

## **AdoptOHIO Recruitment Committee Meeting**

**May 17, 2002**

### **I. Goals for Recruitment**

- Reach out to resource families for children with special needs
- Retention is important, we need programs to keep families supported and keep them happy
- Education, support and engagement
- Public awareness
- Recruit all types of parents
- Child specific: use the needs of the child to find and match with the family
- Do more creative matching, need new ideas and methods
- Address the discrepancy between what the parents are looking for and characteristics of children in care
- Be proactive
- Intervention before permanent placements
- Concurrent planning
- Internal processes in Agency
- Reduce barriers between counties
- Summary: Child specific and parent specific, needs to be earlier and needs to include retention and support

### **II. Story Behind Goals**

#### **A. Interagency collaboration**

- Differences in requirements between private and county agencies
- The process is not clear to all the parties involved
- The state regulates the adoption process but it is county run, so there are differences in the ways that counties work and the regulations in each county; it is a patchwork of rules between counties
- There needs to be increased trust between agencies

#### **B. Incentives**

- The incentive program is a barrier for 'hard to place children'
- Recruitment is not built into the funding structure, this makes it really difficult to do recruiting in the agency

- The subsidy system needs to be changed for parents; they are sharing their bad experiences with one another. There is no Medicaid for children with reactive attachment disorder. Additionally, the subsidy is lowered when the child moves from foster care to an adoptive placement. This is a disincentive for parents to adopt their foster children.
- Federal funding sets up a dichotomy. It is cheaper to take custody of the child rather than using preventative measures in the home.
- There are IV-E waivers (used to fund agencies for placements) but they are labor intensive
- We need social workers to lobby to take the cap off IV-E
- When a public agency places in a private agency home, this should count toward MOE
- Private agencies do not feel that they are getting their part of the federal funds for the placements that they make.

### **C. Public Perceptions**

- There is a negative public perception of the county adoption agencies. This needs to be changed
- The negative perception of the public agencies is tied to the investigation part of the agencies.
- There is an under-use of the private agencies in the community. The private agencies have parents looking to adopt, however, they do not have the resources necessary to use these parents. Additionally, the private agencies are often involved in the community and we should be using all the community resources that we have in order to increase recruitment.

### **D. Requirements**

- We are losing foster parents because of additional training requirements they have to do in order to maintain their license (this is due to the new legislation that mandates this)
- Typical home study rules do not fit with families
- If parents have a dual license (both foster and adoptive) they should not have to redo the home study every 6 years.
- There are tiers of foster homes and parents, parents get specialized training and support in order to care for a certain type of child. However, this creates a barrier for the parents if they would like to foster a child who is in a different tier.

### **E. Adoption by Relatives**

- Adoption by relatives needs to be reworked. The relatives of the child still have to go through the same home study process as anyone else. Step parents have an easier process than other relatives.
- Recruitment should involve looking into the families of the children in foster care. This should be an incented activity. Using a subsidized guardianship that is neither a foster or adoptive placement.
- We should be striving for adoption by people the child knows. Relatives are an untapped resource for the children.
- Children have to be in the home for 12 months when the adoption is with relatives, but only 6 months when the child is with strangers.

## **F. Recruitment and Retention**

- Recruitment and retention have become more difficult due to these new requirements, parents get tired in the process
- “The already least well served children are the least well served by the AdoptOHIO program”
- There is some skepticism about doing more grassroots types of recruitment that are geared toward specific ethnic and racial groups because of the MEPA guidelines.
- There is a disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. We need to look at why there are so many African American children in the system and why this number continues to rise. Additionally, we need to recruit more families for these children. There needs to be an increased commitment to African American children so they do not age out of the system.

## **III. Strategies for Agencies**

- Work with other agencies to prepare relatives for care giving
- Recruit and give incentives for relatives, money for things the family needs like services, respite care and summer camp, PRC money
- Use the community, foster care support groups, incentives for referrals, concerts in church
- Coordinate agencies and resources
- Collaborate with agencies, share families that are waiting to adopt
- Develop formally untapped populations, such as placing white children in African American homes (“it only happens now if the child is blind, crippled and crazy”)
- Continue to offer children to different homes, place the child in respite care
- Do mini staff trainings a few hours a month on different aspects of child focused recruitment
- Share and collaborate with other agencies on training materials
- Make a Eco-Map for each child, where the child is in the middle and you look at all the connections the child has within the community, this helps identify all the resources the child has
- Send letters to everyone the child knows to see if they would be interested in adopting the child and see if they know anyone who would
- Make buttons with the child’s picture on it and information about the child on the back so that people can inquire about the child
- Develop the capacity of the agency: use interns from local colleges and universities
- Work with other areas of the multi-service agencies to have continuity about the goals of the child services which should be permanence for the child. You can do this by participating in trainings and case reviews and informal activities
- “Everyone should be a recruiter”, including the support staff, everyone involved in the organization
- Everyone should share what they are doing when at staff meetings, so that we can decide as an organization what the goal for the month should be
- Add core course on adoption/permanency for the investigators, they do not understand the ramifications of moving the children around several times
- Word of mouth is the best recruitment, so we need to be user-friendly. We have to work evenings and weekends because our families work during the day.

