

Bridge to the Future



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A collaboration between the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Children and Family Services Division & the University of Oklahoma's Center for Public Management



OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES





Bridge Definition

- Bridge is a component of the OKDHS Practice Model that seeks to view practice through the eyes of the child and seeks to ensure that children in care maintain connections to their kin, their culture, and their community while in out of home care.



Because we understand that satisfied resource families are most often our best recruiters, we aim to support and empower our current resource families to recruit on behalf of children in foster care who need permanency



What this means for our Bridge Resource families...

- This means that our families may be asked to:
 - Provide temporary care, love and nurturance to the child and serve as a mentor actively helping the parent improve their ability to safely care for their children while staying connected and assisting in the transition to reunification, legal guardianship, or adoption to another family; and/or
 - Serve as the legal guardian for the child while maintaining a child's connection to kin, culture and community; and/or
 - Adopt the child while maintaining a child's connection to kin, culture and community.
 - Bridge Resource Families must be willing to work toward reunification with the biological family, as well as support and mentor them. In circumstances of adoption, Bridge Resource Families must be willing to assist a child in maintaining contact with the biological family, if ties are established.



Bridge Resource Families – How it looks in Practice

- A Bridge resource family had placement of three siblings. They embraced the Bridge concept by facilitating weekly visitation for all parents involved. When the parents of these children were unable to visit due to transportation issues, the resource family made sure the children were able to visit their parents by transporting them to the parents. One of the children in the home had developmental delays and medical needs. The resource family embraced these needs and mentored the child's parents on how to get the child's needs met, taking them to medical appointments, working with them on a routine and discipline techniques. The biological parents were allowed to come to the Resource home and work with the children and service provider to help teach the child to talk and overcome the developmental delays. When it was time for the children to reunify, the biological parents still had trouble with reliable transportation. The resource family worked to get a car donated for the family to be able to continue with the medical appointments for the children. The families remain connected even though reunification has occurred.

This is just one of many families in the state being a true “Bridge” in the life of a child...



Bridge to the Future Diligent Recruitment and Retention Grant Description

- Oklahoma is chosen as 1 of 9 grantee sites
- Begin Year 3 of a 5 Year Grant on October 1, 2010
- Focus: Recruitment and Retention of Bridge Families
- Definition of Diligent Recruitment and Retention and its importance
- Year 1 – was about planning. Conducted Focus groups and surveys with current families, OKDHS staff, prospective families, tribes and community partners
- The Children’s Bureau has requested OKDHS share:
 - the six month report and evaluation report with the other grantees,
 - to lead conference calls on the work we are doing, and
 - to send proposals to national conferences to highlight Oklahoma



What we found out from families Year 1

- Many find the approval process overwhelming
- Families need access to information and training in multiple formats to make information easily accessible
- They are willing to participate in Bridge once they understand what that means for the child and for them
- Few parents were willing to accept children who were: alcohol/drug exposed, emotionally maltreated, physically abused, neglected, sexually abused, or medically fragile.
- Our response to **internet and 1-800 number parent inquiries** for fostering, adoption, and bridge resources **almost never yielded an application submitted** and included extremely high withdrawal rates.



What we've done in Year 2:

- **Created a Bridge Resource Support Center**
 - Began taking calls in February 2010
 - From February 2010 - August 2010 have taken **1200 phone and internet inquiries** from interested foster/adoptive families
 - Bridge Resource Support Center employees act as additional support to families during the approval process by conducting follow up calls throughout the process (10 days, 30 days, as requested)
 - Top phone calls from current Bridge Resource Families: **Inquiries, Payment, Policies**
 - Positives: Allows for consistent information to be given to families; time from inquiry to follow up from worker has decreased



What we've done in Year 2 (cont.):

