



SOUTHERN AREA CONSORTIUM OF HUMAN SERVICES

Recruitment and Retention of Alternative Caregivers: Literature Review

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- Freundlich, Madelyn, Gerstenzang, Sarah. (2004) "Ethics and Adoptive Family Recruitment" Retrieved April 3, 2006 from:
- Quintanilla, Maria L. (2002) "Remove Barriers and Latino Families Will Adopt" *Recruiting News* (2/3).
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Article Summaries

Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families: A Breakthrough Series Collaborative

(2006) “Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families: A Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)”, Retrieved April 3, 2006 from:

<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Projects/BSC/FosterFamilies/>

A collaboration of expert’s from 22 states, county, and tribal child welfare agencies formed a panel to rapidly test, measure, and implement state wide change of best practices for retaining and recruiting alternative caregivers. Eight elements were broken down for teams to explore. The first priority surrounded raising public awareness about the needs of children in the public welfare system, followed by turning interest into commitment and increasing the numbers of interested resource parents. The focus also included properly supporting these families through the recruitment process, initial placement, and during placement. Another area was a need for streamlining the licensing process in a timely and supportive way, and finding out the needs of resource families to enable them to provide appropriate care. Ensuring success also included the need for development of partnerships between the resource families, youth, birth families, and the agency, as well as finding and creating opportunities for communities to be active partners in recruiting and supporting the partnerships between the birth and resource family, youth, and agency. Lastly, ways to recruit and retain well-trained staff who in turn can recruit, support, and engage resource families, children in care, and the children’s families. **The panel found a number of strategies to be very successful, which when measured showed improved outcomes.**

- Providing mentors to prospective families through the use of experienced resource families throughout the initial placement phase
- Setting up an email distribution list for resource families
- Holding family team meetings using a wraparound approach to include, but not be limited to, birth family, resource family, youth, and agency staff
- Improving relationships with schools
- Making information about resource families available (such as pictures, information forms, videos) to the child/youth and birth family before placement
- Assigning new agency workers to shadow a foster parent for a day
- Making your agency into as homelike and inviting of an environment as possible, and being aware of having culturally representative materials to present
- Ensuring immediate follow up for any prospective resource family

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Article Summaries

Ethics and Adoptive Family Recruitment

Freundlich, Madelyn, Gerstenzang, Sarah. (2004) "Ethics and Adoptive Family Recruitment" Retrieved April 3, 2006 from: www.nacac.org/newletters/ethics.html

In a report analyzing ethical recruitment practice, it was suggested that agencies should routinely test their own system by calling in themselves anonymously to test several key components. Areas to test include a live voice answering the phone, messages being returned promptly, how calls are handled if the caller is not fluent in English or do not come across as highly educated, does the agency representative seem to be able to answer questions about the adoption, the application process, home studies, training, and certification, does it take a long time for requested materials to arrive, does the process feel inclusive and supportive of families wishing to adopt or does it feel exclusionary as an agency who comes across as screening out prospective families?

Practices in the U.S. are moving more toward child-specific recruitment efforts, which include the important element of encouraging families to select a child for themselves. **Lessons learned include the fact that the more involved in the process, the more committed the prospective adopters. Three important principles of the child specific recruitment method are personalizing children who need families, recognizing that families are in the best position to know which child would be the best fit for their family, and allowing families to take ownership of the recruitment process.**

In order to best aide a family in making informed decisions about adoption, agencies should be able to provide families with the minimum following information:

- Where has the child been placed and for how long?
- What happened to the child's birth parents?
- Does the child have siblings in foster care or who have remained with their birth parents?
- Does the child have any special needs that require special education, medical, or therapeutic interventions?
- Can anyone be contacted who is currently providing care for the child?

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Homes for Black Children Recruits through Courtesy and Community Connections

Zemler, Marie. (2002) “Homes for Black Children Recruits through Courtesy and Community Connections”. *Recruiting News* (4/5).

Other best practices that have emerged over time include staying close to community based roots when recruiting by utilizing and taking advantage of already existing community activities (such as small scale to major community/county/state events and celebrations) that already draw large numbers of community members. Creating valuable community partnerships can also expand the ability to recruit, such as a local hospital or public health group, who may be willing to provide information about adoption or foster family care when providing things such as free screenings or low cost vaccinations. (This approach has already proven to be quite successful for some agencies in the state of Michigan). Connecting with the faith based communities (ex. asking to give presentations during parish gatherings or fairs, or speeches to church committees) has also proven to be a successful partnership for many agencies. Allow for a “pipeline” of volunteerism by creating opportunities other than as an active adoptive or foster care parent. Allow past resource families (or those simply wishing to volunteer some time and effort toward the cause rather than become a host family) the opportunity to volunteer their time as future mentors to families, or to help with recruiting events, marketing campaigns, and any other supportive activity to active foster/adoptive families. Be sure to include reciprocity in these partnerships by openly recognizing partnerships and/or volunteer efforts in any publications or events held.

