



# FOCUS



**Newsletter of the  
Family Focused  
Treatment Association**



**Family  
Focused  
Treatment  
Association**



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## Recruiting: You Need to Know What You Need to Know —by Mike B. Logan

In his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni lists inattention to results as the ultimate dysfunction of a team because it allows team “members to care about something other than the collective goals of the group.” He goes on to say, “Every good organization specifies what it plans to achieve in a given period, and these goals... make up the majority of near-term, controllable results.”

We don’t often think of the importance of results in the healthy function and cohesion of a team, but they are the central factor in unifying the energy focus of your organization. Don’t miss, however, that it is not just the projection of a goal that matters; the results of our efforts toward achieving that goal are what really matter in the performance of a team. It is impossible to pay attention to results without a means to accurately measure how close you are to achieving them.

I don’t believe we have faced a time in the foster care industry in which the effectiveness of recruitment strategies was more critical. We need to be innovative and focused in reaching new families so that we can keep up with the growing placement needs. The greatest challenge with innovation, however, is that the ideas that fuel it are speculative. We think that a particular idea will work, but we don’t know for sure.

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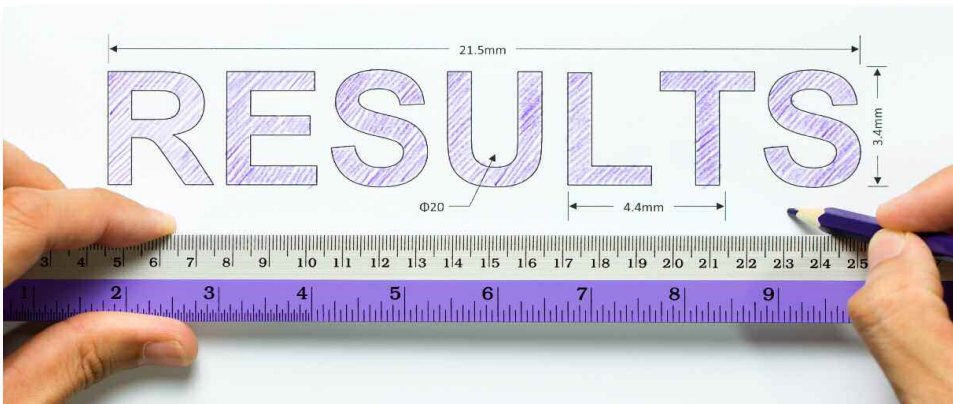
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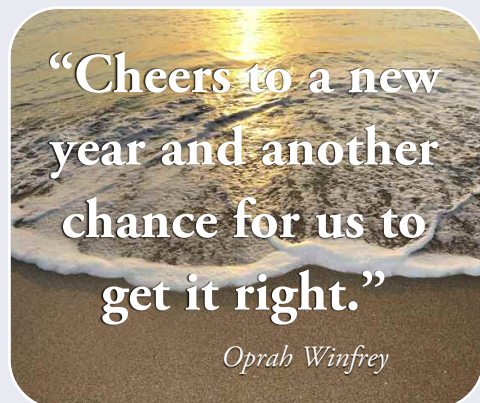
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# EDITOR'S COLUMN

— by Beverly Johnson, LCSW



The new year brings a fresh start and, in the words of Oprah Winfrey, a chance to “get it right.” For those of us who orbit the world of foster care, recruiting and retaining families continue to be challenges and areas where we need to get it right. Children fare best in families, and we all have a vested interest in “getting it right” for our kids’ sake.

This year’s Adoption from Foster Care campaign by AdoptUSKids specifically focuses on the adoption of teens, who generally wait longer to be adopted and have lower overall adoption rates. Of the 428,000 youths under the age of 18 in the U.S. foster care system, 112,000 are currently waiting for adoptive families. Of all the children available for adoption on AdoptUSKids.org, 43% are 15 to 18 years old, but only 5% of all children adopted in 2015 were between the ages of 15 and 18. So what are we doing about that?

In the interest of “getting it right,” we are excited to be dedicating this issue to strategies for inspiring families to step up to become a resource for the hundreds of thousands of youth who, through no fault of their own, have no family when their birth parents cannot care for them.

Check out the child-focused recruitment tool from the Dave Thomas Foundation that is three times more effective than traditional methods in recruiting families for older youth, siblings, and children with physical/mental challenges. CEO Rita Soronen also shares the three greatest challenges

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Sometimes that unknown will keep agencies from attempting anything other than what they have historically done, remaining unwilling to spend limited resources on untested ideas.

Whether you find yourself relying on history or ready to run with innovation in your recruiting efforts, you cannot bypass the vital process of measurement.

### The Irreplaceable Importance of Measurement

Two important questions guide any successful organization: If something is working, how can we get better results from that activity? And, if something is not working, why are we still doing it? Both questions are pretty simple, and the logic behind them is simple as well. However, you can’t begin to answer either question until you accurately know something about your results. How do you know if something is really working or not?

Organizations often make the mistake of using anecdotal data in their decision making. We used to be happy with reports that said, “It felt like we made some good connections at the fair last week” or “I think we get at least a couple calls a month from our ad in the phone book.” Feelings and impressions are like good intentions—sometimes they produce something wonderful, but sometimes they mean nothing. In order to move beyond anecdotes, we have to find accurate ways to measure the results of what we do.

