collaboration with others.)
- Administering formal and informal surveys and making observations during agency events (annual family day picnics, conferences, staff and family beach retreat, participation on MAPP/GPS panels)

- Recognize, acknowledge, and validate each person's experience
- Provide incentives for participation (gift certificates, prizes and awards, discounts, financial assistance)
- Staff is trained to cultivate their relationships with foster parents and teens
- Celebration of success and use of success as a springboard for enhancing recruitment outreach and retention
- Offer support tailored to meet the needs of the families

What specific results have you seen as a result of this strategy?

- We have families who come into the process specifically to adopt teenagers
- Adopted teens are able to articulate their success and speak on behalf of other waiting teens with similar potential
- Teenagers who had given up hope of a forever family start to believe that they are indeed adoptable
- The agency has become an integral part of the community by allowing teens to earn community service hours. Their time at the agency serves to increase awareness, resulting in teens talking to other teens about adoption.
- The agency maintains a pool of adoptive parents and teens who are available to serve in all aspects of the adoption program
- Families and teens are able to see the value of the support they have received, and they willingly discuss the need for new families and teens to take advantage of the support offered

Recipe Card 2

Recruitment Parties

This strategy has been used successfully by Brigitte Lindsay of Forsyth County DSS.

Approximate budget for strategy: $75

Approximate staff hours for strategy: 2 hours per party

We have used this strategy to: Successfully find families for teens and for all other children in foster care

What steps did you take to implement this strategy?

- Identify foster and adoptive families that were willing to have parties
- Have them invite their families and friends to come to an Interest Meeting House Party

What specific results have you seen as a result of this strategy?
This is something that needs to be done on a regular basis (like every other month or every quarter to be successful

Additional details:
The foster parent invites friends and family to their home. I then do a presentation on our foster-adopt resource parent program. I discuss the needs we have. The family will discuss their experience as foster-adopt resource parents. The guests get to ask questions. If teens in foster care are available to speak, they are invited as well. The teens that have been used are active in our LINKS Program and LINKS coordinator will provide transportation for them. I bring information packets (which include brochures) to the meeting.

Things to consider:

- Decide which families you want to host the parties and discuss the idea with them.
- Make sure the families are aware of the foster-adopt resource parent guidelines.
- Make sure the families are aware of the types of families needed.

Recipe Card 3

Child-Specific Publicity: Heart Gallery

This strategy has been used successfully by Gaston County DSS.

We have used this strategy to:

☒ Collaborate with other counties or community organizations
☒ Generate positive media attention
☒ Successfully find families for all children in foster care

What steps did you take to implement this strategy?

- Professional photographers donate services in exchange for publicity
- Photos of waiting children displayed in an exhibit that rotates to a number of high-traffic locations: country club, public library, etc.
- Politicians, influential community members invited to opening exhibit

What specific results have you seen as a result of this strategy?

- 1st year (2006-2007): 7 out of 12 highlighted children adopted
- 2nd year (1st 6 months of this FY): 6 out of 10 highlighted children adopted

Additional details:

- NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network (1-888-NC KIDS-5) works with public and private agencies, free of charge, to support their Heart Gallery efforts

Recipe Card 4

Child-Specific Publicity: PowerPoint Slide Shows Created by Teens

This strategy has been used successfully by Sheila Hill, Child Specific Recruitment Specialist, Three Rivers Adoption Council, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Finished presentations are posted on TRAC's website (www.3riversadopt.org). Here's what Ms. Hill has to say about this strategy:

Approximate budget for this strategy: Lap top and digital camera originally purchased with grant money 5 years ago. No ongoing costs.

Approximate staff hours for this strategy: Varies, but approximately 2 hours per youth. Often this is split up over multiple visits. Sometimes she discusses the idea with teens at one visit, then has them think about it until the next visit so they have time to come up with ideas.

We have used this strategy to: Successfully find families for teens, minorities, and all other children in foster care

What steps did you take to implement this strategy?

- Take the laptop and digital camera to teen's home, so they're comfortable.
- Ask "What would you like adoptive families to know about you?"
- Teens can use up to 10 slides and can put on whatever they want, as long as it's appropriate (no profanity or violent images, for example). The last slide is social worker's contact information.
- Work together on the background, colors, wording, pictures, or images. Sometimes the teens work on the laptop directly; other times they dictate to the social worker. By hooking the camera to the computer, images can be added to the show on the spot.
- Some images may need to be tracked down later by the social worker.
- The social worker e-mails the completed slide show to the web master for the agency, so the show can be uploaded to the agency's web site.