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Article Summaries

Remove Barriers and Latino Families Will Adopt

Quintanilla, Maria L. (2002) "Remove Barriers and Latino Families Will Adopt" *Recruiting News (2/3)*.

In an article exploring recruiting techniques for specifically African American, Latino, and American Indian children, one unifying theme emerged in that recruiters need to fully understand their target community before attempting to recruit appropriate families; that a single strategy approach will not be effective for recruiting agencies. Latino families already have a history of informal adoption built into their culture with a secure extended family network, where it is common for grandparents, aunts/uncles, and godparents that help raise children. Some common barriers were identified that may affect Latino families from adopting.

- The first to keep in mind is that social service agencies are often seen by families as extensions of the government, automatically creating a climate of mistrust due to the corruption and political persecution commonly experienced in many Latin American countries. Additionally, the recent anti-immigration initiatives in California may lead to enhancing the feeling of mistrust. In light of this, families may be reluctant to come forward as prospective resource families, it may prevent them from submitting to fingerprinting and background checks, or from talking openly about themselves and their family during the home study process due to concern about their or other family members immigration status.
- Agencies need to be aware of how they are viewed by a multicultural community. Agencies may be located in areas inaccessible to the Latino community, use forms that are not provided in Spanish, or that maintain hours that do not accommodate working people.
- Common agency practice problems can include a lack of a timely response to initial inquiries, delays in processing, limited agency contact between the time when the home study is completed and a child is placed, and the length and complexity of application forms, financial reports, and legal documents.
- Few traditional agencies provide opportunities for walk-in clients or those who prefer to deliver documents in person, which is a common practice consistent with the Latino cultural custom of personalismo – which is a preference for personal versus impersonal or institutional contacts.
- Culturally responsive services to the Latino population are limited and may remain lacking due to an institutionalized belief that Latinos, specifically immigrants, do not adopt or will not meet qualifications.
- Many highly qualified Latino families are not aware that they are eligible to adopt, since their countries of origin only allow the very wealthy to be considered in the adoption process. Many believe that the income standards would naturally be higher in the U.S.
- It is important to be aware of the stigma attached to infertility among the Latino population, a culture that places high values on fertility, virility, and children. Some Latinos hold religious beliefs that may intensify this stigma in believing that infertility is a punishment from God, which is their cross to bear and they must accept childlessness as their path.

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Helping families to understand the unique roll that they may be able to play as resource families for an adoptive child as their gift they have to give can help create an untapped population of potential new placements.

To help with overcoming these barriers, topics listed below can be addressed in recruitment materials, orientation sessions, pre-service trainings, and throughout the approval process.

- In that only wealthy families are invited into the adoption process in Latin America, reminding that services are free and reinforcing early on that the government not only pays agencies to find families but also provides subsidies to help families raise adopted children may help with recruitment.
- Keep in mind that many Latino families, specifically immigrant families, are more often willing to work with private non-profits than public agencies. If you are a nonprofit, stress to families that you are not government run. Also important is noting that information collected about families is always confidential; be upfront about the exactly what information must be collected and why, and with exactly whom the information will be shared and why.
- Test your own agency by calling in to assess the level of responsiveness to the first initial phone call, how well the call was received, as well as the level of culturally competent service provided.
- Upon the first orientation, provide families with an organizational chart with all staff members names and contact information, and make sure families have a chance to meet the entire staff. Ensure that families understand staff members' roles and responsibilities, emphasize that staff are trained professionals, and are available as resources to the family.
- As Latino families have a much stronger preference for girls due to some common cultural biases, openly discuss and acknowledge these common societal stereotypes with families and help them to examine their own biases.
- Allow families to openly discuss their own spiritual beliefs, specifically any related to their own infertility. Try and introduce the idea of a calling to adopt, rather than a punishment from God. Involving other Latino families who have already adopted in this conversation can also help.
- Most important is the need to explain in detail the process that led to these children being available for adoption (assuring that these children have not been kidnapped or stolen, which may be a concern in their country of origin). Be open and honest about any neglect or abuse that the children have suffered.