The agency I lead fell into that anecdotal trap, and when I asked for the first level of measurement (a multimonth net gains and losses in foster homes), the data showed that we had fallen from a high of 72 homes to 54. The impact of this decline was visible in far more tangible ways than what a graph can show. We were unable to take new placements, we didn’t have the ability to provide adequate respite, and everyone on my staff was feeling the pressure. We could have blamed a lot of things; we had plenty of anecdotal theories about why we were where we were, but this first level of measurement showed us what was really happening.

We set out on the path to discover the reason behind the results and got intentional about our recruiting process. We set a goal at the beginning of 2014 to grow the number of homes from 54 to 80 by the end of that year. We met

It is impossible to pay attention to results without a means to accurately measure how close you are to achieving them.

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for finding families that we need to address in our own recruitment efforts.

Ever important is how we use data to measure results to ensure that our efforts are effective. In "Measuring Results to Inform Recruitment Efforts," Mike Logan writes about the data that are essential to move from anecdotal evidence to results-based evidence. Additionally, our colleagues at Pressley Ridge share the secrets of successful recruitment and how to use data to inform recruitment efforts.

Retaining families is equally important, as Shahrukh Chishty highlights in her article about the effective use of the 3-5-7 model. Getting to the "heart" of the work and tapping into the importance of understanding trauma are keys in this healing.

Additionally, disproportionality continues to be a problem because 22% of the youth waiting for adoption are Hispanic. Maria C. Velasquez shares strategies for developing successful recruitment efforts in the Latino community. We still have much to do.

And let's not forget the essential recruitment strategy of finding relatives and other nonrelative extended family members who can be a vital lifeline for our youth faced with entry into foster care. We need to be intentional in our efforts to identify relative placements and vital connections at initial placement and throughout each youth's life.

I'd like to applaud the communities that are joining in this effort to draw attention to the youth who need families. Together we can make a difference. Here's to "getting it right."

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that goal, which is a growth rate of well over 40%, by taking an intentional, strategic approach to recruitment and then measuring everything we did.

### Measure Everything!

Once you are convinced about the need to measure your results, you must then decide what to measure. My simple answer: **Everything!**

Here's a list of the things we measure all the time:

#### 1. How many referrals are we receiving?

This number establishes the baseline for all other forms of measurement. This number also can be used to set future goals for search engine optimization (SEO) professionals, TV and print advertisers, and agency recruiters.

#### 2. Where are our referrals coming from?

Sometimes you are so grateful for the calls you receive from prospective foster parents that you forget to ask the basic question, "How did you come to contact us?" We give incentives to existing foster parents for referrals, run 30-second advertisements on local television, set up booths at fairs and community events, and invest money in website content and SEO services. I need to know how many referrals are coming from each of those sources so I can adjust budget dollars up or down and determine which ones to put more energy toward and what should be eliminated.

Through this measurement I know exactly where our referrals come from in a specific quarter. I found that our website was producing more referrals than any other source. Those data helped me make the decision to hire a service to revamp our website and set up SEO protocols to get our website ranked higher in Google searches. Second to the website was staff and existing foster parent referrals. Using these numbers, we know where to invest energy and money in successive quarters.

#### 3. What is the difference in the quality of referrals?

We follow the entire process because not all referrals are equal in quality. For example, potential families referred by existing foster parents could be of better quality than potential families who attend a fair or an event. The quality is determined by conversions. The only way to know that is to measure how many referrals come from each source and then follow the

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process to see how many from each source actually convert into a certified home and placement.

Our data informed us that nearly two thirds of our referrals are generated from the website and personal recommendations from our staff and existing foster parents. When we examined the conversion data, we discovered that these two sources also created a higher certification/approval percentage than the other areas. Eighty percent of our certified families come from these two areas; they produce quality referrals.

We found that a referral from an existing parent will generally be better quality. Due to the existing family's connection with our agency, the prospective foster parent will likely know more about us, like us because our parents have shared what they appreciate about us, and trust us based on the testimony of the referring parent.

### 4. What is the cost of each referral/home?

Once you know the number of referrals coming from a particular source (let's say, a TV ad campaign), you can divide the money invested in that campaign by the number of referrals and determine the cost of each referral.

### 5. How long is it taking for families to get through our certification process?

This measurement allows us to address a point of frustration for prospective foster parents. It is easy for them to get discouraged as the process of certification grinds imperceptibly forward. Some of the elements in certification are outside our control, but others may be the result of poor processes and stall points in our system. Again, the only way to identify where the sticking points are is to track and measure the time it is taking to move a referral through the steps to foster parent certification.

### 6. What is our conversion rate?

Conversions take place at a few different stages, so we need to be vigilant to measure all of them. Our SEO service measures conversion rates at the point where a website-generated search results in a form response on our landing page. Another conversion is measured when a referral becomes an active application. Two other conversions happen later in the process: one at the point of certification and, ultimately, the other at the point of placement.

Most of you already know that recruitment involves more than placing an advertisement in the local newspaper. It is a process of attracting, engaging, qualifying, completing piles

of paperwork, undergoing home inspections, more vetting, licensing, and, ultimately, placement. If you are only measuring how many calls you received from a community outreach event, you are looking at less than 10% of the total recruiting process.

### 7. What is our retention rate?

I find that some agencies are measuring on the recruitment side but not on the retention side of foster care. They are active in doing things to serve the needs of existing families, but they don't follow the numbers on how many are leaving and why. I've come to the conclusion that it is far less expensive to keep existing foster parents than it is to recruit new parents.

