

PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

Volume 13, Number 3
July 2008

This publication for child welfare professionals is produced four times a year by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the Jordan Institute for Families and the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In summarizing research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.

Let us hear from you!

To comment about something that appears in this or any other issue of *Children's Services Practice Notes*, please send your comments to:

John McMahon
Jordan Institute for Families
School of Social Work
UNC-Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550
johnmcmahon@mindspring.com

Newsletter Staff

Mellicent Blythe
Lane Cooke
John McMahon

Visit Our Website

www.practicenotes.org

References for the articles in this issue can be found at [<www.practicenotes.org>](http://www.practicenotes.org)

FINDING FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Wait! Don't put this issue down or pass it on without reading it yourself. No matter what your job title or duties are, if you work for a child-placing agency, this issue is for YOU.

Skeptical? You're probably not alone. Our child welfare system has many strengths, but one of its weaknesses is a tendency to compartmentalize families and those who serve them. According to this mindset, if the topic at hand is finding and retaining resource families, the only appropriate audience is your agency's designated recruiter or licensing professional. A reasonable assumption, perhaps. But wrong.

EVERYONE'S JOB

In recent years more and more child welfare agencies have realized that DSS can't do it alone—it takes everyone in a community to keep children safe. As a result North Carolina is pursuing collaboration as never before through the Multiple Response System, System of Care, and child and family team meetings.

The same concept applies to recruitment and retention of resource families. There may be a designated person in your agency whose job it is to find, train, and retain resource families, but the truth is that this person can't succeed without the support and involvement of the entire agency.

THE LINK TO OUTCOMES

Contributing to the recruitment and retention of resource families should be a matter of enlightened self-interest, not charity.

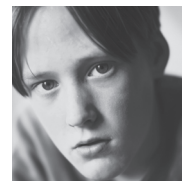
You see, the success of foster care, federal laws such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act, and child welfare agencies in general all rest on our ability to create and sustain an ample pool of resource families.

If we have enough resource families, we stand a better chance of keeping siblings together, placing children in their communities, decreasing the length of foster care stays, increasing placement stability, eliminating unnecessary residential placements, and achieving the core outcomes of safety, well-being, and permanence.

An adequate pool of resource families can have financial benefits, too. For instance, if children are placed with families instead of group homes, placement costs will go down. If agencies find families for children in their own communities, they will save on travel. This money could then be used to improve outcomes.

YOU CAN HELP

Finding and supporting families for children in foster care is everyone's job. This issue of *Practice Notes* offers information and ideas to help you with this critical task. ♦



Recruiting and supporting resource families is everybody's job.

WHAT ARE "RESOURCE FAMILIES"?

Foster families. Adoptive families. Relatives who provide kinship care. Legal guardians.

In this issue of *Practice Notes* and in an increasing number of agencies, all these are referred to as "resource families." The term refers to anyone who provides a safe, stable, loving home for a child when the child's birth parents are unable to provide one.

Why use this term? We need to think more broadly about potential families and children's needs. All kinds of families are needed for children in foster care. Sometimes children need families who can play multiple roles over time.

Instead of dividing families into categories, we are choosing to use a term that leaves the possibilities as open as possible.

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCE PARENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN NORTH CAROLINA

How does North Carolina do when it comes to recruiting and retaining (R&R) families for children in foster care?

NORTH CAROLINA'S STRENGTHS

Our county-administered, state-supervised child welfare system has many characteristics that support the ability of public child welfare agencies to find families for children in foster care. Our system enables the state to set policy and provide guidance while acknowledging and fostering the ability of agencies to understand local needs, make timely decisions, and take innovative actions on behalf of children and families.

Collaboration between the state and local levels is helped by strong partnerships between the Division of Social Services and the NC Association of County Directors of Social Services, NC Foster & Adoptive Parent Association, and networks of foster and adoptive parent recruiters.

County agencies also rely heavily on private agencies to help them find families for children in foster care. As of February 29, 2008 there were 7,129 foster homes in our state. Of these 3,158 (44%) were supervised by DSS agencies and 3,971 (56%) were supervised by our state's 93 private agencies. These partnerships are beneficial in many ways to the children and agencies involved.