- **Customer Service Training: “Valuing Our Resource Families”**
 - Customer service was not only something we knew we had within our control to change, **it was also something that our families identified as an area for improvement.**
 - Online Training Mandatory for all Child Welfare staff
 - Training Objectives:
 - The importance of providing excellent customer services to our families
 - Why resource families are hard to retain
 - Who our families are and how to help them
 - Results that describe the needs and perceptions of families from OKDHS’s research, surveys, and focus groups
 - How to overcome common misconceptions about families revealed from the research
 - 11 “how to” tips to provide excellent customer service
 - Examples of what great customer service looks like in action



What we've done in Year 2 (cont.):

- **Web Portal for Bridge Resource Families – www.okbridgefamilies.com**
 - Uploaded existing training videos onto the web portal and link to assessments
 - Added additional resources for families on general information, the Bridge concept, best practices, training, and more



What we've done in Year 2 (cont.):

○ **Data Collection of Bridge Families**

- Understand the importance of data driven recruitment and retention strategies
- Employ a part-time data analyst through the grant to provide state, area, and county specific data
- Produces quarterly reports looking at the racial and ethnic backgrounds of our resource families compared to those of our children in care
- Develops children profiles outlining their age, gender, placement type, whether they are part of sibling group, etc.



What we've done in Year 2 (cont.):

Process Improvement

- Approach:
 - Use Lean/Six Sigma approach to process improvement
 - Rapid Improvement Events to address communication, home assessment process, meeting prospective families at their level of readiness
 - Dissemination Plan: Tulsa, rural county, area, state
 - Products resulting from these events: Oklahoma “Answering the Call” packet for families:
 - Includes a letter from the OKDHS Director Howard Hendrick
 - Top 10 Things You Can Do for a Foster Child
 - A “Steps in the Process” List
 - A “Resource Parent Application Checklist” (including names of forms and form #s for OKDHS)
 - Additional Outcomes:
 - Tulsa County leadership to conduct random Customer Service Quality Checks.
 - Include county worker and supervisors contact info on the inquiry packet to establish further accountability to the process.



What we've done in Year 2 (cont.):

○ **Online Training Curriculum Development**

- Psychotropic Medications
- Intentional Visitation
- Legal
- Handbook/Contract
- Trauma Informed Care



What we've done in Year 2 (cont.):

○ Recruitment

- General Recruitment:
 - Heart Gallery
 - Bridge Orientation Training
- Targeted Recruitment:
 - Gathering materials on targeting the African American and Hispanic communities
 - Faith Based Community Events
 - Development of county specific recruitment tool for faith-based and community organizations.



What's in store for Year 3

- Market Segmentation
- Branding – Communication
- DVD with Video on the Experience of Children in the System and Foster/Adoptive Families as well as PSAs to be included in every Inquiry Packet
- “Answering the Call” Guide for Families
- County specific Recruitment and Retention plans utilizing community partners and data
- Portal Makeover – localized county “sub-sites”
- Surveys with Withdrawn Families/Bridge Resource Support Center/Web Portal



What's in store for Year 3

- Identify ways in which the grant can support existing tribal recruitment efforts through the Tribal Recruitment subcommittee co-chaired by an OKDHS representative and a tribal representative
- Online Trainings to be done in DVD format – Trauma Informed Care, Psychotropic Medications, Legal, Handbook/Contract, Intentional Visitation
- Development of online Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) training to address multicultural issues, focusing on recruitment



...and Beyond

- Additional OKDHS Logistical Support of Support Groups and Mentoring Programs
- Evaluate effectiveness of training
- Continue to provide data to counties and leadership to guide recruitment and retention efforts
- Measurement of Bridge Resource Support Center outcomes
- Focus on sustainability planning



Long Term Objectives

- Develop county-specific targets for the recruitment and approval of diverse pools of homes, aligned with the county profile of children in care.
- Develop/enhance county and state partnerships to meet recruitment needs.
- Maximize utilization of kinship resources as placements for children.
- In-service training for resource families will be targeted to meeting the needs of children in placement
- Our expectation is that:
 - Resource and Kinship families will report higher levels of satisfaction with OKDHS in focus groups and surveys



Questions?



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