Our agency has adopted the axiom, "If it matters, measure it!"

### 8. How long does it take for a newly approved family to receive a placement?

This form of measurement, like measuring the length of the certification process, was elicited by the frustration of the foster parents. They go through all the work, energy, and time to get certified only to wait for a child to be placed in their home. Here again, some of this delay is outside our control. We may find it necessary to revisit the conditions and limitations the foster parents themselves have placed on the age, gender, or ethnicity of prospective children. I've found that if the placement phase is too long, it creates unrest and a temptation for foster parents to look toward other agencies. Our goal is to get a placement or even a respite service within 3 months of certification. How do we know if we are hitting that goal? We measure!

### 9. Where are our placements coming from?

Some agencies ignore this element of measurement. "That's county business," they say. "We can't really do anything about it." Yes and no. We have ridden the waves of favor and disfavor with county officials and watched them shift away from private foster care, hiring more staff to take on more children themselves. While they are responding to

Our data informed us that nearly two thirds of our referrals are generated from the website and personal recommendations from our staff and existing foster parents.

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state initiatives, new programs, shifting budgets, and leadership changes within their organization, we still must watch the factors in our organization that are impacting officials' relationships with us. We have made decisions to expand into other regions to balance out the unreasonable and unreliable give-and-take of county placements, but at the end of the day, it is our job to pay attention to the numbers and find out why things are different now than they were then.

### Conclusion

This article is obviously insufficient to cover the subject of measurement with the detail necessary to develop a how-to plan. In addition, measurement is just one factor in developing an effective recruitment strategy. My hope is that this general review of measurement will help stimulate your thinking and inspire an approach to recruitment that will increase your effectiveness. I write and develop resources on all phases of the recruiting process. You can find out more by visiting my website at [www.MBLogan.com](http://www.MBLogan.com).

The need is great and growing. Each of us must find the best methods to meet this need and to provide effective, timely, and compassionate care for foster children.

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*Mike Logan is the Executive Director of Children First Foster Family Agency and Founder of Results Recruiting. Mike will present a webinar on the topic of foster parent recruitment for the FFTA Webinar Wednesdays Series in April. Visit [www.fftta.org/webinars](http://www.fftta.org/webinars) for more information.*



If it matters, measure it!"



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# What's the Secret to Successful Recruitment?

## Hint: Using Data Is the Answer

—by Amy Strickler, Ph.D, Jennifer R. Mihalo, MS, and Karen L. Celedonia, MPH

At FFTA conferences, high attendance for recruitment-themed workshops is expected because we all are interested in the elusive secret to successful recruitment. In anticipation of the workshop, we may have similar questions: Did the presenting agency figure it out? What can we do to find the same results? The best way to answer these questions is to explore the unique factors influencing recruitment efforts at your agency. That's why we are going to share with you some best practices gathered from our practical experience working with foster care programs and from reviewing recruitment literature so you can find the answer to what works for your agency. There is one underlying key to harnessing recruitment effectiveness at your agency: collecting and using data. Useful data can include focus group data about foster parent barriers, data about community needs for targeting recruitment, and tracking data about recruitment efforts and success of recruitment strategies. Data can help to uncover the secret to effective recruitment for your agency.

**Recruitment Fact 1:** Potential foster parents consider becoming foster parents for several years.

**What can we do?** Even though recruitment efforts may plant the seed for prospective foster parents, there are ways to expedite this decision-making process. When it comes to decision making, people may encounter several barriers. Researchers have found that barriers can be classified into two types: perceptual (what a person thinks about the decision) and concrete (what logistics can get in the way of carrying out the decision). McKay and Bannon (2004) have found that addressing perceptual barriers *first* helps to mitigate concrete barriers. They found success in addressing these barriers in engaging families in treatment. The same concept can be applied to engaging prospective foster parents in your program.

**How can using data help?** At your next staff meeting, ask your program staff to identify barriers that exist within your program. For staff, internal perceptual barriers may include a lack of buy-in to consistently and actively recruit, and concrete barriers may be the lack of time or resources. Focus groups or interviews with key community members or stakeholders can be conducted to determine your community's perceptions of foster care and identify external perceptual

barriers (e.g., lack of knowledge about foster care) and concrete barriers (e.g., lack of time to help promote the positive aspects of foster care). Current foster parents can also be asked to provide barriers they experienced before becoming foster parents. Examples of perceptual barriers may be role expectations, and concrete barriers may include not having child care to attend trainings. By collecting data from multiple sources, you can tailor interventions and messaging to promote positive perceptions around foster care in order to diminish the effects of concrete barriers.

**Recruitment Fact 2:** Targeted recruitment strategies are more effective than general recruitment efforts.

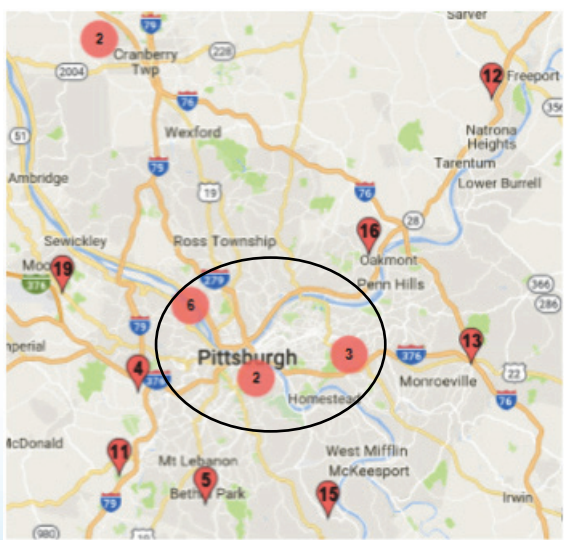
**What can we do?** The majority of your recruitment budget (approximately 60%) should go toward targeted recruitment efforts. Set up your recruitment budget in advance and map out the purpose of your recruitment events (targeted, child-specific, or general). You can still do general recruitment events (flyers, tabling), but you should be strategic about these events because they should be a small percentage of your budget (less than 15%).

