

Site Visit Report: Denver's Village: Wrapping Families With Community Support

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Award #: 90CO1037

Cluster: Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System Discretionary Grant Cluster

Grantee: Denver Human Services (DHS)

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SUMMARY

In 2008, the Children's Bureau awarded eight 5-year grants for its Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System grant cluster. One of those grants was given to [Denver Human Services](#) to plan and implement Denver's Village: Wrapping Families with Community Support. Other project partners include Fresh Start, Lowry Family Center, Sisters of Color, Denver Indian Family Resource Center, and the YMCA. Additionally Denver's Village works with multiple businesses and faith- and community-based organizations throughout Denver. The University Of Denver Graduate School Of Social Work is conducting the project evaluation.

Denver's Village has four primary components:

- **Recruitment and retention.** Denver's Village utilizes Community Based Recruitment Teams (CBRTs) to increase the number of resource families available for placement. The project divided Denver into four areas, with each having its own CBRT, and a fifth CBRT serves the Native American community throughout the city. A Community Outreach Worker (COW) coordinates each CBRT and serves as a liaison between the project and the community. The COWs work with families, community residents, faith-based and community organizations, and businesses to build partnerships, establish community and DHS supports for families, and develop recruitment and retention activities and events.
- **Permanency and concurrent planning.** The project has several initiatives to promote permanency and concurrent planning, including the following:
 - Permanency-decision making (PDM) to help guide decision-making regarding the certification and approval of kinship care, foster, and adoptive homes for children who have been in out-of-home care for more than 90 days
 - An expedited adoption project to address permanency needs for children in cases where termination of parental rights has occurred but legal permanency has not been completed
 - Extreme recruitment efforts for children who are free for adoption, including "fosterware" parties and the distribution of fliers, bookmarks, and other items with the child's information
 - Permanency roundtables to determine what actions are needed to achieve permanence for children, particularly those who have been in care for 12 months or longer
 - Intensive family finding and support to help place children with relatives or kin



- **Data.** Denver's Village utilizes data that are available through existing systems to guide its approach, and it also has developed the Denver Child Placement Database to track current and potential resource families and help caseworkers manage their interactions with those families.
- **Agency cultural shift.** Denver's Village undertook several initiatives to achieve an agency cultural shift that supported improvement in the recruitment of resource families, the inclusion of resource families in workgroups and decision-making, and the agency's response to families who contact DHS.

Over the course of the project, DHS has become more comfortable with community members and organizations playing a crucial role in the recruitment of resource families. DHS had previously viewed recruitment as an internal activity with only occasional community assistance, but DHS now realizes that community organizations can successfully and independently conduct recruitment activities. Additionally, the COWs give community members, youth, resource families, and other organizations opportunities to take leadership roles, which helps build sustainability for the initiative.

Project staff believe that part of Denver's Village success is attributed to its trying to assist the communities as a whole (i.e., beyond just child welfare) rather than solely focusing on the recruitment of resource families. This assists the project in building trust within the community and strengthening its partnerships. It also helps prevent the need for out-of-home placements and has expanded resource family recruitment.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In 2008, the Children's Bureau awarded eight 5-year grants for its Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System grant cluster. One of those grants was given to Denver Human Services (www.denvergov.org/HumanServices) to plan and implement Denver's Village: Wrapping Families with Community Support. Other project partners include Fresh Start, Lowry Family Center, Sisters of Color, Denver Indian Family Resource Center, and the YMCA. Additionally Denver's Village works with multiple businesses and faith- and community-based organizations throughout Denver. The University Of Denver Graduate School Of Social Work is conducting the project evaluation.

The following are the goals of Denver's Village:

- To increase the number of resource families recruited, supported, trained, and retained so that these families more closely mirror the children in or at risk of being in out-of-home care
- To increase the number of resource families recruited, supported, trained, and retained within the neighborhoods where children are being removed in order to minimize trauma and to maintain natural community connections and supports (e.g., school, church, friends, family)
- To expedite the permanency process to achieve permanency for children within the Child and Family Services Review guidelines
- To utilize data to evaluate and measure success and to make course corrections, as warranted
- To achieve sustainable agency shifts in practice and culture

Denver's Village has four major components:

- Recruitment and retention
- Permanency and concurrent planning

- Data
- Agency cultural shift

The following provides additional information about these components.

