

Chapter VI

Community Education and Public Awareness

This chapter is based in large part on the NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Best Practices Manual (2006): special thanks for granting us permission to reprint and adapt this material.

Community education and public awareness efforts are essential to recruiting and retaining resource families—they increase the public's awareness of the need for resource families, create support for child welfare programs, and help us tap into existing community strengths and resources.


1. Community Education Planning

Every resource family recruitment and retention program should have a community education and public awareness plan. The plan should be simple yet creative, appeal to specific audiences and be culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate. Essential components of the plan include the goals and target audiences, messages, channels, timeline, and budget. Plans should incorporate as many types of educational activities as possible, including speaking engagements, development and distribution of materials, and media campaigns. The plan should begin with thorough research and end with an evaluation to measure success.

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Things to Consider When Planning a Campaign

- Year-round campaigns are considered more effective than periodic campaigns.
- Many people think about fostering for a year or more and hear messages about foster care 3 or 4 times before making an initial inquiry call.
- The more frequently people are exposed to positive messages, the more likely they are to call.



Source: Pasztor & Wynne, 1995

2. Purposes and Target Audiences

The primary focus of most community education and public awareness efforts will be on encouraging people to consider stepping forward to explore becoming a resource parent. Education efforts should also inform potential volunteers and other community stakeholders (e.g., churches, civic clubs, etc.) about what they can do to support the good work of your agency. Messages for education campaigns should be carefully designed based on the needs of your agency and the needs of the children and families you serve. Chapters VIII, IX, and X of this guide provide more information about the audiences for general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment efforts.

3. Community Education Events

Child welfare agencies can enhance recruitment of resource families by participating in or sponsoring community education events. These events help build community awareness and advertise the mission and services of the organization. Community education events may also serve as fundraisers. (See Chapter III for more on fundraising.) Often agencies partner with other community organizations in outreach efforts, which increases the reach of their message and enhances interagency collaboration. Common community education events include the following:

- Bills with foster care/adoption inserts
- Book club focus on foster care/adoption themes
- Candlelight vigils to promote awareness of child abuse
- Celebration around anniversaries, facility expansions, or high profile visitors
- Celebration of appreciation to community partners
- Community picnic or potluck
- Interfaith gathering
- Child welfare issue forums
- Marches
- Newspaper pledge in support of foster and adoptive parents signed by members of community
- Participation in national campaigns, including Foster Care Month in May and Adoption Awareness Month in November
- Faith organization-sponsored prayer or meditation services
- Proclamation signing ceremony
- Shopping bags or other containers with resource family recruitment messages
- Panels of former/current youth in foster care and/or resource families

4. Speaking Engagements

Managing a Speakers Bureau

Resource families and former foster youth can be very effective speakers, especially if they tell their own story. Some child welfare agencies run a speaker's bureau that includes people trained and prepared to speak about the need for resource families, child welfare issues, and the organization. Speaker's bureaus should offer presentations in all languages spoken in the community.

Typically, the organization maintains records on speakers including the following information:

- Name
- Mailing and e-mail addresses
- Telephone numbers (including mobile phone numbers)
- Scheduling preferences (day, night, week, weekend)
- Group preferences such as civic groups, youth, businesses, faith organizations, or other specific populations
- Geographic preferences
- Speaker's status as a resource parent or former foster child who will talk about personal experience, if applicable

Resource families and former foster youth can be very effective speakers.

A designated staff person or volunteer usually coordinates speaking engagements. They will contact the speaker who is the best match based on the information above and keep records of all speaking engagements.

SAYSO, which is North Carolina's organization of current and former foster youth, has members who have had experience making presentations that include "telling their story." Your county may have a local chapter of SAYSO, or you can contact them through their website at www.saysoinc.org.

Speaker's Bureau Records

It is important for organizations to keep records of all speaking engagements and to evaluate the speakers. Following the speaking engagement, an evaluation and thank you note should be sent or given to the group that requested the speaking engagement.

