

# Recruiting 4 Free....It CAN BE DONE!!!



With the current budget crisis in many jurisdictions, money for foster/adoptive parent recruitment is often cut back or eliminated. Unfortunately, the need for families does not diminish with the bottom line, rather, the need for families often increases as the stress and strain of financial worries impacts the community. What can agencies do in these tough times to continue to maintain or expand their pool of resource families? What follows are some suggestions for recruiters to continue to do their job with little or no financial support. ***YOU CAN RECRUIT “FOR FREE”!!!!***

## GETTING STARTED WITH AN INTERNAL REVIEW

### A Time for Reflecting....

A budget crisis may be the best time to review recruitment strategies and techniques that have been employed in the past few years. With limited dollars available, agencies must be selective regarding what activities are worth funding. Here are a few ideas for focusing your evaluation:

- **Identifying the strategies that have resulted in the most families who have followed through with certification seems the best idea at this time.** Often recruitment activities or events that have the most names on a list or made the phone ring are seen as being successful. Wrong! It is the activity where families have actually committed to the process and been licensed for the *children who most need homes* that really are the most successful strategies.

This requires reviewing events from the past several years and tracking families through orientation, pre-service training and the licensing process. With fewer recruitment events on the calendar due to budget constraints, now is the time!

- **Identify and establish very specific targets and streamline your system.** This requires a look at data from three perspectives:

- The Children/Youth:** What children are most difficult to place? Who are the children that lack placement resources? Gather data on the children by age, race, gender, sibling group size, special needs and current placement. This will be “point in time” data but will assist you in identifying the types of children for whom recruitment is most needed.

- The Families:** What types of families are currently in your pool? What are their characteristics? Conduct a utilization review by looking at families by the age, race, gender, sibling group size and special needs that the family will accept. In addition, note the families’ capacity (how many children they can accept) and occupancy (current number of children in the home). You will likely identify families that can/should be closed, creating more “openings” for new families to enter the homestudy process asap.

- The Process:** Where are we losing families during the process from 1st contact to licensure? Review the linkages in your system: 1st phone call to orientation, orientation to training, training to homestudy, application to approved homestudy, etc. Track families from the 1st contact through licensure. While there is a natural attrition of families along the process, is there an unusual high loss at any point? For example, if there is a 90% drop off after orientation, review the content and structure of your orientation. Is it too long with an overabundance of rules? Or do you use a lot of scare tactics to discourage prospective parents?

•Another important detail to consider is the family's status--foster only, foster/adopt, adopt only. Note if the family is "on-hold" as this will allow you to discover what the true options are for placement.

**Important Note:** Collecting and analyzing data is critical to the overall success building your pool of available families. This will help you to avoid putting precious few resources into unnecessary activities. If you lack the capacity to collect, track and analyze data related to recruitment, develop, utilization and retention of families, engage the services of a local graduate student or contract with a data analyst....NOW IS THE TIME!

### **Re-Recruiting Your Current and Past Resource Families!**

Again, with limited money to fund recruitment activities and events look to your pool of families to see who is being under-utilized or not being utilized at all. A *second utilization study of your families* will reveal who does not have a placement as well as those who are not being used to capacity. To do this, you will need a printout of your families. Information that will need to be gathered includes:

- number of children the home is licensed to accept
- number of children currently residing in the home
- why the family is not being used or is underutilized

If possible, this information can probably be gleaned from your data system. If not, it can be done by hand with each licensing worker using a spreadsheet. Once the information is gathered, a critical look can reveal families that are going unused or underused. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why are we not using this family?* Is the family "on -hold"? Does the family have narrow preferences for placement? Are they new and staff are unwilling to take a chance? Does the family routinely decline placements?
- What can we do to begin using this family?* There may be concrete things that can be done to begin using the family. Many families are frustrated that they are not receiving placements. After all, they completed the homestudy process in hopes of caring for children only to wait...and wait. Here are some suggestions for specific circumstances:

*The "on-hold" family:* Determine the reasons why the family is on-hold. If the family requested the hold, call them. See if or when they will be ready to resume accepting placements. If there is an administrative hold, review the corrective action plan with the family and help them by referring them to resources and give them a reasonable timeline for completion.

*The "always says "NO" family":* Ask the family to come to the agency for a meeting. With your supervisor, review with the family the list of children they have declined. Discuss with them your needs for placement and encourage them to "stretch" themselves. If they are uncertain, suggest that they provide respite care for foster families to discover their strengths and limitations.