Recruitment and Retention

Denver's Village utilizes Community Based Recruitment Teams (CBRTs) to increase the number of resource families available to adopt and provide foster care for children and youth. In 2001, Denver became a site for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family initiative, and using data and community feedback, DHS divided Denver into seven areas for that initiative. Denver's Village originally aligned its own CBRTs with those seven areas because community networks, partnerships, and relationships had already been established. With the economic downturn, however, many of the community organizations supporting the seven areas could not continue their efforts. In 2009, Denver's Village reorganized the seven areas into four (East, North/Northwest Five Points, Northeast, and Southwest), each with its own CBRT. There is also a fifth CBRT that works across the city to recruit and retain Native American resource families. The CBRTs are made up of community organizations, Community Collaborative Partnership Centers (Family to Family Sites), agency staff, community residents, faith-based organizations, businesses, other major systems (e.g., school partners), and existing resource families. Each CBRT plans and implements four recruitment and/or retention activities monthly and one large recruitment event quarterly. In addition to having a community-level focus, the CBRTs also work as a team on citywide recruitment and retention activities and events. Additionally, each CBRT is aligned with the resource family support groups in the neighborhood to assist with support and retention.

The project hired five half-time Community Outreach Workers (COWs) to coordinate the project's efforts for each of the CBRTs. The COWs also often work across their target areas in order to establish citywide partnerships and activities. They are part-time employees of Fresh Start and are not DHS employees. The COWs serve as liaisons between the project and the community. Their primary task is finding ways to recruit and retain resource families, but their work extends into supporting families and the community as a whole. The COWs work with resource families, community residents, and faith-based organizations, community organizations, and businesses to build partnerships, establish community and DHS supports for families, and develop recruitment and retention activities and events.

In addition to general recruitment, Denver's Village also has targeted recruitment strategies that are well embedded into the work of the CBRTs and the community. The project established the Denver Collaborative for the Recruitment and Retention of African American Resource Families (DCRRAARF) and also has targeted recruitment strategies for Hispanic families, Native American families, homes for adolescents and teens, and homes for siblings. It also includes targeted efforts to increase the number of children who are placed within their own neighborhood.

The following are examples of activities or events planned by the CBRTs:

- The East CBRT works in partnership with the staff, students, and families at Martin Luther King Jr. Early College High School to hold regular community meetings, which the students have dubbed "Taco Nite." This event began as a way for the school and DHS to engage the community further, but it has become a large community celebration. A restaurant in the community provides food at a discount, and students from the school, many of whom are in foster care, take the lead in planning each event. Taco Nite, which usually is attended by 600 to 800 people, often features poetry and dancing by the students. Denver's Village has a table at the event so that parents can learn more about the initiative, how to become a resource family, and other community resources.

- Northeast CBRT has worked with a local meat market to establish discounts for foster families. The market even has a package of meat specifically packaged for foster families.
- The North/Northwest Five Points CBRT holds meet-and-greets in local restaurants to recruit resource families. One of those restaurants is only open for breakfast and lunch but opens in the evenings for these meetings as their contribution to recruitment and retention efforts.
- Two CBRTs have developed Friday Nights Out events for foster families in their communities through partnerships with local organizations. The North/Northwest Five Points CBRT is working with the local YMCA, and the Northeast CBRT is working with the Boys and Girls Club. Every other week foster families can bring their children to the YMCA or the Boys and Girls Club for free child activities so that the parents can have time to themselves. Some parents use this time for a date night, to sleep, or to go shopping.
- The CBRTs also partner with local organizations to provide support and appreciation to resource families. For example, one CBRT partners with local churches to deliver holiday baskets to resource families for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Another partnered with two high schools to deliver Mother's and Father's Day cards, as well as food baskets, to resource families. The high school students also put up recruitment fliers throughout their neighborhoods. Additionally, CBRTs have set up pool events and movie nights as recruitment and retention activities.
- The Native American CBRT hosts an annual Kinship Appreciation Powwow for Native American families and is also creating a culturally appropriate recruitment video to aid in the recruitment of Native American families.