Do you have other advice to offer?

Make time to get to know each teen. Though developing the presentations has taken longer than expected, staff appreciate that the more time they spend with teens at home, the easier it is for the teens to develop a positive and trusting relationship with them. Staff, in turn, learn more about the teens and can better inform prospective families.

What specific results have you seen as a result of this strategy?
Between January and August 2004, 8 of the 12 TRAC youth with online presentations had been matched with permanent families. One of the teens was a high school graduate. It continues to be the agency's most effective recruitment tool, generating more calls than any other method.

It also helps to develop prospective or current foster parents who may not have considered teens. One family had only been interested in children 6 and younger. They saw a slide show of a 17-year-old boy at a matching event, and ended up adopting him two months before his 18th birthday.

While this was originally conceived as a recruitment activity, the process of developing the slide shows is valuable in preparing teens for adoption as well. Important issues come up that teens and social workers discuss to help the teen get ready to move to a new family.

Teens also benefit from the extra attention and have fun creating the slide shows.

Social workers benefit from getting to know the teens better, establishing more trusting and positive relationships with them, and learning more about them to share with prospective families.

Sources: Hill, 2008; Riggs, 2004

Recipe Card 5

A Successful Model of Adoption Support

This strategy has been used successfully by Janet Barr, Depaul Family Services, Christiansburg, VA. Ms. Barr states, "The overall goal for our program is achieving permanency for waiting children through adoption. This is done through a three-pronged model: regional public-private partnerships, evidence-based practices, and worker specialization."

Approximate budget for this strategy: Budget for two full-time adoption specialists (income, travel, supplies, office overhead, etc.)

Approximate staff hours for this strategy: DePaul has two full-time adoption specialists. There were probably between 100 and 150 children waiting for adoption in the region; the most difficult to place were referred to this program.

We have used this strategy to:

- ☒ Review our data/set measurable goals
- ☒ Collaborate with other counties or community organizations
- ☒ Generate positive media attention
- ☒ Improve agency's support of/partnership with foster parents
- ☒ Successfully find families for: teens, minorities, children with special needs, and siblings

What steps did you take to implement this strategy?

This program is a partnership among seven county DSS agencies and a private adoption agency, DePaul Family Services. Adoption specialists at DePaul focus on pre- and post-adoption support with youth and families. Services include:

- Pre-adoption preparation for child. The public partners do not have time to work with youth extensively on considering and buying into adoption, but they recognize it as a critical part of successful adoptions. This service is highly utilized by the public partners.
- Child-specific recruitment. Children referred to this program are all considered "difficult to place" because of age, disability, or some other factor.
- General recruitment/community education to raise awareness about Virginia's waiting children.
- Intensive pre-placement assessments of families and children. This helps in making good decisions about matching.
- Intensive post-placement support. This support is also highly valued and utilized by public partners to maintain adoptions.

What specific results have you seen as a result of this strategy?

- 98% rate of adoption for the 100 children served during the initial three and a half-year grant period. The two teens who were not adopted by then have subsequently been adopted.
- Message: There is a family for EVERY child.

Source: Janet Barr, Depaul Family Services. Personal communication. May 6, 2008.

Recipe Card 6

Teen Panel at MAPP/GPS Classes

This strategy has been used successfully by Durham County DSS.

Approximate budget for this strategy: $0.00

Approximate staff hours for this strategy:
Depends how much you use teens in the class. You must make contact with each participating teen regularly and then remind them of class dates and times.

We have used this strategy to:

☒ Find families for teens

What steps did you take to implement this strategy?

Our agency has a youth panel during the foster/adoptive pre-service training to give insight into the teens' prospective of foster care and adoption.

What specific results have you seen as a result of this strategy?

We have not been able to measure outcomes yet, but reaction from classes is very positive.

One of the major accomplishments that we've seen is that it changes the hearts and minds of some of the foster/adoptive parents. It gives them the opportunity to see what teens go through while they are in the system. It also gives them an idea of what not to do. Some of our families have had a change in mindset about fostering/adopting teens. I just think it gives them a reality check.

We also use the DVD *Voices of Youth* on the first day of class. Then, by the time they talk to our teens, it is a confirmation of what they saw on the DVD.