Finding foster and adoptive families for children and youth with special needs in state care has been identified as one of the greatest recruitment challenges in the state. This challenge resulted in the request for a standardized plan around recruitment of families for special needs children and youth.

Boys & Girls Aid has developed this plan to assist DHS and Boys & Girls Aid staff in efforts to recruit foster parents for children and youth with special needs. Staff are urged to review this plan and select tools and suggestions that will work best in your respective communities. Boys & Girls Aid recruiters are available to provide training in each county to further support using this information to recruit homes for children and youth with special needs.

Please email us at oregonkids@boysandgirlsaid.org if you have comments or questions, or if you wish to set up a training date.
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VI. How Do We Hang on to the Great Families We Already Have?
I. Defining Special Needs

Special Needs is interpreted in various ways depending on the context in which it is used. Because interpretations naturally inform practice, it is important to adopt a consistent definition and understanding of the term to ensure equitable practice.

Within the context of child welfare, the State of Oregon generically identifies a child with special needs - a child with at least one of the following needs or circumstances that may be a barrier to placement or adoption without financial assistance:

- Eight years of age or older
- Member of a racial or ethnic minority
- Member of a sibling group of two or more children placed together and one of the children is six years of age or older
- Member of a sibling group of three or more children placed together
- Documented medical, physical, mental, or emotional condition impairment, or other clinically diagnosed disability causing some level of impairment
- (almost all children has suffered from abuse) Any other identified, predisposing factor that places the child at risk for future problems and need for treatment

Essentially, ALL children and youth in the custody of the State are children with special needs. Recruitment efforts for new foster families should always consider each of the above needs and circumstances of children in care. Currently, standardized targeted recruitment plans are available for use; the plans focus on finding families for teens and sibling groups, and two identified circumstances of special needs children and youth.

This Special Needs Targeted Standardized Recruitment Plan is a guide for recruiting families for the following children in care: Documented medical, physical, mental or emotional conditions impairment, or other clinically diagnosed disability.
II. Why is Placement of Special Needs Children and Youth So Important?

According to the 2010 Child Welfare Data Book, 100% of children adopted from the Oregon Foster Care system had one or more special needs. While 82% of the children adopted had a diagnosed emotional disability, upwards of 65% of the children had a disability other than Emotional Disturbance.

Compared with children outside the foster care system, children in foster care have much higher rates of serious emotional and behavioral problems, chronic physical disabilities, birth defects, developmental delays and poor school achievement. Two-thirds of children in care require some form of mental health service. Regarding education, it is estimated that 30 to 45 percent of foster youth receive special education services, a significantly higher percentage than non-foster care youth. All of the data available supports the disturbing fact that children with special needs represent a disproportionate number of children in care.

Recent reports estimate that children with disabilities are between 1.5 and 3.5 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than youth without disabilities. Although determining the cause of a disability for an abused young person is often difficult, research has assessed that disabilities are often caused and/or exacerbated by abuse and neglect. At the same time, data suggests that youth born with severe disabilities are more often abused, and also more often relinquished to the child welfare system. Lastly, abuse and trauma experienced by children and youth with disabilities are more likely to be mistreated and abused in foster care at a rate higher than in the general public.

The most common disabilities among foster children are learning disorders, Mental Retardation and Emotional Disturbance. However, children who have experienced abuse or neglect are at a higher risk for a variety of developmental problems, including attachment disorders, social and emotional disturbance, cognitive deficits, neurobiological changes in the brain and failure to thrive.

In the foster care system children and youth with disabilities face a difficult reality. Like all children in foster care, they need safety and nurturance from healthy adults as their minds and bodies develop. Moreover, children with disabilities deserve the chance to develop in environments in which people understand their needs and are able to meet them in the way that best suits the individual child.
III. Why is it Difficult to Find Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs

Children and youth with disabilities and in foster care are one of the most vulnerable populations in the United States. Even so, little attention is paid to the unique challenges they face as they negotiate their way through multiple systems to adulthood. One of the best things we can do to serve these children and youth while they are in care is to place them with families who are adequately prepared to care for them. These families are not easy to find and oftentimes training and resources need to be made available in order to prepare and support families in the challenges that parenting a child with special needs can bring.

The ideal foster parent for a child with special needs has parented before and has experience in the medical, mental health and/or education fields. Our plan clearly targets these groups. The traits most important for a foster parent of a child with special needs, however, are patience, understanding of diagnosed disabilities and the willingness and time to learn, make accommodations, and willing to advocate for necessary special resources. A variety of people embody these traits. Targeted recruitment should occur in arenas in which people who share these common traits are found. This plan outlines where and how to reach these invaluable people.
IV. Where Should I Look for Good Foster or Adoptive Parents for Children and Youth with Special Needs?

