



Development of Resource Homes Literature Review

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This literature review summarizes scholarly articles and supplemental materials related to recruitment of foster parents that may, in turn, inform the recruitment and retention of resource family homes for children with serious emotional disturbance (SED). An emphasis was placed on locating articles about recruitment and retention of treatment (also called therapeutic or specialized) foster parents based on similarities in their roles and those of professional resource family care providers. Searches were conducted using Google Scholar and Social Work Abstracts. See Table 1 below for a sample of the search terms used.

Table 1. Sample of Search Terms Used

- recruiting respite providers for children with SED
- evidence-informed foster parent recruitment
- motivation + foster parenting
- foster parent satisfaction
- foster parent retention
- foster parent recruitment + therapeutic skills
- therapeutic foster care + recruitment
- recruiting therapeutic foster parents
- therapeutic foster parent recruitment techniques
- tools for recruiting therapeutic foster parents
- recruitment of treatment foster homes
- treatment foster parent recruitment

This review did not uncover any literature specific to recruiting resource family homes for children with SED outside of the child welfare system. Several journal articles were located that feature studies on the recruitment of family foster parents. In addition, some articles on foster care services offered ideas for recruiting foster parents based on their study results. A small number of articles were found that discuss fostering and recruiting foster parents for children/youth with emotional or behavioral difficulties. Relatedly, a segment of the literature focuses on recruitment of treatment (or therapeutic) foster parents. Overall, studies examine foster parent motivation, perceived needs, and demographic and personality characteristics as well as strategies for recruitment. This literature review will summarize information obtained

from both traditional and non-traditional sources. These sources include recruitment handbooks, newsletter articles, state reports, and scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. First, the review will summarize what is known about foster care recruitment and retention, including recruiting foster care providers for children/youth with emotional or behavioral difficulties, and then it will address, more specifically, treatment foster care recruitment and retention.

Foster Care Recruitment and Retention

Multiple studies have been conducted looking at influences, motivation and selection of foster parents as well as retention and training needs (Baum, Crase, S. & Crase, K., 2001; Cox, Buehler, & Orme, 2002; MacGregor, Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006; Orme, et al, 2006; Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006). The main motivations for fostering seem to be related to loving children and/or making a difference in a child's life (Berrick, Shauffer, & Rodriguez, 2011; Buehler, Cox, & Cuddeback, 2003; MacGregor, Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006; Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006; Stukes Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004).

In regard to what influences prospective foster parents, Cox, Buehler, and Orme (2002) found that how an individual becomes aware of fostering is not associated with the type of care one provides, how many children one fosters, or one's intention to continue fostering. They did find that foster parents who heard about foster care from a church or religious organization fostered for more years than the average respondent. Additionally, since it may take more than one year of considering fostering before an individual pursues becoming a foster parent, the authors recommended agencies use multiple recruitment methods to maximize individuals' exposure to fostering and to further educate community members on foster care (Cox, Buehler, & Orme, 2002). Baum, Crase, and Crase (2001) also emphasized the importance of educating the community on foster care and the need for foster homes. Awareness of the need for foster care was the primary influence for becoming a foster parent, followed by family and friends, and interest in expanding their own family (Baum, Crase, S., & Crase, K., 2001). This finding was supported by Rodger, Cummings, and Leschied (2006) who found that over half of the participants in their study found out about fostering from knowing other foster parents or

foster children. Baum and colleagues (2001) found that very few individuals (3.9%) in pre-service foster care training report that the media was helpful in their decision to foster.

Focus groups with high-quality foster parents identified characteristics associated with successful fostering as flexibility, being teachable, a loving nature, having an interest in strengthening another family, and willingness to be a team member (Berrick, Shauffer, & Rodriguez, 2011). Buehler, Cox, and Cuddeback (2003) identified similar themes among foster parents to include: a deep-seeded love or concern for children, support from a faith community, open-mindedness, tolerance, flexibility, an easy-going personality, and being accepting of differences. Berrick, Shauffer, and Rodriguez (2011) went on to identify behaviors that were common amongst high-quality foster parents. These behaviors included: being loving and nurturing the development of a child, advocating for a child's needs, accepting a child into their family as their own, asking for help when needed, helping a child and birth parent strengthen their relationship, and valuing a team approach. Based on these findings, a marketing/recruitment campaign was developed that featured messages centered on the six characteristics and the six behaviors identified in the focus groups with high-quality foster parents. The authors note that “‘branding’ *average* or *typical* foster care will likely result in targeting potential caregivers who will provide *average* quality care” (Berrick, Shauffer, & Rodriguez, 2011, p. 274). They also point out that in order for a recruitment campaign to be successful, an entire agency must understand and support the “brand” so that prospective foster parents hear the same message no matter who they contact.

