


Strategies for Improving Customer Service

Mix & MATCH Meeting



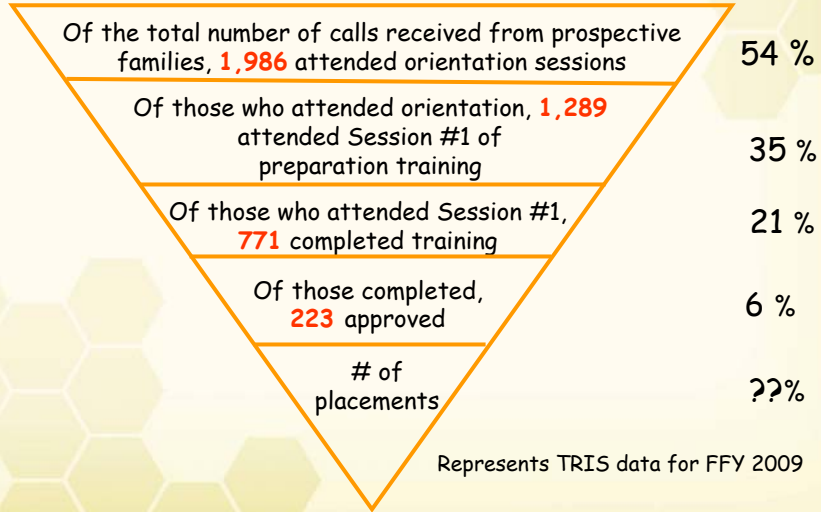
“ Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us everyday”
- Sally Koch

Objectives

1. Participants will gain an understanding that providing customer service to families begins with the first phone call and continues throughout each and every interaction with the agency
2. Participants will learn that good customer service is an agency-wide responsibility
3. Participants will analyze their agency's current level of customer service and identify areas for improvement
4. Participants will strategize ways to improve customer service in their respective agencies

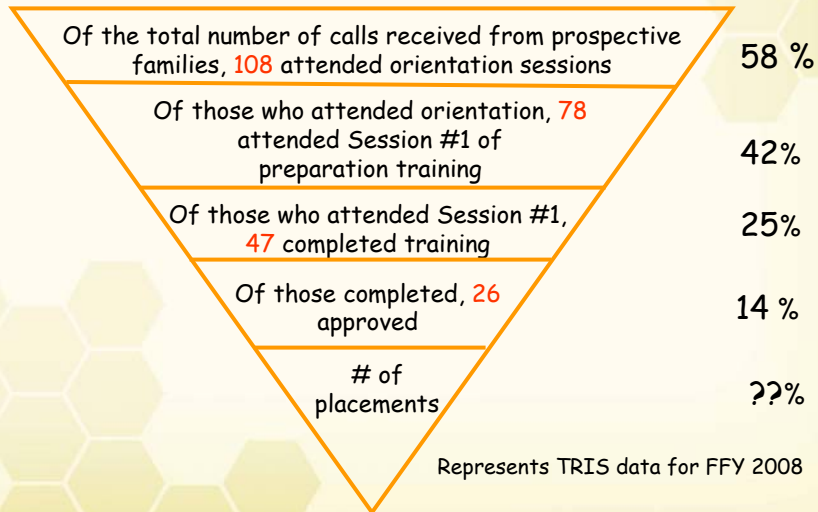
Prospective Family Drop-out rates from Kentucky

Number of calls from prospective foster & adoptive parents = **3,666**



Prospective Family Drop-out rates from Region

Number of calls from prospective foster & adoptive parents = **187**



Results from Project MATCH Focus Groups

Top Barriers:

- Lack of Communication (n=51) x 2
- Issues with the courts (n=24)
- Concerns about public vs. private (n=24)

*192 Participants

Why are values important?

- Personal vs. professional values
- NASW core values:
 - Service
 - Social justice
 - Dignity and worth of the person
 - Importance of human relationships
 - Integrity
 - Competence



These values should influence the way we interact with birth parents, resource parents and community partners.