A. Child Specific Homes
As with other types of child welfare placements, many successful placements come from families that the children already know.

B. Target Groups Likely to Successfully Foster Children and Youth with Special Needs
These groups are equipped with particular skills and resources which are conducive to a successful placement and care of children and youth with special needs.

1. Experienced Parents
2. Education professionals
3. Mental health professionals
4. Medical professionals

C. General Recruitment Targets
Although general recruitment targets may not possess the specific skills and resource available to target groups, the following groups are likely to boast critical characteristics of potential foster parents for children and youth with special needs.

1. General applicants who are interested in foster care and/or are receiving foster care training
2. Faith based organizations
3. LGBTQ community

A guide on these recruitment targets is organized for easy reference in the following table. A brief explanation of each group's suitability and specific tools that will be helpful in recruiting them is provided on pages 7-9.
## Standardized Recruitment Plan #3

### Target Groups Likely to Successfully Foster Children and Youth with Special Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>TOOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Parents</td>
<td>Parent Teachers, Organizations</td>
<td>- Request booth space, usually low cost or free, and distribute print materials&lt;br&gt;- Organize a speakers’ panel&lt;br&gt;- Make presentations at quarterly meetings and events.&lt;br&gt;- Request that information be distributed to staff and parents.</td>
<td>- Posters at family friendly locations&lt;br&gt;- Inserts&lt;br&gt;- Fliers&lt;br&gt;- Display ad&lt;br&gt;- Speakers Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athletic, Music and Theater Events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parks and Recreation Districts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Resource Centers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local events that cater to families, including fairs/carnivals, farmers or Saturday markets, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Professionals</td>
<td>Oregon Education Association</td>
<td>- Contact Oregon Education Association for event and marketing opportunities&lt;br&gt;- Contact School Counselors, Administrators and Special Education staff for connections to teachers, and potential resources and marketing opportunities&lt;br&gt;Request to speak at a staff meeting or other gathering...</td>
<td>- Letter to Education Professionals&lt;br&gt;- Posters&lt;br&gt;- Fliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Associations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Education and Counseling Departments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Professionals</td>
<td>Community health clinics</td>
<td>- Contact local clinics to meet with a director regarding appropriateness of recruitment at specific site</td>
<td>- Letter to Mental Health Professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family services organizations for mental health and behavioral healthcare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Substance abuse treatment facilities
- Offer to hold an information session for interested staff

### Medical Professionals
- Nursing schools
- Medical schools
- Hospitals
- Clinics
- Identify hospital and clinic newsletters for potential marketing opportunities
- Arrange to table or speak at medical conferences
- Post marketing materials in local clinic offices
- Letter to medical association
- Posters at medical facilities
- Inserts
- Fliers
- Display ad

### General Recruitment Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>TOOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| General Applicants   | Local DHS branch             | - Identify individuals who have already inquired and/or began orientation and training to become a foster parent  
                          |                              | - Provide specific information and training about special needs children and youth, the need for specialized care and next steps | (to be developed in conjunction with training)  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Fact sheet  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Q&A  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Community resources available to care givers of children and youth with special needs  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Fliers                                                                 |
| Faith-Based Organizations | Local leadership foundations  
                          | Churches of all denominations  
                          | Church youth groups         | - Meet with church leadership to request information be disseminated to congregation and special needs foster care be the topic of a sermon or discussion group. | - Letter to faith-based organizations  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Insert for church bulletin  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Fliers  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Posters  
                          |                              |                                                                       | - Display ad  
<pre><code>                      |                              |                                                                       | - Speakers Panel                                                             |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, Queer/Questioning Community (LGBTQ)</th>
<th>Community of Welcoming Congregations Parents, Families &amp; Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition (OSSCC) Q.Center, Portland’s LGBTQ Community Center</th>
<th>Meet with women’s church groups, couples classes – adult Sunday school -Have youth group take on recruitment distribution as a service project -Make a presentation, including foster parents or youth, to congregation or service group</th>
<th>-Work with organizations’ public relations staff to have text inserted in newsletters and on websites. -Hang posters and recruitment displays -Ask to make a special needs specific presentation to committee members and LGBTQ groups.</th>
<th>-Letter to businesses and organizations -LGBTQ flier -LGBTQ resource list</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Local Newspapers Magazines Radio Television</td>
<td>-Contact media to arrange for positive coverage of foster care issues and the need for homes for children and youth with special needs. -Send display advertisements to local weekly/monthly newspapers.</td>
<td>-Display ad, -Text for public service announcement (PSA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Send public service announcements to radio and television stations.
Target Groups Likely to Successfully Foster Children and Youth with Special Needs

The following groups are equipped with particular skills and resources which are conducive to a successful placement and to the care of children and youth with special needs.

