

..... PCSAO
FCNBcps CLIFF NOTES

Issue No. 3 - December 1997

This publication is part of a series created to assist counties with the implementation of family-centered, neighborhood-based child protection services. The tools and helpful hints produced herein are a by-product of the materials and documents provided to PCSAO by staff at the Cuyahoga County Department of Children Services; the Hamilton County Department of Human Services; and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In some instances these materials have simply been reproduced. In other instances we have taken the liberty of interpreting and reformatting the information to enhance its usefulness. Included with each publication will be a feedback form. To help us know whether or not the publication is useful, we encourage the reader to complete the form and return it to PCSAO within 3 weeks of receipt of each issue.

This issue focuses on **WORKING WITH FOSTER FAMILIES**

The Standards For Effective Practice that link to this topic include:

Standards: 2.1 LifeBooks; 2.2 Kinship Care; 2.4 Placement Transition; 2.5 Documentation; 6.1 Combined Certification and Approval for Foster Care and Adoptive Families; 6.2 Retention and Recruitment of Foster Caregivers; 6.3 Supportive Services for Foster Caregivers; 6.4 Matching of Children and Out-Of-Home Care Placements; 6.5 Foster Care; 6.6 Visitation; 6.7 Placement Disruptions; 6.8 Rules Violations; 6.9 Reevaluation of Foster Care and Adoptive Homes; 6.10 Long Term Foster Care; 6.11 Congregate Care; 6.12 Transferring and Sharing Foster Care Certificates

This issue begins with some targeted remarks from the Annie E. Casey Foundation regarding the importance of re-engineering our family foster care system. We hope you consider using these comments when speaking to local stakeholders on the importance of reforming our current system to one that is more family-centered and neighborhood-based.

I. The Annie E. Casey Foundation: The Importance of Re-engineering Family Foster Care (edited speech provided by Patrick McCarthy: Director, Policy Reform and Initiative Management at the The Annie E. Casey Foundation Conference held December 15-17, 1997).

The demands of the child protection services system continue to be overwhelming: steadily rising abuse and neglect complaints; increasingly fragile families; an eroding commitment to support those families; a less reliable base of traditional foster care homes; an explosion in the number of children who need protection. These demands intersect with ambiguous, unrealistic and often conflicting public expectations, expressed through media which are expert at capturing all of the drama and none of the complexities of child protection, so that the public's natural response to each new family tragedy is not to ask how we could have supported this family better, but who's to blame so we don't have to understand and so we don't have to take responsibility for the millions of other families at risk. Because of enormous changes in our broader society, over which we have little control, there are more children in foster care, with projections that the number will continue to rise, while the supply of foster care homes continues to decrease. Without a major restructuring, our nation will not be positioned to meet the many and varied needs of children who must be separated from their families. One indicator of the deterioration of the system has been the steady decline in the pool of available foster families at the same time the number of

children coming into care has been increasing. The number of children coming into care is likely to increase with the recent enactment of P.L 105-89: Adoption and Safe Families act.

Over the past five years, The Annie E. Casey Foundation has gathered encouraging evidence that:

- It is possible to find good local foster care homes for the majority of children who need out of home care;
- Biological and foster families should have contact and work in partnership on behalf of children in care; and
- Communities under economic and social stress can be relied on to find, develop and sustain human capital necessary to protect their children and support their families.

This issue is dedicated to providing CPS staff with tips and tools that, when utilized, prove that the right kind of interventions can make helping interventions more effective, more useful, more powerful, more efficient and more likely to be supported by the average citizen.

The following Tips and Tools have been reproduced from the lessons learned in Cuyahoga and Hamilton counties as well as the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Tool Manual entitled: Recruitment, Training, and Support: the Essential Tools of Foster Care.

II. MOVING OUR SYSTEM: THE FAMILY-CENTERED, NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED CHALLENGE

When trying to re-engineer the current foster care system, we must be careful and measured in our approach. Staff buy-in is absolutely critical as is buy-in with existing foster families.

We know that when approaching existing families, some will be eager and have a "its about time you get on board" attitude, because many foster families have been "doing" family-centered, neighborhood-based care long before the system was ready to support it. Others might be leery and resistive. While Cuyahoga and Hamilton counties report that sometimes there are casualties as a result of systems transformation (both with staff and foster parents), they also report that we should strive to bring everyone along.

