

Recruiting Foster and Adoptive Caregivers: A Guide for Public Children Services Agencies



www.pcsao.org

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Recruitment	4
Retention	6
Supporting caregivers during and after licensing and approval	8
• 12 strategies for developing and supportive prospective and current caregivers	9
Assessing county needs and market data	12
Barriers	12
Funding	13
Types of recruitment	14
• Current network	14
• General recruitment	15
• Targeted recruitment	15
• Child-focused recruitment	16
• Sibling-focused recruitment	17
• Faith-based recruitment	18
• Permanency Roundtables	19
Materials and resources	19
Campaign planning and network development	21
• Special consideration: MEPA	22
Evaluation	22
Helpful links	23

Introduction

The Community Education Committee of Public Children Services Association of Ohio is pleased to present this 2015 update of its recruitment guide. This much-expanded edition was written with both new and veteran agency recruiters in mind. Whether you work in a metro area or a rural county, command a large budget or operate on a shoestring, this guide offers you useful information to develop, execute and hone a successful recruitment campaign.

PCSAO is a membership-driven association of Ohio's county Public Children Services Agencies that advocates for and promotes child welfare program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families and supportive communities.

PCSAO's Community Education Committee – formerly known as the Public Information Officers Committee – is composed of county agency recruitment specialists, communications and marketing directors, public information and public relations officers, and others charged with communicating the child welfare message to the larger community. The committee meets regularly throughout the year to develop products and materials, such as this guide.

For more information about the Community Education Committee, visit www.pcsao.org or email pcsao@pcsao.org.

In addition to substantive work by the committee acknowledged on the back cover, PCSAO would like to thank the following partners for reviewing and contributing to this guide:

Kristina Allwood, Institute for Human Services - ocwtp.com

Fawn Gadel, Family & Youth Law Center - familyyouthlaw.org

Mike Kenney, Waiting Child Fund - waitingchildfund.com

Angela Marshall, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption - davethomasfoundation.org

Tara Shook and Carmen Stewart, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

Wendi Turner, Ohio Family Care Association - ofcaonline.org

Important note about kinship care: Keep in mind that while recruitment has historically been associated with developing a pool of individuals and families not previously connected to a child in care, agency practice has evolved to first identify and locate appropriate relative placements for children in care, both for temporary and permanent custody, before considering placement in unfamiliar foster and adoptive homes. Outcomes for children placed with kin tend to be better. Most of these strategies could and should be used when recruiting kin caregivers for children, although recruiters should familiarize themselves with other aspects of kinship care.

Recruitment

As a recruiter for a Public Children Services Agency (PCSA), your role is to enlist individuals and families to serve as foster and adoptive parents for children in temporary and permanent custody.

Definition: *Recruitment is the act of educating members of the community about foster care and adoption for purposes of finding temporary and permanent placements for children in agency custody. It is also the act of advocating on behalf of a particular child to recruit prospective individuals and families who meet the child's specific placement needs.*

Your recruitment efforts not only help your community address this need, but also offer an opportunity to improve the public's understanding and opinion of your agency. Larger agencies may have more staff and resources devoted to ongoing marketing and communications. Even smaller agencies that do not have a full-time staff person devoted to public relations usually have one person dedicated, full- or part-time, to recruitment. As a result, recruitment is one of the few ongoing community education efforts in which all agencies engage.

The benefits of a broad outreach effort are many. Most people in your community may not be foster or adoptive parents, and may not be interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents.

But they may be in a position to encourage a coworker, friend or relative who is interested in doing so. The way you describe the children in care and the need for people to help take care of them frames the public's perception of "who these kids are" and "who these foster and adoptive parents are."

Recruitment of foster and adoptive homes plays a critical role in meeting state and federal requirements for PCSAs. The federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and the state Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation (CPOE) each measure agencies on such factors as placement stability, maltreatment of children while in care, and moving children to permanency within specific time periods. Recruiting the right individuals and families helps ensure that children are safe and stable while in foster care and find lifelong permanent families if they are available for adoption. The Council on Accreditation also requires certain standards with respect to recruitment efforts for those agencies seeking national accreditation or that are currently accredited.



If you have thought
about fostering, it's
time to take the
next step

**Foster Parent
Training Classes
Start soon**



RSVP for one of our
no-obligation,
Information Sessions!