1. Experienced Parents
As noted, many individuals may have the interest and personalities to become effective foster parents for children and youth with special needs. Experienced parents, however, are more likely to have parenting skills which are essential in caring for children and youth. For example, the skills to be a strong advocate for a child, the ability to develop and clarify clear expectations, to stay calm in the midst of tense situations, practice and teach conflict resolution, apply consequences, consistency and praise appropriately, and to model healthy behavior and listening are just some parenting skills of immense value in caring for children and youth.

To connect with such parents, contact community centers and other organizations where families often spend time, such as the YMCA and community parks and recreation districts. Identify Women’s organization who’s mission is to give back to the community and ask to give a short talk about foster care needs, Distribute fliers and hold information sessions. Broaden the search by contacting school administrators and PTOS. Ask to have an ad placed in school publications such as newsletters and athletic programs or a flier mailed out with report cards. These efforts will reach hundreds of experienced parents. A sample letter to education professionals including a text insert can be found on page 16.

2. Education professionals
Advocating for children within the education system can be difficult regardless of a particular child’s status of care. Considering the level of trauma many foster children and youth have experienced, it is not surprising many of these students face marked difficulty in schools.

Children and youth in foster care receive special education services in disproportionate numbers. Estimates of the percentage of school-age children who are receiving special education services range from 30 to 45 percent. Foster children are more likely to be eligible to receive Special Education services, but without a clear understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a caregiver may not be privy to the services a child is entitled to receive.

The value of recruiting education professionals, such as Special Education teachers, School Psychologists and School Counselors, is due to their keen understanding of the education system, learning styles, physical, emotional and academic development, disabilities and disorders. Foster parents, case workers and education professionals each maintain a responsibility to support the academic equity and progress of children in school. However, navigating multiple systems of support, which do not always interface effectively, is a daunting task fit for those with the greatest familiarity.
3. **Mental health professionals**

As a result of abuse, neglect and separation from birth families, children in foster care have a high incidence of emotional disturbance and social/behavioral problems. Nationally it has been estimated as many as two thirds of children in the foster care system are in critical need of mental health services (Jackson and Muller, 2005). A foster parent familiar with common mental health disorders is more likely to recognize a child’s needs and respond accordingly. A foster parent with a mental health background will also be able to identify and utilize resources most suitable for their foster child/youth.

As outlined in the chart, send letters to or visit community mental health clinics to speak with professionals. These initial conversations will likely result in further discussions with their professional peers, who may be interested themselves in foster care or know of someone else who is.

4. **Medical professionals**

Children and youth with chronic medical disabilities or medical disorders care often require specialized or nursing care. Foster parents for these children and youth must have a familiarity with medical conditions and treatments or a predisposition to learn such information. Doctors, physicians’ assistants, and nurses are excellent candidates for special needs foster care due to their depth of knowledge in the medical field.

Distributing information and being available for information sessions at local hospitals and clinics is a great way to appeal to large groups of medical professionals. In addition to face-to-face conversations, printed marketing materials and advertisements in medical newsletters is an efficient way to raise awareness for the great need for medically savvy foster parents.

**General Recruitment Targets**

Although it is not necessary general recruitment targets possess the specific skills and resources as target groups, the following groups are likely to boast critical characteristics of potential foster parents for children and youth with special needs.

1. **General applicants interested in foster care and/or are receiving foster care training**

Families who are already interested in fostering can be educated on the immediate need for foster families for special needs children and youth. A fact sheet and Q&A can be developed providing specific information about the training process, what to expect and how to support special needs, as well as available resources for foster parents. A discussion of the above can be
included in the training process through the sharing of stories and the presence of a child/youth with special needs and their foster parent.

1. **Faith based organizations**
   Studies show that the number one commonality among foster parents is altruism. Communities of faith are a great resource for accessing people who are genuinely concerned about the welfare of others in their community. Current foster parents can be used to help recruit new families within their own congregations. Contact churches and other religious organizations in your community requesting their assistance in finding new homes for children and youth with special needs. Go in person, request the opportunity to speak before various church groups, hand out brochures to all you have spoken before, send a letter asking that text be placed in church bulletins and posters and other print materials be disseminated.

