



Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition

FOR EVERY CHILD... A PLACE TO CALL HOME

EXTREME RECRUITMENT

Issue Addressed

In the St. Louis area, nearly 500 children are waiting for an adoptive family. These are legal orphans who, on average, are 16 years old. Not surprisingly, most “age out” of the system at 18 or 21 years old.

A recent Illinois study found that of the youth who aged out of foster care:

- 48% did not have a high school diploma
- 12.8% were working full time
- 11% percent were entirely idle, neither working nor attending school
- 34% of the female youth had custody of a child or were pregnant.

Our new Extreme Recruitment program brings hope to these youth. In only a little more than a year, 60 youth have been in our program and 42 (70%) have been matched with a safe, appropriate adoptive family.

This program is so powerful that we are now convinced that it will change the child welfare system in St. Louis. Locally, the entire child welfare system—the Children’s Division, private agencies, and the courts—are excited about Extreme Recruitment’s results.

Program Overview

Silly as it may sound, Extreme Recruitment was inspired by the television show Extreme Home Makeover. This program is an exciting race against time to build a house in just a week by coordinating hundreds of professionals and volunteers. Likewise, Extreme Recruitment is a race to find an adoptive home for a child in a fraction of the time it would normally take (12-20 weeks vs. 12-24 months). And it works! In only 12 months, 42 of 60 youth we worked with were matched with adoptive families; accomplishing three times the number of adoption matches in a third of the time.

We work exclusively with the hardest-to-place children: ages 10-18, sibling groups, African-American children, and youth with emotional, developmental, or behavioral concerns. Extreme Recruitment is successful for ANY child in foster care because it:

1. requires weekly, intensive meetings between the child’s professional team for 12-20 weeks
2. demands concentrated support from child welfare supervisors
3. focuses on preparing the youth for adoption, including their mental health and educational needs

The added ingredient that makes Extreme Recruitment so effective is our private investigator. Originally, we tried to do the investigation work ourselves, but our contact rate with relatives was a dismal 23%. Within two weeks of hiring an investigator, the contact rate skyrocketed to 80%.

Our investigator finds relatives through internet tools, court databases, and good old-fashioned gumshoe detective work. Many times, he will find a grandmother or an aunt who will say, "Thank God you are here. I have been waiting years for you to find me." Other times, he must use persuasion and tenacity to convince relatives to meet with him.

Program Achievements

Extreme Recruitment's goal is to:

- Match 90% of youth with a network of safe, appropriate adults
- Match 70% of youth with an adoptive family

In the 2009, we served 56 youth, of whom:

- 50 (89.2%) were matched with a network of safe, appropriate adults
- 39 (69.6%) were matched with an adoptive family

Here are a few kids who have benefited from Extreme Recruitment:

- **Sherry** came into foster care 11 years ago. Despite the challenges of being in the system, Sherry held her own at school and was a favorite employee at a local grocery store. Our **Extreme Recruitment** program located Sherry's older sister and now they are living together. Sherry's grades have skyrocketed and she is even making plans for college. Sherry's deep longing for family has been fulfilled.
- **Keith** came into foster care at age five. Now 15 years old, he has lived a difficult life. In February, our **Extreme Recruitment** investigator found Keith's grandfather. His grandfather, who is former military, is an exact replica of Keith in both looks and manner. He is already 100% committed to Keith, and they talk on the phone every day. In less than two months, Keith's entire demeanor has changed, "Before I thought I had no family to visit. Now I have my grandpa."
- **Serena**. Coalition staff returned from Minneapolis last week, saying the trip was a "home run!" They found Sharon, aunt of 14-year-old Serena. Aunt Sharon lost connection with Serena ten years ago, after her niece entered the St. Louis foster care system. Greeting our **Extreme Recruitment** team with a big hug and tears of joy, Aunt Sharon exclaimed "I have been so worried about her!" The visit was great, and Aunt Sharon's strength, wisdom, and commitment were obvious. Describing herself as the "glue of the family," Aunt Sharon will do all that she can to bring Serena home.

To Learn More About Extreme Recruitment

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