To help establish a dialogue between DHS and the African-American community, Denver's Village worked with the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents (NRCRFAP) at AdoptUSKids (now known as the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids) to develop a listening tour. The listening tour gave community members and leaders the opportunity to interact with DHS staff, including frontline workers and administrators, in order to ask questions or express their opinions. The project wanted to gain additional insight about how the community viewed the agency and also let the community know that DHS was there to assist them. DHS followed up with the community and participants after the listening tours to address their concerns, and the following are examples of changes that took place as a result of the tours:

- Transparency in the presentation of data
- The appointment of a half-time liaison in the African-American community
- Having staff dedicated to answering the recruitment line rather than utilizing a voice mail message
- A streamlined certification process

The agency has continued its dialogue with the community on an ongoing basis to respond to concerns and encourage their involvement in the recruitment and retention of resource families.

Furthermore, the CBRTs are working together to conduct town hall meetings in the African-American, Hispanic, and Native American communities to build awareness of the project and to recruit more families of color. A meeting in the African-American community is scheduled for August/September 2012. It will bring together the Mayor's office, city council members, DHS management and staff, faith-based organizations, resource families, and other community

leaders to address the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system and the lack of resource families available to meet the cultural needs of these children.

Permanency and Concurrent Planning

To promote permanency efforts and concurrent planning, Denver's Village has focused on adding or enhancing the following aspects of DHS' service array.

Permanency Decision-Making (PDM). This process was developed to guide decision-making regarding the certification and approval of kinship care, foster, and adoptive homes. It also assists with the development and implementation of concurrent plans for children who have been in out-of-home care for 90 days or more, until permanency is achieved. This process focuses on the ability, strength, and needs of the child as well as the ability, strength, and commitment of the prospective family. There are two distinct teams in place to coordinate the PDM process:

- The PDM Certification team reviews and approves new resource families. The team also helps build a network of support for resource families, including kin.
- The PDM Matching team seeks to match children with families or develop child-specific recruitment plans for children that are not matched with an existing family. This team also focuses on concurrent planning efforts, which are required in Colorado when a child has been in out-of-home care for 90 days.

The PDM teams have representatives from each of the following areas as standing team members for each child:

- Foster Care Support
- Kinship Support
- Adoption
- Subsidy
- Utilization Management
- Intake, Ongoing Child Protection, and Youth Services
- Home study/Certification
- Recruitment/Training
- Family Advocacy Program
- Community Members
- Guardian *ad Litem*

Expedited Adoption Project. Denver's Village developed and implemented the Expedited Adoption Project in 2009 to address permanency needs for children in cases in which a termination of parental rights had occurred but legal permanency had not been completed. The project looked at the data for this population and found that there were far too many children remaining in care without solid systems in place to ensure that permanency was achieved in a timely manner (i.e., in accordance to the standards of the Child and Family Services Review). This project focused on removing barriers for the backlog of children awaiting finalization and implementing a standard work flow to ensure that children achieve timely permanency. For example, Denver's Village implemented a system for tracking terminations of parental rights (TPRs) in order to expedite the adoption process. Under this system, the caseworker, supervisor, and other staff that assist with adoption finalizations are immediately notified when a TPR occurs. This allows the agency to put the case on a fast track toward adoption. Another example is how the project shifted child study timelines. Previously, the child study, which is used as the basis for subsidy negotiations, was conducted after the TPR occurred.

Other aspects of the cases could not be completed until the child study was final, which delayed permanency efforts. Now the child study process begins upon the child's removal from the home, and the other aspects of the case can continue even if the child study is not final.

The Expedited Adoption Project has resulted in hundreds of children and youth achieving permanency through adoption since 2009, with the anticipation that more than 200 additional children will be adopted in 2012. (See the Outcomes section of this report.) This project was set up to be fully sustainable once the Denver's Village grant has ended.

Extreme Recruitment. Denver's Village conducts extreme recruitment efforts for children who are free for adoption and for whom a permanent home has not been found. In a recent extreme recruitment event, one CBRT worked with a local church to use a typical Sunday service, which was attended by more than 300 parishioners, to assist in identifying families for 13 children waiting for permanent homes. Several families expressed interest in becoming a resource family, and more than a dozen additional families volunteered to host a "fosterware" party. A fosterware party involves a COW and a DHS staff person speaking to the host family and their friends about the need for permanent and temporary homes for children. On Mother's Day, another church plans to distribute bookmarks, posters, and fliers for children and youth who need a permanent family. The bookmarks include a child's picture and brief biography.