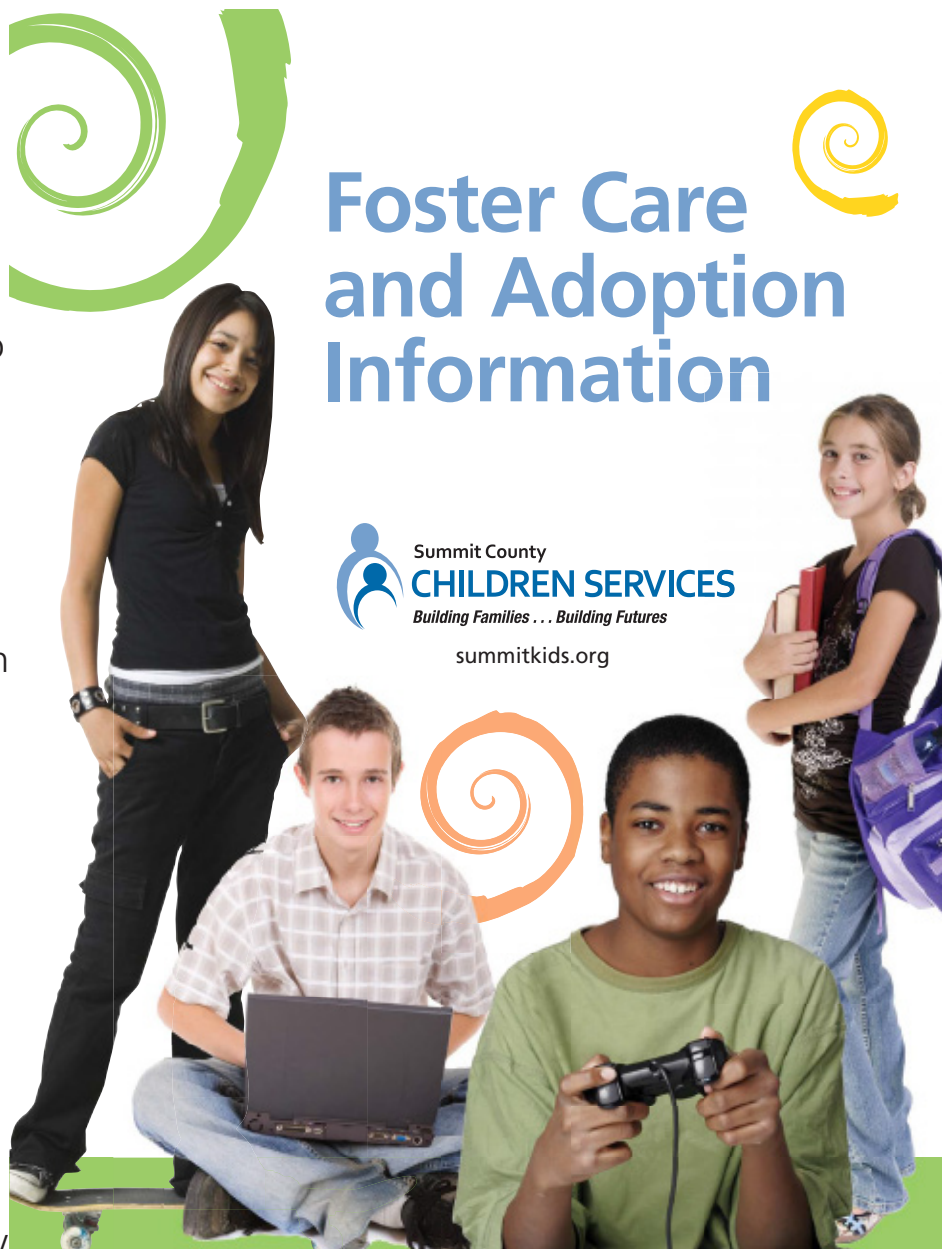
Email or call
LCCS for more
information

Lorain County - Tower Ad

One of the greatest impediments to recruitment is public perception of fostering and adopting. It is important to give the public and the media a well-rounded view of the child protection system and inform them of the need for foster and adoptive families. Child welfare agencies can coordinate media campaigns individually or together by submitting stories on the accomplishments of youth in care or successful events sponsored by children services agencies and local or statewide family support groups.

In designing your general recruitment campaign, be attuned to realism. Avoid using photos, images and descriptors that are different from what parents will actually experience. Think through the descriptive words you use and think about how they contribute to your community's understanding of the foster care system. The use of negative images (a scared child, a crying child, a child with bruises) might create a perception that does not match the reality of the children who need foster care or an adoptive home.

Also, consider the racial and ethnic makeup of the children in care in your jurisdiction. Your messages should reflect, and be sensitive to, the demographics of the children in need of a foster or adoptive home. This information should be available from your agency's foster care and adoption recruitment plan, filed periodically with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.



Sample of an inquiry packet from Summit County.


Finally, think through the urgency of your general recruitment message. If your ad states that you need foster and adoptive parents now, and that message gets people to call the agency with a shared sense of urgency, how will they react when they learn that the actual licensing or approval process could take several months?


Retention


Once an individual or family is recruited, the caregiver must be retained, first through the sometimes lengthy training and licensing or approval process, and then through each successive placement. Agency staff may work hard to recruit a caregiver only to be disappointed and frustrated when the caregiver drops out. Don't forget that adoptive individuals and families can be retained for successive adoptions, too.

There are several strategies you can use to retain those who have already entered the foster care and adoption system in order to keep them actively engaged with your agency, and many strategies rely heavily on other agency staff. They include:

- Transparency throughout the process – Be as forthcoming and specific as possible about everything, from the barriers that may exist to becoming licensed or approved, to the background of the child(ren) being placed, to the reunification process.
- Debriefing before, during and after placement – To the extent possible, check in with the caregiver at every opportunity to listen and provide feedback.
- Communication – Publish a quarterly newsletter to keep caregivers apprised of agency news, training opportunities, success stories, resources and more.
- Satisfaction surveys – Develop and administer satisfaction surveys to give caregivers an opportunity to provide candid and anonymous feedback on the agency-family relationship.
- Recognition – Use opportunities such as National Foster Care Month in May and National Adoption Month in November to publicly recognize them for their service to your agency.
- Support networks – Organize support groups for foster and adoptive individuals and families to give them an opportunity to share, vent, and network.



Quick Notes
Foster Parent Association Meeting
Monday, May 18, 6-8 p.m.
NEW LOCATION:
Lighthouse Christian Fellowship
315 Graham Road, Cuyahoga Falls
Topic: Human Trafficking – What Unique Needs will These Children Have
Speakers:
Kelly Alois and Elizabeth Schmid of Summit County Children Services (who are representatives from the Human Trafficking Workgroup which is part of the Summit County Collaborative)
Registration encouraged.
Email: summitcounty.fosterparents@yahoo.com or call (330) 996-1013
Watch for additional agenda/discussion topics at: <https://sites.google.com/site/scfosterparentassociation>
Note: Scheduling subject to change
Register for off-site childcare: Call Yvonne Edmunds at (330) 379-1990 option 2
PLEASE NOTE: The agency rule is foster parents must register for respite care no later than seven (7) days before the day of the class.


