

Chapter IX

Targeted Recruitment

1. Purpose

Targeted recruitment focuses your efforts on specific families or communities who are best matched to care for the specific children and youth in need of homes. Developing a targeted recruitment plan fulfills your agency's MEPA requirement; it also encourages you to focus resources and efforts in areas that are most likely to yield results. As explained below, there are three crucial steps to success in targeted recruitment.

2. How to Do Targeted Recruitment

STEP 1: Describe the children in care

Develop a profile of the children in care in your agency: how many are there in total? How many are in each category when broken down by age group, ethnicity, and special needs (sibling group, medical, educational, or emotional needs, etc.)?

STEP 2: Describe the homes currently available to them

Develop a profile of the foster homes and beds: how many are there in total? How many are in each category when broken down by ages of children accepted in the home, ethnicity, and willingness to care for special needs?

STEP 3: Make a plan to fill the gap

Identify and reach out to families who can care for the children most in need of homes. Here are some questions to guide you in identifying where to focus your efforts:

- a. Where might you find people who reflect the children in need of care? Use census data for your city or county to inform your efforts (www.census.gov/index.html). Consider neighborhood schools, day cares, faith communities, businesses, voting precincts, and civic or community organizations where you could focus your efforts.

GOLDEN NUGGET!

Your Current Families Can Help

In many cases, you can engage successful resource families in targeted recruitment simply by saying, "We appreciate all you do, and we need more resource families like you! How can we find them?" Resource families can:

- Reach out to their own friends, family and neighbors
- Advise you on how to be culturally sensitive in your outreach
- Tell you about the newspapers they read, radio and TV stations they tune in to, and places they shop so that you can target your community education efforts



- b. What professional or civic organizations might be well suited to caring for the children in need of care? For example, schools, hospitals, and medical and mental health associations have people experienced in caring for special needs or medically fragile children. Area support groups and advocacy organizations have people motivated to care and lobby for children with special needs.
- c. What current resource families might do well caring for these children with additional encouragement, training, and support?

Here are some questions to guide you in planning **how to reach out** to the groups identified:

- What agency staff or resource parents are from the targeted community or belong to the targeted group? A community member can help you decide where and how to target your message, and can help with follow up over time.
- What specific data can you use in your recruitment materials to highlight the need for resource families? For example, how many children are placed in foster care from that particular community and how many licensed homes are currently in that community? How many teens are in need of care and how many are placed out-of-county or in group placement due to a lack of family foster placements?
- How will you do your initial outreach/public information? What materials will you use (posters, brochures, flyers, business cards, etc.)? Where will you place them?
- What follow up will be done and who will do it? Will a staff person make follow up calls to select churches or schools? Will a resource parent speak to their civic group or PTA? Who will be responsible for maintaining contact with groups that agree to partner with you in recruitment and/or volunteer efforts? Remember that it's not just about a one-time effort: targeted recruitment often requires maintaining ongoing relationships with important leaders or organizations.

Source: Casey Family Programs, 2002

3. Examples of Targeted Recruitment for Teenagers

1. Develop current resource parents:
 - a. Have licensed families provide respite or mentoring for teens in care so they can develop relationships with them
 - b. Have teens and their resource parents speak to MAPP/GPS classes and participate in activities and events for resource families
 - c. Provide or refer families to training that prepare them for parenting teens, such as managing common teen behaviors and adolescent development
2. Target community groups that have experience with teens, including:
 - a. High School groups: PTAs, athletic events, teachers associations, etc.
 - b. Community groups: Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, church youth groups, teen community service organizations
 - c. Professionals: group home staff, mental health associations, etc.
 - d. Senior groups: civic and church organizations that have high numbers of empty-nesters or retirees

3. Ask teens:
 - a. Have ongoing discussions with teens individually and in groups about permanency: a goal of long-term support, stability, and a “home base” for every youth
 - b. Ask teens to talk and write about related questions, such as: Who do you consider family? What does family look like? What would you look for in a family? What would you bring to a family? How can you combine birth and adoptive family connections in your life? What do other teens in foster care need from foster families?

4. Examples of Targeted Recruitment for Sibling Groups

Siblings can be comforters, caretakers, role models, spurs to achievement, faithful allies, and best friends. No matter how close they are, most brothers and sisters share years of experiences that form a bond, a common foundation they do not have with anyone else (Viorst, 1986). If parents are unable to provide the necessary care, sibling attachments can be even closer (Banks & Kahn, 1982).

North Carolina policy directs us to place siblings together whenever possible.

Brothers and sisters separated from each other in foster care experience trauma, anger, and an extreme sense of loss. Research suggests that separating siblings may make it difficult for them to begin a healing process, make attachments, and develop a healthy self-image (McNamara, 1990). Indeed, because of the reciprocal affection they share, separated siblings often feel they have lost a part of themselves.

For these and other reasons, child welfare policy in North Carolina directs child welfare agencies to place siblings together whenever possible, unless contrary to the child’s developmental, treatment, or safety needs. To do this successfully, agencies must recruit and prepare resource families willing to take sibling groups. The following suggests ways child welfare agencies can ensure they are sibling-friendly.

Sibling-Friendly Agencies and Practices Keep Children Together

By Regina M. Kupecky, LSW

Reprinted, from the June 2001 issue of Recruiting News, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114; 651-644-3036; info@nacac.org; www.nacac.org

Although the child welfare field emphasizes birth family reunification and kinship adoption, the significance of sibling ties is often glossed over.

However, when a joint placement is in the children’s best interests, placing siblings together not only reduces the children’s losses and preserves kinship ties, it also reduces stressed agencies’ adoption costs. Siblings can help each other process the past, remember experiences, and move into the future together.