Other speaker's bureau documentation may include the following information:

- Audience
- Contact person
- Mailing address
- Phone number and e-mail address
- Number of people in audience
- Volunteer time donated by speaker
- Date sent evaluation and thank you note to the group
- Date added group to mailing list, if requested

5. Printed and Electronic Education Materials

There are a variety of ways that your agency can educate the community through written materials. These materials may be created in-house with the help of desktop publishing software, contracted out to professional publishers, adapted with permission from a neighboring county or partner agency, or obtained from national or regional campaigns. To obtain posters, PSAs, and other promotional materials developed by the Ad Council in cooperation with AdoptUsKids and the US Department of Health and Human Services, go to <http://www.adcouncil.org> or <http://www.adoptuskids.org>.

When creating or reviewing drafts of printed materials it is important to consider the following types of visual elements to make the materials more appealing to readers:

- Boxes, borders, backgrounds
- Capital letters, bold, italics, underlining
- Colors
- Graphics
- Headings, subheadings and captions
- Justification
- Photos that reflect diversity
- Sidebars and white space
- Spacing
- Typefaces

The agency's logo should be placed on all printed education materials.

The following types of printed materials are commonly created and distributed by resource family recruitment programs.

Brochures

The brochure should be written from the public's point of view and be concise, action-oriented, and focused on success and the future. Brochures might contain the following information:

- Mission
- Statement describing the need, including basic information about the characteristics of the children and families served
- Information about who is eligible and the process needed to become a foster or adoptive parent
- Description of what the organization needs to fulfill its mission
- Description of how the reader may help
- Contact information

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Giving Resource Families Business Cards

Matt Davies, a board member of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, recommends that agencies provide business cards to foster and adoptive parents, who can then give them out to people interested in learning more about becoming a resource parent.



Fact Sheets

A fact sheet is a one-page document that offers statistics relating to foster care, adoption, other child welfare issues, and information about services provided by the organization. Information for fact sheets can be found at the Child Welfare Information Gateway (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/>), the NC Division of Social Services website (<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/>), and the site "NC Child Welfare Program" (<http://ssw.unc.edu/cw/>).

Newsletters

Organizations may publish a single newsletter or separate newsletters for the volunteers, staff, and community. See Appendix M for a sample newsletter for resource families from Nash County DSS. It is also important to contribute articles about foster care and adoption to other organizations' newsletters. Newsletters should look professional and usually contain the following types of information:

- Mission statement
- Local and national information relating to foster care and adoption
- Program highlights and information about services offered
- Updates on adoption and foster care related statistics
- Recent and current events and projects
- Calendar of upcoming events
- Resource family, volunteer, or staff profiles
- Legislative information
- Information about partnerships with other organizations

- Organizational and individual honors received
- Hours of clothes closet, etc. (if applicable)
- Needs list
- New resources such as library materials
- Position announcements
- Contact information including the organization's name, mailing address, editor's name, phone number and e-mail address
- Statement requesting address corrections and notification if receiving multiple copies as well as a request for readers to contribute names and addresses for the mailing list

Promotional Items and Advertisements

Promotional items might include posters, bookmarks, stickers, bumper stickers, pencils, pens, T-shirts, mugs or other items with the agency's logo and/or recruitment theme. Additionally agencies may advertise on billboards, the inside and outside of buses, and other locations.

Distribution of Printed Materials

Printed materials may be distributed in person, by mail, or electronically. An important part of the program's annual community education and public awareness plan is where and how your materials will get distributed. Having this information discussed during the planning process will be helpful when decisions need to get made about how much material to have printed. It can also be helpful to discuss the production and distribution of materials to coincide with large speaking engagements or display events (such as community events, health fairs, etc.).

Personal Distribution

Written materials may be distributed through brochure stands at the agency, by handing out at speaking engagements, and by posting at other organizations and businesses.

Some popular places to distribute information include the following:

- Apartment bulletin boards
- Businesses
- Doctors office waiting and exam rooms
- Grocery stores
- Information tables and booths at community fairs
- Laundry mats
- Post offices
- Public buildings
- Schools and libraries

Distribution by Mail

Printed materials may also be distributed by mail. Your community education plan should address mailing expenses and guide staff in decisions about mass mailings. It is important for mailing lists to be accurate, coded, and maintained on a database with names, titles, addresses, phone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and notes about previous contacts or conversations.