THANK YOU!
With May being celebrated as National Foster Care Month, I would like to sincerely thank the many devoted foster parents locally who are making such an incredible difference in our community. The positive and lasting impression you have on the children in your care is very much appreciated. Thank you for your tireless efforts each and every day in helping the children in your care become stronger, healthier and more successful.
— Julie Barnes, Executive Director
JOIN US IN OBSERVING NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH
Summit County Children Services is very proud to pay special tribute to foster parents during National Foster Care Month. 'Be a Hero – Foster a Child' is the special slogan and logo created by Gerald and Catherine McCausland of Stow for our local Foster Care Month celebration. Among the many activities planned for the month will be a Dinner Dance on Friday, May 15 where some of the foster parents who have reached various milestones of service will be recognized.
Throughout the United States today, more than 400,000 children are in foster care. In fact, by one estimate, there are now some 12 million alumni of the foster care system nationwide. With so many children in need of help and support, it is incredibly gratifying to see how many of you willingly and without reservation open your hearts and homes to children in need of stability and love. You truly and simply are the best, and the staff of Summit County Children Services thanks you for everything you do for the children of this community.


Inside this Issue

Congratulations to our Foster Parents.....	2
Important Phone Numbers.....	3
Information for Foster/Adoptive Parents & Kinship Caregivers.....	4-6
Upcoming Foster Parent Association Meetings.....	7
28th Annual Child & Family Awareness Month.....	8

*Summit County Periodic Newsletter
for Foster & Adoptive Families*

Caregivers drop out for a number of reasons, and it's important for you to understand those reasons. Some do so as part of the "weeding-out" process necessary to recruit appropriate individuals and families, and that type of attrition is understandable. But if they are dropping out for reasons that can and should be addressed – everything from a welcoming atmosphere, to issues of diversity and inclusiveness, to unreasonable bureaucracy – you can work to improve the system. Talk to longtime foster and adoptive families: Why do they continue to foster children and/or adopt after all these years? Talk to those who drop out: What would have helped them remain committed?



Summit County Adoption Calendar

It is also critical that you understand your agency's approach to foster care and adoption. Some agencies maintain very strict lines between the two. In such agencies, foster caregivers are needed solely for short-term placements and must be willing to work with the biological family on reunification, while adoptive individuals and families are recruited only for those children in permanent custody. Other agencies encourage a more fluid foster-to-adopt model. Regardless of the philosophy, it is critical that outreach materials be designed to recruit those with realistic expectations, and that you, as a recruiter, understand the different motivations that individuals and families have when they sign up.



Richland County Billboard Ad

A SUMMIT COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES SUCCESS STORY



Building Families Through Foster Care.

*Meet the Johnsons, who have
fostered more than 150 children.*

Visit summitkids.org.



Summit County Billboard Ad

Supporting caregivers during and after licensing and approval

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the primary reason parents drop out of fostering is the lack of responsiveness, communication and support from the foster care system.

A few things prospective and current foster parents may feel:

- “As a new foster parent, I may have unrealistic expectations. I may be broadsided by shattered assumptions.”
- “Although I have had the training, I do not have life experience in living with traumatized children. I will have emotions and thoughts that catch me unaware.”
- “My family will go through a transformation, that fostering isn’t a job, but a lifestyle change for the entire family. Our family may be changing and no one supports us and guides us through those changes — ones we may not like.”

Satisfied, experienced foster parents are the foundation of recruitment. Each county may use different methods to retain prospective and current foster and adoptive caregivers. By continually developing and supporting them, you can help ensure a pool of individuals and families able to meet the needs of the children and youth they are parenting.

Caregivers are more likely to be satisfied with their experience with foster care or adoption when:

- They are treated respectfully and as part of a team.
- They have experienced full disclosure and complete information about a child's background, personality and needs.
- They have been prepared for the experience of adopting and fostering and have access to ongoing training and personal-development opportunities.
- They are connected to and involved with other foster and adoptive parents.
- They are supported during hard times and family crises by their agency, their personal support network and other community resources.

12 strategies for developing and supporting prospective and current caregivers

References:

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Department of Health and Human Services OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, "Retaining Foster Parents"

AdoptUSKids – "Practitioner's Guide: Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts"

- 1. Stay in frequent contact with prospective parents** as they go through training, and with licensed or approved individuals and families as they wait for a placement. This will show that you appreciate and place a high value on the caregivers' commitment to becoming foster or adoptive parents.
- 2. Respond promptly and efficiently to phone calls or email communication from caregivers.**
- 3. Be sensitive to the prospective foster and adoptive parents' sense of time.** The longer it takes to move from step to step, the less likely the caregiver will continue with the process. However, if parents are treated well and helped to feel part of the team early on, they will be more likely to stay the course. It is important to be honest about the reasons for delays when they occur and to help parents use this time in productive ways, e.g., involve them with other foster and adoptive parents.

