

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



December 30, 2003

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-02-04

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DEPARTMENTS
 ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES MANAGERS
 ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES SUPERVISORS
 ALL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ADOPTION AGENCIES
 ALL COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENTS

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
 Federal Law or Regulation Change
 Court Order
 Clarification Requested by
 One or More Counties
 Initiated by CDSS

SUBJECT: FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT: PROMISING PRACTICES

The purpose of this All County Information Notice is to clarify diligent recruitment efforts and strategies for improving recruitment. The Family to Family (F2F) Initiative provides counties an opportunity to reconceptualize, redesign and reconstruct their foster care systems to achieve a more family-centered, neighborhood-based approach to family foster care. The Annie E. Casey Foundation designed the Family to Family Initiative in 1992 in consultation with national experts in child welfare.

In California there are currently 17 counties implementing F2F representing 79 percent of the state's foster care caseload. The F2F initiative is not a state mandated program. It is county driven and is identified as a model in the Child Welfare Redesign as well as being a key component of California's Program Improvement Program (PIP). The initiative consists of four core strategies to achieve F2F goals and evidence-based outcomes, which are consistent with the values and objectives of Redesign: Recruitment, Retention, Training and Support of Resource Families; Building Community Partnerships; Placement Team Decision Making; and Self Evaluation/Data Analysis. This notice highlights the Recruitment, Retention Training and Support of Resource Families strategy, but all four strategies are interrelated. Implementing all four strategies supports a stronger recruitment effort.

As stated in the Family to Family, "Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care, Recruitment Training and Support", the F2F approach to recruitment demonstrates the most success when the following characteristics exist in an agency:

1. Staff members know the profile of all children coming into the system: What do they have in common? What are the trends? Can you group them in terms of age, ethnicity/race, sex, neighborhood, or need? Once the agency answers these questions staff members can target recruitment to families most willing to help real children most in need.

2. Foster and adoption family recruitment is conducted as one effort.
3. Foster parents are part of the team and work in partnership with the child, birth parents, family, extended family, worker, and other involved service providers. Agency staff should first and foremost treat foster families as full partners. Secondly, foster families should act as partners with birth families. All are actively involved in developing and implementing the child's safety and permanency plan.

Foster parents do not replace the parental authority of the child's family, but rather become reunification partners, supporting and maintaining the child's connection with the birth family.

4. The agency tailors its programs of recruitment and retention, selection, training, supervision, reimbursement, and support services for foster parents to this new definition of their role
5. Recruitment, training, and support services are closely linked and one supports and stimulates the other.

Furthermore ***Recruitment is everyone's job***. This means that recruitment will not be seen as the job of one department alone, even in the largest agencies, all staff including clerical, line staff and management need to take an active role in recruitment. Additionally, more emphasis is placed on the role of local community supports.

Standard recruitment activities generally fall into three categories general, child-specific, and targeted. Of these, F2F has found that targeted recruitment is the most effective in placing children. Each approach, however, has a valuable place in a well-rounded recruitment program.

1. **General Recruitment:** Involves reaching mass audiences through media and public outreach programs. These include public events, public service announcements on television and radio stations, billboards, foster care and adoption fairs. This is the most common recruitment method, but it is the least focused. General outreach is best when used to raise the agency's public profile and broaden community awareness of the continuing need for foster families.
2. **Child-Specific Recruitment:** Includes finding relatives or a close friend who will provide a foster home to a child or teen they already know and care about. For medically needy children you may want to contact support groups and associations related to the condition or disease. Careful screening of potential foster families can guarantee that the child is placed with the best possible family for that child's special needs. In each case individualized planning is required, and that is time consuming, but special children deserve special treatment.

3. **Targeted Recruitment:** Focuses on the specific kinds of children and teens in need of temporary and permanent homes in the community. If a majority of children coming into foster care are adolescents, for example, your recruitment efforts can target families willing to foster older children. If certain neighborhoods have a high proportion of children in foster care, your agency can develop an outreach effort in those areas. If medically fragile children are common in your system, consider sending a speaker to a brown bag lunch at a local university hospital, a clinic or medical school cafeteria, where prospective foster parents would already have experience with such children. Then the agency should assess the community. With a little research, the agency can form a fairly complete picture of the community's potential to provide foster/adoptive families for the children in your system. Then you can tailor your outreach and recruitment efforts to particular groups and areas. Utilization and analysis of county specific data helps counties to focus on community and child-specific needs.

Once agencies have successfully recruited families, agencies need to provide pre-service, in-service and ongoing specialized training to their foster parents so they feel secure in their new job. These training sessions begin the serious relationship between prospective foster/adoptive parents and your agency. The way you handle these meetings will be indicative of the way you will handle everything. It is important to note that the support provided to foster families can be the reason why they stay in the program, and lack of support is often the reason why they quit. Strong support programs and staff provide foster families with the following seven things: Appreciation, respect, care-giving assistance, crisis services, professional development, emotional support, and personal involvement.

In short recruitment, training, certification, support and retention are all dependent upon each other. The success of your program rests on this foundation. Casey Family Programs has numerous articles, tool kits, research reports on what works to assist agencies in recruiting/retaining foster parents. Their website can be reached at this location: www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily

The following are useful websites for additional resources:

- Children's Bureau Express has a number of articles on Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families. The website is <http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm>
- "Permanency Planning Today," a newsletter published by the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning, has an issue devoted to finding, preparing and supporting foster and adoptive parent resources(November 2000). The website is www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp
- The National Child Welfare Center for Family-Focused Practice offers helpful articles on various "hot topics" in child welfare(e.g., ASFA, family-centered practice, community collaboration, CFSRs, etc.). The website is www.cwresource.org

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General published research reports on recruiting and retaining foster parents in May 2002. The website is <http://oig.hhs.gov>
- The National Resource on Child Maltreatment website is www.gocwi.org

If you have any questions regarding this notice, please contact Robert Markell, Chief, Recruitment Network Development Unit at (916) 651-7465.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

SYLVIA PIZZINI
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division