Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System

Challenges and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

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Contents

Exhibits

Introduction

For the more than 400,000 children in foster care in the United States, finding a permanent home and family is of both personal and national interest (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Many of these children—about one-third—remain in foster care for a year or longer before achieving permanency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The problem of long-term out-of-home placement is particularly acute for African American and Native American children, who are overrepresented in foster care and spend more time in care than White children (Courtney et al., 1996; Harris, 2014). If child welfare agencies are to achieve permanence for the children and youth in their care, they must establish and maintain a pool of skilled and effective foster and adoptive parents (referred to as **resource parents** in this report). Yet, despite the need, half of U.S. states lost foster home capacity from 2012 to 2017 (Kelly et al., 2017).

The systematic process of recruiting, retaining, and supporting resource parents who reflect the diversity of children who need placements is known as **diligent recruitment**. Diligent recruitment of resource families requires that agencies make efforts to improve permanency outcomes—and safety and well-being outcomes—by addressing systemic obstacles to identifying resource families, moving them through the licensing process, ensuring they have support to successfully care for children, and retaining them over time.

Federal Efforts to Promote and Support Diligent Recruitment

Federal efforts to address long spells in foster care and racial disparities in placement and permanency outcomes extend back to the 1990s. The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act was enacted in 1994[1] to ensure children in out-of-home care are provided with permanent, safe, and stable homes without delay. Congress found state child welfare and private agency policies that commonly promoted or required a match in the race/ethnicity between children and potential resource parents[2] contributed to the delay or denial of permanency (Hollinger, 1998; see also Child Welfare League of America [2007] for analysis and discussion of this issue). Agency practices also contributed to the

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[1] The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act was amended in 1996 by the Interethnic Placement Provisions, which provided the protections against discrimination based on race, color, or national origin.

[2] Practices favoring the placement of children with ethnically matched resource families were often based on the argument that it was in the best interest of the child.

problem by discouraging people of color from becoming resource parents. The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act was intended to address these barriers to permanency by—

- **Prohibiting** the delay or denial of adoption or placement in foster care because of the race, color, or national origin of a child or resource parents
- **Requiring** states and agencies to make **diligent efforts** to recruit potential resource families that reflect the diversity of children who require out-of-home care (Hollinger, 1998)

More recent federal legislation and funding opportunities have sought to support states and local child welfare agencies in their diligent recruitment efforts. For example, the recently enacted Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 provides $8 million in grant funds through 2022 to states to support the recruitment and retention of resource families. And since 2008, the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has provided discretionary funds to grantees to effectively identify, engage, and support resource families as a means of improving permanency outcomes and building lasting connections for children in foster care. Child welfare agencies that received grants through these funding opportunities sought to do the following:

- Integrate their diligent recruitment programs into other agency programs, including foster care case planning and permanency planning processes, to facilitate concurrent planning.

- Use the initiative to make policy and practice-level changes that embrace the philosophy of permanency from the moment a child enters the child welfare system.

- Evaluate the implementation of diligent recruitment programs to document processes and to identify linkages between strategies and improved outcomes.

- Develop model programs that other child welfare jurisdictions could reference for guidance, insight, and possible replication.

> **Concurrent planning** is an approach to child welfare case management in which plans are made for a child's reunification with his or her family, while an alternative permanency plan for the child—such as adoption by his or her foster parent—is also developed in case reunification is ultimately not achieved.

The Grantees

In total, 21 grantees in 3 clusters (2008, 2010, and 2013) received funding to test a diverse array of diligent recruitment activities, programs, and policies. They also completed mandatory evaluations of their program processes and outcomes. The grantees are listed in exhibit 1 by the year in which funding was awarded.

Objectives of the Paper

This paper is intended to help child welfare directors, program managers, and staff improve diligent recruitment practices and services to resource families, with the ultimate goal of improving permanency and well-being outcomes for children in out-of-home placement. Drawing on grantees' final reports and published research, this paper—

- Presents the solutions grantees tested to address common diligent recruitment challenges
- Identifies lessons learned during implementation
- Offers suggestions for improvement

Exhibit 1. Diligent Recruitment Grantees

Grantees' Home State or Tribe	Project/Funded Agency
2008 Grantees	
CA	***Roots and Wings*** County of Santa Cruz, Human Services Department, Division of Family and Children's Services
CO	***Denver's Village*** Denver Department of Human Services
KY	***Making Appropriate and Timely Connections for Children*** Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services
MN	***Permanent Families Recruitment Project*** Ramsey County Community Human Services Department
MO	***Missouri Extreme Recruitment Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition*** Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division
NY	***A Parent for Every Child*** New York State Office of Children and Family Services
OH	***Partners for Forever Families*** Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services
OK	***Bridge to the Future*** Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare Services
2010 Grantees	
CA	***Collaborative Strategies for Diligent Recruitment Project*** Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

Grantees' Home State or Tribe	Project/Funded Agency
2010 Grantees	
IL	***Illinois Recruitment and Kin Connection Project*** Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
MI	***Inter-Agency Community Adoption/Foster Family Recruitment Exchange Project*** Oakland County Department of Health and Human Services
MS	***Mississippi Guided Resource Initiatives Targeting Special Kids*** Mississippi Department of Human Services
NM	***Step Up!*** New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department
NV	***Permanent Families and Lasting Connections Recruitment Project*** Clark County Department of Family Services
TX	***Texas Permanency and Family Resource Development Model*** Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
2013 Grantees	
AR	***Arkansas' Creating Connections for Children Project*** Arkansas Department of Human Services
FL	***Florida Intelligent Recruitment Project*** Florida Department of Children and Families
NY	***Innovations in Family Recruitment in New York*** New York State Office of Children and Family Services
OR	***GRACE: Growing Resources and Alliances Through Collaborative Efforts*** Oregon Department of Human Services
PA	***Recruiting and Engagement Continuum*** Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth, and Families
Winnebago Tribe of NE	***Native Families for Native Children*** Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

Note: For convenience and brevity, the grantees are identified throughout the remainder of this paper by the state in which they were located and the year they were funded, e.g., CA (2008). Appendix A provides more detailed information regarding the grantees' projects.

Note: Originally, the 2008 cluster had nine grantees and the 2013 cluster had five. The remaining grantees funded in these years all completed their diligent recruitment projects.

What Is Strong Diligent Recruitment Practice?

The Diligent Recruitment Process

To improve child outcomes, agencies must undertake activities that engage, equip, and retain resource parents, as depicted in exhibit 2. Diligent recruitment includes informing communities of the need for resource parents; reaching out to potential parents; responding to interested families; and assessing, training, and licensing parents. Once resource parents are successfully recruited and licensed, supporting them to care for children and to take pride in their role encourages them to continue to provide homes for children. In addition, these supports help resource families work with birth parents toward reunification when appropriate and identify and strengthen connections with other caring adults in the child's family and social networks. Key organizational supports to succeed in this process include training and coaching staff in a customer service model to positively respond to families, training and supporting resource parents in their role as caregivers, and engaging in continuous quality improvement efforts by collecting and evaluating data.

Exhibit 2. The Process of Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families

Ongoing training and coaching for staff and resource parents

Marketing and outreach → Families inquire → Families are trained and licensed → Children are placed with new resource families → Families receive ongoing resources/ support to promote retention → Number of resource families increases

Ongoing use of data for evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement
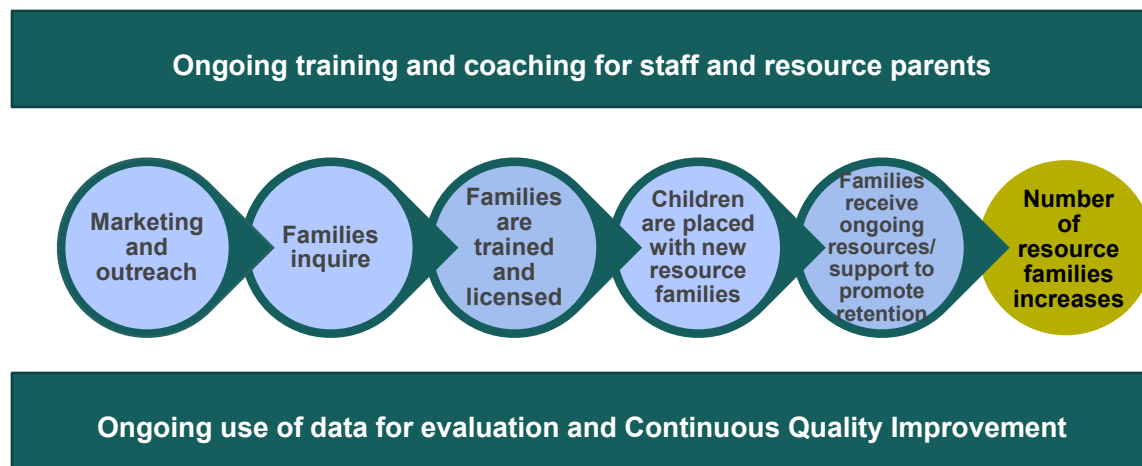
Marketing and Outreach

To raise awareness of the need for foster and adoptive parents, agencies engage in three general types of recruitment efforts (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, n.d. a; University of North Dakota, Children and Family Services Training Center, 2014):

- **General recruitment** broadcasts a call for foster and adoptive parents and builds public awareness and interest. This is done, for example, through advertising or by setting up an information table at a community event.

