

HOMES for BLACK CHILDREN: PROJECT FAMILY TIES

Project Family Ties has the expressed purpose of increasing the opportunity for permanency through openness in adoption. The Project has a target of 150 foster children from the Detroit metropolitan area to participate in open adoptions. The Project specifically targeted children 11 years of age and older, as well as sibling groups regardless of age.

The Project's model consists of six components: (1) recruiting foster and pre-adoptive families, (2) training foster families and pre-adoptive families on permanency and open adoption, (3) life enrichment for youth in foster care and adoption (4) a multi-disciplinary team approach to permanency planning for individual youth, (5) youth mentorship and leadership development, and (6) adoption placement.

Recruitment consisting of a three pronged approach has been successful in maintaining a consistent increase in foster and adoptive homes over the life of the Project for our targeted population. This approach includes maintaining a reciprocal relationship with faith based organizations; participation in established community activities providing information about the program; and child specific recruitment efforts for children who do not have an identified permanency plan.

Training is designed to provide detailed and specific information about adoption, openness, and the characteristics of the youth involved in the Project. By design, training is delivered in a group format. The types of groups are informational or didactic, and support groups. This component has yielded an increase of families willing to explore placement of older youth. We include an evaluation component after each training session to determine the needs of the participants. This is a very important element to include in programming in that information presented will accommodate the need of the participants. Support groups create a sense of community and shared experiences.

The Structured Decision Making approach, in conjunction with the child adoption assessment, explores permanency plans and openness options for youth referred to the Project.

The centerpiece of the Project is the youth. It is important to provide an environment which promotes a positive sense of self. This is accomplished through encouraging youth to participate in decision making regarding their adoption preference. Youth leaders, known as Youth Ambassadors, have actively participated through presentations in community recruitment and training events. Twelve Youth Ambassadors have been developed. One youth serves on the Michigan Youth Advisory Board.

Adoption placement has continued to be the major accomplishment to date. One hundred eighty-six youth have been referred and 125 youth have been placed through the Project's efforts. The Project's outcomes are as follows: 57% relative adoptions, 32% foster parent adoptions, and 11% were recruited families. Additionally, 53 youth were between 15 and 20 years of age and 42 youth were between the ages of 10 and 14. More males were served than females (53% were males and 47% were females). Thirty-one sibling groups were served, with one group consisting of 13 members. To-date, thirty-three sibling groups have been placed.

Lessons Learned/Recommendations: (1) Reciprocity and establishing a relationship is the best means of partnering with the faith-based community (2) utilizing a multifaceted recruitment approach will reach the largest possible audience interested in open adoption and sib-group adoption (3) providing training on a number of fronts will increase the likelihood of permanency for the children in the Project (4) training prospective adoptive families as well as professionals such as social workers and court officials is needed to reinforce and support the goals of openness in adoption (5) preparing youth through mentorship and leadership development will enhance their understanding of open adoption (6) budget development should include allocations for transportation, recruitment, retention activities as well as post adoption services that may be needed to support the adoption.

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