Creating a Sibling-Friendly Agency

Part of recruitment is having a sibling-friendly agency. First, educate the *entire* staff about the importance of sibling connections—everyone from the adoption recruiters and workers to the pre-service trainers, supervisors, intake workers, subsidy staff,

administrators, foster care departments, and support staff. A clear understanding of sibling connections could eliminate problems that result from separation and lack of visitation in foster care. Everyone must be on board, whether from a sense of child-centered practice, or simply from the fact that placing four children in one home is cheaper than recruiting, educating, and providing post-placement services to four families.

Next, recruit for siblings all through the adoption process:

- **Intake:** That first telephone call from a prospective parent is key to setting up a friendly working relationship. The staff person should mention siblings as an option. Families need time to process new ideas.
- **First mailing:** When information packets go to families, do they mention siblings? Send a few child-specific flyers, at least one featuring a sibling group. For later education packets, the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (www.calib.com/naic or 888-251-0075) has a useful article or Three Rivers Adoption Council (312-471-8722) can share a pamphlet I wrote, called *Siblings are Family, Too*.
- **Pre-service training:** If you don't have a section on siblings, fold it into sections about loss, birth families, or attachment. Be sure that parent panels include at least one family that adopted or fostered a sibling group.

Also consider these ongoing sibling-friendly practices:

- If your office displays posters of waiting children, are some of them sibling groups? Newsletter articles should also mention the need for homes for siblings.
- Do all staff members recruit, including secretaries, administrators, and janitors? If they go to churches, YMCAs, stores, or libraries, have they hung sibling-friendly posters?
- When recruiters go out to malls or fairs, do they always post pictures of sibling groups on their display?
- Are workers who complete family assessments talking about sibling groups in a positive way? Do they remind parents that few people adopt one child—families usually come back for more? By taking two or three at once, families eliminate extra paperwork.

No one wakes up one morning, calls an agency, and says “Do you have a sibling group of four children that includes three boys, ages 8–14?” The only way to successfully recruit families for specific children is specific recruitment.

- Siblings need a recruitment plan. List who is doing what and when. Ensure the plan's timely execution.
- A great picture of the sibling group together is a powerful tool. When separate pictures of each child are shown, it gives parents a feeling they can pick and choose whichever child they want (usually the youngest).
- Sibling groups almost always get the most calls when presented in the media. Feature sibling groups often in newspapers, television features, agency newsletters, posters, or wherever your agency recruits.
- Pre-service training groups are a great place to recruit homes for siblings—all the parents are there because they want to care for children. Ask the trainer if

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you can have five minutes to present a sibling group. Pass out flyers and show a video of the children together.

- Don't eliminate singles or childless couples. They don't disrupt any more than married or repeat parents.
- Make sure recruiters know about available subsidies. Many parents feel they can't adopt a group because of costs and are reassured to learn of financial assistance.
- When an event such as a recruitment picnic is planned, buy each sibling in the group the same shirt so that prospective parents can spot them all in the crowd. Make sure they eat at the same table or play together.
- Measure success in terms of events, not time. Agencies separate children because "we haven't found a family in five months." But have you tried every recruitment idea once, then again? If so and still no response, then reassess the recruitment plan.

Some sibling groups cannot be placed together. Prior to recruitment, sibling groups' attachments to each other and their primary caretakers as well as their safety when in the same home should be assessed. But with lifebook work and careful pre-placement preparation, many more sibling groups can be together than are presently. We have 117,000 children waiting in the United States. If we place them two by two that is only 58,500 homes—if three by three only 39,000 homes. So make your life easier and the children happier. Create a sibling-friendly agency and recruitment practice.

Ms. Kupecky has spent more than 25 years in the adoption field and frequently presents workshops about siblings, attachment, and preparing children for adoption. She co-authored *Adopting The Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special Needs Kids* and works at the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio. Contact her at 440-230-1960 ext. 5 or reginaku@msn.com.

Source: <http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/targeted.pdf>

5. Common Mistakes

- Sometimes agencies think that **big ticket items** such as billboards and ad campaigns will get the best results. In fact, such expensive general recruitment efforts are very unlikely to attract families willing to accept those children most in need of care. You will never get enough people calling your agency asking for a teenager to come and live with them. Once you know the specific children most in need of homes, it is much more efficient to focus your efforts on specific individuals and groups who are likely to respond to those specific needs.
- **Not using teens enough** in targeted recruitment efforts. Consider involving teens through speaker's bureaus or as panelists during resource family pre-service training. Continually seek to provide ways for resource families to meet teens.

6. Winning Strategies

The following winning strategies for targeted recruitment can be found in the "Recipe Cards" portion of the Appendix:

1. Using Foster Parents and Teens as Recruiters
2. Recruitment Parties

7. Sponsorship Ideas for Targeted Recruitment

Community organizations can play a vital role in supporting targeted recruitment efforts. The key is to identify organizations that are located in or involved with targeted communities, such as a Catholic Church that serves a large number of Latino families, a service sorority that has a large number of African-American members, or a school in a neighborhood from which a large number of children have been removed from their homes. Organizations can lend support to your efforts in countless ways:

- Hanging up posters
- Sending flyers or brochures to their mailing lists or listservs or home in students' backpacks
- Inviting someone periodically to speak to their group
- Manning tables at community events
- Hosting an informational meeting

Local businesses might pay for printing, promotional materials, or other expenses related to targeted recruitment. If a potential business sponsor won't do it for free, they might provide these things in exchange for a mention in the printed materials or another marketing plug.

Sources: Goodman, 1999; Zemler, 2001