- **Targeted recruitment** refers to efforts to find foster and adoptive parents who can meet particular needs of children in care. Agency administrative and demographic data are used to determine the characteristics of current foster and adoptive parents and of the children in care. Recruitment efforts are then targeted to potential resource parents who can meet the unique placement needs of certain children, such as sibling groups, adolescents, or children with visual or hearing impairments.

- **Child-specific recruitment** refers to efforts to recruit a foster or adoptive family for a specific child or sibling group.

The challenge for agencies is to manage their limited recruitment resources by finding the balance between casting a wide net to meet high demand for resource families and using more targeted recruitment approaches that may reach fewer people but result in a higher proportion of families that are qualified to become foster parents (see Adams, 2018). The Strategies for Success section of this paper describes grantee efforts to improve the marketing and outreach process.

Family Inquiry, Preservice Training, and Licensing[3]

The process of accepting and responding to inquiries from potential resource parents and moving them through the licensing process varies by state. However, for most families this process involves—

- Having initial conversations with the agency to explore their interests and capabilities

- Undergoing a more extensive family assessment or "home study" during which they disclose personal information to demonstrate their ability to serve as a resource home

- Passing criminal background and reference checks

- Having their home examined for safety (e.g., fire hazards) and demonstrating they have adequate space to care for a child

- Completing paperwork during the process, which may be lengthy and time consuming

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[3] In some states, the "licensing" process is instead referred to as the "approval" process.

- Attending preservice training, which may be 10–30 or more hours of education on working with the child welfare agency and caring for children with special needs

Here, agencies face the challenge of sustaining resource families' interest and commitment through what can be a lengthy process. By design, the assessment and licensing process is a deliberative approach that helps families determine whether foster care is right for them and what children they might be best suited to serve (National Foster Parent Association, n.d.). It also helps agencies better understand families to make the best possible match with a child; determine whether they meet licensure requirements; and assess whether they can support, coach, and mentor birth parents in preparation for and following reunification. Grantee efforts to improve the licensing and preservice training process are discussed in the Strategies for Success section.

Retention

Given the high demand for foster and adoptive parents, recruitment can most effectively help maintain a stable supply of resource homes when it is paired with a high rate of retention. In an analysis of data from one state, Chapin Hall found 25 percent of first-time foster homes close in 2.5–3.8 months (Wulczyn et al., 2018).[4] Families that are licensed to receive children from the foster care system may become unavailable for many reasons:

- A family may request to no longer serve as a resource home because it experiences a change in its circumstances or for personal or family issues, or because it has a concern about the provider agency.

- A family that is fostering kin (i.e., the child of a family member) may leave the system once the kinship case ends.

- A family may adopt a child and leave the foster care system.

- Less commonly, an agency may decide to close a resource home because of abuse/neglect or because it has concerns about the resource parents' performance.

To better understand and address the reasons for loss of resource homes, agencies must develop resource families' skills and capacities, support their emerging and ongoing needs, and give them a meaningful voice in the fostering process.[5] Grantee efforts to address the challenge of retention are discussed in the Strategies for Success section.

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[4] Among foster homes that opened for the first time between 2011 and 2016.

[5] See Ahn, Greeno, Bright, Hartzel, & Reiman (2017) for further discussion of this issue.

Ongoing Training for Staff and Resource Parents

In addition to the preservice training that occurs during the licensing process, two training categories are important to the success of diligent recruitment and retention efforts. The first is **in-service training for resource parents** to help strengthen their parenting skills and teach them strategies to support the socio-emotional well-being of children in their care. For example, Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Trained, a 16-week program for caregivers of children in foster or kinship care placements, is implemented in many states (Chamberlain, 2015; Chamberlain et al., 2008). Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Trained was designed to improve parents' skill at managing difficult child behaviors—a common reason for placement instability and for caregivers withdrawing as placement resources. Facilitators use this curriculum-based program to teach resource parents methods for creating a safe environment for children, encouraging cooperation, promoting self-regulation, and setting limits, among other topics, and they provide resource parents with supervision and support. The training also includes sessions on dealing with problem behaviors, promoting school success, and encouraging positive peer relationships, along with strategies for resource parent self-care to manage the stress of providing foster care.

A second training category that is key to successful recruitment and retention is **training for child welfare staff** and community partners. This includes training in the use of a customer service model when responding to current and prospective resource parents. Customer service training in child welfare commonly focuses on developing awareness and skills for the use of respectful, courteous, and timely communication with families and other partners. Agency staff and community partners may also be trained in how to engage with diverse communities that reflect the demographics of children and families that the agency serves (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, n.d. b). The objective of this kind of training is to improve resource and birth families' perceptions of how they are treated, whether their needs are responded to, and whether they feel actively engaged and valued as members of a child's support team (Florida's Center for Child Welfare, n.d.). Grantee efforts to introduce or improve training opportunities for staff and resource parents are discussed in the Strategies for Success section.

Use of Data for Continuous Quality Improvement

A final important element is the integration of continuous quality improvement principles into diligent recruitment efforts. This involves collecting and reviewing data to assess implementation of efforts and to determine whether efforts are improving recruitment and retention of families. Activities in this area include—

- Raising awareness and understanding within agencies about the value of data
- Determining data/information needs

- Building internal capacity for data analysis and continuous quality improvement

- Building capacity to ensure the data on children in care are kept current and accurate

- Developing reliable methods for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to measure outcomes

- Developing and implementing a plan for agency staff to review findings regularly and discuss their implications for program refinement

Efforts may also include the use of particular statistical methods, such as market segmentation, in which data are used to find new resource families by understanding the characteristics and behaviors of existing resource families. Market segmentation (discussed in the following section) allows agencies to determine which families they should target and where they can be found.

Strategies for Success

Effective diligent recruitment requires agencies to overcome challenges and barriers to success that are typical in foster care. This section describes how grantees creatively responded to some of the most common obstacles agencies face in the areas of—

- Improving licensure processes

- Changing attitudes, knowledge, and practices

- Developing specialized staff positions

- Expanding or refining marketing and outreach efforts

- Developing collaborations and partnerships

- Increasing retention of resource families

- Using data to improve program functioning and outcomes

Exhibits B1–B7 in appendix B provide additional examples of grantees implementing these strategies.

Improving Licensure Processes

Completing the licensure process can be a lengthy and daunting undertaking for potential resource families. Agencies require these families to complete numerous tasks, including training, fingerprinting, and background checks. As a result, agencies commonly find the number of potential resource families drops precipitously between initial inquiry and licensure approval. For example, the MN (2008) grantee found just 20 percent of families that inquired went on to be licensed, while the proportions were even lower in OH (2008) and CO (2008) at 9 percent and 7 percent, respectively. Several grantees implemented strategies to improve their licensure processes and increase the number of resource families.

Family Support During Licensing

Several grantees provided support to families navigating the licensure process. CA (2008) utilized its licensure data to identify and provide specialized support to families during the licensing process; for example, helping families complete required forms or obtain needed documents, answering questions, and identifying community resources (e.g., childcare, after-school programs). Because of these efforts, the number of families that achieved each licensing milestone grew considerably

across the years of the grant, with more than twice as many attending an orientation and completing training, and twice as many receiving a license.

Protocols and Documents

Some grantees determined the numerous documents or protocols required during the licensure process were obstacles to increasing the number of resource families. MN (2008) reviewed and updated all licensing forms and documents to eliminate redundancies and make the process easier.

It also streamlined the initial recruitment and training process by combining previously separate informational and orientation meetings into one session and developed a comprehensive unified database to track the entire recruitment, training, and licensing process. These activities significantly increased the number of applicants and trainees between 2009 and 2013.[6] A survey conducted with a sample of resource families revealed improved satisfaction on several indicators related to timeliness, communication, assistance with paperwork, and positive support.

Changing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices

Lack of knowledge or skills, poor communication, and lack of buy-in to best practices among both agency staff and resource parents can be major obstacles to building a stable reserve of resource families. Potential resource families often do not understand agency requirements or the potential challenges they may encounter in parenting a child from the child welfare system. This lack of knowledge, sometimes combined with difficulties accessing important information, may lead to frustration or negative perceptions of the child welfare system. Child welfare staff may not always possess the knowledge, time,

Expanding the Availability of Resource Family Training

OK (2008) developed a solution to the challenge of resource families being unable to attend all five of their required in-service trainings. The grantee created a website to make the trainings available online and also made them available in DVD format at local county offices. This enabled resource families to access the information in a timely manner and helped ensure sustainability of the training after the grant period ended. The increased availability of the training content may have helped—a survey revealed that the number of resource families reporting lack of knowledge about child welfare services and lack of knowledge about the application process as obstacles to their work *decreased* by 22 percent over 3 years.