2. **LGBTQ community**
   The LGBTQ community is a resource that has gone virtually untapped until recently. Research to date has shown that children raised by LGBTQ parents grow up as successfully as the children of heterosexual parents. LGBTQ home environments are just as likely to support a youth’s successful development. Additionally, 75% of LGBTQ couples that inquire about foster care or adoption follow through to completion of the certification process, a number far greater than heterosexual couples. To network with this community, contact LGBTQ organizations in Oregon to find out specific ways to converse with individuals and groups. An LGBTQ resource list, which can be used to locate LGBTQ friendly agencies and churches in your community, can be found on page 23. Training around LGBTQ issues is also available.

3. **Media**
   Mass media messaging is critical in raising awareness on a regular and consistent basis. Through posters, fliers and inserts at targeted locations and in targeted publications, the public will be exposed to the great need for capable and caring special needs foster parents and exactly how to initiate an inquiry. Boys and Girls Aid recruiters are available to assist with this endeavor.
V. How Do I Get Started in Finding New Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs?

Numerous tools to assist you in your recruitment efforts are included in this package. You may wish to make a plan by first using the Blank Recruitment Plan sheet to map out your goals and key players, next reference the Recruitment Chart to decide on your target audience and how you’ll go about reaching them. All of the tools you’ll need are included right here.

Color copies of these materials are available at no charge for DHS staff. Contact Boys & Girls Aid at oregonkids@boysandgirlsaid.org to order what you need.

A. Planning Tools for the Recruitment of Homes for Children with Special Needs

Blank Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan

Sample Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan

B. Specific Tools and Materials

Sample Letter to Education Professionals

Sample Letter to Mental Health Professionals

Sample Letter to Medical Professionals

Sample Letter to Faith-Based Organizations

Guide to Organizing a Speakers Panel

Public Service Announcements and Text Inserts

LGBTQ Recruitment Recommendations and Resource List

Special Needs Print Materials

Material Formats

2. Faith based organizations

Studies show that the number one commonality among foster parents is altruism. Communities of faith are a great resource for accessing people who are genuinely concerned about the needs of children and youth in foster care.

Standardized Recruitment Plan #3: Recruiting Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs
welfare of others in their community. Current foster parents can be used to help recruit new families within their own congregations. Contact churches and other religious organizations in your community requesting their assistance in finding new homes for children and youth with special needs. Go in person, request the opportunity to speak before various church groups, hand out brochures to all you have spoken before, send a letter asking that text be placed in church bulletins and posters and other print materials be disseminated.

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Blank Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan

__________________County

__________________# of special needs homes needed

Who will recruit for these homes?

Who can we access to help (businesses, community partners etc.)?

What are we doing to improve training for families interested in fostering children with diagnosed disabilities?

What services are available for foster families of children with disabilities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience(s)</th>
<th>How will we reach them?</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Standardized Recruitment Plan #3: Recruiting Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs

16
SAMPLE Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan

Crook County

# of sibling homes needed: 3

Who will recruit for these homes? Certifier J. Moss with assistance from BGAID

Who do we already know who we can access to help (businesses, community partners etc.)? Dan Schutte (Advisory Chair of Pioneer Memorial Hospital), Scott Willard (Director of Lutheran Comm. Services)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience(s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Contact Kids Clubs and other family friendly organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drop off materials, ask that text be inserted into newsletters and websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Professionals</td>
<td>Contact Dan Schutte at Pioneer Memorial &amp; see if he can set up a presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask him to have text inserted into hospital newsletter/e-mail going to staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Professionals</td>
<td>Contact Scott Willard at Lutheran Comm. Services. Get additional contacts for mental health field</td>
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What are we doing to improve training for families interested in fostering children with diagnosed disabilities?

Add section to training about resources in our community to support parents of children with disabilities.

What services are available for foster families of children with disabilities?
IV. How Do I Get Started in Finding New Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs?

Numerous tools to assist you in your recruitment efforts are included in this package. You may wish to make a plan by first using the Blank Recruitment Plansheet to map out your goals and key players, next reference the Recruitment Chart to decide on your target audience and how you’ll go about reaching them. All of the tools you’ll need are included right here.

Color copies of these materials are available at no charge for DHS staff. Contact Boys & Girls Aid at oregonkids@boysandgirlsaid.org to order what you need.

