



AdoptUSKids

Together we hold their future



PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

*Getting More Parents for Children from
Your Recruitment Efforts*



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Your Recruitment Efforts*

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Purpose for this Guide

This guide is for and dedicated to all of the people in child welfare who have a hand in recruiting and preparing foster and adoptive parents to serve our nation's children. This includes the recruiters, the trainers, the assessment social workers, the placement staff, the foster and adoptive parents, and volunteers who work in a "virtual" team to make this world a better place for our nation's foster children.

This Guide contains many tips that individuals or teams can use to improve recruitment results. It is designed to help you look at your local response process from that important first call to when a child is placed with a new family. It challenges you to walk with the parents on their journey. It highlights practices that can help you and your team be responsive to the concerns of parents and reduce the time it takes them to become foster and adoptive parents.

.....
"We are promoting a definition of recruitment that is results-based and inclusive of all persons in the agency who have a hand in helping a prospective parent become a foster or adoptive parent."
.....

For purposes of this guide, the response process is presented in seven steps. *AdoptUSKids* does not encourage a strict linear sequence of activities. Many agencies will have a different sequence of steps and/or do several steps concurrently, especially when there is a foster parent or relative adoption involved.

This Guide is one of three in the series, "Answering the Call," publications from *The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids* designed to help States improve adoption and foster care recruitment outcomes. The other publications are:

- ***Recruitment Workplan Guide for Adoption and Foster Care Managers***
- ***Answering the Call Family Pocket Guide***—This is designed to answer frequently asked questions and help parents keep track of their personal journey through the process.

Our hope is, after working with you, more recruited parents will be motivated and empowered to become a part of the team in this vital work of achieving permanency for our most vulnerable children.

Welcome from AdoptUSKids

NOTES

You're busy. We know you have a mountain of information and forms to master as part of your position in child welfare, not to mention your caseload and other work, so you rarely have time to read and research. But you do want to be informed about the latest information on recruitment for foster and adoptive parents so that you can get better results from your efforts.

Concise and to the point, this guide for recruitment practitioners summarizes current information on promising practices in keeping families involved from their first contact with the Agency until a foster child is placed with them. It points you to web pages and other sources of practice wisdom, so you can keep up to date on emerging thinking on the subject of recruitment to placement.

During the past several years, States have reported that holding on to families to adopt and foster children is becoming a serious crisis. This impedes their ability to meet timely safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children.

In 2002 the Children's Bureau entered into a Cooperative Agreement with The Adoption Exchange Association and its partners (*The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids*) to do the following:

- Provide technical assistance and training to States and Indian tribes
- Devise and implement national adoptive and foster family recruitment and retention strategies, including national recruitment campaigns and an annual recruitment summit
- Operate the *AdoptUSKids* photolisting website
- Encourage and enhance adoptive family support organizations
- Conduct a variety of adoption research projects

You, and the families you prepare to foster and adopt, are the heart and soul of this important mission.

AdoptUSKids will seek opportunities to promote the need for adoptive and foster families through national media and other contacts. Whenever we are able to give the State(s) an advance "heads up" and assistance in incorporating national activities in their recruitment plans, we have pledged to do so.

In partnership with the Children's Bureau, the Administration for Child and Families (ACF), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the

Advertising Council, *AdoptUSKids* is proud to announce its National Ad Campaign to encourage adults to adopt children who are in foster care. This multi-media advertising campaign is set to launch in the spring of 2004. It is a three year project.

The television, radio, print, and Internet public service announcements for this campaign are being created and distributed to national media through the Ad Council, which has a 60-year history of marshalling talent from the advertising and media industries to deliver critical messages to the American public. The Ad Council icons and slogans are woven into the very fabric of American culture—from Smokey Bear’s “Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires” to the United Negro College Fund’s: “A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste.”

Although the public service announcements will focus on children needing adoption, States and local agencies are being encouraged to use this exceptional opportunity to build public awareness about the need for both adoptive and foster parents for their children who need care and permanency.

AdoptUSKids is currently working with the Children’s Bureau to provide technical assistance to States and Tribes to help them plan their State and local response to the Ad Council Campaign and other national recruitment initiatives. This Guide is one of three publications that are intended to help fulfill that purpose. They are written to be applicable to all types of recruitment efforts used by a State and local office.

It is our most sincere hope that the *AdoptUSKids* National Ad Campaign, combined with supportive materials and other ongoing national campaign initiatives from *AdoptUSKids*, will bring more and more committed parents to your door. We hope that the practitioner’s guide will help you get the results you want from your work with foster and adoptive parents on behalf of our nation’s children. And, finally, we hope that you will see *AdoptUSKids* as an effective collaborator with you in reaching your goals.

Wishing you much success,

Barbara Holtan

Barbara Holtan, MSW, MA,

Executive Director of the Adoption Exchange Association, Project Director for The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids, a service of the Children’s Bureau

Part I: Background and Definitions

NOTES

Definition of Recruitment Used in the *Practitioner's Guide*

Recruitment includes all outreach, educational and supportive activities that an organization uses to interest and help an individual and/or family become a foster and/or adoptive parent. This includes all activities from outreach and/or first contact to placement of a child with a licensed and/or approved parent.

For purposes of this guide, we include some activities that others may call “retention” or family preparation. Our definition is comprehensive, because we are promoting a definition of recruitment that is results-based and inclusive of all persons (practitioners) in the agency who have a hand in helping a prospective parent become a foster or adoptive family. The intended result of recruitment is the placement of a child in a prepared and committed foster and/or adoptive home.

Types of Recruitment this Guide is Designed to Address

The *Practitioner's Guide* is specifically designed to help you develop an effective agency and individual response system to all your recruitment efforts, not just national recruitment initiatives. Regardless of what type of recruitment is used to locate a family, the principles of getting results from recruitment are the same. [AdoptUSKids](#) has developed a separate guide, “Recruitment and Marketing Kit,” in collaboration with the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption, which will give you specific recruitment techniques and ideas.

The types of recruitment usually mentioned in the literature are described below:

General Recruitment—Broadcasts the need for foster and adoptive parents, builds public interest and awareness. It is useful for setting the stage for more targeted recruitment and drawing in a wide variety of families. Examples include: billboards, public service announcements, radio and advertising, agency publicity, e.g., around National Adoption Month (November) and National Foster Care Month (May).

