

Chapter VIII

General Recruitment

1. Purpose

General recruitment efforts raise awareness of the need for parents to care for children involved with the child welfare system. They are also a good way to promote a positive picture of foster care and adoption and child welfare in general, and of broadening awareness of the valuable contributions social services agencies make to their communities.

This, in turn, can enhance the success of other recruitment strategies.

General recruitment efforts typically convey a single, simple, unfocused message such as “help a child,” “change a life,” or “foster, adopt, volunteer.”

Research suggests that on the whole, general recruitment efforts are overused. Because they broadcast a single message to a large part of the population, they are more likely to produce unsuitable applicants than other recruitment efforts.

General recruitment efforts should always be used in combination with and as a complement to other recruitment strategies—as an appetizer, not a main dish. In its analysis of recruitment methods, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2002) recommends agencies spend no more than 15% of their recruitment budget on general recruitment.

Sources: AECF, 2002; Pasztor & Wynne, 1995; Barbell & Sheikh, 2000; USDHHS, 2002a

Use general recruitment efforts as an appetizer, not a main dish.

2. General Recruitment Ideas

Many of the following ideas come from USDHHS, 1995.

No Cost/Free General Recruitment Ideas

- Television public service announcements or community interest stories. For more on PSAs, see Chapter VI.
 - 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>.
 - The Dave Thomas Foundation has also made available a host of materials that can be used in the recruitment of adoptive parents. Go to <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/Adoption-Resources/Free-Materials>.
- Information booths at events, foster care/adoption fairs, and events.
- Ask select churches to put a short announcement in the worship service bulletin each Sunday in the months of May (Foster Care Month) and November (Adoption Month) about the need for families. Include your contact information in the announcement and then be available after one or more services to answer questions about fostering, adoption, and volunteering.
- Speakers' bureau, scheduling presentations at churches, civic groups, etc.
- Notices in community bulletins
- Television and newspaper feature stories

- Adoption day in court (a ceremony to celebrate children’s formal adoptions)
- Messages on business marquees
- Adoptive mother and father of the year
- Door-to-door canvassing
- Appearances on interview programs, including your county’s public access TV station
- Surveys or flyers in shopping malls
- Write an ongoing newspaper column concerning the plight of children and the need for adoptive and foster families. This should include both major daily newspapers and local weekly newspapers. Ongoing columns have been effective because of their predictability.
- Provide information about fostering and adopting on web sites

GOLDEN NUGGET!

Using Community Marquees

Laura Chintapalli, from Chatham County DSS, has this to share:



My favorite pastime is scouting out roadside marquee signs. It's great free advertising. A billboard would cost us \$800 for six months. I have had success with churches, community message signs, and local businesses such as oil and gas companies, gas stations, etc. If someone has a marquee, I will go and ask if we can use it. We usually ask to have the sign up for two weeks, but will take a week if this is more plausible. One company had it up for a month.

Our messages were simple: “Foster Parents Needed! Please call 642-6956” and “Be a Foster Parent! Call 642-6956.” You want your message to be short, eye-catching, and easy to read as someone is driving by.

As for tips I would pass on to other agencies: don't be afraid to ask businesses for their help. The worst thing they can say is “no,” and that's OK. Recruitment of resource families is not only an agency need, it's a community need. If agencies can involve the community, you not only find folks who want to help, but your recruitment efforts will be more effective.

Low-Cost General Recruitment Ideas

- Posters, flyers, and brochures could be developed for distribution throughout communities through churches, clubs, and other organizations and to doctors’ offices, hospital and clinic waiting rooms, libraries, beauty parlors, barber shops, laundromats, community centers, etc.
- Business cards. In addition to providing each DSS employee with a business card, some agencies also provide generic business cards to foster and adoptive

parents, who can then give them out to people interested in learning more about becoming a resource parent.