A. Planning Tools for the Recruitment of Homes for Children with Special Needs

- Blank Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan
- Sample Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan

B. Specific Tools and Materials

- Sample Letter to Education Professionals
- Sample Letter to Mental Health Professionals
- Sample Letter to Medical Professionals
- Sample Letter to Faith-Based Organizations
- Guide to Organizing a Speakers Panel
- Public Service Announcements and Text Inserts
- LGBTQ Recruitment Recommendations and Resource List
- Special Needs Print Materials
- Material Formats
Blank Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan

__________________County

_______# of special needs homes needed

Who will recruit for these homes? __________________________________________________

Who can we access to help (businesses, community partners etc.)? _______________________

What are we doing to improve training for families interested in fostering children with diagnosed disabilities?

_________________________________________________________________________

What services are available for foster families of children with disabilities?

_________________________________________________________________________

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Standardized Recruitment Plan #3: Recruiting Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs
**SAMPLE Special Needs Homes Recruitment Plan**

**Crook County**

### # of sibling homes needed: 3

Who will recruit for these homes? Certifier J. Moss with assistance from BGAID

Who do we already know who we can access to help (businesses, community partners etc.)? Dan Schutte (Advisory Chair of Pioneer Memorial Hospital), Scott Willard (Director of Lutheran Comm. Services)

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</table>

What are we doing to improve training for families interested in fostering children with diagnosed disabilities?

Add section to training about resources in our community to support parents of children with disabilities.

What services are available for foster families of children with disabilities?

Not sure, I’ll have to look into that ASAP.

---

Standardized Recruitment Plan #3: Recruiting Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs
Sample Letter to Education Professionals

[Date]

Dear ______________,

Children and youth in foster care receive special education services and school accommodation plans in disproportionate numbers. It is estimated that between 30 to 45 percent of school age children in care have either an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan. While foster children are more likely to be eligible to receive Special Education services, a caregiver who is uninformed about the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), may not be privy to the services a child is entitled to receive.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and Boys & Girls Aid are working in partnership to recruit homes for children in foster care. Every community needs foster families, but children and youth with special needs in [NAME] County are particularly in need of loving homes that will meet their individual needs. A person with an understanding of the education system, learning styles, childhood development and the broad spectrum of disabilities would make an excellent foster parent to a child receiving special education services. I am writing to request your support in locating foster families in your community who will be able to meet the individual needs of children in care.

There are many ways you can help. The simplest is to have conversations with your colleagues about the need for more foster families with a background in Education. Many people aren’t aware that the need exists. Another way you can help is to insert text into your professional newsletters or websites. We have included a preferred text below along with some printed recruitment material for your use. We have other ideas about the ways you can get the message out. I encourage you to call me to talk more about the simple actions you can take to help children and families in your community.

Did you know that children with disabilities are up to 3 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than children without disabilities? Our children need safe families to care for medical, physical, and emotionally fragile conditions. Are you the one they need? Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent for Oregon’s most vulnerable children.

Speakers are available to present at appropriate events or committee meetings and color posters and fliers are available for distribution. Your assistance in this effort would be greatly appreciated!

If you are ready to help, please contact me at [(XXX)XXX-XXXX] or xxx@xxxx.xxx.

Thank you immensely for your assistance in this important effort.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]
Sample Letter to Mental Health Professionals

[Date]

Dear ________________,

As a result of abuse, neglect and separation from birth families, children in foster care have a high incidence of emotional disturbance and social/behavioral problems. Out of the over 8,000 kids in Oregon foster care, two thirds require mental health services.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and Boys & Girls Aid are working in partnership to recruit homes for children in foster care. Every community needs foster families, but children and youth with special needs in [NAME] County are particularly in need of loving homes that will meet their individual needs. A foster parent with a mental health background will be able to identify and utilize resources most suitable for their foster child/youth. I am writing to request your support in locating foster families in your community who will be able to meet the individual needs of children in care with mental health diagnoses and other special needs.

There are many ways you can help. The simplest way is to have conversations with your colleagues about the need for more foster families with a background in mental health services. Many people aren’t aware that the need exists. Another way you can help is to insert text into your professional newsletters or websites. We have included a preferred text below along with some printed recruitment material for your use. I have other ideas about the ways you can get the message out. I encourage you to call me to talk more about the simple actions you can take to help children and families in your community.

Did you know that children with disabilities are up to 3 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than children without disabilities? Our children need safe families to care for medical, physical, and emotionally fragile conditions. Are you the one they need? Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent for Oregon’s most vulnerable children.

Speakers are available to present at appropriate events or committee meetings and color posters and fliers are available for distribution. Your assistance in this effort would be greatly appreciated!

If you are ready to help, please contact me at [(XXX)XXX-XXXX] or xxx@xxxx.xxx.