Another "re-recruiting" strategy is to *reconnect with past foster, adoptive and kinship families*. Some families to contact are:

- Families that have finalized adoptions in the past 3-5 years
- Families that begun the process in the past 1-2 years but did not complete
- Families that were past foster parents and closed on good terms with the agency

- Families that were kinship or child-specific from the past 3-5 years.
- Current Kinship or child-specific families can be asked to consider expanding their license to care for non-related children
- Families that came to orientation and requested follow up later

A simple letter, phone call or email inviting them to reconsider becoming a foster or adoptive parent (again) and inviting them to a special orientation might be just the encouragement they needed to sign up again! Be sure to have outlined, in advance, if and what can be waived (like training and certain paperwork) when speaking with past families.

## **ENGAGING THE MEDIA AS A RECRUITMENT PARTNER**

All major media outlets including newspapers and television stations conduct public service and community relations activities like sponsoring a walk-a-thon, concert, organization, auction, etc. Contact your local media outlets and ask to meet with their community relations director to discuss possibilities. Even if they decline, keep them informed about your activities and make contact with them quarterly. You never know when they might become interested, especially if there is a relevant news story.

### **TELEVISION PARTNERS:**

•**Wednesday's Child**--Many agencies partner with a local television station to film and air segments on children awaiting adoption. These are often called, "Wednesday's Child". These are produced at no cost to the agency. You may want to ask to add on information about foster parenting/adoptive parenting. Tell the station manager of your financial predicament and ask if they can help you do additional recruitment. If they can make copies of the Wednesday Child's segment, you can show these at recruitment events, orientation or preservice training.

•**Public Cable Access programming**--Cable television companies are mandated by law to make available free channels and airtime for the community to access. Contact the your local cable providers for information on how to get a time slot. There are no requirements to be on cable access television. Any citizen can do it! Some ideas for a pre-recorded program are: a short public service announcement, a program with interviews of foster/adoptive parents, a program with youth planning, producing and participating or even an infomercial on becoming a foster/adoptive parent. You can focus different segments on teens, sibling groups, teen moms, etc. The options are infinite! You can also suggest that the cable company use your produced PSAs to fill in around other programs, giving your foster/adoptive program greater exposure. Ask for multiple time slots, don't be picky--take what time slots are available and work towards more desirable time and days.

If you need help producing your segments, ask the cable company where you can get free or low cost technical assistance. They may be willing to donate their time. Or you can contact a local college or university video classes who may take this on as a class project for a semester.

•**Local Television Call-in Programs:** From time to time, local channels will produce a segment about a topic that allow viewers to call-in live to a bank of phones answered by "experts" who can answer questions and concerns. Suggest to the station manager that foster care or adoption be featured as the main topic perhaps during April (Child Abuse Prevention Month), May (Foster Care Month) or November (National Adoption Month). During the broadcast, information about the process, eligibility, data about children and interviews with foster/adoptive/kinship parents and youth would be presented. In the background, recruiters, social workers, alumni and resource parents answer phones, giving information and recording information. The next day, information packets would be mailed to all callers.

**Television Station PSA's:** Public Service Announcements are a required part of a television station's programming. These are free. However, they may be played at "off hours"... like 3:17am! Developing a positive, working relationship with the station manager can go a long way to having your PSA played during daytime, high-viewing hours. Suggest/request that the PSA's run occasionally during strategic programming or coordinated with other media events and releases.

### **RADIO PARTNERS:**

•**Radio call-in shows:** In many communities, radio stations, small and large, devote some airtime to live call-in shows. Contact the station manager to ask about the possibility of scheduling foster care or adoption as a topic. May (National Foster Care Month), November (National Adoption Month) and April (Child Abuse Prevention Month) are good times to request an appearance on the show. In addition, if there is legislation or other current events in the community related to foster care/adoption, child welfare, kinship care or child abuse, the station manager may see the topic as current and interesting. Including a foster/adoptive or kinship parent as well as a young person or alumni will make your request more appealing!

**Radio Interviews:** These are different than the live call-in shows. Interviews can be pre-recorded and played at various times as part of a news broadcast or regular community programming.

**Radio PSA's:** Like TV Public Service Announcements, PSAs are also a required part of a radio station's programming and they are free. Work with the station manager to obtain more favorable airtime occasionally. Coordinate the PSAs with other radio appearances to make a bigger impression.

### **PRINT MEDIA:**

•**Human Interest Stories in Newspapers**--While placing ads newspapers, can cost big bucks, however, human-interest stories or a columnist featuring foster care or adoption, costs nothing. Arrange to meet with local newspaper reporters. Offer pictures to newspapers and arrange interviews with foster/adoptive/kinship parents, birth parents and young people or alumni. Your story may not run immediately, so be flexible. Personalize the article with local data about children in foster care, number of foster homes, adoptions, etc. When the reporter becomes interested and writes an article, then ask for free ad space.

