Recruitment, Retention and Technology: The Foster Care Program of Child Protective Services in Waco, Texas

Nice graphic

Developed for
The Foster Home Development Unit
Of Child Protective Services
In Waco, Texas

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Submitted April 200
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Executive Summary

Introduction

Every year, as the number of children in foster care increases, the number of available foster homes decreases. This is a problem for the foster home program of CPS in Waco. Recruitment and retention efforts of staff play an important role in this problem. This plan presents an analysis of the foster care program and offers possible solutions to address the problem.

Needs and Capacities Identified

The needs and capacities of the stakeholders, you included all the stakeholders, not only those in the environment, were identified through the analysis of the foster care program of CPS in Waco. The needs identified were:

1. Workers need to look at the role that technology can play in recruiting and retaining foster parents.
2. Workers need to look at the ways they are providing support for foster parents and what they can do to offer more support.
3. Foster parents need more support and training.
4. Workers need to explore alternative training methods for recruitment and retention.
5. Workers need to meet with supervisory staff to discuss how caseload management could be addressed so that recruitment and retention can be included.
6. The community and the legislature need to be made aware of the importance of foster care.
7. The community and the legislature need to be made aware of the crisis in the foster care system and the need for foster parents.
8. The legislature needs to be made aware of the success that technology has had in the field of adoption and how that same success can be made in foster care.
9. The legislature needs to know what research has found to be effective in recruiting and retaining foster parents.
10. Workers need to develop ways to recruit minority foster families due to the number of minority children in foster care, which is currently not being done outside of regular recruitment.
11. Workers need to explore why inquiries are not followed through by those that inquire.
12. Workers need to explore how they can incorporate recruitment activities into their active caseloads.
13. Foster foster parents need an easy way to help recruit potential foster parents.
14. Foster parents and potential foster parents need an easy to keep in touch with TDPRS workers.

The capacities that were identified in the analysis were:

1. Workers realize the need for more foster parents and are willing to work on recruitment and retention efforts as they have time.
2. Workers are the most knowledgeable about foster care recruitment and retention.
3. Workers have ongoing contact with current and prospective foster parents, which enable the workers to learn about foster parents’ needs.
4. The regional recruitment staff has funds to explore possible solutions to the problem.
5. TDPRS at the state level realized the need for more foster (and adoptive) parents and have taken some recruitment measures such as posting children available for adoption on the internet and having the option of completing a foster care inquiry on the internet.
6. TDPRS as a whole is very technologically based and regional and local staff are very open to technology-based solutions.
7. Research studies show that with an increase in foster parent stipends foster parent retention and recruitment rates could be higher.
8. TDPRS currently uses the Internet for recruitment of foster parents through their statewide website at [http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us](http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us). Those interested can find information out about foster care and can also fill out an inquiry form online.
9. The community as a whole is becoming more technologically based.
10. The legislature and community currently take an active interest in the role CPS plays in society with abused and neglected children.
11. The majority of the foster homes have internet and email access.

Excellent list of needs and capacities.

### Recommended Solution

The recommended solution that addresses a large number of the needed identified and builds upon the capacities identified is to create a local website that builds into a virtual community for the foster care program. This website would include the following components: support/self-help group, online training for foster parents, chat room, general information on becoming a foster parent through TDPRS, online application for becoming a foster parent with TDPRS, local contact, list of internet resources for foster parents, bulletin boards, general information on foster care, success stories from foster parents, and stories highlighting and recognizing foster parents.

### Conclusion

This plan provides an analysis and possible solutions for retaining and recruiting foster parents. Worker time prevents many recruitment activities and limits the amount of retention efforts that can be made. The solution in this plan requires little to no addition foster home worker time, but focuses on recruitment, retention and information sharing. In order for this plan to be successful, the foster home program, including staff, administrators and IT staff, must support it.

**Very good executive summary**
Introduction

Every year the number of children in foster care rises, while the number of people willing to be foster parents decreases (Chamberlain, Moreland & Reid, 1992). Currently there are about 550,000 children in foster care in the United States (Wexler, 2000). This is double the number from a little over a decade ago (Eggers, 1997). The population of children in foster care is growing 33% times faster than the United States child population in general (Craig, 1995). This problem is not a new one. In 1957, Bohman published the first article on recruiting foster parents that documented the dwindling supply of foster homes and the increasing need for foster homes. The problem facing the nation is what to do with all of these children coming into care when there are not enough foster homes to take them. Children, even the very young, are being placed in shelters and children’s homes. Even when foster homes are available, sibling groups are rarely placed together leaving children separated from the only other people they know, breaking very important bonds (Pasztor & Wynne, 1995). Reasons given by foster parents who drop out of the system include lack of training, support and respite care, and the increasing severity of problems that the children in care exhibit (Chamberlain, Moreland & Reid). The increase of women working outside the home also plays a role in recruiting a sufficient number of foster families. Child protective service must inquire about the cause for the decrease in the number of foster homes. Child protective service workers face this issue, as they are responsible for placing so many children in care (Testa & Rolock, 1999). Foster care workers make decisions that affect the recruitment and retention of foster parents that in turn affect the lives of so many children.

