Recruiting Homes for Sibling Groups

Standardized Targeted Recruitment Plan # 2

In 2009, 13,291 Oregon children spent at least one day in foster care. Of those children in foster care, 3,786 were part of a sibling group. While approximately 80% of these sibling groups were placed together in the same family (2009 Child Welfare Data Book, DHS), approximately 750 children statewide were unable to live with their siblings upon entering care.

Finding foster and adoptive homes for siblings in state care has been identified as one of the greatest recruitment challenges in the state. A recent survey conducted of Oregon DHS branches overwhelmingly identified the recruitment of sibling homes as an area in need of targeted attention. The reasons for children not being placed with their siblings are many and varied. At times, it is due to the lack of space in available foster homes. Other times, it is due to the needs of the children, as they may pose a danger to one another based upon their behaviors, or they may have needs that only a highly specialized foster family can meet. Although these reasons are valid, the sibling bond and the potential for issues related to sibling separation are significant enough that additional efforts to reduce/eliminate the separation of siblings are warranted.

Boys & Girls Aid has assembled this plan to assist DHS staff in efforts to recruit foster parents for sibling groups. Staff are urged to review the plan and select tools and suggestions that will work best in their community. Boys & Girls Aid recruiters are available to provide a training in each county to further assist in using this information to recruit homes for siblings.

Please email us at oregonkids@boysandgirlsaid.org if you have comments or questions, or if you wish to set up a training date.

February 28, 2011
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I. Why Are Sibling Placements So Important?

One of the most critical contributions that child welfare professional can provide for children who enter care is to preserve their connections with their brothers and sisters. Children who come into foster care or are adopted often are separated from existing or future siblings. Approximately 70 percent of children in foster care in the United States have another sibling in care (Child Welfare Information Gateway).

Extensive evidence-based research has demonstrated that the placement of siblings together results in more positive outcomes for the children involved. For children entering care, being placed with siblings can enhance their sense of safety and well-being. Siblings in the same home can provide natural support to each other and a sense of stability and belonging in an otherwise unfamiliar and vulnerable situation. The continued relationship with a sibling assists children in maintaining a sense of identity and a connection to their family history and cultural heritage.

Sibling separations have been associated with more negative outcomes for children in foster care, including but not limited to more running behavior, lower adoption rates, higher resource usage for special needs that arise as a direct result of a loss of this emotional connection, and more placement disruptions and moves. Siblings who have been separated from one another have indicated, when asked, that they have felt as if they were “doubly punished” or victimized by the child welfare system twofold by being removed from their home AND their sibling(s). For many of the children entering foster care with siblings, the sibling bond is the only one that has been consistent in their lives. It is especially important for children with a history of abuse or neglect to maintain the relationship with their siblings that may have, to date, been the only source of support and constancy in their lives.
II. Why is it Difficult to Find Homes for Sibling Groups?

Common Barriers to Sibling Placement:

Although sibling groups are very common in foster care and there are many benefits of keeping the children together in the same home, siblings are often separated and placed in different homes. Some of the reasons are of a practical or procedural nature, others more related to the relational factors of the siblings.

- The size of sibling group: children from larger groups are often placed in different homes due to insufficient available space in a single home.
- A sibling group has a large gap in ages, and available families are not approved for children in the entire age range or families aren’t comfortable with taking children of a certain age that is part of the sibling group.
- Siblings enter care at different times.
- Significant difference in the needs of the siblings exists.
- Relational differences in relatives: kin may want to foster only children to whom they are related and not include half or step-siblings who are not blood relatives.
- Behavior problems: a sibling with a behavior problem is more likely to be removed, while brothers and sisters may remain in a placement.
- Organizational procedures: homes able to take sibling groups are not held open for sibling groups due to insufficient availability of available homes.
- Agency rules regarding the maximum number of children who can be placed in a foster home.

Additional information on sibling adoptive placements can be found in the document at the AdoptUSKids website, *Ten Myths and Realities of Sibling Adoption*.
III. Defining a Sibling Relationship

The first step in keeping siblings together within the child welfare system is identifying what defines a sibling relationship. This can be a challenging issue particularly in cases in which children have lived in more than one family. A child’s definition of their siblings often differs from those of caseworkers or official legislative definitions.

Formal Definitions:

In Oregon, the definition of a sibling, reads:

A Sibling is one of two or more children or young adults who are related:

a) By blood or adoption through a common legal parent.
b) Through the marriage of the children or young adult's legal or biological parents.
c) Through a legal or biological parent who is the registered domestic partner of the children or young adult's legal or biological parent.