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# What's the Secret to Successful Recruitment?

**Hint: Using Data Is the Answer** | continued from pg. 6

**How can using data help?** Use your referral information to identify the community or school district that the referrals are coming from and where you already have families. A targeted recruitment strategy pinpoints specific neighborhoods based on areas of highest need. Collect zip codes and use geo-mapping to visualize where referrals are coming from and connections you may already have in those communities (these connections could be current foster parents, businesses, school districts, or churches). You then overlay inquiries you receive to find out whether you are reaching these intended locations. In the example geo-map, the majority of foster parent inquiries are coming from suburbs surrounding Pittsburgh. However, referral data indicate that most youth in need of foster homes are in Pittsburgh city neighborhoods. Our targeted recruitment messaging has included the exact number of youth being referred in each neighborhood, with a call to action to community members to keep these youth in their community.



**Example Geo-Map—  
Number of Foster Parent Inquiries**

**Recruitment Fact 3:** Personalizing marketing efforts for your agency can help with recruitment messaging.

**What can we do?** Use information you already have or reach out to those who have the information so that you can personalize marketing slogans, pictures, and campaigns to your specific geographic location.

**How can using data help?** There are four factors that when combined, have a significant influence on people's motivations to become foster parents (Stein, 2006). Using this information in your marketing campaigns may motivate your community to answer the call to action:

1. People want to know they are joining a professional team that provides appropriate support and training. Use foster parent satisfaction results in your messaging to show how supported your current parents feel.
2. People are motivated by the size of the issue—the absolute number of children being placed in foster care in their community makes the issue personal and creates a sense of urgency. Use your county contacts to get community-specific referral data. Alternatively, if you need a specific number of foster parents, include that number in your messaging.
3. People want to know they can help a specific child right now. Photos should represent the diversity and age of the youth in your program. If you're serving teens, include pictures of teenagers.

4. People typically feel they can provide a safe, stable, caring home—make sure you communicate this in your messaging. One of our youth in foster care said it best: "They don't have to be the smartest people in the room, they just have to be caring and be understanding."

**Recruitment Fact 4:** Collecting and looking at your data are musts for guiding recruitment efforts.

**What can we do?** Get your staff excited about collecting data. Even though it may require extra effort, collecting data will help you target interventions to what works—and require less work in the long run. Instead of casting a wide net, identify the most effective recruitment strategies and stop doing the ones that do not work.

**How can using data help?** Developing a recruitment inquiry database can help individualize strategies for your agency and inform decisions about which recruitment strategy is most effective. The first step is to identify the data you need to collect by thinking of the questions you would like to answer. For example, you might want to know which events or advertisements are resulting in inquiries or how long it takes from initial inquiry for a parent to become certified. Tracking information such as recruitment strategies, amount spent, number of parent inquiries, and number of parents certified can enable you to calculate a return on investment for specific events or advertisements. Depending on the specific needs or questions your program has, other data can be collected as well.

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# What's the Secret to Successful Recruitment?

**Hint:** Using Data Is the Answer | continued from pg. 7

## Examples of Data Points for Your Recruitment Database

Parent Information	Recruitment Method	Key Dates	Parent Status
Name	Type of event/strategy	Date of event or referral	Certification status
Phone number/ email address	Advertisement type	Initial inquiry	Training status
Current or previous license	Name of current parent, recruiter, or staff person	Follow-up contacts	Reason screened out
Address, zip code, and school district	Cost of strategy	Interviews	Child placement status
		Training start and completion	

**Recruitment Fact 5:** Foster parent word of mouth tends to be a successful recruitment method.

**What can we do?** Foster parents often recruit new foster parents to our agencies without being asked to do so: they're simply excited to spread the word about the great work that we do! We can provide foster parents with additional recruiting tools. Here are a few ways we can provide support to foster parent recruiters:

- Develop an active recruitment strategy for your foster parents with a clear message for foster parents to talk about the program. Create a 10-second sales pitch that sets your program apart from others and that foster parents can tell others.
- Give foster parents marketing tools such as business cards, car magnets, and yard signs.
- Ask foster parents to present with you at churches, events, and parties and to attend festivals and fairs. Work with foster parents to identify three benefits of being a foster parent that they can communicate to others.
- Develop a video with testimonials from foster parents and youth to use during marketing events and on social media.

**How can using data help?** We can use data to identify a few foster parents as core recruiters—or foster parent recruiter champions. You typically know who your champions are, but you can also use a simple Excel file or electronic health record (EHR) system to track how many referrals foster parents make. Routinely monitor the data to see which foster parents are attracting the most new foster parents. Once foster parent recruiting champions are identified, focus efforts on giving these foster parents additional support such as bonuses. Or try to learn why those with low referrals are not referring—maybe there's a method of recruitment support the agency is not providing to these foster parents.

We have our data, so where do we go next?

