

Site Visit Report: Kentucky's Diligent Recruitment MATCH Project

Title: Project **M**aking **A**ppropriate and **T**imely Connections for **C**hildren (**MATCH**)

Award #: 90-CO-1040

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

Grantee: Kentucky Department for Community Based Services

Contact: Jennie Willson, Interim Project Director; DCBS Out of Home Care Services Branch; 275 East Main St., Frankfort, KY 40621; 502.564.2147; Jennie.Willson@ky.gov

Project website: <http://www.Project-MATCH.org>

Last Update: September 2011

SUMMARY

Faced with increases in out-of-home placements and stagnant numbers of resource families, the Commonwealth of Kentucky is utilizing a 2008 Children's Bureau grant to recruit and approve more resource parents in the hopes of achieving timely permanency for children in foster care. The funded project, Making Appropriate and Timely Connections for Children (MATCH), uses a host of innovative outreach tools, including community intervention, listserv and website development, press outreach, and other strategies.

Kentucky identified a problem in the disconnect between the number of families that inquire about and the number of families approved as resource families. In 2007, more than 3,600 families expressed interest in becoming resource families, yet only 446 were approved—a mere 12 percent. As of May 2008, there were 7,622 children in out-of-home care and only 2,206 resource homes. Compounded, these issues lengthen the stay of children in the foster care system.

Project MATCH—executed in the Eastern Mountain, Southern Bluegrass, Lakes, and Two Rivers regions—increases its pool of resource parents through five approaches:

- **Targeted and Child Specific Recruitment** mobilizes paid foster parents to perform a range of community intervention activities to raise awareness about the need for resource families and generate interest.

- **Customer Service** efforts are focused on centralized intake at Murray State University for interested families.
- **Respite Provided by Waiting Families** allows families awaiting approval to remain engaged in the process by providing respite care. This tactic also helps to ease waiting families into full-time care for children with special needs and potentially broadens their acceptance scale.
- **Mix and Match Sessions** help identify barriers and develop strategies for overcoming barriers to permanency. These quarterly meetings comprise public and private partners as well as resource parents and function as peer consulting groups.
- **Collaboratively Review Permanency Data** with the courts and Kentucky's central office in order to identify barriers to permanency and devise plans to overcome challenges.

In addition to the primary goal of increasing the pool of resource parents, Project MATCH also aims to increase the effectiveness in locating and using kinship care, fully integrating concurrent planning into permanency planning, and increasing inter- and intra-agency communication among public, private, and community stakeholders. In working toward these goals, project staff have encountered some challenges, including the problem of dealing with a large number of intervention strategies, economic difficulties including budget cuts, and data sharing.

Project MATCH outcomes vary by region, but highlights include:

- The time from inquiry to approval in the Eastern Mountain Region decreased from an average 15.22 months for the period from October 2009 to March 2010 to an average 5.43 months for the period from October 2010 to March 2011.
- The percentage of siblings separated in the Southern Bluegrass Region decreased from 36.52 percent in September 2009 to 26.6 percent in March 2011.
- The percentage of siblings separated in the Two Rivers Region decreased from 42.29 percent in September 2009 to 35.7 percent in March 2011.

Outreach methods and tools used by Project MATCH can be viewed on the AdoptUSKids website:

<http://www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/diligent-recruitment/kentucky>

Reprinted from *Children's Bureau Express*, "Site Visit: Kentucky's Diligent Recruitment MATCH Project" (<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov>).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

ABSTRACT

Project MATCH is how the Commonwealth of Kentucky is using Federal discretionary grant funds to engage in diligent recruitment activities intended to find homes for children who have been considered difficult to place. The project team is employing five intervention strategies in an attempt to reduce the length of stay for children in foster care, maintain family connections by placing siblings together, and integrate the knowledge and experiences of current foster parents to recruit potential foster and adoptive parents from the community. The use of both qualitative and quantitative by the Project MATCH evaluation team is intended to provide rich data that will provide insight into how the interventions are helping to improve services to children and families and mold practice.

NEED FOR THIS SERVICE

At the time of the grant application, the Commonwealth of Kentucky was seeking to reduce the large gap between the number of families who inquire about foster care and adoption and the number of homes approved annually. For the calendar year 2007, 3,616 families inquired with Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) to express interest in becoming a resource parent, but only 446 were ultimately approved. This means that only 12.3 percent of all inquiries were approved for that period. Focus groups provided some insight in this attrition rate; stating lengthy approval times, pre-service training occurring in inconvenient locations, poor customer service, parents not being fully understanding the needs of abused and neglected children.

