

Recruiting Eligible Children Tip Sheet

Overview

Families impacted by incarceration have often been identified as an “invisible” population. This is true for many reasons and can make it challenging to engage with the families so the children might benefit from the mentoring you offer. Families impacted by incarceration are often not identified by other service providers because it is simply not a question that has been integrated into their intake process. Though progress has been made, the criminal justice system does not think of those who are incarcerated as being parents. Families often feel guilt, anger or shame about the incarceration and do not share this information. This resource provides some strategies from the field that have been successful in engaging families and their children in mentoring programs.

Strategy: Recruit in your own Agency

Implementation	Examples
<p>The most overlooked recruitment opportunity is often within your own agency. If your organization provides social services or recreational services to families and their children, it is likely that a percentage of the agency stakeholders represent this population.</p>	<p>It is helpful for agency leadership to request referrals from agency staff for the program. A personal request from the Director goes a long way to encouraging staff collaboration and referrals.</p>
<p>1. Develop and deliver an orientation session for every staff person working in your agency and provide both an oral presentation and written information packet on your program.</p>	<p>Ask the agency receptionist to assist in recruitment by passing out flyers and letting families know about the program.</p>
<p>2. Talk with caseworkers and youth workers individually to ask them for referrals. (Specifically, ask them to help you identify children who are impacted by incarceration and to assist in connecting with families to share more about your program. The relationship the staff have already developed with the family will assist in starting this conversation.</p>	<p>Take the time to provide a program tip sheet for staff. This will help them understand your program and provide talking points when engaging families.</p>
<p>3. Conduct a file review and look for families with relative caregivers and single parents.</p>	<p>Integrate your orientation presentation into the new hire orientation process.</p>
<p>4. Change your program enrollment forms and ask the question...Is your family impacted by incarceration? Use this information to make outreach calls to potential participants in your program.</p>	

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Strategy Community Asset Mapping

Implementation	Examples
<p>It is likely that mentors and mentees live in very different parts of the same community. Program staff may be less aware of the areas of the community where the children and their families reside. Most of the youth currently in your program live in communities with other families impacted. Here are some suggestions to connect with these families.</p>	<p>Invite families with whom you have a relationship to an informal social for tea/coffee to talk about the program and ask for their suggestions about contacts and activities.</p>
<p>1. Sort your current matches (youth) by zip code and use a map of your service area to pinpoint the location of the children in the community.</p>	<p>Target outreach to families to areas where there is a high rate of incarceration.</p>
<p>2. Identify the current community services in the identified zip codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public housing ● WIC ● Head Start ● Juvenile court and Court services (probation) ● Churches and other mission projects ● Police sub stations ● Schools ● State services sub offices ● Food Banks ● Prison re-entry programs ● Senior Service Centers ● Goodwill ● Salvation Army ● Laundry mats ● Grocery Stores 	<p>Public housing could be a good resource for engaging families. Many of the families impacted live in public housing. The housing programs are very user friendly and are interested in connecting families with resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use already organized community meetings to get the word out. ✓ Host a get-together (with food) and provide information to families. Hot dogs and balloons bring in kids and parents. ✓ Use your parents/families who reside in the housing community as a resource for recruitment.
<p>3. Identify appropriate target agencies and determine if any staff have contacts with the organizations.</p>	<p>The Juvenile Court System often has youth with disproportionate numbers of parents who are incarcerated. As a result, the juvenile probation departments have caseloads of youth and their siblings with incarcerated parents.</p>
<p>4. Make contact with staff at the organizations either through current contacts or cold calls. Go out and visit the agencies. Remember: Successful collaboration is about consistency and RELATIONSHIP. If you are not making headway with one agency representative move on to someone else in the agency who may have an interest in your program</p>	<p>Caregivers for the children while a parent is incarcerated are often grandparents. Senior services agencies may be a good relationship for engaging families. They are also a helpful resource to suggest to families needing additional support.</p>

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Strategy: Current Families as Recruitment Assets

Implementation	Examples
<p>The children of incarcerated parent community can be very secretive and often out of the day-to-day view of many agencies. If you are interested in connecting with these families, your greatest resource is already a part of your program. Your current families make great spokespersons for the program, they live in the community with other families, and they can speak to the benefits of mentoring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage parent/caregiver participation ✓ Help parent/caregivers with developing their testimonial and talking points. ✓ Encourage parent/caregiver to engage friends and relatives with the program ✓ Families want to give back and this provides an opportunity for involvement in the program and a chance to help. 	<p>Create specialized recruitment materials that help families understand the value of mentoring for a child coping with the loss of a family member or loved one due to incarceration.</p>

Strategy: Community Advisory Group

Implementation	Examples
<p>Your agency might want to consider a Community Advisory Board to provide more focused input into the issues facing the families and to assist with outreach and recruitment. The advisory board can be any size but needs to have key individuals from the community who are involved in the children of prisoner's issues.</p> <p>The Advisory Board should include children of prisoners and parents/caregivers and may also include representatives from corrections, court, probation, law enforcement, attorneys, key businesses, schools, social service agencies, adult children of prisoners, and re-entry program representatives.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet regularly at set date/time – monthly is optimal. 2. Provide meaningful role for the board 3. Consider the Advisory Board as a source for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth Referrals ● Mentor Referrals ● Community Donations ● Information relevant to program and families 	<p>Your advisory board can provide you with contacts in areas of the community where the families are likely to reside.</p> <p>Your advisory board can also be a great resource for brainstorming ways to engage families with the program.</p> <p>The Advisory Board members can also be helpful in your internal assessment process to provide insights and feedback on program data.</p> <p>Potential Advisory Board Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Police officers ● TV/Radio/Newspaper staff ● Judges ● Parents/Youth ● Agency Directors ● Business leaders ● Re-entry parents ● Corrections Program Staff ● County Jail staff