We hope that collecting data will give you a great starting point for developing individualized secrets to successful recruitment. However, it can be helpful to share these strategies with others. Although conference presentations and articles provide some shared knowledge, there are many ways to share "secrets" to successful recruitment. Collaborative information sharing can help spark ideas and is a great forum for open discussion and sharing unique approaches. Although no two agencies' recruiting needs look the same, there may be some overlap in effective methods. This sharing of information can be done through developing a learning community where ideas and strategies can be shared with recruiters from various agencies or through creating a task force in which collective knowledge can be used to target certain areas of interest. Through collecting and using data to inform and individualize recruitment efforts as well as sharing ideas and resources with a network of agencies, we can continue to improve our strategies to ensure that we are successful in recruiting quality foster parents to care for our youth.

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## “What’s Up” In Public Policy

By Laura Boyd, PhD

Welcoming a new year is always exciting, and 2018 certainly fits that mold! We will meet new challenges in the public policy arena in 2018, we will surmount “old” and “ongoing” obstacles, and we will experience success in minute and large ways. The beauty of systems theory is that when a part of the system changes, the whole system changes! Eventually even small wins become transformative.

At the public policy level, FFTA is addressing the needs and challenges of our member agencies in several ways. Our federal legislation Family-Based Care Services Act (H.R.2290/S.1357) specifically delineates the policy (and current CMS reimbursement practice) that any youth who needs TFC treatment and who qualifies by the state’s own definition of eligibility must be served regardless of where the individual resides. This requirement applies to youth living in their own bio-families, in kinship care, in adoptive homes, or in non-relative foster families.

Eventually even small wins become transformative.

FFTA’s 15th Annual Public Policy Institute and Advocacy Day is scheduled for March 12–13. Join FFTA to learn from experts in the field and current policy makers. We will hear from Jerry Milner, Acting Commissioner for the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), who will be sharing his leadership goals for ACYF. Division leaders from CMS and SAMHSA will address opioid misuse and multigenerational treatments for TFC providers. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at HHS will share the final reports of a 2-year national study on TFC. Industry leaders from the private, public, and managed care arenas will update us on various regulations emphasizing the tie between biomedical and behavioral health services and how this integration impacts us as providers of TFC and the youth and families we serve.

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# 15th Annual Public Policy Institute & Advocacy Day



Family Focused Treatment Association

MARCH 12-13, 2018  
WASHINGTON, DC

## “What’s Up” In Public Policy

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Of particular excitement will be the congressional briefing on Monday afternoon during which Institute attendees will join House staff for a presentation on H.R.2290. The briefing will be hosted by the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth.

There is still time to register for the Public Policy Institute in D.C. Visit [www.ffa.org/ppi](http://www.ffa.org/ppi) to register.

State and federal governments are addressing various aspects of child welfare reform: major changes will occur before 2019 as state child welfare waivers sunset. Child-serving systems will need other processes to update or continue various state models of payment and of innovation; SNAP and reduced-price school meal programs must be authorized and, hopefully,

sustained or increased; “Families First” legislation is rumored to be repackaged and re-proposed; and funding streams for other children’s programs such as Social Services Block Grants need to be preserved.

As state and federal governments address these vital issues, FFTA will stay attuned to ensure that the needs of youth experiencing exceptional mental and behavioral challenges are responsibly addressed and served in family settings where possible.

Please read the regular Monday Public Policy Update and Alert. Let us know about any issues—local, state, or federal—on which we might support you and your efforts.



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## Write for an upcoming edition of **FOCUS**

Spring Issue: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) **Due: 2/21/18**

Summer Issue: Serving Rural Populations **Due: 5/23/18**



# Caring, Contribution, and Commitment: Making the Impossible Possible, One Adoption at a Time

—by Keisha Bryan, LCSW-C

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is North America's only national nonprofit that specializes in finding permanent homes for children and youth currently in foster care. The foundation provides forever homes to more than 140,000 children and youth in the foster care system without regard to age, race, intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental or emotional health, and behavioral or cognitive needs. This prodigious work is achieved by offering grants, engaging in robust fund-raising, increasing awareness about the large number of kids currently in foster care, and providing free resources to agencies, professionals, and prospective adoptive or foster parents. How is all this accomplished, you may ask? The answer is simply through unwavering commitment from the top down—from the board of trustees to the president and CEO to the entire senior leadership staff.



**Dave Thomas  
Foundation  
for Adoption**

Along with managing a global multifaceted organization, president and CEO Rita Soronen

takes time to share with *FOCUS* readers the foundation's work, challenges to achieving its ultimate mission, and areas for partnership and growth in bridging service delivery gaps.

## How does an agency form a partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption?

*Rita:* We have a couple of levels of partnership; we look to partner with as many organizations that share our core values, mission, and vision of creating a home for every child. Partnership in terms of collaborative work is continuously explored; however, we tend to seek out these partners because we are a national nonprofit public charity and because we are a grant-making organization. We do encourage organizations to share the good work they are doing by bringing them to our attention. Currently, the majority of grant making is directed to the Wendy's Wonderful Kids programs, which are sought on a state or county level. We

do our due diligence in finding agencies that are willing to utilize the child focus recruitment model and those willing to become a part of our national initiative. We also have a national grants program, separate from the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program, that we work to elevate through grant making, best practices, and initiatives with those organizations that can provide wraparound services to the work that we are doing. Our focused mission has resulted in the dramatic increase in the adoptions of children from the North America foster care system.