Targeted Recruitment—The organization knows the population of children it needs to serve through fostering and adoption and bases recruitment strategies and messages on their needs. It has a good understanding of the demographics, including locations, of the people who typically foster and adopt these children.

Examples of targeted recruitment include: neighborhood and faith based initiatives; incentive programs for resource parents to recruit others; posters and flyers at places where resource parents typically shop; invitational receptions in the homes of parents.

Child Specific Recruitment—This type of recruitment is based on finding a family for a specific child through aggressive outreach efforts, including cross-jurisdictional efforts. This method is usually used in adoption, but rarely in foster care. Typical examples include: newspaper or television features of a specific child or sibling group, e.g., Wednesday’s Child or photo listing a child on AdoptUSKids.org. Recruitment efforts are “targeted” to those people in the areas where they are most likely to respond and/or on a statewide adoption exchange.

A New Category: Child Centered Recruitment—[AdoptUSKids](http://AdoptUSKids.org) is seeing a fourth type of recruitment being emphasized, which we call “child-centered recruitment.”

These methods are being utilized by some agencies for older children, who wait for adoption. This practice starts with an assessment of the child, includes the child if he or she is old enough, and aggressively searches for lost relatives (birth relatives, grandparents, possibly aunts, uncles, cousins) and/or other persons who are important to the child. This type of recruitment is being used for children in foster care, as well as for children and youth who are waiting for families after termination of parental rights has occurred.

.....
*“Foster and adoptive parents
 are the most important
 resource we have to give the
 children we serve.”*

Child-centered recruitment is consistent with the values of “Family Centered Practice” and kinship care.

Role of National Campaigns in Recruitment

National media campaigns build public awareness and support and interest families that might not be reached through other means. They are intended to provide a positive image of foster care and adoption and provide a foundation for your more targeted recruitment efforts. It is very expensive for individual States to launch such campaign efforts. And, it is almost impossible for local agencies to secure the kind of public service announcement schedule that the Ad Council can provide.

11 Things a Practitioner Can Do to Improve Recruitment Outcomes

NOTES

1. Be informed about local, State and national recruitment initiatives and calendar. This information will help you schedule your work so you can be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to the possibility of an influx of inquiries.

2. Regardless of what your job is, volunteer to participate in your agency's community recruitment projects. From the agency director to the person who answers the telephone, recruitment is everybody's job. Successful agencies encourage all staff and resource parents to be mindful of the need for families wherever they go and help out with recruitment.

3. Be customer-friendly in your approach. Foster and adoptive parents are the most important resource we have to give the children we serve. How you treat them will determine whether they stay in the process and, ultimately, become part of your team. Try to put yourself in their shoes at every stage of the process. How would you like to be treated?

4. Know the characteristics and needs of the children in your area who need foster and adoptive parents. Speak of the children who need care and the role of the foster and adoptive parent optimistically and honestly. As prospective parents go through the process, continue to provide them with reliable information to make informed decisions about fostering and adopting, including full disclosure regarding the children, their needs and service needs of birth families. Respect the parents. Give them the opportunity to explore areas where they may have doubts. Trust their ability to make good decisions for themselves. This can be done at all stages of the process.

5. Be knowledgeable about all of the steps of the recruitment to placement process. Prospective parents will have lots of questions. Be prepared to answer them whether you are answering the phone, providing training or doing a home visit. Promise to get back with answers to questions you can't respond to on the spot.

6. Work to rule people in, not out of the process. It is important that the practitioner realize that the most ordinary, and sometimes unusual, people have grown into amazing resource parents with training and support. Most of the time parents present themselves to the Agency for an altruistic purpose. They have passion and

emotion about this. Our challenge is to learn how to maintain that passion and turn it into informed commitment.



7. Try to utilize seasoned foster and adoptive parents to help support new parents through the process. Many agencies are partnering with their resource parents and/or parent groups to help in recruiting. Parents handle initial inquiries, participate in home visits, are part of the training team and provide support to new parents during the process. Agencies that do this are modeling the team process from day one.

8. Collaborate with other community workers and organizations. Networking with community groups and partnering on recruitment efforts can be satisfying, supportive and productive for the practitioner. Faith based and community based organizations that endorse your efforts can bring new families to your door. These organizations can also provide space and resources to make your orientation and training meetings more accessible to parents and you are likely to get better attendance as a result.

9. Be a team player. Everybody who has a hand in recruiting and preparing families to foster and adopt can be made to feel that they are part of a team in a very important endeavor. This is a complex process that involves handoffs from recruiter to trainer, to family assessment worker, to placement worker, etc. All involved should have the same value system and a sense of urgency about completing the work as soon as possible.

10. Be sensitive to the prospective foster and adoptive parents' sense of time. The longer it takes to move from step to step, the less likely the family will stay in the process. However, if a parent is treated well and helped to feel part of the team early on, he/she is more likely to stay the course. It is important to be honest about the reasons for delays when they occur and to help the parent use this time in productive ways, e.g., involve them with other resource parents.

11. Understand your role in and the importance of tracking and evaluation to

improve recruitment outcomes. Organizations that are customer-oriented are beginning to look at the quality of their interactions with resource families at every stage in the process. They need cooperation from people on the “front line” to get good data and feedback.

Some agencies are starting to track how long each step of the process takes and are looking specifically at the time prospective parents have to wait between steps. These agencies seek to understand the reasons why people drop out (Casey Foundation, 2001).

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, families are often lost in the transition between steps and multiple handoffs from one staff person and/or stage of the process to another, as illustrated below:

When Do Gaps Occur?	
BETWEEN	AND
The first call	Orientation
Training	Application
Assessment	Approval
Orientation	Pre-service training
Application	Assessment
Approval	Placement

This *Practitioner’s Guide* pays special attention to transitions and gives you some tactics you can use to support and keep families motivated during waiting periods.

The Practitioner's Values and Challenge



A committed staff person and/or team with a positive attitude is the most crucial element in reaching success.

You have a very challenging position and nobody expects you to perform miracles. You work hard and get good results most of the time. There are no single or simple solutions to improving recruitment results, but there is a pathway to success that you can follow.

NOTES

First—Remember, your job is to listen, support and teach the prospective parents everything you know that will help them succeed as foster and adoptive parents. Recognize that parents, not social workers, are responsible to care for the children 24-7 and your job is to empower them to be the best they can be.