- Host support groups from preplacement until the end of the process, have the custodial county present the children to the group and allow the group of parents and workers discuss the needs and issues of each child
- Have parents mentor each other, match an approved family with one that has finalized so that they can share their experiences with one another and help guide the new family through the system
- Put on recruitment shows in the community where people will be so they don't have to come to you. Use the mall and set up a store front, can be in conjunction with another group
- Reach out to faith based communities
- Identify early in the process which foster families are interested in adopting and which are not
- Form partnerships with community organizations, for example, the home builders association, were able to use them to get information out through posters and payroll inserts, you are able to get to families who are unaware of the problem and who might be interested once they are informed
- We have a special night called Boys, Boys, Boys, where we get parents and people who have already adopted boys together to share information specific to boys and talk about different children who are in the system
- We place posters of families who have adopted in the church they belong to so that we can show the success stories
- We built a thermometer in church and raised the mercury every time a family was referred to us from that church
- We had pastors contract with us to preach about adoption and to recruit families for us
- Have child readiness groups in the community for children who are making the transition from foster care to adoption
- Use professionals in the city to help prepare the children, often the professionals need to be educated about the problems that the children are facing
- "Each movement that a child makes sets them back 6 – 8 months developmentally"
- Join the volunteer boards at other agencies in the community, use your expertise to these systems

#### **IV: Strategies for ODJFS**

- Have separate time at conferences in which agencies can share their ideas with each other
- Maintain a website so that every agency can have access to updated information about policies and can get clarification about the policies
- Increase information sharing among the agencies, create a secure message board where workers could communicate and brain storm about ideas and share what is working in their agencies
- More advocating in government for MEPA, kinship and training
- Provide a funding mechanism for identifying homes for children who may be stuck in the system, so that we can add newer families and keep them engaged
- Allow different products for funding, like good homes studies, home studies for children with special needs, things that we are not funded for now
- Need a matching system that works (FACIS, OARE), that has updated and current information

- Have regional trainings so that agencies do not have to do as much traveling
- Don't use the 'special needs' label or 'child with special needs' it sends a bad message, scares parents away, it is better to use 'child who is waiting'
- Have some minimal requirements for bringing kids and families together
- Share the rules that differ between counties and between private and public agencies
- Clarify questions regarding ASFA and MEPA rules for placing and matching children
- Provide training to the regional staff about adoption
- Clarify the difference between state and regional level issues
- Counties need training to keep up with the rules because they come out so fast that agencies have a hard time keeping up
- Use the money to encourage collaboration among the private and public agencies
- Use the money in a RFP/grant situation to encourage collaboration among the agencies to fill the needs of the individual counties
- Have one large event (like a telethon) that cuts across all the counties where people can call in and get information and become part of the system
- Engage people who are involved early in process and who are in the support system, train them about permanence and the consequences and goals for placements
- "Some people who work with the kids don't see how the decisions they make about placements make it hard for the child to be placed permanently."

## **V. Programming and Implementation**

- The money should be allocated along areas of need, and this should be determined not only by the number of children in the county or area, but the needs that the county has for the money
- There are big things that need and can be done, like using buttons and fliers and campaigns but there are also micro things such as skills and treating the families better and making sure that there is a quick turn around in communicating with the families that is just as important as the bigger things
- Make money contingent on working on the smaller things, the money should go to agencies where the recruitment is high as well as the retention
- The private agencies can't hang on to the recruitment as well without some additional funds
- The money is not as important as the one to one support and attention between the agency and the family
- Children get placed through a collaboration among agencies, use the money for training workers along in the process so that they can help the adoption workers do their jobs
- Big counties have lots of children and needs but the smaller counties do both have the money to provide support and services to the families because they do not have the tax levies to support them. This hurts recruitment and the public perception of the agencies
- Who are we trying to recruit? It is important to conduct focus groups to target families and people who will stick with the process, this allows the money to be used more effectively and produce results
- We can train the people who are emotionally interested in adoption and make them good parents
- We need to tap all segments of the population
- We need to demystify the process of adopting an older child or a child with some problems.

## **VI. Summary Statements**

- Permanence should be the goal and we should do more to promote it
- Needs to be a balance between the micro and the macro: the micro is where the work is, this includes making sure that the parents have a positive experience, the macro includes the big recruitment efforts, we need them both to succeed
- Whatever we do it should improve the system from child's point of entry into the system to the point of exit from the system
- We should be best practice driven not funding driven
- There needs to be some urgent attention focused on the needs of the children who will age out of the system
- We need better post adoption support for the families
- Recruitment belongs to the entire staff, everyone who is involved at any point in the process
- Recruitment needs to include retention and support services
- Do more adoption readiness work with the children and families