County DSS agencies also partner with NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network, which offers a variety of supportive services at no charge to public agencies, including a hotline (877-NCKIDS-1) in English and Spanish for families from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Saturday. NC Kids staff speak with callers about foster care and adoption, connect callers with child-placing agencies,

RESOURCE FAMILY RETENTION IN NC

North Carolina does not currently possess detailed data about the rate at which resource families leave the child welfare system. However, there is evidence to suggest that many do exit each year: although the system added 1,851 new foster homes in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 06-07, the actual number of licensed foster homes increased by only 738 from the previous year, suggesting turnover among licensed foster parents in our state is an issue.



and follow up with each caller to ensure no family is lost while navigating the system.

Much of the success of North Carolina's R&R programs must also be attributed to the values, dedication, and drive of people across our state. From child welfare professionals to families, countless individuals are deeply committed to helping children. This is perhaps our greatest strength.

NORTH CAROLINA'S NEEDS

As is the case with every person, agency, and system, North Carolina has needs as well as strengths. The challenges our state faces are reflected in findings from a foster parent recruitment and retention survey completed by the UNC-CH School of Social Work earlier this year.

Sixty-eight of NC's 100 county DSS agencies participated in the survey; respondents represent each region of the state and agencies of different sizes, including 11 large agencies, 24 medium-sized agencies, and 33 small agencies. At the time of the survey 8,885 children were in the custody of these 68 agencies; this represents *cont. p. 3*

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CFSR

North Carolina's most recent federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), conducted in spring 2007, found inconsistency across the state in the level of recruitment efforts and in the need for foster homes. The review expressed particular concern over the need to improve targeted recruitment for special populations, such as older children, minority children, and children with special needs (USDHHS 2008).

Once North Carolina children are placed in a foster home, the CFSR found, placement changes often occur when agencies fail to intervene early enough to address behavior problems. In other words, maintaining stable foster homes for children requires ongoing support from the agency long after a license is issued.

In response to the CFSR North Carolina has developed and

is implementing a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Not surprisingly, diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive homes figures prominently, especially in connection with federally mandated goals such as cultural competency (to ensure foster and adoptive families reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in foster care) and increasing involvement of all family members throughout the life of a family's case.

For a description of some of the activities in North Carolina's PIP related recruitment and retention, see page 8. To read the PIP itself, go to [http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/stats/docs/Approved 2008 NC PIP.pdf](http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/stats/docs/Approved%202008%20NC%20PIP.pdf).



from p. 2

approximately 83% of the 10,605 North Carolina children in foster care on February 29, 2008 (Duncan, et al., 2008).

The survey identified the following needs:

Separating Siblings. Every responding agency reported that at some time it had been forced to separate siblings in foster care due to a lack of foster families: 70% of responding agencies said they often (10.4%) or sometimes (59.7%) place siblings separately because they lack foster homes that can accommodate them.

This is contrary to North Carolina's child welfare services standards, which state that "Siblings shall be placed together whenever possible, unless contrary to the child's developmental, treatment, or safety needs." This policy exists because brothers and sisters separated from each other in foster care may experience trauma, anger, and an extreme sense of loss. Research suggests separating siblings may make it difficult for them to begin healing, make attachments, and develop a healthy self-image (McNamara, 1990).

Inappropriate Use of Group Care. Although North Carolina policy states that children removed from their homes should be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting in which their needs can be met, responding agencies reported 5.6% of children in their custody live in group placements solely due to a lack of available resource families.

This is a concern because evidence continues to mount that residential placements can be detrimental for children: Ryan and colleagues (2008) found that youth who enter group home placements are nearly two and a half times more likely to enter the juvenile justice system compared to similar youths placed in family foster care. Residential placements have also been linked to reduced permanency outcomes compared to family foster care (Barth, 2002).

Placement Distance. Nine percent of children in foster care in the responding agencies are placed more

RECRUITMENT & CONCURRENT PLANNING

There is a direct link between concurrent planning, a child welfare strategy authorized by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and recruitment of families for children in foster care.

Concurrent planning facilitates timely permanency by promoting (1) consideration of all reasonable permanency options as soon as a child enters care and (2) the simultaneous pursuit of those options that best serve the child's needs. Typically the primary plan is reunification with the child's family of origin. In concurrent planning, an alternative permanency goal is pursued at the same time (Katz, 1999; Lutz, 2000).

Often that alternative goal is adoption by the foster parent or relative providing temporary care for the child. This is clearly reflected in North Carolina's adoption statistics. For example, in 2005-06, 1,234 children were adopted from foster care in our state. Of these children, 54.1% were adopted by their foster parents, 23.3% were adopted by a relative, and 22.6% were adopted by a non-relative (USDHHS, 2008).