Second—Engage experienced resource families as team members in recruitment, training, family preparation and post-placement activities to support and nurture new families through the system. This will lift your burden somewhat, and you will feel supported as well.

Third—Probably the most important thing you can do is to be vigilant about your own cultural, racial, social class, and personal biases. Everybody has some and they may cause you to be less effective and unsatisfied in your work.

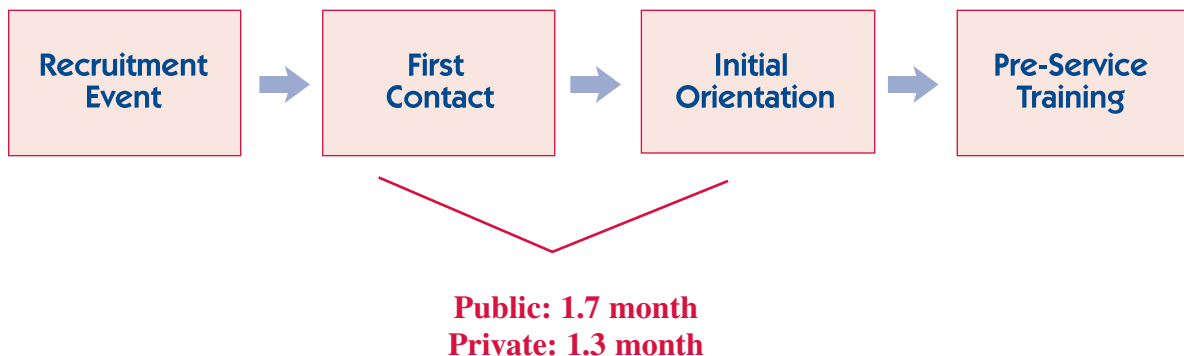
Fourth—Be a team player. Work on your peer relationships, so that handoffs can occur with your personal touch. Do your own part on time, so parents don't get hung up in the process. Advocate for regular cross-functional meetings to reinforce the organization's mission and beliefs and plan better processes and hand-offs to achieve the right goals.

Finally—Simply try to do your best. We guarantee if you develop good rapport with your resource parents, consider them part of the team and help them grow in autonomy and competence, you too will reap more satisfaction from your work and have the results you desire.

Part II: Examining and Optimizing the Recruitment

Time: This example is based on a survey of 11 public and 57 private agencies in one State, conducted in 2000.

How Long Does it Take?



Purpose of Part II

In this section we will be looking at each of the seven steps shown above, and exploring the process from the agency's as well as the prospective parent's point-of-view. Our objectives are to explore (1) how this seven-step process can be made more prospective parent (customer) focused and (2) how time can be optimized to retain and prepare resource parents for the challenges ahead.

We will be addressing three questions:

- What results are we looking for at each step?
- How does this look from the parent's point of view?
- What do successful agencies do?

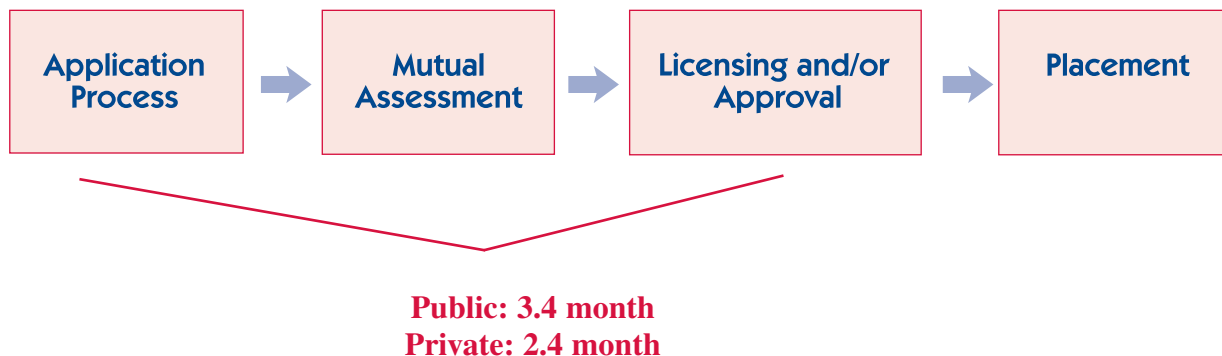
The process flowchart shown above leaves many questions unanswered. Do you have similar questions about your process?

- How are prospective families valued by the Agency?

Process from First Inquiry to Placement

This chart shows average time between steps in a seven step response process. Each State and agency is different, but it usually takes 7–12 months from first inquiry to placement.

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- What is the total time it takes from the start of step 1 through the completion of step seven?
- How long does each step take and how much time elapses between steps and how is this time managed?
- How many prospective parents enter at step 1 and how many of those complete step seven?
- How many parents drop out at each stage and why?
- How frequently are initial orientation meetings held?
- How many pre-service training sessions are held?
- Are the orientation and pre-service sessions held at times and places that meet parents' needs? When is the application step usually started?

We will be examining these questions and others as we go through each step of the process in part II of this guide.

Step 1: First Contact

NOTES

How does the agency welcome prospective parents in and do initial follow-up to preserve and build relationships with parents?

What results are we looking for at this step?

- Make a good first impression. The prospective parent feels welcomed and encouraged.
- Get information, answer questions, motivate the parent to come to the first orientation meeting.
- Log inquiry and data about prospective parent.
- Send packet of information.
- Schedule attendance at first orientation.

How does this look from the parent's point of view?

At this stage the parent is driven to make a call due to an emotional connection. Perhaps they have a friend or relative who is a foster/adoptive parent. Perhaps they

just saw a public service announcement that really hit home with them. For whatever reason, they have become motivated to make a difference for a child and are inquisitive about how to make this happen. This is a very personal experience. Parents want affirmation and encouragement, plus some practical advice and information about how to proceed.



Impact of wait time—Parent may start to have self-doubt if the wait is prolonged. Others may be discouraging them. They become irritated. If no one gets back to them, they may ask: Where is the urgency? Why am I not being valued?

