

Chapter X

Child-Specific Recruitment

1. Purpose

Child-specific recruitment “means developing an individualized plan for a particular child based on the child’s background” (Goodman, 1999). It is often used for children that can be more difficult to place through traditional recruitment techniques, such as older children or those who are medically fragile. To the greatest possible extent, the youth should play a central role in deciding on the recruitment materials, methods, and targets.

EUREKA!

First You Have To Believe

A study of the longest-waiting children in New York State (Avery, 1999) found that caseworker attitudes and practices may play a significant role in the failure to find permanent placements for some children. Forty-one percent of caseworkers responded “no” and 26% responded “maybe” when asked “Do you think this child is ultimately adoptable?”



Avery concludes from this that workers’ skepticism “appears to be translated into reduced recruitment efforts on behalf of the child.”

Furthermore, over one-third of caseworkers indicated that they believed some types of placements (gay/lesbian, transracial, or single-parent) were inappropriate; presumably these workers would not be actively recruiting parents in these categories.

For 70% of the children in the study, none of seven identified standard recruitment tools (newspapers and other print media, television, radio, national and state photolisting books, Internet and other, such as special events and local/regional exchanges) were used.

Excerpted from Casey Family Programs. (March 25, 2003). *Individualized and targeted recruitment for adoption*. Online: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/targeted-recruitment.pdf>

2. Selecting and Preparing Youth

Workers Must Carefully Select and Prepare Children for Child-Specific Publicity

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For a child who has been neglected and abused most of her life, finding a permanent family can be one of the most terrifying yet important events she will ever experience. Her worker plays a crucial role in deciding if publicity will be a part of the efforts to find a home for her, and helping to prepare her for the exposure if it is.

Selecting a Child

When selecting children for publicity with the dual goals of family recruitment and heightened public awareness in mind, choose those who are representative of children in care. Publicity for a healthy infant would undoubtedly find a family for the child and inspire lots of calls, but would not generate appropriate resources for other waiting children. After selecting a child, workers must explore the child's situation before continuing. Essential questions include:

- **Will the child be safe?** If a child comes from a violent birth family, public exposure might be risky. If publicity could lead an angry relative to find and endanger the child, the risks outweigh the benefits.
- **Are relatives or foster parents adopting?** Routinely publicizing children who are going to be adopted by people they know undermines a recruitment campaign. Families respond to publicity because they perceive that children need help. If they are taught otherwise, they may lose interest and tell their friends not to bother.
- **Is the child's caretaker supportive?** Caretakers' cooperation has a direct bearing on children's perceptions about public exposure. If the child's caretaker cannot nurture her during the publicity campaign, select another child—especially for higher-profile venues.
- **Is the child ready for placement?** Although crises are impossible to predict, a child who is completely unprepared for life in a family setting is not well served by public exposure. Hold off on publicity if the child needs intensive therapy instead of an adoptive home.

Nonetheless, placement in a treatment program should never exclude a child from recruitment efforts—if the child needs a family to be involved in a slow transition toward adoption, don't be afraid to ask for that.

Preparing the Child

A selected child should be developmentally and age-appropriately informed of the benefits and risks of publicity. Share the goals of the exposure—emphasize that the right family may or may not come forward and that the publicity is part of a larger effort to find a home. Preparation must include an honest discussion of what it will be like for the child to see himself on flyers or on television.

One key to successful recruitment is getting workers and children committed to using publicity alongside other techniques until a family is found—with the understanding that months or years of diligence and patience may be required. Unless the child is unable to understand, always work to secure her cooperation before public exposure. If a child does not feel good about being publicized, the chances for successfully finding and placing her with a family are greatly reduced. Once the child is on board:

