

**RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION OF**

**RESOURCE
FAMILIES**

The
Promise
And
The
Paradox


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Developed for Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support™

by

The National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning
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This paper is dedicated to

Joelle Horel

Foster Care Specialist for the State of Utah

Division of Family and Children Services.

Her dedication to the well-being of children and her commitment to creating meaningful partnerships with families were an inspiration to those whose lives she touched.

Joelle you are deeply missed.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the Children's Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services, 64% of children adopted from the child welfare system in 1996 were adopted by their foster parents.¹ These dedicated "resource families²" (in this paper we use the term resource family to refer to foster and adoptive families who serve as the primary and permanent caregiver for children) were willing to commit to the children in their care regardless of the outcomes—reunification with their birth family or adoption. If this trend persists and resource families continue to serve as the option for permanence for children in custody of the child welfare system, the reality is that we will lose many of these families from the pool of available resource families. Certainly the resulting permanency for children is worth the loss, but this pattern suggests the need for public child welfare agencies to develop innovative and effective strategies for the recruitment of new resource families.

However, the recruitment of resource families is a tremendous challenge to state child welfare systems. Our expectation for resource families to work closely with the birth family as a mentor, to support the reunification process through consistent and frequent visitation, and to help the child deal with the flaws and inconsistencies of their birth family, is much different than our past expectations and as such, states are finding the need to develop new recruitment messages and accompanying strategies.

So what are public child welfare systems doing to create awareness of the need for these special, generous families? This paper provides an overview of the messages and the unique efforts of eight states as they strive to find the right recruitment methodologies for this new kind of resource family. These states were chosen for the innovation and the rigor of their recruitment efforts. The strategies highlighted include:

- Performance-based contracting
- Community and neighborhood specific recruitment
- Innovative community partnerships
- Child specific recruitment strategies,
- Orientation efforts that seek to help resource families better understand the challenges they will face.

¹ Promising Practices: States Streamlining Foster and Adoptive Home Approval Process. (November 2000). *Children's Bureau Express*. Volume 1, No. 7. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.calib.com/cbexpress/articles.cfm>

² The term resource family is used interchangeably with the term foster/adoptive family, legal risk family and in some instances resource family. This is due to the fact that states have different terms to describe those families who have committed to serve as a permanent resource for a child.

There is a growing trend in foster care recruitment centered on the use of performance-based contracting. States are using this community partnership strategy to expand the resources available to meet the growing need for resource families. These creative models of performance-based contracting provide possible solutions to the recruitment efforts of states.

Additionally, work is also occurring in several places in the country to more carefully define the characteristics of effective resource families. Once defined, states and community-based organizations are exploring with prospective resource families the characteristics they possess and how these characteristics will (or in some cases will not) enable them to be successful.

Finally, this paper explores existing social work practice and its relationship to retention. Conversations with those who have spent years observing the relationships between the staff from state child welfare systems and resource families shed light on a problem that needs to be addressed at every level of social work practice... the love-hate, trust-mistrust relationships social workers have with their resource families. Because the relationship between resource families and social workers directly impacts retention, this topic bears considerable attention and discussion.

II. BACKGROUND

In early 2000, Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support (CNC) and the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work – City University of New York, collaborated on the development of a monograph to learn about the status of the dual licensure of resource families in the country. A primary reason for development of the monograph was the increasing reality that foster families were serving as the primary permanency option for children in foster care. According to the Children’s Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services, 64% of children adopted from the child welfare system are adopted by their foster parents.³

Dual licensure of foster and adoptive families is a way to streamline paperwork and reduce the time it takes for a resource family to legally evolve to an adoptive family. In this paper, dual licensure refers to incorporating all of the requirements for foster home licensing and adoptive home approval into a single process that appears seamless to the family. Dual licensure is perceived by many to be an effective option in the toolbox of “best practices” supporting child permanency. However, if this trend continues and resource families continue to serve as an option for permanence for children in care, and if we continue to develop tools and supports to streamline the process requirements between the transition from the provision of foster care to adoption, then the predictable byproduct is a decrease in the pool of available resource families.

National data supports this contention. Increasingly in much of the U.S., foster families are in short supply, especially in large cities. In the 1970s and 1980s, unrelated resource families provided care for most of the children in foster care.⁴ Although the number of children in foster care increased by 68% between 1984 and 1995, the number of foster families decreased 4%.⁵ As such, the paper emphasized the need for states to invest resources in the rigorous recruitment of resource families.

When the dual licensure paper was completed, Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support (CNC) and the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning took the paper “on the road” to numerous national and state conferences around the country. During these presentations, the discussions about the challenges of recruitment and retention of resource families brought the most energy and passion to the room. Both child welfare staff and resource families talked about the challenges involved in

³ Promising Practices: States Streamlining Foster and Adoptive Home Approval Process. (November 2000). *Children’s Bureau Express*. Volume 1, No. 7. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www.calib.com/cbexpress/articles.cfm>

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Children’s Bureau. AFCARS. (2000)

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Children’s Bureau. AFCARS. (2000).

finding families willing to serve as a support to the reunification process by encouraging healthy and steady birth parent involvement, or if it was determined that reunification was not possible—serve as the permanent resource for the child.

In fact, many of the tools that have emerged as best practice in child welfare over the last two decades, e.g. concurrent permanency planning, dual licensure, and differential assessment are predicated upon having resource families who understand the complex role they need to play in the life of the child and that child's birth family. Under the Adoption and Safe Family Act, the child welfare system works best when resource families are fully wedded to the process of permanency planning – a process which is grounded in the belief that whenever safely possible, reasonable efforts should be made to help children remain with or be returned to their birth families; and that parents, resource families and agencies must work together to achieve the range of permanency outcomes. Many of the issues around implementing dual licensure led us to believe that dual licensure must be rooted in open and inclusive practice.⁶ This means several things:

- 1) **That resource families support and even facilitate frequent visitation between the child and their biological family.** The more birth families visit their children who have been placed in care, the greater chance for successful reunification.⁷ The ability for renewed connection and healing for both the child and the parent that can occur during frequent and safe visitation is the hope for permanency. If the visitation does not result in successful reunification, the child and parent can be provided the opportunity to shift their relationship through a supervised and healthy process. Equally important, as emphasized by Fanshel and Shinn, “it is better for the child to have to cope with real families who are obviously flawed in their parental behavior, who bring a mixture of love and rejection, than to reckon with fantasy families who play an undermining role on the deeper level of the child's subconscious.”⁸

- 2) **That resource families see themselves as a support system to the birth family.** The way in which the resource families work with the birth family and support reunification is fundamental to successful reunification or alternative permanency placement. Not only does the child benefit tremendously from having two sets of adults who unselfishly care about their well-being, but with the help of the resource family, the birth family

⁶ Lutz, Lorrie, Greenblatt, Sarah. (2001) Dual licensure of Foster and Adoptive Families: Evolving Best Practice. Washington DC Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support.

⁷ Davis, I. Landverk J., Newton, R., Ganger, W. (1996). Parental Visiting and Foster Care Reunification. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 363-382. Mech, E. (1985) Parental Visiting and Foster Care Placement. *Child Welfare*. 64:67-72.

⁸ Fanshel, D., and Shinn, E. (1978). *Children in Foster Care: A Longitudinal Investigation*. New York: Columbia University Press. (pp. 489).

may be able to learn skills that can fundamentally change their approach to parenting.

- 3) That full disclosure is a part of every discussion.** Full disclosure between the social worker and the resource family encourages the parallel process of open and honest dialogue between biological families and resource parents, where the rights and responsibilities of each are clearly described. It honors the integrity of the permanency planning process and ensures that birth families and resource families have the same information, thereby allowing them to make informed decisions. Full disclosure provides the birth families with a “lay of the land” and a road map of what needs to occur when or if their children are to be returned home. It also involves cheering them on, offering feedback, and gentle confrontation when faced with parental ambivalence. Full disclosure provides resource families of the expectations about their role of mentoring and supporting the birth family whenever safely possible.

Finding families with these values and characteristics is difficult. And sometimes, when we do find them, the actions of child welfare staff impact their willingness to remain in the system. The issue of resource family recruitment and retention is significant to the future of child welfare services in this country. As such, the CNC and the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning decided to collaborate yet again on a paper focusing on the challenge of recruitment and retention of these kinds of special families. This paper seeks to learn what states, counties, resource families and private providers are doing to **recruit and retain** resource families.

Please note that this paper is entitled *Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families: The Promise and the Paradox*—because the role of resource families is one of the most complex in the field of child welfare. The way in which the resource family interacts with the birth family and supports reunification is fundamental to successful reunification or alternative permanency placement. As stated by Mary Ford in her work on concurrent planning:

Resource families are asked to do nearly an impossible task...love the child like their own, including being open to having a permanent role in the child's life, while at the same time serve as a support and mentor for the birth families to help them successfully reunify with the child. Resource families safeguard the positive aspects of the child-birth parent relationship by stressing the birth families worth and qualities, while simultaneously accepting the child's negative feelings toward his parents. Resource families help the child to reconcile having two sets of parents.⁹

⁹ Ford, Mary. (1998). *Three Concurrent Planning Programs How They Benefit Children and Support Permanency Planning Families*. North American Council on Adoptable Children.

There is tremendous ambiguity and conflict that exists in resource families as they walk that fine line between helping the birth families succeed and wanting/hoping to adopt the child. Resource families need to be able to say with conviction... "... you're either going to go home, or remain with us" – a powerful message to a child.¹⁰

This paper looks closely at the approaches of eight states' to foster care recruitment and retention; Minnesota, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire, Alaska, Missouri, Utah and New Jersey. These states were chosen because of their response to the initial survey and their attempts to employ innovative strategies. We address the criticality of recruitment messages, systemic changes as well as discrete innovations that are occurring within states, the importance of social worker-resource family ongoing relationships and the practice policy implications of the findings in this paper.

¹⁰ Williams, Laura. (1998). California Department of Social Services, Adoption Initiatives Branch. California Workshops.

III. RECRUITMENT MESSAGES FROM THE STATES

In the summer of 2001, a survey was developed and sent to the foster care managers in each of the states. The goals of this survey were: 1) to assess if states were developing new messages and strategies targeted at the recruitment of resource families, 2) if so, how these messages and strategies differed from historical recruitment efforts, and 3) to learn about the promising practices in the area of foster care recruitment and retention.

Responses were received from 30 states and follow up conversations ensued. While many states were implementing various kinds of innovations, due to time limitations, we were only able to select 8 states for in-depth review.

We first looked at the recruitment messages. The states of Minnesota, Utah, Missouri and Illinois have changed their recruitment messages to target families interested in helping families.

State	Messages
Minnesota	Minnesota children need families to love and care for them
	All children need a permanent family
	Minnesota is committed to finding permanent families for children
	Children need ordinary people to do extraordinary things: Permanent resource families Resource families Adoptive families
	Permanent resource families are resource families who provide immediate care, love and nurturing for children. They actively work towards reunifying children with their families while committing to the possibility of adoption if reunification cannot take place. It is traumatic for children to move from family to family so they need resource families to provide their care.
	The role of permanent resource families is challenging; to love children as their own, support, meet and relate to children's parents; and adopt children if they cannot safely return home. Without permanent resource families, children will continue to move from one family to another.
Missouri	Regional-specific, family-focused messages based on regional needs assessment. (How many children were in care and the needs of those children).
Utah	Strengthen a Family ...Become a Resource family

State	Messages
Illinois	We need families who are willing to make a permanent connection with a child: who will work with birth families to help the child return home or if that isn't possible, consider adopting the child
	Our greatest need for foster families is for children over the age of 8 - especially teenagers, sibling groups and children with special needs. The majority of children are African American
	We provide training, support and community-based assistance to resource families and the children in their care
Maine	A Family for ME!

Our discussion with representatives from these states including foster care specialists, resource families, foster care trainers and private agencies staff told us that finding new recruitment message is very challenging. According to Kelsi Lewis, Program Director for the Utah Foster Care Foundation, the historical message of “save the child”

is in many ways more compelling than our new message of “Strengthen A Family...Become a Foster Parent” ...but we want families to know right from the beginning what we expect of them. They need to be willing to work with the birth family and serve as a source of hope, encouragement and education.”

Sheila Kitchen, Vice President of Program Administration and Development for Children’s Place in Kansas City, Missouri, agrees:

We want to be perfectly clear about our goals and the roles of the resource families we recruit. Otherwise we are setting them up for failure and frustration and we are not serving our regions or our children and families well. But... it absolutely is more complicated to find a message that will entice prospective families. People respond to children in pain...much more than they respond to families in pain, especially families who may have abused or neglected their children.

Catherine Charette a resource family in Maine fully concurs:

Maine, like other New England states has a strong orientation towards individual responsibility. We expect people to take care of their own. Those in the state will gladly reach out to a child...but the mainstream attitude regarding the child’s family is, “you had your chance and if you cannot take care of your own, you are not worth my time.” Recruiters are seeking new messages that will capture the hearts and the minds of community members so that they consider becoming a resource family.”

As states evaluate their foster care recruitment messages, it is important that they strive to find compelling messages that stress the urgent need for families to

care for children in care. At the same time these messages should be very clear about the expected role and responsibility of the resource family in helping children maintain connections to their neighborhood, culture and to their family (however broadly defined) so that when these children leave the child welfare system, they will do so with key relationships intact.

IV. FIVE STATES APPROACH TO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

In our research we found several states that have initiated a systemic approach to their recruitment and retention efforts. In this section we look at five such states, Minnesota, Missouri, Utah, Illinois, and New Hampshire. Each has implemented broad, systemic change in the area of resource family recruitment and retention through contracting with community-based providers, targeted, data-driven recruitment and changes in training and orientation of resource families.