Both traditional and non-traditional literature associates successful recruitment of foster parents with maintaining a business-like approach to recruitment (Sellick, 2006; Sellick & Howell, 2004), targeting specific neighborhoods or demographics (e.g. older women or a specific race), and involving faith-based organizations (Stukes Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004) or other community partners. Cultural sensitivity is important to recruitment efforts (Casey Family Programs, 2005; Stukes Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). Nasuti, York, and Sandell (2004) compared foster parent role perceptions of African American and white foster parents in Louisiana and found that African American foster parents may be more willing to facilitate birth

family contact. In addition, those providers who perceive themselves as an “agency partner” are more likely to be willing to help recruit additional African American foster parents.

Literature suggests that word-of-mouth is the most effective strategy for recruitment (Fisher & Chamberlain, 2000; Sellick & Howell, 2004). Additionally, getting current foster parents involved in recruitment is a frequently touted strategy for success. Suggestions from the studies included in this review include engaging current foster parents to help recruit and train prospective foster parents (Baum, Crase, S., & Crase, K., 2001; Daniel, E, 2011) and to assist in educating the community—possibly through newspaper articles or magazines—about why they foster, the benefits and challenges, and how others can get involved (Baum, Crase, S., & Crase, K., 2001).

Although not considered a primary motivator, there is a positive association between the total number of familial resources (particularly income) and becoming and remaining licensed as a foster parent (Rhodes, Orme, Cox, & Buehler, 2003). Two articles from the United Kingdom suggest professionalizing foster care (i.e. viewing it as work) to widen the availability of foster parents who have the skills set to meet the more complex needs of the children in care (Colton, Roberts, & Williams, 2008; Hutchinson, Asquith, & Simmonds, 2003). Hutchinson, Asquith, and Simmonds (2003) suggested providing 52-week compensation that is not based on having a child in the home and providing benefits such as pension, paid holidays, professional supervision, and after-hours support as well as professional development that supports career development. It has also been suggested that rewards for foster parents be based on their skill set rather than the needs of a child placed at any given time (Hutchinson, Asquith, & Simmonds, 2003). Redding, Fried, and Britner (2000) mentioned that recruiting professional foster parents may be difficult if there is not sufficient pay to attract those interested in the professional side of fostering. Likewise, Marcenko, Brennan, and Lyons (2009) suggested that agencies assess how boarding rates (i.e. foster parent reimbursement) affect recruitment and retention.

Recruiting Foster Care Providers for Children/Youth with Emotional of Behavioral Difficulties

Cox, Orme, and Rhodes (2003) sought to identify the number of foster families willing to care for children with different types of emotional or behavioral difficulties, determine foster

family resources that impact that willingness, and see if this willingness predicts having placement of a child. None of the families surveyed were kinship caregivers or therapeutic foster parents. Cox and colleagues (2003) found that a majority of the 142 families surveyed were willing to discuss fostering a child who had emotional or behavioral issues. Based on survey responses, families were least willing to foster children with fire setting, destructive behavior, and sexual acting out types of emotional or behavioral issues. European American respondents, those who worked in a helping profession, and those with more resources were most likely to foster a child with emotional or behavioral difficulties. Willingness to provide care for children/youth with emotional or behavioral issues resulted in a higher likelihood of having a child placed in their home. The authors conclude that pre-service training should assess and build on strengths and resources as well as prepare prospective foster parents to handle the emotional and behavioral issues most commonly seen in children who are in foster care. In addition, they suggest that targeted recruitment include hospital employees, teachers, paramedics, firefighters, day care workers, and social workers (Cox, Orme, & Rhodes, 2003).

In their article describing Multi-disciplinary Intervention Service – Torfaen (MIST), Street, Hill, and Welham (2009) touched on characteristics of foster parents who provided this family-based wrap-around approach. These caregivers were: a) very committed, had good communication skills, and prioritized the youth's agenda; b) value the role of attachment in fostering and offer meaningful relationships to youth that may extend past placement; c) expect issues to arise and respond to those in a matter-of-fact way; d) do not ask youth about the reasons they chose to behave in a certain way; and e) understand that though they have a great deal of experience, they have room to learn. These parents were willing to take advice, be part of problem-solving activities, and work as part of the youth's team. Street, Hill, and Welham (2009) noted that when recruiting, MIST searches for individuals who share similar philosophies and values of the service, are able to tolerate highly expressed emotions and risky situations, are passionate about helping vulnerable youth, have experience and skills working with adolescents, can be part of a team and take direction, have good personal support systems, are self-aware and self-reflective, and have no other children under 15 in their home.