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[6] The number of families that completed the home study did not, however, increase as expected.

and skills needed to assist families in becoming resource families. To address these challenges, grantees implemented various types of staff and resource family training activities as fundamental components of their programs (see sidebar on previous page). Content areas included effective communication strategies, information sharing, recruitment and licensing processes, and overcoming barriers to recruitment and retention.

Staff Training

Staff training focused on improving staff knowledge and skills to improve practices and interactions with resource parents and increase awareness of circumstances that affect children.

- Several grantees implemented **customer service** training to improve communication between agency staff and clients. For example, MN (2008) developed a customer service model that included role-playing, a film depicting exemplary customer service, and guiding principles to steer staff in their day-to-day interactions with families.

- Many agencies trained staff in **family finding and engagement**. In NY (2008), training provided staff with tools to identify and connect children with family members and other permanency resources, to develop plans to return children to safe and stable family arrangements, and to support and sustain a permanent network of caring adults for children. The grantee found—

36%
of adults recruited through family finding and engagement
became permanent resources for children.

Resource Family Training

Resource family training focused on improving understanding of the processes and requirements for becoming a resource family and how children's experiences may influence their behavior.

- Grantees provided resource families with training on **child trauma**. NY (2008) developed a training that covered caring for children who have experienced trauma, the effects of trauma on youth development, and how to help children overcome traumatic events.

- Several grantees provided training for resource families on **concurrent permanency planning**. NM (2010) developed digital stories—videos about real-life concurrent planning experiences—and incorporated them into its concurrent planning curriculum to increase resource family understanding of and support for the concurrent planning process.

Developing Specialized Staff Positions

Effective diligent recruitment requires a level of effort that often goes beyond an agency's usual services. This means agencies must either add responsibilities to front-line staff's existing workload or create new positions to focus on recruitment and retention efforts. Several grantees established or contracted for specialized staff positions to support their efforts, as described in the following section.

Program Coordinators

Diligent recruitment efforts require an understanding of the local community. An inability to authentically engage community partners and lack of knowledge of the local "market" of resource parents can be barriers to recruitment. To address these barriers, some grantees identified a need for specialized, locally situated staff. For example, CO (2008) hired community outreach workers to lead seven community-based recruitment teams, a key feature of its approach. The teams were situated in neighborhood-based regions and tasked with building partnerships and collaboration within the community to promote improved provision of diligent recruitment and other child welfare services. The grantee reported—

"Having staff whose sole purpose was to partner with the community for the recruitment and retention of resource families was a great opportunity to overcome the negative image of the department as well as develop strategic, targeted recruitment plans."

Family Finders

Family finding is a set of methods and strategies for locating and engaging the relatives of children in out-of-home care (National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, 2015). The process is labor intensive and requires some expertise in relative search and engagement (Williams, Malm, Allen, & Ellis, 2011), so it can be challenging to add this responsibility to the existing workload of front-line staff. Several grantees, therefore, developed family finding specialist positions to identify immediate and extended family and fictive kin.[7] For example, IL (2010) developed a kin connection specialist staff position. The specialist facilitated supporting relationships between children and birth families, fictive kin, and other significant relations. The specialist began this family finding work early

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[7] Fictive kin are individuals who are unrelated to the child by birth or marriage but have an emotionally significant relationship that is similar to a family relationship.

in a case, by interviewing family members present at court about themselves and other significant people in the child's life who might serve as potential resource families. The specialist also searched for other relatives and people close to the family who could potentially participate in service planning, serve as a resource for the child's placement, offer respite care, host sibling or parental visits, or serve as mentors for the family. Of this approach, the grantee said—

"Our goal was to keep children connected or get children connected to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime by engaging the birth family and child when appropriate, immediately after temporary custody was granted."

TX (2010) took an innovative approach to family finding by involving Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) in the process. Children in the grantees' target population received enhanced CASA case services, which included systematic efforts to locate extended family and other connections. CASA volunteers—who were trained in family finding techniques—searched for extended family and kin by conducting thorough reviews of children's case records; interviewing family, friends, teachers, and others; using software applications to develop family trees and genograms; and using genealogy software and social media to identify and locate connections. When family members were located, the volunteers reached out to them and began the process of reconnecting them with the child's existing family and support network.

Resource Parent Supporters

The process of supporting resource families through the application and licensure process, responding to their ongoing questions and concerns, and helping them understand the child welfare system is essential. However, the time and staffing needs required to return calls and emails can hinder agencies' ability to provide timely responses. To overcome this barrier, some grantees established positions or work units dedicated to this task.

- AR (2013) established a four-person centralized inquiry unit dedicated to guiding prospective resource parents through the application process. The unit comprised two family service social workers, an administrative specialist, and a program eligibility specialist. Together, they ensured more timely response to and assessment of new resource

Modifying Staff Roles to Support Resource Families

To ease work burdens on current foster and adoptive families and support them in their core role of caring for children, NM (2010) modified the responsibilities of family resource coordinators to take a more active role in recruiting prospective resource parents by hosting recruitment parties, encouraging coordinators to engage in one-on-one recruitment, and having coordinators attend foster parent orientations.

family inquiries, processed resource family paperwork, called families when paperwork was missing or overdue, and more quickly identified families that were no longer interested in becoming resource parents. The grantee reported having this focused unit reduced the number of days it took to process a resource family's application from 75 to 24.

- NV (2010) developed the Foster Parent Champion Program, a mentoring program for licensed and unlicensed caregivers. A team of licensed resource parents, relative and kinship caregivers, adopted families, and others served as on-staff mentors to new and experienced resource families. These "champions" contacted resource parents to offer support, information, and resources; answered incoming general questions from caregivers; shared information about the program at meetings, preservice trainings, and community events; and provided perspective on potential matches between children available for adoption and caregivers. The grantee explained the champions' ability to connect with resource parents:

"They are able to empathize with caregivers because they have been in the same situations. They share their personal experiences and give examples of what they have done to manage situations and, most importantly, they are genuine in each response, which gives credibility to the program."

Expanding or Refining Marketing and Outreach Efforts

Child welfare agencies must raise awareness of the ongoing need for resource parents and reach families that might be willing to serve as resources. For their message to be heard, though, agencies must cut through the barrage of advertisements and information people are exposed to daily. To overcome this challenge, grantees tested a variety of marketing strategies for general and targeted recruitment.

Leveraging Media

Grantees used several types of media, including social media and the web, television and radio, and printed marketing materials, to broadcast their need for resource families.

- **Online media.** Numerous grantees reached out to potential resource families through the web and social media. CO (2008) developed and launched a Stand Up for Me branded website to recruit and retain resource families and provide an overview of the needs of Denver's child welfare system. The website highlighted children waiting for placement and provided honest information about the certification requirements and process for resource parents. The grantee reported that the website was their most productive recruitment tool, and that potential resource parents who came to them through the website were more likely to follow through because of the

website's "realistic approach to presenting the challenges and joy of becoming a foster or adoptive parent for Denver."

- **Television and radio.** Many grantees placed free public service announcements and paid spots on television and radio stations to market their foster care and adoption services and their need for resource parents. Grantees reported radio in particular was an effective strategy for reaching potential caregivers in minority communities. MN (2008) produced commercials and public service announcements for television and radio, with an emphasis on African American and Hispanic/Latino media outlets. They wrote a script for a public service announcement produced by the St. Paul Neighborhood Network; the public service announcement aired on cable television in the Twin Cities metro area and was posted on YouTube. Their project manager and Hispanic/Latino community consultant also provided a 30-minute interview to air on the St. Paul Neighborhood Network. According to survey findings from the project's evaluation, half of Hispanic/Latino families that inquired about becoming a resource family said they learned about the need for resource homes through these TV and radio spots.

- **Print.** Several grantees turned to a more traditional media source—local papers—to raise awareness about the need for resource parents. Some reported it was a particularly good outlet for targeted recruitment of African American and Hispanic/Latino families. For example, MI (2010) found partnering with local African American print media offered the opportunity to write articles that would be run at no cost, to receive discounts on ad purchases, and to receive acknowledgment of the work it was doing to find families for African American children. Similarly, CO (2008) worked with the free weekly Spanish-language newspaper *La Prensa* to run a front-page article on the need for Spanish-speaking resource homes in the Denver area.

Using Market Segmentation Techniques

Targeted recruitment of resource families for children with unique placement needs can be challenging, but data can help make the process more efficient. Through market segmentation techniques, agencies can analyze demographic and administrative data to gain insights into the characteristics of successful resource parents and use that information to identify and locate potential new resource parents (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, 2015). Market segmentation is the process of dividing up a market—such as the pool of potential resource parents—into groups based on particular sets of characteristics or traits, such as lifestyle or media use preferences. People within a segment are expected to respond similarly to a given message or marketing approach because they share these similar characteristics. Understanding the traits of successful resource parents enables agencies to identify and locate potential new resource parents and create personalized recruitment campaigns just for them.

Several grantees used market segmentation techniques to refine their targeted recruitment efforts. For example—

- NV (2010) partnered with the Nielsen Company to engage in market segmentation activities. Nielsen used agency data to identify the characteristics of quality resource parents and compared this information with geodemographic from the Census Bureau and other data

sources. Through this process, it identified a target audience for recruitment outreach, identified the lifestyle preferences of that audience (e.g., where they shop and eat, leisure activities), and made recommendations about the most effective strategy to reach them (e.g., locations where advertising billboards should be purchased, where community recruiting events should be held). The agency then partnered with a marketing firm to create an advertising campaign to recruit from among that target audience.