This report will cover the problem of the low number of foster parents by addressing recruitment and retention efforts of the foster care staff at Child Protective Services. The needs and capacities for change, with a specific emphasis on the role of technology in that change, will be addressed. Considerable research has been done and many states have tried to address the issue of recruitment and retention. Curriculums are available to foster care agencies that specifically address recruitment and retention (UK Joint Working Party on Foster Care, 1999). Yet, while many states have done studies of their foster care programs over the past several years, there still continues to be a shortage of foster homes available (New York State Department of Social Services, 1988). Technology is one aspect of recruitment and retention that has not been adequately addressed in these reports. Advertising on the Internet is the only technology based recruitment activity mentioned in the literature. With the growing popularity and use of technology, it seems that technology could play an important role in this foster care crisis. This report is important because of the growing needs for foster homes. The findings offer possible solutions to this problem. Solutions identified are both technologically and non-technologically based. This report offers one recommended solution that addresses the largest number of needs.
The problem to be addressed in this study is the low number of people foster parenting through Child Protective Services in Waco, Texas. Information gathered from Child Protective Services was gathered through interviews with D. Brown, Foster Home Development and Adoption Supervisor, J. Moore, Foster Home Development and Adoption Specialist, and B. Hare, CPS Regional Recruiter for Foster Care and Adoption, in February 2001 by this author. Two years ago there were over 70 licensed foster homes through Child Protective Services in Waco, Texas. Today there are only 45 licensed homes (D. Brown, personal communication, February 15, 2001). Although the number of foster homes has decreased the number of children in foster care has continually increased. Good citations of sources of data

The system that is involved in this analysis is the foster care and adoption program of Child Protective Services through the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. The foster care and adoption program of CPS licenses and maintains foster and adoptive homes licensed through CPS. The majority of the homes are basic level care homes. A few of the homes are habilitative and therapeutic homes, serving children with greater needs. Many subsystems exist surrounding this situation. One subsystem is the foster parents themselves. A larger sub-system that is involved with actions of the foster care program in Waco, Texas is the group of staff that makes up the regional foster care and adoption program and the regional administrators. This includes program directors, administrators, information technology staff, recruitment staff and staff training personnel. In Texas, along with statewide efforts, regional staff are to perform recruitment activities. A budget is set aside regionally and locally for recruitment and retention. Recruitment staff are very open to recruitment ideas and are interested in the role that technology can play in increasing the number of foster homes. Administration staff and information technology staff are available to help perform these tasks also.

Many stakeholders are involved with Child Protective Services as an agency. Stakeholders can be defined as anyone that has an interest or comes into contact with the agency. As far as this report is concerned the stakeholders are those specifically related to the foster care program of child protective services. Those stakeholders include foster parents, potential foster parents, citizens, CPS staff, administrators and the legislature. Each of these stakeholders has a different interest and plays a different role in the foster care program of CPS. Foster parents play such a large role in the make up of the environment surrounding CPS that the environment outside of the agency and the needs and capacities of that environment must be considered. In essence, the environment surrounding this problem is the agency, community, region and state.

This analysis looks at the role played by recruitment and retention efforts of staff. The assumption is that the recruitment and retention efforts of staff have an impact upon the number of foster parents coming into foster care and staying in foster care. Another assumption is that there are more efforts for recruitment and retention that could be done, through use of technology and other means, that could aid in increasing the number of foster homes.

**Literature Review**

The problem of recruiting and retaining enough foster homes is not a new problem. In 1957, a study was done that looked at the children that were in care and recruitment and retention
efforts for foster parents. The study looked at some of the reasons people came into fostering the negative aspects of fostering, and why the people chose to stop fostering. The study also looked at recruitment efforts being done to find foster parents (Gray & Parr, 1957).

Eastern Michigan University did a study on retaining foster parents. They found that the amount of training that foster parents received was crucial in determining if they continued to foster (Pasztor & Wynne, 1995). In Oregon from 1988 to 1990, Oregon’s State Children’s Services Division looked at foster parent retention. They found a significantly lower drop out rate than across the rest of the state for the participants that received more training and support, or an additional stipend, or both (Chamberlain, Moreland, & Reid, 1992). A study done in 1992, showed that lack of support for foster parents was a predictor of foster parents discontinuing to foster (Rindfleisch, Bean & Denby, 1998).