What Agencies Do To Get Best Results

NOTES

1. Create a culture where recruitment is everybody's job from director to receptionist, including current resource families.
2. Cross-train foster and adoption staff to do recruitment together.
3. Have a special recruitment 800 number and a real person answering the phone; have access to a translator for return call.
4. Prepare the person who answers the phone to answer most questions. Don't bounce the caller around from person to person.
5. Establish standards for immediate personal responses to inquiries.
6. Make personal visits and/or follow up telephone calls within a few days of initial inquiry.
7. Use seasoned foster/adopt parents to follow-up.
8. Have a customer-service orientation, make prospective parents feel welcomed, respected, accepted and needed.
9. Provide persons who have first contact and/or take first calls with talking points rather than a script and with answers to commonly asked question.
10. Provide training to all who come into contact with resource parents on how to handle the first call. Emphasize cultural differences in training.
11. Provide information on the children who need homes:
 - Age and various racial ethnic backgrounds
 - Emotional needs of children
12. Provide information on the pre-service training process.
13. Send notes and meeting reminders at least a week before the first orientation or training session.
14. Put the parents on a mailing list for newsletters.
15. Periodically audit the agency's first contact approach:
 - Use a "secret shopper" method in which agency staff call in to personally experience the quality of response.
 - Have auditors use a check list to rate the experience and give consistent feedback.
 - Ask: Do we respond in a way that encourages the caller to bring friends to orientation?

Step 2: Initial Orientation

NOTES

How does the agency welcome, support and build on the prospective parent's initial enthusiasm for helping these children while giving them the essential information they need?

What results are we looking for at this step?

- Establish a foundation for a mutually respectful relationship with a prospective parent. This is the most important thing you can do at any step.
- The parent walks away with a good basic understanding of:
 1. Who the children are that need care
 2. The role and responsibilities of foster/adoptive parents
 3. The process they need to go through
 4. Awareness of the next steps, and desire to continue with the process
- Parents have a good packet of information that communicates welcome and addresses most of their initial questions.
- They have a scheduled date for their pre-service training and the name and phone number of a real person to contact for questions and support.
- When parents leave the room, they feel valued, optimistic, connected and want to continue to explore this journey.

How does this look from the parent's point of view?

This is a serious step. Many parents will become discouraged. They may be hearing the real challenges of fostering and adoption for the first time. They learn:

- These children have had a tough journey of their own
- They may be asked to interact with birth parents
- They will have to go through background checks
- The complexity and length of the process

Impact of wait time—Families may experience self-doubt and fears if they don't have some way to maintain a connection and obtain reassurance. This is a critical stage where families may self-select out, some for good reasons, but others may opt out who would have been good resource parents.

What Agencies Do To Get Best Results

NOTES

1. Make follow up calls and send notes to encourage people to come to orientation.
2. Have a regular, frequent schedule of orientation meetings.
3. Hold the meetings in an accessible, community location (on bus route) and at times convenient to parents.
4. Provide parking, handicapped access.
5. Encourage people to bring friends to this first meeting.
6. Organize orientation meeting as receptions or open houses.
7. Include seasoned resource parents to help welcome and provide information.
8. Provide childcare or reimbursement for childcare.
9. Provide hearty snacks or a meal and refreshments.
10. Hand out a welcoming packet of information that gives a clear and accurate message about fostering and adopting and the children who need care.
11. Consider using the *AdoptUSKids Answering the Call Family Pocket Guide*.
12. Explain up front what the requirements are and why background checks are necessary.
13. Try to anticipate and address questions and concerns, as this may be the parents' first exposure to the realities of fostering.
14. Encourage prospective parents to proceed to training to get more information and help to make their decisions.
15. Offer time after the open house to answer individual questions, in private if requested.
16. Provide individualized help to persons with language or reading difficulties.
17. Provide direct access phone numbers so that people can have private follow up conversations.
18. Make a good first impression—don't turn off a prospective parent.
19. Schedule first pre-service training session as soon as possible, after open house (preferably within 2-3 weeks).

Step 3: Pre-Service Training

NOTES

How does the agency involve prospective parents in a learning process that:

- Prepares them for fostering/adopting
- Creates a basis for teamwork with the agency and
- Contributes to their growth and development as parents

What results are we looking for at this step?

Prospective parents will:

- Understand the requirements and application process
- Develop new understanding of parenting skills related to children in foster care
- Have met and conversed with other prospective parents, staff and experienced resource parents
- See themselves as part of an enthusiastic, hard-working and competent team
- Have sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether to apply to become a foster or adoptive parent
- Know what type of child they can best parent and what type of parenting resource they will be, e.g., foster, adoptive, respite, foster-adopt
- Have started the application process

How does this look from the parent's point of view?

- Prospective parents came with a dream, and now they're faced with reality. Foster care and adoption is not easy.
- They are being bombarded with lots of information. And they may feel like they're on an emotional roller coaster. Sometimes they want to continue and some times they want to duck out. This is a period of self-selection and reflection.
- They need to face their real motivation for wanting to do this and their values. They have questions: Should I stay the course? How will this affect my marriage, my other children, my finances, my privacy and other life goals? They need to feel like a valued member of a caring community.

Impact of wait time—Stretching the process out unnecessarily may irritate parents. If a trainer/agency is not sensitive and supportive, the parent may drop out.

What Agencies Do To Get Best Results

NOTES

1. Send reminder notes a week before training starts.
2. Compress training program to the shortest time possible, while maintaining quality.
3. Offer several options for training location to meet the needs of the families, including neighborhood settings.
4. Hold training at times convenient to parents, e.g., 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., weekends or on Saturday mornings and on public transportation routes with free parking.
5. Keep in mind safety concerns of participants during the winter months when it turns dark early in the evening.
6. Provide childcare for people with pre-teens and children.
7. Have coffee, soft drinks, snacks, and/or light dinner available as another way of showing respect to the parents.
8. Use experienced trainers and/or contract for trainers if internal staff are not able to provide the training.
9. Contract with and train foster, adoptive, and kinship parents to be part of the training team.
10. Have panel presentations including experienced resource parents, birth parents, older youth in foster care.
11. Have recruitment/licensing staff attend some sessions in order to maintain a continuing relationship with the inquiring parents.
12. Provide on-site fingerprinting, with best quality equipment.
13. Choose a pre-established curriculum that employs good adult learning theories and is consistent with your organization's values, needs and goals.
14. Have ample staff available to answer questions or concerns personally with participants.
15. Track training attendance and offer opportunities to make up missed sessions.
16. Stage a graduation ceremony and celebration for participants and their invited support people.
17. Include director or designee as the guest speaker and share a special meal together.
18. Send "missed you" cards to parents who are absent.
19. Do exit interviews for dropouts and contact them again in six months to re-invite them to training.
20. Keep the plight of the children and their pictures in front of parents during training, so that they sustain their passion and focus.