The first round of CFSRs identified a link between concurrent planning and positive results for children, including reduced time to permanency, enhanced reunification or adoption efforts, and reduced time to adoption finalization. Yet the CFSRs also found many states have yet to actively and consistently apply this practice.

North Carolina, like other places, has had some difficulty with concurrent planning. Although it has been an established part of child welfare policy in our state since 1998 and agencies are required to list the concurrent plan for each child at key points during the child's case (NCDSS, 2008), the second round of the CFSR concluded that the practice is not pursued with the same vigor for all children in care, in part because judges and attorneys do not sufficiently emphasize concurrent planning (USDHHS, 2007). As a result, our current Program Improvement Plan (PIP) calls for training of court personnel on this topic.

The upshot of all this? If your work with families involves developing and supporting concurrent planning, keep in mind that you are making a big contribution to your agency's efforts to find families for children in foster care. You are part of its recruitment team.

Concurrent planning is directly linked to resource family recruitment.

than a one-hour drive away from their birth family's home. This problem is more pronounced in smaller counties, where an average of 27% of children are placed more than one-hour away from home.

This is contrary to state policy, which requires agencies to place children within close proximity to their families. Long distances can make arranging visits with birth families more difficult. This in turn can negatively affect children, since research has linked frequent visits with improved child well-being (White et al., 1996; Cantos & Gries, 1997) and more timely reunification (Mech, 1985).

Finding Families for Teens. Survey respondents reported they need about 1,200 more foster families for teens, which is not surprising: teens are vastly overrepresented in residential placements in our state.

Finding Families for Minorities. The federal Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) directs child welfare agencies to recruit resource families that reflect the characteristics and communities of children in foster care. In North Carolina nonwhite children made up only 30.6% *cont. p. 4*

OVERVIEW from p. 3

of the state's population between the ages 0-17 in 2003 (NC Data Ctr, 2006). Yet African-American children made up 40.52% of the children in foster care in April 2008.

Responding agencies want to improve their ability to recruit minority foster parents: 70% said they have difficulty recruiting foster parents from minority groups. The average responding agency wants to recruit 8 more African American families, 2 more Native American families, and 5 more Latino families. Once minority foster parents are licensed, however, agencies don't believe they have a problem—75% say they have no difficulty retaining minority foster parents.

Children with significant medical and/or developmental needs. The average responding agency would like to recruit 6 additional foster families for children with significant medical and/or developmental needs.

Fragmentation. In addition to findings from the survey, ongoing contact with county DSS agencies has led the Division to conclude that fragmentation also undermines efforts to find and retain resource families. In some agencies, retention of resource families is seen solely as the job of the workers who license and train foster parents. In reality all

interactions with all agency staff have a large influence on the families' feelings about the agency. Improving collaboration and communication across the agency is crucial to increasing the satisfaction and commitment among resource families (AECF, 2001; Rodger et al. 2006).

Overconcern with Jurisdiction and Competition for Resources. The Division also believes that jurisdictional issues sometimes shift county agencies' focus away from ensuring the safety, well-being, and permanence of children and their families. While many agencies readily share effective practices with one another and pool resources (e.g., allowing prospective resource families to attend training in an adjoining county), others do not.

A possible solution to this challenge is the regional approach discussed in the box below.

CONCLUSION

This article describes the tremendous resources and strengths North Carolina has to draw upon to find families for children in foster care, as well as the challenges it is experiencing in this area. To explore why we experience these challenges and to learn what you can do to help, read on. ♦

IN FAVOR OF A REGIONAL APPROACH TO RESOURCE FAMILY R&R

The Division has come to believe that overconcern with jurisdiction and competition for resources sometimes impedes efforts to find and retain resource families in North Carolina. In response, the Division is urging public agencies to take a "regional approach" to recruiting and retaining resource parents, one that involves working closely and collaboratively with other public agencies, jointly offering foster parent pre-service training, and freely sharing information about available foster and adoptive homes.

Through regional collaboration, counties can pool scarce resources for recruitment materials and training, license families in a more timely manner, and potentially have access to more foster and adoptive homes that fit the individual needs of the children in care.

The vast majority of the 68 agencies responding to North Carolina's recent recruitment and retention survey said they were interested in exploring this approach. That's not surprising, since many county DSS agencies already engage in collaborative recruitment and retention practices to some degree.