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Strategy: Angel Tree and Prison Fellowship Ministries

Implementation	Examples
<p>The Angel Tree program is a national program of Prison Fellowship Ministries. Each year Angel Tree staff work with prisons across the country to identify incarcerated parents who would like to have their children receive a Christmas gift in the parent's name. By mid-September the Angel Tree program begins to distribute lists of children to churches who volunteer for the program in many communities. The church sets up a Christmas Tree at services in November and December with child tags that contain a name, sizes, and a toy wish. The church members take the tags, shop and return the gifts to the coordinator at the church. Sometime near the Christmas holiday the church either hosts a party for the families or delivers the gifts to the family's door.</p> <p>Angel Tree and Prison Fellowship have the most comprehensive list of children of prisoners of any agency in the country.</p>	<p>Identify the Angel Tree churches in your community. This will mean either phoning or dropping by churches to ask the question</p> <p>If you are working with an Angel Tree church, ask for the name and contact information of the Angel Tree coordinator for that church. Your goal is to collaborate, not to take the names and run for the door.</p> <p>If the church participates in the Angel Tree program you have a common mission: you are both concerned about children of incarcerated parents. Ask how you can collaborate.</p>
<p>Remember, having a name and address only gets you part of the way to engaging a family with your program. The address list is good from September through January and becomes less accurate with time. These families are wary of agencies and you will need the good will of Angel Tree and the church to help gain trust in order to get a family to participate in your mentoring program.</p> <p>This process provides you with a collaborative relationship with the church and a potential referral source for children.</p> <p>Research Angel Tree before you go out. http://www.angeltree.org</p>	<p>Ask how you can assist. Volunteering for an Angel Tree program is a great way to develop some Positive Youth Development programming for your mentors and mentees and it builds rapport with the eligible families and with the church.</p> <p>Ask if you can distribute information on your program in the information sent out by the church/Angel Tree program.</p> <p>Volunteer to provide gifts for some of the children represented by the Angel Tree tags.</p> <p>Volunteer to wrap gifts, deliver gifts, or verify family addresses.</p>

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Strategy: Use Multiple Contacts

Implementation	Examples
<p>Remember, even the premier mentoring agencies indicate that a person must hear your message an average of 17 times before they will step up and volunteer. The same logic applies to your contacts in the community. You are one of many people that are requesting referrals for something from the schools, the courts, and the counseling agency.</p>	<p>You will receive referrals for mentees because of your RELATIONSHIPS.</p> <p>Referrals do not necessarily come about simply for the sake of a good cause. Always thank your referral source</p>
<p>1. Identify the agency contact person. It is best to use someone you know or who someone else knows. The personal connection will get you in the door.</p>	<p>Your agency Board of Directors can also be helpful in spreading the word and providing access to possible pools of mentors and mentees. Business leaders might be willing to allow you to invite their employees to be mentors.</p>
<p>2. If you have to make a “cold call”, then do it with intent. Make your visit memorable, find out how mentoring children of prisoners can help the person you are speaking with and recognize that shared concern as your starting point.</p>	<p>Use your mentors/families/advisory board members to identify contact people at various agencies.</p>
<p>3. Be brief, leave information, your card, and some other remembrance of your program.</p>	<p>Have outreach talking points and materials that match the agency interests you are visiting.</p>
<p>4. Go Back, Go Back, Go Back.....Do not believe that just because you dropped by once referrals will start flowing in. Plan on many ways to get your message in front of your referral source. (emails, phone calls, flyers, text messages, gift baskets, drop-bys)</p>	<p>Relationships take time to develop and are a two-way street. Remember to ask about what’s happening with their agency.</p>
<p>5. If you have spent a significant amount of time (4-6 visits) and have no referrals then move on to someone else in the organization. The more contacts you have the more likely you are to get referrals.</p>	<p>Track your outreach efforts and assess whether there is progress being made. Make sure you target your efforts.</p>
<p>6. Always find a way to thank your referral source and keep building the relationship. Share some of the great stories from your program. Send thank you notes.</p>	<p>Provide program data and updates to your referral source so they can appreciate their role in supporting families.</p>

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Strategy: Working with the Families

Implementation	Examples
<p>It can be difficult to locate and stay in contact with families impacted by incarceration. Many families live and work in a more kin care provider/clan community. This may mean that the family moves frequently and that multiple people share the responsibility of caring for the children. Generally there is one person in that kin care/clan family who knows where everyone is staying. That person may be a grandmother or an aunt. Understanding the kin care/clan family model can be key to your success in tracking the family over the course of the mentor match.</p>	<p>Why should families participate in your program?</p> <p>Ask the parent/guardian what they want for the child. What are their hopes and dreams for the child? What would need to happen in order for the child to obtain those goals? Those hopes and dreams can help you share about the mentoring program in a way that's relevant for them.</p> <p>Some Mentoring Talking Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides support for the child ● Increases school performance ● Improves family relationships ● Provides child with new experiences such as: field trips, outings, sports activities ● Gives the caretaker a "break" ● Provides a trained, screened, adult friend for the child ● Program staff (You) are always available if there is a concern or problem
<p>1. Make certain those contacts are part of the kin care/clan relationship by asking the parent and child who would be taking care of the child if they were not with the parent.</p>	<p>Provide the additional contacts page to the mentor at the time of the match (with permission of family).</p>
<p>2. Make it a 60-90 day goal for the mentor/child/parent to make contact with the kin care network for the child and have the mentor meet these other care providers. If the parent/child help facilitate the meetings then the mentor will have greater success in locating the child if there is a move because they already know the mentor.</p>	