Minnesota

Minnesota is a county administered system and as such the state central office staff do not direct foster care recruitment efforts in the counties but they do seek to support the county efforts. Early this year, central office staff initiated a statewide effort to support counties in their recruitment efforts. They began by dividing the state into 9 regions. Using state and federal dollars, they solicited bids through a Request for Proposal (RFP) (see appendix) from private agencies. The RFP called for private agencies to partner with the counties in the development of a regional/community-based approach to resource family recruitment. The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) was awarded the statewide contract. Under the provisions of the contract, NACAC is obligated to hire 9 Resource Family Developers to support the county recruitment efforts. Deborah Beske-Brown, Foster Care Specialist for the state of Minnesota, indicated that the expectation is that these regional Resource Family Developers will be highly involved in the communities within each region, identifying the sites where community members are eager to support a visible and aggressive recruitment effort.

The state of Minnesota emphasized that the best practices of family-centered practice, inclusive and open dialogue, partnership and cultural responsive practice are woven into all aspects of the work of the contractors.

An excerpt of contract features and expected outcomes are described below¹¹:

Goal: Develop and manage a statewide foster care and adoptive parent recruitment program. This program will:

- Focus on regional needs for foster and adoptive families. Recruit families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children for whom homes are needed in that region.
- Emphasize existing resource families recruiting new resource families.
- Develop active participation from all areas of the community to promote, recruit and support prospective resource families.

¹¹ Excerpt from the Minnesota Department of Human Services Request For Proposals issued in March of 2001.

- Ensure that members of the community have a culturally sensitive foster care licensing and adoption home approval process.

Methods:

1. Recruit, hire, supervise, and support Resource Family Developers. The grantee shall:

- Hire, prepare and support Resource Family Developers. It is strongly recommended that resource families who have adopted be utilized in these positions.
- Prepare the Resource Family Developers to promote continuity of care for children in their region. Continuity of care would include: supporting resource families to work with families and family members in reunification efforts, supporting relative foster care, supporting permanency goals for children, and reducing placement disruptions.
- Train Resource Family Developers in community organization, cultural sensitivity, child welfare system, and communication skills. Identify other training needs.
- Design supports for the Parent Resource Developers.
- Address how the Resource Family Developer will work with the current child foster care and adoption services in their region.
- Assist Resource Family Developers to promote foster care and adoption services so that licensed and trained foster and adoptive homes reflect the cultural diversity of that region.

2. Guide the Resource Family Developer in establishing Advisory Committees within the Developer's region.

- Membership in the Advisory Committee should include but not be limited to representatives from: county social service agencies, foster parents, adoptive parents, civic groups, private foster care agencies, churches, education system, tribal members, cultural and ethnic groups in the community, health providers, therapists, media representatives, and community leaders. Membership of the Advisory Committee should reflect the race and ethnicity of the population of the region.
- Each Advisory Committee shall develop a foster care and adoption recruitment plan **consistent with local agency needs**. The plan should also address the efforts to recruit families that reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the children in need of placement in that region. The plan shall be consistent with Minnesota Statutes and the Department of Human Services recruitment plan.

The plan should:

- Identify local agency needs,

- Focus on the recruitment of homes for the region's children who are not being placed in their home community,
- Address barriers that hinder continuity of care for children in the region,
- Seek ways to mobilize supporters in working together to recruit foster care and adoptive homes in the region.

3. Evaluate the results of each Regional Advisory Committee's plan.

Expected Outcomes of Minnesota's Performance-based Contract

Infrastructure:

- Regional Developers hired, trained and beginning work within three months from the award of the contract.
- Regional Advisory Committee meeting within six months of the award of the contract.
- Regional Advisory Committees have assessed regional needs for foster and adoptive parents, identified regional goals, and developed a written recruitment plan by the end of the first year.

Outcomes:

1. Increase in the number of skilled, trained, foster and adoptive homes. For example:

In the fourth through eighth quarter of the grant the number of resource families with completed home studies and resource families licensed in each region increase **by at least 25 percent**.

During the fourth through eighth quarters of the grant period the grantee will demonstrate that **75 percent of the developed foster homes were licensed by the county social service agency**.

2. Increase the likelihood that children who cannot return home achieve permanency with a relative or foster parent. For example:

In federal fiscal year 1999, 634 Minnesota children were adopted. Of the 634 children, relatives adopted 180 children and former resource families adopted 175 children. **The ratio of adoptions by resource families and relatives is expected to increase by 25 percent by the end of the seventh quarter of the grant period.**

3. Decrease the likelihood of placement disruption for children. For example:

In federal fiscal year 1999, 57 percent of the children in placement experienced two or fewer placement settings. **It is expected that this will**

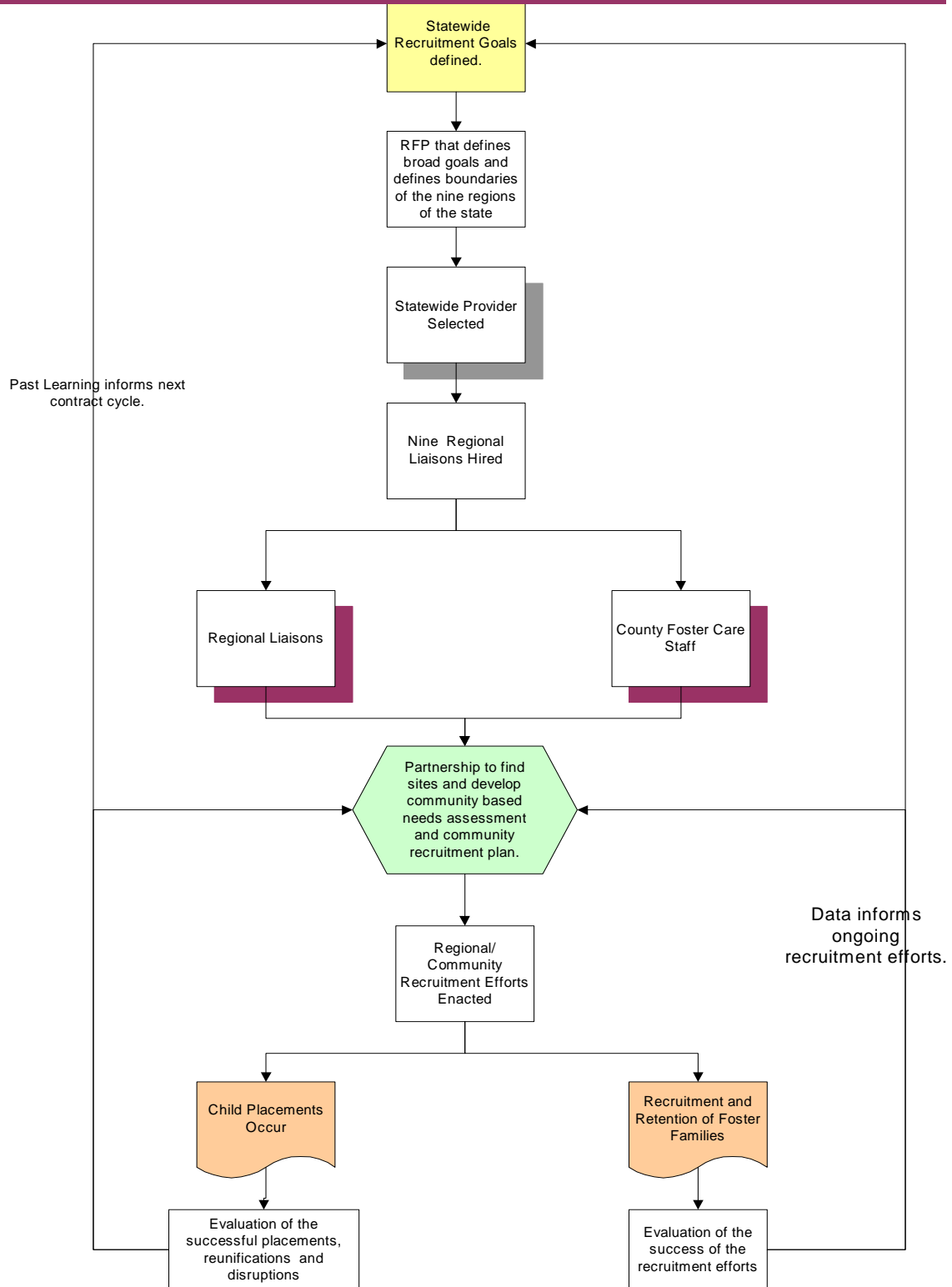
increase to 75 percent for the sixth and seventh quarters of the grant period, which would indicate a decrease in placement disruptions.

4. Increase the expectation that siblings remain together in both foster care and adoptive placements. For example:

Statewide 103 sibling separations were requested for adoption in the calendar year 1999. **It is expected that sibling separations in adoption would decrease by 25%.**

The diagram below depicts the way in which Minnesota plans to assess the efficacy of this partnership with the private provider.

Minnesota Assessment plan for Private Provider Partnerships



Looking for Characteristics of Successful Resource Families –Minnesota’s Strategy

As an adjunct effort, Mary Ford from NACAC has developed a Guidebook for Training Concurrent Permanency Planning Resource Families in Minnesota, to be published by the Department of Human Services¹². A theme woven throughout this Guidebook is that prospective resource families need to explore the characteristics that may help or hinder them in being effective in their role as resource parents. Fords quotes the work of Norma Spoonemore, a founder of Concurrent Planning:

All (resource families) have goals beyond themselves. They have a strong desire to help a child and to impact a child’s life positively, even if that child does not stay with them permanently. Others feel they are helping society, breaking the cycle of abuse, or taking into their home a child that others may reject. Through training, most resource families are able to develop sincere empathy for birth parents. They are able to understand that the birth families they see before them today were most likely the abused children of twenty years ago. Many resource families have expressed a desire to, “turn back the hands of time,” and “adopt” these parents. They wish the cycle had been broken sooner.¹³

Building on the work of Linda Zschoche, a social worker in Jefferson County Colorado who has sought to define why some resource families are successful and others are not, Ford suggests that the characteristics needed to be successful in the role of resource family include:

- ◆ Resource families have empathy for both the child and the birth family.
- ◆ Resource families demonstrate flexibility in their expectations about the outcomes of the placement as well as in their day-to-day life.
- ◆ Resource families tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty in the outcomes of a child’s case. They recognize that much of the decision-making is not in their hands, but in the hands of the juvenile court officials and child protection workers.
- ◆ Resource families possess a philosophical, spiritual and religious belief system that supports altruism and providing care for others.
- ◆ Resource families have acquired a basic satisfaction with where they are in life, with no significant, driving unmet needs.
- ◆ Resource families demonstrate a willingness to share relationships with a child.

¹² Ford, Mary. Guidebook for Training Concurrent Permanency Planning Resource Families in Minnesota. North American Council on Adoptable Children. December 2001. Minnesota Department of Human Services.

¹³ Spoonemore, N., Colacurcio, L., Fitchitt, D., Jackson, s., & Katz, L. (1998). Concurrent planning video series. Seattle, WA: Lutheran Community Services Northwest.

- ◆ Resource families evidence resiliency when earlier losses were experienced.
- ◆ Resource families demonstrate resourcefulness when confronted with challenges.
- ◆ Resource families maintain positive connections with the community.

While no resource family will possess all of these qualities, it is the combination of most of these characteristics that suggests success in this complicated task.

Ford's framework requires that prospective resource families are asked a series of sensitive and thoughtful questions that go to the heart of the role of a resource family. These well-crafted, self-assessment questions expose vulnerabilities and assets in ways that assist families in coming to their own conclusions about their ability to be successful in this role:

Question #1. How do you imagine sharing your foster child with other important people in his or her life?

Trainers are encouraged to allow for the full range of responses from "I can't imagine it" to "Yes, I have had birth families in my home in the past." Trainers are encouraged to ask group participants with whom they might anticipate sharing the foster child; birth parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.

Question #2. What would you say to birth families who said they were sorry for abusing or neglecting their child?

Trainers again are encouraged to allow for the full range of responses from negative to empathetic. Furthermore, trainers are asked themselves to understand and communicate that admission of guilt or regret may be a birth parent's initial step toward recovery and family reunification. Birth families who can say "I'm sorry" to their child are beginning to take responsibility for their actions. Trainers are encouraged to emphasize that empathy for both the child and the birth parent is an important resource parent characteristic.

Question #3. Is it important to you to be certain about the outcome of your placement? Why or Why not?

Trainers again are encouraged to allow group participants to elaborate on their full range of responses. Resource families who demonstrate flexibility in their expectations about the outcome of placement will more likely be successful resource parents.

Question #4. Would anyone like to share a little bit about their philosophical, spiritual or religious belief system and how it helps

you? Follow up with the question: Who might define themselves as altruistic?

Many successful resource families possess a philosophical, spiritual or religious belief system that guides them to care for others. Altruism is defined as an unselfish concern for the welfare of others.

Question #5 Please describe how you've recovered when you experienced losses in your life.

*Trainers allow group participants to elaborate. Trainers are encouraged to listen for resource families who have experienced infertility, as they may describe varying degrees of resolution.*¹⁴

The Minnesota Department of Human Services is very optimistic that this combination of performance based contracting and resource family orientation and training will increase the pool of available resource families in the state. They hope to have their first set of results by the middle of 2003.