## Have you noticed any trends in the age range of kids or trends in racial breakdown or geographic location of the children and youth being adopted?

*Rita:* We have been working really hard, particularly since the release in 2011 of a child focus recruitment tool. This tool reports that our model works three times more effectively for our targeted population, which includes older youth, sibling groups, and children with mental and physical challenges. We have been working really hard at the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program to focus on children age 9 and

# Caring, Contribution, and Commitment: Making the Impossible Possible, **One Adoption at a Time** | continued from pg. 11

older without an identified adoptive resource. For the past six or seven years, we have seen a real emphasis on older youth and those youth at most risk for aging out of care and a more robust conversation in agencies about assuming that these children are unadoptable. Every 5 years we do a national survey of Americans' attitudes toward foster care and adoption, and we have seen some measurable changes in Americans' beliefs about these children. An increasing number of Americans believe that all children are adoptable and that children are in care through no fault of their own, so we are seeing a positive trend that agencies and adoptive families understand that every child, no matter that child's age or journey, deserves to have a family.

**How are you able to shift the mindset of potential adoptive families, especially regarding our older kids in foster care, from the stereotypical views to being able to embrace the fact that every child or youth is adoptable and that every child deserves a loving and safe home?**

*Rita:* [We change] the misperceptions surrounding these children by teaching others that our youth are damaged, not dangerous. Many of our children and youth have experienced incredible trauma, incredible loss, incredible grief, and if they have to move multiple times, they often become untrusting of adults. They may express the kinds of behaviors that push adults away, so [the challenge] is both changing our children's perceptions and having adults who understand what these children have

experienced. The critical component to that [effort] is providing the education and support to families, so they understand this journey and they have support services available to them when behaviors begin to come to light.

**What are the three greatest challenges to accomplishing the mission of finding forever homes for kids in your program?**

*Rita:* [The first challenge] is making sure that when families are stepping forward to consider adoption, they understand that foster care adoption has a rich tapestry of children available for adoption and that older youth can be a viable part of any family—getting over that notion of why I should adopt a teenager and understanding that there is room in my family and I do have the qualities that can provide a viable family. Another challenge is that some systems are not set up to be customer friendly. [We help] highlight the need for great customer service at the front end (which is the critical end) so that when potential families reach out, they feel supported while receiving information about

being an adoptive parent. In addition, the biological family should be the first source of permanence for a child, and if the biological parents are not suitable or safe, let's then look to extended family members before we look into anything else. There is still some belief, within agencies, that if a child or youth came from an abusive



**Every child, no matter that child's age or journey, deserves to have a family**

family, then that family is not suitable for this child; this [belief] creates a disconnect. Finally, we find that agency social workers, not because they are ill intended but because of their experiences or lack thereof, still

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believe that some children are unadoptable or that a [particular] child is incapable of functioning in a family setting. We see time and again that this is not true; hence, we need to change the frontline workers' mind-set to understand that every child deserves deep advocacy for permanency.

**Are there any instances of adoption disruption or dissolution, and how are they handled?**

*Rita:* We are in year 5 of a 5-year survey following as many families who have adopted older youth to see what their outcomes are within their families. We are evaluating whether there are any policy and practice gaps on behalf of these families. A challenge has been getting permission from families to keep their contact information for research and follow-up. We have a statistical

sample that we are examining to inform us about policy and practice gaps, and we are looking forward to seeing the data. I do not know of any disrupted adoptions, but I am aware of families in which there have been issues with siblings groups stemming from one sibling having such elevated therapeutic treatment needs while the others do not.

**Have there been any challenges with interracial adoptions?**

*Rita:* Regarding interracial adoptions, the challenge continues to be making sure that those children's background and heritage are being respected and that there is compliance with the law. [We] ensure that families who do adopt interracially are keenly aware of the needs that a child has for self-identity and [the] need for potential contact with extended family. The recruiters are also well trained in cultural competency, and due diligence is taken that

they then tend to find people who already know the child and are aware of how to ensure that a child's needs are being met.

**What is your recruitment strategy for adoption workers?**

*Rita:* The strategy is that we provide the grants—

public or private, large or small—and really [recruit] anyone who can accommodate the requirements of the grants. The agency then hires the full-time workers, but we put the parameters in for grant accountability. The parameters [specify] a trained social worker, preferably with a master's degree, with child welfare experience within the adoption strategy in the child welfare system. This [approach produces] workers [who not only can] hit the ground running but also are familiar with the laws that surround our children and the complexity of the child welfare system. We do provide a very robust training that is the same from state to state and includes three online modules and a two-day, in-person training that addresses every aspect of our model. We have ongoing webinars and a two-and-a-half-day summit in Columbus, Ohio, for technical assistance and team building and where we address any barriers or performance issues.

For further information and free resources, see <https://davethomasfoundation.org/>.

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An increasing number of Americans believe that **all children are adoptable** and that children are in care through no fault of their own





# MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL... —by Shahrukh Chishty, MS

Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Who am I?... I am the child who was never protected.

Who am I?... I am the baby who was never fed.

Who am I?... I am the teen who was exploited.

Who am I?... I am the kid who was told to keep a dark secret.

Who am I?... I am someone who will be there for you, to hold you when you are pushing away, to nourish you when you are sick, to protect you when you are afraid...  
I am here because there is nowhere I'd rather be.