Some lessons learned by Ohio's pilot sites

Staff Buy-In

- Buy-in from staff must begin at the administrative and supervisory levels. If supervisors don't support this shift in philosophy, systems transformation will go no where fast;
- The administration must set out performance expectations that foster care retention and recruitment is everyone's concern.
- Clerical staff should mail out copies of the case plan to foster parents or case workers should bring a copy to the planned foster care visit.
- Staff should receive training on the Family to Family values and outcomes and should be asked to identify their "place" in assisting the agency to embrace the values and impact the outcomes.
- Staff should receive training on the Family Team Meeting.

Foster Parent Buy-In

- Begin buy-in with Foster Parent Association.
- Train foster parents and support them in attending the Family Team Meetings.
- Involve foster parents in all aspects of planning.
- Use the **Bridges** document developed in Cuyahoga County that shows the role and responsibilities of staff, biological family and foster family; underscore the importance of the partnership for improved child and family outcomes (included in handout section of this publication).
- Stress that partnership building is a gradual process.
- Develop and expect joint visitation activities between the foster and biological families.
- Formalize expectations regarding the partnership in the foster parent agreement.
- Ask foster parents to identify informal resources available in the community the agency might not know about - put these in a booklet and share with all foster families in the area and with staff.
- Establish local culturally-specific Councils (e.g. The African American Leadership Council) to gain support, direction and guidance on working with cultural groups in the county and on foster care retention and recruitment strategies.

III. FOSTER CARE RETENTION

According to Dr. Denise Goodman, "when we talk about recruitment, we are REALLY talking about RETENTION". **According to the National Foster Parent Association, approximately 60% of foster parents quit in the first twelve months, when the hard realities of fostering set in. The primary reason given for dropping out is the lack of responsiveness, communication and support from the foster care system.** Low reimbursement or increased demands are not cited anywhere near as often.

If we are to meet the challenges ahead, we must reconceptualize foster care as a temporary extension of the child's family not as a temporary replacement for it. Foster parents must now be seen as reunification partners, supporting and maintaining the child's family connection with the birth family. Foster care that is community-based builds bridges between the two sets of parents and therefore has a much better chance of succeeding.

This means shifting the way in which we are used to conducting business.

Dr. Goodman provides us with insight as to how we must approach foster care retention and recruitment if we are to meet the challenges that lie ahead (request PCSAO send your agency a copy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation Recruitment, Training, and Support: the Essential Tools of Foster Care when available - 1st quarter of 1998).

The best recruiters are existing foster parents - so we must do everything we can to retain our existing foster families.

- The agency might lodge Foster Care in one unit or department but RECRUITMENT is everyone's business. We must educate our staff as to what they can do to assist with foster care retention and recruitment - it means the agency must step outside of the box, finding ways to engage staff in the retention and recruitment of foster homes.

- The agency must provide a clearly defined, valued and respected role for foster parents.
- Provide support for foster parents from the very beginning. Foster parent support begins at the time the inquiry is made and runs throughout their tenure with the agency.
- Services should include an adequate understanding about the role of fostering and about the child to be placed (including a medical, social, emotional and family history).
- The program should provide frequent relief by means of baby-sitting, child care, after school programs, summer camp, weekend or vacation respite.
- Provide assistance with transportation; emergency back-up assistance; liability insurance.
- Return phone calls promptly (avoid communication dead-ends). Staff must be accessible and provide various ways in which foster parents can access staff at the convenience of the foster family.
- Involve foster parents in case planning activities. We cannot expect our foster parents to act as partners of the treatment team if they are not apprised of the child and family plan. The more foster-parents know, the more they buy-in, the more they buy-in, the more willing they are to partner and help.
- Provide a variety of supportive opportunities. Support groups are only one strategy and are not necessarily culturally broad-based. Some might enjoy support groups while others may not. Consider the buddy-system, weekly phone calls, stop-bys, etc.
- We must provide foster parents with the tools they need to do their job. You wouldn't expect a plumber to arrive at your home asking to borrow your tools - you would expect the plumber to have the tools s/he needs to fix the sink. Likewise, we must provide foster parents with training opportunities (at various hours, days, locations); timely reimbursement checks; vouchers; case information; etc. so they can do their job.
- Provide ongoing education opportunities: manuals; classroom; home visits with agendas for on-site education.
- Staff conduct monthly visits with foster families caring for children under the age of 6 and maintain monthly contact with foster parents caring for children over the age 6 (bi-monthly home visits with phone contact on alternative months).
- Neighborhood-based special issue clusters, facilitated by foster parents and supported by the agency, offer education, training and mutual support.
- Distribute bi-monthly newsletter, mailed to all foster parents, updating on events, training, changes in policy, tips and ideas.
- Provide up to 45 days of family preservation funds to assist families, both birth and foster families in crisis.