Informal Definitions:

Children are less formal than adults in their view of who is a brother or sister. In particular, children involved with the child welfare system may experience a number of different families and may develop close relationships with children with whom they do not have a biological relationship. There are many types of relationships that might be defined as sibling relationships:

- Full or half siblings, including children who were relinquished or removed at birth
- Step-siblings
- Other close relatives or nonrelatives living in the same home
- Foster children in the same family
- Group home mates with close, enduring relationships
- Children of the partner or former partner of the child’s parent

The definition under Oregon policy is more restrictive, however child and family centered practice would respect cultural values and recognize close, non-biological relationships as a major source of support for a child.
IV. Where Should I Look for Good Foster or Adoptive Parents for Sibling Groups?

A. Child Specific Homes

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

Tips and Tools:
Utilize file mining, social history information and conversations with the children entering care as quickly as possible upon placement to locate potential resources, either relative or kinship, that may be willing to provide a home to the children as a sibling group. Be sure to check for resources that may only have a relationship with one child in the group, either relative or non-relative, as these adults may still be very happy to foster the whole sibling group despite only having a relationship with one child.

B. Target Groups Likely to Foster Sibling Groups

1. Families with children already in the home
2. General applicants who are interested in foster care and/or are receiving foster care training
3. Faith Based Organizations

A guide on these groups, where to find them and how to reach them are in the table on the following page. Following the table are brief explanations as to why these groups are good targets and the specific tools that will be helpful in recruiting them.
### Standardized Recruitment Plan #2

**Target Groups for Recruiting Homes for Sibling Groups in Foster Care**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>TOOLS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families with children already in the home</td>
<td>PTOs Athletic, Music and Theater Events Teachers Associations Special Education and Counseling Departments Family Resource Centers Local events that cater to families, including fairs/carnivals, farmers or Saturday markets, etc.</td>
<td>-Request booth space, usually low cost or free, and distribute print materials -Organize a speakers’ panel -Make presentations at quarterly meetings and events. -Request that information be distributed to staff and parents.</td>
<td>-Letter to school -Posters at family-friendly locations -Fliers -Inserts -Display ad. -Speakers Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Local Leadership Foundations Churches of all denominations Church youth groups</td>
<td>-Meet with church leadership to request information be disseminated to congregation and foster care be the topic of a sermon or discussion group. -Have youth group take on recruitment distribution as a service project -Make a presentation, including foster parents or youth, to congregation or service group</td>
<td>-Letter to faith-based organizations -Insert for church bulletin -Fliers -Posters -Display ad -Speakers Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public</td>
<td>Civic organizations Salons Gyms Banks Grocery and department stores Recreation Departments Theme parks, bowling alleys, regional parks and other family</td>
<td>-Hang posters or place recruitment displays at businesses and organizations -Work with businesses’ public relations staff to have inserts mailed with utility and service bills and bank statements. -Request that fliers be placed in customer’s bags at grocery and department stores.</td>
<td>-Letter to businesses and organizations -Posters -Fliers -Insert -Display ad -Bookmarks</td>
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<tr>
<td>attractions</td>
<td>- Ask an alumni association to run a story or place an ad</td>
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<td><strong>Media</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Magazines</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Radio</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
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|             | - Contact media to arrange for positive coverage of foster care issues and the need for homes for siblings.  
|             | - Send display advertisements to local weekly/monthly newspapers.  
|             | - Send public service announcements to radio and television stations.  |
|             | - Display ad,  
|             | - Text for public service announcement (PSA) |
1. **Families with children already in the home:**

Large families are often willing to parent sibling groups because they are already comfortable with the functioning of a large group of people in one home. While workers may be weary of placing additional children into an already large family, research shows that living in a large family has many benefits. Large families tend to have a consistent structure that all members are familiar with, a welcome change for children who have experienced the chaos that abuse and neglect can bring. Additionally, children of large families become familiar with many styles and personalities, allowing them to learn flexibility.

*Large families teach each other how to work together. The older children help the younger children and they all learn to share* -- Mother of fifteen, ten of whom are adopted

**Tips and Tools**

1. Contact school administrators, PTOs or other school groups. Ask to have an ad placed in school publications such as newsletters and athletic program or a flier be mailed out with report cards. A sample letter to schools including a text insert can be found on page 13.
2. Contact community centers and other organizations where families often spend time, such as the YMCA. Distribute fliers and hold information sessions.