Missouri

Missouri embarked on a massive recruitment strategy two years ago contracting with an array of community-based providers in a statewide effort to recruit, train and assess foster or foster/adoptive families for children in legal custody of the Division of Family Services. The effort was deemed very successful and as a result, the state expanded its strategies in a new RFP issued in late fall of 2001. In this new contract, DHS committed \$3 million in state resources to the recruitment of resource families. Two significant changes were initiated in this new contracting cycle based on the learning during the first cycle. First, Missouri is state administered, but was divided into regions for contracting purposes. Each region was provided an allocation based on historical need and a significant emphasis was placed on recruiting resource families willing to provide care to three specific populations of children in custody: adolescents, sibling groups and children of African American heritage. Second, each region has the discretion to only purchase those services that they need, enabling the counties to maximize their own staff resources while relying on the community providers to fill the gaps.

The requirements of the provider under the contract included the following:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the STARS (Specialized Training Assessment Resources Support/Skills) pre-service training for

¹⁴ Ford, Mary. Excerpt from "A Guidebook for Training Concurrent Permanency Planning Resource Families in Minnesota. November 2001. North American Council on Adoptable Children.

foster/adoptive parents. This understanding must be acquired by attending STARS “Train-the-Trainer” sessions.

- Initiate targeted efforts to increase the number of homes for adolescents - especially the older youth, sibling groups, and children of African American heritage.
- Develop new and creative recruitment materials and techniques. (These must be pre-approved by the state)
- Design concrete strategies to involve existing resource families in recruitment strategies.
- Conduct in-home consultations with all prospective foster/adopt families.
- Educate and assist foster/adopt families in understanding the special needs of children in legal custody of the state and the skills and emotional commitment required.
- Help prospective foster/adopt families in making decisions as to whether or not to continue the application process.
- Meet the **state’s goal that 60% of prospective** families who begin the foster care/adoption process, complete the pre-service training and become licensed foster/adoptive parents.

According to Janine Foley, Program Manager of the Out-of-Home Care Unit for the Department of Social Services, it is the hope that this approach will provide incentives for community-based providers to work aggressively to find foster/adoptive families that are willing to provide care for the pool of waiting children. *“The reality is that the more accurate and detailed information that the private providers have about the needs of the county regarding specific needs for homes, the better they are at recruiting accordingly.”*¹⁵

Shelia Kitchen of Children’s Place, a not-for-profit agency awarded one of the contracts for the Kansas City area, was also enthusiastic about the contracting model. She was clear that *“the greater the specificity in the regional plans, the more effective we are in recruitment of the kinds of families needed.”*

In addition to expenses, contractors are only paid for the following:

- Recruitment of a family who goes through the entire process from the point of the in-home consultation, training and licensure
- In-home consultations
- Provision of the initial pre-service training session
- Completed assessments where the foster/adoptive family applicant is found to be skilled in all competencies listed in STARS and is recommended for licensure as foster families or approval as adoptive parents
- Completed Adoption Assessments
- In-service training provided to foster/adoptive families

¹⁵ Personal Communication with Janine Foley. (February 2002).

- Reassessment of a foster/adoptive family

A new option in the recent contract is the county's discretion in purchasing only parts of the services provided by the private agencies. For example, a few counties have exercised the option not to purchase the specific home studies that were completed by the private agencies if the family that was recruited does not meet any of the county's needs. Other counties are choosing not to pay for certain activities such as reassessment or the ongoing in-service training - rather they have county staff perform these functions. While this is not occurring every place in the state, because of the regional cap on spending within the new contract, counties may begin to exercise increasing discretion in what they choose to purchase and what they provide themselves.

Contract Monitoring in Missouri

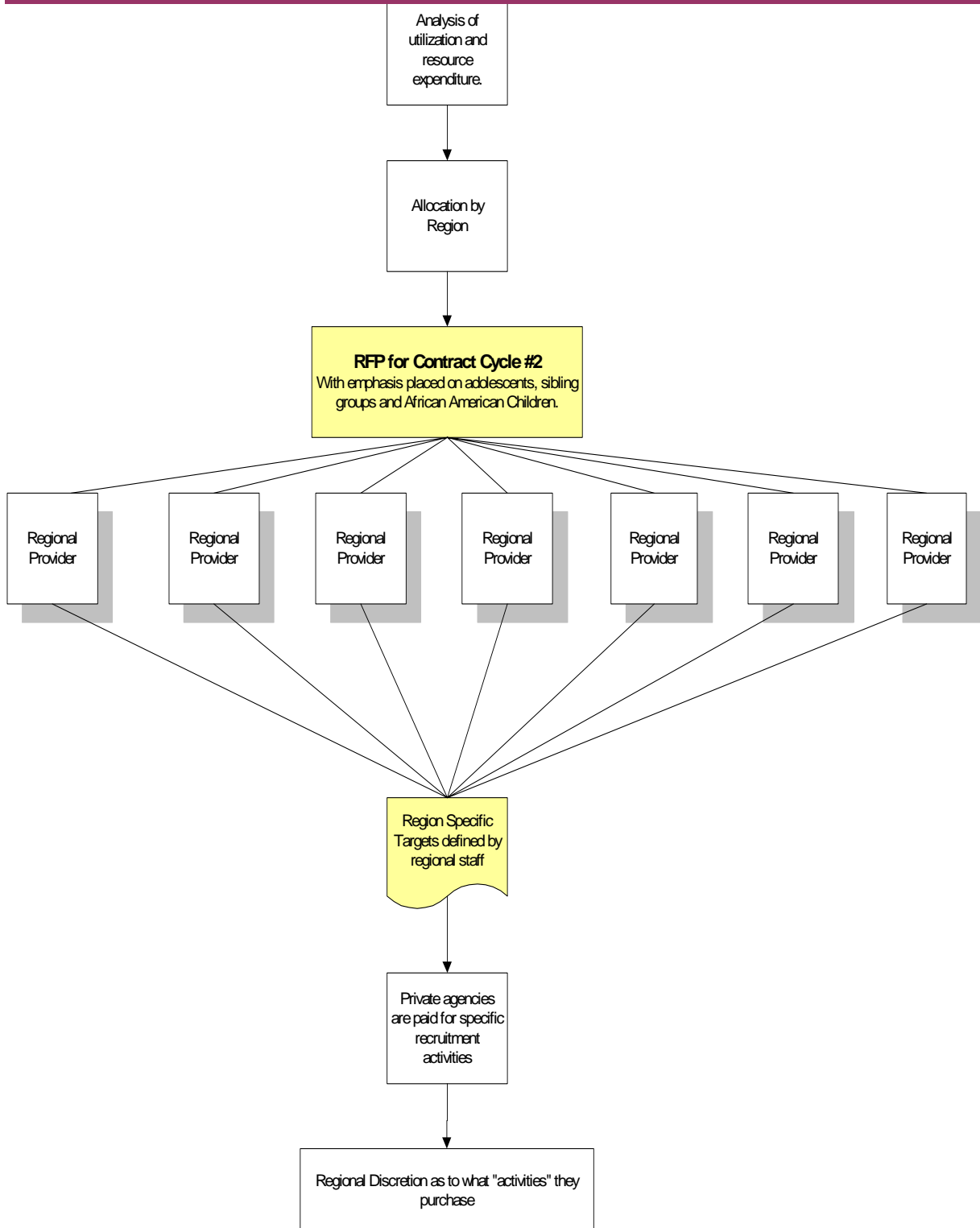
On a monthly basis the contractor must submit a report to the local agency office containing the following:

- Number of inquiries from potential foster/adoptive families.
- Number of in-home consultations.
- Number and names of foster/adoptive family applicants who withdrew or were selected out of the foster/adoptive application process.
- Number and names of foster/adoptive family applicants beginning pre-service training.
- General description of the recruitment activities provided by the contractor during the month.

These reports serve as the basis for the quarterly regional "point meetings" where activities, successes and needs are discussed in detail. From these quarterly meetings, successes are identified and plans are modified as required to meet the evolving needs for resource families within the regions.

The chart on the following page depicts the Missouri contracting model.

Missouri's Contracting Model



Learning About the Families Who Do Well –Missouri’s Thinking

Due to the payment and monitoring mechanisms of the contract, community-based providers want the families they recruit to meet the expressed regional needs. The recruitment of the families who have an optimal chance at success is greatly assisted by the completion of the STAR Training Curriculum for foster and adoptive families. Within this curriculum, five core competencies have been identified that are deemed to be critical for success. These include:

Competency #1	Protecting and Nurturing
Competency #2	Meeting Developmental Needs
Competency #3	Supporting Primary Relationships of the child (birth family, siblings, extended family, etc.).
Competency #4	Promoting Permanency Outcomes
Competency #5	Working as a Professional Team Member

According to Ms. Kitchen,

We look for these competencies from our initial conversation with the prospective foster/adoptive family, throughout the process of training and orientation to the point of licensure and beyond. Through homework, discussion and self-assessment exercises we help the foster/adoptive family come to their own conclusions about how well they “fit” this work. At any juncture along the way, if we find the foster/adoptive family is struggling with a competency, we meet with them individually and strive to work through their fears, confusions or concerns.

So for example, if a foster/adoptive family is fearful and/or unwilling to work with the birth family, we go to their home and try to help them work through their fears. Or if a prospective foster/adoptive family is only willing to provide care for a certain age child, and the region has no need for this type of home, we work to see if they might be more flexible in their decision. If after extensive effort on our part, they are still unwilling to work

*with the birth family, or only willing to care for a child of a certain age, we will suggest to them that fostering at this time may not be right for them.*¹⁶

Through the mix of clear contracting requirements, a top notch recruitment approach and a characteristic based training model Missouri is very optimistic about its ability to meet the needs of children waiting care in the state.

UTAH

In 1999, due to pressure from the Governor's office and the growing need for resource families, Utah initiated a "hybrid" community-based organization. That year, the state's legislature authorized the establishment of a not-for-profit agency solely focused on the recruitment, training and retention of resource families. In the past, Utah struggled as many states do with a lack of staff dedicated solely to the recruitment of resource families. Recruitment was simply a part of the child protection workers responsibilities and there was not enough focused time or resources devoted to the effort.

The not-for-profit was named in Utah's legislative code "The Utah Foster Care Foundation" and was funded with \$2.6 million in state dollars. These designated funds covered the entire operating budget of the Foundation. Fundraisers are used to conducting community focused recruitment efforts. Due to the high-profile nature of the Foundation, and the backing of many high level government and business leaders, fundraising for foster care recruitment initiatives has not been a challenge.

The Foundation has three separate divisions; recruitment, retention and training. A Board of Directors was established made up of religious, business, social service providers and foster parents. The Foundation was challenged to recruit "3000 (homes) by 2000." While this did not occur, the state has experienced a significant increase in the numbers of resource families recruited in the state. Foundation recruitment and training personnel are located in the five regions of the state and work closely with the DCFS staff. According to one DCFS staff member, "*While the contract is a good solid starting place, there is no way this effort would work without the frequent and consistent communication between the Foundation and DCFS regional staff.*"

Recruitment efforts are data-driven and community specific, focusing on age group and ethnicity. Data are generated by DHS and shared with the Foundation. According to Kelsi Lewis, Director of Foster/Adoption Family Recruitment for the Utah Foster Care Foundation,

¹⁶ Excerpt of a personal communication with Sheila Kitchen, Vice President of Program Administration and Development for Children's Place. January 2002.

The turning point in our recruitment efforts was when the Board of Directors agreed that we should not conduct any major recruitment efforts until we fully understood the needs of the various regions and communities of the state. We sought to understand the regional/community needs for homes for older children, sibling groups and children of diverse cultures. Then we had a clear message for the community recruitment efforts.¹⁷

¹⁷ Excerpt of a personal conversation with Kelsi Lewis, Director of Foster/Adoption Family Recruitment for the Utah Foster Care Foundation, January 2002
Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support™
Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families: The Promise and the Paradox

On the following two pages is an excerpt from the Salt Lake Valley Regional Foster Care Recruitment Plan. You will note the level of specificity and the data-based needs assessment outlined within the plan.

***Salt Lake Valley (SLV) Regional Recruitment Plan
April 1, 2001-December 31, 2001***

Age Group

The need for additional structured placements for adolescents is not only obvious in the numbers, but was also reported as the largest need by DCFS local, front line staff. The chart below depicts the need.

Age Group	Status
Infant/preschool	There are placements for 82% of the children (230 placements/281 children).
School Age	There are placements for 79% of the children (306 placements/385 children).
Adolescents	There are placements for 46% of the children (202 placements/440 children).
Structured Adolescents	There are placements for only 33% of the children (114 placements/347 children).

Ethnicity

Throughout the Region, there is a need for additional foster/adoptive families from various ethnic backgrounds, including, bi-lingual Hispanic, Native American, African American and Asian families. In the SLV Region, there are far more Latino youth than any other ethnic groups. The chart below depicts the need.

Ethnicity	Status
Hispanic	Available Hispanic placements reflect only 34% of the Hispanic youth in care (68 placements/198 children).
African American	Available African American placements reflect only 24% of the African American youth in care (9 placements/37 children).
Native American	Available Native American placements reflect only 42% of the Native American youth in care. (9 placements/21 children).
Pacific Islander	Available Pacific Islander placements reflect only 67% of the Pacific Islander youth care. (6 placements/9 children).

Asian	Available Asian placements reflect 0% of the Asian youth in care. (8 children)
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Not only are the recruitment targeted to the regions, but there is specific neighborhood recruitment efforts based on defined needs.

Neighborhood Specific Needs: Metro Neighborhood

Goals/Objectives

- 1) Finish the year with 30 total foster homes in the Metro Neighborhood.
Support retention efforts and add 6 new families to the pool (12 placements).
 - 2 homes for infant/preschool (3 placements)
 - 2 homes for school age (4 placements)
 - 2 homes for adolescents (5 placements)

- 2) Increase the number of Hispanic, bi-lingual homes in the region by 30%.

The Chart below depicts the need by age group.