Permanency Roundtables. The purpose of the Roundtables is to determine what actions are needed to achieve permanency for a child. The Roundtables focus primarily on youth but are held for any child who has been in care for 12 months or longer. They include DHS staff, the youth in care, and individuals the youth identifies as being important to them (e.g., relatives, friends, mentors). Roundtables help involve youth in the decision-making process, and the youth often identify potential placements and permanent families. While achieving legal permanence is the primary goal, in the absence of identifying a permanent family, the Roundtables also identify permanent connections for youth as they transition to adulthood.

Intensive Family Finding and Support. DHS practice is to make every effort to place children with relatives or kin. As a part of this grant, Denver's Village instituted an Intensive Family Finding Process that searches for family or kin as placement options from the moment an out-of-home placement decision is made and every 6 months throughout the life of the case. To support kinship families, the project launched what is now known as the Kinship Advocacy and Advisory Network (KAAN), a provider-driven and directed network to assist relatives and kin. Community members and organizations, as well as DHS kinship support staff, support the network. KAAAN offers a variety of services for relatives who are parenting other family members' children, and DHS assigns a kinship support worker to each kinship family identified as a placement. The support worker can help determine the path for placement, assess which supports are needed for the family to be successful, and assist the family through the certification process. The worker can also offer the following:

- Financial assistance, such as emergency funds and budgeting education
- Referrals to community resources, including legal assistance
- Navigation support to help the families understand the court and child welfare systems
- Peer support, such as monthly support groups for noncertified families
- A support hotline
- Training for certification and contacts to resolve any legal issues

Additionally, the kinship support worker conducts a weekly Kinship Orientation in the community.

The permanency and concurrent planning efforts for the project may at times serve the same children, but they are organized so that they do not duplicate the same services or supports. Each service or program focuses on a unique aspect of the case. For example, a child's case

may receive services or supports through the Expedited Adoption Program to accelerate the adoption process and through KAAAN to provide services to that child's kin, who may be caring for him or her.

Data

Denver's Village utilizes data that are available through existing systems to guide its approach. The project obtains most of its data from Colorado Trails, the State's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Using Colorado Trails, the project is able to view a wide array of data, including child characteristics, who are the children in care, how many children were removed from their homes, how many resource families are certified by DHS and their location in the community, and the usage rate of the existing resource family homes. The project breaks out this data by CBRT community, views historical data, and views data from similar counties in Colorado (e.g., Adams, Jefferson, and Arapahoe).

To help bolster its recruitment efforts, Denver's Village created the Denver Child Placement Database. The database helps the project track current and potential resource families. It tracks families from their first call to DHS and allows DHS staff to update their status and information. Currently, DHS workers enter the data into the database, but the project is determining if there is a way to connect the database with Colorado Trails to reduce data entry duplication. The database also allows the project to track its marketing and recruitment efforts so they can better assess the efficacy of those efforts and know how families are coming into contact with the agency.

In addition to being a repository for data on resource families, the database also helps assign and track tasks for DHS staff. This helps the caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators manage the work, which helps move families through the process more efficiently. Previously, some families had contacted the agency, but without a way to effectively track their information, they never received any follow-up from DHS. The database also includes maps of the CBRT areas, which assists the project in referring current and potential resource families to the CBRTs for support. The project hopes to eventually add a component to that would allow the database to assist with matching children with resource families.

Agency Cultural Shifts

Denver's Village undertook several initiatives to achieve shifts in agency culture and practice that support improvement in the recruitment of resource families, the inclusion of resource families in workgroups and decision-making, and the agency's response to families who contact DHS.

Customer Service Leadership Team (CSLT). The CSLT, which was created in January 2011, includes approximately 15 to 20 core members, including DHS staff (managers, supervisors, and frontline workers), resource parents, two staff from the State child welfare agency, and staff from community organizations. The following are the three priorities of the CSLT:

- Integrating customer service standards into daily work
- Streamlining the resource family certification process
- Establishing and implementing communication and resolution processes

The CSLT was established to address feedback DHS had received from resource parents that the agency was not responsive to their needs or the needs of the children in their care. The resource parents felt that they had to push too hard to be heard by the agency. DHS requested assistance from the NRCRRFAP to help develop the mission, vision, and standards for the CSLT and support a series of listening tours to obtain additional feedback from the community.