Thank you immensely for your assistance in this important effort.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]
Sample Letter to Medical Professionals

[Date]

Dear ____________,

Children and youth with disabilities who are also in the foster care system are one of the most vulnerable populations in the United States. Even so, little attention is paid to the unique challenges they face as they negotiate their way through multiple systems to adulthood. Recent reports estimate that children with disabilities are between 1.5 and 3.5 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than youth without disabilities.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and Boys & Girls Aid are working in partnership to recruit homes for children in foster care. Every community needs foster families, but children and youth with special needs in [NAME] County are particularly in need of loving homes that will meet their individual needs. I am writing to request your support in locating foster families in your community who will be able to meet the individual needs of children in care with medical disabilities and other special needs.

Children and youth with chronic medical disabilities or considerations require intentional and specialized care. Foster parents for these children and youth must have a familiarity with medical conditions and treatments or a predisposition to learn such information. Doctors, physicians’ assistants, and nurses are excellent candidates for special needs foster care due to the depth of knowledge in the medical field. Will you help spread the message amongst your colleagues? Included below is a short text we ask that you insert in newsletters, announcements and programs.

Did you know that children with disabilities are up to 3 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than youth without disabilities? Our children need safe families to care for medical, physical, and emotionally fragile conditions. Are you the one they need? Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent for Oregon’s most vulnerable children.

Speakers are available to present at appropriate events or committee meetings and color posters and fliers are available for distribution. Your assistance in this effort would be greatly appreciated!

If you are ready to help, please contact me at [(XXX)XXX-XXXX] or xxx@xxxx.xxx.

Thank you immensely for your assistance in this important effort.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]
Sample Letter to Faith Based Organizations

[Date]

Dear _____________,

Children and youth with special needs who are also in the foster care system are one of the most vulnerable populations in the United States. Even so, little attention is paid to the unique challenges they face as they negotiate their way through multiple systems to adulthood. Recent reports estimate that children with disabilities are between 1.5 and 3.5 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than children without disabilities.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and Boys & Girls Aid are working in partnership to recruit homes for children in foster care. Every community needs foster families, but children and youth with special needs in [NAME] County are particularly in need of loving homes that will meet their individual needs. I am writing to request your support in locating foster families in your community who will be able to meet the individual needs of children in care with special needs.

There are many ways your faith organization can help. The simplest way is to hang a poster or flyer on your bulletin board and insert text about the need for new foster parents into your Sunday bulletins. We have included a preferred text below along with some printed recruitment material for your use. We have other ideas about the ways you can get the message out. I encourage you to call me to arrange a time to talk more about the simple actions your church can take to help children and families in your community.

Did you know that children with disabilities are up to 3 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than children without disabilities? Our children need safe families to care for medical, physical, and emotionally fragile conditions. Are you the one they need? Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent for Oregon’s most vulnerable children.

Speakers are available to present at appropriate events or committee meetings and color posters and fliers are available for distribution. Your assistance in this effort would be greatly appreciated!

If you are ready to help, please contact me at [(XXX)XXX-XXXX] or xxx@xxxx.xxx.

Thank you immensely for your assistance in this important effort.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[CONTACT INFO]
Guide to Organizing a Speakers Panel

A speakers’ panel is often a powerful tool to use for presentations. When planning for your panel presentation, particularly during foster parent training sessions, make sure to include a foster family who has or currently does foster a child with special needs. Current foster parents can aid by giving an accurate picture of what it’s like to be a foster parent for children with special needs.

1) Decide who will be on the panel.

Youth: Use foster youth you know to be good speakers or contact Children First for Oregon at (503) 236-9754 or www.cffo.org for recommendations. Please refer to Tips on Preparing and Debriefing Foster Youth (page 21).

Current Foster Parents: Check in your own county for strong foster parents of children and youth with special needs that you know will paint a realistic, yet positive picture of being a foster parent for a special needs child. People are more likely to relate to someone from their own community. If a local resource is not available, contact the Oregon Foster Parent Association at (503) 361-3906 or www.ofpa.com for recommendations.

2) Decide how the panel will work.

You may decide to have an open discussion with predetermined questions or topics identified by the organizing committee, much like a presidential debate. Or, you may choose to have the panel respond to questions from the audience, submitted either before or during the discussion.

Meet with the panel of speakers before the presentation begins to ensure that everyone is familiar with the format and that all speakers feel comfortable with the topics to be addressed.

3) Select someone to run the discussion.