## I SAW TRANSFORMATION IN FRONT OF MY EYES IN THE MOST MAGICAL OF WAYS...

A few years ago, I joined Aldea Children and Family Services in Napa, California, as the new supervisor for its treatment foster care and adoption program. We had a fairly small, closely knit, and good-hearted team with much ambition to make a difference but with many roadblocks ahead. One of the many struggles concerned taking children who were highly wounded and traumatized and finding homes that had the patience and empathy to work with the many faces of hurt that these children expressed. We had several well-intentioned foster families that wanted to help and heal; however, they were confronted by the haunting face of pain and suffering that came in the form of cursing, swearing, lying, stealing, and so much more. Several of these parents had just completed all the requirements: home studies, clearances, and the standard foster parent training. They were ready with arms open to love and care for children removed from their families and even had dreams of maybe someday being the forever family for a child. Of course, this desire was shared by the team in the office as well.

Unfortunately, this goal proved difficult as family after family got frustrated with the behaviors that a child was displaying and decided that they couldn't work with that child any longer. Often this decision resulted in a 7-day notice to remove the child. This transfer was disruptive and devastating for the child who had to move but also impacted the foster family, our team, and the entire morale of the program and agency in many ways. Our amazing team saw a dimming of their light and energy because they felt that no matter what they did, they couldn't be successful.

As a group, we pondered ways to improve this situation. What could we offer our families to make them want to stick it out with the cursing and kicking child? We had limited resources and felt cornered with no way out of this dilemma. Several staff felt resigned to the situation, and it appeared hopeless for some of the kids with more difficult behaviors. Phrases such as "Any parent would give notice on that type of behavior" or "That child is not going to last long" were on the tips of everyone's tongues.

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Something had to be done. I felt myself losing faith in the goodness of humanity when we as adults were unable to help care for the most vulnerable of the human creation.

One day I received a text message from my supervisor, who had just heard about a new approach at an FFTA conference. He asked me to look into the 3-5-7 Model of Grief and Loss by Darla Henry and said this might be the magic we were waiting for. At that point, anything was better than continuing to see frustrated parents giving up foster care and staff becoming bitter from their losses. We discovered in this model something that eventually not only helped our children find some stability but also restored hope to our staff and our foster families, who came to believe that their capacity to care and their desire to love could overcome and heal difficult behaviors.

We decided to look at every aspect of our program and to introduce this beautiful and simple model into all aspects of our practice. We started by having the leadership team learn the model and then teach it to our staff and eventually our families. The 3-5-7 Model of Grief and Loss combined with Trauma Competent Caregiver training helped expand our families' capacity for tolerance, patience, and empathy. Through simple activities, all who attempted to participate were transformed.

## OUR FAMILIES HAD BEEN THERE ONCE THEMSELVES. THEY LOOKED INTO THE MIRROR AND SAW A REFLECTION OF A CHILD WHO WAS ONCE GIVEN UP ON.

I started working at Aldea on December 7, 2011, and have witnessed many amazing events. None, though, can ever come close to what I experienced the first time this new trauma sensitivity training and the 3-5-7 model were introduced to a group of our families. Having worked with these families for some time, I was familiar with their personalities, tendencies, body language, and much more. The day of training included an activity that our social worker would have done with one of the foster children. It was a letter to anyone they chose to write to...someone who had hurt them, someone they couldn't get closure from. Our leadership team was very anxious about how some of these long-time foster parents would react to such an activity. To our surprise, some of the

sternest and most tough-love parents were in tears by the end of the activity, volunteering to share their letters with the larger group of engaged parents.

Several activities were done that day, ending with a candle-lighting ceremony in honor of someone each family revered. One of the families lit a candle for us at Aldea, fighting back tears as they shared that they had found the place where they could build their forever family and that they felt that they were right where they belonged.

For some of these families, this was the first time they had ever been given the opportunity to get something like this off their chest. They also were able to realize that the children coming into their homes may have never been given a chance to share their pain with anyone and that sometimes their pain had been expressed in anger, fear, and hatred. Our families had been there once themselves. They looked into the mirror and saw a reflection of a child who was once given up on.

The changes we have experienced since adopting this model have been remarkable. The number of removal notices for children has dropped dramatically. We have finalized several adoptions for high-need youth (intensive services youth) who otherwise would have ended up in a higher level of care or in institutionalized care. We have witnessed families using the skills and empathy they learned in their training as they

work with the children in their homes.

Our staff members hold their heads high with pride and satisfaction because they truly are making a difference. Few families have left the agency or decided not to continue doing foster care. Our families speak of the agency with high regard, and several other families want to become foster families with our agency. And yes,

from that day onward, I, too, was transformed. My faith in the goodness and strength of the heart has been renewed because we teach in the language of the heart.

### Resources

Henry, D. (2012). *The 3-5-7 model: A practice approach to permanency*. Camp Hill, PA: Sunbury Press.

Schooler, J. (2014). *Wounded children, healing homes: How traumatized children impact adoptive and foster families*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

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# Recruiting Latino Foster and Adoptive Families: Understanding Is as Important as Doing

—by Maria C. Velasquez

As the number of Latino children and families in the United States grows, how can foster care and family service agencies adapt to understand the strengths and needs of these children and families to serve them effectively? News reports are full of stories about the challenges of engaging, recruiting, and supporting foster families and kin caregivers. However, many communities have developed successful recruitment efforts in Latino communities.