•**Invite media to any and all events involving foster/adoptive parents**--Another source of free media is to invite media to all events both statewide and locally. This includes Foster Parent month, Adoptive Parent month, Adoption Day, Child Abuse Prevention Month, foster parent social gatherings and fundraisers, as well as any recruitment events and activities in the community. Invite ALL media: newspapers, TV, radio...you never know who will show up!

•**List your events and activities in the community calendar in the newspaper**--Every newspaper, big and small, has a "community calendar" section. It may only be in the paper once a week or month. This is free and requires contacting the newspaper to learn what their requirements are such as, format and deadlines. Often, this is as simple as emailing the name, day, time and location of the event. Be sure to list foster/adoptive and kinship activities and support groups, trainings as well as orientations, information sessions and recruitment activities.

•**Newsletters**--It seems like everyone receives a several newsletters these days...from their bank, library, recreation center, local school, professional organization, your employer, alumni groups...the list goes on and on. The newsletters may be mailed or emailed to you. Use newsletters from strategic organizations, businesses, parent groups and community organizations to highlight the need for foster homes and adoptive homes. There are lots of options: write a short article including the data on children in need of homes, place a complimentary

advertisement, share a story of a waiting child, feature a success story of a family or post a calendar of your upcoming recruitment events.

## **WEB-BASED RESOURCES:**

•**Emails**--Send emails to organizations, businesses, governmental offices, universities/colleges, and hospitals informing them of the need for more foster and adoptive homes. One idea to make your email more attractive is to put together a “newsletter” that could be sent out to everyone. The newsletter can include data, stories of successful families, profiles of waiting children, a calendar of upcoming events. A simple “one-pager” that is attractive and easy to read would be most effective.

•**Google, etc.**--There are many search engines on the internet such as “Google”, “Yahoo”, “MSN” that can help you find organizations in community. For example, if you work in Chicago and are in need of homes for African American teen boys, put “recreation African American teen boys Chicago” in the search window and you’ll be surprised what will come up! These are organizations that are concerned with the same group of children for whom you are recruiting. They could be excellent partners in your work.

•**Craig’s List, FACEBOOK, MySpace, Twitter, etc.**

With increasing use of web-based services, sites such as Facebook and MySpace have been used to spread the message as well. Foster/adoptive parents have shared success stories on their web pages. Email blasts can go out to a list of people that grows everyday. Start collecting the email addresses of all interested persons and send them regular blasts via email with upcoming orientations, trainings, recruitment events and profiles of waiting children. The internet can reach many people AT NO COST!

•**Your Agency Website**--With the growing use of the internet, many prospective families’ first step in the process is to research foster care and adoption using the internet. Review your agency’s website.....is it accessible? Inviting? Informative? Encouraging? Revise the website to include:

- data about children (who are the children, demographics, etc.)
- steps to foster care/adoption/kinship care,
- frequently asked questions and answers,
- a calendar of upcoming recruitment events including the date, time and location of the next several information sessions
- a calendar of activities for current foster/adoptive parents
- next steps for the individual viewing the website
- contact information for specific agency personnel
- links to other useful websites such as NFPA, NACAC, etc.

•**Link your agency to other websites:** Arrange to have your agency or program as a link on other organizations’, businesses’ or agencies’ websites. Foster/adoptive/kinship parents or volunteers who are business owners or are willing to ask their employers, may be able to get a link on the website for you.

## **RESOURCE PARENTS AS RECRUITERS**

•**Each one, reach one:** A foster parent recruiting others is one of the most effective means of identifying prospective resource parents that will follow through and complete the entire process. A great opportunity to engage resource parents is at the annual appreciation banquets. Here are some ideas:

- invite banquet attendees to enter a raffle for a donated prize. For every referral name, address and phone number they provide, a ticket will be placed in the raffle for them.
- encourage attendees to pick up a packet of 10 bundled recruitment brochures. Ask them to “sprinkle” them around the community where they shop, worship, eat and recreate.
- develop an recruitment incentive program for resource families. Some agencies have given \$500 to a resource family when a family they referred has been licensed. Others have provided smaller incentives to the referring family for each step the newly recruited family completes.

### •“Open the Doors” to Recruitment

Ask foster and adoptive parents via phone calls, articles in the Foster/Adoptive Parent Newsletter, at in-service training classes, via email, with notes in monthly checks to talk with their employers, spiritual leaders, organizations, PTAs to “open the door” to recruitment. This can lead to invitations for speaking engagements, offers to hang posters or place recruitment materials in new places!

### •Foster/Adoptive Family House Parties

Much like the model used for Tupperware parties, these small and intimate events are held in the homes of veteran foster and adoptive families. The host family invites friends, family, neighbors and work friends to their home to hear about foster care and adoption. Agency staff supports the event by bringing food, brief information and enthusiasm. In many sites, this has been a successful strategy for targeted recruitment needs.