- For its Intelligent Recruitment Project, FL (2013) partnered with a local marketing firm to analyze data collected from established resource parents. The analyses enabled the agency to develop a database of prospective resource parents with characteristics that matched those of established resource parents. For each project site, it then developed strategic marketing plans that laid out tools, tactics, messages, and the timing of targeted efforts to recruit new resource families. From these efforts, all project sites reported an increase in the number of interested families.

Holding Community Recruiting Events

Most grantees held or participated in community events to raise awareness about foster care and adoption and to connect with those who might be interested in serving as resource parents. For example—

- OH (2008) participated in the kickoff event of a new gallery at Cleveland's Botanical Garden, which featured a gospel music festival with performances designed to increase awareness about adoption and the need for permanency for older youth and sibling groups. This was followed by a community forum on kinship care with one of Ohio's congressional representatives.

- MS (2010) helped organize "foster-ware parties," community or small-group get-togethers hosted by resource parents to increase awareness about the need for additional resource parents. The agency created kits for party hosts, including materials and game ideas; provided instruction and training for hosting the parties; and coordinated with the hosts to have a representative at the party to answer questions and share personal experiences.

Developing Collaborations and Partnerships

Implementation of a comprehensive recruitment strategy that includes general, targeted, and child-specific components requires extensive resources and compels child welfare agencies to collaborate or partner with other agencies or organizations to achieve their recruitment goals. All grantees developed or expanded collaborations and partnerships to support their diligent recruitment efforts.

Faith-Based Groups

Some grantees worked with faith-based organizations to develop recruitment models, educate families about the need for resource families, and recruit resource families. For example, AR (2013) partnered with several faith-based groups, including Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries, which recruited resource parents and maintained foster homes; Christians for Kids, which assisted Christian families and singles to become resource parents; and Children of Arkansas Loved for a Lifetime, a nonprofit organization that performed faith-based recruitment of resource families.

Local Businesses

Several grantees developed partnerships with local businesses to educate families about the need for resource families. For example, MI (2010) implemented a marketing campaign and formed partnerships with local businesses (e.g., sandwich and coffee shops, pediatric offices) that the audience targeted for recruitment were likely to frequent. It created brochures with recruitment information and provided information about the local business (e.g., menus, addresses, coupons). Over 20,000 brochures were distributed through these partnerships.

Local Agencies or Nonprofit Organizations

Most of the grantees developed partnerships with local agencies or nonprofits to recruit resource families. As part of the targeted recruitment of resource families, CO (2008) developed working relationships with partners in the African American community, including the Black Sheriff's Association and several African American fraternities and sororities. MN (2008) developed relationships with African American community organizations, including African American sororities and fraternities and the Council on Black Minnesotans. The grantee also contracted with culture-specific community liaison consultants to develop relationships with organizations in African American and Hispanic/Latino communities.

Child Welfare Courts

Some grantees worked with the court system to identify and recruit resource families. For example, IL (2010) worked with public defenders, guardians ad litem, and court personnel to engage birth parents in providing information about family members and fictive kin with whom children could live until the children could return to the parents, and to identify relatives who could support the family's effort to improve their situation.

Universities and Research Organizations

Along with partnering with universities and research organizations to assist them in evaluating their projects, several grantees partnered with these same organizations to facilitate the implementation of their projects. OK (2008) worked in partnership with the University of Oklahoma's Bridge Resource Support Center,[8] which handled inquiries regarding foster care/adoption, provided prospective resource parents with information about resources, served as a contact point throughout the approval process for prospective resource families, and worked with approved resource families.

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[8] The Bridge Resource Support Center was developed in 2010 in collaboration with University of Oklahoma Center for Public Management, a longtime partner of the state's Department of Human Services. University of Oklahoma Center for Public Management has a statewide network offering trainings to resource families and Department of Human Services staff.

National Organizations

Several grantees developed partnerships with national organizations to assist them in improving recruitment processes. For example, grantees worked with the National Resource Center on Permanency and Family Connections, a federally funded training and technical assistance provider, to improve their concurrent permanency planning processes.

Increasing Retention of Resource Families

Agencies seek to retain effective, experienced resource families—they represent an investment in training and are a repository of valuable experience. Keeping seasoned resource families in service is more efficient than losing them and recruiting new ones. To address some of the reasons resource families leave service, grantees tested strategies for improving agency responsiveness to family inquiries and increasing and enhancing services and supports to families.

Improving Agency Responsiveness to Family Inquiries

Potential and current resource families reach out to child welfare agencies with questions and needs and expect their inquiries will be addressed swiftly and thoroughly. In the absence of clear customer service standards, poor or inconsistent communication by agency staff may serve as an obstacle to building the trust of resource families and retaining them. Improving agency responsiveness requires more than simply greater effort from front-line staff; it requires agencies to review critically their existing systems for communication and follow-up and to implement

Increasing Resource Family Satisfaction

OK (2008) set out to improve resource families' satisfaction through more timely communication and improved customer service. It developed a resource support center to improve communications with prospective resource families. Staff at the center answered inquiries about foster care and adoption, and resource specialists made follow-up calls to families to check on their progress throughout the approval process. Staff served as contact people through the approval process and answered general questions. The agency also developed a customer service training to improve communication with and respect for resource families. Evaluation data suggested these efforts helped. Response times to initial inquiries improved, and the customer service training efforts led to an improved perception of Child Welfare Services by current and potential resource families. Resource families also reported improved rapport with their case workers.

structural reforms that address the inefficiencies and capacity limitations that prevent responsive communication.

MN (2008) created a customer service model that set out quality service standards for all communication with families and the public, and then trained staff to use the model. The standards included improvements such as responding to all phone inquiries and email requests within 24 hours; always giving callers the option of reaching a "live person" when they dial agency office numbers; documenting all phone, email, and walk-in inquiries with an inquiry tracking form; and having backup staff checking the email messages of key staff who are listed as contacts on the website, when those staff are out of the office and unable to check for messages. **The grantee reported that, since the introduction of the standards, the 24-hour inquiry return rate for adoption inquiries from African American and Hispanic/Latino parents reached—**

over 100%
by the end of the grant period.

An evaluation of these efforts indicated a 10 percent improvement over 1 year in client satisfaction with caseworker timeliness and communication.

Increasing and Enhancing Services and Supports for Families

Child caregiving is a 24-hours-a-day responsibility for resource families, as it is for other families. But resource families devote additional time and energy to coordinating and communicating with the child welfare agency, the child's birth family, service providers (e.g., the child's therapist), court staff and CASA workers, and others involved in the child's case. They often also deal with the grief and behavioral problems triggered by the child's experience of trauma, and their own grief and sense of loss when a child they have fostered returns home. When resource parents do not have a chance to recharge, their experience of burnout, grief, and secondary traumatic stress[9] can undermine agency efforts to retain them long term. Grantees tested several approaches to providing support to resource families, to make their caregiving experience more sustainable and to retain their services.

- **Checking in with resource parents about their needs and capacities.** NM (2010) conducted listening tours with resource parents to increase their understanding of their needs and availability, particularly regarding the extent to which it was reasonable to ask them to help with

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[9] Secondary traumatic stress refers to physiological symptoms that resemble posttraumatic stress reactions, experienced by those who work directly with trauma-affected individuals (Bell, Kulkarni, & Dalton, 2003).

outreach efforts to recruit new resource families. TX (2010) surveyed exiting resource parents as they left the child welfare system to identify barriers that prevent families from continuing to provide temporary and permanent placement options for children in child welfare.

- **Providing support and peer mentoring.** NV (2010) developed the Foster Parent Champion Program, a mentoring program for caregivers. Individuals who had previously been resource parents were hired to serve as mentors to new and experienced caregivers. They offered credible understanding and support to resource parents by sharing their personal experiences and by giving examples of how they managed similar situations.

- **Offering respite care.** Respite care providers care for children in foster care for a few hours or days to give resource parents a small break from their ongoing childcare responsibilities. KY (2008) introduced Alternate Care Training to increase the availability of respite care, keep prospective resource parents engaged during the long training and approval process, and give them on-the-job training. The KY grantee's original proposal would have allowed new resource parents to provide respite care, but the experienced resource parents objected because they did not know the new parents. The grantee reworked its plan by having new resource parents shadow experienced resource parents with children in the home, so they could get to know the parents and the children. When all parties felt comfortable with one other, the new resource parents were able to serve as respite care providers for short periods.

- **Offering grief counseling.** Resource parents are trained to support family reunification for the child they foster, but many hope to be able to adopt the child, and they experience loss and grief when the child instead returns to his or her family. Resource parents who experience this pain are often unwilling to risk going through it again by fostering children in the future. To overcome this barrier to retention, CA (2010) partnered with Mattel Children's Hospital at University of California Los Angeles to offer the Loss Intervention for Families in Transition Program. The program offered individual and group therapy to grieving resource families, to help them heal and to increase the chance they would feel willing to consider fostering again in the future.