Many assume that the low reimbursement rate of foster parents is the primary cause for the decrease in the number of foster parents; studies now show that it is only one of the factors influencing the recruitment and retention of foster parents (Simmel, Lim-Browdowski, Goldberg & Austin, 1997). Simmel et al., found in the research that they compiled, several factors affecting recruitment. These include: an increase in the number of single-parent households, divorce rates, the cost of supporting a child, the number of women employed outside the home, the demand for foster parents to care for diverse youth both ethnically and those with special needs, a large number of minority children in foster care, limited staff to handle intake calls and to process evaluations, poor utilization of private referral organizations, delays in licensing adoptive parents and lack of in person contact with families. Simmel et al. also found many factors affecting retention of foster parents. Some of these include: poor working relationships with social workers, foster parents perceiving they are not being treated with respect, foster parents not being treated as a part of the team, inaccessibility of over-worked agency staff, foster parents feelings that they should have more input in the decisions regarding the children, and low reimbursement rates.

Gries (1997) found, in Oregon after interviewing foster parents that left foster care, that a lot of the people found that fostering did not meet their expectations and they were left disillusioned with the program. Many of these same people felt inadequately trained to care for the level of children that were placed in their homes. Those who felt inadequate to care for the children quickly burned out because they did not feel that they were getting the support they needed to help them solve the problems they were having (Gries). Many foster parents drop out of the system within just a year of fostering without support from the foster care system (Moore, 1998).

Richardson, Foster and McAdams (1998) emphasized providing training for foster parents. Their study looked at providing a cognitive-developmental training program versus the traditional foster parent training program. During their study, support services were provided which included monthly group training, supervision and 24-hour pager support. The results of this study showed that a developmental training model results in more competent foster parents. According to this study, foster care programs that can promote the development of effective foster parents would avail over ones that require parents to bring with them the skills needed for the job.
One area that affects recruitment that cannot be overlooked is that foster care workers in local agencies have less time for recruitment because of greater caseload responsibilities and demands (Virginia Department of Social Services, 1991). Another area that affects recruitment and retention in some foster care agencies is the inconsistency that exists between recruitment and retention. In some agencies, recruitment and retention are done by different staff with different goals in mind. In order for both of these efforts to be effective, staff must work together to recruit and retain foster parents (Pasztor, Shannon & Buck, 1989).

Recruitment of minority foster parents is another concern for all foster care agencies. While only fifteen percent of all children in American are African American, forty percent of the children in foster care are African American (Craig, 1995). African American children are more likely to be placed in foster care and to remain in foster care (Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993). Foster care agencies have an obligation to address this situation and to actively develop new policies and strategies for attracting and retaining African American families (McRoy, 1989).

Simmel et al. (1997) proposed some strategies for increasing the availability of foster homes. They recognize that low reimbursement rates are only a part of the problem and that agencies need to address a number of issues in order to increase the recruitment and retention rates of foster parents. These include: educating the public, doing targeted recruitment, utilizing current foster parents as recruiters, providing recognition to foster parents, increased pre- and post-licensing training, providing continuous support to foster parents and providing adequate financial incentives. Hamm (1997) states that agencies need to be careful when doing recruitment. A recruitment campaign that is perceived by the community as rigid in its requirements and highly judgmental is destined to fail. This lit review gives you a good base for your problem solution. You probably should have reviewed web based solutions as part of this review.

### Decisions Involved

This analysis addresses two major decisions: how to retain foster parents and how to recruit foster parents. Within these two decisions lie many smaller decisions.

Foster home workers must decide when, where and how to do recruitment and also who is appropriate for recruitment. Foster home workers must decide how often to do recruitment activities and where to do these recruitment activities. At the current time in the foster home program in Waco, this decision is primarily left up to the workers. The workers are only required to do one recruitment activity per quarter. Currently recruitment activities that take place include, leaving advertising supplies such as pens, magnets, plastic bags, cups, and bookmarks at local libraries, businesses, doctor offices and day cares; setting up a display booth at local health and education fairs; and attending information meetings. Due to lack of time available to the workers with full caseloads, recruitment has fallen by the wayside and is only being done minimally. Workers are not searching for new recruitment locations and are only fulfilling the requirement of one recruitment activity per quarter. At the state level, the Internet is being used for recruitment through advertising. The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services has a website where those interested in foster care can learn about foster care.
care and complete an inquiry form. State recruitment staff operates this website. The regional recruitment staff it would be nice to know who these staff are, what credentials, how many, etc, since it seems they will be key to any solution, requires that public information meetings be held monthly regarding foster care recruitment. The regional recruitment staff decides the format and content of these meetings. Locally the only decision that must be made is deciding which worker will attend each month. Other recruitment activities that take place that are set up by the regional recruitment staff are placing ads in the newspaper, on the radio and the television. Workers must deal with how to recruit minority foster parents considering the high number of minority children in foster care and the low number of minority foster parents. Workers are challenged with how to reach out to minority communities to begin recruitment. In the foster care unit in Waco, all of the foster home workers are non-minority so none of the workers are currently a part of a minority system that they could get involved in.

