

## Public Agencies Don't Need to Do It Alone:

# Eight Reasons to Use a Partnership When Providing Support Services to Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families\*

Many support programs across the country are operated by nonprofit organizations in partnership with the state, tribal, or territorial agency, with the public agency offering expertise, funding, and oversight. For states, tribes, and territories interested in providing valuable, sustainable post-placement services to adoptive, foster, and kinship families, partnering with nonprofit organizations can be an effective strategy for implementing this support effectively. In an analysis of social services partnerships, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and James Bell Associates found that collaborating with community-based organizations was one of the key factors in a project's long-term success and its capacity to make a positive difference.<sup>1</sup>

Below we explore the specific benefits public agencies may see from partnering with family-support organizations and other nonprofit partners.

### 1. Partnerships can make implementation easier

Working with a nonprofit organization can help child welfare systems break down common barriers to program start-up and ongoing implementation. For example, nonprofits typically have increased flexibility for program implementation compared to public agencies. Nonprofits can usually hire staff more quickly and have fewer regulations or protocols than public agencies do when starting or operating a program.

In county-administered systems, having one privately operated initiative or a few regional service providers may be more efficient than having each county offer its own program. The partner is able to offer services across county lines and host statewide events, such as conferences, or webinars that are available to individuals regardless of where they live in the state.

Many nonprofit partners also bring established and trusted connections with children, youth, and families in the communities they serve. These connections can ensure faster initial implementation of new programs because the organization's established base of clients and strong credibility with parents makes outreach and start-up simpler.

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\* You can find more information and research in [Chapter 4](#) of *Support Matters: Lessons from the Field about Support Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families* (<http://www.nrcdr.org/develop-and-support-families/support-matters>).

## **2. Partnerships can help programs reach families needing support**

New programs sometimes struggle to reach their desired clientele and often have to invest significant time in outreach to families with whom they may not be connected. Parent or youth support groups and parent associations—as well as other nonprofit organizations—frequently have well-established and ongoing relationships with many parents and youth in the community. They often have mailing lists of families, knowledge of events families attend, and proven strategies for reaching the target families in their area. Similarly, child-placing agencies and adoption exchanges have established relationships with the families they have worked with. Having an existing network of parents, children, and youth ensures a connection with the target population for the support program and offers an excellent source of word-of-mouth outreach.

## **3. Partnerships can help families feel more comfortable asking for support**

Some parents who care for children adopted from the child welfare system may be reluctant to engage the public agency in their lives again, but may not have similar hesitations about working with organizations run by their peers or other community members. Those who have been approved and trained to adopt, foster, or provide kinship care may feel like asking for support will be seen as a failure or worry that they will be judged if they have to reach out to the public agency for help.

Kinship caregivers may have some negative feelings about the public agency if their family members have had children removed from the home or if they fear the children they are caring for might end up in foster care. Even if the public agency offers a support program directly, a partnering community-based organization can help connect families to services and encourage families to trust the agency and its service providers.

In their analysis of barriers to the provision of post-placement services, Ryan et al. noted: “Another possible reason for low usage of post-placement services, particularly those that are provided through agencies, is adoptive families’ use of and preference for informal rather than formal help (Dhami et al., 2007; Kramer & Houston, 1998).”<sup>2</sup>

## **4. Partnerships can help reach and successfully serve a diverse community**

One of the many benefits of collaboration is that it can enable a program to be more culturally competent—and more effective at serving diverse groups—than it might be with just one agency working alone. Partnerships with community-based organizations are a good way to ensure that service providers are more diverse and better represent the clients to be served. A public agency can partner with multiple organizations to ensure it reaches all of the communities that need support services, with specialized services offered by partners who have connections with and expertise serving different populations

## 5. Partnerships build on the strengths of each partner.

Public agencies and nonprofit organizations each bring wide-reaching strengths and capacity for serving children and families. By joining together, child welfare systems can leverage the strengths of each partner to improve program implementation and effectiveness.

Although each agency's or organization's strengths will differ, according to [A Model for Public and Private Child Welfare Partnerships](#), private partners may be more likely than public agencies to be able to:

- Initiate action quickly
- Specialize services
- Tailor policies and practices

The publication also notes that public partners can:

- Respond better to large problems
- Maintain consistent and stable funding
- Obtain other sources of funding when needed<sup>3</sup>

## 6. Partnerships enable the public agency to maintain its priorities while also adjusting to shifting priorities

Public agencies may face shifting priorities based on political changes or crises. A nonprofit partner can often keep offering support services to adoptive, foster, and kinship care families even if public agency staff have to focus elsewhere, allowing for continuing of services through changes in the public agency. Public agency staff have also reported that having a nonprofit partner dedicated to supporting families can reduce the burden on public agency staff, allowing them to focus on other efforts.

## 7. Partnerships can increase access to other financial resources

Public agencies often don't have the ability to try a small project as a pilot or to access corporate, foundation, or individual donations. On the other hand, nonprofits can typically find funding for a small innovative program. Then, once they have proven its success, the group can go to the public agency or other funders and partner on a larger, more sustainable effort.

Nonprofits can also access United Way and foundation funding that would not be options for a public agency to access on its own. Nonprofit partners can accept in-kind donations for food, clothing, school supplies, and similar items, which can help keep program costs lower. Nonprofits are typically better able to attract volunteers, which can keep program costs lower than if all services are provided by paid staff.

## 8. Partnerships can make it easier to sustain programs

Community-based organizations can play a key role in the efforts of states, tribes, and territories to sustain effective support services. In *Implementation Resource Guide for Social Service Programs: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Programming*, the authors note, “Project partners and community goodwill appear to play a critical role in the ability of a project to sustain itself.” The report continues, “It appears that, beyond participant referrals, one of the most important roles a partner organization can play is in project sustainability. Creating a network of agencies that are invested in the success and continuation of your project is key to successful sustainability.”<sup>4</sup>

Contact the [National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids](http://www.nrcdr.org) ([NRCDR@adoptuskids.org](mailto:NRCDR@adoptuskids.org) or 303-755-4756) to find out how we can assist your child welfare system in applying insights from the *Support Matters* publication as part of your recruitment, development, and support of families.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and James Bell Associates, “Implementation Resource Guide for Social Service Programs: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Programming” (2010), accessed July 10, 2016, [https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/files-for-pages/Implementation\\_Resource\\_Guide\\_Social\\_Service\\_Programs.pdf](https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/files-for-pages/Implementation_Resource_Guide_Social_Service_Programs.pdf)
- 2 Scott D. Ryan, Nina Nelson, and Carl F. Siebert, “Examining the Facilitators and Barriers Faced by Adoptive Professionals Delivering Post-Placement Services,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31 (2009): 584–593.
- 3 Dennis J. Braziel, “A Model for Public-Private Child Welfare Partnerships” (2001), Annie E. Casey Foundation, accessed July 10, 2016, <http://www.aecf.org/resources/a-model-for-public-and-private-child-welfare-partnership/>
- 4 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and James Bell Associates, “Implementation Resource Guide.”



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