The Division would like to see agencies intensify their efforts to work regionally. However, in keeping with

the ethos of our county-administered, state-supervised system, it is up to each county and each region to decide how to go about this.

One way to get started might be to use a regional recruitment and retention committee.

You can use existing inter-agency committees, collaboratives, and other groups to lead this effort on the local level, or you can start from scratch. Either way, it is a good idea to have the following people serve on the committee: DSS workers, DSS supervisors and program managers, foster parents, and community members with experience and connections in the fields of media relations, marketing/public relations, fundraising, local government, local business/chamber of commerce, local churches, and cultures and communities that reflect children in care.

If you are interested in expanding the regional approach in your area but need help getting started, contact the Jordan Institute for Families' Mellicent Blythe (mblythe@email.unc.edu) or John McMahon (johnmcmahon@mindspring.com).



Most NC agencies say they are open to taking a regional approach.

RETENTION /S RECRUITMENT

Our system demands a great deal from resource families. We want them to simultaneously play a variety of complex roles: reunification partner with the birth family, contributing member of the team of professionals serving the child and family, potential permanent family for the child if reunification is not possible, and loving caretaker for the child (Casey Family Programs, 2002). We want them to do everything from shared parenting to participating in child and family team meetings to taking the children to all their appointments.

Indeed, the surprising part of recruitment is not that we have trouble finding families, but that there are so many out there who feel called to come forward. But come forward they do. They make the tough decision to bring a child into their lives. They survive our stringent licensing process. They go to training. They take children into their homes.

And then, after all that, a great many of them leave. According to several studies, at least half of resource families quit within the first year of fostering (National Commission of Family Foster Care, 1991; Gibbs, 2005). The reason they most often give is not the difficulty of the child or challenges in their family life, but lack of support by the very system that worked so hard to recruit them.

How is this possible? More to the point, what can we do about it?

OUR SYSTEM'S AMBIVALENCE

In its 2002 report *Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families: The Promise and the Paradox*, Casey Family Programs attempts to answer these questions. The report suggests that the complex expectations we have of resource families are sometimes hard for social workers to manage, too. Within resource families' numerous and sometimes contradictory-seeming roles there is "ample opportunity for the lines of responsibility and authority to become blurred . . . and for the presumed partnership between the resource family and the social worker to become one that lacks trust and respect" (p. 54). In this context, true partnership is difficult.

Societal values may also be a barrier. One foster care professional cited in the report puts it this way:

In American culture . . . individualism is at the heart of what we value and cherish. So, if someone comes along who says, "I want to make this sacrifice to help others because it's in my heart, or Jesus said to give, or I want to help a child," there is something in



Why do so many families go to the trouble to get licensed, only to quit soon after?

most of us that just doesn't trust this motive—we are suspect and we communicate this suspicion through code words such as "understanding a person's motivation." We imply "they are doing it for the money" or . . . they are "religious fanatics" if their motivation is based on a philosophical framework of God or church. . . .

The sad reality is, more often than not, should a member of the community come forward to say, I want to be a part of "the village that is raising this child" our first words

are: "You have to be fingerprinted first." How does this engage and draw families to be a part of the community helping system?

Other retention barriers identified by *The Promise and the Paradox*, which draws its conclusions from interviews with stakeholders in many states, include agencies' failure to share adequate and necessary information with resource families due to unfounded concerns about confidentiality and the way resource families are treated during investigations of child maltreatment in their homes.

WHAT AGENCIES CAN DO

If it is true that our failure to provide adequate support is impeding our ability to ensure children have the resource families they need, what can be done about it?

A good first step is to assess the situation in your agency. Conduct satisfaction surveys with your current resource families and exit interviews or surveys with those who leave to find out whether support is an issue. To support resource families *The Promise and the Paradox* suggests that agencies must also ensure:

- Staff are trained during their orientation about the importance of creating strong partnerships with resource families.
- Staff view resource families as role models and mentors to the birth family and as such, incorporate these roles into the planning when crafting case plans.
- Staff practice this partnership by inviting families to all team meetings and asking resource families to provide feedback on the well-being of children in their care.
- Staff are trained to respond to resource families' requests for help in a timely manner and to be available for crisis situations.

The Promise and the Paradox can be found on the Casey Family Programs website at <<http://www.casey.org>>. ♦

WHAT CAN I AND MY AGENCY DO TO IMPROVE RECRUITMENT?