The following standards for the team were adopted by the DHS Executive Committee:

- Respect: Every family, child, and staff member is treated with dignity and respect.
- Safety: The welfare and safety of children, families, and staff is a paramount concern.
- Commitment: Everyone follows through on commitments and meets timelines.
- Compassion: Every family, child, and staff member is treated with empathy.
- Authority: Members of the team continually examine the use of power, use of self, and personal biases.

Streamlining and Quality Improvement. To address the streamlining of the certification process, a CSLT workgroup planned a weeklong rapid improvement event using "lean" principles. Lean is a process that originated in the auto industry to maximize value to the customer and minimize waste. It can be used for both production and services. DHS had determined that the process to certify resource families was too slow, had too many duplicated and wasteful steps, was not transparent to the community, and was too linear and compartmentalized. The workgroup mapped all the steps in the certification process, determined which steps were unnecessary or required change, and developed an improved process. The existing process certified approximately 180 families per year, with an average of 248 days to certification. The target for the new process is certifying 225 families per year, with the process only taking 90 to 120 days on average. The project will continue to use these tools and processes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of other processes (e.g., conducting home studies).

Department Child Welfare Values. The project also developed a set of child welfare values for DHS, including the following:

- Strong families: Each family in the DHS system deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Strong resource families: Resource families will receive the support and training they need to be an effective partner in working with families.
- Safe children: All children deserve a safe and permanent family.
- Strong, effective workforce: The DHS staff deserve a workplace where all are treated with respect, integrity, and honesty.
- Supportive communities: Strong relationships with community partners strengthen our capacity to keep children and families safe.

These values apply to the entire Child Welfare Division and not just Denver's Village. Other divisions in DHS have been developing their own set of values based on those developed by the project for the Child Welfare Division.

SITE VISIT HIGHLIGHTS

The site visit occurred on May 9–10, 2012, in Denver, CO. The following is an overview of the meetings that occurred:

Day 1

- Denver Human Services Main Office: Presentation about the general project by the grant management team (Margaret Booker, Program Director, Denver Human Services (DHS); Fabiola Esposito, Lead Worker and Grant Coordinator, DHS; Anthony Clayton, Trainer/Recruiter, DHS; Jeanne Granville, Executive Director, Fresh Start; and Michele Hanna, Evaluator, University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work)
- Tocabe American Indian Eatery: Discussion with business partners and additional members of project team (Grant, Community Outreach Worker, Fresh Start; Kristen

- Bunker, Recruitment Unit, DHS; Ben Jacobs, Owner, Tocabe and the grant management team)
- Cleaves Memorial CME Church: Meeting of the Denver Collaboration for the Recruitment and Retention of African American Resource Families (Aaron Neal, Executive Director, Heart of the Father; Mark Hill, Senior Pastor, Cleaves Memorial CME Church, Paul Huckabee, Assistant, Heart of the Father; Rikki Ruben, Community Outreach Worker, Fresh Start; Victoria Garcia, Recruitment Unit Caseworker, DHS; Helen Onyeali, Kinship Unit Supervisor, DHS; and the grant management team)
 - Encompass Denver: Meeting of the East Community Based Resource Team (CBRT) (Twenty-three people were in attendance, including the East CBRT Community Outreach Worker, foster parents, the DHS Adoption Liaison, the grant management team, and representatives from the DHS Foster Care Unit, Encompass Denver, local businesses, the DHS Home Study and Certification Unit, the DHS Kinship Unit, Healthy Communities, the Martin Luther King Jr. Early College High School, and other Denver public schools and faith-based organizations.)
 - **Day 2**
DHS Main Office: Joint meeting of the Resource Family Customer Service Leadership Team and the Denver's Village Advisory Committee (Seventeen people were in attendance, including the Community Outreach Workers, the DHS adoption liaison, a foster parent, the DHS Adoption Liaison, the grant management team, and representatives from the Denver Indian Family Resource Center, the DHS Utilization Management Unit, the DHS Foster Care Unit, Fresh Start and the Lowry Family Center)

