

Chapter VII

Community Alliance Building

1. Community Relationships

When your recruitment and retention program is stretched for time and money, how can you develop productive community relationships? This is one area where time up front pays big dividends down the line. Here are some tips from social workers in North Carolina:

- **Make it a win-win.** Figure out what you can offer to others in exchange for help with recruitment and retention. A business' name and logo on all your materials? A local mission activity for churches? Community service hours for local high school students?
- **Find one person who will champion your cause.** You need just one person in an organization to get excited about helping children in foster care, and that person will help you build the relationship over time. Is it the preacher's wife or the church secretary who knows how to get things done? Can you set up a meeting with the reporter or editor responsible for covering community events? Is there someone in a civic group who has personal experience with foster care?
- **Use the community education and public awareness material** from Chapter VI for your initial outreach to community groups. Be prepared to tell each group specifically what you are asking them for. Remember, think beyond "foster parents." Then make sure that someone—resource parent, staff member, or volunteer—will follow up and take the relationship to the next step.
- **Schedule time in your calendar** for building and maintaining community relationships. It may be one hour a week or every other week, or one day a month. In whatever way works for your agency, someone needs to have regularly scheduled time to make sure relationships bear fruit and continue year after year. It is not enough to send flyers to all the churches or schools in your county. It's the personal follow-up that makes the difference.

*Investing
community
relationships
today pays
big dividends
later.*

Thanks to Jeanne Preisler and Cumberland County DSS' Sandra Robinson for contributing ideas for this section.

2. The Regional Approach

Agencies, especially those that are smaller or in rural areas, can greatly benefit from a regional approach to recruiting, training, and retaining resource families. This will allow agencies to share resources and increase the pool of foster homes for everyone (USDHHS, 1995). Agencies can then make placement decisions based on the best match for a child, rather than placing children wherever they happen to have an open bed.

How might your agency collaborate with others in the same region?

- Offer joint MAPP/GPS classes (each agency hosts 1 or 2 classes per year that are open to families from the other agencies)
- Share information about available foster and adoptive homes on a regular basis (see information about existing collaborations below)

- Have a joint Recruitment & Retention Committee that funds and plans recruitment, in-service training, and appreciation events. You can use existing interagency committees, collaboratives, or other groups to lead this effort.

Who Should Be on a Regional R & R Committee?

- DSS and private agency recruitment, licensing, and foster care professionals
- DSS and private agency supervisors and program managers
- Resource families
- Youth in care
- Community members with experience and connections in relevant fields such as:
 - Media relations
 - Marketing/public relations
 - Fundraising
 - Local government
 - Local business/chamber of commerce
 - Local churches
 - Cultures and communities that reflect children in care in your region (for example, members of tribal organizations or Latino advocacy groups)

Existing Regional Collaborations

- **The Recruiter’s Network**
Includes a listserv of well over 100 professionals from public and private child-placing agencies in central North Carolina. Meets quarterly in the central region of the state for training and matching of families and children. To contact this group, send e-mail to: Jon.Hunter@rowancountync.gov.
- **WAFCA (Western Area Foster Care Association)**
Serves professionals from public and private child-placing agencies in western North Carolina. Meets quarterly in Western North Carolina for networking, policy and practice updates, and training. To contact this group, send e-mail to: JMillican@nazch.com or jgrindstaff@aohealth.com.
- **Local System of Care Collaboratives**
Many communities already have a foundation for interagency collaboration. Consider other ways these professional networks could support your agency’s efforts. Do they serve families that fit your targeted recruitment needs? Could they help a Child and Family Team consider permanency options for a child? Can you develop a joint community education campaign? Whether your network is new or well-established, efforts like this can strengthen relationships.

3. One Church – One Child Initiative

In many communities in North Carolina, churches and other religious organizations are one of the strongest and most reliable resources for families in need. While there are countless ways to involve religious communities in your agency’s efforts, Once Church – One Child is a popular and successful model.

In this model, you maintain a personal connection with a congregation, and rely on them for ongoing support. While originally this program developed to have churches provide support for a specific foster or adoptive child, it has now broadened in scope to providing a wide range of financial assistance, donated materials, volunteer hours, and

supportive relationships for youth in care and resource and birth families. In Appendix R you will find contact information and a sample newsletter from Rowan County's One Church - One Child Program. See also *Best Practices for One Church, One Child Model Programs* (Talley, 2008), which can be downloaded free of charge from <<http://www.nnaap-ococ.org/documents/OCOCBestPractices.pdf>>.

4. NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network

The NC Division of Social Services established NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network in 1999 through a contract with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. NC Kids provides recruitment services to each of the 100 county departments of social services in North Carolina free of charge.

Whether you utilize their services for your recruitment campaigns, your prospective waiting parents, or your waiting children, you will be meeting the MEPA requirement for diligent recruitment efforts and increasing the likelihood a waiting child will be matched with his or her forever family.

The team at NC Kids is committed to partnering with each public and private child-placing agency in North Carolina to ensure timely placement of children. This includes working with legal risk children and waiting families. Please review the list of services below and contact them with any questions.

LET NC KIDS HELP YOU!

- **NC Kids is a partner, not a competitor.** It is a state-sponsored organization that recruits foster and adoptive parents and supports child-placing agencies.
- **Register your children.** Remember all children must be registered within 30 days if there is no identified home. You can register legal risk children anytime for possible pre-adoptive matches.
- **Encourage prospective adoptive parents to register with NC Kids.** By registering, these families may have a better chance of finding the child they seek.
- **Request Heart Gallery Portraits of your legally free child.** You can specify where the children you are working with are featured. We have Heart Gallery exhibits all across the state.
- **Plan an adoption promotion event.** NC Kids' provides consultation to help you plan and put on a successful adoption promotion event.
- **Publicize your events.** NC Kids can provide publicity for all of your adoption and foster care related events. You can target a particular group to receive your announcements or send it to our entire database.
- **Use the NC Kids hotlines.** Social workers: call 1-888-NC KIDS-5 to place a child on the adoption registry. Families: call 877-NC KIDS-1 to get information about foster care and adoption.
- **Tell them what you want!** NC Kids strives to provide individualized support to every social worker when it comes to recruitment, matching, and referrals.
- **Reach out to the media.** Do you have a good relationship with a newspaper or TV station in your area? Let NC Kids know and they will contact them to request periodic features on waiting children across the state.