## SCHOOL-BASED RECRUITMENT

There are countless free opportunities for recruitment at your local schools. If you have a community or neighborhood that lacks enough foster homes, meet with the principal to determine how best to work with the schools. Here are some free ideas:

- articles in the staff and PTO newsletter*
- speaking engagements at faculty or staff meetings, PTO meetings*
- meet early in the morning (bring donuts!) with cafeteria staff and bus drivers*
- live announcements read at half time of basketball or football games*
- live announcements made at intermission of theater or music performances*
- ask the principal to speak with volunteer coaches and program aides during orientation*
- emails to faculty, staff and parents*

For the above suggestions, write a short article or talking points on the need for foster and adoptive homes in the school district. Use data from that school district that shows the number and type of children entering care and the number of foster homes available. Share the impact of children having to change schools and how it would benefit children to remain among their friends, teachers and continue in their activities.

### -*place a table or booth at the sporting, music or theater programs*

Meet with the principal of the local school you are targeting and ask if it would be possible to have a table at the school events. Having a table at an event where parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles and godparents are in attendance provides the opportunity to connect directly with families. Share materials with data specific to the community and the school. Having local foster, adoptive and kin parents at the table can be helpful.

***-complimentary ads in programs for theater, sports or music programs***

A suggestion is to share quotes from kids who talk about having to leave their school. Include brief information about the first steps in becoming a foster/adoptive parent. Use clipart or photos that represent the type of children that need families in the school district.

***-speaking engagements in classes with students***

Often overlooked, students represent a great recruitment resource. Scheduling a speaking engagement with a class or student club is a good start. Some ideas for topics might be child abuse/neglect, teens in foster care or adoption of older youth. Students respond well to discussions about how it feels to be in foster care as a teen. Consider bringing a foster youth or young adult alumni along to share their story. Provide materials to the students to share with their parents. It may be helpful to work with the teacher to plan a follow up class assignment. The class may be inspired to do a class project around recruitment!

***-students taking on recruitment as a “community service” project***

Often senior students must complete community hours to graduate. In addition, clubs or school associations may take on a service project. A great opportunity for the students would be to plan and implement a small recruitment activity.

***-library displays of books about foster care and adoption***

Encourage student, faculty and staff to think about foster care and adoption by creating a display of books, videos and DVD's about foster care and adoption. This could be during National Adoption Month (November), National Foster Care Month (May) or Child Abuse Prevention Month (April). Internet sites like the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption ([www.davethomasfoundation.org](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org)), North American Council on Adoptable Children ([www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)), National Foster Parent Association ([www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org)) or the Child Welfare Information Gateway ([www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)) offer lists of famous adoptees, bibliographies of books about foster care/adoption for children, teens and adults and lists of DVD/videos with foster care or adoption themes.

***-engage the principal or other school personnel to be an “in house” or community recruiter***

Provide the individual with recruitment materials and talking points that cover local data, eligibility requirements and steps in process. Help them to personalize their presentation by helping the individual recall children and youth that they have known and can share the story--be sure to adjust the child's information to protect their privacy and follow all confidentiality laws/policies.

## **ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN RECRUITMENT**

•**Talk with Public Officials**--Enlisting the support of a local public official can launch your recruitment program into the limelight. This person can be the mayor, county commissioner, city council member or state legislator. Be sure to share local data with the public official about children in foster care, number of foster homes, children waiting for adoption and highlight your biggest needs for recruitment. A set of talking points including anecdotes of actual children developed for the public official can be helpful when s/he is being interviewed by the media, making a speech or speaking with constituents.

•**Community Task Force for Recruitment**--Invite community partners from various entities to serve as an advisory board, assist with recruitment planning and help identify free resources in the community. Some suggestions for membership are: marketing executive, radio/TV/newspaper reporter, cable company employee, small business owners, school principals, CASAs...anyone who can assist with recruitment!

•**Offer training and education for community groups**--Sometimes, you have to give to get. Many groups in the community would welcome the opportunity to have a training or presentation about child abuse/neglect, how the child welfare system works, impact of foster care on children, etc. made to their organization or group. Some suggestions include professional groups, faith community groups, parenting groups, neighborhood organizations, etc. This usually results in generating interest and desires to help. Be prepared with specific ways the group can help!

•**Go to the Library!**

The library can be a wonderful partner in recruitment. There are countless free ways to spread the word through your local community or school libraries. Meet with the head librarian and arrange a display of books on foster care (In May for Foster Parent Month) or adoption (In November for National Adoption Month). The book display could include children's books about foster care/adoption, biographies/autobiographies about famous people who were adopted or had been in foster care, general books about the foster care/adoption process. Don't forget to identify DVDs and videos in the library that have themes about foster care and adoption. A list of books and DVDs can be found on the internet at the Child Welfare Information Gateway ([www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)), The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption ([www.davethomasfoundation.org](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org)), The North American Council on Adoptable Children ([www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)) and the National Foster Parent Association ([www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org)).