Using Data to Improve Program Functioning and Outcomes

Child welfare agencies need current, actionable information so they can respond to changing needs and conditions. Several grantees used qualitative and/or quantitative data to assess their systems and processes and to make modifications and improvements to more effectively recruit and retain resource families. For example—

- NM (2010) conducted an extensive listening tour of several counties to identify strategies to improve the retention of resource families. They used the information they received to develop a customer service model to improve agency responsiveness to resource families' needs. They also developed a process to use data to create and regularly update local targeted recruitment plans to align with the changing need for resource families.

- OR (2013) administered a statewide resource parent customer service survey to identify resource parents' needs and concerns. One of the concerns identified was the lack of timely information, support, and services for resource parents; as a result, the agency contracted "211" help-line services (i.e., telephone and web support for resource parents and after-hours contacts).

Recommendations for Future Efforts

The combined experiences of these grantees provide insights into strategies for overcoming common barriers to the recruitment and retention of resource families. As their projects closed, the grantees were asked to reflect on their work and provide recommendations for other child welfare jurisdictions that might consider launching similar diligent recruitment efforts. Key themes from their recommendations included the following:

- **Develop a plausible theory of change and logic model.** Articulate a clear theory about the root cause of your agency's identified recruitment or retention problems. Identify causal linkages for addressing the problem—what activities will improve recruitment and retention and what are your assumptions about how and why the change will occur? Use a logic model to depict the causal linkages across program activities, outputs, and outcomes.

- **Assess your system's capacity and readiness.**

  - Think carefully and strategically about all the levels in the agency at which changes will need to happen (e.g., policy and procedures, practice, staffing). Ensure you have buy-in at all needed levels.

  - Assess whether your agency's policies and procedures align with your proposed efforts.

  - Before you begin to recruit families, assess whether you have the capacity and resources to respond to and serve those families. For example, determine whether you have sufficient staff and funding to conduct additional home studies and other licensing activities, and whether high turnover and workload among licensing specialists and supervisors may present a problem.

- **Narrow the focus.** Consider taking on a smaller scale of work to begin with; assess initial progress, track and refine these smaller-scale efforts over time, and determine their long-term sustainability before expanding a project's scope. Large and ambitious diligent recruitment initiatives may not be realistic given competing agency priorities.

- **Prepare staff for a new way of doing business.** Prepare staff to accept and engage in the use of new diligent recruitment techniques, such as segmented marketing approaches or using data to improve diligent recruitment practices. Staff engagement and buy-in are important, particularly when staff are most comfortable with "the way we've always done it." Acknowledge staff concerns about the shift in organizational culture that is necessary for an improved diligent recruitment system, make and communicate changes in a planful manner, and ensure that staff are supported and heard throughout the transition process.

- **Understand your system's contracting processes.** Assess how long it will take to establish needed contracts with, for example, the local CASA program or other agencies. Ensure early on

the state agency is able to sole-source vendors you may have in mind for your project, or whether it requires competitive bids.

- **Put program champions in place early on to convey and celebrate success.** A persuasive leader can help spark the process of change, garner buy-in, and keep staff and partners motivated.

- **Build in time to create relationships and trust.** When targeting recruitment efforts toward specific communities (e.g., African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans), allow adequate time to cultivate the relationships with community residents and leaders, and to overcome historical distrust among these groups toward child welfare and related agencies.

- **Address barriers to family involvement.** Barriers include insufficient caseworker support for kin and fictive kin involvement, families' geographic distance from children, and complex family dynamics that are not identified or understood early enough in the process.

- **Educate staff and service partners about family systems theory and family-centered practice and engage them as partners and champions of a family-centered approach.** Training can help staff and partners at all levels understand that each family system is unique and is to be respected and empowered. Recognize family strengths and leverage them to guide cooperative development of a plan for the child's placement.

- **Check with resource parents before planning a role for them.** Giving existing resource parents a meaningful role in the recruitment process may enhance recruitment and licensure. For many grantees, resource parents were the most frequently identified source of information about becoming a resource parent. However, do not build a recruitment initiative around existing resource parents without first determining their willingness or availability to participate and understand their availability may change over time.

- **Build family finding and engagement into casework practice.** This may require policy changes (e.g., changes to state law that expand the definition of kin to include fictive kin) and a shift in practice culture to create greater support for family finding among child welfare workers and the broader child welfare community.

- **Link recruitment and licensing data to placement and license renewal data to inform caregiver retention efforts.** You must determine whether improved recruitment efforts result in more trained and licensed caregivers, or whether those caregivers do not go on to become placement resources or close their licenses after a short period. You must also examine whether recruitment efforts are successful in identifying and licensing families for special populations (e.g., older youth) and whether licensed families reflect the race/ethnicity of the foster care population. Track caregivers from their first inquiry through their final child placement to identify points at which they withdraw from the licensing process or discontinue serving as placement resources.

- **Evaluate your efforts.**

    o Define success prior to implementation. For example, develop measurable performance targets for the number of homes licensed and the number of children matched with licensed homes.

    o Expect diligent recruitment efforts will have greater impact on more proximal outcomes— those on which the program has a direct impact (e.g., family members identified as

placement resources)—rather than on more distal outcomes (e.g., exits to permanency over time).

- o Use evaluation data to make measured, sound program modifications when needed, and communicate these changes to all stakeholders.

- **Think long term.** Diligent recruitment is a long-term process. It may take several years for a person's initial exposure to information to result in a decision to inquire about becoming a resource parent and eventually complete the training and licensure process.

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Appendix A

Exhibit A1. Grantees, Project Names, Target Populations, and Core Service Elements

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
2008 Grantees		
County of Santa Cruz, CA, Human Services Department, Family and Children's Services *Project: Roots and Wings*	Children in out-of-home placement aged 11 and older	• Conducting outreach to establish new relationships with families that have not yet considered being resource families, along with businesses and public organizations to provide venues for outreach to prospective resource parents • Conducting community outreach efforts through designated resource family specialists • Developing a permanency field guide for social workers that outlines the steps of child-specific recruitment • Posting photo listings on national and state websites; collaborating with local businesses; and using Facebook, public service announcements, and YouTube to recruit resource families and engage youth • Communicating with staff in the Santa Cruz Department of Human Services to increase awareness of the needs of resource families • Establishing a permanency workgroup to guide permanency efforts and address system challenges related to achieving permanency for youth

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Denver, CO, Department of Human Services *Project: Denver's Village*	African American, Latino, and Native American children in or at risk of out-of-home placement	• Collaborating with key partners to provide resource families with referrals, program services, and evaluation services • Establishing integrated foster care support units within the Department of Health and Human Services • Creating general recruitment and retention strategies, including radio spots, newspaper articles, movie viewings, special trainings, and "parents' night out" events, and participating in other large-scale events, such as PRIDEFEST • Providing targeted recruitment in the African American, Latino, Native American, and LGBTQ communities • Developing a resource family database to track the training and licensure of recruited applicants • Developing recruitment media, including a recruitment video and the Stand Up for Me brand and website • Developing a customer service training/curriculum
Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services *Project: Making Appropriate and Timely Connections for Children*	All children in out-of-home care	• Providing customer service focused on centralized intake and diligent recruitment • Providing respite/alternate caregiver training • Holding quarterly regional peer consultations; establishing an advisory board; establishing an annual regional training calendar; and increasing trainings • Conducting a collaborative review of permanency data with the courts, and collaborating with the Division of Child Support Enforcement on identification of kinship resources • Making practice change regarding scheduling of "SWIFT" adoption approach meetings and referrals • Using data to identify barriers, track progress and practice indicators, and promote evidence-based decision making

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Ramsey County, MN, Community Human Services Department *Project: Permanent Families Recruitment Project*	African American and Hispanic/Latino youth aged 12 and older under state guardianship	• Creating recruitment strategies and community-based partnerships for recruitment activities • Establishing infrastructure and tools to improve processes, including a unified resource family database to track recruitment, training, and licensing activities • Conducting systems change activities (e.g., identifying and analyzing agency structures that may be barriers to the licensing process, developing a practice model for implementing Concurrent Permanency Planning) • Training and supporting families and youth • Providing community outreach and collaboration • Expanding concurrent planning efforts • Establishing youth and African American advisory groups
Missouri Department of Social Services Children's Division	Youth aged 10–18 who have been in out-of-home care for 15 months or more, reside in the St. Louis region, and do not have an identified permanent resource	• Implementing the Extreme Recruitment™ Model: 12–20 weeks of intensive, multifaceted recruitment activities by the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition that result in the identification of potential permanency resources. Core strategies include using private investigators to identify and contact potential permanency resources and implementing general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment activities concurrently. • Providing Connector Services: supportive services (e.g., mental health, psychological testing and evaluation, parent education, support groups, advocacy services) to help youth and potential adoptive families prepare for permanency and stabilize placements for up to 1 year • Collaborating among 14 public and private agencies and media partners with an advisory group to oversee and provide input regarding project activities • Providing kinship care best-practice recommendations for workers

