



INFORMATION PACKET

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONS

What are some strategies for **finding and keeping traditional and therapeutic resource families?**

Children deserve to grow up in loving and lifelong families and have a sense of unconditional belonging. Research and experience have shown that [separating children from their families creates lasting, usually life-long trauma](#) for children. When children must be removed from their families and placed in out-of-home care, one way to mitigate trauma is to place the child in the best possible setting, right from the start. Ideally a [child's first and only placement will be with kin](#). When that is not possible, [placing children in a family setting is critical](#).

To ensure all children in care can be placed with a family that best meets their needs, the recruitment and retention of resource families is an ongoing activity of any child protection agency. Even if an agency has one licensed home for every child in out-of-home placement, a greater number of resource homes should be recruited and retained to ensure an ideal fit between child and family, and that there are sufficient family-based placements that can best meet the needs of the current and future cohorts of children in care. Further, additional resource family homes should be developed to provide additional mechanisms of support, such as mentoring of new families and respite care.



What are some strategies for finding and keeping traditional and therapeutic resource families?

This brief includes the following sections:

1. Strategies for **recruiting traditional resource families**.
2. Strategies to customize **recruitment of therapeutic resource families**.
3. **Retention strategies** to bolster recruitment efforts, as word-of-mouth and the perceptions of current families impact recruitment success.
4. A **selection of tool and resources** to support the development of comprehensive, integrated resource family recruitment and retention plans.

For more information about how the states of New Jersey, Oklahoma and Washington have approached the recruitment and retention of resource families, see: [How have some child protection agencies successfully recruited and retained resource families?](#)

Strategies for recruiting traditional resources families

The following strategies have been highlighted in the literature and through jurisdictional examples to effectively and efficiently recruit resource families to best meet the needs of children in care:

- **Analyze the data** to: (1) identify strengths and areas in need of improvement in the current recruitment and licensing process; and (2) [identify any gaps](#) between the characteristics and location of children in need of resource homes and the current array of available resource homes, including location, skill, and demographic information. Data gathering and analysis are key features of the recent Foster and Adoptive Diligent Recruitment Plans, including those in [Missouri](#) and [Nevada](#). Many jurisdictions have engaged in **geo-mapping**, or use of [geographic information systems](#) to analyze these needs and

trends, or foster family utilization reviews to gain an accurate picture of their current foster parent pool and better target their recruitment efforts.

- Understand **what motivates individuals** to become resource parents and then [tailor marketing messages](#) accordingly, given that general marketing campaigns have been found to have limited impact. For example, Pressley Ridge, a private agency that offers both traditional and treatment foster care, utilized **surveys with current foster parents** to understand what prompted them to become foster parents and what message they would give to others who might consider becoming foster parents. Youth also were given a similar survey, which asked them to imagine the characteristics of a perfect foster parent and what they would want to tell prospective foster parents. The information gathered from both of these surveys was used to develop a recruitment video, infographics, and other visually engaging marketing materials that incorporated the youth and foster parent voice.
- Use focus groups to identify the **desired behaviors/ skills** of high quality resource parents, such as advocating for a child's needs, helping a child and birth parent strengthen their relationship, and accepting a child into a family as its own.
- Utilize findings regarding key resource parent characteristics¹ to implement a [market segmentation](#) process, which involves: examining the broad population of potential resource families; dividing that population into subsets that have common needs, interests, or characteristics; and then designing and implementing strategies to locate and target them. For example, New Jersey learned through their market segmentation efforts that specific groups of potential resource families enjoyed going to the movies, and subsequently developed marketing materials for movie theaters, including short videos played before the previews.

Recruitment efforts should be strategic, targeted, and culturally sensitive.

— UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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- Ensure that recruitment materials are [culturally appropriate](#). If targeting specific ethnic populations, recruitment materials should be available in the appropriate language (including tribal languages, if recruiting within Native American tribes).
- Conduct [outreach at faith-based institutions](#), [cultural events](#), and community events. Assign a [community liaison from the agency](#) to work intensively with specific communities to support these efforts. Partner with local faith-based institutions, schools, businesses, and community organizations to build community-based [resource teams](#).
- During local outreach opportunities, [provide data specific to that community](#), as that has been found to be more powerful than providing general data regarding the need for resource homes. For example, explaining that “four young children in your neighborhood will have to leave South Street Elementary school and their community” is more effective than a general statement regarding “hundreds of children in foster care across the state are in need of resource homes.”
- Create [advisory boards](#) that can help the agency develop, implement, and enhance integrated, comprehensive recruitment plans.
- Train recruitment and licensing staff on [positive customer service techniques](#) and [establish guidelines for responding to inquiries](#) in a timely manner.
- Ensure positive [word-of-mouth recruitment](#), utilizing current resource families and youth in care as ambassadors. In one study, over half of participants learned about fostering from other foster parents or youth in foster care.²
- Implement [child-specific recruitment efforts](#), such as case record-mining, family search and engagement strategies, and identifying other important adults (past or present) in a child’s life. [Promising programs](#) include [30 Days to Family](#)[®], [Family Finding](#), and [Extreme Recruitment](#)[®].
- Provide [orientation sessions](#) that are engaging, realistic, and feature the voices and perspectives of youth in care as well as resource families.
- Streamline licensing to [remove barriers or inefficiencies](#) that prolong the process, such as paperwork with duplicative questions. Some agencies host an intensive licensing weekend at a hotel so that prospective families can complete the licensing process conveniently and quickly. For example, Denver County, Colo., using [lean process mapping](#) to identify and implement strategies to reduce barriers to timely licensing completion, found that 80% of the process did not feel valuable to families or the agency. The licensing process was subsequently shortened by 62%.
- Offer **concrete supports** such as beds or child care, as well as funding to cover licensure-related costs that may be acting as deterrents to prospective families.
- Create [dedicated positions to support families through the licensing process](#). For example, the Human Services Department in Santa Cruz County, Calif., created a family resource liaison position to offer one-on-one support for resource parents during and after the licensing process, including individualized assessments of caregiver needs and linkages to services.