Age Group	Status
Infant Preschool	There are placements for 32% of children (16 placements/50 children)
School age	There are placements for 20% of children (10 placements/50 children)
Adolescent	There are placements for 21% of children (11 placements/52 children)
Structured Adolescent	There are placements for 13% of children (5 placements/31 children)
Asian	There are placements for 21% of children (11 placements/52 children)

The chart below depicts the need by ethnicity:

Ethnicity	Status
Hispanic	Available Hispanic placements reflect only 31% of Hispanic children in care. (9 Hispanic placements/29 Hispanic youth)
African American	Available African American placements reflect 0% of African American youth in care.
Pacific Islander	Available Pacific Islander placements reflect 0% of Pacific Islander youth in care.
Native American	Available Native American Placements reflect 0% of Native American Youth in care.

Asian	Available Asian placements reflect 0% of Asian youth in care.
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Building on the Plans

The neighborhood-specific plans serve as the basis for the “swat team” approach used by Foundation staff. Once they compile the neighborhood data, using zip codes which assist in data analysis, they decide on a neighborhood to target and focus two months of recruitment within that targeted community. They contact newspapers where press releases and articles are published. They contact foster families who assist in hosting open houses where community members come to learn more about foster parenting.

One extremely effective neighborhood recruitment strategy has been the partnerships that have been created with schools in the communities. The schools agree to distribute flyers announcing Open Houses and other community recruitment efforts. According to Kelsi Lewis, *“It is remarkable the number of families who attend the community gatherings with these flyers in hand. We are very grateful to the schools for their support of our recruitment efforts.”*¹⁸

Supporting Resource Families Increases Retention

Not only does the Foundation work in concert with DHS to support these unique series of community-based recruitment efforts, they also have employed effective retention efforts. While they are not able to place retention staff in every region of the state, they have been able to initiate efforts for supporting existing resource families. The Foundation has created a statewide newsletter for communication with resource families. This newsletter includes some of the following information:

- Resources for training.
- Tax benefits for foster and adoptive families.
- Businesses willing to give discounted items to foster and adoptive families.
- Informative articles about children and their needs.

The Resource Family Association of Utah and the Division for Children and Family Services also uses the newsletter as a communication vehicle to the foster and adoptive families in the state.

Additionally, the Foundation is initiating resource family clusters where resource families provide support to one another through respite care, conversation and networking, and family-to-family education. Recently, the clusters in the state have begun to develop advocacy positions and are increasingly active with the Utah legislature. These efforts have been effective in the recruitment and retention of resource families in Utah.

¹⁸ Excerpt of a personal conversation with Kelsi Lewis, Director of Foster/Adoption Family Recruitment for the Utah Foster Care Foundation. January 2002.

ILLINOIS

Jane Elmore, Deputy Director Division of Foster Care and Permanency Services Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, shared her views of the emerging practices of recruitment in Illinois:

Three years ago we were doing general recruitment basically with a smile and very well intentioned. In fact, over 50-60% of our recruitment is general in nature. According to Casey, it should be more like 15%. So we have initiated an array of recruitment strategies. We have started to keep data to much better understand why we are doing what we are doing and to better focus our efforts. We intend to give our recruiting partners (state, private agencies and resource families) data every quarter—to provide trends and to create a better baseline for decision making.

Furthermore, where we used to only recruit for resource families, we now recruit aggressively for all three types of families, foster/adopt, resource families and adoptive families. We need every possible family we can get because in Illinois 91% of the children in foster care are adopted by their resource families. Also, in each of our recruitment efforts we provide common information about the needs of the children in the system, the importance of working with birth families, and the risks inherent in any aspect of the process. We have much more frank conversations with families because we must prepare them for the unpredictability of the system.¹⁹

Community-Based Recruitment

Illinois has six regions encompassing 62 Local Area Networks (LANS). At the time this paper was being written, each of these networks was in the process of developing a separate strategy for recruitment of resource families that mirrors the various cultures within the communities located in each of the LANS. To support the regional plan development, central office staff spent 6 months traveling across Illinois talking with people about recruitment strategies, barriers and challenges, the use of local data in assessing and directing recruitment needs, and determining seminal issues in recruitment and retention of foster and adoption parents.

The foster care specialist talked with over 100 people in the following roles:

- Regional administrators;
- Resources Development Managers;
- Licensing workers;
- Recruiters;

¹⁹ Excerpt of a personal conversation between Jane Elmore, Deputy Director Division of Foster Care and Permanency Services Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

- Foster parents;
- Resource family support specialists;
- Adoption specialists and adoption managers;
- Adoptive parents;
- Members of the State-wide Adoption advisory council;
- The Adoption Information Center;
- One Church One Child staff and recruiters;
- Resource workers in private agencies.

The goal of these conversations was to build awareness in communities about the need for more effective recruitment strategies and the state's commitment to build these strategies from the "ground up." According to Diane DeLeonardo, State Foster Care Specialist, a common theme emerging from these conversations was how much the needs of children have changed in the last 20 years—and that there is no such thing as "traditional foster care" anymore. According to DeLeonardo:

Those we spoke with understood that what has worked in the past will not work for the future. The conversation was effective in serving as an impetus for creative "out of the box" planning. At this juncture the plans are being crafted based on data from the state, community specific needs assessments and community input and perspectives. As the work continues to unfold—we are learning that the "work" is in communities--not regions, not Local Area Networks, not cities. But truly neighborhoods and communities within cities—which literally means hundreds of different plans across the state written specifically to address the needs of families and children in those communities.

Corporate Partnerships

The State of Illinois has developed partnerships with corporations for the purpose of recruitment of families willing to adopt children in the child welfare system. The state has contracted with community-based organizations to conduct the recruitment and licensure efforts in these corporations. The project has four goals:

- To demonstrate the effectiveness of corporate partnerships as a source for the recruitment of families.
- To recruit and expeditiously license families referred by the Corporate Partners.
- To demonstrate the effectiveness of a customer friendly approach that facilitates the licensing of interested families.
- To recruit homes that meet the needs of the children and their families and match them with children.

A project coordinator was employed to pair interested corporations with community based agencies around the state. While most pairings will be one

corporate partner with one agency, there are times in communities where several corporate partners exist with multiple agencies, that multiple partnerships are established. The community-based agencies that participate in the corporate partnership program must demonstrate skills and techniques that are “customer friendly” toward partner employees. These customer friendly skills and techniques include at a minimum:

- Two-business day response to questions and problems from prospective families.
- Flexible agency work hours including nights and weekends that accommodate applicants’ shift schedules for home visits.
- An approach to applicants that emphasizes education not investigation.
- Allows families to change social workers if requested.

The process of recruitment begins with breakfast or lunch meetings at the workplace headquarters of a corporate partner. These informational meetings are brief in nature (about 30 minutes). The purpose is to engage the individual/family enough so that they will attend a longer orientation session in the near future.

The orientation sessions also occur in the workplace headquarters. After the completion of the orientation the home visit occurs. Again, these visits are scheduled when it is convenient for the family. The agency then has 75 days to complete the licensure process including the background check, family assessment home study, and the 6-hour training. Once the license has been awarded, the agencies take an aggressive and pro-active approach to the matching process. The community agencies are reimbursed for specific activities as outlined below:

ACTIVITY	AMOUNT PAID
Completed application	1186.00
Licenses issues within 75 days	1186.00
Match made and child in the home for 30 days	1186.00
BONUS AMOUNTS	
For placement within 90 days of issuance of the license	1000.00
For adoption finalization	1000.00
ADDITIONAL BONUSES	
Finding a home for a teenager.	2000.00
Finding a home for a child coming out of a residential placement .	2000.00
Finding a home for a sibling group up to three children.	2000.00
Finding a home for a sibling group of four or more children.	5000.00

To date, the following statistics have been compiled about the Corporate Partnerships For Recruitment Program for the first year.

ACTIVITY	NUMBERS
Numbers of families licensed	47
Families who have withdrawn, are on hold or are inactive	20
Families who have completed adoptions	9
Number of families serving children or open to have children in their homes.	19
Families with children placed and waiting for finalization	7
Families who have already adopted and want to adopt again	1

Note: Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support has developed a publication entitled, "Partners: Working with the Business Community to Recruit Resource Families," that further explores this type of public private partnership.²⁰

One Church One Child

One Church One Child was established in partnership with DCFS in 1980 as a vehicle for providing educational services, counseling, mentoring and other support services to prospective families during the adoption licensing process. Its mission is to "Promote the foster parenting and adoption of homeless minority children in the child welfare system".²¹

Over time the program has set a national standard for state-church partnerships. In the past decade as the needs in the state of Illinois for foster and adoptive families has increased, One Church One Child has become even more rigorous in its efforts to recruit families to serve as resource families or adoptive parents. In fiscal year 2000-2001 the program exceeded its goal for finding and registering 100 African American families who seek to become resource families or adoptive parents. However according to Bishop Harold Dawson:

*While we are pleased, much remains to be done, as 93% percent of all children awaiting adoption in Cook County are African American. This year we revisited old friends and allies, and established new partnerships with organizations and corporations that support our mission and appreciate the crisis facing many African American children and families.*²²

²⁰ Agosit, Jennifer. (2002). Partners: Working with the Business Community to Recruit Resource Families", Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support, Washington, DC.

²¹ Annual Report. (2002). One Church One Child.

²² Annual Report. (2002). One Church One Child.

Recruitment occurs through the efforts of the staff of One Church One Child who conduct outreach to other churches. During FY 2001, over 145 presentations occurred in FY 2001 reaching over 153,750 church parishioners.

At the end of the year churches around the state receive Platinum, Gold, and Bronze awards for their success in supporting the recruitment efforts of One Church One Child. This innovative and sustained effort demonstrates an extremely effective community partnership.

Resource Family Finders Fee Pilot

Illinois has recently embarked on a resource family “finders fee” pilot. Finder fees will be paid to resource families for recruiting other resource families who receive licenses to foster the types of children needing homes. The program will be piloted through two Local Area Networks. The first LAN to pilot the program is located in Northern Illinois. The recruitment efforts are solely based on the community needs assessment data which in this community indicated a significant need for homes for teenagers. Bonuses will be paid when newly recruited homes accept placements of these identified children. The fee structure is outlined in the chart below:

ACTIVITY	Fee
License issued (to families recruited to take children identified in the needs assessment)	30.00
Recruited family accepts a placement with a sib group--at least one child over six	250.00
Recruited family accepts a placement with a child over 12	250.00
Recruited family accepts a placement with a child who has a treatment or specialized level of care	500.00
Recruited family takes a child coming out of a residential facility or group home	1000.00

While this is largely a community-driven effort, the Division is providing organizational, management, data collection, technical assistance and program evaluation support to the pilot. Staff from the Division are confident that engaging experienced foster families to recruit others to foster specific types of children should have a positive impact on recruitment efforts. Outcome data will be collected on licenses issued, children placed, and cost benefit. In order to test these assumptions the program will be evaluated at six and 12 months and, if it proves to be successful in the two LANS, it will be incorporated into the states multi-faceted, comprehensive recruitment plan.

To date, the data strongly suggest that this targeted and multi-pronged approach is very effective in the recruitment and retention of resource families in Illinois.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) has 12 District Offices located throughout the state. There is an overarching statewide plan developed that compliments the local efforts. Local plans reflect local office resource family needs. The foster care specialists in the twelve District offices are responsible for developing a recruitment plan for their area. The Districts encompass towns with very different needs. It is the job of the foster care specialists to profile the children needing care in their area and from this profile, work with community members to recruit families.

Efforts are coordinated by a contract that was awarded to Casey Family Services to support the recruitment and retention efforts for the District Offices of the state. Central office foster care specialists and Casey Family Services staff work closely with the District Office foster care specialists to develop their individual plans.

Recruitment team members are invited to participate because of their interest or connection to foster care or their influence in the community that would contribute to the success of the plan. Foster care specialists, ongoing child protection workers from the individual District office, foster parents, private child placing agency staff and community members work together to develop the local plan, which must include:

- **NEEDS ASSESSMENT:** A needs assessment is completed by reviewing monthly statistics of children requiring placement and children placed. This data assist the team in targeting the recruitment and retention efforts to produce desired measurable outcomes such as number of families for specific age ranges, specialty homes required including medically fragile and adolescent homes, and families that will take sibling groups.
- **DATA COLLECTION:** In addition, the number of inquiries, the number of home studies in process that would produce licensed homes, and identification of successful retention practices in the local office are reviewed as part of the annual plan. These retention practices might include award dinners, support groups, mentoring between resource families, etc.
- **DETAILED RESPONSIBILITIES OUTLINE:** Tasks, persons responsible for completing tasks, and deadlines for completion of tasks are developed and shared among the members of the team and others who will have a role in the implementation of the plan. *All activities*, including those that have no related cost, are reflected in the plan. The foster care specialists

from Central Office are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the plan and providing feedback and support as required.

- **COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSIONS:** A minimum of 4 information sessions are held annually and reflected in the plan. These information sessions are scheduled in the communities where families are being sought, hosted by staff or resource families already residing in those communities, or in partnership with the NH Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. Additionally, opportunities to speak to civic, social, religious and service groups that may result in education and outreach, donations to resource family support activities, or actual recruitment of families are pursued. The scheduling of these information sessions or speaking engagements can depend upon the availability of DCYF staff, and/or foster families who have a vested interest in the identified group, or who have volunteered to present to the group. Recruitment and community outreach is a shared responsibility among the district office staff and foster parents. Specific objectives for each outreach event including number of families to reach, number of materials to distribute, etc. are specified.
- **TRAINING:** A minimum of 2 pre-service trainings are held annually are completed within the year and included in the plan and timeline.
- **BUDGET:** The plan must include a budget for items included in the plan. Every goal may not require additional money to be accomplished. However, there are funds designated to support recruitment and retention initiatives. These funds have some restrictions. Only items specified in the budget may be reimbursable.