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)	Children residing in a facility licensed or operated by the New York State Office of Mental Health, New York State Office of People With Developmental Disabilities, OCFS, and OCFS juvenile justice facilities; more broadly, youth and older youth residing in child welfare residential or congregate care who have a permanency goal other than adoption	• Providing targeted recruitment activities and strategies; for example, reaching out to former resource parents or physical therapists who worked with youth • Offering a child-centered approach for connecting or reconnecting with kin through case record mining, family finding, family search, and engagement • Providing general and parent recruitment activities and support, including portable studios designed for taping adoption chronicle videos of youth, adoption panels/ permanency panels, and Internet photo listings • Offering workforce training activities: service guides of foster care, adoption, family support, and therapeutic services available by region: "Building Trauma-Competent Healing," and "The Effects of Trauma on the Development of Youth in the Child Welfare System" • Holding cross-system meetings, workshops, and trainings, and establishing advisory boards
Cuyahoga County, OH, Department of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) *Project: Partners for Forever Families*	Older children and sibling groups in out-of-home care	• Introducing a multifaceted resource family recruitment and service program • Creating youth engagement strategies (e.g., expanded use of social media and arts events such as plays and singers) • Creating family search, engagement, and practice strategies • Developing systemic change efforts, such as policy and workgroups to address sustainability, topical issues, and customer service training • Planning and hosting annual symposia with judges, guardians ad litem, public defenders, adoptive families, and youth in foster care • Coordinating strategic planning groups focusing on relatives and older youth to promote lasting changes within the child welfare agency (e.g., a sibling workgroup under the leadership of CCDCFS staff)

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare Services *Project: Bridge to the Future*	Children in foster care statewide (some emphasis on children with special needs and sibling groups)	• Developing a Resource Family Support Center, including a telephone "warm line" to provide information and support for prospective and active resource families • Partnering with internal and external public and private organizations to improve recruitment • Providing customer service training for child welfare staff and training for resource families, including the Bridge Resource Parent training conferences and "Customer Service: Valuing Our Resource Families … For Our Agency … For Our Partnership … For Our Kids" • Creating the Bridge Resource Family website and using the Friends of Foster Families Facebook page • Offering faith-based and county-specific recruitment and retention activities
2010 Grantees		
Los Angeles County, CA, Department of Children and Family Services *Project: Collaborative Strategies for Diligent Recruitment Project*	Youth in foster care in Los Angeles County	• Contracting with Five Acres to increase the number of resource parents for deaf children and for children of deaf parents • Contracting with Kidsave to increase the number of adoptive families and permanent adult connections for older Black and Hispanic youth in the foster care and probation systems • Providing training through a contract with the Human Rights Campaign Foundation to increase cultural competency of child welfare and probation staff regarding LGBTQ individuals • Contracting with the Loss Intervention for Families in Transition program to provide individual and group therapy to resource parents who are grieving the loss of a child who had been placed in their home but either returned home or moved to a more appropriate placement to achieve the child's permanency goal • Contracting with Sycamore Park Foursquare Church to recruit resource parents from the faith-based community • Employing retired and part-time social workers for the Permanency Partners Program to conduct family finding and family engagement activities

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services *Project: Illinois Recruitment and Kin Connection Project*	Children aged 6–13 entering foster care in Cook, Will, Grundy, and Kankakee counties	• Implementing family finding and outreach activities by providing specialized staff support immediately upon temporary custody being granted to the child welfare agency • Establishing the position of kin connection specialist, who serves as a member of the family's professional team and attempts to locate family members who can participate in service planning and potentially be resources for placement, alternative placement, hosting sibling visits, hosting parent visits, or family mentoring • Providing training to the kin connection specialist, including family finding and family engagement training and the Cultural Humility Put to Practice training • Collaborating with public defenders, guardians ad litem, and court personnel to engage parents in providing information about family members and fictive kin • Developing and providing training on concurrent planning • Developing individualized recruitment plans for children with special needs and older youth that are based on a thorough exploration of each youth's family, social, and education connections
Oakland County, MI, Department of Health and Human Services *Project: Inter-Agency Community Adoption/ Foster Family Recruitment Exchange Project*	Adolescents; youth with behavioral, psychological, and criminal histories; large sibling groups; children with disabilities or other physical needs; and Black youth in foster care (all in Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb counties)	• Developing a database that captures all the elements of a recruitment event, from planning to event completion • Partnering with faith-based organizations to develop a faith-based recruitment model in the tri-county project area • Developing joint marketing brochures with local businesses that contain information about foster care and adoption as well as information about the business partners • Creating and distributing a 3-minute DVD, titled *Become a Southeastern Michigan Superhero*, that highlights the need for resource homes for sibling groups, Black children, and teenagers • Conducting targeted recruitment within organizations and agencies that serve or come in contact with youth in foster care, including offering free training sessions to their employees and disseminating information regarding the need for resource families • Developing the Planning a Transition With Hope Home model, a comprehensive guide and project to transition youth from congregate care to family settings

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Mississippi Department of Human Services *Project: Mississippi Guided Resource Initiatives Targeting Special Kids*	Children in foster care in the state who are aged 13 or older; are victims of sexual abuse; have sexualized behavior because of past abuse; have physical, emotional, behavioral, or cognitive challenges; and/or are part of large sibling groups	• Conducting market segmentation research to identify families and individuals to target for recruitment activities • Developing and implementing a customer service training protocol for resource and licensing specialists to ensure families inquiring about becoming resource parents are engaged throughout the recruitment, training, and licensure processes • Providing training, guidance, and tools for existing resource parents to recruit new resource parents and training resource parents on how to use that information • Developing a brochure and creating presentations that provide realistic information about being a resource parent and about the children in need of families • Utilizing various types of media, including yard signs, marquees, and posters, to draw attention to the need for resource parents
New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) *Project: Step Up!*	Children in foster care, with a specific focus on children from populations overrepresented and/or underserved in the foster care system (i.e., Hispanic, off-reservation American Indian, and Black children) in Bernalillo, Lea, Luna, San Juan, and San Miguel counties	• Developing individualized family retention plans to keep families engaged in the foster care licensing and approval processes • Contracting with family resource coordinators to provide support to prospective resource parents during the application, home study, training, and placement processes • Developing and implementing strategies, including creating models and curricula, to improve customer service methods and strengthen concurrent planning practices • Working with CYFD staff to create county-specific, data-driven targeted recruitment plans • Developing and providing training sessions and monthly support group services to assist CYFD resource parents in recognizing and addressing grief and loss engendered by the fostering experience • Creating a process to study the work related to concurrent planning and, based on that study, developing a new concurrent planning model • Developing the Ice Breaker program to bring caregivers and biological families together to improve placement stability and increase the likelihood of reunification and the timely achievement of permanency for the children

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Clark County, NV, Department of Family Services *Project: Permanent Families and Lasting Connections Recruitment Project*	Children in foster care in Clark County, specifically sibling groups of three or more children, children with special needs, and teenagers	• Developing the child-specific adoption recruitment protocol that allows the Department of Family Services to match children's special characteristics and needs with a family that can best meet those needs • Identifying the characteristics of quality caregivers and where those caregivers live and, through market segmentation, determining locations for billboards and community recruiting events • Determining how to effectively engage these prospective caregivers through social media • Partnering with a marketing firm to create an advertising campaign to recruit resource parents • Revamping and implementing the Foster Parent Champion program, in which the "champions" serve as mentors to new and experienced caregivers
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services *Project: Texas Permanency and Family Resource Development Model*	Children in foster care in three Department of Family and Protective Services regions, with priority given to sibling groups, children of color, older youth, and children with special physical or behavioral health needs	• Developing new foster and adoption recruitment materials • Updating the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange website and training tools, and increasing the number of profiles on the AdoptUsKids website (www.adoptuskids.org) • Expanding the recruitment activities of Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs to include recruiting for resource families, particularly Black and Hispanic families, while recruiting new CASA volunteers • Enhancing the responsibilities of CASA volunteers to include case record mining, family finding, and family engagement activities

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
2013 Grantees		
Arkansas Department of Human Services *Project: Arkansas' Creating Connections for Children Project*	Resource parents in Benton, Craighead, Crawford, Greene, Pulaski, Sebastian, and Washington counties, specifically for parents of— Youth who have been in care for 24 months or longer Youth of color (Black and Hispanic) Youth with mental illnesses, or emotional and/or behavioral disorders Youth with siblings in foster care	• Implementing a Geographic Information System to find resource homes near the neighborhood from which a child is removed • Recruiting homes for the targeted demographics, namely older youth, youth of color, youth in care longer than 24 months, sibling groups, and youth with mental/behavioral disorders • Developing family search and engagement policies/procedures, a toolkit, and training • Developing a resource family recruitment toolkit • Developing a volunteer recruitment toolkit • Developing a concurrent planning training/practice guide • Developing branding/marketing • Developing community outreach policies/procedures and training • Developing a customer service model • Developing community supports for resource families • Acquiring trauma-informed trainings • Training new and current staff on Family to Family elements and new policies and procedures • Training new and existing staff on trauma-informed practice • Training staff on concurrent planning
Florida Department of Children and Families *Project: Florida Intelligent Recruitment Project* (FIRP)	Children and youth aged 9–17 determined to be most in need of permanency in the judicial circuits served by the FIRP community-based care lead agencies	• Enhancing statewide collaboration between Department of Children and Families and privatized lead agencies responsible for providing child welfare services in the state • Implementing a recruitment approach that acknowledges the need for children to remain in their own geographic and demographic areas • Implementing and utilizing a customer centric–based approach to recruitment and training • Using available data to analyze the children in care in each of the areas served by the FIRP partners