Another idea is to create a list of resources: books, DVDs, website that could be distributed at the library. Be sure to include some recruitment content on the materials with your agency's contact info and how to take the first step. Also, a very inexpensive strategy is to create bookmarks with recruitment info that could be placed in every book that is checked out. (Hint: Print on both sides of the bookmark to share more information!)

## **ENGAGING PARTNER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

•**Co-recruit with Big Brother/Big Sisters**

One organization in the community with a reputation of working with at-risk youth is Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Arrange a meeting to discuss the possible ways that the your agency and their organization could collaborate to create resources for youth in foster care or group care. Suggest a joint recruitment campaign where the community would be approached to consider being a BB/BS or resource parent for a youth in foster or group care. While the bulk of the volunteers recruited may lean towards being a BB/BS, it could be a stepping-stone to being licensed as a resource parent in the future once a relationship with a youth has been established. Be sure to earmark those volunteers to be matched with youth in foster or group care.

•**Connect with private agency social service coalitions**

There are groups of social service agencies in every community who unite over their geographic location, issue or mission. Schedule a time to be on their meeting agenda. Share data about the children in need and brainstorm ways that they can assist in spreading the word about the need for foster and adoptive families in the community. Suggest that they could help by distributing materials, hang posters in their agencies, include information about foster care and adoption in their agency newsletters, talk about foster care and adoption at their individual agency's staff meetings or create a link on their website to your program. Listen carefully, as the group may have their own set of unique ideas of how to get the information to their constituents. Another strategy to partner with agencies is to piggyback on their events. Offer to pitch in and assist them with their event. This can open doors for you and grow a pool of volunteers.

•**Other public social service agencies**--Take advantage of public agencies' structures and activities. Ask to speak at staff meetings, write articles for their newsletters about foster care and adoption, hang posters and place recruitment information at their agencies in the waiting room, lunchrooms or meeting rooms. Make a date to be in their lunchroom with an informational table and photos of waiting kids. Be sure to clarify the any



policies regarding possible conflicts of interest with public agency staff being licensed/approved as foster/adoptive families.

## **ENGAGING THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

### **•Companies for Kids**

An often untapped resource in the community is the vast array of large companies and corporations that exist. One site created a program called, “Companies for Kids” where a small group of companies/corporations were engaged as recruitment partners. The companies agreed to integrate recruitment messages and dedicated time and resources to spread the word among their employees. Bulletin boards were reserved for recruitment materials, messages were sent in employee paychecks and employees who were foster or adoptive parents were featured in the company newsletter. These companies/corporations embraced foster care/adoption as their community service project.

Another idea is to suggest is that companies become “foster/adoption friendly” workplaces (More information about “adoption-friendly workplaces” can be obtained for free from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption at [www.davethomasfoundation.org](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org)). This would include allowing time off to care for the child’s needs, financial support for adoption expenses, etc.

Consider an on-site “Brown Bag Lunch” where the recruiter would arrange to be in the lunchroom area on a specific day from 11:30am till 1pm. Staff would be alerted to the event through posters, intra-office memos/emails and announcements at staff meetings. A short “Just the Facts” presentation for 15 minutes could be done at a specific time but the remainder of the time would be an informal “meet and greet”.

### **•Unions and Trade Organizations**

Unions and trade organizations are well-organized groups with great highly developed ways of communicating with their constituents. In addition, unions are able to assist in making workplaces more supportive to the needs of foster and adoptive parents. Arrange to meet with officials and stewards of the major unions in your area. Remember that unions may represent a variety of occupations and vocations. Share information and data about the children who most need homes. Ask for their ideas of how to best get the word out to their membership. Offer to speak at union meetings, highlight union members who are foster/adoptive parents in union publications, send customized emails to membership, arrange “Brown Bag Lunches or Breaks” at workplaces with the support and endorsement of the union.

### **•Corporate Communications/PR Departments**

There are many resources available in the corporate communications or public relations department. Many companies or corporations have strong community outreach programs. Meet with the department head and suggest a partnership where they could work with your agency developing recruitment materials such as posters, brochures or even a video. In addition their corporate meeting spaces could be used for training, orientation or other recruitment events. Consider hosting an orientation at the workplace immediately after the end of the workday. If there is enough interest, you can then sponsor a preservice training at the office, after work as well.

### **•Highlight an Employee who is a Foster/Adoptive Parent**

Another strategy that could be used in partnership with an internal communications department of a company/corporation is to showcase an employee who is a foster or adoptive parent (with their permission, of course!). Having an employee as an internal spokesperson and “go to” person may be what other employees need to take that first step! A short video or story in the office newsletter could lead in to a company-wide onsite recruitment event.