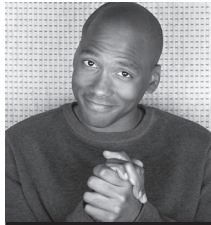
As AdoptUsKids explains in its recruitment work plan guide for adoption and foster care program managers, finding and preparing families to adopt and foster is a complex process that involves hand-offs from recruiter to trainer, to licensing professional, to placement worker, and so on.

“Everyone who comes into contact with a prospective parent is part of the process. From the agency director to the person who answers the telephone, recruitment is everybody’s job. High functioning organizations tie recruitment to their mission statements and encourage all staff to be community ambassadors for the children and families they serve.

All involved must have the same value system and a sense of urgency about completing the work as soon as possible. The longer it takes, the less likely the family is to stay in the process. However, if a parent is treated well throughout the process and helped to feel part of the team early on, he or she is more likely to stay the course and not drop out.”

10 THINGS YOU CAN DO

The following suggestions are reprinted from AdoptUsKids’ *Getting More for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts, Practitioner’s Guide*. We hope you find them helpful.



Everyone who interacts with resource families has an impact on R&R.

1. Be informed about local, state, and national recruitment initiatives and calendar. This information will help you schedule your work so you can be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to the possibility of an influx of inquiries.

2. Regardless of what your job is, volunteer to participate in your agency’s community recruitment projects. From the agency director to the person who answers the telephone, recruitment is everybody’s job. Successful agencies encourage all staff and resource parents to be mindful of the need for families

wherever they go and help out with recruitment.

3. Be customer-friendly. Foster and adoptive parents are the most important resource we have to give the children we serve. How you treat them will determine whether they stay in the process and, ultimately, become part of your team. Try to put yourself in their shoes at every stage of the process. How would you like to be treated?

4. Know the characteristics and needs of the children in your area who need foster and adoptive parents. Speak of the children who need care and the role of the foster and adoptive parent optimistically and honestly. As prospective parents go through the process, continue to provide them with reliable information to make

SUGGESTIONS FROM YOUR COLLEAGUES IN NORTH CAROLINA

As part of North Carolina’s resource family R&R efforts, this spring the Division of Social Services and the Jordan Institute for Families asked a number of experienced foster parent recruiters in the state for their “secrets” of success. Here are some of the suggestions they shared:

1. Provide good case management — lots of TLC.
2. Have child placement workers go through MAPP training, to develop relationships with foster parents and to increase understanding of the foster parent perspective.
3. Have foster parent co-trainers for MAPP. This not only improves the training for participants, but sends a clear message of partnership and respect.
4. Include foster parents in decision-making, including child and family team meetings and treatment team meetings.
5. Provide support for a local foster parent association, and participation in state and national foster parent associations.
6. Provide respite care.
7. Provide mentors for new foster parents
8. Offer relevant, helpful trainings/meetings on a regular basis, or provide foster parents with other resources for training. Include child placement workers and other agency staff as much as possible.
9. Be responsive to foster parents. Encourage or implement a policy of returning calls within 24-hours. Have workers give their supervisor’s name and number on their outgoing voice mail, and update it to let callers know when they’ll be out of the office.
10. Show your appreciation to foster parents: annual dinner, picnics, birthday cards, gift cards, holiday parties, Christmas presents, social events, etc. Do all you can to encourage child placement workers as well as licensing workers to attend the events.
11. Survey foster parents annually on their needs and ideas.
12. Provide opportunities to develop consistent rapport between foster parents and caseworkers.

informed decisions about fostering and adopting, including full disclosure regarding the children, their needs and service needs of birth families. Respect the parents. Give them the opportunity to explore areas where they may have doubts. Trust their ability to make good decisions for themselves. This can be done at all stages of the process.

5. Be knowledgeable about all of the steps of the recruitment to placement process. Prospective parents will have lots of questions. Be prepared to answer them whether you are answering the phone, providing training or doing a home visit. Promise to get back to them with answers to questions you can't respond to on the spot.

6. Work to rule people in, not out of the process. It is important that the practitioner realize that the most ordinary, and sometimes unusual, people have grown into amazing resource parents with training and support. Most of the time parents present themselves to the agency for an altruistic purpose. They have passion and emotion about this. Our challenge is to learn how to maintain that passion and turn it into informed commitment.

