

# Chapter IV

## Diversity

Federal law and best practice dictate that agencies should diligently recruit potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom homes are needed (P.L. 104-188).

When recruiting resource families for a targeted population, involve any agency staff who are a part of that population and/or are trained to address racial/ethnic/cultural barriers. Similarly, agencies should ask current foster, adoptive, and kinship families to help them learn about and connect with various cultures and groups in the community.

It is important to provide culturally appropriate materials, food, and personal products and to decorate lobbies, offices, booths at fairs, etc. with items which reflect the cultural heritage of the various communities from which you want to recruit resource families.

When families from diverse backgrounds express an interest in becoming a resource family, allow for flexibility; recognize the challenges different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups might face adjusting to rules and regulations to which they are not accustomed. One of the ways to help people feel comfortable in a new setting is to be aware of the language used.

***Use current resource families to learn about and connect with various cultures and groups in your community.***

### 1. Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is language which recognizes that:

- People's experiences differ.
- Our shared language makes the experiences of dominant groups more visible than those of oppressed groups.
- People are empowered by having a language with which to express their life experiences.
- Language changes as cultural and social conditions change.
- Our language choices have the power to hurt and exclude others and to damage or hinder relationships.

Culturally appropriate and non-gender-specific language should be used in professional documentation and advertising and educational materials.

#### General Principles of Inclusive Language

1. Choose inclusiveness over grammatical correctness or linguistic grace.
  - With a little thought, these need not conflict.
2. Call people what they want to be called.
  - Individual and group preferences can change over time. Keep up to date.
  - If you're not sure, ask.
  - Words do have the power to hurt. They also have the power to convey understanding and respect.
3. Take correction with grace. Your willingness to do so demonstrates partnership.
  - DON'T SAY: "I didn't mean anything by it" or "That's just political correctness."

- Such statements convey that you weren't thinking about what you were saying, didn't care enough to think about how your words would affect the other person, or that you think other considerations are more important.
- Our language says more about what we think than we are usually aware of, so choose language that reflects what you really mean.
- DO SAY: "Oops...sorry. I won't say that again."
  - Then follow through. If you're not sure why someone took exception to something you said, ask.

Source: "Domestic Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Bisexual Communities," A curriculum developed for: HIV Education and Training Programs NYSDOH AIDS Institute, by NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence July, 2001, cited in North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

## 2. Non-English Speaking Resource Families

Although partnering with non-English speaking families can be a significant challenge for monolingual child welfare staff, families should not be discouraged from becoming a resource family because of this barrier. Being able to communicate with a child in his own language as you take care of him 24 hours a day is far more important than the ease with which resource families communicate with professionals serving the child.

***The ease with which resource families communicate with a child is far more important than the ease with which they communicate with professionals serving the child.***

Still, agencies have a responsibility to ask practical questions about working with current and prospective resource families who do not speak English, such as, who can conduct pre-service and other training in this family's language? Even if agencies have documentation forms available in the family's language, that does not mean there is someone in the agency that can read that language once the forms are filled out.

Professionals ask (and rightly so) what will happen once we get non-English speaking families licensed—how will the family communicate with other professionals? Interact with the schools? Administer medication? There are many possible obstacles.

If you face questions such as these, don't be discouraged. Solutions can be found. Indeed, the seed of many solutions may be found within resource families themselves—often at least one adult in the household speaks some English, which allows communication and facilitates problem solving.

That said, at present there is no single way to get answers to questions you may have about licensing/approving and partnering with non-English speaking families. The best approach is to reach out to other agencies to see if they have encountered and overcome obstacles similar to the ones you face. The NC Division of Social Services sponsors several e-mail listservs that can be used to query your peers at other agencies:

- **MRS listserv.** Subscribed to by county DSS child welfare practitioners, supervisors, program managers, directors, university partners, Division staff, and others. To join, send e-mail to [MRS@lists.ncmail.net](mailto:MRS@lists.ncmail.net)
- **Child Welfare Supervisor listserv.** Subscribed to by county DSS child welfare supervisors, Division staff, university partners, and others. To join, send e-mail to [super-vision@resources.biglist.com](mailto:super-vision@resources.biglist.com).

- **Certified MAPP/GPS Leaders listserv.** Subscribed to by certified MAPP/GPS leaders and Division training staff. To join, contact the NC Division of Social Services' Child Welfare Staff Development Unit (919/334-1172).