## UTILIZING SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE COMMUNITY

### •Local Restaurants

Approach a small, family-owned business and inquire about their potential interest in being a recruitment partner. It may be easier than you think....one of your existing foster or adoptive parents may already own a restaurant! One site engaged a restaurant that made one day a month, Foster Care/Adoption Day. Special placemats were used, recruitment table tents were placed on each table and every waiter had a button on that read, "Ask me about foster care and adoption!" When a customer asked about foster care/adoption, the waiter gave them recruitment materials that had been provided by the agency. The employees at the restaurant were very enthusiastic about their role as recruiters!!

### •Movie Theaters

Make an appointment to speak with owner of a local movie theater, particularly one with a heavy "family viewing" schedule. Have a conversation regarding how the theater could support the recruitment of foster and adoptive families. While the owner may have his/her own ideas, you could suggest that posters be hung or recruitment materials be distributed once a month. Another ideas to share information are the slides that are run prior to any movie. Perhaps the theater could arrange to have a few slides devoted to foster care/adoption show before selected movies. The slides could include information such as local data about children in need, agency contact info, dispel common myths and how to take the first step in the process.

### •Grocery Stores

By speaking to the store manager, a recruiter may be able to have recruitment materials placed in the bags of groceries, be able to hand out materials one day a month to customers and have an opportunity to connect with employees through "Brown Bag Breaks", hanging posters, placing materials in break rooms, etc.

### •Other Small Businesses

Any small business such as the hardware store, pharmacy, bank, garden center, dry cleaner, specialty store, coffee shop, gas station, etc. can be a recruitment partner. As previously described, it may take a few face to face contacts with the owner, sharing the needs of the children and having a dialog of what the business is willing to do to help get the word out to the community and their employees. *Anything* that the owner is willing to do is great! Be sure to follow up with the owner when their effort has led to an inquiry from a perspective parent by letting them know what they did led to a contact from a prospective family for a child. This could motivate them to offer more opportunities for recruitment!!

If your town or city has art galleries, work with the owners to display pictures of waiting children on a specific weekend. There may be a regular "Gallery Hop" once a month. November would be a great month to feature the Heart Gallery in their places of business. Have brochures and photolisting flyers nearby for interested people to take with them. Be sure to follow up with the owners to let them know if their efforts resulted in a family for a child.

## WORKING WITH COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

### •Connect with the faculty and staff

There are many levels and types of staff on any college/university campus. Use newsletters, paycheck stuffers, break room posters, staff meetings, campus-wide email blasts to get the word out. Feature staff/faculty who are foster/adoptive parents in human-interest stories in campus publications. Create a link on their intranet to your agency. Host information sessions on campus after the workday to make it convenient for staff and faculty to attend.

### •Fraternity/Sorority Groups

Every fraternity and sorority has community service projects each year. Connect with fraternity/sorority groups at your local college or university and suggest that they take on foster care or adoption recruitment as their academic year service project. This can be done as part of your targeted recruitment plan. Engaging a sorority like Alpha Kappa Alpha, a historically African American sorority to take on the recruitment of families for African American teen girls can be a great match. In addition, each fraternity/sorority has alumni groups across the country that may be interested in getting involved in recruitment, particularly for older children and teens.

### •Campus clubs and student organizations

There are an infinite number of very diverse student clubs and organizations that could become partners in recruitment. Campus groups in the departments of education, child development, human services, social work, public administration and psychology are obvious choices. Offer to do a speaking engagement at their meeting about child abuse/neglect, sexual abuse, foster care and adoption. It can often lead to offers to help that can turn into recruitment events on campus and in the community.

### •Local college/university social work classes

Contact the professors and instructors in the social work department, particularly those who teach child welfare courses. Offer to speak to the class about a child welfare topic. Suggest that a class or group could host a community recruitment event as a class project. Connect the project to a targeted group such as teens, children of color or siblings for a bigger return. Also consider students in education, human development, psychology, law enforcement, nursing, law, journalism, photography, and public relations/marketing as possible collaborators that bring additional knowledge, skills and resources to recruitment.

### •Local college/university alumni groups

Alumni groups from the social work and other academic departments may be willing feature stories of alumni who have fostered or adopted in their newsletter. In addition, meeting with the alumni group's board or executive committee to ask for their assistance may generate their own ideas of how to connect with local alumni to consider becoming foster/adoptive parents, support foster/adoptive parents, mentor children or help to recruit other families.