The local staff utilize a combination of community fairs, informational sessions, media campaigns, some TV, and radio to get the messages out. New Hampshire has designed an inquiry packet, a brochure, rack cards, and posters that are used statewide throughout the year to also reach out to prospective families.

Approximately 2 years ago, DCYF initiated Permanency Plus. This contract was awarded to a collaborative of two statewide not-for-profit agencies, Easter Seals and Familystrength. Easter Seals has an extensive background in recruitment of resource families and Familystrength has extensive experience in working with families whose children had been placed or were at risk of placement in out of home care. According to Gail DeGoosh, Foster Care Specialist for DCYF, "*The strong reputation shared by these two agencies made them an excellent choice for this innovative initiative.*"²³ The approach to both recruitment and retention in this program is unique. Resource families are recruited from one of three sources, the existing resource family pool of DCYF, the existing pool of families

²³ Personal Communication with Gail DeGoosh, Foster Care Specialist for NH DCYF. November 2001.

recruited by Easter Seals, and new resource families recruited through the joint efforts of Easter Seals and DCYF. This teamed effort has resulted in the recruitment of a strong pool of resource families willing to serve as the permanent option for the child. According to DeGoosh, *“it is the strong retention of the program that supports recruitment efforts. If resource families know that they will be supported they tell their friends.”*

In this model, the team that is wrapped around the child is called the “Circle of Support”. This circle consists of the birth family, the resource family, and Familystrength and Easter Seals staff. Every two weeks, the Circle of Support meets to discuss case progress. These team meetings solidify the goals for the child and the birth family and have been extremely important in building trusting relationships between the birth family and the resource family. These meetings also set the stage for effective visitation between the child and the birth family. Depending upon the reason that the child is in care, many of the visits between the child and his/her family occur in the resource families home. One of the most unique aspects of this Circle of Support is the concerted and ongoing effort by Familystrength and Easter Seals staff to build a strong relationship between the resource family and the birth family.

Linda McCabe, Regional Director of Familystrength and the Permanency Plus Program Director shared some of her perspectives on the success of this effort to date:

We are there consistently for both the resource family and the birth family and they know it. It has been our experience in the more traditional foster care program that visits between the child and his/her family are stressful for everyone. Now, rather than causing stress, visits between the resource and birth families are serving to create partnerships and a mentoring relationship. When issues do arise between the resource family and the birth family, the Familystrength counselor is available to immediately assist in conflict resolution. Issues are resolved well before a crisis arises.²⁴

The immediate and intense level of support appears to be making the difference in the quality of the care provided. In one instance, the resource parent had grown up in foster care and, according to her birth children, was overcompensating for this by not setting clear boundaries and showing favoritism to the foster children. The Familystrength counselor was there to assist the resource parent in understanding her actions and changing her patterns of behavior toward the foster child, thus saving both a shaky placement and the resource family’s role in the system. This level of support for resource families goes a long way to reduce burn-out and to sustain relationships that only serve

²⁴ Excerpt of a personal communication with Linda McCabe, Regional Director Familystrength. January 2002.

to benefit the child. As a result, the number of resource families who have dropped out of the program is minimal.

This model is also serving to support and sustain relative resource families. Easter Seals and Familystrength staff have found that in numerous instances when resource families are relatives, long-term family issues can cause disruptions in the placement. The frequent team meetings, planful and inclusive approach to visitation and the rigorous attention paid to involving all players in decisions about the child, has reduced the friction in these relationships. When family issues do arise, Familystrength counselors are able to utilize intensive and highly skilled therapeutic interventions.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PERFORMANCE-BASED CONTRACTING FROM THESE STATES

Today, many states are looking to improve procurement processes to enhance the recruitment efforts of the private provider community. There is a movement across the country to no longer fund agencies whose applications include no outcome data. States are increasingly interested in funding providers who are much clearer about how they will achieve outcomes. Additionally, government funders in general are getting much better at defining the connections between activities and outcomes and they are becoming much more insistent on asking for evidence that the outcomes were in fact achieved.²⁵ These trends are impacting how public child welfare systems contract with private providers. Those states that we have highlighted; Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire and Utah have learned lessons that are valuable to other states considering moving in this direction. There appear to be five primary factors that predict success in performance-based contracting: (1) clarity of outcomes within the contract language; (2) commitment to partnership and frequent communication with the private agency; (3) clear reporting requirements; (4) a reasonable financing/sanction incentive model; and (5) simplified procurement process.

Clarity of Expected Outcomes Within the Contract Language

Outcomes must be based on historical data and must be clearly defined in the contract. The goal of a performance-based contract is to improve the status of the present service or activity and to serve as a vehicle to hold providers accountable for the quality of services provided. Expectations for enhanced improvement need to be based on analysis of past performance. In order to see an improvement in recruitment efforts, the historical data needs to be clear and understood by the community agency. The contract language must be very clear regarding the “definition of success,” but flexible in how the private provider can reach the desired outcome. The more flexibility that can be allowed in how the

²⁵ Shore, Lizbeth. (2002). Role of Evidence in Improving Outcomes for Children. Funding What Works: Exploring the Role of Research on Effective Programs and Practices in Government Decision-Making. Child and Family Policy Center. Des Moines, Iowa.

provider actually goes about meeting the performance targets, the more innovative and effective providers will be.

Commitment to Partnership and Frequent Communication

Without exception the states that have implemented performance-based contracts emphasize the need for frequent communication between the state and the contractor(s). The award of the contract is in no way the end of the need to clarify contractual expectations but serves as a jumping off place. Most states and community-based providers are on a steep learning curve. It makes abundant sense during the first 1-2 years of contract implementation for the state and providers to act as learning partners. While contract expectations need to be clearly spelled out, it only makes sense that providers are given the time required to adapt and change their practice orientation. After all, the success of the providers ultimately means the success of the state in meeting children and families' needs.

Clear Reporting Requirements

The consistency of the reporting process is key to effective trend analysis and ongoing planning. Contracts need to define the data that are to be reported, ensuring that providers understand exactly what is required. Many states struggle with asking for too much data, or too vague data, both meaningless to the understanding of the efficacy of the effort.

Reasonable Sanctions/Incentives Model

A good performance-based contract can be used to align public objectives with the interests of private contractors through the establishment of rewards and/or penalties. That said, sanction/ incentive systems should be implemented only if the *purchaser* is certain that the level of funding is sufficient to accomplish desired outcomes. The first years of the system shift should be used to, in part, to evaluate the sufficiency of the resources. Once the adequacy of the system's resources is determined, then a sanction and rewards process can be implemented.

The state might provide incentives for:

- consistently exceeding the contract requirements for resource family recruitment
- implementing innovative strategies for the involvement of the consumer community in recruitment strategies that result in the licensure of additional resource families.
- increased role of resource families in the training and orientation process resulting in improved retention.

Similarly, penalties can be established for:

- not recruiting the required number of resource families
- not recruiting child specific families i.e. adolescents, sibling groups required by the contract.
- developing recruitment efforts that do not reflect identified community needs.

Simplified Procurement

There are procurement issues that should be addressed as this process moves forward. For example, most public agencies have rules in place that mandate the frequent re-bidding of contracts. While the state may see advantages to holding an annual competition among providers to secure a new contract, the state also incurs risks and costs in the annual re-bidding process. If the provider is reasonably successful in meeting contractual outcomes, there is little advantage to either the provider or the payer in costly annual competition. In addition, a longer-term contract reduces the risk that a provider will terminate services unilaterally. On the other hand, contracts that are too long can lead to complacency and non-responsiveness by the contractor. In planning for this effort, public agencies must attempt to strike a balance that will support the ability to the deliver on contractual obligations without losing energy and the competitive spirit.

The next section of the paper will discuss the unique innovations that are occurring with in states that are resulting in improved recruitment and retention of resource families.

V. UNIQUE INNOVATIVE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES WITHIN STATES

In the course of our research, we found several states that have initiated unique strategies in the recruitment of resource families. These innovative strategies bear attention and consideration as other states in the country are looking for ways to think “outside of the box” in the arena of resource family recruitment and retention. These innovative strategies include Alaska’s approach to child specific recruitment, Maine’s practice integration, including the integration of the resource family into the recruitment process, New Jersey’s community-based training partnership model, and Kentucky’s in-depth review of intake and response processes.

CHILD SPECIFIC RECRUITMENT

In their paper, *Foster Care Today*, Barbell and Freundlich highlight that children of color have historically constituted a large percentage of the children in foster care. In 1980, 47.3% of children in foster care were children of color; by 1990, the proportion had reached 60.7%; and by 1999, it had increased to 64%.²⁶ Despite the increasing representation of people of color in the U.S. population overall, children of color continue to make up a disproportionate proportion of the population of children in care.²⁷ In 1990, for the first time, more African American children than white children were in foster care, a trend that has continued to the present.²⁸ Some studies have shown that increases in the number of children in foster care are attributable to increased entry rates for children of color. Wulczyn and George, for example, found that the dramatic increase in the number of children in foster care in Illinois between 1987 and 1988 was due entirely to African American children entering care in numbers disproportionate to their membership in the general population.²⁹

The demographic data describing the children in care and the public policies regulating the recruitment of foster and adoptive families suggest that states **have an obligation** to aggressively recruit resource families of color and as such the recruitment and retention efforts must take into consideration messages that

²⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000a). *The AFCARS report: Interim estimates for fiscal year 1998*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/stats/tarreport/rpt04003/ar0400.htm> [2000, September 29].

²⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001c). *AFCARS report #5* (Preliminary estimates published April 2001) [Online]. Available.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000a). *The AFCARS report: Interim estimates for fiscal year 1998*. [Online]. Available <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/stats/tarreport/rpt04003/ar0400.htm> [2000, September 29].

²⁹ Wulczyn, F.H., Harden, A.W., & Goerge, R.M. (1997). *An update from the multistate foster care data archive: Foster care dynamics 1983-1994*. Chicago: University of Chicago, The Chapin Hall Center for Children

will reach cultures and families other than the traditional middle class, suburban, Caucasian family so as to include African American, Hispanic, Native American and Asian cultures. To do so requires an understanding of culture and the messages that compel various cultural groups.

ALASKA'S EFFORTS

The state of **Alaska** is a classic example of recruitment efforts built on a sensitivity to race and culture. In Alaska, a resource family recruitment media campaign will not work. The very idea of foster care is juxtaposed to many of the tribes' cultural beliefs in Alaska.

Ritchie Sooner, foster care specialist for the State of Alaska stated:

I read as much as I could about effective recruitment and everything that I read suggests that retention is directly tied to the ability of the state to recruit. Word of mouth is a basis for recruitment. We pay a great deal of attention to this in Alaska. I believe that in many ways what we are talking about comes down to simple customer service. Do we respond to resource families in a way that makes them encourage their friends to become a resource family? On the other hand, if we work to develop a strong reputation within a community or village, we share with folks our needs, we make it clear how we will support them and then we do what we say...we would not have the issues we have with recruitment.³⁰

Deborah Hayes, Director of Alaska Resource Family Training Center, fully concurs:

Alaska has a tremendous and well-networked religious community. If we do a good job of recruiting one family and if we partner well with them, before we know it three other families express interest in recruitment. But if the system does not support these families, as is often the case, we significantly jeopardize our changes to recruit other families from the church network. For example, every year we hold a resource family Christmas party. We hold it at a place and time convenient for both the resource families and for state staff. We need state staff to be there to join us in saying thank you to these families who pour their heart into caring for a child and learning to more effectively work with families. We have to move from what appears to be a system of chaos to a system of care.³¹

A challenge faced in Alaska is to slowly thread the concept of foster care into the Native American culture on a child-by-child basis. According to Ms. Hayes:

In Alaska, some of the tribes are completely closed, independent communities, it is only through relationship and connection to the village

³⁰ Personal Communication with Ritchie Sooner, Foster Care Specialist for Alaska. October 2001.

³¹ Personal Communication with Deborah Hayes. Director of Alaska Resource Family Training Center. December 2001.

and villagers that we can recruit resource families. They look to individuals who are already in and connected to the village residents such as the Public Health nurses to identify people who may be likely candidates to serve as resource families for a specific child. The culture within many Alaskan tribes requires that fellow villagers not become involved until asked directly—and then only about a specific, known child.

The training for both resource families and child welfare agency staff is provided by the Resource Family Training Center. It occurs within different regions of the state and provides opportunities not only for the sharing of information but for the development of relationship between members of the tribes, training center personnel and state child welfare staff:

We take time to meet with regional representatives of the tribes, on their turf, and we have meals and sit down face to face to talk. These times are invaluable for our ability to then go back to the tribal leaders and ask for assistance in placing a child. Relationship is the key to opening doors in Alaska.

According to both Sooner and Hayes, one of the most important vehicles for recruitment of families is the Tribal State Collaboration Group. This is a body of tribal representatives from across the state that meet quarterly with the Indian Child Welfare Specialists from the State of Alaska Division of Family and Youth Services. This group includes regional representatives from the tribes and as such ensures that both large and small tribes are represented. According to Hayes:

It is during these meetings that we learn members of communities and tribes that might be interested in providing care for a child, we get the word out about the need for a foster home for a specific child or sibling group, and we learn who the key community/tribal members are so that when we do have a need for a child we know who in the community to contact.