## EUREKA!

### Resources for Working with Spanish-Speaking Families

- **Spanish-Speaking MAPP/GPS Leaders.** The Division maintains a list of certified MAPP/GPS leaders who speak Spanish and are willing to contract with agencies to lead Spanish-speaking MAPP/GPS groups. To obtain this information, call the Division's Child Welfare Staff Development Unit (919/334-1172).
- **Great Written Resource.** A resource on working with Spanish-speaking resource families is *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura: Promoting & Supporting Latino Families in Adoption and Foster Care* (AdoptUsKids, 2008). Go to [www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/NuestraFamilia\\_NuestraCultura.pdf](http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/NuestraFamilia_NuestraCultura.pdf)



### 3. Interpreters

Children in resource families should not be used as interpreters. Asking a child to interpret for his parents can disrupt the family hierarchy—it gives the child the opportunity to change the meaning of what's being said and/or it may expose the child to information he is not developmentally ready to hear. Instead, use an adult interpreter.

**Finding an Interpreter.** Many social services agencies contract with people from the community to help interpret exchanges with non-English speaking families. If your agency does not, or if you need to communicate in a language in which your regular interpreters are not fluent, consider contacting the language department of a nearby college or university or your local hospital; these can be excellent resources for locating free or low-cost interpreters. Faith communities (churches, mosques, temples) that serve native speakers of a language may also have people willing to volunteer time as an interpreter. Finally, reach out to organizations that provide ESL (English as a Second Language) classes in your county for recommendations. Once you identify one person who is bilingual, he or she can help you find other potential interpreters in the community.

**If You Cannot Find an Interpreter.** If no interpreter is available, some guidelines for communicating include the following:

- Speak slowly in a calm, moderate voice.
- Address a person using his or her complete name or last name. Use a formal style, especially if you are not familiar the person.
- Use any word(s) you know in the person's language and act out words and actions while verbalizing them.
- Discuss one topic at a time; give instructions in sequence.
- Avoid asking questions or making statements in the negative.
- Avoid using pronouns.

If there are still difficulties communicating, you may wish to try communicating in writing or through a third language (i.e., you may not speak Russian and the Russian parent may not speak English, but you both may speak some French).

**Translating Written Materials.** Web sites such as <<http://www.altavista/babelfish.com>> can translate blocks of text into many languages from English and vice versa at no cost. However, it is a good idea to limit your use of this resource—use a qualified translator to ensure your materials say what you intend them to say.

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

## 4. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resource Families

Because most child welfare professionals have not worked with deaf or hard of hearing resource families, they may anticipate difficulties in partnering with them. However, deaf and hard of hearing families should not be discouraged from becoming resource families. Indeed, because of their experiences and knowledge of community services and resources, they can provide excellent care—especially to children who are themselves deaf or hard of hearing. Following are some guidelines for working with resource families who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- Do not use children to interpret. Instead, use interpreters. The interpreter and speaker should be positioned beside one another so the resource family member can see both persons easily.
- If the resource family is speech reading, ensure proper lighting so he or she can see the speaker's mouth easily. The speaker should face the speech reader and be positioned at the speech reader's eye level. The speaker should talk slowly yet naturally.
- Consider videoconferencing to provide services for clients with hearing impairments.
- Consider needs of clients with hearing impairments when purchasing alarm systems, alarm clocks, phone systems, televisions and other equipment that is typically utilized through hearing.

**TTY Devices.** A text telephone device (TTY) is a keyboard and text display device that can be connected to a telephone and is used by persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or who have speech impairments. Some social services agencies have a TTY with a dedicated phone line. TTY equipment should be tested regularly and all staff should be trained on its use and appropriate terminology. If the organization does not have TTY it may communicate with TTY users via the NC Relay. The NC Relay system allows an operator to translate for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing for people who do not have a TTY system on their end. There is also TTY compatible software and hardware for personal computers. Additionally, TTY might be set up as an answering machine to retrieve text teletype messages. If your agency receives TTY calls on a voice line, these are typically identified by a high pitched electronic beeping sound, by an announcer, or by silence at the other end. If an organization uses portable TTY units, it is suggested that these are located near the phone in order to reduce delays.

NC Relay is a service which can connect a TTY caller with a hearing caller. Access NC Relay by dialing 711 or 877-735-8200.

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

## 5. American Indian Resource Families

When working with American Indian resource families it is important to learn about their tribe and its traditions and history. Child welfare professionals should have a good understanding of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and resources available within the tribe. They must also demonstrate a strong respect for the tribe's cultural integrity.