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Finding African American Families for Foster Care Children: Tips for Workers & Agencies

Riggs, Diane. (2005)“Finding African American Families for Foster Care Children: Tips for Workers & Agencies.” North American Council on Adoptable Children. Retrieved April 3, 2006 from: www.nacac.org/newsletters/findingfamilies.html

A report from Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) reflected that by Fall 2003, over 40% of children in foster care awaiting adoptive families were African American, nearly 50,000 children. In contrast, only 13.3 percent of the entire U.S. population as of July 2003 was black. This obvious disproportionality speaks to the particularly important task of recruiting African American resource families. Some general recruiting techniques applicable to any culture include good customer service as absolutely essential (welcoming, sincere, respectful, and responsive), should always have a Live response to inquiries and first time callers, and immediate follow up. Having a flexible schedule is equally important, as the business of recruiting cannot operate on a 9-5 business day schedule. Hours must be able to include evening and weekends to accommodate working families, as well as make efforts to meet families on their own turf. Recognize that there is no cookie cutter approach to recruitment, and families strengths should be the initial focus while helping prospective applicants in identifying their own strengths and personality traits that will help them make good foster parents. Adding to this, experienced recruiters offered a few tips that can help African American family recruitment efforts.

- Start with recruiting African American staff members (a multicultural staff has a better chance at recruiting multicultural families) and include people of color on your board of directors, if your agency has one, who can represent your agency in the black community. Including African American volunteers and already existing resource families and their newly adopted or foster child in you recruitment efforts can also increase success. Of those staff, board members, and volunteers, encourage them to invite friends, colleagues, and church members into any recruiting activity.
- It is highly suggested that staff, particularly if staff is predominantly white or new to recruiting black families, take the time to assess or reassess the agency’s cultural competence. Start by assessing the agencies mission, history with recruitment efforts, successes, and lessons learned, the agencies organizational demographics, image, community focus, community collaborations, policy and budget priorities, and current program’s strategies and techniques used in recruitment efforts. Equally important is having existing staff examine their own personal biases.
- If your operating agency does not exist in an ethnically diverse part of town, it is imperative to invest time and energy into establishing trust and credibility from the community from which you are trying to recruit. Establish your presence by attending festivals and events that were organized by or for people of color, however, be careful as to not rely on showing up at an event as the only means to establishing a relationship. Try and partner first with a black organization or have a black mentor along, or try volunteering to help plan events as a way to contribute to the community Before asking for its help.

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- Create opportunities to Educate the Community about the crucial need for African American Families and include support from African American churches, but as Reverend Talley (director of the National Network of Adoption Advocacy Programs) noted, “you can’t just walk in off the street” and ask for help. In order to work with a black church, recruiters need to create a good relationship with the pastor or another church member who can vouch for you as trustworthy to the congregation.
- Review your agency by asking a few simple questions. Does your agency disseminate a written adoption policy and process to applicants? Have you frequently and consistently reached out to the black community through civic organizations, churches, social clubs? Do you establish a relationship Before requesting financial information from a family? Are your applications simple or do they ask unnecessary questions? Do you routinely involve black adoptive families in recruiting and preparing prospective adopters? Do you have and maintain a network of black professional and colleagues outside the agency to turn to for advice and assistance?

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The Indian Child Welfare Act: An Overview

Deserly, Kathleen. (2002). "The Indian Child Welfare Act: An Overview", *Recruiting News*, (6).

When working with Indian Children, agencies need to follow the provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) which concerns what agencies must do prior to a child's entry into care, and when considering foster or adoptive placement for the child. According to the Act, agencies must do the following:

- Provide remedial, culturally appropriate services for Indian families Before a placement occurs;
- Notify the child's tribe by registered mail of the child's welfare proceeding;
- Recognize the tribe's right to intervene in the case or assume jurisdiction over the case;
- Use expert witnesses to assess the need for placement; and
- Follow the stated placement preferences for foster care versus an adoptive home, which are listed in order below.

For a Foster Care Placement:

- #1. An extended family member
- #2. A tribally licensed, approved, or specified foster home
- #3. A tribally operated or approved institution that can meet the child's needs

For an Adoptive Home:

- #1. An extended family member
- #2. A member of the child's tribe
- #3. A member of a different tribe

The other important component of ICWA is provided for Indian tribes to reassume jurisdiction over child welfare matters (such as developing and implementing juvenile codes, setting up juvenile courts, and developing tribal-state agreements regarding child welfare agencies.

Agencies should be aware that their recruitment and retention practices are consistent with the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-382), the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-188), and the Indian Child Welfare Act (P.L. 95-608). The NASW recommends that social workers do all they can to include tribes in decision-making and for their assistance in locating appropriate placements for a Native American child requiring out-of-home care, and if impossible, that prospective resource families receive diversity training.