Training is also another decision made as a part of recruitment. Foster parents must attend 30 hours of pre-service training. The type of training offered and where to offer the training is a decision made at the state and regional levels. The workers decide when to hold the meetings. Prior to training prospective foster parents, workers must respond to inquiries that come in regarding foster care. Workers decide when to recontact those that inquire about becoming foster parents and how to respond to those inquiries. This affects those that are interested in becoming foster parents. If they are initially given a negative impression of the foster care program, then they are less likely to follow through with pursuing foster care. In reviewing the foster care inquiries for the foster care program in Waco from August 2000 to February 2001, this author found that about half of the inquiries that are taken for potential foster parents never make it to being licensed. About 60% of those that do not make it to licensing are unable to attend the pre-service training that is mandatory; therefore they drop out of the picture. Good data.

The workers also make decisions about how to best train and support their current foster families as a part of retention efforts. The workers decide what type of training to arrange for foster parents and what type of training might be more appropriate for foster parents with certain problems. Workers decided how often to contact their foster families. There are minimal guidelines for contacts (one contact per quarter) and workers must make the decision if a family needs more frequent contacts than is minimally required. They must choose how much support a foster home needs but also have to take into consideration how much time they have to give to a foster home. Workers need to also consider using other foster parents as support, especially for newer foster parents. This is one area currently that has failed to be addressed. In two years experience at CPS, this author has experienced that workers only utilize veteran foster parents once a problem arises and a foster parent is asking for more support. Another decision that foster home workers make is which home to place children into when they come into foster care. This author’s experience has proven that many times children are placed in the only foster home that is available at the time. This affects foster parents continuing to foster if they are given children they cannot handle. Workers do not always have the time to support their foster homes and try to find interventions so that they could continue fostering.

The decisions made within the foster care program have been summarized as they relate to retention and recruitment of foster parents. The next two sections will address the needs and
capacities that emerge from the decisions that are made within the foster care program.

### Priority Needs

This author rated the priority needs listed below mathematically after being assessed through:
1. Magnitude: what is the extent and scope of the problem at risk
2. Severity: what will happen if nothing is done
3. Social Concern: what extent is the community concerned
4. Susceptibility to control: what is the likelihood that action will be meaningful
5. Relationship: to the agency’s sanctions, visions and goals
6. Community/agency resources: available resources to combat the problem

**Needs** (in priority order)

1. Workers need to look at the role that technology can play in recruiting and retaining foster parents.
2. Workers need to look at the ways they are providing support for foster parents and what they can do to offer more support.
3. Foster parents need more support and training.
4. Workers need to explore alternative training methods for recruitment and retention.
5. Workers need to meet with supervisory staff to discuss how caseload management could be addressed so that recruitment and retention can be included.
6. The community and the legislature need to be made aware of the importance of foster care.
7. The community and the legislature need to be made aware of the crisis in the foster care system and the need for foster parents.
8. The legislature needs to be made aware of the success that technology has had in the field of adoption and how that same success can be made in foster care.
9. The legislature needs to know what research states is effective in recruiting and retaining foster parents.
10. Workers need to develop ways to recruit minority foster families due to the number of minority children in foster care, which is currently not being done outside of regular recruitment.
11. Workers need to explore why inquiries are not followed through by those that inquire.
12. Workers need to explore how they can incorporate recruitment activities into their active caseloads.

### Capacities on which to build

In order to make changes within any system, one must begin by addressing the strengths and abilities of the people and the resources they have to offer. The capacities on which to build are listed below.
Capacities on which to build: (in priority order)

1. Workers realize the need for more foster parents and are willing to work on recruitment and retention efforts as they have time.
2. Workers are the most knowledgeable about foster care recruitment and retention.
3. Workers have ongoing contact with current and prospective foster parents, which enable the workers to learn about foster parents’ needs.
4. The regional recruitment staff has funds to explore possible solutions to the problem.
5. TDPRS at the state level realized the need for more foster (and adoptive) parents and have taken some recruitment measures such as posting children available for adoption on the internet and having the option of completing a foster care inquiry on the internet.
6. TDPRS as a whole is very technologically based and regional and local staff are very open to technology-based solutions.
7. Research studies show that with an increase in foster parent stipends foster parent retention and recruitment rates could be higher.
8. TDPRS currently uses the Internet for recruitment of foster parents through their statewide website at http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us. Those interested can find information out about foster care and can also fill out an inquiry form online.
9. The community as a whole is becoming more technologically based.
10. The legislature and community currently take an active interest in the role CPS plays in society with abused and neglected children.
11. The majority of the foster homes have Internet and email access.

Summary of the Decision Analysis

This analysis addressed the issue of the low number of people wanting to become foster parents and the problem with retaining foster parents within the Child Protective Services foster care system in Waco, Texas. Although the lack of foster parents is a larger problem than just locally, this analysis only looked at the foster care program at Child Protective Services in Waco, Texas. The key findings of this analysis are: staff are only doing minimal activities to recruit new foster parents and retain current foster parents, staff need to address how they can provide more support and do more recruitment activities, and the role of technology in recruitment has minimally been addressed and needs to be looked at further. As shown, the agency locally and statewide has only used technology minimally to support foster care staff and to help with recruitment and retention efforts. In a phone survey taken of the how many foster families currently licensed through TDPRS in Waco (Stout, 2001) (See Appendix A for survey results), 31 out of 45 foster homes stated that they have a computer in their home with Internet access. All, but one, of the other homes stated that they know where they can get access to a computer with Internet and email access. Almost 75% of those interviewed in the survey also said that they would be interested in training on the Internet and support for foster parents via the Internet. So this analysis and the information gathered, points foster care in the direction of looking at what benefits technology could offer in helping to recruit and retain foster parents. I think this survey information should have been presented earlier, not in the section summary.