- Banners hung on main street or a prominent building; perfect for annual events such as National Adoption Awareness Month (November) or Foster Parent Month (May)
- Host a table at local farmers' markets
- Decals
- Theme night activities
- Puppet shows
- Give-aways: place slogans or themes with your agency name and phone number on bookmarks, pencils, balloons, key chains, rain hats, t-shirts, seed packets, bottles of cold water, travel mugs, sewing kits, bandage kits, beach balls, balloons, pens, bandanas, fold up flyers, paper fans, etc.
- Displays in store windows and libraries
- Placemats in restaurants
- Flyer attached to pizza boxes
- Flyer attached to drug store bags
- Bill inserts
- Calendars
- Newsletters
- Special events, carnivals, or fairs
- Picnics and ice cream socials
- Welcome wagon packets for new residents distributed through the appropriate organization (e.g., Chamber of Commerce)
- Awards programs
- Appreciation nights and banquets
- Open houses
- Radio spot announcements

Mid-to-High Cost General Recruitment Ideas

- Bus and taxi cab placards
- Direct mailing and ad coupons
- Display ads in the phone book
- Recruitment videos/films
- Ads in newspapers
- Customized videos
- Billboards
- Rent space at a local mall or shopping area where you can leave posters and adoption information for everyone passing by

Sources: The Rural Adoption Recruiter (Adoption Exchange, 2008)

3. Use of Regional Approach to Recruitment

The NC Division of Social Services strongly encourages public agencies to take a “regional approach” to recruiting and retaining resource parents, one that involves working closely and collaboratively with other public agencies, jointly offering foster parent pre-service training, and freely sharing information about available foster and adoptive homes.

Through regional collaboration, counties can pool scarce resources for recruitment materials and training, license families in a more timely manner, and potentially have access to more foster and adoptive homes that fit the individual needs of the children.

Joining forces with nearby agencies can bring more expensive general recruitment strategies within reach and produce positive results for the whole region.

4. Common Mistakes

Starting Before You're Ready

Although enthusiasm and a sense of urgency are good, be careful not to launch your general recruitment efforts until you are sure you are prepared to respond to an increased volume of calls, able to offer additional orientation sessions, etc. Get ready before you begin.

Make sure you are ready for the response BEFORE you start your recruitment efforts.

Speaking Off Message

Avoid using language and themes in your general recruitment efforts that appeal to values and worldviews that are not what we want to see in foster and adoptive parents. For example, since our expectation is that all foster parents will engage in shared parenting and/or maintain connections with the birth family, it would not be appropriate to use language that invokes a child rescue mentality (e.g., rescuing “good” children from “bad” parents).

Similarly, when using images of children in your recruitment materials, take care to use images that accurately reflect the children for whom you need foster and adoptive families. This will help the public understand who it is that needs their help.

5. Winning Strategies

In picking a message for general recruitment materials, consider the following top five messages recommended by foster parents

1. You help change someone's life
2. You are helping a child
3. You are considered a professional parent
4. You receive financial assistance
5. It's a short-term commitment

Sources: Pasztor & Wynne, 1995; AECF, 2002

A report from the Urban Institute (2005) suggests that in future campaigns it would be productive to send a message that encourages those interested and able to adopt a foster child to actually take steps toward that end. They recommend a shift from telling prospective parents that anyone can adopt to telling interested adopters **how** they can adopt.

Adoption Day at the Mall

In Rhode Island, the idea to hold an adoption fair at a local mall came about through a recruitment taskforce where one person's connection with a local mall led to a great public information-sharing event. Malls present high traffic, family-oriented locations ideal for recruitment events. Held in conjunction with Rhode Island's first National

Adoption Day, the event included 17 licensed foster and adoption agencies from around the state. Each agency staffed booths with representatives to field questions and distributed program and event information. Face painters helped lend a fun family atmosphere.

Source: AdoptUsKids, 2008

Wristbands Raise Awareness & Fund Scholarships

After seeing the popularity of the yellow wristbands promoting cancer awareness and funding cancer research, board members of the Arizona Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents thought the same principle might work to support foster children. In conjunction with May's National Foster Care Month, they ordered 10,000 blue wristbands, one for each of Arizona's 10,000 foster children. The bands were sold for \$2 each and included a card informing the wearer what the band symbolized and directing them to additional information on the Association's webpage. All 10,000 bands were sold and the proceeds donated to Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation to fund scholarships for college-bound children in foster care.

Source: AdoptUsKids, 2008