## UTILIZING HOSPITALS FOR RECRUITMENT

### •Connecting with Employees

Most hospitals are a maze of various departments, units and levels of staff. Schedule an appointment with the hospital administrator. Share information about the needs of medically fragile children and ask his/her assistance in taking the word about the need for foster and adoptive homes to all employees of the hospital. Like many other community organizations, you can utilize the same ideas such as hanging posters, placing recruitment materials in meeting rooms and staff lounges, paycheck stuffers, articles in hospital employee newsletters or publications to the community. Recognize hospital employees who are foster parents (in May) or adoptive parents (in November) with a special email publication or on a special bulletin board or display.

However, connecting with the staff will require a willingness to flex your schedule as hospitals operate 24/7. A "Brown Bag Break" may need to occur from 7pm-8pm in the evening to catch a later shift. In the break room or cafeteria, have a tray of cookies and some candy on a table with recruitment materials to offer while staff take their scheduled break.

### •Connecting with the public

People come to hospitals for a variety of reasons. While some may be admitted for care, others are simply attending an appointment. Ask if recruitment materials could be placed in the waiting areas of the outpatient clinics. Hospitals often have display areas that change monthly, request that pictures of waiting children be the

“display of the month” for November. Be sure to have a place where recruitment brochures can be hung close by for those who may be interested.

## **FAITH ORGANIZATIONS AS RECRUITMENT PARTNERS**

Much has been written about using the faith community in recruitment work. Here are just a sampling of ideas that are free or extremely low cost.

### **•Faith Organization Newsletters**

Email a short article to the organization that can be included in their regular newsletter. The faith organization may agree to a regular column where myths can be dispelled, common questions can be answered, data presented, the steps to approval/licensing can be described, children may be featured and current foster/adoptive families of the congregation can be highlighted.

### **•Bulletins/Programs**

Some faith organizations distribute bulletins or programs at each religious service held. Email a short paragraph to the faith organization about the need for foster/adoptive homes. Make it a targeted message. For example, if the faith organization has a strong youth program, highlight the need for homes for teen. If the congregation is predominately Spanish-speaking, provide data on the needs of Spanish-speaking children...and offer the paragraph in both Spanish and English.

### **•Heart Gallery Displays**

Many jurisdictions around the United States have created beautiful collections of photos of waiting children that have been professionally done and framed. Ask the faith organization if they would be willing to host the Heart Gallery for two weeks. The gallery could be assembled using tripods in the lobby area, meeting hall or other area of the building where people pass by. Be sure to have recruitment brochures nearby so interested persons will have something to take with them.

### **•Mobilize the congregation to be recruiters**

Contact a local faith leader and share the needs of the children. Enlist the support of their congregation as recruiters for children of the community. The faith leader can begin by generating interest during regular worship services as well as an article in the newsletter and posters hung in their building. Schedule a “Recruiter Orientation” after a few weeks after the leader has begun to spark interest. Assemble “Recruiter Packets” with extra materials for their dissemination. At the event, share the reasons why children need foster care and adoption. Arrange for a foster or adoptive parent and youth to speak. Provide an overview of eligibility and steps in the process. Play “Recruiter Jeopardy”, preparing them for the typical questions. Brainstorm ideas where and how the participants can recruit. Be sure to check in with your volunteer recruiters in the next 30 days...they will probably need more materials!

## **ENGAGING YOUR OWN AGENCY’S STAFF: *RECRUITMENT IS EVERYONE’S BUSINESS***

Too often, staff outside of the foster care or adoption departments do not recognize the importance that their contributions can make to the agency’s overall recruitment program. Staff in investigations, independent living, ongoing, clerical, fiscal, maintenance, etc. will find their work easier when the pool of qualified families is expanded. The suggestions do not take any time, much effort and do not ask them to step out of their job role. Here are a few easy and FREE ways that ANY and ALL staff can participate in:

### **•Take 10**

Bundle recruitment brochures in packets of 10 each. During an all staff meeting or a short, special recruitment rally, challenge each staff to take 10 brochures and sprinkle them along their daily path. Wherever the individual travels in the next few days, leave a brochure with someone. For example, during a school visit, leave a brochure with the school secretary. Or at the barbershop on Saturday, leave one in the waiting area.

### •Share Your Leads!

Each staff member of the agency is connected to his or her own community. They attend church, recreate, dine, shop, use services, belong to organizations, have friends and family. In addition, others may know that the individual works for the agency and will ask them questions about foster care and adoption from time to time. Encourage staff know basic information and to make referrals of people they believe may be interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents.

### •Open Doors for Kids

Beyond sharing leads and ideas, staff members can pave the way for a recruitment event or activity by talking with their faith leaders, community contacts, PTAs and making the initial contact for the recruiter. This greatly enhances the recruiter's ability to "get their foot in the door".

### •Highlight Your Successes

Encourage staff members to share the names and success stories of youth, foster, adoptive and kin families. These can be used as human-interest stories (with their permission, of course) in newspapers and on TV. In addition, some parent or young people may agree to serve on panels, be interviewed on the radio or become a recruitment partner.