Step 4: Application Process

NOTES

Agencies vary as to when they give prospective parents applications to complete. Some provide the application during orientation, some during or after pre-service training. This step is usually concurrent with step two, “orientation,” or step three, “pre-service training.” It is described separately here as it is valuable to understand its various elements and importance to parents.

How does the agency make the application process as simple and non-threatening as possible, while meeting all the necessary requirements? Agencies differ in when they provide the application, but it is usually necessary to have an application before any formal “checking” occurs.

What results are we looking for at this step?

- Application proceeds in parallel with other processes, so as to reduce the total time to placement.
- Application is filled out completely, accurately and quickly.
- Potential eligibility requirements are identified and resolved early on in the process.
- Applicants understand the process and are provided with the help they need from start to completion, e.g., language, filling out forms, getting references, medical, legal and other records.

How does this look from the parent’s point of view?

- Parents want the application process to be kept simple and straightforward. They don’t want to feel they are being raked over the coals.
- If there is a real or perceived requirement(s) problem, a parent needs to talk with someone who is sensitive, discreet and helpful.

Impact of wait time—Most parents will be anxious about filling out an application. As time moves on, the worries can be extended and magnified.

.....
“Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from their neck that reads: ‘Make me feel important!’ Never forget this when working with people.”
.....

What Agencies Do To Get Best Results

NOTES

1. Provide simple, straightforward application forms; revise them if they are too problematic for a lot of applicants. Keep paperwork as simple as possible.
2. Explain the application process and necessary requirements clearly and as soon as possible, usually at the first orientation, first pre-service meeting or home visit. Remember to give parents plenty of warning so they can psychologically prepare for intrusions in their private business.
3. If the State requires fingerprints or other hard-to-get information for background checks, do it on site and as early as possible to decrease bureaucratic processing time.
4. Have the application and parental consent forms in hand, prior to seeking private information from parents or about them.
5. Try collecting information in small pieces, starting at the first session and continuing over time.
6. Encourage applicants to provide references and a doctor's statement as soon as possible.
7. Provide special assistance for applicants who need it, e.g., a translator or help in reading. Additional home visits may also be needed to help complete applications.
8. Have a reliable tracking system for applications and related paperwork, so that requirements are complete and/or problems identified and eliminated as soon as possible.
9. Have the application and other technical requirements, e.g. references, medical and background check, completed prior to starting the mutual assessment step. This practice allows time to eliminate possible glitches in advance and reduces overall wait time for parents.
10. Try not to turn anyone away completely. Parents who are not ready, interested or legally eligible, may be able to fulfill volunteer roles, e.g., answering phones, providing respite, tutoring, etc.

Step 5: Mutual Assessment and Homestudy

NOTES

How does the agency engage prospective adoptive and foster parents in understanding the implications of fostering/adopting and making decisions that are “right” for them?

This is the time that the agency licensing or family workers meet with prospective families in their homes to talk with them about their personal history, family relationships, reasons for fostering and adopting, and their support network. The agency will determine whether the home is safe and has sufficient room for a foster or adopted child. The idea is not to screen people out but to enable all sides to see if placement will or will not work.

What results are we looking for at this step?

- All participants see clearly whether placement will or will not work
- Parents and their household members are prepared and ready to proceed to placement
- Parents who are not ready or are not legally eligible for fostering/adopting are considered for other roles
- Parents and staff see this as an educational and strengths-based process

How does this look from the parent’s point of view?

- Parents don’t want to be judged. They wonder about what cultural, racial, social class or other biases an agency or a particular staff person may bring to the process.
- Parents may be nervous and worried that they won’t make the cut. This may come across as shyness, lack of cooperation, incompetence or other negative responses.
- They may take rejection very personally and may feel so wounded that they reject the agency’s attempts to involve them as volunteer or future parents.

Impact of wait time—The process is building to a life-changing decision. Applicants may become resentful if made to wait too long for a decision from the Agency.

What Agencies Do To Get Best Results

NOTES

1. Have strict timelines and expectations for staff related to completion of assessment process.
2. Develop a schedule of contacts and expectations with the parents and adhere to it to complete the process on time.
3. Present process to parents as a mutual opportunity to make a fully informed decision about fostering/adopting and to decide whether they want to work with this particular agency.
4. Start mutual assessment process during pre-service training when possible, especially, if the parent has identified a specific child to foster or adopt, so the process can be expedited.
5. Share information about the agency's expectations for its workers with parents so they can also track the process (use *AdoptUSKids Answering the Call Family Pocket Guide*).
6. Conduct assessment as a strengths-based, educational process, not as an investigation.
7. Be honest about birth family involvement. Help surface a parent's fears and support them through their hesitancy with correct information, case scenarios, talking with other families.
8. If a parent is interested in adopting a specific identified child, spend considerable time exploring parenting scenarios likely to occur with this child. This can also be done with a type of child, using a real but anonymous child as an example.
9. Provide help and advocacy for a parent during this period, e.g., assign an experienced parent mentor or buddy or have the original recruitment worker act as an advocate.
10. Refer prospective parents to further reading material and help them network with other foster parents, such as attend a parent group meeting, or contact individual resource parents.
11. Help parents eliminate fixable impediments to licensing, e.g. minor home repairs, beds for children, medical exams, special equipment needs, etc., including financial assistance if necessary.
12. Seek to rule people in, not out of the process.
13. Help parents identify their support persons and begin to connect them with community resources that may be needed.

Step 6: Licensing and/or Approval

By this point the agency pretty much knows whether or not an applicant is going to be approved. How quickly can the agency inform the applicant of its decision and move through the licensing and/or approval process?

What results are we looking for at this step?

- Timely completion of the written assessment (homestudy) and other licensing/approval paperwork.
- The State licensing/approval process is timely and efficient.
- Parents are provided with a copy of their homestudies and are given a chance to correct any inaccuracies prior to it being finalized.

How does this look from the parent's point of view?

- As the decision is prolonged so is the parent's uncertainty and anxiety.
- Parents have a hard time understanding why it takes so long to complete the paperwork.
- Parents are concerned about what has been put in the record about them and potential violation of their privacy.

Impact of wait time—When the process is cumbersome and is taking a long time, applicants may lose faith and trust in the agency worker. Parents will have concerns about the agency's perception of them. They will start to second-guess themselves and, possibly, lose their fire for this.