In a recently published handbook by the National Indian Child Welfare Association, *Heritage and Helping: A Model Curriculum for Indian Child Welfare Practice*, Terry Cross discusses the reasons why it is challenging for Native Americans to become involved in foster care. First, a value of non-interference in some tribes inhibits people from offering themselves to assist in someone else's' business or problem. Second, it is likely that potential foster families may have experienced foster care themselves or had relatives who were in care (before 1978 one in every four Indian children was in some form of out-of-home care). Many Indian people do not want to expose their family to what they experienced. Third, Native Americans may fear the child welfare system and what it represents. They also fear how their family might be judged. Finally, many people have such a negative view of the child welfare system that they simply do

not want to become part of a program that removes children.³²

According to Cross, one of the most successful foster home recruitment strategies used by tribes has been a door-to-door home-finding approach. In this approach, a foster home recruiter begins by going to respected elders and to community and spiritual leaders. The leaders are informed about child welfare and the need for resource families and are asked who they know in the village would be good at taking care of children. Once a few names are gathered, the worker starts the process of visiting each person's home. During the visit, the workers ask if he or she can tell them about the child welfare system and about the need for resource families, but the worker does not usually ask about their interest in actually providing foster care at this time. According to Cross, the worker might say "People around here say that you care about your kids? Do you know anyone who you think would also be good at taking care of kids?"

The worker may come back several times before asking the family to consider becoming a resource family. This approach is considered polite and respectful.³³

Additionally, a worker might wait until a particular child needs a home and make a request in the context of that child's need. It is helpful if the worker is part of and knows the community, as discussed earlier, but it can be done well by any respectful worker willing to take the time to develop relationships with the community members and tribal leaders.

INTEGRATION OF FOSTER CARE, ADOPTION AND RESOURCE FAMILY RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES--MAINE

In the paper published by the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning entitled, *Concurrent Planning: Tool for Permanency, Survey Of Selected Sites*, it was suggested that the better integration of foster care and adoption services within a state system is an effective strategy for improved concurrent planning efforts. Because so many of the children adopted through state child welfare systems are adopted by their resource families, it is logical to try to integrate the practice of these parts of the system as much as possible, thus reducing duplication and unnecessary complications for resource families choosing to adopt. This same message was emphasized in the dual licensure paper.³⁴ In fact, the practice of dual licensure was initiated by states that thought the disconnect between the foster care and adoption licensing and certification process made little sense when it was the same families in many

³² Cross, Terry. (1995). *Heritage and Helping: A Model Curriculum for Indian Child Welfare Practice*. National Indian Child Welfare Association.

³³ Cross, Terry. (1995). *Heritage and Helping: A Model Curriculum for Indian Child Welfare Practice*. National Indian Child Welfare Association

³⁴ Lutz, Lorrie. (2001). *Dual Licensure of Foster and Adoptive Families: Evolving Best Practices*. Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support and the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning.

instances going through each. Katz and others have proposed that agencies restructure and “dissolve unnecessary distinctions” between adoption staff and foster care staff.

Martha Proulx, Children's Services and Foster Care Licensing Program Specialist from the Maine Bureau of Child and Family Services, took this step further. She and her staff concluded that if the integration of practice by the foster care and adoption staff through the efforts of Concurrent Planning and Dual Licensure supported a more effective movement of children to permanency, it was just as logical that the integration of foster care and adoption training and recruitment efforts would be effective. As such, over the course of the past several years, Maine has developed a more integrated approach to the training and recruitment of foster and adoptive families:

While our training of resource families and adoptive families has been combined for a decade nothing else was combined...including our recruitment initiatives. We are seeking to ensure that the foster/adoption recruitment unit works hand in hand with our adoption unit. In reality, the change in the way we work is hindered by the lack of mindset shift. Staff need to more fully understand the seamless approach that we are trying to create...and they have to support it. We have initiated cross training and cross supervision between the foster care staff and the adoption staff to support the required mindset and practice shift. Through a more standardized statewide approach we are not duplicating efforts between foster/adopt and adoption recruitment, but synchronizing them. In addition, we tightly monitor the training that is provided to our foster and adoptive families...we have even stopped having two annual conferences (one for foster care and one for adoption) and combined them. We have struggled to ensure that we are honestly communicating that our goal is to find families who are willing to work with the birth parent and to serve as the permanency option for the child, regardless of the plan. Of course the message takes some time to get out...not even all of our internal staff always understand the message, but it is much better than it was say 6 years ago.³⁵

Maine resource family, Catherine Charette, shared several perspectives about the system's approach to recruitment and the challenges faced. The mindset changes required by not only state staff but resource families is significant:

First I want to say that I really respect both the people in the system and the work of the system. Given the complexity of the work that is required by all (state agency, community-based organizations, citizens) we are doing good work with limited resources. But that said...we still have a long way to go. Resource families that have been in the system for a long time may not want to work side by side with birth families...in fact there are

³⁵ Personal Communication with Martha Proulx. Children's Services Foster Care Licensing Program Specialist. Maine DHS. November 2001.

times when they clearly sabotage reunification. Other resource families, ones newer to the system can be trained from the beginning to serve as a role model and partner to the birth family, however that partnership evolves.

Catherine suggests that the diagram below be used as a guide to move the resource families to a new level of understanding of their role.

Suggested Resource Family Analysis and Training Plan

<p>Veterans that have been doing foster care for a long time and have little to no interest in working with the birth family.</p>	<p>Best decision is to learn who they are and to only send children to these families whose permanency plan is adoption due to the absence or complete lack of involvement of the birth family.</p>
<p>Resource families who have been recruited in the past 3-5 years and who may be willing to learn a new way of interacting with birth families.</p>	<p>Get to them now, before the process of little birth parent contact becomes ingrained in how they think. Provide immediate training and support.</p>
<p>Prospective and New Resource Families</p>	<p>From the point of the first message, make certain that they understand their role is to partner with the birth family and to serve as a mentor and a role model.</p>

Maine did not stop the integration at the point of state level staff. Resource families have been included in the integration of recruitment efforts. Maine foster father Steffan Duplessis (husband of Catherine Charette) suggests that one of the gaps in the system of recruitment today are messages aimed at the foster father:

They are often forgotten in the process of fostering...it is the foster mom who is the focus of recruitment messages and support efforts. My goal is to reach out to the potential foster father and help them understand the nature and importance of their role.³⁶

As a member of the Advisory Committee for FACT (Families and Children Together), a community-based organization that has a contract with the state for the recruitment of resource families in Maine, Steffan takes it upon himself to contact all prospective foster fathers. In these conversations, he seeks to understand if the foster father is able to identify what they hope to both give and get out of the fostering experience. Steffan suggests:

If the individual cannot talk about his desire for some kind of connection with the child, I worry that he is not fully understanding his role. The male

³⁶ Individual conversation between the author and Mr. Duplessis. November 2001.

*role model is critical to these children, and often to their families. I try to help the prospective foster father find his place in the fostering process.*³⁷

This could also be an effective strategy for single individuals who seek to foster children. The question that could be posed by existing foster families is how is the need for a male/female role model going to be met? It is important that the system takes into consideration the need for male and female role models in the life of children in foster care, and assist prospective resource families in ensuring this need is met. Existing resource families might find ways to share the role modeling with families where there is no male or female in the home.

COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING PARTNERSHIPS

Donna Younkin, Assistant Director of DYFS for the state of New Jersey, stated emphatically that the state takes seriously the fact that retention is key to recruitment. One of the needs expressed by resource families was more focused and comprehensive training. For the past two years Donna and her staff have been working with the training staff from DYFS to overhaul the way training is provided to resource families:

First, our initial training and orientation approach was convenient for us but not for resource families” states Younkin. “We held training centrally, during the day time hours. In fact, both the prospective foster father and mother were required to attend a week long training, held during the days at a site of our choosing. This meant that these individuals had to take vacation time to become a resource family. For those who had no vacation, they had to obtain permission for a leave with no pay. This was not an incentive to recruitment.

This model is in the process of significant change. Today there are increasing numbers of orientation and training sessions held in communities. These sessions are held at night or on Saturdays. Resource families are able to arrange the training sessions around their work schedules. This has significantly enhanced recruitment efforts in the state. In addition, it was a statement to resource families that their perspectives and needs were honored. *“Prospective foster families need to know from the very beginning that we see them as partners and as critical to our overall success...modifying the training to better meet their needs was one concrete way of demonstrating this,”* says Younkin.

As the state continued to explore ways to improve its training model, it considered the significant need for families to care for medically fragile children. The concern expressed by resource families and social workers alike was insufficient training for resource families given the degree of medical care that medically fragile children required. State staff reviewed data to determine the

³⁷ Excerpt of a personal communication with Stephan Duplessis, resource family in Maine. December 2001.

communities where the highest number of medically fragile children resided in foster care. In these communities, hospitals were approached to partner in the state's training efforts. Because several of the hospitals already had training sessions as part of their staff professional development efforts, it was easy to link up resource families to these training activities. According to Younkin, this process has been very successful:

Foster families are getting what they need—comprehensive tutorials on a diverse array of medical conditions, how children with these medical conditions can act and respond in day to day activity, effective ways for the lay person to respond—when to call the physician for intervention, the depth of the training and its quality is very exciting. The hospitals have been recipients of a tremendous amount of good will from resource families. In addition, the state has spread the word that these hospitals are partnering to enhance the knowledge base of foster families and ultimately impacting the welfare of vulnerable children. “It has been so effective that these hospitals are now calling us and asking if we would like to co-craft the training schedules for the rest of the year. This has been a very effective and successful community partnership.

MONITORING THE PROCESS –GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE IN KENTUCKY

Sometimes the problem of recruitment and retention lies in the organization's general approach to customer service. According to a study by Friedman of recruitment and retention conducted in a public child welfare agency in Hillsborough County Florida, 63% of the resource families were lost between the intake call and the first orientation meeting.³⁸ In follow-up calls to those who failed to attend the orientation Friedman found that the most prevalent reason was that they were “no longer interested”. According to Friedman, “something during the initial call changed their mind.”³⁹ To try to combat this drop-out rate, Hillsborough Count initiated a process where a personal visit or telephone call was made within 2 days of the inquiry call by the prospective resource family. Their data showed that this personal outreach improved the response rate (those who attended the orientation) by 14.9%. An interesting statistic is that the lowest dropout rate occurred when the resource family was referred by another resource family.

The state of Kentucky was interested in this information and wanted to know: 1) if they lost a significant number of families in the intake process; and 2) if so, why. Their data analysis indicated that at least 50% of the families who called for information did not follow-up and attend the orientation meeting.

³⁸ Friedman, R. (1980). Difficult Job Of Recruiting Foster Parents. APWA.

³⁹ Friedman, R. (1980). Difficult Job Of Recruiting Foster Parents. APWA.

A “secret shopper” approach to assess the quality of the response by staff at the point of the intake call was instituted. An independent researcher from the University of Kentucky was asked to conduct the calls with intake staff. They were interested in assessing three primary pieces of information:

- how accessible is the information gathering process for prospective resource families.
- how accurate and complete is the information provided.
- how welcomed, encouraged, and supported the customer (potential foster parent) is likely to feel during the information gathering process.

Initial data suggest that staff showed a strong enthusiasm for the foster care program and that this enthusiasm was communicated to the caller. It was also found that the prospective resource families received the least amount of information about the following:

- emotional needs of children;
- homes for older children were needed;
- homes for children of various racial or ethnic backgrounds were needed;
- homes for children with disabilities were needed; and
- the training process for becoming a foster parent.

Kentucky is taking immediate steps to enhance the quality of the information shared during the first call.

The next section of this paper will explore the importance of relationships between resource families and staff from the child welfare agency. This complicated and often confusing relationship has direct impact on the retention of resource families and their willingness to recruit new families.

VI. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF RESOURCE FAMILIES: GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Once states recruit resource families, in some ways, the easy work is done. The challenge is to engage the resource family in such a way that they choose to remain a resource family. Barbell and Freudlich relate that surveys of foster families repeatedly find that the primary reason foster families leave fostering is a lack of agency responsiveness, communication and support.⁴⁰ They go on to cite a study from the National Commission of Family Foster Care stating that 60% of foster families withdraw from the program within the first 12 months for the following reasons:

- ◆ lack of agency responsiveness;
- ◆ insufficient emergency, weekend or vacation respite;
- ◆ inadequate consultation and support for social workers;
- ◆ poor agency response to crisis situations;
- ◆ disrespect for foster families as partners and team members; and
- ◆ few opportunities to provide input into training or services for foster parents.⁴¹

Do We Speak out of Both Sides of Our Mouths? The Love- Hate Relationship Between the System and Resource Families

What is behind this lack of support for resource families? Why is it so challenging to change the mindset of social workers regarding the worth and value of foster families in case planning?

Research suggests that part of the reason for the tension in the relationship between resource families and social workers is the confusion in the minds of social workers about an appropriate resource family role.

Currently, resource families take on numerous roles—some that can be anticipated and planned for and others that evolve as the child's needs become more evident. Resource families nurture the children in their care; provide access to medical care, support healthy development; they provide the more traditional parenting roles of discipline and guidance; they advocate on behalf of the children with schools as required by the state/county systems; and are asked increasingly to mentor birthparents.⁴² Within these multiple and possible

⁴⁰ Barbell, K. and Freundlich, M. (2001). *Foster Care Today*. Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support. Washington D.C.

⁴¹ National Commission of Family Foster Care. (1991). *A blueprint for fostering infants, children and youths in the 1990s*. Washington DC: Child Welfare league of America.

⁴² Child Welfare League of America. (1995). *Standards of excellence for family foster care*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

conflictual roles there is ample opportunity for the lines of responsibility and authority to become blurred, for resource families to become an advocate for the child to the exclusion of their role as a mentor and support to birth parents, for social workers to make assumptions that may be incorrect, and for the presumed partnership between the resource family and the social worker to become one that lacks trust and respect.