Kentucky recognized a critical need for resource parents. As of May 12, 2008, there were 7,622 children in out-of-home care (OOHC), while on April 28, 2008, there were only 2,206 approved DCBS resource homes. DCBS competes with contracted private child care (PCC) agencies for the recruitment of foster and adoptive homes in Kentucky. There were 1,485 PCC foster homes in Kentucky as of April 7, 2008. The number of children entering OOHC in Kentucky has increased by 20.9 percent since July 2002, while the number of DCBS resource families has remained relatively flat. This is due in part to the fact that children with a higher level of care have been placed with private agencies and therefore the reimbursement rate, as well as the expectation of increased service provision, is increased. Additionally, DCBS has also struggled to keep an increase of resource home options as families moving on to adoption may no longer be available for future placements.

SITE VISIT HIGHLIGHTS

The site visit to Project MATCH occurred on Monday, June 13, 2011, which also was the day of the Project MATCH Advisory Board meeting. Prior to this large meeting, the project staff met to provide the site visitor with background and context for the project and for the upcoming meeting. Present at this premeeting were:

- Jennie Willson, Interim Project Director
- Caroline Crump, Co-Project Manager
- Phil Kilby, Program Coordinator
- Crystal Collins-Camargo, Evaluator
- Ramie Martin-Galijatovic, Evaluator
- Dana Sullivan, Evaluator
- Jennifer Hall, Co-Project Manager
- Jessica Morris, Program Coordinator

During this premeeting, the participants engaged in a candid discussion about how Project MATCH was conceived, the project's successes and challenges, and the anticipated next steps for the project as the team prepared to move into the fourth year of diligent recruitment activities.

The focus of the Advisory Board meeting was to highlight successful practices in each region in which the program had been implemented. Attendees from the public agency as well as the private partners attended the meeting to provide participants with a sense of the progress that has been made in the first 2 years of the grant and begin planning for the coming years.

In addition to those who attended the premeeting session, present at the Advisory Board meeting were:

Project MATCH Advisory Board Members

- Lydia Akin, Treatment Director, SAFY: Private Agency Partner
- Grace Akers, DCBS, Service Region Administrator: Southern Bluegrass Service Region
- B.J. Ball, Youth Representative: Private Agency Partner
- Nina Begley, Director, Children's Review Program: Private Agency Partner
- Christa Bell, DCBS, Service Region Administrator Associate: Southern Bluegrass Service Region
- Belinda Boggs, DCBS, Service Region Administrator Associate: Eastern Mountain Service Region
- Elizabeth Blumrick, Omnivisions, Recruiter/Trainer: Private Agency Partner
- Audrey Brock, DCBS

- Renee Buckingham, DCBS, Service Region Administrator, The Lakes Service Region
- Lou Camp, Director, We Care Child and Family Services: Private Agency Partner
- Mary Cook, DCBS, Service Region Administrator Associate, Two Rivers Service Region
- Chris Cordell, DCBS
- Beverly Craig, Treatment Director, WKUMFS/Omnivisions, 450 Park Avenue: Private Agency Director (did not attend)
- Mike Cheek, DCBS Director
- Jeff Damron, Resource Parent Mentor Program, University of Kentucky
- Sara Boswell Dent, J.D., Family Services Administrator, Administrative Office of the Courts, Department of Family and Juvenile Services
- Janine Dewey, Director of Operations, Central Kentucky Bellewood Presbyterian Homes for Children: Private Agency Partner
- Honorable C. Michael Dixon
- Lori Dowdy, DCBS, Permanency Specialist, The Lakes Service Region
- Lisa A. Durbin, DCBS, Child Safety Branch Manager Protection and Permanency
- Jessica Fletcher, Associate Director, University of Kentucky
- Christina Givens, DCBS, OOHC Branch
- James Grace, DCBS Associate Director
- Brandon Harley, DCBS, Service Region Administrator Associate, Two Rivers Service Region
- Honorable Johnny Ray Harris, Family Court; Floyd, Knott, Magoffin
- Bill Heaton, Omnivisions, State Director: Private Agency Partner
- Shirley Hedges, KFACA: Private Agency Partner (did not attend)
- Susan Howard, DCBS, Service Region Administrator, Eastern Mountain Service Region
- Sherry Hunton, LifeSkills, Inc.: Private Agency Partner
- Marie Johnson, CFL Specialist, RWCP Project Manager
- Virginia Jones, DCBS, Specialist, Southern Bluegrass Service Region
- Sherry Lamar, River Valley Behavioral Health Therapeutic Foster Care Program: Private Agency Partner
- Mary Kay Lamb, River Valley Behavioral Health Therapeutic Foster Care Program: Private Agency Partner
- Margery Lindon, DCBS, Specialist, Eastern Mountain Service Region
- Patsy Love, Director, Pennyroyal Center Therapeutic Foster Care: Private Agency Partner (did not attend)
- Branden McMichael, Youth Representative, Eastern Kentucky University
- Joey Minor, DCBS, Service Region Administrator, Two Rivers Service Region
- Crystal Palmisano-Dillard, The Network, Murray State University Training Resource Center (did not attend)
- Rhonda Riley, Ed Necco & Associates: Private Agency Partner