LESSONS LEARNED

- It can take years to build the types of relationships required to make a project of this scope successful. The project and its partners need to be committed to a long-term change process.
- Denver's Village has developed partnerships with people and organizations that are already respected in the community (e.g., public schools, churches), which helps families and other community members feel more comfortable with the project.
- Being transparent with the community helps to build trust. For example, during question and answer sessions, agency or project staff should answer questions in a forthright manner rather than talking around the answer or giving the answer that staff believe the community wants to hear.
- Cooperation between the Community Based Recruitment Teams (CBRTs) can strengthen the project. CBRTs should not focus on who will receive credit for recruiting a particular family. It is more important that they share ideas and work together to support children and families. By collaborating with each other, the Community Outreach Workers (COWs) know each other's strengths and weaknesses and support one another across the CBRTs.
- Communication among the project team is critical, especially with many project members based offsite.
- A key message to utilize when working with the community is that everyone should view the children in need of homes as "our kids" rather than "their kids."
- Community members and organizations can play a crucial role in the recruitment of resource families. Denver Human Services (DHS) had previously seen recruitment as an activity that should be conducted primarily by agency staff with only occasional

- community assistance. Now, DHS realizes that organizations such as the CBRTs, Heart of the Father, and Cleaves Memorial can successfully and independently conduct recruitment activities.
- The COWs are essential to leading and conducting the CBRT activities. During the first 2 years of the project, there was no COW position. During this time, it was difficult to coordinate the day-to-day work of the CBRTs without staff solely dedicated to that role.
 - What works for one CBRT may not work for another CBRT or in another community. For example, the Northeast CBRT organized a successful series of Friday Nights Out with its local YMCA. Another CBRT attempted a similar event with its local YMCA, but it was not nearly as successful. Each community has a unique set of characteristics that require unique approaches. Rather than trying to replicate every aspect of a successful activity from another community, programs can try to capture the essence of what made it work, such as finding a unifying factor to bolster community support or meeting a particular community need.

Successful Strategies

- Extensively reviewing data has allowed the project to assess progress, determine problems that are occurring, and make course corrections.
- It was pivotal to have a community voice (Fresh Start) on the project management team. This helped establish trust with the community and move the project forward more quickly.
- The project established strong connections with the Spanish-language media in Denver, which in turn helped build better relationships with the Hispanic community and improve recruitment. One of the Spanish-language radio stations gives Denver's Village airtime to talk about the project, and print publications may provide free advertising space or articles about the project.
- All the COWs currently live or previously lived in the communities in which they work. This helps establish an immediate trust with the community.
- One of resource families created Play It Forward cards to help encourage people to become resource parents. The cards have contact information for DHS on one side, and the other side says, "You've been spotted being a great parent! Play it forward. Be a great parent for a foster child." There is also space on the card where the recipient can write down her contact information. COWs, DHS staff, or community members can present these cards to parents who are interacting well with their own children. Passing the card along, which is a compliment to the parent, is a way to break the ice and talk about being a resource family.
- The DHS recruitment phone line used to go automatically to voicemail. After hearing feedback during the listening tour about DHS' inaccessibility, the agency decided to have the line go to a live person during normal business hours.
- Project staff believe that part of Denver's Village success is attributed to its trying to assist the communities as a whole rather than solely focusing on the recruitment of resource families. This helps build trust within the community and strengthens its members. This could help prevent the need to place children in out-of-home care and also helps put families in a better position to become resource families.

Challenges

- The relationship between DHS and the African-American community has improved through the work of the project but is still in need of healing. Many people did not anticipate how long it would take to build better relationships and improve recruitment of African-American resource families.
- The project has worked hard to engage the faith-based community, but it generally has to connect with them individually because there are no existing unifying groups or associations among the faith-based community. Additionally, although many faith-based

- organizations have the desire to assist, many of their resources already are spread thin, thereby limiting how much they can help.
- There is only enough funding to give the COWs part-time positions, but they are really needed fulltime. The COWs often work well beyond their 20 hours per week.
 - In the early stages of the project, some DHS staff felt threatened when asked to cede some of their recruitment responsibilities, especially to the COWs. This is a natural occurrence when asked to let go of some of responsibilities, and these feelings need to be acknowledged and addressed by the agency.
 - The community often wants to act faster than the agency when making policy and practice changes. The community may not realize the number of layers a seemingly easy decision must go through to be approved, and they become unsatisfied with the process. To help set realistic expectations within the community, agency staff should explore how decision-making protocols will affect a possible change before they approach the community about the idea. They also should educate the community about agency decision-making processes.
 - The project needed to work through agency issues that are out of its control, such as budget cuts and priority changes.
 - The following are challenges to the project evaluation:
 - Turnover among agency staff and community members makes it difficult to gather data about the implementation from a consistent group of people throughout the project, which limits the comparisons that can be made over time.
 - Because many components of the project augment existing DHS services and structures, it often is difficult to determine what outcomes have been caused by the project. Additionally, new initiatives in DHS and the community may have started during the project's implementation.