Key principles of customer service

Good customer service is based on two key principles:

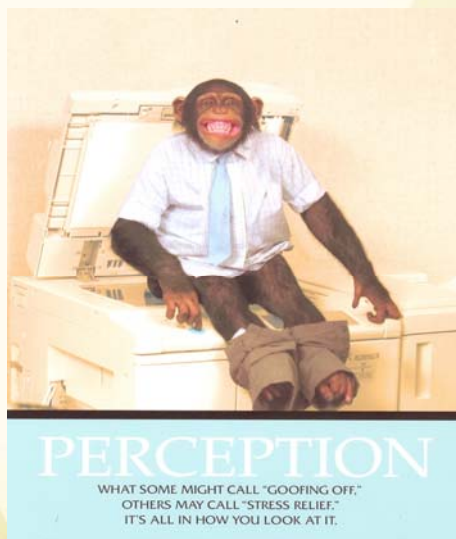
1. Communication

2. Respect

The ability to see things from the perspective of the other person is also important

A note about perception....

A *perceived* lack of communication or respect is the leading cause of dissatisfaction with the agency



Being a worker is a difficult job

- Increased case loads
- Doing more with less
- Budget and economic concerns
- “One bad apple”



11 ways to improve customer service

1. Be responsive
2. Return calls promptly
3. Provide information
4. Be flexible when scheduling appointments
5. Include resource parents in permanency planning
6. Provide support and communication during CPS investigations
7. Be sensitive when a child is leaving
8. Gather information about the child from resource parent
9. Help resource parents adopt if that is their goal
10. Promote stable placements
11. Follow up with interested families

Source: Oklahoma DHS, 2010

1. Be responsive

- Responsiveness goes beyond simply not being rude– it is going out of your way to meet the need or answer questions
- Lack of response gives off an impression but is it the right one?



2. Return calls & emails promptly

Reasons for avoiding calls

“ I know Mrs. H is calling about a court date but we just don’t have one yet...”

- **It’s okay to not have all the answers but at least communicate that**

“ The child is in a safe place, why bother...”

- **Any call may be a call for help**



“Mrs. H only wants to complain about Johnny’s behaviors ...”

- **Ignored complaints don’t go away**



3. Give them information

- Withholding information = resource parents that feel minimized and disrespected
- Resource parents can deal with difficult situations if **informed**, **supported** and **treated as partners**
- “Not knowing” and omissions lead to crisis and threaten placements

4. Be flexible when scheduling appointments

- Take everyone’s schedule into consideration whenever possible



5. Include resource families in permanency planning

- If everyone is on the same page changes won't seem arbitrary and successful transitions can occur
- Advocate to include resource parents
- Help resource families to build relationships with birth parents



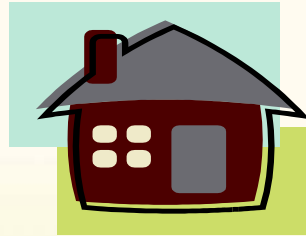
6. Provide support and communication during CPS Investigations

- The Network, ASK and Mentor Programs can all help with this
- “When” not “If”



7. Be sensitive when a child is leaving

- Acknowledge the difficulty in the situation
- Express your gratitude for their effort
- If the home is no longer appropriate and you are planning on closing it, the family deserves an explanation



8. Gather information about the child

Resource parents are valuable sources of information asking them about the child:

- Helps them feel valued
- Helps ease the transition
- Provides family with valuable info.



9. Help resource families adopt **if** that is their goal

- Adoption is an honorable goal
- Resource families should be aware that most children return to their biological parents
- **Never** promise that a child will be available for adoption



10. Promote stable placements

- Pull out all the stops to ensure that the placement is stable
- Treating the resource parents with **respect** will go along way to help **stabilize placements**
- Placement disruption has negative consequences for everyone

11. Follow up with interested families ASAP



- Whenever you speak to someone who is interested in fostering or adopting a child, get as much information as possible from that person and pass it on
- Follow up and make sure people get the information they need

What if my job does not involve a caseload?

Make a good impression:

- Smile
- Speak in a warm and welcoming tone
- Minimize transfers or passing the person off
- Try to locate the information or person yourself if at all possible
- Follow through if you offer to help someone
- Express your appreciation



Customer Service and birth parents

- Take a strengths based approach
- Keep personal values in check
- Make cultural considerations
- Encourage a shared-parenting approach



Community partners

- Be mindful and appreciative of time
- Communication is key
- Always say “thank you”



References

North Carolina Division of Social Services (2009). Treat them like gold: A best practice guide to partnering with resource families. Retrieved from <http://www.ncdhs.gov/dss/publications/>.

NRCRRFAP(2009). Responding effectively to families throughout the recruitment process. [Power point Slides]

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