Electronic Distribution

All printed materials may also be distributed electronically through e-mail or web sites. It is important for recruitment and retention staff to work carefully with electronic

communications experts to ensure appropriate distribution. A quick way to distribute materials for public use is to format your documents as pdf files, through Adobe Acrobat. Storing files in Adobe Acrobat pdf format and keeping the original Microsoft Word document (doc) in a safe place ensures that the document cannot be edited unintentionally. Similarly, when distributing fliers or other announcements electronically, attaching them as pdf files instead of doc files ensures that they cannot be modified by the receiver.

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Working with PDFs

To download a free copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader, with which you can **read** pdf files, visit:

<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>. Install this application once you download it.

There are two free software programs you can download to **create** pdf files:

- For PrimoPDF, visit: www.primopdf.com
- For Cute PDF Writer, visit:
<http://www.cutepdf.com/Products/CutePDF/Writer.asp>

After you have downloaded the software, to convert a Microsoft Word document to pdf format, follow these steps:

1. Go to File menu
2. Choose Print
3. Next to "Printer Name," click arrow so drop down menu appears
4. Choose Adobe pdf¹



6. Media Relations

It is important for resource family recruiters to understand the staffing of media organizations and to keep current lists of media contacts. See Appendix N for a sample format. The following positions are common contacts:

Television

- News directors
- Producers
- Editors
- Anchors
- Reporters

Radio

- Talk or Public Affairs directors
- Producers

¹ This only works AFTER you have installed PDF software.

- Hosts
- Reporters
- Bookers

Typically the structure at print media organizations includes editors and reporters who write for newspapers, magazines, or web sites in the following topic areas:

- National events
- City or metro events
- Editorials
- Features
- Special topics such as child welfare issues

When planning media efforts, it is important to be aware that local stories may be picked up by wire services and printed in state or national media outlets. Media pieces may take on a variety of formats, several of which are outlined below.

Editorials

Editorials highlight a specific current issue, are usually 700 words or less and are written in the format of a memorandum. Prior to creating an editorial, it is helpful to contact the newspaper to inquire about any preferred formats or methods of submission. When writing an editorial, it is important to express passion about the issue and use local, real life examples. It is also helpful to include information about relevant laws or policies, services and volunteer or donor opportunities in the local area. A strong editorial will end with a call to action. Information about the author, such as his or her background and affiliations, should accompany the editorial. A sample editorial from Guilford County DSS can be found in Appendix O.

Feature Articles

A feature is a non-news piece of general interest to the public. Features often tell someone's story. DSS agencies have countless stories to tell that can educate and motivate the public. Feature story ideas include:

- Volunteer opportunities for helping birth families and children in care (donations, mentoring, providing respite care, becoming resource parents, etc.)
- A family who has fostered for many years or fostered or adopted a large number of children
- A youth who found a family during his or her teen years
- The profile of a single foster mom
- A successful reunification that highlights shared parenting
- A family that has fostered more than one generation
- Available subsidies and supports for adopted children

Source: NACAC, 2001

See Appendix P for a sample feature story that celebrates a successful foster family while also providing local statistics to highlight an agency's needs.

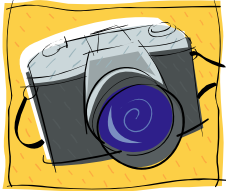
Media Advisories or Alerts

A media advisory or alert serves as a reminder that an event is approaching. It should be brief, with a headline, contact information, date, and details including the purpose, time, and place of the event. It is also helpful to include an offer to set up interviews and photo opportunities with key individuals.

Media Packets (Press Packets)

Media packets are distributed to media representatives who attend an event sponsored by the organization. Staff generally meet with media representatives before the event begins to discuss materials in the packet. Information that might be part of a media packet includes the following items:

- Copy of press release
- Biographies of presenters and contact information
- Brief talking points
- Statistics related to foster care, adoption, or child welfare (fact sheet)
- Story ideas
- Brochure
- Recent news clippings
- Photos that are labeled with a caption and names of persons in the photo (with their permission); black and white 5x7 photos are usually preferred



Press or Photo Opportunities

A press or photo opportunity is an event that is not planned specifically for the media but might be covered by the media. Examples include fundraisers, rallies, and other community events. It is important to be prepared for these opportunities and plan who will address the media and what points will be presented if the opportunity arises.