A powerful tool that has gone far in helping staff, foster parents and the biological family in bridging differences, concerns and issues has been the FAMILY TEAM MEETING. Cuyahoga

County Children Services uses the Family Team Meeting to assist in developing the partnership between the foster and birth family from the time the child enters care.

Within the first 2-3 days (ideally) but no more than the first two weeks of placement, the caseworker calls a meeting with the foster family and biological family. At this meeting, staff facilitate an informal conversation regarding the placement of the child in the foster home. Information is shared regarding the child's likes and dislikes, interests, habits, etc. (e.g. what does the child like to eat, favorite colors, normal bed time, favorite subject in school, hardest subject, etc.). See the handout section of this publication for more information on the Family Team meeting.

IV.FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT

At the recent Casey Conference held December 15-17, 1997 in Baltimore, Maryland, Dr. Denise Goodman provided insightful, yet humorous one-liners that say it all:

- We must develop real messages for real children. The message "all you need is a little extra love to share" to be a foster parent no longer applies to kids needing homes. How about "Are you up for the challenge" ?
- While pens and mugs are nice and nice to get, pens and mugs don't recruit people, people recruit people.
- We tend to be very impersonal with people we expect to be very personal in their work - and then we wonder why there is a 60% turnover rate.

According to Dr. Goodman and the lessons learned through the Casey pilot sites, simple changes in the way we approach foster care services can make a tremendous difference for children, their birth parents and foster families. First and foremost, we must see recruitment as a process, not an event. Foster parents go through a process to be licensed, we must help them through this process - formulating ideas, understanding and gaining skills.

We can improve the likelihood that our recruitment efforts will pay off if we develop plans to address the three basic types of recruitment: General Recruitment, Targeted Recruitment and Child-Specific Recruitment.

General Recruitment: To mass audiences through mass media and public outreach programs. These can include public events; billboards; public service announcements; etc. When using this approach, always express the values of Family to Family (neighborhood-based foster care to keep our children in our communities).

Targeted Recruitment: Focuses on specific children and teens in need of temporary and permanent homes. Focus your efforts for specific populations of children (teens, sibling groups, etc.) recruiting through schools; churches or community centers. If certain zip codes or school districts have a higher proportion of children in foster care, develop an outreach effort in those areas (PTA meetings, church presentations, organized cultural events: Kwanzaa Celebrations, Afro-American Festivals, Christmas and Hanukkah Celebrations, etc).

Child-Specific Recruitment: Can include kinship care or finding a close friend who will provide foster home to a child or teen they already know and care for.

General recruitment activities are very helpful in improving the agency's overall image and should be used. But General recruitment may also result in callers unwilling to foster or adopt the kinds of children in your system. Therefore, the agency might want to develop a recruitment program that involves all three types of recruitment strategies.

Once your recruitment plan is set, make sure staff are ready and prepared to provide supportive and user-friendly services.

Incoming calls should be responded to with warmth and friendliness. Recruiters should respond pleasantly in a warm and enthusiastic voice, and:

- Answer all questions and concerns;
- Assist the caller in determining his or her readiness to foster or adopt a child or sibling group;
- Mail an information packet to the caller within 24 hours;
- Send reminder notices of training seven days before the event;
- Maintain a record on each caller for follow-up as needed.

Recruitment efforts should also consider:

- Identification of specific groups of children in need of foster care or adoption services;
- Materials that give a clear, accurate message, reflecting agency goals and philosophy;
- Identification of target individuals, groups and neighborhoods and communities capable of meeting client needs;
- Standards for staff in providing an immediate response to inquiries;
- Warm, personal, speedy response from informed, positive, enthusiastic staff;
- Training on an ongoing, scheduled and frequent basis;
- Weekly follow-up phone calls to maintain contact and interest post training;
- Provision of interim informational group or one-on-one meetings;
- Mailing list of perspective parents for mailings and newsletters.