Before launching any effort, it's critical to understand who Latinos are. A recent guide to the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* stated:

**Latino:** "Any person of Latin American descent residing in the United States," according to Associate Director of Latino Studies Mintzi Martinez-Rivera from Indiana University, Bloomington. Latinos can be, she says, of any "color, shape or background." This is not to be confused with Latin Americans, which refers to the people living in Latin America right now.

**Hispanic:** People who share Spanish as a common language. This was a word adopted by the U.S. government in the 1970s to give people from Latin America a common identity, says Martinez-Rivera.

Today in the United States, one in six people and one in four children are Latino. Latinos represent the largest

economy in the United States and the fifteenth-largest economy in the world, and their numbers are growing. The percentage of children in foster care who are Latino is growing as well, for many reasons. Data related to Latino children and families and the child welfare system are limited. However, we do know that "although Latino children remain slightly underrepresented among children in foster care at the national level (20% in foster care compared to 22% in the child population as of 2008 [USDHHS, 2009]), current trends at the state level suggest an increasing overrepresentation of Latino children in certain states. In 2000, a state analysis revealed that Latino children were overrepresented in foster care in 10 states (Hill, 2005). In addition to the growing need, federal law and policy, including the Multiethnic Placement Act, require child welfare agencies to both eliminate discrimination and support family diversity.

## Importance of Culture

Latino families have a long history of helping raise children and, in general, are accustomed to large families. A strong value of family, community, rites, and traditions impact parenting and children's experiences in families. Examples include the following:

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- The concept of *hijos de crianza* whereby it's expected that other adults will step in to care for a child if the birth parents are unable to do so
- *Compadres and comadres*—trusted adults who may share child rearing and mentoring responsibilities
- Godparents (*padrino or madrina*)—chosen to sponsor a child at the rite of baptism and to accept responsibility for ensuring the child's religious upbringing, and who can care for the child in place of birth parents if needed

The idea of helping raise children in need of temporary or permanent families through informal foster care and adoption is common in Latino communities, members of which are willing to help and place great emphasis on the importance of family. The mind-set of inclusiveness means Latinos may be very accepting of sibling groups, which can help children develop attachments and positive identities.

Although the benefits of recruiting Latino families as kin caregivers or foster families are many, it is important to understand the barriers. Mistrust of government, a perception of foster care agencies as not community-friendly, a lack of culturally relevant recruitment efforts, cultural barriers, and documentation requirements may pose challenges for foster care agencies seeking to better serve children and youth. Tips for overcoming the barriers include the following:

- Recruit bilingual, bicultural staff from the communities you serve, and provide training to all staff to ensure that they use best practices in working with Latino families (for example, provide information about Latino parenting styles).
- Anticipate the prospective parents' needs and respond to them.
- Identify existing relationships to Latino communities to maximize partnerships (through staff, foster families, board members, consultants, contracted organizations, etc.).

- Take time to build new partnerships with Latino communities (for example, through community organizations or churches) and create meaningful relationships.
- When speaking with Latino community members, clarify the agency's relationship with government to reduce apprehension.
- Start by establishing personal relationships between staff and prospective families.
- Acknowledge stereotypes to help families examine their own biases.
- Address spirituality and celebrate the cultural traditions of Latino families.
- When placing children with a family, explain who the children are and where they come from.

Successful targeted recruitment in Latino communities requires focusing on areas with large concentrations of Latinos, offering materials in a language they'll understand, reaching out through community systems and media that Latinos have access to, focusing on face-to-face contact, and enlisting existing foster parents.

Consider using the health-care promoters approach (Promotores Model) that has been developed in Latino communities. This approach involves asking your existing foster parents about their experience, partnering with them as champions, training and supporting them as ambassadors to recruit new families, and rewarding them for the families they bring in.

Effective training techniques include offering training in Spanish (all sessions and materials) at locations familiar to Latino families, using an informal experiential teaching style rather than a lecture format, and encouraging group process and group problem-solving skills rather than solo learning. During the home study or certification process, when visiting and talking with prospective families, staff should be aware

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**The idea of helping raise children in need of temporary or permanent families through informal foster care and adoption is common in Latino communities, members of which are willing to help and place great emphasis on the importance of family.**





## Recruiting Latino Foster and Adoptive Families: Understanding Is as Important as Doing

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of the concepts of *respeto* (respect) and *dignidad* (dignity), understand various cultural definitions of family, and be knowledgeable about how the community regards authority and government systems. Supporting families as they negotiate requests for references and required documentation is especially important.

Supporting Latino families will improve retention. Being responsive to and advocating with families regarding supportive services they or the children in their care need, especially for children with high behavioral or medical needs, is an essential component of retaining all families. Engaging local community-based organizations and faith communities as brokers and supports can be especially helpful for Latino families. Bilingual and bicultural staff can often better engage families, build trust, and increase the family's understanding about how the child welfare and court systems work. Addressing issues of loss and separation (that the child experiences through removal, or that the foster family experiences during a reunification, for example), through the family's cultural lens, can reduce stress and increase understanding.

A partnership with and for Latino families should not begin with the sole purpose of recruitment. Partnering with the Latino community is a must when caring for Latino children in the foster care system and providing culturally sensitive support and services for their families.

### Resources

AdoptUSKids, *Benefits for children of recruiting Latino foster and adoptive families*, [http://www.nrcdr.org/\\_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/latino-tipsheet-packet.pdf](http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/latino-tipsheet-packet.pdf)  
Promotores model: <https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/promotores/index.html>

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