Options to Address the Situation/Decision

Fictitious Plan: For SOCW 6383 class use only, page 11
This report takes the needs and capacities identified and offers possible solutions both technology based and non-technology based.

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<th><strong>Non-Technology Based Solutions</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Solution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Completing more than the required one recruitment activity per quarter</td>
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<td>Hire a recruitment staff person locally</td>
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<td>Workers to have more frequent contacts with their foster parents</td>
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<td>Link foster parents with other foster parents (Mentor program)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer child/family specific training (ie, if a parent has a child with attachment disorder, find a training for them on that disorder)</td>
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Have foster home workers available to foster families 24 hours a day via phone and pager

Foster families would have support 24 hours a day so they would feel more supported
Workers already have individual work pagers
Addresses the needs identified 1, 2, 3, & 4 that address retention and providing support to foster parents

Workers would be on call 24 hours a day
Would require more worker time
Workers may not want to give out their home phone numbers

### Technology Based Solutions

This report helps guide the information needs of foster home development workers in their efforts to recruit and retain foster parents. The information technology options that this report suggests are less complicated, but effective means of retaining and recruiting foster parents.

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<tr>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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| Local website (virtual community) that focuses on recruitment, retention and providing information | Provides information specific to local foster care program
Provides information to current foster parents, prospective foster parents, the community and others interested
Once set up and running it might do some of the recruitment and retention efforts that workers do not have time to provide
Less costly than some of the other possible solutions
Would not require additional worker time
Most of the foster homes have internet access
TDPRS has hardware and software available currently
Meets the largest number of needs of all the solutions because it addresses recruitment, retention and information needs of stakeholders
Addresses the needs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, & 12 | Takes time to set up and keep up to date
Not personal/face to face
People have to know that the website exists, how to get there and have internet access to use it |

| Give email addresses of staff to all foster families | Allows foster parents to have another way to contact hard to reach caseworkers
Quicker for the workers to read and respond to than phone calls
Email is already set up for the workers and most of the foster homes have access to email
Would not require the agency to | Takes away from the personal communication such as telephone or face to face
Workers may be overwhelmed with emails from foster parents
Confidentiality would have to be addressed [Good point]
Workers’ busy schedules do not always allow email checks |
obtain any additional hardware or software
Addresses the needs identified 1, 2, 3, & 4 that address retention and providing support to foster parents

Have foster families exchange information electronically, e.g., instant messenger, chat, exchange of email addresses

- Allows foster families to use each other for support instead of only having caseworkers
- Gives them another way to contact each other
- Addresses the needs identified 1, 2, 3, & 4 that address retention and providing support to foster parents

Some foster parents may overwhelm others with “junk” emails
Not as personal
Foster families that do not have email would be left out

Recommended Solution

The primary solution that this paper recommends is to create a local website or virtual community. Because the website has so many varied components, it is the solution that builds on a large number of capacities and addresses the largest number of needs identified in the analysis. You seem to ignore your capacities in your solution— you need to insure you are taking a strength’s based approach to this and other problems in your work!! Many virtual communities exist on the Internet. This website would provide foster parents through CPS in Waco with a local website with information specific to their area and their needs. They would know the other foster parents using the website and using the website might encourage the foster parents to support each other outside of the Internet more. Examples of two such websites are the Foster Parent Community (http://fosterparents.com) (See Appendix B) and FosterCareAgency.org (http://www.fostercare.net/index.html) (See Appendix C). The proposed website for this project would consist of the following features:

- **support/self-help group** – the support group would be set up so that users needed a password to enter the group; the group would meet in a chatroom like setting; the support group would meet at certain times and would have someone in the room to monitor the group who could be a veteran foster parent or staff. Appendix D shows sample online support groups from Foster Parent Community (http://www.fosterparents.com/).

- **online training** – training available that the foster parents could read and complete an evaluation on at the end to get some of their required training credits; the training would have to be approved by the foster home supervisors and program directors before posting to the site. Appendix E shows sample online training programs from Foster Parent Community (http://www.fosterparents.com/) and FosterCareAgency.org (http://www.fostercareagency.org/).

- **chat room** - a chat room would be available for anyone who visits the site. Appendix F shows sample chat rooms from FosterCareAgency.Org (http://www.fostercareagency.org).

- **general information on becoming a foster parent through TDPRS.** Appendix G shows sample pages of the statewide information TDPRS provides on becoming a foster parent (http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us).