What Agencies Do To Get Best Results

1. Set deadlines and standards for timely completion of family assessment studies and licensing/approval.
2. Consider using dual licensure/approval, so that the homestudy can be completed concurrently for either foster care and/or adoption.
3. Provide a technical staff person, e.g., an administrative assistant to assist in processing licensing/approval documentation and paperwork.
4. Provide incentives to staff when they make their goals related to numbers and timeliness of completing licensing/approvals.
5. Provide parents with copies of their family assessment studies so they have a chance to fix any mistakes or misunderstandings.
6. Inform families when all the paperwork is complete and licensing/approval has been achieved.
7. Continue to contact parents regularly to inform them of current placement activity and possibilities and to explain reasons for delays. Personal notes are also helpful and mean a lot during this period.
8. Have all the necessary paperwork, training, homestudy and licensing certification and/or approval completed at the time a family is ready to accept children.
9. Make phone calls to applicants at least once every 30 days until placement to make sure they know they are being considered and served.
10. Ask experienced parents to host “Waiting Parents” meetings, perhaps at someone’s home, to maintain family’s enthusiasm and to let them know they are not forgotten.

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“The greatest good you can do for another is not just share your riches but reveal to them their own.” — Benjamin Disraeli
.....

Step 7: Placement

NOTES

How does the agency assure the right match between a prepared resource parent and child/sibling group's needs?

What results are we looking for at this step?

- The agency has a reliable information system that identifies waiting families and honors their preferences.
- The parent has the necessary information to make an informed decision about a specific placement including:
 - o The child/children's personality, behavior, preferences and needs
 - o Medical, psychological, education history
 - o The birth parents' status and service needs
 - o The child/children's preliminary permanency goal
- The child/children are prepared to come into this new family.

How does this look from the parent's point of view?

- Parents want and need to be in the driver's seat on placement decisions. They don't want to be pressured into taking a child that they are not prepared to help.
- Parents may be open to considering many types of children, if they are given full disclosure about the child and his/her circumstances.

Impact of wait time—Families get really frustrated if they have to wait too long between approval/licensing and placement. This may lead to shopping for another agency and/or taking a child that they are not ready to parent.

What Agencies Do To Get Best Results

NOTES

1. Stay in frequent contact with the licensed/approved family while they are waiting for a placement.
2. Encourage waiting families to attend parent support groups and/or be in touch with local foster and adoptive parent organizations.
3. Provide parents with an ongoing training calendar and send them invitations to other agency events.
4. Encourage parents to provide respite or emergency care while waiting.
5. Provide parents with ongoing information about the children waiting to be adopted.
6. Are responsive and considerate when parents call for information and updates on their situation.
7. Make sure parents have necessary information to make an informed placement decision and provide immediate care for the child.
8. Explore “AdoptAir” if adoption involves out-of-state travel and help is needed for visiting and/or placing (www.adoptea.org).
9. Visit the new resource parents immediately after placement to assure all requirements are met, the resource family and child are settling in and birth parent/family visits are scheduled, when indicated.
10. Have the recruitment/homestudy worker make a contact in the first week to answer any questions and provide transition to placement staff.
11. Provide follow up to support parents on an ongoing basis:
 - Conduct regular home visits by agency staff
 - Have a 24-hour emergency hotline
 - Know the Medicaid hotline number to secure medical services
 - Provide regular training opportunities for the foster parents
 - Conduct monthly foster/adopt group meetings
 - Respond immediately and/or within 24 hours to parents’ telephone calls.
 - Involve parents in decision making about children in their home and agency decisions and programs

Part III: Other Considerations

NOTES

The Children

In recent years the number of children in foster care has risen from 260,000 to over 540,000*. Of these, about 100,000 are children and youth in need of adoption. The median age of children in foster care with a goal of adoption is 8.2 years.

Foster children have experienced trauma, including multiple separations from their families and, possibly, more than one placement while in foster care. More often than not, they have experienced neglectful conditions and/or abusive treatment in their young lives. Some will have been sexually, physically and/or emotionally abused either at home. Many of them will have lived in birth families where substance abuse and/or physical violence were part of their everyday lives.

These children are likely to have developed emotional, behavioral, social and developmental challenges, as they struggle in child-like ways to cope with the effects of their early life experiences and the uncertainty of their futures.

In addition to these children, agencies will be serving children with special health needs unique to our times. Some children who are born drug-addicted or with HIV exposure will also need fostering and adoption.

Many of these children are part of a sibling group; or are older; and/or are of a minority race, ethnicity or culture.

Some children are more naturally adaptive and resilient than others.

We do know that some children will be more difficult than others to parent throughout their childhood and teen years. Some will have more extreme emotional reactions to their early life experiences, be angry, irritable, and have attachment difficulties. These children will be especially challenging to parent and may need frequent specialized services and resources.

* This data is from the AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2001 Estimates as of March 2003, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/ar0400.htm

Recent research documents that the adoption of older children is successful for most families. The University of California learned that adoption disruptions occur with less frequency than expected and that the rate of disruption remains about 10%. They further documented that social support and services for families are crucial to successful adoptions. The Child Welfare League of America reports similar findings. In one study, 73% of the families reported a high satisfaction with adoption.

Families are more likely to be satisfied with their experience with fostering and adopting when the following supports are in place:

- They are treated respectfully and as part of a team.
- They have experienced full disclosure and complete information about a child's background, personality and needs.
- They have been prepared for the experience of adopting and fostering and have access to ongoing training and personal development opportunities.
- They are connected, involved with other foster/adoptive parents.
- They are supported during hard times and family crises by their agency, their personal support network and other community resources.

Why are children placed for adoption?

	Adopted Children in General	Children Available for Adoption out of Foster Care
The children were taken away from parents because of neglect and abuse.	30%	71%
The birth parents decided they weren't ready to be parents.	42%	13%
The birth parents decided they couldn't afford to raise the child.	20%	8%
The parents of the child died.	4%	2%

The above chart was adapted from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption; Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute; Harris Interactive, Inc. "National Adoption Attitudes Survey." June 2002.
http://www.davethomasfoundationforadoption.org/html/resource/adoption_attitudes.pdf

Characteristics of Successful Foster and Adoptive Families

NOTES

1. Tolerance for Ambivalent Feelings

Successful resource families keep going when “the warm, mushy feelings are gone.” They do not judge themselves too harshly for experiencing negative feelings toward the child and/or the child’s birth family. They understand that they may feel angry without acting on that anger. They have empathy for both the child and the birth family.