Treatment/Therapeutic Foster Care Recruitment and Retention

Traditional literature also contains findings related to recruitment and retention of treatment foster care (TFC) parents. The Connecticut Department of Children and Families Office of Foster Care Services (2008) used focus groups and surveys to learn about the supports, services, and trainings that TFC parents found most helpful in their role with youth and families. The main motivations for providing TFC were “to make a difference,” “enjoy children,” and “to provide a safe home” (Connecticut Department of Children and Families, 2008, p. 5). Likewise, using TFC parent focus groups and a personality questionnaire, the Child Welfare Initiative (CWI) in Los Angeles County researched motivation, rewards, challenges, and agency changes needed to improve TFC parent recruitment and retention (2013). Based on the personality questionnaire, it was discovered that exceptional foster parents had high levels of extroversion and openness, moderate-to-high levels of emotional stability, and very high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness (CWI, 2013). Similarly, a study conducted by Redding, Fried, and Britner (2000) found that successful foster parents tend to have personality traits such as moderate levels of emotional stability and the ability to be realistic, strong, sensitive, and responsive to a child’s needs. Fisher and Chamberlain (2000) pointed out that many families who provide regular foster care do not make good MTFC parents. In order to be a MTFC parent, a person must be willing to be active in treatment, implement a daily structured program for youth in their home according to program guidelines, and work directly with the youth. When MTFC recruiters visit a prospective home, they informally assess traits that have been related to success with difficult youth. Traits associated with successful work with MTFC youth include: openness to hearing another person’s perspective, knowledge of child and adolescent development, and a good sense of humor (Fisher & Chamberlain, 2000). The authors noted that these traits were deemed successful based on over 15 years of practice experience, not formal research on selection factors.

Fisher and Chamberlain (2000) reported the two most successful techniques for recruiting treatment foster parents are word-of-mouth and newspaper ads. The authors noted that when newspaper ads contained a description of the age and gender of children needing placed and the amount of the monthly stipend, recruitment success increased. Other

techniques mentioned were providing existing MTFC parents with a \$100 referral bonus as well as screening possible applicants via phone for appropriateness, sending those deemed appropriate an application, and following up with a MTFC recruiter visiting the applicants' homes. Chamberlain (2003) noted that it is common to struggle with MTFC recruitment initially due in part to the lag between the time it takes to recruit and certify foster parents and the current referral needs. When referrals have dropped off and homes are not used, they may be lost. Thus, Chamberlain (2003) suggests that recruitment and certification be coordinated with availability of referrals and possibly expediting certification for MTFC parents. In their review of literature surrounding characteristics of fostering children, biological families, foster families, and agencies that are correlated with successful TFC placements, Redding, Fried, and Britner (2000) briefly mentioned foster care recruitment. Specifically, they stated that some authors assert that the difficulty in recruiting TFC parents stems from agencies not devoting sufficient time and resources to targeting appropriate populations and/or providing sufficient payments that attract individuals interested in professional parenting (Redding, Fried, & Britner, 2000).

Cole (2011) described a collaborative project in Kentucky between several universities, the State of Kentucky, and public and private providers called Project MATCH. Project MATCH had goals of increasing the pool of resource parents that could meet the identified needs of the children in care, increasing the assessment and use of appropriate kinship homes, fully integrating concurrent case planning into all permanency planning, and increasing communication amongst stakeholders. Phase one gathered information from public and private agencies as well as foster parents to learn about barriers to placement, permanency, and foster parent recruitment, training, and retention. The results of phase one were used to inform phase two where the following strategies were to be implemented: 1) targeted and child-specific recruitment; 2) a customer service model of recruiting, selecting, training, and retaining resource homes; 3) quarterly meetings (called Mix and MATCH) held with agency staff and foster parents to review data, discuss challenges and successes, celebrate successes, and create stability action plans; 4) use of shadowing in resource parents' homes; and 5) collaboration between public and private agencies. We were unable to locate an evaluation of phase two so results of these strategies are not provided in this review.