- **online application for becoming a foster parent with TDPRS.** Appendix H shows the application that TDPRS uses for people interested in becoming foster parents
• local contact information – would put the user in contact with either staff from CPS, foster parents or the foster parent association.  See Appendix I for the application screen from the contact page of Foster Parent Community.

• list of Internet resources for foster parents.  The Texas State Foster Parents Inc. web page has a comprehensive list of Internet resources for foster parents.  See Appendix J to view some of the application screens from this site.

• bulletin boards – users can post questions and responses to questions.  Babycenter has a good example of bulletin boards.  See Appendix K for an application screen from one of Babycenter’s bulletin boards.

• general information on foster care – would include information on the current foster care crisis, statistics, how the foster care program benefits not only the children but the community, needs of the foster care program, success of the website and other technology being used, etc…

• success stories from foster parents.  FosterCareAgency.org offers some encouraging stories and poems written by foster parents and foster children.  Appendix L shows an example of one of those stories from their website.

• stories highlighting and recognizing foster parents

This website/virtual community would incorporate recruitment and retention efforts along with providing general information to other stakeholders of the agency.  According to Kollock and Smith (1998), technology will have the most profound effect when it alters the way that people come together and communicate.  This website in its bringing people together and opening up communication, utilizes technology at its highest level.  TDPRS at the state and local level has become very technologically based.  This makes use of that strength and builds on it.

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How to Proceed/Issues Identified

The next step in order to make this solution to the problem a reality is to meet with the Information Technology staff of Region VII of TDPRS about setting up the website.  The administrators and program directors of the foster care program will need to back up this solution in order for it to be successful and also for the Information Technology staff to be willing to devote the time needed for this kind of project.  Most of the components of the website will not cost the agency any additional funding except for IT staff time.  The first thing that would need to be decided is where to publish the website.  The agency already has state web space that could be used for the site.  If the agency decides not to use this space, then they would need to search out a place to publish the website that would be able to hold all of the components.  The next step would be to begin the site creation one component at a time.

Schoech (1999) identifies guidelines for making information technology implementation successful and several issues that need to be addressed.  In order for the proposed website/virtual community to be successful, it is important for the agency to be aware of these guidelines.  Schoech states that the first stage of IT success is planning.  Before starting the proposed website, those involved, foster home staff, administrators and IT staff, would need to sit down and write out a plan for developing the website.  Each component of the website would need a
plan for development along with the website as a whole. The plan would need to include timelines and identify responsible persons. The plan would also need to include what order the components of the web page will be completed. The next stage that Schoech describes is to place IT in a separate top-level department. In Region VII of TDPRS, IT staff are a completely separate department from the agencies within TDPRS. They function at the regional level and accommodate all of the agencies under TDPRS. The next step that Schoech describes is to involve the stakeholders. He states that the application will be more successful when the stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the website. The stakeholders of CPS could definitely be used in creating the website. The foster parents would be an important asset in creating this website for their ideas on what to include on the website. Although it would be difficult to include some of the stakeholders, such as the legislature, at the creation of the site, the site could contain a place for feedback and ways to improve the site. This would give other stakeholders such as the community and unknown prospective foster parents a way to give their input to the ongoing implementation of the site. Current foster parents and CPS staff would be of great importance in the beginning stages of the website development. The next stage described by Schoech is to consider the agency sophistication. The agency has moved toward sophisticated technology as a whole. The abilities or sophistication of the potential users of the website need to be considered. The website is not a difficult IT application and general knowledge of Internet access is all that is required. The next stage is to avoid overreliance on a few isolated technical specialists. Currently the agency does rely on one IT specialist that covers the Waco area. The agency would benefit from having several of the IT staff work on the website so that several of them know about the site from the planning stage and would be available in the future as IT staff change. The next stage that Schoech describes is to select software before hardware. With the proposed solution website, this is not really an issue as the website does not require any additional software. The state already utilizes website development software and could go ahead and use that. It does not require any extra hardware since it will all be stored on the Internet and all TDPRS currently have new computers that have Internet access. The next stage would be to safeguard security and confidentiality from the beginning. This would be a concern since foster parents will be meeting and talking about confidential information and also prospective foster parents will be filling out online applications with personal information about themselves. IT staff would need to explore ways to make the site as confidential and safe as possible. You should probably mention how this problem is solved on the example sites you mention. Once the site is running, foster parents using the site would need to understand and agree to confidentiality also. The next step described by Schoech is to incorporate continuous improvement mechanisms. This could be done by having a place on the website for questions, comments and feedback. Also after the site is up and running staff would want to talk to foster parents using the site to determine how useful the site is and what changes might need to be made. Success of the site could be measured in various ways such as number of visitors to the site, number of inquires and contacts from the site and response to the site. The site would need to be continually updated to be successful and monitoring measurements set into place. Since the goal of the site is recruitment and retention of foster parents, an increase in the number of foster homes could identify success of the site. The final point that Schoech makes in making an application successful is to expect the development effort to be frustrating and time-consuming. Although setting up a virtual community is probably easier than creating a new application, the problem of IT staff time will be an issue. Foster home workers can expect
delays in getting the website up and running when IT staff have to put the website on hold to handle more emergency type IT problems. Also once the website is up and running, it may take foster families some time to start using the site and become comfortable with using the site. Good section. A little more information on the success of other similar web sites would be helpful if it were available. Did any of the sites in the appendices post success information? Did any have an email address to contact? I think it would have been useful to review the steps in Technology development process as well as the guidelines for success. Some of those steps are very important. You could have included those and left out the guidelines for success that did not apply.