4. **Help parents eliminate fixable impediments to licensing.** Unanticipated expenses caused by damages to the home, required modifications to the home, special equipment needs, expenses for social activities and daycare can cause a financial strain on some parents. Connecting caregivers to community resources and providing ongoing information on community linkages, events and resources can help reduce the financial barrier to fostering or adopting.
5. **Provide a periodic foster care and adoption newsletter.** Providing frequent access to information supports foster and adoptive individuals and families. If your child welfare agency does not have the time and internal resources to coordinate a regular newsletter, consider linking prospective and current caregivers to newsletters provided by family support agencies such as the Ohio Family Care Association (OFCA).
6. **Conduct periodic surveys and focus groups of caregivers** to learn what issues are important to them and find out what additional services and supports may be needed.
7. **Help parents identify their support persons.** Helping caregivers identify support persons or respite agencies before they are needed enables them to maintain placement stability and permanency.
8. **Utilize seasoned foster and adoptive parents to help support new parents through the process.** This could involve partnering with caregivers and support groups to help by serving as mentors and coaches. This will not only help prospective individuals and families understand the licensing and approval process, but it will also show that you value and appreciate the veteran caregivers' service and knowledge base. Make sure all caregivers understand your child welfare agency's values system and sense of urgency about completing the paperwork as soon as possible.
9. **Encourage caregivers to network with other parents.** This can be achieved by connecting prospective parents with individual foster and adoptive parents within your agency. Encourage parents to attend family support groups and connect with local foster and adoptive parent organizations



Stark County Periodic Newsletter for Foster & Adoptive Families

10. When a child leaves a caregiver's home — whether for reunification, another placement or permanency — have an "exit interview" with the caregiver. Through this discussion, you can help caregivers process questions and emotions about a child leaving the home, share insights about what worked well in the parenting process, and, if needed, identify new developmental needs for the caregivers to help them feel better equipped for future placements.

11. Show agency appreciation.

This can be shown by sponsoring an annual recognition event, hosting luncheons, acknowledging and publicizing successes and milestones, and sending thank you notes, among other ideas.

12. Remember, your job is to listen, support and teach prospective parents everything you know that will help them succeed as foster and adoptive parents. Recognize that parents, not case workers, are responsible for caring for the children 24/7, and your job is to empower them to be the best they can be.

Building your capacity to address these elements of diligent recruitment will help you develop, retain and support a pool of individuals and families who can meet the needs of children and youth in care and provide placement stability and permanency.



Stark County Job & Family Services
& Project KARE
Present

**Set Sail With Us for the 27th Annual
Foster Parent Recognition Banquet
"ANCHORS AWAY"**

Social Hour at 5:30pm - Program at 7:00pm
Meyer's Lake Ballroom, 3218 Parkway St. NW, Canton
General Admission: \$25.00
Friday - May 8 - 2015



Stark County Foster Parent Banquet Program

Assessing county needs and market data

No matter how large or small, each county needs some sort of recruitment program. The specific type, size and scope of recruitment activities necessary can best be determined through an analysis of the number of children who come into care and their unique characteristics, including but not limited to age, gender, race/ethnicity and special needs – as well as a similar analysis of the potential pool of individuals and families available to recruit. The pool of prospective adoptive homes should be cultivated to meet the needs of the waiting children.

Most caregivers have different financial means, religious and cultural identities, values and educational backgrounds, as well as varying generational and housing circumstances. Market demographics for your county can be obtained free of charge from www.census.gov or at a modest fee from www.nielsen.com (formerly Claritas).

Barriers

Agency challenges or obstacles to developing a robust recruitment program are common, and may include lack of the following:

- Funding;
- Staff (especially staff with special skills needed to recruit, such as marketing and public relations);
- Organizational commitment to the need for recruitment; and
- Time for staff to develop and consistently implement an effective recruitment program.

Take time to assess the barriers to recruitment within your agency and work to address those that can realistically be changed. Ideally, all staff should be engaged in recruitment efforts, at least informally. They can speak to the need for recruiting individuals and families, identify potential sources, and help dispel myths about the agency and the children it serves. All staff should be versed in the basics of recruitment. Consider adding recruitment to job descriptions agency wide, or include recruitment as an option if staff are expected to volunteer at a certain number of agency events each year.

You may also encounter community weaknesses such as poverty, transience, lack of education and lack of supportive resources. While you may initially view such community factors as weaknesses, you should leverage these unique community indicators as part of a comprehensive recruitment campaign.

Funding

The specific level of funding available for recruitment depends on each county's budget circumstances and the level of organizational commitment to making aggressive recruitment a priority. Generally, funding for these activities comes from federal sources, supplemented by state and local funds.

How do you recruit with no or little funding? Having money to print attractive materials is great; however, recruitment is ultimately about building relationships with your community and fostering understanding about kids in care. Some successful recruiters have eschewed costly advertising and outreach materials altogether in favor of becoming a community ambassador who uses civic groups, faith-based organizations and events to build successful networks – all at little or no cost to the agency.

A direct mail advertisement for Lucas County Children's Services. The ad is divided into several sections. On the left, there is a large photo of a smiling young boy. To the right of this photo is a smaller photo of a family (a man, a woman, and two children) standing outdoors. Below the family photo is a circular inset photo of two young children. The text in the ad reads: "In Lucas County, hundreds of children are unable to live safely with their birth families. While their parents work on making positive changes in their lives, these children need warm, supportive families to care for them." "Other children need permanent, adoptive families because their parents or relatives are unable to care for them." "Lucas County Children Services needs families to partner with our agency to raise happy, healthy children. We need individuals who are willing to care for children on a temporary (foster) or permanent (adoptive) basis. Our caregivers serve as models for positive family relationships. If you love being a parent and value children, we need you!" The bottom left section contains a "BUSINESS REPLY MAIL" label with a barcode and the address: "FOSTER/ADOPT RECRUITER, LUCAS COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES, 706 ADAMS ST. FL. 1, TOLEDO OH 43604-9908". The bottom right section features a large photo of a young boy lying down, looking up. The Lucas County Children's Services logo is in the top right corner, and the text "Foster and Adoptive Parenting" is prominently displayed in the center right.