Family to Family experience tends to show the most success when:

Foster parents are part of the team and work in partnership with the child, family, staff and other involved service providers, all of whom are actively involved in developing and implementing the child's permanency plan.

Foster parents and birth parents work cooperatively towards reunification, and commit to keeping a child in the foster home for as long as necessary, without disruption. Working with the child's family is a relatively new responsibility for most foster care systems and reflects a change in philosophy and attitude. This can be emphasized when recruiting, training and supporting the foster parents to work in tandem with the biological family.

The agency tailors its program of recruitment and retention, selection, training, supervision, reimbursement and support services for foster parents to this new definition of their role.

V. FOSTER CARE TRAINING

Foster care training is an opportunity to socialize people to the agency's philosophy. In many ways, it is a form of continued recruitment. During training, foster parents are given multiple opportunities to self-select in or out of the program and if they select in, can become the best advocates for children and families served through our system. We have an obligation therefore to make foster parent training uplifting, fun, real and informational.

We can improve the training we offer by:

- Using the new foster parent pre-service training curriculum which is family-centered and neighborhood-based;
- Offering culturally responsive training (providing a variety of training strategies: small group, lecture, interactive);
- Including birth families and foster families on panels (highlighting how the partnership can and does work);
- By having staff who respond to inquires available to register participants to reinforce the user-friendly approach to services (name and face recognition adds a level of familiarity and comfort to the process);
- Having foster parents co-train.

Additional ideas to improve training includes:

- Provide on-site finger printing during the training so parents do not have to make a special trip to the police department;
- Gather the information in smaller pieces, asking for different forms to be turned in at different times during the pre-service (avoid overwhelming parents);
- Emphasize the importance of family to family care giving rather than rules and regulations;
- Offer opportunities to make-up missed sessions;
- Use good trainers (while curriculum quality is important, it is not nearly as critical as top trainers);
- Vary the time and day, location of training sessions;

Shoot for the ideal: when a family completes the approval and training process and is ready to receive a child, the child arrives within two weeks.

VI. CUYAHOGA AND HAMILTON COUNTIES: SUGGESTIONS AND TIPS

Cuyahoga and Hamilton counties have learned much over their past five years involved with the Family to Family project. **In transforming the CPS system to be family-centered, neighborhood-based, a self-assessment, and series of data gathering activities were necessary.**

- Conduct a foster parent survey to ascertain the degree to which foster parents feel part of the team and the changes they would like to see made (see the handout section of this publication);
- Form a work group to track progress on:
 - a. recruiting;
 - b. screening;
 - c. licensing;
 - d. supporting of foster families.
- Hold focus groups with staff, foster parents, community folk to gather data on how to improve foster parent services (culturally responsive, etc.)
- Develop and implement a family-centered, neighborhood-based Action Plan for 1998 and beyond that addresses:
 - a. strategies for involving the entire agency in retention and recruitment efforts;

- b. recruitment based on where the children are coming from;
 - c. recruitment for the General public based on the values of Family to Family, Targeted populations, and Child-Specific populations;
 - d. additional retention strategies based on resource availability and a shift in approach (non-resource dependent).
- o Develop and implement a process for interviewing foster parents who leave the system (exit interviews with an objective third party).

Once service gaps are identified, seek additional service development to fill the gaps.

- o Work with community providers to develop respite programs (see Touching Kids Lives in handout section of this publication).
- o Work with the local Family and Children First Council to develop creative funding alternatives to fill gaps identified through data gathering activities.

LOOK FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF FCNBcps CLIFF NOTES

WE WILL SHARE IDEAS AND INFORMATION REGARDING:

***WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROVIDERS***

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ACCOMPANYING HANDOUTS

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FEEDBACK FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING AND RETURN IT TO PCSAO: [ATT. S.A. SAUNDERS] W/IN 3 WEEKS OF RECEIVING THIS PUBLICATION. WE HOPE IT IS USEFUL - LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK.

	Absolutely	Somewhat	It's OK But...	Not at all
1. This publication is just what we've been wanting to help us get started	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. This publication has answered some questions we had about the subjects covered	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. We would like this publication to continue	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Topics we are interested in for future issues include:				
5. Suggestions we would like to make include:				