2. **General applicants already interested in foster care and/or receiving foster care training:**

Families who already are interested in fostering can be educated on the immediate need for foster families for sibling groups. A discussion of this need can be included in the training process through the sharing of sibling stories and the presence of a sibling group, either via a foster parent of siblings or one of the siblings themselves. A family considering fostering or adopting one child will be more likely to open their home to sibling groups knowing how critical it is to the child’s development.

3. **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.

**Tips and Tools**

Contact churches and other religious organizations in your community requesting their assistance in finding new homes for sibling groups. Go in person or send a letter asking that text be placed in church bulletins and posters and other print materials be disseminated. A sample letter and a text insert written for faith based organizations can be found on page 14.
V. How Do I Get Started in Finding New Homes for Sibling Groups?

We have included numerous tools to assist you in your recruitment efforts. You may wish to make a plan by first using the Blank Recruitment Plan sheet to map out your goals and key players, then 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@boysandgirlaid.org.

A. Planning Tools for Sibling Group Recruitment

   Blank Sibling Group Home Recruitment Plan

   Sample Sibling Group Home Recruitment Plan

B. Specific Tools and Materials for Sibling Group Recruitment

   Sample Letter to Schools

   Sample Letter to Faith-Based Organizations

   Sample letter to Businesses and Organizations

   Speakers Panel for Presentations

   Public Service Announcement (PSA)

   Sibling Print Materials

   Material Formats
Sibling Homes Recruitment Plan

__________________ County

_______ # of sibling homes needed

Who will recruit for these homes? __________________________________________________

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

______________________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience(s)</th>
<th>How will we reach them?</th>
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How can we address the pressures to place children in different homes? _________________

______________________________________________________________________________

If there is a significant difference in ages between the oldest and the youngest child in a sibling group, are there specific supports we can offer a foster parent?______________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
SAMPLE Sibling Homes Recruitment Plan

Sample County

# of sibling homes needed: 2

Who will recruit for these homes? Certifier S. Maxwell with assistance from BGAID

Who can we access to help (businesses, community partners etc)? Greg Kowski at Newberg Friends Church, Church on the Mountain-Kathy Franklin, Centerville Community Center- Chris Hanson, current foster parents

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Target Audience(s)</th>
<th>How will we reach them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Families with kids already in the home    | - Register for Carlton Fun Days
                                               |  - Present at PTOS at family resource centers
                                               |  - Distribute materials to McMinnville community centers and Parks and Rec Department. |
| Churches                                 |  - Contact Rika Kiswal and Kathy Michaels to set up presentations at their churches. |
|                                          |  - Ask them to insert text into their Sunday Bulletins for a month.                     |
| Media                                    |  - Contact News Register, KKJC & KSLC to ask that a display add and PSA be featured.  |

How can we address the pressures to place children in different homes?

If we can’t hold a home for siblings indefinitely, can we hold it for up to 60 days (?) Educate new foster parents on the importance of sibling relationships.

If there is a significant difference in ages between the oldest and the youngest child in a sibling group, are there specific supports we can offer a foster parent?

Connect teens in the sibling group to other teens through support group; provide respite care.
Sample Letter to Schools

[Date]

Dear ________________,

Sibling relationships are emotionally powerful and critically important not only in childhood but over the course of a lifetime. Sibling relationships are for most the longest relationships that people experience. For children in foster care, sibling relationships are even more critically important because they can provide the support and nurturance not consistently provided by parents. Studies show that for many children in care, sibling relationships promote resilience, diminishing the impact of separation from parents and other adverse situations. Unfortunately, children in care are often separated from their siblings.

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 more homes for children of all ages, but right now siblings in [NAME] County are particularly in need of loving homes that will accommodate two or more children of the same sibling group. I am writing to request the support of your schools in finding more foster families for siblings in your community.

I ask for your willingness to spread the message about the need for foster parents in your school hallways, newsletter and athletic and music programs. Included below is a short text that we ask you insert in newsletters, announcements and programs.

Did you know that when a child enters into foster care they are often not alone? Many children enter care along with a brother or sister or have a sibling who is already in care. Our community needs foster families who will take a family of children, small or large, so that siblings can be together. Last year over 13,000 Oregon children spent at least one day in foster care. Of those, almost 70% had siblings who were also in care. Help brothers and sisters in your community stay together. Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent today.

Color posters and fliers are available for distribution. Can you send information home to parents and hang posters in your hallways? Speakers are also available to present at appropriate events or committee meetings. We urge you to help kids in your community now!