Recommendations

- Programs should use multiple methods to reach out to the community (e.g., events, personal contacts, fliers). Additionally, programs need to be proactive in their communication approaches. For example, if staff are sitting at a booth at a community event, they should actively seek out people to recruit rather than waiting for people to approach them.
- When working with or reaching out to community organizations and members, as well as other agencies, programs should conduct research to determine what their needs are, what the barriers to their participation or support are, and, if an organization or agency, whether they have any policies that could affect their participation or support.
- Multiple staff should be focused on community outreach, especially when the target population is across a city or county. One person simply cannot be as effective as many when trying to communicate to several communities or across a broad population. For example, it may be more effective to have two people working 40 hours a week than having one person work those same 40 hours.
- Programs should help the community meet its needs so that it can better support children and the agency.
- Agencies need to accept that the community can assist with some of its traditional work (e.g., resource family recruitment). This helps alleviate some of the agency's workload and empower the community.
- To help improve sustainability, similar projects should focus their funds and efforts on enacting systems change rather than creating new staff positions. At the end of the project, staff positions created through the project will require new funding, either through the agency or an outside source (e.g., another grant), but policy, protocol, and cultural changes are more likely to continue without additional funding.

OUTCOMES

Design

The project evaluation consists of two parts: a process evaluation and an outcome evaluation. The process evaluation is assessing the implementation of the project, including barriers to success and what is or is not working well. It includes observation of project activities and interviews with various stakeholders. The outcome evaluation is focused on the recruitment of resource families. Three other Colorado counties (Adams, Jefferson, and Appaloosa) are being used as a comparison group. The evaluation also sought to make community-level comparisons between the CBRT areas within Denver, but it was difficult to determine the effect that a particular CBRT had on a family's decision to become a resource family. For example, a family living in the area of the East CBRT may have attended a countywide event, an event hosted by the Northeast CBRT, or multiple events hosted throughout the county. The evaluation is looking at a variety of child and family factors, such as the race and ethnicity of resource families, length of stay, the time from a family's inquiry to being approved, and the time required to receive a home study.

The following describes three of the data collection processes:

- The project is asking families to complete a survey at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months after their approval as a resource family. The survey records how the families' opinions about the process and, if the family stops being a resource family, the reasons why. The project initially provided surveys and envelopes to DHS so they could send batches of surveys every month. The surveys were not always sent to each applicable family, though, so the project began to also utilize an electronic survey. They later determined that only 25 percent of foster parents have Internet access, so project staff began to go to project meetings and classes to mention the survey to parents. Additionally, the evaluator arranged for graduate students to call families in order to try to complete the survey over the phone. These adaptations have helped increase the response rate.
- The project provides a quarterly survey to non-family project participants to collect data about the opinions of community members and DHS staff about the progress of the project.
- The project is conducting exit interviews with resource families after a child exits from their care in order to gather data about their overall experience with the project and as a resource family.

Additionally, the project evaluation is participatory, with the evaluator being an involved member of the project management team. Being part of a participatory evaluation helps the project to assess itself on an ongoing basis and adapt itself based on the data.

Findings

The following are some of the preliminary findings from the Denver's Village evaluation:

- At beginning of project, children in Denver were achieving permanency, on average, 50 months after their removal. As of April 2012, children were achieving permanency at an average of 27 months after removal.
- DHS has finalized more than 650 adoptions over the past 3 years. Prior to the project, more than 150 children were free and clear for adoption but had no potential permanent homes identified. Now, only 52 of those children remain in out-of-home care.
- The Expedited Adoption Project helped DHS achieve permanency through adoption for 217 children in 2009, 210 children in 2010, and 228 children in 2011.

- In the first year of the project, only 6 percent of the children who participated in permanency roundtables achieved legal permanency. As of April 2012, 20 percent were achieving legal permanency, with others moving toward permanency or establishing permanent connections.