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
New York State Office of Children and Family Services *Project: Innovations in Family Recruitment in New York*	Youth just entering group/residential care, and youth who have already been in group or residential care for at least 3 months	• Developing a recruitment blueprint based on experiences with identified counties and regions • Distributing the recruitment blueprint to counties and agencies in all regions of the state through a series of regional forums and written materials • Establishing and strengthening cross-county and regional recruitment strategies in Regions IV and V • Conducting regional trainings for counties, agencies, and the Office of Children and Family Services regional staff • Utilizing or developing screening tools/processes to help recruit resource parents with the skills necessary to care for children with significant trauma and high Adverse Childhood Experiences scores • Ensuring recruitment materials reflect the culture and language of identified communities • Supporting and strengthening recruitment workers' cultural competency • Ensuring sufficient information is given up front to prevent resource parents from leaving the child welfare system • Using social media to raise public awareness of the need for resource parents • Reviewing literature and collaborating with key stakeholders to identify new general recruitment strategies, including models of professional resource parenting • Developing and strengthening partnerships with community-based and faith-based organizations to encourage word-of-mouth recruitment of families that have the same ethnic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics as the children • Conducting intensive data mining of case records to identify relatives and other adults who might be willing to foster or adopt a specific child • Using social media to make and maintain contact with potential resource families in targeted communities • Arranging or enhancing adoption exchanges with stakeholders in each region to share information about specific waiting children and recruitment efforts

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) *Project: GRACE: Growing Resources and Alliances Through Collaborative Efforts*	Children with high-priority placement needs (recruitment targets), including children with mental health or behavioral needs, teens, and sibling sets; long-term targets to identify culturally appropriate placements for Native American, Hispanic, African American, and LGBTQ youth	• Establishing county-level community action teams to energize DHS-community partnerships and leverage local resources to meet local needs • Engaging partners in planning and implementing recruitment and retention activities • Supporting the establishment of major foster care partner nonprofits (e.g., Every Child) at the county level to connect community members at every level of engagement with DHS Child Welfare, from contributing goods and services and providing staff and resource parent appreciation events, to organizing trainings, respite, and resource home recruitment • Identifying high-priority resource family customer service issues and providing timely information to DHS for action • Providing customer service trainings for DHS workers, supervisors, and managers • Establishing a half-time recruiter/community liaison position at the district level • Creating data-informed annual local recruitment/retention plans to determine key targets and service/support gaps within the community • Integrating local and state plans to address recruitment targets such as culturally appropriate placements and homes for large sibling groups, teens, and children with mental health/behavior issues • Using inquiry tracking tools to improve the support and retention of prospective homes from inquiry to certification • Developing tools and materials to support local plans • Updating statewide recruitment policy and procedures

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Allegheny County, PA, Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth, and Families *Project: Recruiting and Engagement Continuum*	Teenagers in foster care, and prospective and current resource parents	• Collaborating with the Department of Human Services and four foster care provider agencies selected through a request for proposals process to specialize as teen family foster care agencies • Providing teen-specific training, engagement, and support for resource families with teens, along with training for Office of Children, Youth, and Families and provider agency staff • Providing opportunities for teens to share their experiences with stakeholders and to advocate for their own placement • Creating a marketing plan, called Foster Goodness, that is supported by various local activities in the primary target communities, to raise public awareness and attract resource families • Targeting prospective and current resource parents for marketing outreach, engagement activities, training, and peer support from resource family support partners who have prior experience with resource parenting • Training for Office of Children, Youth, and Families caseworkers to enhance effectiveness, consistency, and cultural sensitivity in assisting children and families

Grantee and Project Name	Target Population	Core Service Elements
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska *Project: Native Families for Native Children*	Native American children, including those residing in the Winnebago, Omaha, and Santee reservations, and Ponca and other Native American children residing in 14 Nebraska and Iowa counties	• Describing the characteristics of children in care • Forecasting the types of foster, concurrent, and permanent families that may be needed • Identifying challenges, barriers, and strategies to improve recruitment and creating a map of tribal and state systems • Determining barriers and strengths to support a single adoptive/foster licensure process that meets the needs of Iowa, Nebraska, and four tribes • Exploring active concurrent planning • Assessing agency and community organizations that can provide family-centered services as part of concurrent planning • Reviewing and field testing Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting and Caring for Our Own curricula • Assessing the need for cultural competency training for system workers • Hiring six native recruiters and creating a learning community • Working with the tribe to leverage/create other family support resources • Carrying out resource family recruiting, education, and support events • Creating a culturally relevant public relations campaign • Identifying four native trainers/leaders from project sites

Appendix B

The tables below provide additional examples of grantees implementing the strategies for success discussed in this report.

Exhibit B1. Improving Licensure Processes

Family Support During Licensing

- OK (2008) provided information to prospective parents through its website and through the Bridge Resource Support Center (see footnote 7). The Bridge Resource Support Center serves as a contact point throughout the approval process for prospective resource families. Over 4 years, these activities increased the number of respondents who were satisfied with their overall customer service experience during the licensure process by 24 percent and decreased the number of individuals reporting difficulty getting their fingerprints processed correctly by 19 percent.

- FL (2013) provided support to licensing staff to follow up with families and engaged senior management to support families that had questions.

Protocols and Documents

- FL (2013) modified its resource family training, enhanced training to improve parenting capacity for older youth, and established clear protocols for families undergoing recruitment and licensing. The percentage of licensed homes for the target population (as a percentage of all new homes licensed) increased from 36 to 61 percent.

Exhibit B2. Changing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices

Staff Training

- CA (2008), MN (2008), NM (2010), IL (2010), and PA (2013) implemented training related to permanency and concurrent permanency to help expedite child placement. Because of the training in CA (2008), staff attitudes shifted to support permanency alternatives besides reunification (for which caseworkers had always demonstrated a strong preference) and staff experienced increased confidence in employing best practices in concurrent planning and permanency work. The project activities, including training, in PA (2013) resulted in the institutionalization of a new norm: the assumption that every teen who enters placement should have a family, in contrast to the expectation 5 years prior that most teens would be placed in congregate care settings.

- NY (2008), TX (2010), and PA (2013) provided staff and partners with trainings related to trauma. In TX (2010), the trainings provided staff an overview of best practices in trauma-informed care to assist youth in resolving their past losses and to prepare them for permanency while developing caring adult connections. The trainings also provided tools and activities to help professionals assist youth in resolving past grief, loss, and trauma and developing healthy emotional connections.

- CA (2010) provided training to Department of Children and Family Services and probation staff[10] to increase their cultural competency in working with LGBTQ youth and adults and to increase their ability to help youth in care feel comfortable with self-identifying as LGBTQ.

Resource Family Training

- PA (2013) had previously implemented a successful Youth Support Partner unit—young adults with personal life experience in child-serving systems who were trained and equipped to become advocates, mentors, and professionals who work with youth currently involved with these systems. During the grant, the agency expanded this peer support model to include resource family support partners[11] being trained to make home visits and serve as ongoing support to resource families.

Exhibit B3. Developing Specialized Staff Positions

Program Coordinators

- NM (2010) developed a family resource coordinator position and hired one for each of five targeted counties. The coordinators developed grassroots diligent recruitment initiatives in their assigned counties to increase the number of resource families in that community and, in later years of the project, supported prospective resource parents through the licensure process.

Family Finders

- CA (2010) dedicated three social worker positions to conduct family finding and family engagement activities. The grantee reported that, prior to its diligent recruitment grant, the search for family was haphazard-the agency often sent out letters to kin and waited for a response, and paternal relatives were commonly not engaged at all. The agency's revised strategy was to have these dedicated family finders step in early to find kin using a variety of search techniques (e.g., detailed review of case records, social media and online searches, search of governmental information databases, use of the online investigation software, CLEAR). Once family connections were established, these social workers engaged family members by setting up phone calls, assisting the child or family in drafting letters to one another, facilitating family visitation, and assisting the primary social worker with placement paperwork.

- MO (2008) hired Extreme Recruiters[12] paired with investigators to identify and engage with biological families, family friends, and other supportive adults of children in care. The goal was to reconnect children with kin and supportive adults with whom they had fallen out of touch, or connect them with kin they may not have met, to help the children develop a stronger sense of identity by answering questions about family and history, and to identify potential adoption or guardianship placements.

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[10] These staff work with youth on probation who need foster care placement.

[11] Resource family support partners are highly experienced foster parents who serve as mentors and coaches to other foster parents.