- Michelle Sanborn, Children's Alliance: Private Agency Partner
- Carrie Saunders, Adoption Support for Kentucky, University of Kentucky
- Sharon Scrivner, Regional Director, Benchmark Family Services, Berea Regional Office: Private Agency Partner

LESSONS LEARNED

UNIQUE AND INNOVATIVE FEATURES

The first year of Project MATCH, as with all federally funded Diligent Recruitment grants, was spent planning. The Project MATCH team began implementing the interventions in October 2009, the program was implemented, and the team has seen both successes and challenges. What follows is a brief description of what they have learned so far.

Project MATCH has a different design from other diligent recruitment projects. The recruitment strategy is not based on race but on the needs of the children who are in care. The team has come up with a multifaceted approach to moving children who are considered "hard to place" to permanency by implementing five intervention strategies, which are:

- **Targeted and Child Specific Recruitment** engages paid foster parents as diligent recruitment specialists in each region to conduct activities in the community.
- **Customer Service** provides centralized intake at Murray State University for interested families.
- **Respite Provided by Waiting Families:** Families awaiting a child provide 3-5 hours of respite services, which helps them make the transition to caring for a child with special needs full-time.
- **Mix and Match Sessions:** Quarterly public and private consultation and training sessions focus on developing and overcoming barriers to achieving permanency for identified children.
- **Collaboratively Review Permanency Data With the Courts:** Kentucky's central office and regional leadership share regional and county permanency data to assist in addressing barriers to finding permanent homes for children in foster care.

CHALLENGES

Project MATCH is coming to the end of the grant's third year and is in a good position to assess successes and challenges. Some of the challenges that staff have faced are the following:

Large number of intervention strategies. In response to the grant announcement, the Kentucky team's approach included five intervention strategies to address the recruitment and retention needs in several regions. All regions have implemented all five intervention strategies with varying degrees of success. The success of the interventions has been dependent upon the needs of the region and what how well the intervention will meet the needs of the target population. Although the project is experiencing successes in the regions with different interventions, the team feels that an effort focusing on a smaller number of interventions may have been more effective.

Effectively using marketing segmentation data. Although this data was somewhat useful, its use did not produce the expected results. The Project MATCH team hired a firm to do a targeted mailing of information to potential resource parents in all of the intervention regions in an effort to recruit more foster and adoptive families. However, given the high cost and the low response rate, this effort was not as fruitful as expected.

Coordination of foster parents as recruitment specialists. Although foster parents have been successful in their outreach efforts, there are challenges with retaining and coordinating foster parents as recruiters because they often work full-time and recruit engage in recruitment activities only as their schedules allows. and resources .

Economic hardships. As with other jurisdictions across the country, Kentucky is facing hard economic times. The human service budget in Kentucky has seen some significant cuts that result in workers not being granted overtime and furlough days. This limits the time that workers have to do all of their work, not just the work of Project MATCH. The budget cuts also have had an effect on the morale of the agency staff and possibly have limited the buy-in of staff with regard to the interventions.

Data sharing. While the public agency has a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) that is available to the evaluation team to measure the effectiveness of recruitment activities against baseline data, the private agencies do not all document the information in the same way. Therefore, it is difficult for the evaluators to track some information to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. For example, some agencies did not provide data for the time it took an interested family to complete foster care training and be approved for a child to be

placed in the home. It has been difficult to see if the recruitment and retention strategies incorporated into Project MATCH are having the intended effect.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

In the 3 years that Project MATCH has been operating, with the first year being a planning year, the team has seen success with engaging in collaborative efforts to find foster placements, permanent families and permanent connections for children who have typically been described as hard to place or would otherwise leave the foster care system with no support system in place. Some of the ways that they have achieved these efforts is through the following:

Inclusive Advisory Board. The Advisory Board for Project MATCH is made up of representatives from the central and regional offices of the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, private service delivery partners, the Project MATCH evaluation team, and recruitment specialists. Their meetings help to engage leadership from more than 20 agencies and provide a place to share program strategies and solve problems.