Lucas County Direct Mail Ad

While having funding would, of course, enable a county to undertake a comprehensive recruitment campaign – which could include paid advertising, direct mail and other such tactics – there are other recruitment techniques that require little or no funding. These include free media through proactive media relations, E-communications, and social media. (See the [PCSAO Media Guide](#) for more information.) Outreach activities may also be cost effective, such as having a recruitment presence at various community celebrations or at local libraries and faith-based events. Develop personal relationships with local clergy and seek out opportunities to work within their congregations to develop potential foster and adoptive homes. In addition, it may be possible to fund recruitment events and activities (totally or in part) through aggressive solicitation of business sponsors.

Types of recruitment

While the following is not meant to be all inclusive, it does describe some of the most common approaches to recruitment, along with ideal use and drawbacks.

Current network: Some of your best recruiters are existing foster and adoptive caregivers. They are living, breathing examples of how rewarding the process can be. Work closely with experienced, longtime placements to turn them into your most effective spokespeople. Their word of mouth is golden.

- Best use: Equip them not just with training on the right messages, but with palm or business cards they can hand to people they meet. You can also create videos of caregivers talking about the benefits of fostering and adopting to use on the agency's website and social media. Ask them to speak on behalf of the agency at community meetings or at their places of worship.
- Pitfalls: Busy parents may make wonderful connections with prospective homes, but then forget to circle back with you, as the agency recruiter, for follow-up. Be sure to have a communications plan in place.

Take the Next Step Today

Stark County Children Services is in need of loving foster & adoptive parents.

We provide our foster parents with the training & support they need, as they begin their journey into foster care & parenthood.



Stark County Job & Family Services has a program for you, whether you would like to provide a temporary home for a child who needs you, or expand your family through adoption.



If you or someone you know are interested in learning more about foster parenting or adoption, please contact Jennifer Loomis at 330.451.8789 or Jennifer.Loomis@jfs.ohio.gov



Stark County Poster for Community Partners

General recruitment: General recruitment helps you reach mass audiences through media and public outreach programs. This is the most common recruitment effort. Examples include public events, public service announcements, billboards, foster care and adoption fairs, and booths at county fairs or sporting events. Place fliers or ads on pizza boxes or on placemats at local restaurants.



Marion County - Marion Star Ad

- Best use: When attempting to raise your agency's public profile and broaden community awareness of the need for homes.
- Pitfalls: Many times unsuitable applicants respond because the recruitment is generic and not child specific. Some applicants aren't willing to take the specific types of children who are in need of homes. Cultural issues can also impact the outcome. For example, the advertisement may appeal to a middle-class white two-parent family but might fail to entice more diverse individuals and families. If you are going to use general recruitment, your images and messages should be reflective of your entire community.

Targeted recruitment: This focuses on the specific kinds of children in need of temporary and permanent homes in your community. It also involves reviewing the types of homes your agency has licensed or approved. Based upon these assessments, your agency will target its recruitment efforts to the need. The focus is on the kinds of children available to be fostered or adopted and targeting the types of placements needed for these children. Targeted recruitment can be tailored for hard-to-place children, older youth, sibling groups (see below), and others.

Especially in urban areas, many of the children who come into foster care may live in particular neighborhoods. By recruiting foster caregivers from those neighborhoods, children more easily maintain connections to their birth families, schools and places of worship. Ideas for neighborhood recruitment campaigns include partnering with businesses located in those areas and targeting recruitment mailings and events to specific zip codes. Also consider utilizing existing foster and adoptive families who reside in those neighborhoods; they can help spread the word through their relationships and community connections.

- **Best use:** This has proven to be most effective in locating the right kinds of homes for particular children who need to be placed. This type of recruitment effort can be child specific and yet go to a mass market. For example, if most children in your agency's care are adolescents, recruitment efforts can target individuals and families willing to care for older children (e.g., local schools, houses of worship, gyms, community centers). With some research, you can get a solid picture of the potential placements in your community.
- **Pitfalls:** You need to have accurate data regarding the children and families, as well as the ability to research the data. This can be time consuming depending on your agency's data structure.

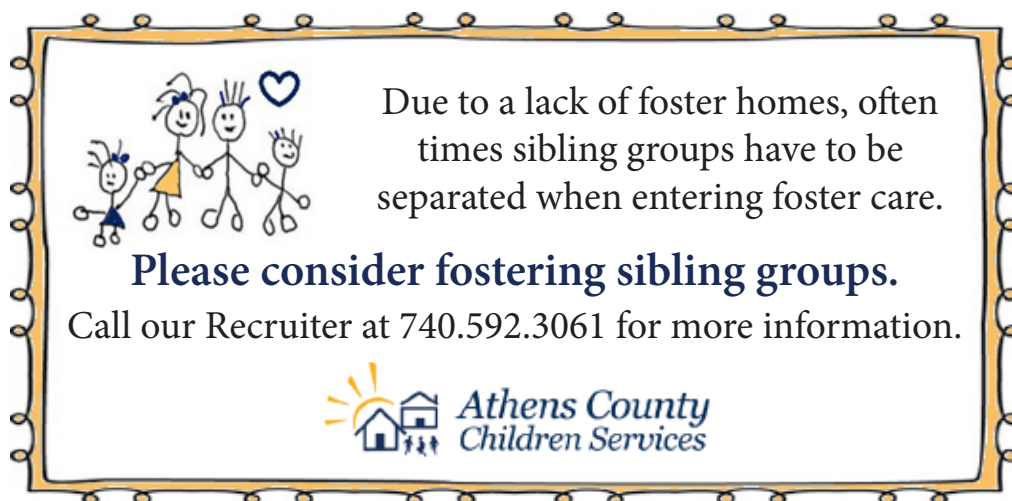
Child-focused recruitment: Child-focused recruitment is an aggressive approach to finding permanent homes for waiting children. Through a public/private partnership between the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, more than 50 Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) Child-Focused Recruiters have been placed with public and private agencies throughout the state. When administered with fidelity, the WWK model has been shown to be up to three times more effective at placing children for adoption. WWK recruiters work hand-in-hand with the caseworker, employing methods such as Family Search and Engagement, "deep dives" into the child's file, Internet search engines and social media, and genograms to identify relatives and others suitable for adopting the child. They develop relationships with the child and work through reservations the child may have about being adopted.