2. Firm and Controlling Qualities

They are comfortable giving direction and providing structure for their children. As the adults in the family, they take the lead in the relationship in a strong and caring way. They try to anticipate behaviors, interrupt negative behaviors early, and provide praise and physical affection. They are not deterred by a child’s protest or withdrawal.

3. Flexible Expectations

When involved with children, they have realistic, flexible expectations of themselves and their children. They do not work to remake the child, but strive to help the child achieve success by acknowledging and appreciating small steps toward goals. They demonstrate flexibility in their expectations about the outcome of the placement.

4. Tolerance for Rejection

They are able to withstand testing behaviors by their foster/adoptive children, including hurtful, angry, rejecting behaviors. They do not take it personally if the child is rejecting, because they recognize the rejection as the child’s fear of closeness. They realize that the child’s tie to the birth family, former foster families, and others is not a rejection of their new parents.

5. Ability to Delay Parental Gratification

They are aware that the relationship with their foster/adopted children may not be reciprocal. They can give nurturance without receiving much in return. They can postpone their own rewards and not equate the child’s behavior with their failure as a parent.

6. Sense of Humor

They are able to use humor to cope with the stress that can result from foster or adoptive parenting. They can laugh and vent feelings, finding humor in daily exchanges with their children and/or birth parents.

7. Ability to Meet Personal Needs

They know how to take care of themselves. They refuse to be martyrs and recognize that taking personal time as a couple and as individuals is necessary. They take breaks from the child, using respite care and other resources to do this.

8. Ability to Use Resources

They seek and accept help. They learn how to identify and access help and support. They may do this on a formal or informal basis, seeking assistance ranging from self-help support groups to professionally facilitated therapy. They let others into their family system to get the additional support they need.

9. Flexible Family Roles

They share the responsibility of parenting and nurturing. They look to the total family system to find answers for problems. Parents are able to detect signs of “burnout” in their partner, and share the care-giving role for the children. Such flexibility greatly increases the likelihood of success.

10. Spirituality

Resource families possess a spiritual or religious belief that supports altruism and providing care for others. They have acquired a sense of meaning and basic satisfaction with where they are in life.

These 10 characteristics develop over time. Successful resource families are those willing to grow and change in order to maintain their commitment to their child. They are also families who feel good about asking for help and use it appropriately.

Adapted from the videotape, *Characteristics of Successful Adoptive Families*, @ Spaulding for Children, 1989, and adapted from ideas first put forth by Katz, Linda, “Parental Stress and Factors for Success in Older Child Adoption.” *Child Welfare*, LXV, 6, November-December 1986, pp. 569-578.

Characteristics of Successful Recruitment Practitioners

NOTES

Successful recruitment practitioners have lots of good qualities. Following is a list of some of these characteristics. How do you rate on each of these? No one has all of these qualities. Remember that more is accomplished in a team. You don't have to do it alone.

- Sense of urgency
- Respects and likes people and focuses on their strengths
- Sees parents as resources to be developed, not excluded
- Detective-like qualities when searching for lost relatives
- Non-judgmental in nature and humble
- Inquisitive about different cultures and always willing to learn more
- Ability to explain and break down tasks
- Barrier busting attitude—finds a way around a difficult situation
- Common sense
- Family advocate
- Team player
- Good judgment
- Not afraid to ask for help from peers or resource parents
- Good trainer
- Good communication skills—verbal and writing
- Not intimidated by community groups or public speaking
- Willingness to go the extra mile

Cultural Competency

NOTES

Framework for Working with Culturally Diverse Populations

- **Do your homework:** Assess your organization's mission and practice related to working with diverse cultures. Know your strengths and weaknesses and be open about them.
- **Gain appropriate entrée:** Are there people on staff, or in stakeholder groups, or community leaders who will make introductions and vouch for you and your organization.
- **Develop relationships and collaborative networks:** How do colleagues and leadership people from organizations of color view you and your organization? How can you strengthen these relationships by including those leaders in your endeavors and volunteering to work for theirs? How can you build trust?
- **Follow protocol:** Learn in advance how to function in settings such as African American churches, at tribal meetings, etc. What is the protocol, how can you be prepared to observe it?
- **Acknowledge the reciprocal nature of relationships:** What does the community have to gain by collaborating and cooperating with you? This is important, don't come empty handed. It is a matter of respect.

Key Indicators of Cultural Competence in Child Welfare

- Agency philosophy, policy, and practice are culturally relevant at all levels and are regularly reviewed and updated.
- Services and forms are provided in the language and dialect of those being served.
- Staff at all levels of the organization are representative of the cultural groups served.
- Program policies and procedures are developed in the cultural context of the populations served, i.e., value systems, family definitions and traditions, gender and age, etc.
- Programs and work settings exemplify cultural preservation and celebration and are accessible in the communities served.
- Language translation is provided, particularly in assisting and advocating for families whose only or primary language is not English.
- Empowerment strategies and respect are evident throughout the organization.

From Spaulding for Children, National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption. Excerpts taken from the Cultural Competence in Child Welfare Curriculum.

Additional Considerations: Native American Tribes

NOTES

Why is it often challenging for Native Americans to become involved in foster care?

1. A value of non-interference in some tribes inhibits people from offering themselves to assist in someone else's business or problem.
2. It is likely that potential foster families may have experienced foster care themselves or had relatives who were in care (before 1978 one out of every four Indian children were in some form of out-of-home care). Many Indian people do not want to expose their family to what they experienced.
3. Native Americans may fear the child welfare system and what it represents. They also fear how their family might be judged.
4. Many people have such a negative view of the child welfare system that they simply do not want to become part of the program that removes children.

Suggestions on how to overcome resistance

Try using 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 that would be good at taking care of children. Once a few names are gathered, the worker starts the process of visiting each recommended person's home.



During the visit, the worker asks if she/he 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. The worker may 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.

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. This must be done in a respectful way by a worker willing to take the time to develop relationships with the community members and tribal leaders.

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

Staying Motivated

NOTES

How can adoption/foster care practitioners keep motivated and replenished in the very complex and often changing human services environment?

Be mission driven

Have a clear objective. Your cause is to assure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. Is this a cause worthy of your heart? Do you feel strongly about these children? If you do, you will find the strength and resources to serve the children who need you. And, in so doing, you will make a profound difference in their lives.