According to Diane DeLeonardo of Illinois, conversations with key stakeholders throughout the state of Illinois during their statewide tour provided insight on a broad system flaw that may be impacting the success of foster care recruitment and retention, not only in Illinois, but also across the country. She shared that:

*There is significant concern in the communities about how we (the state) treat folks that come forward to serve our kids. Included in this category of retention and support is training, preparation of families, services to families and children once a placement has been made including both casework and community services.*⁴³

“Word of mouth” is the strongest mechanism for both encouraging and discouraging new recruits” suggests DeLeonardo. This concern has caused the state to carefully evaluate its respite care options, its communication with resource families, and its staff training regarding foster care/social worker interaction.

A foster father from Minnesota who elected not to share his name told a personal story that validated this concern:

We have been foster families for a long time in Minnesota and I think that most of the county staff know our commitment to permanency and reunification. However, a 14-year-old boy that has been living with us for some time came to us one evening and said that he no longer wanted to pursue adoption. He told us that he had formed a deep bond with us, was really active in his school, and just wanted to live with us until he graduated. We told him to make sure and think it through. If he was sure then we would fully support that decision. When this young boy told the social worker of his feelings the first words out of the social worker's mouth were, “Have your foster families pressured you into making this decision?” My wife and I were shocked and so was the young boy. We were suspect immediately.” We confronted the social worker and even talked to her supervisor to little or no avail...the system just doesn't trust our motives...

One foster care specialist who asked that her name not be published shared her thoughts:

⁴³ Excerpt of a personal conversation. December 2001.

At the very core of the reasons why resource family retention and support is so difficult is that foster families are an anomaly in our society. We give lip service to the notion that "foster parenting is hard" or "we are looking for a few very special families" but in fact, in many ways foster parenting is juxtaposed to our defining values as a society and culture.

In the American culture we value the individual -- individual growth, individual achievement, individual stuff, individualism is at the heart of what we value and cherish. So, if someone comes along who says, "I want to make this sacrifice to help others because it's in my heart, or Jesus said to give, or I want to help a child", there is something in most of us that just doesn't trust this motive—we are suspect and we communicate this suspicion through code words such as "understanding a person's motivation", we imply "they are doing it for the money" or "they were abused when they were young and have issues" or they are "religious fanatics" if their motivation is based on a philosophical framework of God or church.

To further complicate the issue of supporting and retaining foster families is the reality that we are asking foster families to do something we don't really value in our society...."a village raising a child". As one family said to me recently "...the problem is that as a society we just don't live on that planet. We don't speak that language or embrace those kinds of values..." the sad reality is more often than not, should a member of the community come forward to say, I want to be a part of "the village that is raising this child" our first words are: "you have to be finger printed first". How does this engage and draw families to be a part of the community helping system?

The Director of the Resource Family Association from the state of Kentucky further described this "rift between resource families and the ongoing case workers:

It plays out from the moment the child is placed in our homes. Are we provided with adequate information about the child's history and background including the reasons for placement, the kinds of acting out we might expect, the permanency plan for the child? Are we provided with current information regarding the child's physical needs and the name of the child's primary care physician? If the social worker takes the time to provide this and other information to us, we enter into the care of the child clear that we are viewed as partners. If not, and if our requests for information go unheeded, we begin to feel like we are no more than drop off sites.

The state of Kentucky is also concerned that the way resource families are treated during the investigation of alleged abuse or neglect of children in care contributes to the problems with retention. "We are viewed as guilty before proven innocent...that is a significant deterrent to telling our friends and neighbors to become foster parents." In response to this concern, the state has

plans to implement the following:

- ◆ Standardize the child abuse and neglect investigation process across the state for resource families.
- ◆ Follow up procedures after the investigation need to be refined and defined—resource families should not be left out in the cold and should be allowed opportunities to process all that occurred to them, and their feelings about the investigation.
- ◆ Train designated staff.
- ◆ Educate and inform resource families regarding investigations in the process prior to licensure.
- ◆ Re-educate resource families while the investigation is underway—some may have been trained on the process of child protection investigations years before during their initial training and orientation.

While it is hard to concretize *why* resource families are often treated as second-class citizens by social workers in the field, the reality is that it occurs all too frequently. It would appear that staff training and close supervision are the logical vehicles to combat this significant practice issue. States need to provide opportunities for entry-level professionals to examine their values and their beliefs about foster care and its role in the child welfare system. State's need to help new workers understand the interconnectivity between the role of the social worker and the resource family—and each role should be validated for its contribution to the lives of children and families. Further, performance evaluations of child welfare staff need to evaluate the quality of the worker's relationships with foster families, their ability to work with families of different backgrounds and lifestyles and the impact these relationships are having on the outcomes for children in care. It might also be valuable for resource families to participate in worker evaluations—thus making the building of relationship more central to the social worker's success in the agency.

VII. POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

So what do we (all those who are part of creating policy, training and developing the social service system in this country) do about ensuring that there is a sufficient pool of competent, nurturing resource families to meet the needs of children and youth in care? Several policy and practice implications can be drawn from the learning that occurred as a result of this paper.

Recruitment Messages, Orientation and Training Must Reflect New Roles and Must Be Accessible

Historically, most of the recruitment messages have centered around “saving the child”. While this message is compelling, it presents a precarious trap in that those who respond to this kind of message, may not possess the characteristics to work effectively with the child’s birth family. Those states that have been most effective in recruiting resource families willing to work with birth families, have changed their message to reflect the evolving role of foster care—role modeling sound parenting skills to the birth family, supporting consistent visitation and helping a child work through the ambivalence about their birth parents. Utah’s message of, *Strengthen a Family...Become a Resource Family*, is an example of a message that communicates this paradigm shift.

Once a family expresses an interest in becoming a resource family, it is important that orientation and training support exploration of the family’s characteristics that may help or hinder them as resource families. Facilitating this exploration early in the process helps the prospective resource family sort out their ability to effectively carry out this complex role. This is best accomplished when the training is delivered by both the resource families and the agency staff. Further, new resource families and new line staff should be trained at the same time—ensuring the passage of common messages.

Finally, training has to be located in sites and during times that are accessible to resource families. Given the diverse working hours of families, training staff must be available throughout the day and evening hours and on the weekend.

Recruitment is About Community

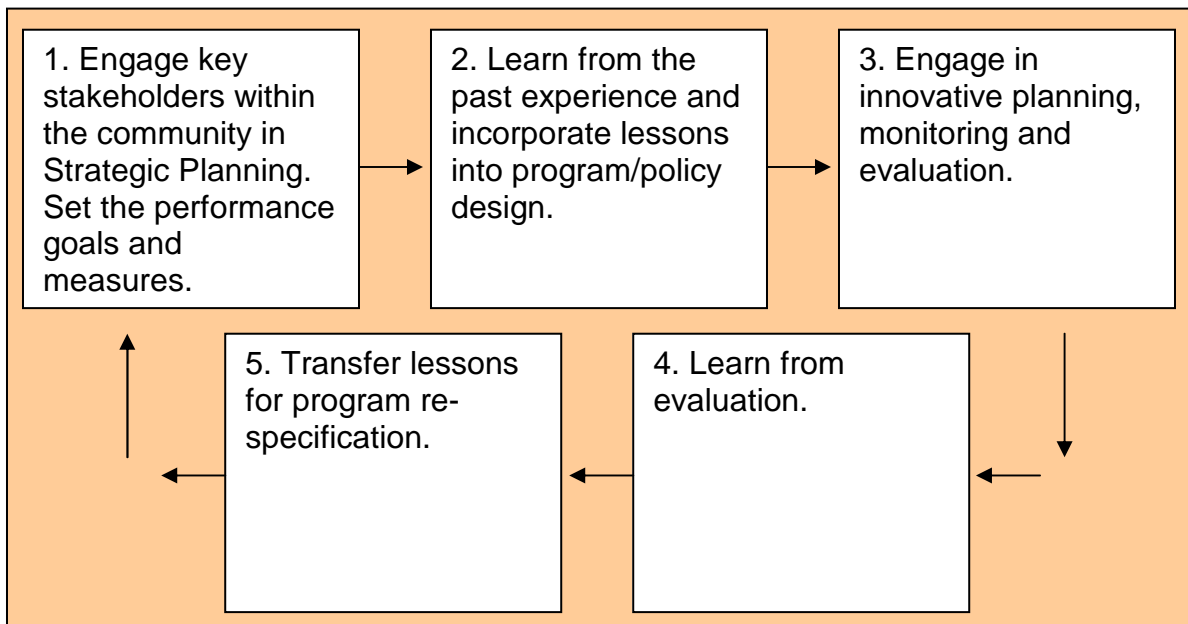
Without fail, recruiters from both the public and private agencies emphasized that the foundation of successful recruitment is building strong relationships with visible, influential community members. Successful recruitment is not something that can occur in a bubble. The most successful efforts were those where the community took ownership for meeting the needs of children in care. Community stakeholders must be engaged in the goal setting and recruitment process. This requires that leaders from the recruitment organization (public or private) meet with the community leaders and communicate the urgency and the importance of recruiting and retaining resource families. In order to engage community members, data need to be community-specific and include a description of the

children or types of children in care from the community needing homes (i.e., sibling groups, adolescents, children with special medical needs, children of certain racial or cultural backgrounds). This makes the recruitment efforts personal and more tangible to community members.

Once resource families are recruited, there must be a concerted effort to provide training and peer support activities within close proximity to the new resource family's community. The more local the ongoing training and support activities remain, the more this effort retains the flavor of "community".

Recruitment in Today's Environment Requires Structured Partnerships With Not-for-Profit Providers

There is shrinking public agency resources and growing needs. The challenge for the system is to prudently use *all* resources available. Most states have a pool of private providers that are embedded into the culture of communities, with prominent citizens serving as board members. A structured recruitment partnership with these providers infuses new energy and opportunities into the recruitment efforts of the public agency. Private providers operating within performance-based contracts are able to leverage their own political base to generate interest in the needs of children, including the need for resource families. The performance-based nature of these partnerships ensures that the types of families that are needed are actually recruited. The following chart depicts an effective, sustainable and transferable performance-based contracting model:



Retention is Recruitment—Public Agencies Must Support Existing Resource families

It is unacceptable that nearly 60%⁴⁴ of resource families recruited leave during the first year of fostering, citing lack of support as the primary reason for leaving. These are families who made the complicated decision to bring a child into their homes and lives. These are families that have gone through the arduous task of completing the licensing requirements of the state. And yet...after all of that they leave. And the reason cited is not the difficulty of the child or the challenges to their personal family life, (which would be understandable), but the lack of support by the very system that worked so diligently to recruit them. It only makes sense that if community members make the decision to dedicate their time and resources to a child, these community families needed to be adequately supported in their efforts. If they are poorly supported and left to manage complex children alone, a tremendous backlash results and this harms future recruitment efforts.

It is the responsibility of public agencies to ensure the following:

- ◆ That staff are trained during their orientation about the importance of creating strong partnerships with resource families.
- ◆ That staff view resource families as role models and mentors to the birth family and as such, when crafting case plans incorporate these roles into the planning.
- ◆ That staff practice this partnership by inviting families to all team meetings and asking resource families to provide feedback on the well-being of children in their care.
- ◆ That staff are trained to respond to resource families' requests for help in a timely manner and to be available for crisis situations.
- ◆ That respite plans are included in the case planning process, taking into account the needs of the child and the demands of the family.
- ◆ That fair processes are implemented in the investigation of allegation of abuse and neglect of children in foster care.

Conclusion

Today, states face significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of families who are able as Mary Ford from the North American Council on Adoptable Children suggests:

To do nearly an impossible task...love the child like their own, including being open to having a permanent role in the child's life, while at the same

⁴⁴ National Commission of Family Foster Care. (1991). A blueprint for fostering infants, children and youths in the 1990s. Washington DC: Child Welfare league of America.

time serve as a support and mentor for the birth families to help them successfully reunify with the child.

The new strategies highlighted in this paper offer promising approaches that states might explore in their quest to bring more resource families into the child welfare system.

The National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning and the Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support (CNC) are committed to further learning and exploration as the strategies for recruitment and retention continue to evolve.

APPENDIX

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Family and Children's Services Division

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Minnesota Foster Care and Adoption
Regional Recruitment Initiative

March 2001

PURPOSE OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

The State of Minnesota, through its Department of Human Services (hereafter “STATE” or “DHS”) is interested in awarding a grant for the development and management of a Regional Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment Initiative, utilizing Regional Parent Resource Developers.

It is the STATE’s intent to enter into a grant with a qualified responder for the provision of grant services set forth herein, this RFP does not obligate the STATE to complete the Request for Proposal process or to enter into a grant. The STATE reserves the right to cancel this RFP at any time and for any reason. Bidders to this RFP assume all risks and costs associated with the submission of their proposals.

In carrying out its broad mission, DHS has five articulated core values that guide the Department’s actions, which are the following:

1. We **focus on people**, not programs.
2. We are **responsible for the common good**.
3. We recognize and act upon our **mutual responsibility to each other**.
4. We **provide safety nets and ladders up** for the people we serve.
5. We are **partners with communities** to mobilize supports that **help people function and succeed**.

DHS’s Family and Children’s Services Division will utilize any contract executed as a result of this RFP.

The purpose of this RFP is to contract for a qualified vendor to assist DHS in both the development and management of a regional foster care and adoption recruitment initiative. The goal of the regional recruitment initiative is to have available in each region a pool of skilled, trained, and supported foster and adoptive families who reflect the racial and cultural diversity of children in need of placement.

BACKGROUND OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Recruitment of child foster homes is required in Minnesota Statute 260C.215. Each county social service agency must provide for diligent recruitment of potential resource families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in the state for whom homes are needed. This statute was based on the federal Multi Ethnic Placement Act of 1994.