Even if an agency is not working with WWK, Ohio Revised Code 5101:2-48-05(L)(4) (5)/5101:2-48-16(X) requires that certain child-specific recruitment strategies be employed when there are no families to be considered at a matching conference, including distribution of material about the child to two or more adoption agencies, review of case file for relatives/nonrelatives, and exploration with the child regarding the ability of familiar adults who may be willing to adopt.

Finally, web-based channels, including the Ohio Adoption Photolisting and AdoptUSKids, are child specific and available at no cost to your agency. Many agencies are starting to advertise children on their own websites and with videos on their own YouTube channels. Be sure to have a conversation with children before posting their photos to ensure that they are comfortable with their information being public. If you have community or civic groups that have websites, ask them to post information about a child on the site (e.g., a site for the autism community might be willing to feature information on a child with autism who needs a home).

- Best use: Children over the age of eight who have had a hard time with placement. Children are given as much attention as they need by WWK recruiters. The children served by WWK are children who have been in care the longest and need to be on a plan for adoption, not given the goal to age out of foster care.
- Pitfalls: Recruiter turnover (as with caseworker turnover); child's team not immediately embracing the recruiter and his/her role.

Sibling-focused recruitment: Both practice experience and research have demonstrated the importance of maintaining connections and relationships among sibling groups who come into foster care. Children depend on their siblings for emotional support even more while coping with trauma, abuse, neglect and loss. Additionally, there is evidence to support that children experience better permanency outcomes when placed into foster care with their siblings. Make sure that agency staff – specifically placement workers, recruiters and trainers –



Athens County - Sibling Recruitment Sticker

are educated about current research regarding sibling placement. It is also essential that the agency be proactive in its efforts to place siblings together. PCSAs can achieve this by making sure that the licensing or approval process for new foster and adoptive homes is aligned with effective sibling placements. Special funding and other resource incentives also aid in recruiting homes large enough and willing to accept sibling groups.

- Best use: Making recruitment materials and literature available that specifically indicates the necessity of placing sibling groups together from the perspective of children's emotional well-being. Having in-person tabling opportunities, handouts or other visual aids available at places where families typically interact together in a positive way, including movie theaters, family-friendly arcades, local little league fields or other youth team sports venues, local houses of worship, community fairs, festivals, parades and PTO-sponsored events.

- Pitfalls: A recruiter will want to avoid giving the impression that the agency only needs homes big enough for sibling placement. Additionally, depending on the circumstances involved in the children's removal from their home, it may be in the best interest for one or more of the children to have separate placements.

Faith-based recruitment: A special audience needing a unique approach is the faith-based community, often a very motivated audience. Many counties develop a dedicated tool kit tailored to faith leaders and their congregations. Even without significant funds, PCSA staff can establish relationships with local clergy and ask for opportunities to speak to congregants at meetings (women's group, men's group, etc.) or from the pulpit.

Ideas for interacting with various faiths abound:

Gospel music concerts, featuring local choirs and a children's choir; "Hats on for Kids," involving a women's group wearing their best church hats, lunch and a motivational speaker; events honoring foster and adoptive parents at their own places of worship; interaction with faith-based social media; distribution of bookmarks or hand fans with recruitment information; networking with local ministerial alliances; literature drops at local places of worship; and participation at faith-based and interfaith events. Above all, it is important to build a solid, meaningful relationship with local religious institutions. Calendars are often established well in advance, giving you time to plan ahead. Clergy can be particular about time (starting on time, ending on time), so be sure to respect the time given you.

- Best use: Recruiters can reach out to local faith-based groups using email or mailings, but a personal touch – phone calls and in-person meetings – yields better results. Agency information such as a schedule of upcoming information meetings and recruitment materials should be shared when making a request to attend the place of worship as a guest speaker. Ongoing cultivation is critical. Recruiters should continue to build on faith-based networking through regular email and in-person communication.



Lucas County
Children Services
Protecting Children, Promoting Families

705 Adams St.
Toledo, OH 43604
419-213-3200
FAX: 419-327-9291
TDD: 419-327-3559

Executive Director

Dean M. Sparks

Chairman

Laura Wilson

Vice Chairman

James Ray

Secretary

Laura Lloyd-Jenkins

Board Members

Gordon Barry

Terry Chase-Talar

Suzette Cowell

Nathaniel Ford

Laura Lloyd-Jenkins

Johnetta McCollough

Jamie Moore

James Ray

Lisa Shousner

Larry Sykes

Eric Walker

Dear Pastor,

Psalm 127 reminds us that, "Children are a gift from the Lord. They are a reward from Him." We believe at Lucas County Children Services that here is no better way to welcome and love a child than through adoption or foster care.

In 2014, Lucas County Children Services responded to 4,271 reports of suspected child abuse in Lucas County. Unfortunately, many of these children are victims who are in need of foster families or relative care. Some of them will never be able to return to their birth families, and are awaiting new, adoptive families.

Nearly 400 children are in foster care in Lucas County. We need the church to help us answer the call by becoming foster and adoptive parents. Our infants, sibling groups and teens deserve the stability that foster and adoptive care can provide.