The Kennedy Krieger Institute developed a task force to study perceptual and functional barriers that TFC parents perceived when they first decided to become TFC parents. King and Stark (2011) discussed the results of this study that used both qualitative and quantitative methods. They found that TFC parents initially deciding to become foster parents thought they must be superhuman or some type of a hero to care for a child with special needs. The Kennedy Krieger Institute created a marketing campaign with the aim of debunking this myth. The marketing campaign included targeting specific communities (i.e., geographic targeting), peer-to-peer oriented approaches (e.g., using current TFC parents to develop a video, increasing community-outreach events, distributing employee newsletters, advertising through media partnerships and social media). After several years of marketing, King and Stark (2011) reported the Kennedy Krieger Institute had 75% more certified TFC homes in fiscal year 2010 than in fiscal year 2005 when their marketing campaign first began.

Deakin (2011) provided tips on how foster care agencies can utilize social media as part of their marketing campaign beginning with an analysis to determine: 1) specific objectives of campaign (i.e. type of foster parents needed and with what skills), 2) the profile of people needed to meet the objectives, and 3) previous recruitment efforts. Following the analysis, Deakin (2011) suggested designing a plan that leverages the agency's existing relationships and is tailored specifically to the targeted audience, testing with a pilot and revising as needed, and finally, scaling the plan. Another suggestion was researching what search terms are being used in major search engines (such as Google) and then using those terms to create relevant content on your own media tools. This may mean creating a specialized web page with specific content, testing advertising on social media sites, measuring results, fine tuning efforts, and scaling the work.

The strategies proposed by King and Stark (2011) and Deakin (2011) were described as "...delivering the message of need to the people who would be most likely to respond to the need" rather than trying to sell it (Werth, 2011, p. 2).

Implications for Recruitment of Resource Homes

The literature covered in this review suggests that recruitment be targeted toward individuals most likely to be able to meet the needs of children/youth who need homes. Important factors to consider when recruiting foster parents, particularly those providing treatment services, include: personality characteristics (including emotional stability and openness to hearing others' perceptions); knowledge of children and adolescent development; and willingness to be actively engaged in treatment and work as a team. These characteristics are similar to those shared by community mental health center (CMHC) staff in the Comprehensive Review of Professional Resource Family Care (PRFC) study conducted July 1, 2013-June 30, 2014 (Levy & Palmer, 2014). In that study, the following characteristics were identified by CMHC staff as important for PRFC providers:

- Experience with children and special skills to work with children who have mental health issues (e.g., basic understanding of children's mental health, skills to handle behaviors and respond appropriately)
- Availability (i.e., able to care for and nurture children, meet their needs, and maybe not work outside the home)
- Flexibility (e.g., allow biological parents to come to their home or go to biological parents home, willing to leave a bed open for PRFC, be part of the plan and flexible to follow it)
- Willing to actively work with the child and parent (i.e., learn and teach) as well as be an active part of the treatment team
- Ability to maintain good boundaries (e.g., careful not to side with the child)
- Passionate about providing PRFC (i.e., want to make a difference)
- Good communication with team members

Likewise, the literature suggests the importance of understanding foster parent motivations so that messages to potential foster parents can be tailored. The literature describes common motivations as making a difference for a child, loving/enjoying children, and providing a safe place for children. These motivations parallel those uncovered in our survey of

current respite providers and current and former PRFC providers (summary report forthcoming).

This literature review provides recruitment strategies that have been used to recruit foster parents and may be adapted to recruit professional resource families. Techniques and recommendations provided for recruiting treatment foster parents are similar to those for recruiting traditional foster families. Overall, the literature suggests that efforts be strategic, targeted, and culturally sensitive. In particular, using current foster parents in recruitment and retention efforts, targeting specific demographics and groups of people most likely to care for the particular children in need, and using multiple methods to educate the community are the most successful methods for recruiting additional foster parents.

Since only children/youth with serious emotional or behavioral health needs and their families receive PRFC, the people recruited to serve them must be able to help meet those needs. A targeted approach to recruitment is necessary to increase numbers of individuals who complete licensing and provide PRFC. Community mental health centers (CMHCs) and child placing agencies (CPAs) in different geographic areas must create their own targeted plans. A first step might be using data to learn more about the children on the SED waiver in their catchment area and the available resource homes (if applicable). This will enable assessment of recruitment needs and realistic goal setting. CMHCs and CPAs should consider cultural factors when targeting specific communities and individuals for recruitment. Educating communities on what PRFC is and how they can become providers or support families who provide PRFC is a critical component of a recruitment plan. Using social media in a targeted manner may be one community education technique to explore. Developing ways to incorporate existing PRFC providers into recruitment and retention activities should be considered when creating targeted recruitment plans. Utilizing and creating partnerships with community leaders – including faith-based organizations – has reportedly been successful for foster parent recruitment. These partnerships deserve attention when creating and carrying out a targeted recruitment plan for developing resource homes.

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