- **Share samples of previous efforts.** Give the child an opportunity to view materials about other children of similar age and background. This can reduce fears, spur honest questions, and minimize feelings of isolation.
- **Talk about helping other children.** Tell the child, “We are asking you to appear in publicity because we think you are [articulate/charming/mature/funny/ outgoing/ energetic]. We know that with your help, we can really promote adoption.” Frame selection for public exposure as a compliment so the child can take pride in helping others—even if it doesn’t find a family for him.
- **Discuss realistic expectations.** The child must understand that months may pass before the right family comes forward, completes a home study, and commits to adopting. Be clear that even if the publicity does not immediately find a good match, it is no reflection on the child’s attractiveness, personality, or lovability. Moreover, it does not mean a home will never be found.
- **Alert adults in the child’s support network.** Children may experience anxiety when publicity efforts begin as well as renewed anger at past abuse and fears about adoption. The child’s teachers, therapists, and mentors must be prepared to lend extra encouragement.
- **Explore possible reactions.** Help the child to understand that neighbors and classmates may see the publicity. Explain that some don’t know much about adoption. Role-play what the child will say in response to positive and negative comments from adults or peers.
- **Rehearse what to do or say.** If publicity efforts include an interview, rehearse potential questions and answers. Help the child brainstorm ideas about her interests, best qualities, biggest accomplishments, and desire for a family. If possible, make a practice tape and review it together, giving compliments and making suggestions.
- **Let the child contribute.** Give the child ownership—even a small child can select a favorite location for videotaping or taking photographs. Older children can help with descriptions. If appropriate, ask the child to share the things a prospective family should know.
- **Physically prepare the child.** Help the child pick comfortable, clean clothes that make him feel confident. Make certain he is fed and rested, avoid scheduling the session during any favorite activities, and select a time when medications are most effective.
- **Accompany the child to the session or event.** When possible, the person who prepared the child for publicity should be present for support. A trusted adult

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can reduce the child's anxiety and advocate for the child should the interviewer or photographer ask any inappropriate questions.

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

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One Perspective on Preparing the Child

One child-placing agency in North Carolina shares the following:

Young people are VERY sensitive about what materials are used, and WHERE they will be distributed! Their social worker or current foster parent should take the time to be very specific with the child about “what if” questions such as:

- What if one of your friends sees this information?
- What if someone from your church asks you about the flyer they saw?

We often turn to the child's therapist for insight on just how involved the child should be with recruitment efforts. Age, developmental readiness, and other factors are all important to consider.



3. Examples of Child-Specific Recruitment

There are different types of child-specific recruitment.

1. **Child-Specific Publicity:** Agencies provide to the public a photo and written profile of a child free for adoption. NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network can provide assistance to agencies on writing profiles. “Child-specific publicity has two goals. First...it stimulates prospective parents’ interest in a child and results in adoption. Second—and more commonly—it builds public awareness about the need for parents and generates resources for other children in the system” (Zemler, 2000). Following are some common venues for child-specific publicity:

- **Photolisting Book of Waiting Children***
In North Carolina, this service is provided by NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network through the Photo Adoption Listing Service (PALS)
http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/adopt/pals/NC_KIDSLINKBUTTONS.pdf
- **Internet Listings***
NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network photolisting website (<http://www.adoptuskids.org/states/nc/index.aspx>) and many individual agency websites feature photographs and brief descriptions of waiting children, along with agency contact information. As more people turn to the Internet as a primary source of information, such listings become more and more important.

*Under the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA), all children free for adoption must be registered with NC Kids to participate in these recruitment efforts.

- **Print and Television Campaigns** such as “Wednesday’s Child”
Each week a child or sibling group is featured, with photograph, description, and agency contact information. Suggestions for how to begin (Ortiz, 2001; cited in Casey Family Programs, 2003) include the following:
 - Send a press kit that includes a fact sheet and press release about your agency, a sample campaign item (photograph and profile of a child) and a letter to the features editor or the editor of the section most appropriate for the column.
 - Follow up with a phone call.
 - Pitch your idea: for example, a front-page feature profiling a child, a foster family, and a successful adoption that leads to announcing the regular column.
 - Meet with the reporter you'll be working with.
 - Be sure to make their deadlines so the column is not a burden for them.
 NC Kids can help you develop a Wednesday’s Child program. Call them toll free at 1-888-NC KIDS-5.

- **Heart Galleries**
Professional photographs of waiting children become part of a traveling exhibit at high-profile locations. A description of the child and agency contact information accompanies each photograph. NC Kids has a list of professional photographers around the state willing to provide this service for free to county DSS agencies. See Recipe Card 3 in the Appendix for details on a very successful Heart Gallery in North Carolina.