LCSS certainly appreciates the support you have given us in the past. But today, Pastor, because of the increased need, we are asking for a renewed focus on helping us identify families within your congregation who have the heart and a loving home to foster or adopt our children. We believe that the church is a strong institution in our community and is able to make the difference that is needed!

If at all possible, will you please consider incorporating this message into one of your sermons? We believe that Psalm 127 is a verse that will inspire those who will hear and feel the need to respond to this urgent plea.

Please give me a call and let me know how we can work together to answer this need for our children, who would love to have a family and a place to call home! Thank you for your ongoing support of children and families in Lucas County.

Sincerely,

Celine Woods

Celine Woods
Foster Care & Adoption Recruiter
Lucas County Children Services
(419) 213-3606
celine.woods@co.lucas.oh.us



Lucas County Pastor Letter

- Pitfalls: As government agencies, PCSAs may not sponsor or pay for programming or materials that support a particular religion. Ensure that recruitment efforts are interfaith (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc.) or at least multi-denominational in areas where there is less diversity. Avoid religious imagery or verses on materials paid for by the agency; instead, use foster and adoptive parents as volunteers (particularly if they are members of the congregation) to speak to the religious aspects and benefits.

Permanency Roundtables: While not a recruitment strategy per se, many agencies have started using a Casey Family Programs model called Permanency Roundtables (PRTs) or Youth-Centered Permanency Roundtables. The model involves an intensive staffing, internal at first and then including the youth and the youth's chosen support person(s), to create urgency around permanency and to identify new strategies for reunification, legal custody/ guardianship or adoption. Often, specific recruitment-oriented action items result from the roundtable.

- Best use: PRTs are typically geared toward youth ages 12 and up who have been in care for 17 months or longer.
- Pitfalls: Creating urgency for permanency requires PRTs to occur every 90 days until permanency is achieved. The model is complex and requires a great deal of agency preparation and training for staff and community stakeholders.

Materials and resources

The variety of materials (tactics) available to recruiters is lengthy, including but not limited to:

- Direct mail
- Paid advertising in print, broadcast, electronic and transit media
- Positive media relations (see [PCSAO's Media Guide](#))
- Agency and recruitment websites
- Internet advertising and social media
- Foster care and adoption information meetings
- Exhibits at community events (including Foster Care and Adoption Month events)



Portage County Facebook Banner

- Information dinners
- Mixers (bowling mixers, virtual mixers, etc.)
- Annual adoption calendar



Hamilton County 2015 Adoption Calendar

- Inquiry packets
- Brochures and fliers
- Promotional items (with the inquiry phone line or web address clearly displayed)

Internet marketing and social media have expanded the recruitment reach of agencies and driven down the cost. Options include:

- County website
- Facebook (inexpensive advertising is available)
- Twitter
- HootSuite (for managing Facebook and Twitter feeds)
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- Reach Local (Internet Advertising and Search Engine Optimization/SEO) or similar “pay-per-click” services

Each agency’s needs, budget and available staff time will dictate what materials and resources to use. For more information about any of these tactics, contact PCSAO’s Community Education Committee.

Campaign planning and network development

All PCSAs that engage in foster care recruitment – i.e., have not privatized that function – are required to submit a plan to ODJFS. See Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-5-13 for the most up-to-date guidelines for submitting the plan. PCSAs are also required to submit adoption plans to ODJFS. See OAC 5101:2-48-05 (K) and (L). In each case, the complete rule can be obtained through an Internet search.

Both plans should be comprehensive, tailored to your county's needs and useful. Whether you are starting from scratch, updating an existing recruitment plan or expanding your efforts, you should start by putting together an action plan. First, identify the following:

- What are your needs (i.e., number of homes needed, types of children needing homes)?
- What are your goals?
- Who is your target audience? Define by demographics: age, gender, race, zip code, income level, etc.
- Who are your supporters?
- Who/what are your detractors?
- What assets are available to you?
- What hurdles exist?
- What strategies can you use to reach your target audience?
- What tactics are effective in reaching your target audience?
- How will you measure your success/failure?

Next, develop your county-specific plan. You may view the recruitment plans and strategies of other counties in SACWIS for guidance. Typically, such recruitment/marketing plans cover a full year for purposes of event planning, media buying, mailings, special events, etc. The plan should cover your agency's fiscal year (July through June) in order to align with budget constraints.

If a month-by-month campaign plan is too overwhelming or not feasible, then focus recruitment activities at key times of the year:

- April: Child Abuse Prevention Month and Wear Blue
- May: National Foster Care Month
- September: Kinship Appreciation Month
- November: National Adoption Awareness Month

Campaigns can also be scheduled around foster and adoptive parent training calendars.

Finally, don't forget to build in an evaluation plan (see below).

Special consideration: MEPA

Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994

As Amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996

MEPA-IEP is one of several recent federal initiatives and laws aimed at removing the barriers to permanency for the hundreds of thousands of children who are in the child protective system. The specific intentions of MEPA-IEP are to:

- Decrease the length of time that children wait to be adopted;
- Facilitate the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents who can meet the distinctive needs of children awaiting placement; and
- Eliminate discrimination on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the child or the prospective parent.

To achieve these goals, MEPA-IEP has three basic mandates:

- It prohibits states and other entities that are involved in foster care or adoption placements, and that receive federal financial assistance under Title IV-E, Title IV-B, or any other federal program, from delaying or denying a child's foster care or adoptive placement on the basis of the child's or the prospective parent's race, color, or national origin.
- It prohibits these states and entities from denying to any individual the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent on the basis of the prospective parent's or the child's race, color, or national origin.
- It requires that, to remain eligible for federal assistance for their child welfare programs, states must diligently recruit foster and adoptive parents who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in the state who need foster and adoptive homes.