Resources for working with American Indian resource families include the following:

- **Working with American Indian Families**, *Children's Services Practice Notes*, vol. 11, no. 2 <[http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/vol11\\_no2.htm](http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/vol11_no2.htm)>
- **Indian Child Welfare Issues** [Resource Page], National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning <[http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info\\_services/indian-child-welfare.html](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/indian-child-welfare.html)>

### Recruiting American Indian Resource Families

American Indians often find it challenging to become resource families for the following reasons:

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 as many as 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 not trust the child welfare system and what it represents. They also may have concerns 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 for Overcoming Resistance

Try using a door-to-door home-finding approach. In this approach, a resource family recruiter begins by going to respected elders and to community and spiritual leaders. The leaders are informed about the need for resource families and are asked to recommend families 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. Reprinted from *Answering the Call: Getting More for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts, Practitioner's Guide* (n.d.)

## ***Recruiting American Indians: It's All About Relationships***

“Both of us are Lumbee, so we had a relationship starting out. We went to [tribal] board meetings to talk to them. Their concern is Native American children being placed with non-Native American families. But we explained to them our numbers, that Native American children far outweigh the number of Native American foster families. And that most recruitment comes from word of mouth, through churches, etc.

“We also adjusted our criteria. It used to be that you had to turn in an application before going to MAPP/GPS class. But we lost some people who didn't get their application in. Now, if someone calls and we have a MAPP/GPS class starting the next week, you're welcome to come. Just get us the application before the end of MAPP/GPS. We had five or six Native American families come to our last MAPP/GPS class.”

— Anthony Maynor & Debra Bailey, Robeson County DSS

## **6. Training for Cultural Sensitivity**

Stay in touch with demographic trends in the communities you serve. To find and prepare resource families who can meet the needs of the children in foster care, it is important to be able to answer the following types of questions about the children's racial, ethnic, or cultural groups.

- What are the roles of men and women in this culture? What is the role of children, elders and extended family members?
- What is the communication style of this culture? How does one show respect?
- How are children disciplined?
- What is the role of religion or spirituality in this community?

You can educate yourself through formal training, your own research and, most of all, by learning directly from someone who belongs to the group in question.

### **Building Affirming Relationships Across Lines of Difference**

True partnership with prospective and current resource families depends on one-on-one relationships and building trust. Some guidelines for relationship building with people who are different from you include the following.

- Be flexible about time; different cultures view time differently
- Correct pronunciation shows respect: learn to pronounce each person's name
- Do not be offended if a client speaks to another person in their language
- Adjust your communication style as much as possible to the person's style in regards to tone, pauses, pace of speech, gestures, eye contact, personal space, and touching
- Understand the person's interpretation of their culture; it is critical to recognize that everyone has his or her own personal belief system

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

## EUREKA!

### Using Culturally-Sensitive Recruitment to Meet the Needs of All Children

Recruiting families of color can pose a particular challenge when there is mistrust between agencies and communities (Casey Family Programs, 2005). The frequency with which children are placed with families of a different ethnicity can contribute to this sense of mistrust. In North Carolina, the high incidence of Lumbee children placed in non-Lumbee foster homes has caused concern (Jenkins, 2007), while the state's growing Latino population suggests a similar trend may develop if Latino foster families are not added to recruitment efforts.



Casey Family Programs' Breakthrough Series Collaborative (2005) has generated numerous interventions in this area. Agencies in other states have successfully undertaken recruitment campaigns among communities of color with similar interventions (Utah Foster Care Foundation, cited in ACF, 2001; Contra Costa, CA, "Kids Like Maria" campaign).

Recommendations include:

- a. Translating materials into Spanish or other languages of minority communities, including recruitment brochures, applications, flyers for schools, posters in community spaces, etc.
- b. Certifying foster families of color as co-trainers of MAPP/GPS
- c. Conducting joint recruitment efforts by families of color at fairs and other community events
- d. Making joint contact (agency staff and foster parents of color) with prospective foster families
- e. Having existing foster families of color contact prospective families who have dropped out or slowed in their momentum towards licensing
- f. Conducting informational meetings in other languages and/or with other foster parents of color
- g. Creating a recruitment video for specific groups of color
- h. Implementing a dedicated line for foster family inquiries with a recording in multiple languages
- i. Building relationships and focusing recruitment efforts in faith, ethnic, and civic organizations in communities of color