[12] Extreme Recruiting is a program of the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition (www.foster-adopt.org).

Resource Parent Supporters

- PA (2013) engaged two highly experienced resource parents to offer peer support to resource families by serving as resource family support partners. The support partners made an initial home visit to resource parents and provided ongoing support and advocacy to them throughout the child's placement. They also organized parent support groups to facilitate peer learning and support among active resource families.

Exhibit B4. Expanding or Refining Marketing and Outreach Efforts

Leveraging Media

Online media

- OK (2008) promoted children available for adoption via the agency's Facebook and Twitter outlets. It posted the children's photos and brief, compelling portions of their profiles to generate interest and to encourage sharing (i.e., reposting/retweeting) of the information across readers' social networks. The agency also regularly posted general information about foster care and adoption to its social media sites to inform and educate the public.

- TX (2010) used online media for targeted recruitment of resource parents who reflected the race and ethnicity of their foster care population and lived near the children's homes. The agency partnered with CASA programs, which promoted eligible children from the CASA's areas on the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange, an online recruitment tool for prospective adoptive homes. The website featured Texas children awaiting adoption, presenting the children's photos, profiles, and videos. The agency also used Internet advertising for its Why Not Me? adoption campaign to drive traffic to the website.

Television and radio

- CO (2008) secured free airtime on Denver Public Schools' Educa station, which includes a Spanish-language broadcast. The grantee used the opportunity to promote its Stand Up for Me recruitment campaign.

Holding Community Recruiting Events

- MI (2010) worked with churches and other religious organizations to hold 1-day events to recruit resource families before and after services and post information and distribute brochures in the facilities. Congregation members were also educated about how to support youth in care and resource families (e.g., provide donations, volunteer) when they were not interested in becoming licensed resource parents. Through 59 faith-based community recruiting events, the grantee reached an audience of over 4,200 people. These events were a key component of its recruitment strategy; 75 percent of those who inquired about becoming a resource parent reported they learned about the role at a community recruitment event.

Exhibit B5. Developing Collaborations and Partnerships

Faith-Based Groups

- MN (2008) partnered with African American pastors and faith-based leaders to present about the overrepresentation of African American children in foster care and to find families for children waiting for a permanent home.

- MI (2010) partnered with the Tri-County Faith-Based Community Coalition to develop a faith-based recruitment model in each county. The project team participated in summits and conferences that focused on engaging faith-based leadership from across the state in supporting the efforts of both public and private child welfare agencies in the recruitment and retention of resource homes. The team created a *Faith-Based Toolkit* to provide information on recruiting and retaining potential resource families.

Local Agencies or Nonprofit Organizations

- CO (2008) worked in partnership with the Fresh Start Organization in Denver to have Fresh Start staff serve as community liaisons, host gatherings, and help the agency execute the grant.

- NM (2010) partnered with school districts, parent-teacher associations, and athletic organizations to support messaging and recruitment efforts for targeted areas in need of resource families.

- NY (2010) partnered with agencies (e.g., Hillside's Children's Center, Parsons Child and Family Center, You Gotta Believe!) with extensive experience facilitating the adoption of children in foster care and specifically for their experience working with youth with special needs.

- FL (2013) partnered with four community-based care organizations to design and implement the project. One of the organizations, Kids Central, acted as the primary grant manager and administrative entity responsible for day-to-day operations of the grant.

Universities and Research Organizations

- KY (2008) partnered with Murray State University, which provided a co-grant manager for the project, a diligent recruitment specialist, and customer service to potential and current resource families, and served as the grant liaison for two of the intervention regions. Murray State University also runs a training resource center, providing continuing education training and support to social workers and resource families.

- AR (2013) worked in partnership with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Geographic Information System Applications Laboratory to adapt specific recruitment strategies to different communities based on the characteristics of the children in foster care communities across the state.

National Organizations

- Grantees worked with AdoptUSKids.org to help identify and support potential resource families (CO, 2008); improve their licensure processes (MN, 2008); support project implementation, especially with respect to tracking recruitment data utilizing the Family Intake Tracking Tool[13] and

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[13] This tool provides child welfare professionals easy access to the names of families that have contacted AdoptUSKids.org and indicated an interest in fostering or adopting. See https://fitt.adoptuskids.org/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f.

Market Segmentation[14] training and technical assistance (NV, 2010); and recruit and support resource families (NV, 2010).

Exhibit B6. Increasing Retention of Resource Families

Improving Agency Responsiveness to Family Inquiries

- OK (2008) set out to improve resource families' satisfaction through more timely communication and improved customer service. It developed a resource support center to improve initial and follow-up communications with prospective resource families. Staff at the resource center answered email, Internet, and phone inquiries about foster care and adoption, and resource specialists made follow-up calls to families to check on their progress through the approval process. Staff also served as contact people through the approval process and answered general questions posed by current resource parents. The agency also developed a mandatory online customer service training to increase communication with and respect for resource families. Because of these efforts, response times to initial inquiries improved, and current and potential resource families' perception of Child Welfare Services improved. Resource families also reported improved rapport with their case workers.

- NM (2010) sought to improve responsiveness by enacting policy and practice changes that could facilitate improved customer service. It developed a customer service workgroup to guide development of strategies to reduce resource parent complaints and increase retention. The agency developed customer service goals and set standards for professionalism, communication, and engagement. The five counties involved in the project then developed customer service plans that identified areas for improved practices and indicators to measure progress. The agency developed a customer service model, trained staff in it, and then used a train-the-trainer approach to support statewide rollout and long-term sustainability of the model. Survey data showed small but consistent improvements in resource parent ratings of customer service over the year after the customer service plans were introduced.

Increasing and Enhancing Services and Supports for Families

- **Checking in with resource parents about their needs and capacities.** As part of the evaluation of its program, NV (2010) conducted reviews of exiting resource families to learn their reasons for leaving and to hear recommendations for additional supports that should be put into place to support caregivers in similar situations.

- **Providing support and peer mentoring:** PA (2013) hired two experienced resource parents as resource family support partners to offer peer support. They made initial home visits to resource families and served as ongoing supports throughout the child's placement. They shared strategies for addressing behavioral challenges and accessing community resources, and helped organize resource parent support groups so families could be a resource to each other.

- **Offering grief counseling:** NM (2010) partnered with a local child placement agency to develop and implement a 3-hour grief and loss training for resource parents and to offer monthly support

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[14] An overview of market segmentation developed by the NRC at AdoptUSKids.org is available at https://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/overview-of-market-segmentation.pdf.

group services. The support group also included a therapeutic "kids only" component for the other children in the resource family's home.

Exhibit B7. Using Data to Improve Program Functioning and Outcomes

Improving Agency Responsiveness to Family Inquiries

- To improve targeted recruitment of African American families, CO (2008) conducted three focus groups with African American resource parents and community leaders. The agency utilized the information received to identify the need for and assign a liaison to the African American community, implement specialized training sessions on cultural needs of African American children, and implement town hall meetings in the African American community to improve resource family recruitment. A survey conducted to identify the needs of kinship families led to the formation of the Kinship Advocacy and Advisory Network, which developed a newsletter for resource parents and a website with recruitment materials and information on becoming a resource family. To improve the licensing process, the agency also conducted a listening tour with resource parents, to identify challenges to becoming a resource family. Information gathered informed changes, including adding an additional phone line for inquiries and establishing a policy to return calls within 1 business day.

- MN (2008) conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis[15] with AdoptUSKids.org to improve its diligent recruitment plan. The analysis resulted in modifications to the plan, including involving youth in training events and panels, planning more targeted recruitment activities with communities of color, and developing activities to enhance collaboration with pastors and other groups that were reflective of the children's communities of origin.

- To improve interactions with resource families and incorporate customer service principles into its strategic plan, OH (2008) evaluated its home study process. The agency used the findings to develop strategies to better support resource families going through the foster/adoptive process through the use of collaborative agency supports (e.g., providing assistance with navigating the home study process and overcoming barriers to licensure such as minor housing violations) and the Adoption Network Cleveland's navigator program.[16]

- To address the inadequate number of resource families, OK (2008) conducted four rapid improvement events with families and staff to identify ways to improve the state's home study process, the timeliness of the resource parent approval process, and communication with resource parents. As a result of these events, the agency implemented customer service training to improve communication with parents; introduced customer service quality checks; created a pocket guide for families, titled *Oklahoma's Answering the Call*, that included information on the resource family

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[15] The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis examined the foster/adoptive prelicensing process from the point of initial inquiry to home study completion and/or dropout point to determine factors that might have influenced potential resource families' ability to complete the process.

[16] This program uses paraprofessionals (many of whom have personal experience with adoption) to give families information, emotional support, and logistical information as they move through the process of considering adoption or fostering to becoming a resource parent.

licensing approval process; and added county worker and supervisor contact information to information packets for prospective resource families.

- MI (2010) developed a database to capture all the elements of recruitment events. This information provided a feedback loop for assessing the implementation process as it rolled out and making needed adjustments to future recruitment events. Information gathered in the initial project stages on the types of children in care was used in combination with the information in the recruitment events database to plan recruitment events to address the identified needs.