Select someone from the organizing committee to introduce the panel and topic, monitor and moderate the discussion, keep the panelists and discussion on track, and ensure that time limits are met. The speakers may have some difficult experiences related to why they are in foster care, and it is important to have someone in charge of guiding the questions and the discussion.
4) Prepare Foster Youth for the Discussion.

Foster youth are often interested in being a part of panel discussions and their involvement is integral in helping interested foster families understand the voice of youth. In order for foster youth’s participation to be safe and meaningful, those working with them must adequately prepare them and support their participation. The following tips will help prepare foster youth for panel discussions (Oregon Foster Youth Connection).

**Pre and Post Support:** Work with youth to ensure they have a therapeutic and relational support both before and after the discussion to deal with the feelings that will inevitably arise. This is an invaluable opportunity for the youth to learn to deal with these feelings in a healthy way.

**What:** Explain the purpose of the discussion, what type of issues will be discussed, what information might be helpful for the youth to share and what is appropriate to share. Make space for any questions or concerns the youth might have.

**Who:** Talk with the youth about who will be in attendance.

**When:** Discuss how long the meeting and possible wait time may be.

**Where:** Provide the youth information on where the meeting will take place and any information about where he/she will be sitting in relation to the other parties in attendance. Allow space for the youth to have privacy or alone time if needed. If possible, take the youth to the discussion location so that they can familiarize themselves ahead of time.

**Dress:** Explain how others will be dressed at the discussion. Encourage youth to dress in a way that will help them feel comfortable. If the youth needs clothing, work with the provider or social worker.

**Transportation:** Assist with arranging reliable transportation to and from the discussion.

**Language:** Provide a “cheat sheet” of terms and definitions that might be used during the discussion. After, be sure to debrief youth to ensure they understood what occurred and answer any questions they might have.

**Role-Playing:** Role-playing can be important to helping youth feel prepared and informed. Role-playing is especially critical if youth want to share a personal story.
Public Service Announcements/Text Inserts

Local radio stations and newspapers are often willing to play short public service announcements or publish text inserts. The following text is an example of what you might ask them to use:

**PSA/Text #1**

*Foster families for children and youth with special needs are needed in [NAME] County. You may be the caring and committed adult who can help them overcome the challenges they face due to abuse and neglect. Call 1-800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can care for Oregon’s most vulnerable children.***

**PSA/Text #2**

*Did you know that 100% of children adopted from the Oregon Foster Care system had one or more special needs? It is estimated that children with disabilities are up to 3 times more likely to have experienced abuse or neglect than youth without disabilities. Our children need safe homes to care for medical, physical, and emotionally fragile conditions. Are you the one they need? Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent for Oregon’s most vulnerable children.*
LGBTQ Recruitment Recommendations and Resources

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) community could be a valuable resource for locating new foster families for children and youth with special needs. Before launching a recruitment campaign targeting the LGBTQ community, it is important to consider the following:

- Have staff been trained to work with LGBTQ clients in a culturally sensitive manner specifically surrounding communication methods?
- Are DHS staff conversant with LGBTQ terminology, abbreviations, etc?
- Have staff been adequately informed about resources available to help support LGBTQ families?
- Do media and marketing materials reflect an accepting attitude toward the LGBTQ community?

If you said “No” to one or more of these questions, there are organizations that offer training and resources to help you access this community.

Resource List for LGBTQ Information and Training

The following is a list of organizations that offer educational, support, and advocacy resources that may be useful to those working with LGBTQ families.

**PFLAG (Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays):** [http://community.pflag.org](http://community.pflag.org)
Contact them for: Referral to local chapters offering support groups (support groups are open to foster parents), advocacy, and information.

**Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Resource Center (Smyrc):** [http://www.smyrc.org/](http://www.smyrc.org/)
Contact them for: Consultation, resources and support, and to schedule a training in your town.

**TransActive:** [http://www.transactiveonline.org](http://www.transactiveonline.org)
Contact them for: Information, education and support surrounding gender identity. Website includes links to a variety of resources relating to family, education, health, and legal issues for transgender children.

**Community of Welcoming Congregations:** [http://www.welcomingcongregations.org/](http://www.welcomingcongregations.org/)
Contact them for: Listings of welcoming church communities statewide. Member congregations are listed by denomination.

Print Material: Special Needs #1
Standardized Recruitment Plan #3: Recruiting Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs

(Name can be modified to reflect local county or other specific location.)