Customizing recruitment for therapeutic/treatment resource families

The strategies used to recruit traditional resource families also apply to therapeutic/treatment resource families, as the literature considers them to be a subset of resource families. One study³ found that a majority of the foster families that participated in a survey were willing to discuss fostering a child with emotional or behavioral challenges, implying that with the right training and support, traditional resource families were also willing to serve as therapeutic resource families.

In addition to the strategies discussed above, strategies for specifically recruiting therapeutic resource families include:

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- Target **recruitment of professionals in allied helping fields**, such as those working in medical settings, behavioral health, substance use treatment, education, and other social or human services³ through specialized outreach at places like hospitals, clinics, schools, day care centers, provider organizations, other human service agencies, and fire and police stations, as well as through current resource families that have connections to those allied professions.
- **Provide incentives** to current therapeutic resource families that successfully recruit other prospective families.
- Seek to **debunk the perception** that therapeutic resource parents must be “extra special” or have a specialized skill set. Include this counter-messaging in marketing materials that feature the voices and perspectives of current therapeutic resource parents.⁴
- Implement an [evidence-based model of therapeutic foster care](#), such as [Treatment Foster Care Oregon](#) or the [Teaching-Family Model](#), in order to help interest prospective therapeutic resource parents in a structured program that provides clear expectations, tailored training, and other support elements.
- **Seek formal accreditation** by the Council on Accreditation, the Commission on Accreditation of Residential Facilities, The Joint Commission, or an equivalent national accrediting body, to demonstrate to prospective resource families that the agency meets and adheres to high standards of quality practice. In Illinois, [child-placing agencies are reimbursed](#) for the cost of accreditation once they have successfully received accreditation, acknowledging the importance of this achievement and the quality of practice that it reflects.
- **Secure membership** in the [Family Focused Treatment Association](#) (FFTA), which provides the only national program standards for treatment foster care. In Michigan, child-placing agencies must be members of FFTA if they want to be eligible to provide treatment foster care services, as it is assumed that they will adhere to FFTA's program standards.^{3,1}

- [Professionalize the role of therapeutic resource parents](#). For example, define their role and related licensing, training, and supervision requirements within agency policies or other standards.
- **Embed treatment resource parents within the state Medicaid plan.** In Oklahoma, for example, therapeutic foster parents have been classified as Treatment Parent Specialists, and the services they provide can be billed under Medicaid.

Retention strategies to bolster recruitment success

While recruitment is a necessary and important step in building a diverse pool of resource families, it is only the first step. Agencies that want to retain resource families and give them the skills and confidence to care for a range of children, including those with specific treatment needs, must pay equal attention to the training, encouragement, and support that is provided to both new and seasoned resource families. **Retention of current families is one of the most important elements in effective recruitment, given that word-of-mouth and the perceptions of current families impact the success of an agency's recruitment efforts.**

Select strategies to support retention of resource families include:

- Ensure that each resource family has an [assigned resource staff person or caseworker](#) to troubleshoot challenges and provide ongoing support, particularly when a child is first placed in the home. In some agencies, the same caseworker stays with a resource family from recruitment through placement until case closure, to provide [seamless support throughout the process](#). For example, the Brevard Family Partnership has a [foster parent navigator](#) who serves as a liaison between resource parents and caseworkers, and provides information, support, and mentorship to both new and experienced resource parents.
- Select and offer an **evidence-informed array of interventions** designed to improve caregiver skills, enhance attachment between children and their foster parents, decrease behavior problems, and

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reduce parenting stress and the risk of placement disruption. Consider interventions that either:

- * Are well-supported by research evidence, such as [Parent-Child Interaction Therapy](#), [Triple P Positive Parenting Program - Level 4®](#), or [Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up](#).
- * Are supported by research evidence, such as [The Incredible Years](#), [Together Facing the Challenge](#), or [Triple P Positive Parenting Program® System](#).
- * Offer promising research evidence, such as [KEEP \(Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Trained\)](#), [KEEP SAFE, 1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12](#), or [FosterParentCollege.com](#).
- Provide **clear models of crisis intervention** for resource parents, such as Brevard Family Partnership's mobile response team or New Jersey's [Mobile Response Stabilization Services](#).
- Build [capacity for regular and consistent respite care](#), and ensure that the transition to and from respite care is coordinated and consistent, making the process easier for the children as well as the caregivers.
- Help resource families to [identify and craft a plan for their own sources of support](#), including respite, within their own networks and in their communities. The Family Focused Treatment Association also encourages [identifying individuals within the youth's network](#), such as biological family, parents of friends, or teachers, who can be trained and approved as respite providers.
- Include resource families as valued **members of the treatment team** by ensuring active and meaningful inclusion and participation on child and family teams, as well as multidisciplinary teams.
- Offer a clear model of practice, including roles and responsibilities, for resource families, such as the [Quality Parenting Initiative \(QPI\)](#), a program created by the Youth Law Center that makes teamwork between birth and foster families an essential strategy and an explicit expectation of all resource parents. QPI is currently being implemented in 10 different jurisdictions, and there are a variety of

tools to support co-parenting and communication between birth and foster parents.

- Ensure families have a **mechanism to learn about prospective placements in real time** in order to include them in the placement decision-making process, as well as reinforce that their services are needed. For example, Arkansas has implemented a mass-text messaging program that alerts resource families when there is a child in need of placement so that resource families can be proactively involved in the placement process rather than having to wait for a call.
- Provide a [forum for peer contact and communication](#) among resource families, such as a peer mentoring program, a social media page for resource parents, or a resource parent helpline staffed by experienced resource families that are available to respond to questions and offer immediate support and encouragement.
- Show [appreciation and recognition of resource families](#) through celebratory events, thank-you cards, or material gifts, or by hosting an annual community picnic and awards ceremony for resource families.
- Provide [adequate compensation](#) to reflect the value placed on excellent, high-quality care. One randomized controlled trial of foster families found that providing additional financial support (\$70 a month) decreased the family dropout rate from 26.9% to 14.3%. The [dropout rate](#) for families that received additional training on top of the financial support was even lower, at 9.6%.

Key resources

A number of guides and tools have been developed to support the recruitment and retention of resource families:

- The [Annie E. Casey Foundation's Foster Home Estimator: Helping Child Welfare Agencies Plan for Family Recruitment](#) can help agencies estimate the number of foster homes needed, including therapeutic foster homes, and its [Building Successful Resource Families Practice Guide](#) offers guidance on creating a strategic plan for recruiting

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and providing ongoing support to foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

- The [AdoptUsKids' Developing Recruitment Plans: A Toolkit for States and Tribes](#) offers ideas and strategies, examples of recruitment plans, tools agencies can use and adapt with their planning processes, and other key considerations. The [Diligent Recruitment Navigator](#) helps guide states, tribes, and territories through the process of developing a comprehensive, multi-faceted diligent foster parent recruitment program. The [Using Integrated Recruitment and Support to Build A Strong Pool of Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families](#) presents a vision for integrated recruitment, development, and support of families, tips on using data effectively as part of feedback loops, considerations for various structures of state and tribal child welfare systems, and examples and ideas from the field.

- [Children Need Amazing Parents \(CHAMPS\)](#) is a national campaign built on research and dedicated to building high-quality parenting for children in foster care. CHAMPS encourages policymakers to prioritize and strengthen policies and programs that support foster parents. [A CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention: Strategies for Developing a Comprehensive Program](#) aims to support the improvement and achievement of excellence in recruiting, developing, and supporting foster parents and kinship caregivers. The [Policy Playbook](#) outlines six specific policy goals to serve as a guidebook for states and tribes looking to use policy to improve the lives of children and youth in foster and kinship care.

To learn more, visit [Questions from the field](#) at [Casey.org](#).

- 1 Berrick, J.D., Shauffer, C., & Rodriguez, J. (2011). Recruiting for excellence in foster care: Marrying child welfare research with brand marketing strategies. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 5, 271-281.
- 2 Rodger, S., Cummings, A., & Leschied, A.W. (2006). Who is caring for our most vulnerable children? The motivation to foster in child welfare. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30, 1129-1142.
- 3 Cox, M.E., Orme, J.G., & Rhodes, K.W. (2003). Willingness to foster children with emotional or behavioral problems. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 29(4), 23-51.
- 4 King, S.M., & Stark, B. (2011). A strategic approach to integrated marketing and recruitment in treatment foster care. *FOCUS Newsletter of the Foster Family-based Treatment Association*, 17(2), 1-3.

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