Engaging Leadership of Partner Agencies. The Project MATCH team put effort into engaging the leadership of partner agencies to be part of the Advisory Board as a way to get buy-in from staff from those agencies into the intervention strategies and to focus on permanency for children.

Community-Specific Recruitment Activities. Project MATCH has been creative in the ways they reach out to communities where they seek foster and adoptive families. While there have been issues with the marketing segmentation information, the team has been able to use some of the data to go into the community and get support from local businesses to talk to their customers. Another recruitment strategy was dispersing bookmarks to get information out regarding how those in the community could help the children in their area. The team has been willing to engage in recruitment activities that are more public as well as those that are subtle, depending on the level of interest from those they seek to engage.

Foster Parent Recruiters: These parents add value by sharing firsthand experiences, providing and coordinating training, and assisting with other recruitment activities.

OUTCOMES

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

Project MATCH has used several methods of disseminating program information to community partners:

These methods include:

- Developing a listserv
- Creating a website: <http://www.Project-MATCH.org>
- Distributing a quarterly newsletter
- Distributing biannual executive summaries
- Attending and presenting at public and private agency statewide and staff meetings

SUSTAINABILITY

As Project MATCH enters its fourth year of the grant, the team has begun strategizing about which interventions to continue after the grant period. The project team and Advisory Board have started conversations about these issues but have not yet made any decisions. Results of the evaluation will play a big part in determining how the program will be structured in the future.

EVALUATION

The evaluation for Project MATCH is being conducted by University of Louisville Kent School of Social Work and Western Kentucky University Department of Social Work. They are using a quasi-experimental, quantitative/qualitative research design to determine the effectiveness of the five interventions implemented in the five regions. Evaluators surveyed foster parents, Kentucky Department for Community Based Services staff, and staff from the private agencies that provided services.

The evaluation team conducted a survey in 2011 to ask public and private agency foster parents in both intervention and control groups what they felt were the biggest barriers to permanency. Survey respondents (n=96) in the intervention regions stated the following:

- Caseloads too high (78.1 percent)
- Court process too cumbersome (72 percent)
- Concurrent planning not occurring effectively (62 percent)
- Courts do not support timely permanency decisions (61.9 percent)

- Agency adoption process too lengthy (61.5 percent)

Foster parents in the comparison regions (n=108) stated the barriers as:

- Caseloads too high (82.4 percent)
- Court process too cumbersome (79.9 percent)
- Change in family circumstances (76.8 percent)
- Agency adoption process too lengthy (69.5 percent)
- Families not willing to accept children needing placement (65.7 percent)

Staff in both the intervention and control regions were also asked their views on barriers to permanency. The evaluators reported the following results for the staff intervention regions (n=73):

- Caseloads too high (83.5 percent)
- Not enough potential adoptive families (80.8 percent)
- Available families not willing or unable to adopt older children (74 percent)
- Court process too cumbersome (69.8 percent)
- Lack of emphasis on exploring fictive kin for potential placements (69.8 percent)

Staff in the control regions (n=115) stated the following barriers:

- Caseloads too high (91.3 percent)
- Not enough potential adoptive families (83.5 percent)
- Families not willing to accept children needing placement (73.9 percent)
- Child's attachment issues (68.6 percent)
- Courts do not support timely permanency decisions (67.9 percent)
- Concurrent planning not occurring effectively (67.8 percent)

The evaluators also provided the following preliminary data:

Eastern Mountain Region

- Decrease in the average number of months from an inquiry about fostering/adopting to the time of approval—from an average in October 2009–March 2010 of 15.22 months to an average of 5.43 months in the October 2010–March 2011 timeframe
- Decrease in the average number of months from last foster parent/adoption training session to home approval for placement of a child—from 11.83 months in October 2009–March 2010 to 2.84 months in October 2010–March 2011

Southern Bluegrass Region

- Decrease in the percentage of children with a goal of "Other Planned Living" since the beginning of the grant—from 2.96 percent to 1.19 percent as of March 2011

- Decrease in the percentage of siblings who were separated at the time of placement—from 34.26 percent in September 2009, to 27.62 percent in March 2011

Lakes Region

- Decrease in the percentage of siblings placed in separate homes—from 36.52 percent in September 2009 to 26.6 percent in March 2011

Two Rivers Region

- Decrease in the percentage of separated siblings—from 42.29 percent in September 2009 to 35.7 percent in March 2011

ATTACHMENTS

- Project MATCH Newsletter, June 2010
- Individual Recruitment Plan for Two Rivers, June 2010
- Project MATCH Newsletter, September 2010
- Project MATCH Executive Summary Issue, November 2010
- Project MATCH Executive Summary, April 2011