Print Material:

Formatted: Font: 14 pt
Standardized Recruitment Plan #3: Recruiting Homes for Children and Youth with Special Needs

**Mason, age 9**

**His Special Needs:**
- learning disability
- speech delay

**Type of Family needed:**
- structure
- sense of humour
- education advocates

**Potential Foster Parent:** Adriana

**Occupation:** Mental Health Counselor. **Hobby:** Sports

**Home life:** Married, three kids. **Personal Description:** Loves to laugh, play games, and cook.

---

**Are you the match he needs?**

Children with Special Needs in foster care, need you. All families, including those with backgrounds in education, medicine and mental health, are needed in our community to meet the needs of these special children. Are you the perfect match? Reach out to an Oregon child. Become a foster parent to a child with Special Needs.

**fosterORadopt.com**

1-800-331-0503

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*Oregon Family Outreach*
Mason, age 9

His Special Needs:
- learning disability
- speech delay

Type of Family needed:
- [ ] structure
- [ ] sense of humour
- [ ] education advocates

Potential Foster Parent: Adriana
Occupation: Mental Health Counselor. Hobby: Sports
Home life: Married, three kids. Personal Description: Loves to laugh, play games, and cook.

Are you the match he needs?

Children with Special Needs in foster care, need you. All families, including those with backgrounds in education, medicine and mental health, are needed in our community to meet the needs of these special children. Are you the perfect match? Reach out to an Oregon child. Become a foster parent to a child with Special Needs.

fosterORadopt.com

1-800-331-0503
Print Material: Special Needs #2
(Name can be modified to reflect local county or other specific location.)

Are you the match he needs?

Children with Special Needs in foster care, need you. All families, including those with backgrounds in education, medicine and mental health, are needed in our community to meet the needs of these special children. Are you the perfect match? Reach out to an Oregon child. Become a foster parent to a child with Special Needs.

fosterORadopt.com

1-800-331-0503
Are you the match she needs?

Children with Special Needs in foster care, need you. All families, including those with backgrounds in education, medicine and mental health, are needed in our community to meet the needs of these special children. Are you the perfect match? Reach out to an Oregon child. Become a foster parent to a child with Special Needs.

fosterORadopt.com

Potential Foster Parent: Carol
Occupation: Nurse
Home life: Married, stay at home partner, quiet house
Personal Description: Likes to read, study history, dance

(Print Material: Special Needs #3
(Name can be modified to reflect local county or other specific location.)

OLIVIA, age 14 months

Her Special Needs:
- Drug Exposed
- Hypersensitivity

Type of Family needed:
- quiet home
- one stay-at-home parent
- health advocates

Are you the match she needs?

Children with Special Needs in foster care, need you. All families, including those with backgrounds in education, medicine and mental health, are needed in our community to meet the needs of these special children. Are you the perfect match? Reach out to an Oregon child. Become a foster parent to a child with Special Needs.

fosterORadopt.com

Potential Foster Parent: Carol
Occupation: Nurse
Home life: Married, stay at home partner, quiet house
Personal Description: Likes to read, study history, dance

(Print Material: Special Needs #3
(Name can be modified to reflect local county or other specific location.)

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Are you the match she needs?

Children with Special Needs in foster care, need you. All families, including those with backgrounds in education, medicine and mental health, are needed in our community to meet the needs of these special children. Are you the perfect match? Reach out to an Oregon child. Become a foster parent to a child with Special Needs.

fosterORadopt.com

Potential Foster Parent: Carol
Occupation: Nurse
Home life: Married, stay at home partner, quiet house
Personal Description: Likes to read, study history, dance
Format for Print Materials

- Full Poster
- Half Poster
- Half Sheet Flyer
- 4x2.5" Display Card
- Bookmark
VI. How Do We Hang on to the Great Families We Already Have?

While recruitment may bring interested families to the table, retention efforts are just as crucial in the recruitment process. When current foster families are strong partners with the child welfare system, they are much more likely to continue providing care for children and youth in the system and are also more willing to help with the recruitment of new families.

To keep prospective and current parents engaged:

- Have a timely and appropriate inquiry response strategy. First impressions are extremely important in keeping families interested and invested.
- Have a timely training and certification process established so that families are not lost during the period between inquiry and placement.
- Create specific trainings for foster families who are interested in caring for children and youth with disabilities.
- Provide specific support to families fostering children and youth with special needs. Be aware of resources in the community that families can access.
- Recognize and honor foster parents for a job well done.
Oregon Department of Human Services has partnered with Boys & Girls Aid, Oregon’s oldest non-profit child welfare agency, to create Oregon Family Outreach. Our campaign is dedicated to recruiting foster and adoptive families for Oregon’s children.
VII. References


3. Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care (2000). Developmental Issues for Young Children in Foster Care. *Pediatrics, 106* (5) 1145-1150