Press Releases

A press release highlights an upcoming event. Press releases are usually distributed the day before the event and are addressed to a specific person. A press release should describe who, what, why, when, where, and how in regards to the event being publicized.

Press releases are typewritten on letterhead and double-spaced with a wide left margin for editorial notes. These documents are typically 1 to 2 pages in length and one-sided rather than printed front and back. If the press release is two pages, write "Add one" on top of second page. If possible, provide suggestions for video or audio footage to accompany the story. Appendix Q contains instructions for writing a press release for a special event.

Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements (PSAs) typically offer information about the need for foster or adoptive parents or special events. The PSA should be clear, concise, and informational as well as emotional and answer who, what, why, when, where, and how.

A PSA is usually written by community education staff and forwarded to the broadcaster along with a cover letter. The media type, date, description, length, and contact information should appear on the top of the page and the PSA text should be typed in uppercase letters. Standard spots are typically 10 seconds, 20 seconds, or 60 seconds. Each block of 10 seconds will equal approximately 20-25 words. Several versions of different lengths might be created to accommodate different media spots. Many organizations secure a local personality to donate their time as a reader or submit pre-taped PSAs.

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Free Public Service Announcements

In partnership with AdoptUsKids, the Ad Council has developed free, high quality PSAs about adopting children from foster care. Available in English and Spanish, they direct viewers to the national AdoptUsKids hotline, which routes callers to NC Kids for support, follow-up, and referral to the appropriate county DSS. You can register for free with the Ad Council and then view and download all of their PSAs at <http://psacentral.adcouncil.org/psacentral/signon.do>.



7. What North Carolina Media Representatives and DSS Directors Say

The following excerpts, taken from interviews conducted by the Rural Success Project (UNC, 2005), reflect the experiences, concerns, and advice of editors, reporters, and rural child welfare agency directors.

The Media: Newspaper Editors and Reporters

“I don’t think I’ve ever gotten a press release [from our local DSS agency]. They are good about responding to questions but don’t initiate stories that might help the community.”

“We’re looking for stories that contain news and information which can help our readers. If we’ve informed people to help them relieve the stress of a crisis, then I feel like I’ve done my job. That is my mission—to help people.”



“An overall discussion of the ground rules would be very helpful—especially when the relationship is just beginning or changing with a new reporter or director. Both sides are a little more cooperative when there is not a grenade already sitting on the table.”

“The director at the DSS here is informative and cooperative if I take the first step. If I don’t approach the agency, I don’t get the information. It would be great if there was someone who would keep in close contact with me to keep me informed.”

“If you want a good news story covered, you’re going to have to think of a bad news angle. When writing a press release, talk about the problem and how the agency is dealing with that problem.”

Rural Child Welfare Agency Directors

“I’ve learned that I have to make the news, I have to frame the picture, I have to shape the story. Otherwise, the only information that would get out about DSS would be the ugly stuff.”

“You have to build a relationship with the media when there is not a crisis. Then when something does happen—and it will happen—you have a better chance of getting your side of the story out.”

“If the only time you communicate with the media is when there is a crisis, you will be seen as a crisis agency. There’s an old saying – if you don’t create your image, one will be created for you.”

Source: UNC, 2005

8. Media Interviews



When a Reporter Calls

All agency employees should receive basic training on taking media calls and directing these calls to designated staff members. Below are suggestions for staff who respond to media contacts.

- Be available and respond quickly since reporters are often under tight time frames.
- Determine the reporter’s name and the media source that they represent and their contact information. You might offer to call back the reporter in order to verify the legitimacy of the caller.
- If you need extra time or want to gain more control over the interview, get a list of the reporter’s questions and say you will call back. Be sure to give a time that you intend to call back and check with the reporter to make sure that the timing will still allow them to make their deadline.
- Determine the reporter’s agenda including the story angle and know their deadlines so you can assist in a timely manner.
- It is critical to maintain confidentiality when working with the media. Ask media representatives to sign a confidentiality agreement before allowing them to visit your agency.
- If you are not available for the interview or do not want to be interviewed it is helpful to refer the reporter to another expert.
- If possible, meet with the reporter before the interview to discuss the story angle, who else is being interviewed, and the length of the interview.
- Know the demographics of your audience and use this knowledge to plan the most effective way to address them.