- **Adoption Parties/Matching Events**
Waiting children and potential adoptive families come together for organized activities and, in some cases, facilitated conversations. The families are able to review children’s profiles before and after the events. See Appendix S for more on holding an adoption party.

2. **Child-Centered Recruitment:** Youth take a leading role in deciding how to describe their strengths, needs, and interests, and in designing recruitment materials. This process often helps teens in resolving concerns about adoption and preparing them to accept new permanency goals. For a specific example, refer to Recipe Card 4 in the Appendix for a description of how to create slide shows with teens in care.

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A Youth-Directed Recruitment Resource

Under One Sky, a nonprofit based in Western North Carolina, has developed a new program to help North Carolina's children find adoptive families. What makes its approach unique is the extent to which it is directed by the youth themselves.



At the core of Under One Sky's efforts is Passages, a two-year, co-educational, camp-based mentoring village for youths aged 12 to 18 who are in foster care and free for adoption. The camp provides a supportive, honest, respectful place to explore the possibility of adoption.

Youths who choose to pursue adoption create their own promotional materials. Working with experienced professionals and their instructor-mentors, youths develop recruitment plans that may include a video, written profile, and radio public service announcement. The youth themselves act as creative directors of these projects and decide how the materials will be used.

The written profiles developed at Passages are 12-page booklets called 'Zines. Youths control each development stage. After pictures are taken they choose which shots to use. After the interview is transcribed, they select excerpts to appear in the 'Zine. They also do the final layout. As you can see by clicking [here](#), the result gives prospective adoptive parents a vivid impression of the child's interests and spirit.

Youths participating in Passages also get to say where their promotional materials will be used. For example, one girl requested that her photograph not be shown in her community's newspaper.

Under One Sky is not itself a child placing agency. Instead, it works with public and private agencies to provide a community of support for youth.

For more information about Passages, including eligibility guidelines, costs, and registration information, contact Under One Sky (828/251-9703; e-mail: info@under1sky.org; www.under1sky.org).

3. Identifying Potential Caregivers from a Child's Life

- a. Children and teens are asked specifically and repeatedly about important people in their lives, even before they come into care. As the Casey Breakthrough Series Collaborative (Casey Family Programs, 2005) recommends, "**Ask early and ask often.**"
- b. **Case records** are reviewed in detail to identify significant support people in the child's or birth family's history.

- c. Every **Child and Family Team Meeting** is an opportunity to identify, engage, and support potential caregivers for a child. Be sure to include professionals from other systems who are working with the child or family, such as schools, mental health providers, or juvenile courts. They may know of additional support people to bring into the planning.

Sources: Casey Family Programs, 2003; Zemler, 2000

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Making the Most of Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTs)

Carrie Lauterbach from Appalachian Family Innovations' Adoption Plus program uses a team approach to help with child-specific recruitment. Here are some suggestions based on what has worked for them:

- **Cast a wide net to build your team.** The core team of agency staff generates a contact list of other folks who know and care about each specific child. Invite them all to team meetings. The more people spreading the word in their own personal communities, the better.
- **Share leadership on the team.**
- **Do "in-team training."** This is critical, as it ensures all team members are using the same language, know how a recruitment plan is built and implemented, are sharing appropriate information, and have clarity about follow-up.
- **Identify who the contact person will be** for any interested families that come forward. Families can get lost in the process without clear guidelines.
- **Immediate follow up** is critical.
- Teams **review all outreach materials** for accuracy and the right message.
- **Never say** "We are going to find your forever family." Don't make promises you not sure you can keep!

4. Family Finding Project

Family Finding, developed by internationally known youth permanency expert Kevin Campbell, is a set of strategies being used throughout the United States and in the Province of British Columbia to find lifelong supports for children and young people in foster care. The premise of Family Finding is that youth in care can make or reestablish appropriate biological family connections, when given the opportunity and the time for personal maturation and changes in family situations.

Family Finding's process of connecting and reconnecting youth with their families includes an extensive search and discovery process to identify and then engage family members. Internet-based search tools, such as [US Search](#), are used to identify and locate

family members we did not know where to find. Therapists and children fly throughout the country to connect with family members or find relatives who live as close as next door. The family leads the planning process to ensure they remain engaged and can potentially provide lifelong support for the young person. The support offered by newly found family members may include inviting the child to spend the holidays with them or, in some cases, providing a permanent home in which the child can grow and flourish (CFFYC, 2008).