Evaluation

Every campaign effort should be evaluated, particularly if funds are being spent. Be sure to plan ahead for how SACWIS will be used to track data and measure progress toward goals throughout the life of the campaign so as to avoid the need to create an alternate system of data collection. SACWIS allows agencies to track incoming calls in such a way that callers who enquire about fostering or adopting are asked to identify how they learned about the opportunity. In this way, you can determine which tactics (events, billboards, radio spots, etc.) are most effective.

While setting specific goals for your campaign can be intimidating, you should establish an ambitious plan in your first year and then make adjustments based on periodic check-ins and annual evaluations. A solid evaluation that employs accurate data can be the basis for expanding recruitment efforts – and securing a bigger budget – in future years.

Helpful links

The following state and national organizations are available as resources to Ohio PCSAs:

- **Ohio Adoption Photolisting (OAPL)** <http://adoptionphotolistingohio.org>
Every child has a right to a permanent family – a family where they can be loved, cared for, and kept safe. Unfortunately, in Ohio many waiting children do not have families to call their own. OAPL is designed to assist individuals and families interested in learning more about the adoption process and to provide information on waiting children in Ohio. OAPL is managed by the Family & Youth Law Center (see below).
- **AdoptUSKids** <http://www.adoptuskids.org/> AdoptUSKids is a project of the U.S. Children's Bureau operated through a cooperative agreement with the Adoption Exchange Association. The project launched in 2002 with a two-fold purpose: To raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families; and to support States, Territories, and Tribes in their efforts to find families for children in foster care, particularly the most challenging to place including older youth, those who are part of sibling groups that need to be placed together, and children and youth of color, and to assist with placements across county and state boundaries.
- **Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK)** <https://davethomasfoundation.org/adopt/wwk/>
WWK is making a difference for thousands of children for adoption – one child at a time. The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption awards grants to public and private adoption agencies to hire adoption professionals who implement proactive, child-focused



Portage County Wendy's Wonderful Kids Ad

recruitment programs targeted exclusively on moving America's longest-waiting children from foster care into adoptive families. Recently released research from a five-year evaluation of WWK shows that children referred to the program are up to three times more likely to get adopted.

- **Ohio Family Care Association (OFCA)** <http://ofcaonline.org/> : OFCA serves as the statewide voice for the thousands of adoptive, foster, kinship, primary and respite families – what we here refer to as resource families – in Ohio. Our role is to advocate on behalf of our members at the state level, connect them to resources, and provide them with educational opportunities to ensure that they are able to volunteer their time, their homes, and their hearts to serve Ohio's abused, neglected, dependent, and unruly children.

- **North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)** <http://www.nacac.org/> : In North America, tens of thousands of children cannot remain with their birth families. These children—once labeled unadoptable or hard to place—are mostly school-aged. Some are brothers and sisters who must be placed together. Some are drug-exposed or medically fragile. Most have physical, mental, or emotional difficulties. Many are children of color. All need loving families. Founded in 1974 by adoptive parents, NACAC is committed to meeting the needs of waiting children and the families who adopt them.
- **Family & Youth Law Center (FYLAW)** <http://www.familyyouthlaw.org/> : FYLaw seeks to improve the law, policies, and practices associated with child protection and adoption systems. Every day we work towards realizing the goal that all children -- especially those who have been abused or neglected or are dependent on the state for their care -- have safe, healthy, permanent homes. Our primary tools in this regard are education, advocacy, and research.
- **Ohio Adoption Planning Group (OAPG)** <https://www.facebook.com/OhioAdoption> : OAPG is a statewide consortium of adoption professionals and parents representing a diverse group of child welfare agencies and organizations. Formed in 1981, the group brings together an assembly of public and private partners from over fifty adoption agencies as well as birth and adoptive parents that meet quarterly to collaborate on issues concerning the permanency of Ohio's children, youth and their families. Our mission is to provide a forum for discussion and recommendations to address the issues surrounding adoption and child welfare in Ohio.
- **Waiting Child Fund** <http://www.waitingchildfund.com/> : The Waiting Child Fund has one fundamental goal: to help place children in foster care with a permanent family. Founded in 2005, the Waiting Child Fund was built on the belief that all children can achieve permanency no matter what their circumstances. Youth in the foster care system waiting for their “forever family” are usually pre-teens and teens, and many of them have been living in foster care for years. These children are at risk of aging out of care at age 18, at which point many will face homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, and other challenges.
- **Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) – Caregivers’ Corner** <http://www.ocwtp.net/CgCorner.html> : Founded in 1986, OCWTP is a comprehensive, competency-based inservice training (CCBIT) system for staff, managers, and foster and adoptive families in Ohio's county Public Children Services Agencies (PCSAs). Designed as a state/county, public/private collaboration, OCWTP develops and provides an array of training activities to promote mastery of the complex knowledge and skills needed to assure protection and permanence for Ohio's abused and neglected children. The Caregivers’ Corner page is dedicated to providing general resources for foster and adoptive families.

Public Children Services Association of Ohio
37 West Broad Street, Suite 1100
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 224-5802
www.pcsao.org

PCSAO thanks the following members of the Community Education Committee for their contributions to updating this resource:

Kim Bushek, Portage County Job and Family Services
Brent Hite, Summit County Children Services
Carl Hunnell, Richland County Children Services
Joetta McCruter-Polk, Franklin County Children Services
Julie Malkin, Lucas County Children Services
Stephen Rowland, Stark County Job and Family Services
Robin Webb, Athens County Children Services
Scott Britton, Public Children Services Association of Ohio