**Conclusion**

This report evaluated the foster care program of CPS in Waco and identified possible solutions to address the needs of the stakeholders. A comprehensive website or virtual community is the solution that the report recommends as it meets the largest number of needs. The decreasing number of foster parents is a problem that has to be addressed by the agency. The solution recommended in this report offers a low cost means of recruiting and retaining foster parents. The website does not require as much additional worker time as some of the other possible solutions. The solution also provides a means of getting information to other stakeholders and making all those interested in or involved with foster children more knowledgeable with the power to help the children.
References


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Virginia Department of Social Services. (1991). Report of the department of social services on training, supportive services and recruitment for foster families: A feasibility study to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia (Senate Document No. 14). Richmond: Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of service Programs Adoption, Foster Care and Training Units.
Wexler, R. (2000). Would opening more boarding schools be preferable to foster care?
Insight, 16(45), 40-43.

Useful Websites


Foster Parent Community. http://www.fosterparents.com


FosterCareAgency.org. http://www.fostercare.net/

Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us

Good to include these
Appendix A: Survey Results of Internet Access of Foster Parents

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have internet access at home?</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If not, do you have other access to the internet?</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you be interested in internet based training?</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you be interested in support for foster parents via the internet?</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Survey: 45 foster homes licensed through Child Protective Services were interviewed via telephone by this author in February 2001

Source: Child Protective Services, Foster Home Development Unit

Very good table.

Screen deleted to save email time.
I liked the screens. Maybe a little explanation at the bottom of the screens in the appendices would help.
Appendix B

Welcome to the Foster Parent Community. This site is for the purpose of sharing information with foster and adoptive families, prospective foster and adoptive families, and anyone involved in the field of working with at-risk children. Below, you will see our schedule for guest speakers in our chat room. To navigate this site, simply use the left menu. Please bookmark this site and feel free to participate in our chat and email discussions. Share information and get questions answered by other care providers on our discussion boards. We hope you find this visit to be very informative and supportive.

Sincerely,
Foster Parent Community

You Are Visitor# 229287
Appendix C

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Appendix E

Online training instructions:

1. Choose and click on a topic of interest from the list below.
2. Read course material
3. Answer questionnaire and submit
4. Once your answers have been verified, you will receive a certificate of completion by email.

Certificates are in Portable Document Format (pdf). You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader to read the downloaded files. It is free, very easy to use and available by clicking here: [Acrobat Reader]

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Appendix E Continued

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Training & Testing By Susan
For training start here. Click on a topic below. Read through the material. When you are familiar with the material - take the test. The test may be found on the training module page. If you would like to see training on a specific topic please contact susan@fostercare.net

Our Training Modules
Preparing our Teams for Life
How to Make Positive Behavior Changes
How To Handle Allegations Against Your Home
Twelve Skills for Successful Fostering and Adopting
Organizing Your Life
Appendix F

Fictitious Plan: For SOCW 6383 class use only, page 28
Appendix G

Children Available for Adoption

Foster Care & Adoption

- What is a Home Study?
- How do I become a Foster/Adopt Family?
- Basic Requirements to Foster/Adopt
- Some Additional Foster Care Requirements
- Placement of PPS Children Out-of-state
- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)
- Texas Foster and Adoptive Parents Speak
- Responsibilities
- Contact Information

Texas Foster and Adoptive Parents Speak

Can foster families adopt? Can adoptive families provide foster care?
Why are children placed in foster homes and adoptive homes?

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Appendix G Continued

How do I Become a Foster or Adoptive Family?

Step 1: Attend Information Meeting
You will need to attend an informational meeting in your area where you can discuss the scope and requirements of being a foster or adoptive parent. You will get basic information and questions are welcome. Your local PRS office will furnish you with this information if there are no informational meetings in your area.

Step 2: Preparation and Selection
If you can meet the basic requirements, you are invited to meet with PRS staff to decide if fostering or adopting is right for your family. You will also be assessed by PRS staff. This process furnishes you with information about PRS and the children who come into the foster care system.

Step 3: Training
You will attend training to learn more about the children available through PRS and to assess your strengths in parenting children. The classes also boost your knowledge and confidence to meet the challenge of taking children into your home and to be sure you are ready to follow through on the commitment.

Step 4: The Family Study
A caseworker will visit you in your home. The purpose is to discuss your personal history, family interests and lifestyle, childcare experiences, the types of children you feel would best fit in your home, and your strengths and skills in meeting the children’s needs.