### •Become a foster/adoptive parent yourself!

In some jurisdictions, staff of the public child welfare agency are permitted to become resource parents. This possibility should be fully explored. Tennessee and Arizona have created policies that encourage staff to become licensed and approved while removing issues related to conflicts of interest. If this is a possibility in your agency, conduct recruitment activities at the agency specifically designed for staff.

## SOME HELPFUL TIPS TO ENSURE SUCCESS!

1. **Don't give up!** Recruiters can sometimes be easily deterred when a cold call is not returned or a meeting is cancelled. With countless possibilities in the community, move on to the next. People and priorities change, interest in foster care and adoption fluctuates. Circle back at a later time or try to connect with another person in the organization.
2. **Only take on as many organizations that you can really support.** It can be easy to get swept up in your enthusiasm and try to bring on 25 churches or all the schools in the city. Be realistic. Relationships with organizations or businesses require a great deal of investment, time and energy. You will find it advantageous to bring on only one, two or three entities, support them well and be successful. Their success will generate interest from others, reducing resistance and making their engagement in recruitment far easier. One of the most critical things to do is to contact the entity to let them know that their effort resulted in a inquiry call, placement or adoption--that will *make their day* and lead to their continued commitment to recruitment.
3. **Use great planning skills.** Investing time in strategic planning will avoid a haphazard, uncoordinated, sloppy approach to recruitment. Use data to drive your planning. Work to create a plan where activities build on each other. Create campaigns that focus recruitment activities for specific groups of children over a period of consecutive months. Only recruit for families that you truly need to meet your current placement resource gaps!

4. **Have a plan to follow up and respond to inquirers.**

With all the extra help recruiting...you can expect an increase of inquiries and attendees at orientation. Are you ready? Review your phone and internet inquiry protocol. Are inquirers being responded to immediately? Can interested persons attend an orientation within 7-10 days and are there opportunities for alternative orientations such as in office, in home and over the phone? It will be self destructive to your recruitment program *and* your relationships with community, resource parents and staff if their efforts do not make it in the front door.

5. **Have customized talking points ready.**

Having specific talking points prepared when approaching different entities and organizations creates a customized and personalized conversation. For example, when talking with schools, share how many children have left the school because there were not enough foster parents in the district. Or when talking with a community organization that serves African American youth, share the disproportionate numbers of African American children in care and the disparate outcomes the children experience.

It is also helpful to provide the organizations, businesses and individuals in the community who have agreed to be recruitment partners to have their own set of talking points to use when they are spreading the word. Provide them with statistics on the children in care, needing adoptive placement as well as a set of "Frequently asked Questions" with the common concerns the public has about eligibility, steps in the homestudy process, support, etc.

6. **It's all about RELATIONSHIPS!**

The success of your "free" recruitment program is based on your ability to form positive relationships with people who can support your efforts. Use your best relationship-building skills: return phone calls promptly, use great manners, respect their ideas, be on time, don't be demanding and show appreciation. This will be one of the best investments you will ever make! Let them know when their efforts have been successful-call them to tell them about the inquirer who got information from them or when a family has been identified for a child because of what they did. They will continue to be enthused about their role as a recruitment partner.

7. **Listen and learn from the community**

When approaching community resources, faith organizations, schools, etc. it is likely that they will become enthused about partnering with you to find to recruit families. While every recruiter is a fountain of ideas, the community is the expert on itself and possesses the insight about what would be most effective with their constituents. Listen. Really listen!

8. **Be appreciative for whatever people can offer you**

While it would be great if the people you approach could jump into recruitment with 100% effort, most will not be able to make that level of commitment due to the priorities of their current roles and responsibilities. To encourage folks to get involved, have a variety of ideas...a continuum of recruitment activities from which people can choose. Start with simple, low time commitment activities like hanging posters or handing out recruitment brochures. A second level of commitment would be assisting in arranging recruitment events while the far end of the continuum would include planning and implementing their own recruitment plan. Always be grateful for whatever an individual or organization is willing to do.

9. **Recognize their efforts**

Whether the community, staff or resource parents become your partner to assist you with recruitment, they will be anxious to know if their efforts have made a difference. Create an email newsletter where your partners can be recognized for their efforts. Share data on the increasing numbers of inquiries, applicants and approvals. Highlight an individual's specific effort or creative idea. On an annual basis, send a letter of appreciation,

signed by the agency's executive director. Another idea for recognition is to host an inexpensive (cookies and punch) reception and present certificates of appreciation.

**These are just a few ideas of how to recruit with no budget. You are only limited by your own creativity. Don't just "think outside the box", throw out the box! Good luck!**