7. Try to utilize seasoned foster and adoptive parents to help support new parents through the process. Many agencies are partnering with their resource parents and/or parent groups to help in recruiting. Parents handle initial inquiries, participate in home visits, are part of the training team and provide support to new parents during the process. Agencies that do this are modeling the team process from day one.

8. Collaborate with other community workers and organizations. Networking with community groups and partnering on recruitment efforts can be satisfying, supportive and productive for the practitioner. Faith-based and community-based organizations that endorse your efforts can bring new families to your door. These organizations can also provide space and resources to make your orientation and training meetings more accessible to parents, making better attendance likely.

9. Be a team player. Everybody who has a hand in recruiting and preparing families to foster and adopt can be made to feel that they are part of a team in a very important endeavor. This is a complex process that involves handoffs from recruiter to trainer, to family assessment worker, to placement worker, etc. All involved should have the same value system and a sense of urgency about completing the work as soon as possible.

10. Be sensitive to the prospective foster and adoptive parents' sense of time. The longer it takes to move

TRACKING & EVALUATION ARE KEY

Responses to the Division's recent survey revealed inconsistent evaluation efforts on the part of county DSS agencies when it comes to foster parent recruitment and retention. This is a serious concern because to recruit a pool of resource families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in need of homes and to accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their recruitment efforts, child welfare agencies must have a thorough and integrated understanding of the characteristics of the children in foster care and the characteristics of its resource families. This is particularly true for targeted recruitment, which is one of the most effective ways of attracting the right kinds of families for the particular kinds of children in care (AECF, 2002).

Nationally, one thing some agencies are starting to track is the length of time each step of the recruitment process takes. These agencies seek to understand the reasons why people drop out. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, families are often lost in the transition between steps and multiple hand-offs from one staff person and/or stage of the process to another, which are illustrated below:

WHEN DO GAPS OCCUR?

<u>Between</u>	<u>And</u>
The first call	Orientation
Training	Application
Assessment	Approval
Orientation	Pre-service training
Application	Assessment
Approval	Placement

To learn more about this approach to enhancing recruitment efforts, consult "Recruitment, Training, & Support: The Essential Tools of Foster Care" <<http://www.aecf.org>>.

from step to step, the less likely the family will stay in the process. However, if a parent is treated well and helped to feel part of the team early on, he or she is more likely to stay the course. It is important to be honest about the reasons for delays when they occur and to help the parent use this time in productive ways, e.g., involve them with other resource parents.

To learn more about what you can do to recruit and support resource families, consult *Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts: Practitioner's Guide*, which can be found online at <<http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/practitionersGuide.pdf>>.

EFFORTS TO SUPPORT COUNTY DSS AGENCIES

North Carolina is striving to ensure public agencies have the support and resources they need to find and retain high quality families for children in care. As part of this, the NC Division of Social Services has begun to partner with county DSS agencies and others on the following efforts:

1. Survey. As described on page 2, the Division recently surveyed county agencies about their strengths and needs related to foster parent R&R.

2. Clinics. To help agencies develop effective strategies, nine R&R clinics were held statewide in spring 2008.

3. R&R Guide. Using input from the clinics and nationally identified best practices, the Division and the Jordan Institute for Families will soon develop and disseminate a recruitment and retention guide for agencies and their communities.

4. Periodic Webinars. In State Fiscal

Year 2008-09, the Division and the Jordan Institute for Families will conduct periodic online seminars. These 60-90 minute sessions will provide time for sharing successes and consulting with experts and peers from across the state. Each event will focus on a key R&R topic.

5. Tracking/Measurement. The Division will soon work with stakeholders to establish a method of tracking data related to foster parent R&R and making this information available online. County agencies will then be able to assess whether foster families reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in care, in accordance with federal law and our state's Program Improvement Plan.

6. Technical assistance to individual county agencies. The Division and its partners will provide ongoing support to county agencies as they implement effective R&R practices.

7. Pursuit of funding changes.

The Division is working with the Governor and the General Assembly to increase the foster care board rate/adoption assistance rate and to standardize rates paid to private agencies that care for children in foster care.

8. Pursuit of federal funding. The Division has applied for a five-year federal grant from the Children's Bureau, which would provide additional funding for foster parent recruitment and retention.

With these efforts and resources, North Carolina will provide technology, training, and infrastructure support for the important goal of finding and retaining families for all children in foster care. ♦

"The Division is working hard to help your agency find foster families for children."

—Bob Hensley,
NC Division of Social Services

IN THIS ISSUE: FINDING FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