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Appendix H

Foster Care and Adoption Interest Form for Region 7-Austin

If you live in one of the counties listed below and would like more information about becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent, please fill out our inquiry form. Your inquiry will be sent to the local foster/adopt contact for follow-up.

Note: This is not an application for becoming a foster or adoptive parent.

Counties in Region 7: Bastrop, Bell, Blanco, Bosque, Brazos, Burleson, Burnet, Caldwell, Coryell, Falls, Fayette, Freestone, Grimes, Hamilton, Hays, Hill, Lampasas, Lee, Llano, Limestone, Lampasas, Madison, McLennan, Milam, Mills, Robertson, San Saba, Travis, Washington, Williamson

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<td>Your Date of Birth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your Spouse’s name (if applicable):</td>
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<td>City</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4/28/01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your Name</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Your Date of Birth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Your Spouse’s name (if applicable):</td>
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<td>Your Name</td>
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<td>Your Date of Birth</td>
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<td>Your Spouse’s name (if applicable):</td>
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Appendix H Continued

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Appendix H Continued

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Appendix I

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Appendix J

FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATIONS

http://www.nfpausa.org - National Foster Parent Association
http://www.geocitites.com/texas - Denton County Foster Parents Assoc.
http://www.tfpa.org - Tarrant County Foster Parent Assoc.
http://www.tfpa.org - Texas Council on Adoptable Children
http://www.texas-ls.org - Irish Foster Care Assoc. (fighting across the big pond)

HOMELIFE AND LEISURE

http://www.marsborders.com - local mom's schedule, just enter your zip code, I use it often
http://www.texas.gov - movie reviews for parents
http://www.kidzadr.com - hundreds of things for kids
http://www.texas.gov - Texas, information about Texas
http://www.milliton.com - free stuff
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
http://www.mandarinworld.com - search for money owed you by govt. and lending institutions
http://www.travelocity.com - travel information, reduced fares and bonus packages
http://www.telephone.com - national telephone listings for individuals and businesses
http://www.rahug.com - you guessed it for the chocoaholics

MEDICAL RESOURCES

http://www.defoemorgan.org - self-defining
http://www.healthcare.com - Home healthcare information
http://www.nps.org - American Psychological Assoc. mental health links and links to related websites

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Appendix J Continued

http://www.accessdata.com - Comprehensive medical search engine
http://www.medindex.com - Drug reference and medical dictionary
http://www.medsearch.com - searchable database for National Institute of Health and CDC
http://www.saferedu.com/SafeAlcohol.htm - site dealing with Alcohol and Alcoholism at which users can subscribe to twins
http://www.library.tmc.edu - Texas Medical Center Library

ADVOCACY LINKS
http://www.msp.org - Texas Center for Public Policy Priorities
http://www.hlstate.tx.us - Texas Legislative Library
http://www.capitol.state.tx.us - Texas Legislature Online
http://statecare.org - Child Advocates Resource Exchange
http://www.visalist.org - Directory of non-profit organizations and resources for funding and lobbying
http://www.afad.com - mailing list for subscription to e-mail on specific topics and areas of research
http://www.kidcenter.org/index.htm - Institute for Children in Foster Care
http://www.youthcare.org - Youth in Foster Care United
http://www.safefamily.org/code.htm - NACF Code of Ethics
http://www.nacsac.org/casework - National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect
http://www.texas.edu/texasspecical - Stephen P. Austin University School of Social Work
http://www.wcwa.org - Child Welfare League of America
http://www.mydoc.com - Tips for helping kids, etc.

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Appendix J Continued

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Appendix L

It has been 20 years in the making of having a chance to make a difference in over 40 different lives. I feel we were called by God to do a ministry in the lives of those who sometimes could not make a change in their own life. Most of our were babies who come to you helpless and are depending on you to make a difference in their lives. Most do not stay very long and you do all you can in a short amount of time and when the time comes for them to leave you have them goodbye and say a prayer that all will be as he has planned.

One girl came at age 5 and stayed till 13. Was adopted and grew 6 years and we left the door open not fearing any problems between them and us. Something happened between the adopted parents and the daughter then at age 18 one weekend between Christmas and New Years a call came to come visit us for the weekend when she returned home. She was told to leave and she came back and we brought her back and redopted her as an adult. She is now married and lives out of state.

We had one other child adopted and we keep in touch all the time and we are Aunt and Uncle to the child. There is never a day we do not hear from them and there are the joys of being a foster parent. Several letters and never hear in touch but that at their right for we are not promised that this would happen.

We have another girl whom was adopted and we were apart of the adoption from the very start we stay together very much of the time.

One of the boys who was adopted 8 years ago we are family friends all his life. He now has his adopted sister and we have her as a foster child for she lived across town.

When we go out to eat I share with everyone that these are our foster children for I am proud to be making a difference in their life.

We are not sure how long we will do this - As long as the good Lord gives us the health. It is a real blessing.