In 2008 the NC Division of Social Services received a grant from The Duke Endowment to pilot Family Finding in six North Carolina counties: Buncombe, Catawba, Gaston, Mecklenburg, New Hanover and Wake. Each site anticipates serving about 25-30 youth per year. The grant includes training with Kevin Campbell, national evaluation by Child Trends in Washington DC, on-site coordinators for each county DSS, and a state consultant. The Division hopes the pilot will last between 2-5 years, depending on continued funding.

In November 2008 participating counties had hired their respective coordinators who will do Family Finding work. They had also determined the youth/child eligibility criteria and referral criteria and begun practicing Family Finding techniques on sample cases with a hope of being fully implemented in early 2009. Kevin Campbell will provide training for participating North Carolina counties in 2009.

Tamika Williams (Tamika.Williams@ncmail.net), Permanency Coordinator for the Division, is the primary contact for information about this project.

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5. Winning Strategies

See the following in the Appendix:

- **Recipe Card 3—Child-Specific Publicity: PowerPoint Slide Shows** (with teens in care)
- **Recipe Card 4—Child-Specific Publicity: Creating a Heart Gallery.** Using this strategy, Gaston County DSS found adoptive homes for 7 out of 12 highlighted children in SFY 2006-2007. In the first six months of the following year, 6 out of 10 highlighted children were adopted.
- **Seek families among groups of people who share a common interest with the child.** One agency in North Carolina shared this example: we have a 10-year-old girl who needs an adoptive family. Her current foster family discovered that she loves caring for farm animals, and the child is currently an active member of 4-H. We have asked the 4-H Leader if he will let us talk to the adults in this local 4H about the needs of this child in finding a family. Hopefully that outreach will generate more ideas on where else we might go.

Child-Specific Adoption Promotion and Post-Adoption Support

Many public agencies have had successful collaborations with private agencies that provide specialized adoption recruitment and support. These specialists establish relationships with the children and teens, and with prospective adoptive families. They provide assessment, preparation, matching, and ongoing support services to the youth and the families. Some programs have had high levels of success with teens and special

needs children considered the hardest to place. Please refer to Recipe Card 5 in the Appendix for details of one successful model.

Every year the NC Division of Social Services contracts with private agencies to help county DSS agencies recruit adoptive families for specific children (called adoption promotion) and provide post-adoption support. Children and families receive the services at no cost to the family or the referring agency.

For adoption promotion, agencies can refer any child in their custody. Generally the child is legally free for adoption. In SFY 2008-09 providers for adoption promotion are:

- Appalachian Family Innovations, Adoption Plus (828/236-2877; www.biabh.org/pp_adoption.html)
- Another Choice for Black Children (704/394-1124; www.acfbc.org/)
- Children's Home Society of North Carolina (800/632-1400, www.chsnc.org)
- Lutheran Family Services (919/832-2620; <http://www.lfscarolinas.org/>)
- Methodist Home for Children (888/305-4321; <http://www.lfscarolinas.org/>)

Families can be referred for post-adoption support at any time after the final decree and the vendor will provide post-adoption services based on the needs of the referred family. Services can include crisis management, behavioral strategies, family preservation services, information and community referral, and specialized training. The providers for this contract cover specific geographic areas. The Division sends out a Dear County DSS Director letter each year listing the providers and the counties where they will provide services. For the most recent list of providers and regions, visit the Division's Dear Director letter website at <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/dcdl/>.

To obtain additional information about adoption promotion, contact the Division's Amelia Lance (919/334-1096; Amelia.Lance@ncmail.net). For information on post-adoption support, contact the Division's Tamika Williams (919/334-1090; Tamika.Williams@ncmail.net).

6. Sponsorship Ideas for Funding Child-Specific Recruitment

Community groups can support child-specific recruitment by providing direct funding for a child's recruitment materials, organizing or hosting a Heart Gallery, or publicizing waiting children in their own publications or venues. For other ideas, see Chapter III.