

WHAT'S WORKING IN FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT: STORIES FROM THE FIELD

by Elisa Rosman, Ph.D.

In Adoption Advocate No. 17, *Finding Permanence for Kids: NCFA Recommendations for Immediate Improvement to the Foster Care System*, NCFA presented several suggestions for immediate and long-term foster care reform.¹ One of our areas of focus in those recommendations was foster parent recruitment. Now, in honor of National Foster Care Month, just celebrated in May,² NCFA will highlight parent recruitment strategies from across the country that appear to be working. These stories were gathered primarily via word-of-mouth, and we know they are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the amazing work that is being done nationwide to find better outcomes for children in foster care.

Intense Recruitment Services

Missouri Extreme Recruitment Grant

In three counties in Missouri, child welfare advocates are employing a parent recruitment strategy called Extreme Recruitment, consisting of 12-20 weeks of diligent recruitment services to improve permanency outcomes for hard-to-place youth in the city of St. Louis and three surrounding

counties. The Extreme Recruitment project combines general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment efforts to achieve permanency for children aged 10-18 who have been in foster care for fifteen months or longer and do not have an identified permanent placement. When prospective resource families are identified, "Connector" services are provided to help the families navigate the licensing process and support the children and families before, during, and up to a year after placement.

During the first year of the project (October 2008—September 2009), The Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition (FACC) provided Extreme Recruitment services to 55 children and youth in the St. Louis area. As a result, 50 were connected with safe and appropriate relatives. Thirty-nine were matched permanently, either with a relative or in an adoptive family.

During the second year of the project, an experimental evaluation was established. In Years 2-5, 37 children and youth in the target population will be randomly assigned to the experimental group for Extreme Recruitment services, or to the control group for "business as usual." As of

¹ Read online at <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/ncfa.a.advocate17rev.pdf>

² President Barack Obama's National Foster Care Month proclamation of April 28, 2010 can be viewed online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-proclamation-national-foster-care-month>

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May 2010, 20 children randomly selected are receiving Extreme Recruitment services. The group average is age 16, and most of the parents of the participating children and youth have not yet had their parental rights terminated.

The Extreme Recruitment pilot program has generated local and national interest with its emphasis on family finding and the use of private investigators. On October 25, 2009, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ran a feature about a teenaged girl receiving Extreme Recruitment services who “thought she had nobody left to love her.” The Extreme Recruitment Work Group believes publicity is important in educating the general public on the importance of kin connections for foster children, and to alter the belief that all relatives “fall from the same tree” as their abusive kin. The evaluation data at this point is very limited; however, by the end of the five-year grant, they expect to have more detailed information about the children and youth served through the Extreme Recruitment project.

For more information, contact:
Extreme Recruitment Project Manager
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Public/Private Partnerships

Focus on the Families’ “Wait No More” Project

The Wait No More Project is a collaborative effort between government officials, adoption agencies, church leaders, and ministry partners to raise awareness and recruit families for children waiting in foster care. Through half-day events and targeted media campaigns, Wait No More is highlighting the urgent need for foster and adoptive parents.

At Wait No More events, attendees have the opportunity to hear different perspectives on adoption and foster care from adoptive parents, adopted youth, adoptive siblings, and social workers. On-site adoption agency staff and local and country officials are available to answer questions and help families take the next step in getting involved in the lives of children in foster care. Most importantly, interested families have

the opportunity to start the process of adoption from foster care before they leave the event.

So far, six Wait No More events have been held, attended by approximately 4,100 people. Of those in attendance, 945 families initiated the process of adoption from foster care at one of the events.

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Networking with Churches and Synagogues

The Wisconsin Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

In Wisconsin, the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center (FCARC) “Wisconsin Success” has dedicated a portion of its website to high-lighting efforts by individual local caseworkers in foster parent recruitment and retention. Here is one example of the ways in which involving churches and synagogues can prove beneficial at the local level:

Planting the Foster Care Seed in Washburn County

Lisa Cottrell, Foster Care Coordinator for Washburn County, found success in recruiting foster families in her rural northwestern Wisconsin county by writing letters to local churches. By providing several examples of short announcements about the need for foster families, the church staff chose the announcement for their bulletin and provided this message to congregations for about one month. Lisa had 7 families voice an interest in learning more about providing foster care! As a follow-up, Lisa scheduled an informational meeting for those families. As a result, she has met with two families who have followed through with the licensing process. Lisa is pleased with this result, knowing that the word has spread about the need for foster homes for children.

For more information, go to:
<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/site/indexer/465/content.htm>



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Support for Current Foster Families: Taking Care of the People who Are Taking Care of the Kids

Washington State's Children's Administration Foster Parent Support and Recruitment

As Bob Partlow, program manager for Foster Parent Support and Recruitment for Washington State's Children's Administration, explains it, imagine a foster mother waiting in line at the grocery store. She bumps into a friend who asks her how things are going as a foster parent. If that mom feels as though she is receiving the support and services she needs as a foster parent, and she shares that with her friend, she is a walking advertisement for foster parenting. Conversely, if she is having a terrible experience and feeling unsupported, then there is almost no chance that friend will pursue foster parenting.