In 1998, more than 18,800 Minnesota children were in out-of-home placement.

Reason for placements include child maltreatment, delinquency, child behaviors, family interaction problems and substance abuse issues.

In 1998, adolescents from age 13 through 17 accounted for 57 percent of those who entered care, although this group accounted for only 30 percent of the State child population. 26 percent of children entering care were less than eight years of age, although this group accounts for about 41 percent of the State child population.

By racial category, 59 percent of the children in out-of-home placement were White, 22 percent African American, 11 percent American Indian, four percent Hispanic and two percent Asian/Pacific Islander. The representation of African American children in out of home placement was five times greater than their 1998 proportion in the Minnesota child population. American Indian children were similarly over represented.

In 1998, White and Asian/Pacific Islander were more likely to enter care due to child-related reasons such as behavior problems, delinquency and status offenses. African American, American Indian and Hispanic children were more likely to enter care due to parent-related reasons such as child maltreatment, parental substance abuse, abandonment, and parental incarcerations.

Currently there are over 750 Minnesota children in immediate need of adoptive homes. Of these 750 children:

- ◆ Over 65 percent have been chronically neglected or abused.
- ◆ Over 60 percent are siblings who need to be adopted together.
- ◆ Over 60 percent are children of color.
- ◆ Over 40 percent have been diagnosed with psychological or medical disability.
- ◆ Over 40 percent are 6 to 11 years old.
- ◆ Over 35 percent are 12 to 18 years old.
- ◆ Over 20 percent are under 6 years old.

Since 1995, DHS has contracted with private and public child placing agencies and a statewide agency, for recruitment of foster care and adoptive parents.

Minnesota has a long history of requiring the child welfare system to address permanency planning for children in out of home placement. In 1998 the passage of the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, encouraged states to find adoptive and other permanent families for foster children and authorized the practice of Concurrent Permanency Planning. Concurrent Permanency Planning requires the child welfare worker to work towards family reunification, while at the same time developing an alternative permanent plan, such as adoption. The emphasis of Concurrent Permanency Planning is the attachment needs of children. The practice of Concurrent Permanency Planning has resulted in the need for families to actively support reunification efforts and be open to the

possibility of adopting the children in their homes, if they cannot return home. This change in practice has resulted in the need for more adoptive and resource families.

PRINCIPLES OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Adoptive families are needed who will make a life time commitment to children, and who will maintain an open relationship with the child's siblings and other family members.

Resource families are needed to provide care in a variety of ways. Some of them are:

- ◆ As emergency shelter homes, to provide care for children in crisis.
- ◆ As permanency resource families, to support the plan for the child to return home and to be available as a permanent family, if reunification is not successful.
- ◆ As special needs or treatment foster homes, to provide specialized care to children with behavioral, medical, or other needs.

It is DHS's hope that all children in need of foster care placement can remain with their extended families and home communities, that siblings can remain together in placement, and children will experience two or fewer placements.

Successful recruitment of foster and adoptive families requires an increased community understanding of foster care, adoption and the work of the child welfare system. Through this grant, DHS seeks to extend statewide recruitment efforts for foster care and adoptive homes with the utilization of a Regional Parent Resource Developer. Because foster and adoptive families are the best recruiters, we encourage the Regional Parent Resource Developers to be foster parents, adoptive parents, or preferably a resource family who has adopted.

Through the work of the Regional Parent Resource Developers, DHS wants to promote comprehensive community collaboration in the recruitment and support of foster and adoptive families to meet the needs of children and their families, for whom homes are needed. This collaboration would include: county social service agencies, private foster care agencies, community organizations, foster and adoptive parents, and citizens. Through this collaboration, regional advisory committees would identify their needs for foster and adoptive homes, develop and then implement a plan to meet the needs of their community.

GRANT AMOUNT

The STATE estimates that the funding available is \$245,000.00 per year for up to four years. A two-year contract will be awarded, followed by another two-year contact upon satisfactory performance. If additional funds become available

during the contracted period, they may be added to this amount. DHS plans to execute the contract by June 30, 2001.

CONTRACT FEATURES

Goal: Develop and manage a statewide foster care and adoptive parent recruitment program. This program will:

- ◆ Focus on regional needs for foster and adoptive families. Recruit families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children for whom homes are needed in that region.
- ◆ Emphasize foster and adoptive families recruiting foster and adoptive parents.
- ◆ Develop active participation from all areas of the community to promote, recruit and support prospective foster and adoptive parents.
- ◆ Advocate for members of the community to access culturally sensitive foster care licensing, completion of an adoption home study and foster care/adoption training.

Methods:

1. The Grantee shall recruit, hire, supervise, and support Regional Parent Resource Developers. The grantee shall:
 - ◆ Identify statewide regions in consultation with DHS.
 - ◆ Hire, prepare and support Parent Resource Developers. It is strongly recommended that foster families who have adopted be utilized in these positions.
 - ◆ Prepare the Parent Resource Developers to promote continuity of care for children in their region. Continuity of care would include: supporting foster families to work with families and family members in reunification efforts, supporting relative foster care, supporting permanency goals for children, and reducing placement disruptions.
 - ◆ Train Parent Resource Developers in community organization, cultural sensitivity, child welfare system, and communication skills. Identify other training needs.
 - ◆ Design supports for the Parent Resource Developers.
 - ◆ Address how the Parent Resource Developer will work with the current child foster care and adoption services in their region.
 - ◆ Assist Parent Resource Developers to promote foster care and adoption services so that licensed and trained foster and adoptive homes are available in the region, who reflect the cultural diversity of that region.
2. The grantee shall guide the Parent Resource Developers to establish advisory committees within the Developer's region.

- ◆ Membership in the Advisory Committee should include but not be limited to representatives from: county social service agencies, foster parents, adoptive parents, civic groups, private foster care agencies, churches, education system, tribal members, cultural and ethnic groups in the community, health providers, therapists, media representatives, and community leaders. Membership of the Advisory Committee should reflect the race and ethnicity of the population of the region.
 - ◆ Each Advisory Committee shall develop a foster care and adoption recruitment plan consistent with local agency needs. The plan should also address the efforts to recruit families that reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the children in need of placement in that region. The plan shall be consistent with Minnesota Statutes and the DHS recruitment plan. The plan should identify local agency needs, focus on the recruitment of homes for the region's children who are not being placed in their home community, address barriers that hinder continuity of care for children in the region, and seek ways to mobilize supporters in working together to recruit foster care and adoptive homes in the region.
 - ◆ The plan shall include the Advisory Committee's strategy to achieve specific goals, how the strategy will be implemented, and the role of the Advisory committee members and the Regional Parent Resource Developer in the execution of the plan. Members of the Advisory Committee shall be active participants in the implementation of the plan. Based on the needs assessment of the region, the Advisory Committee shall include a method to evaluate the plan's success.
3. The Grantee shall evaluate the results of each Regional Advisory Committee's plan.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

DHS expects the following contract outcomes will be realized and will include such outcomes as contract performance measures in any contract awarded.

The Regional Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment Initiative will increase community awareness and investment in children and families involved in foster care and adoption.

To keep DHS informed on progress, the Grantee will:

- ◆ Meet quarterly with DHS and provide a written report on the regional Parent Resource Developer's activities. Include information on the data collection that supports the regional need assessments, regional Advisory Committee goals, strategies, activities, and outcomes.
- ◆ Provide an annual written report, which compares the regional Advisory Committee's plan to the success of their efforts to develop foster and adoptive parents. The report should also address the efforts to recruit families

that reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the children in need of placement in that region.

Expectations in the first year of the contract:

- ◆ Regional Developers hired, trained and beginning work within three months from the award of the contract.
- ◆ Regional Advisory Committee meeting within six months of the award of the contract.
- ◆ Regional Advisory Committees have assessed regional needs for foster and adoptive parents, identified regional goals, and developed a written recruitment plan by the end of the first year.

DHS expects the Advisory Committee to compare their region's measurement in the following areas, and set goals using one or more of the statewide successful outcome factors. DHS expects successful outcomes at the end of the two-year contract to include:

1. Increase in the number of skilled, trained, foster and adoptive homes.
For example:
 - ◆ In the fourth through eighth quarter of the grant the number of adoptive families with completed home studies and foster families licensed in each region increase by at least 25 percent.
 - ◆ During the fourth through eighth quarters of the grant period the grantee will demonstrate that 75 percent of the developed foster homes were licensed by the county social service agency.
2. Increase the likelihood that children who cannot return home achieve permanency with a relative or foster parent.
For example:
 - ◆ In federal fiscal year 1999, 634 Minnesota children were adopted. Of the 634 children, relatives adopted 180 children and former resource families adopted 175 children. The ratio of adoptions by resource families and relatives is expected to increase by 25 percent by the end of the seventh quarter of the grant period.
3. Decrease the likelihood of placement disruption for children.
For example:
 - ◆ In federal fiscal year 1999, 57 percent of the children in placement experienced two or fewer placement settings. It is expected that this will increase to 75 percent for the sixth and seventh quarters of the grant period, which would indicate a decrease in placement disruptions.
4. Increase the expectation that siblings remain together in both foster care and

adoptive placements.

For example:

- ◆ Statewide 103 sibling separations were requested for adoption in the calendar year 1999. It is expected that sibling separations in adoption would decrease by 25%.

PARTICIPATION OF THE DEPARTMENT WITH THE GRANTEE

Staff at the Department of Human Services will provide technical assistance to all grantees. To monitor the contract, budget, and program DHS will conduct quarterly meetings. Partnership with the DHS Foster Care, Adoption, Kinship Training Program will be an expectation of the grantee.

QUALIFIED APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants are public, private and nonprofit agencies that can demonstrate in their proposal that they can develop and support this initiative. In order to achieve the contract outcomes set forth above, all proposals submitted must include the following features of the applicant:

- ◆ A commitment to support community development in meeting the placement needs of children within their home county. This commitment would include a demonstration of how principles of community organization would be used to develop and support both the role of Parent Resource Developer, and the regional advisory committees.
- ◆ Ability to secure a highly qualified project manager who will be responsible for all aspects of the bidder's performance of contractual duties.
- ◆ Capability to provide statewide services. However, proposals would be considered, which would individually address the needs of the seven county metropolitan regions of Minneapolis and St. Paul and the non-metropolitan regions. A responder could bid on metropolitan region, non-metropolitan regions or both. If a responder bids only on metropolitan or non-metropolitan, their budget would need to be half or less of the funding available.
- ◆ Ability to be an employer, and follow applicable Minnesota laws.
- ◆ Description of the process used to hire Regional Parent Resource Developers. It would be preferred that the Regional Parent Resource Developers have the previous experience as a resource family who has adopted children.
- ◆ Preparation of a budget for grant funds, including administrative cost,

salaries, and supports for Parent Resource Developers.

- ◆ It is expected that any grantee maintain any current efforts in foster care and adoption recruitment. Funds from this grant cannot be used to replace funding for current recruitment efforts.

All proposals must address, in sufficient detail, how the bidder will deliver the outcomes and incorporate the features set forth above. Simply repeating the outcomes and features and asserting that they will be performed is not an acceptable response. Bidders must submit a Statement of Work detailing how they will perform the services. The envisioned role of DHS in working with the bidders should also be clearly set forth.

Nothing herein precludes the STATE from changing these provisions through RFP addendums or contract negotiations, nor precludes bidders from proposing additional or different outcomes, requirements or features that may be more beneficial to the STATE provided that such additions or differences are clearly identified as such. Failure to address the outcomes and features specified in this RFP could, at the STATE's discretion, constitute a material deviation from the RFP, leading to the disqualification of the bidder's proposal from further consideration for contract award.

APPLICANT SELECTION PROCESS

Proposals will be reviewed and rated by a DHS review committee that includes community representatives such as county social service staff, foster parents, adoptive parents, and state agency representatives.

Proposals will be rated on the attached **Proposal Summary and Annual Program Budget**. Letters will be sent to all applicants to inform them of final funding decisions. Please do not call to inquire about the status of your grant application. Staff time is limited, and such calls will slow down the decision making process.

DHS reserves the right to reject any and all applications received as a result of this Request for Proposal. DHS will not pay for information solicited or obtained, pursuant to this application process. If a grant is approved, changes may be made based on availability of funds, requirements of the grant program, funding sources and recommendations from the review committee.

Questions about this RFP will be addressed at a Bidder Conference to be held on March 21 2001 at 1:30 .m. in Conference Rooms 1B at 444 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, Minnesota. Attendance at the Bidder Conference is not mandatory but is highly recommended. There will be no transcription of questions and answers from the Bidder Conference.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Applications must include all of the sections outlined in the PROPOSAL SUMMARY in order to be considered for the grant.

Proposal must be clear, understandable, and required sections must be easily found. DHS prefers an outline approach that retains the order listed in the attached PROPOSAL SUMMARY and Annual Program Budget. Proposal summary should be kept to a maximum of 8 pages, double spaced one inch margins on the top, bottom, and sides, and number 12 font. Letters of support for each proposal are limited to a maximum of three.

The attached **Proposal Summary** and **Annual Program Budget** will provide guidelines for the development of your application.

CONTACT FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

Deborah Beske Brown, Program Advisor
Telephone number: 651-296-4309
E-mail address: deborah.beske.brown@state.mn.us

APPLICATION CLOSING DATE

Each responder must submit Proposal Summary and Annual Program Budget, using the attached format. **Faxed or e-mailed proposals will not be accepted.**

All proposal packages must be submitted no later than 4:30p.m.on April 18, 2001, at the following address:

Minnesota Department of Human Services
Attention: Deborah Beske Brown
C/O: **Information Desk**
444 Lafayette Road
First Floor
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Late proposals will not be considered and will be returned unopened to the submitting party.