Tips for Interviews

During an interview it is important to convey a confident and helpful attitude and stay focused on the message. Below are additional tips for participating in an interview.

- Inquire about when the interview will air or be published. The best time slots for radio and television are typically the hours immediately before and after the work day. Also ask if the interviewer has prepared questions or if there will be questions from an audience.
- Review the program or other interviews by the same reporter before being interviewed.
- Conduct role plays before the interview. Practice with people who can offer support and constructive feedback.

- For television interviews, wear simple clothes and jewelry (solid colors are best) and pay attention to your posture.
- To reduce the likelihood of being misquoted by print media, you might provide a written statement summarizing your main points.
- For radio interviews, pay special attention to verbal punctuation—pace your speech and use pauses. This will help the audience to remember what they hear.
- Keep a glass of water nearby.
- Know the main message you want to convey and repeat it several times.
- Use everyday language rather than jargon or abbreviations.
- Remember what you say represents the organization and may be quoted—never say anything you do not want repeated and remember that you are never really “off the record.”
- Keep responses short and to the point. Answers should be about 30 to 45 seconds in length. Tie your responses back to main points.
- Give real life examples of the points you make while maintaining confidentiality.
- Be prepared to offer your thoughts and analysis and state clearly what is fact and what is opinion.
- Use numbers rather than percentages, such as “one in four” rather than 25%.
- Do not introduce a topic you feel uncomfortable addressing.
- Never speak negatively about other organizations or individuals.
- If a reporter states incorrect information, restate the information correctly.
- If asked a question about a third party it is usually best to answer that you do not wish to speculate.
- If asked a question with specific choices, remember that your answer is not limited to those choices and offer a broader perspective if necessary.
- Never repeat a negative statement. Instead, replace it in your answer with a positive point.
- After you get the point across, stop talking. Don’t ramble.



Maintaining Positive Media Relationships

Build ongoing relationships with the media and continuously thank them for their support because they are an important partner in child welfare. Below are ideas for creating and enhancing these relationships.

- Ensure the media is on your general mailing lists and invite them to attend activities sponsored by the organization.
- Keep updated lists of media contacts. These lists may be obtained from press associations.
- Ensure the media knows your organization’s contact persons and keep them updated regarding any staff changes.
- Know the reporters in your area and their reputations.
- Inform yourself about local and national events and be prepared to present a statement or grant an interview when a high profile child welfare incident occurs.
- Provide relevant data from your agency to educate and motivate readers.

- Maintain a list of ideas for human interest stories involving the organization and encourage the media to contact you when they are in need of a story.
- Maintain a list of resource families and/or foster care alumni who are available to speak to the media.
- In case of a severe misquote or misprint, request a retraction or file a complaint with the media source.
- Encourage the media to assist the organization by sponsoring education campaigns.
- Invite media representatives to participate in volunteer training or other conferences or workshops.
- Encourage the media to spotlight foster care and adoption issues regularly rather than only covering the sensational cases.

Preparing for a Media-Covered Crisis

Usually the media will be on your doorstep as soon as a crisis or problem occurs. Below are some tips to help you prepare for a crisis before it happens.

- Written crisis procedures should designate persons responsible for investigating and managing a crisis and describe who is authorized to serve as the organization's spokesperson.
- Recognize when a minor problem may turn into a crisis and plan ahead.
- When the crisis occurs, identify and assess issues and develop action plan.
- Be prepared to create a press release outlining how the organization will respond to clients, staff, the public, funders, or others involved with the issue. Develop a plan for interviews or other follow up activities. The agency director should approve any formal statements before these are shared with the media.
- Try to anticipate specific questions from the media and prepare answers in advance.
- Keep a record of any requests for information and the organization's responses.

Source: North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2006

Celebrating Successes

An important part of community education is the celebration of successes and the many lives that are changed by the work of foster parents, adoptive parents, volunteers, and child welfare staff. Celebrations might take place at local, statewide, or national gatherings. Recognition categories might include any staff or volunteer positions as well as:

- Foster parents
- Adoptive parents
- Kinship parents
- Members of your speakers bureau
- Board or committee members
- Donors
- Funders
- Local and state government leaders
- Media companies or individuals
- Partner agencies, organizations, churches, etc.
- Statewide leaders
- Students or interns
- Visionaries