The state of Washington focuses its efforts on customer service, driven by the belief that the best foster parent recruiters are satisfied and supported foster parents. Keeping foster parents satisfied involves several strategies, including:

- Support groups—There are 50 to 60 support groups across the state. The groups typically include training opportunities for parents.
- Monthly newsletter—The newsletter covers a wide range of topics that are useful, helpful, and interesting to foster families. For example, the May 2010 newsletter included articles on mileage claims, a program offering free camp sites to foster families in Washington parks, information on crisis support for foster parents, and tips on stress relief.³
- Giving parents legislative and policy input—House Bill 1624, passed in 2007, mandated that DSHS consult with foster parents at least quarterly. Therefore, the “1624

Committee” meets quarterly with high-level children’s administration to troubleshoot issues on a statewide and regional level.

As Partlow explains, there is no “silver bullet,” but supporting foster parents is the key to recruitment and retention success.

For more information, contact:

Bob Partlow, PBOB300@dshs.wa.gov

Support for Current Foster Families: Involving the Community

Metro Recruitment Team, MN Community Human Services, Child Foster Care Licensing

In Minnesota, six counties have teamed up to share the work and minimize the cost of their recruitment efforts. The “metro recruitment team” is made up of one representative each from Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, and Scott Counties, as well as one representative from the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

The team is working on bringing in the larger community to recognize and support foster families. For example, during Foster Care Month, the metro counties collaborated for a fun-filled day at the National Sports Center. Activities included a soccer clinic sponsored by the Sanneh Foundation⁴ and face-painting by volunteers. The Sanneh Foundation solicited door prizes and purchased t-shirts for all participants, and, thanks to the NSC Minnesota Stars, everyone was treated to a free soccer game. At half-time there was a speech honoring foster families, with a representative from each county on the field to receive the honors.

As Terri Haselberger of Child Foster Care Licensing in Ramsey County explained, the day was a big hit with families, and demonstrated how truly valued they are in the community. Local press covered the event, commentators talked about it on the radio, and there was mention of it both on the Sanneh Foundation website

³ View the May 2010 newsletter online at http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/ca/Caregiver_Connection_MAY10.pdf

⁴ The Sanneh Foundation is an organization committed to building positive networks within communities to support children. For more information, see: <http://www.thesannehfoundation.org/index.htm>



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and the Minnesota Stars website. Before the day was over, both the Stars and the Sanneh Foundation representatives were talking about new things to try next year. This demonstrates a new way to get the community and other organizations involved in supporting foster children and parents.

For more information, contact:
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Social Networking: Facebook

About a year ago, Hamilton County Job & Family Services in Ohio began using Facebook as a way to get the word out about foster care and foster parent recruitment. John Cummings, Community Adoption Recruitment Manager, believes it has been extremely successful so far in increasing awareness. The Hamilton County Job & Family Services Facebook page introduces visitors to specific children, shares general information about adoption, and provides answers to those interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents. For example, here is one status update:

Butterflies & Blue Ribbons, 3-5 p.m., today, Krohn Conservatory. Honoring foster and adoptive parents. Sharing info with those interested in foster or adoptive parenting.

Also, when featured children are posted on the website, staff find that there is a bump in the number of hits once it goes out on the Facebook page. Facebook has proven to be especially helpful for reaching a younger demographic.

For more information, contact:
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Recruitment Manager for Hamilton County
Job & Family Services,
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Other Resources

NCFA is proud to be part of a larger community devoted to working on adoption and foster care issues. For more information about NCFA's foster care initiatives, please visit www.adoptioncouncil.org or www.familiesforall.org. Our recommendations for other resources for best practices and promising new policies in foster parent recruitment include:

From The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute

Best Practices in Foster Parent Adoptive Recruitment Roundtable (held on May 13, 2010)
<http://www.ccainstitute.org/how-we-do-it/congressional-resource-program/past-crp-events.html>

From Denise Goodman, Ph.D., Consultant
Target Recruitment Strategies (2008)
<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/737/targetedrecruitment-08.pdf>

From the United States Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau
Promising Practices in Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families (2008)
<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=96§ionid=1&articleid=2096>

From the United States Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau
Resources for Diligent and Targeted Recruitment (2008)
<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=96§ionid=1&articleid=2111>



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From AdoptUSKids

Selected Review of Foster Care & Adoption

Recruitment Models and Strategies (2006)

<http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/professionalResourceCenter/documents/AdoptUsKidsRecruitmentModelsandStrategies.pdf>

From Casey Family Programs:

Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families
(2005)

http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/BreakthroughSeries_RecruitmentRetention.htm

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