

## Chapter II

# Assessing, Planning, and Evaluating Your Efforts

You can't decide where you're going until you know where you are. Take the time to assess your needs, plan your efforts, and evaluate how you're doing—it will pay off with more effective and lasting changes.

### 1. Use a Committee to Grow Your Recruitment Program

To sustainably recruit and retain families for children, you need a recruitment *program*, not a recruitment person. A committee of agency and community stakeholders can most effectively grow your program. Here are some tips for forming and focusing your committee:

- Include at least one program manager so the committee has enough clout to get things done.
- Include at least one current resource parent and one youth currently or previously in care and, if possible, one birth parent.
- Include community members who reflect the children in care.
- One of the committee's goals will be getting community members with expertise in relevant areas such as media relations, marketing, and fundraising to join the committee.

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### 2. Step 1: Where Are You Now?

Here are some of the things you need to understand to begin assessing where your resource family recruitment and retention program is right now.

- Profile of children in foster care in your county, including:
  - How many there are
  - Demographic profile (consider age, ethnicity, sibling groups, etc.)
  - What neighborhoods or areas of the community (e.g., zip codes) they are from
  - Other characteristics, such as services needed or other special needs
  - Where they are placed
- Profile of your agency's resource families, including:
  - How many there are
  - Demographic profile
  - The neighborhoods or areas of the community in which they live
  - Kinds of children they are currently willing to care for (consider age, ethnicity, special needs, etc.)
  - Capacity of their homes
  - How many are currently in use

- Qualitative data on your agency's strengths and needs
  - What do your resource families think your agency does well?
  - What do resource families think are your agency's greatest needs or areas for improvement?
  - How can your resource families contribute to your agency's efforts?
  - What do agency staff members see as the agency's strengths and needs related to resource family recruitment and support?
  - How can staff outside the licensing/recruitment unit contribute to your agency's efforts?
- Data on what's working right now—your agency's successful recruitment and retention methods.

**Ask prospective resource families who call your agency**

- How did you hear about us? What made you decide to call today?
  - This tells you which methods generate the most calls.

**Ask your current resource families:**

- How did you hear about us? What made you decide to become a foster or adoptive parent?
  - This tells you which marketing approaches are most successful in recruiting people who make it through the licensing process.
  - See the Appendix E for a sample intake form for new callers and Appendix F for a sample table to track responses. You can also download Appendix F as an Excel file by clicking [here](#).
- What does our agency do to keep you working with us as a resource family?
  - This tells you which retention methods are most successful.

By gathering data from the experts in your system, and by comparing the profile of the children in foster care and to your current resource families, you can determine what your greatest needs are. This will determine how to prioritize your efforts and funding.

## EUREKA!

### Developing Your Current Resource Families

Many licensed foster homes are empty or underused. A survey found that **35% of licensed homes had no children placed** in them (Cox, et al. 2002). Research suggests that a major factor in under-use of foster homes is that families who become licensed are **often unable or unwilling to care for the majority of young people needing care**: school-age and adolescent children, and children with special needs (USDHHS, 2002). Anecdotal evidence suggests this is happening in North Carolina. Some families want only young children; some say they only want children of a certain race; still others are interested only in adoption.



Conversely, research shows that families who express a willingness to foster “difficult to place” children are more likely to have children placed with them, foster more children overall, and foster longer (Cox, et al., 2002). This raises important questions for your efforts:

- How many resource families in your county are unused? What are the reasons behind this?
- What training and support can you give to prospective and current resource parents so they feel more competent and willing to care for the children who need homes? Ask your licensed resource families who don’t currently have placements: what training or support would make you feel more comfortable about caring for these children?
- In other cases, what training and support may be needed so that *agency staff* can feel confident that your licensed families are competent and prepared to care for these children?
- What groups or communities can you target who might be willing to care for these children? What is the best way to do this?

### Data Collection Resources

Here are some suggestions for sources you might consult or create to help assess your agency’s recruitment and retention of resource families:

#### Quantitative Data

- **NC Child Welfare Program** (<http://ssw.unc.edu/cw/>). This site allows you to search a wealth of data on demographics and outcomes for children in care in your county, and to compare your county to others of the same size or to the state as a whole.
- **Simple Resource Family Tracking Spreadsheet**. Use a spreadsheet or table to maintain a profile of your current resource families (see Appendix F).

## Qualitative Data

- Annual resource family survey (see Appendix G for sample)
- Annual staff survey
- Foster parent stay interviews (see Golden Nugget box below and Appendix H for tips and sample questions)
- Foster parent exit interviews (see Appendix I for tips and sample questions)
- Agency roundtable with resource families and staff

### GOLDEN NUGGET!

**What Is a Stay Interview?**

A “stay interview” is a conversation designed to find out what makes a resource family stay in the program and what might make them leave. It is a way to proactively gather information about what is working well in the partnership and where improvements could be made. Stay interviews can help determine what kind of acknowledgement, training, support, or problem-solving can be done to keep families fostering and developing (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2005).



### 3. Step 2: What Are Your Greatest Priorities?

Once you’ve assessed where you are in terms of children needing homes and homes available, set specific recruitment and retention goals and priorities. This will help focus everyone’s time and attention, and it will help you see what’s working and what’s not.

Setting goals for a program requires the same rule of thumb as setting goals with a family: your goals should be realistic, objective, and measurable. If the goals are unrealistically high, people will get frustrated and give up. Ask yourself: if this is our goal, how will we know we’ve achieved it? How will we know we’re making progress?

Of course, how much you can achieve also depends on the resources your agency and community can devote to the recruitment and retention of resource families. The table below includes some priorities for agencies of different sizes, sample goals, and where you can find related information in this guide.

***Your goals should be realistic, objective, and measurable.***

## Information for Developing Your Program and Setting Goals

If Your Priority Is . . .	Your Goal Might Be...	See Page
Creating a recruitment and retention committee	Committee of x# of people will meet monthly and recruit 2 community members in next 3 months	10
Gathering data to assess your program	Conduct survey of foster parents and gather profile data of youths and homes in next 3 months	10
Getting participation from others in the agency	All staff will be evaluated and given flex time for their participation in recruitment and support activities in 1 year	7, 11
Finding more families for teens	x# of additional families for teens in 1 year	52
Finding more families for children with medical needs	x# of additional families for medically needy children in 1 year	52
Finding more families for siblings	x# of additional families for siblings in 1 year	53
Licensing more families of any kind	x# of additional families in 1 year	10
Collaborating with other counties/private agencies to pool resources	Convene regional planning meeting with agency directors/managers in 3 months	43-44
Developing and supporting current families to take children in need of care (teens, special needs, etc.)	Provide quarterly in-service trainings on relevant topics	62

### 4. Step 3: Develop and Apply Your Agency's MEPA Compliance and Annual Plan

As directed by federal law, the NC Division of Social Services asks each North Carolina county DSS agency to develop its own annual plan for complying with the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996 (MEPA/IEP).

Although in the context of a busy agency this requirement may sometimes feel unwelcome, it is actually a valuable opportunity. Your MEPA plan gives you all the data you need and outlines what you will do during the course of the year. Don't treat this as an exercise in creative writing. Instead, develop and use a workable plan to systematically enhance your resource family recruitment and retention efforts. Work your MEPA plan!

For a MEPA plan template that can be customized for your agency, see Appendix J.