Clearly understand the risks involved and to whom they belong

When asked, practitioners usually say that children take the biggest risk when in foster care. Actually, it is usually the resource or adoptive parents who stand to take the greatest risk for the longest period of time. That is why they must be treated with the greatest honesty and respect, so they can make informed decisions. Children can be hurt as much by the risks you do not take as those that you do. Failure to make timely permanency decisions can put children at great risk.

Build your own style of empowerment

Empowerment is the key to managing risks. Being empowered means bringing your professional expertise to the table, including what you know about these children and youth being served, as well as information you have gathered from a child-specific assessment process.

- When you acknowledge a family's expertise and see them as resources for children, there is a real basis for partnership, for planning and sharing risks in the interest of the children involved
- Recognizing that social workers can share their knowledge and skills with families and that families can direct their own destinies is empowering
- Understanding that a family's strength and knowledge will grow with practice over time is empowering

Take responsibility for your own learning process

Know yourself and the personal values you bring to your work. What are your

strengths and weaknesses in working cross-culturally? How can you get the support and training you need to do your job now and in the future?

Find affirming support networks

Be careful not to isolate yourself. This work cannot be done without support. Networks need to be built between foster care and adoption staff. These supports are essential to your sense of personal worth and empowerment.

Develop and be part of an entrepreneurial spirit

Be willing to try new ideas, take practical risks, one step at a time, and encourage others to do so.

Be active in advocacy

Build networks and a personal power base. Advocate for system changes. Document what works and what doesn't work. Be a forceful and informed advocate for positive change.

Take time to celebrate

Take time to celebrate victories—even the small ones:

- Acknowledge when a task(s) has been completed.
- Take a deep breath and pat yourself on the back.
- Do a little victory dance.
- Prepare checklists of the activities that need to be done and put gold stars by items as they are completed.
- Acknowledge others as they complete tasks; be sure to be specific in your praise.

Your personal journey in child welfare is like “following the yellow brick road.” Take along your courage, heart and wisdom. Do your best. And you can make a significant difference in the life of a child.

Adapted from previous speech given by Judith K. McKenzie, Spaulding for Children, “The Charge for Special Needs Adoption Now and in the Future, The Special Needs Adoption Curriculum.” (1991)

The Pre-Service Curriculum

NOTES



Training subjects can include such issues as understanding and handling the emotional problems of children, behavior management, child development, use of community services, and ways to work with children's birth parents toward reunification.

The best curricula promote the involvement of experienced foster and adoptive parents as an integral part of the training team and have the following features:

- Gives the experience from the perspective of the child/youth in foster care
- Speaks to the various roles of the resource parent, e.g., fostering for reunification and/or adoption; adoption only; respite; fostering children with special health needs, etc.
- Models and teaches what it means to be a team member as a resource parent
- Deals with the importance of the birth family from the child's view including parent involvement, importance of visiting and ways that resource parents can support permanency.
- Includes information to anticipate typical behaviors of foster/adopted children and provides information about appropriate discipline for children who have previously experienced abusive care.
- Gives lots of opportunities for interaction, discussion and practical exercises.

About Pre-Service Trainers

NOTES

Trainers can make or break your recruiting efforts. A good trainer makes the sessions both informative and fun for the prospective foster/adoptive parents. The room should be noisy with laughter and questions and then silent with concentration. The trainer illustrates principles and ideas with lots of real-life examples, funny stories, some tragic. Everyone leaves energized about the future, enthusiastic about the decision and eager to continue working and learning. They are engaged in the process.

Good trainers work well in a training team that includes experienced resource parents.

A less effective trainer drones through lists of rules and instructions, and has to pull responses like teeth from those present. Few people have questions and the ones that do receive vague or uncertain answers or flat decrees. Some participants leave early and permanently. Everyone leaves with misgivings about their commitment.

Training is hard work requiring preparation, practice and talent. Good caseworkers or agency officials may be terrible trainers, and good trainers may not necessarily be good caseworkers or executives. The temptation can be overwhelming to send in anyone available and let them “wing it” as a “trainer by accident” hoping for the best. This will be very costly for recruitment.

- Agency leaders can take particular care that those who conduct training have energy, expertise, cultural awareness and enthusiasm
- Leaders can also factor into employee/trainers' workload enough time to prepare materials and settings, make plans for each training session, and to clean up and follow through afterward.
- Training for trainers is crucial. Trainers need time to prepare themselves for the task as well as to master the material and a teaching plan.

Agencies of every size can collaborate with other agencies and/or contract for competent part-time trainers.

References and Websites for Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment Information

NOTES

National Adoption Month 2003 Campaign Recruitment and Marketing Kit, a joint product of *The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids* and the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption.

Adoption: A guide for Military Family Service Center Staff and Civilian Social Workers. An Adoption Exchange Association Publication.

You can Adopt: A guide for Military Families. An Adoption Exchange Association publication.

Placing Children Across Geographic Boundaries. An Adoption Exchange Association and National Adoption Center publication.

Overcoming Geographic Barriers: A Guidebook for Families Pursuing Interstate Adoption. Adoption Exchange Association and National Adoption Center.

“Exemplary Title IV-B Recruitment Plan Elements,” 2001. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families
www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/laws/pi/pi9523a3.htm

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Family to Family, Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care Recruitment Training and Support, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, March 2002.

Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families. Lorrie L. Lutz, M.P.P., Consultant. Monograph (2003) developed for Casey Family Programs, National Center for Resource Family Support by the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning, Hunter College School of Social Work, a service of the Children's Bureau.

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“A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though, awakens your own expectations.” — Patricia Neal

Helpful Websites

NOTES

The Collaboration to AdoptUSKids

www.adoptuskids.org

Adoption Exchange Association(AEA)

www.adoptea.org

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Statistics

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/report8.htm

Adoption Homestudy Process

http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/f_homstu.cfm

Casey Family Programs

www.casey.org/cnc/

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse

www.naic.acf.hhs.gov

National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption

www.nrcadoption.org

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning

www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp

North American Council on Adoptable Children

www.nacac.org/

National Indian Child Welfare Association

www.nicwa.org/

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]



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AdoptUSKids is a service of the U.S. Children's Bureau, member of the T/TA Network, and supported through a cooperative agreement (grant #90CQ0002) between the Adoption Exchange Association and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