[CALL TO ACTION] 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 ________________,

Sibling relationships are emotionally powerful and critically important not only in childhood but over the course of a lifetime. Relationships with siblings are the longest relationship that most people experience. For children in foster care, sibling bonds are even more critically important because they can provide the support and nurturance not consistently provided by parents. Studies show that for many children in care, sibling relationships promote resilience, diminishing the impact of separation from parents and other adverse situations. Unfortunately, children in care are often separated from their siblings.

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 more homes for children of all ages, but right now sibling groups in [NAME] County are particularly in need of loving families who are able to accommodate two or more children of the same sibling group. I’d like to enlist the support of your faith community in recruiting new homes for children in care.

There are many ways your congregation can help. The simplest is to hang a poster or flyer on your church bulletin board and to insert text about the need for new foster parents into your Sunday church bulletin. 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 congregation can take to help children and families in your community.

Did you know that when a child enters into foster care they are often not alone? Many children enter care along with a brother or sister or have a sibling who is already in care. Our community needs foster families who will take a family of children, small or large, so that siblings can be together. Last year over 13,000 Oregon children spent at least one day in foster care. Of those, almost 70% had siblings who were also in care. Answer the call and help brothers and sisters in your community stay together. Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent today.

[CALL TO ACTION] 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 Businesses/Organizations

[Date]

Dear _____________,

Sibling relationships are emotionally powerful and critically important not only in childhood but over the course of a lifetime. Sibling relationships are the longest relationships that most people experience. For children in foster care, relationships with siblings are even more critically important because they can provide the support and nurturance not consistently provided by parents. Studies show that for many children in care, sibling relationships promote resilience, diminishing the impact of separation from parents and other adverse situations. Unfortunately, children in care are often separated from their siblings.

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 more homes for children of all ages, but right now sibling groups in [NAME] County are particularly in need of loving families able to accommodate two or more children in the same sibling group. I’d like to enlist the support of your business in recruiting new homes for children in care. It takes a village to raise a child, and children in your village need you now! Anything you can do, big or small, will aid in locating more foster families for children in need.

There are many ways your business can help. The simplest is to hang a poster or flyer on your company bulletin board and to insert text about the need for new foster parents into your company newsletter. 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 business can take to help children and families in your community.

Did you know that when a child enters into foster care they are often not alone? Many children enter care along with a brother or sister or have a sibling who is already in care. Our community needs foster families who will take a family of children, small or large, so that siblings can be together. Last year over 13,000 Oregon children spent at least one day in foster care. Of those, almost 70% had siblings who were also in care. Help brothers and sisters in your community stay together. Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent today.

[CALL TO ACTION] I can be reached at [xxx-xxx-xxxx] or [xxxxx@xxx.xxx]. I will follow up with you next week.

Thank you immensely for your assistance in this important effort.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[CONTACT INFO]
Speakers Panel for Presentations

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 parents a sibling group. Current foster parents can aid by giving an accurate picture of what it’s like to be a foster parent for siblings.

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.

Current Foster Parents: Check in your own county for strong foster parents of siblings that you know will paint a realistic, yet positive picture of being a foster parent for a sibling group. 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 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.
Public Service Announcements

Local radio stations and newspapers are often willing to play or publish short public service announcements. The following texts are examples of what you might ask them to play:

PSA #1

Foster families for sibling groups of two or more children are needed in [NAME] County. No bond is typically longer, stronger or more comforting that that of siblings. Can you help keep siblings in our community together by opening your home? Call 1-800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a foster parent today.

PSA #2

Did you know that when a child enters into foster care they are often not alone? Many children enter care along with a brother or sister or have a sibling who is already in care. Our community needs foster families who will take a family of children, small or large, so that siblings can be together. Last year over 13,000 Oregon children spent at least one day in foster care. Of those, almost 70% had siblings who were also in care. Help brothers and sisters in your community stay together. Call 800-331-0503 or go to fosterORadopt.com to learn how you can become a certified foster parent today.
We need a foster home that can take all of us!

Help brothers and sisters in Lane County stay together.

Siblings entering foster care need each other now more than ever. Become a local foster parent and make a big difference for brothers and sisters in our community. Learn how today.

fosterORadopt.com

1-800-331-0503
Help brothers & sisters in Klamath County stick together.

Brothers and sisters entering foster care need each other now more than ever. Become a foster parent and help support Oregon families. Learn how today.

fosterORadopt.com 1-800-331-0503
Necesitamos un hogar de crianza que pueda recibirnos a todos!

Ayude para que hermanos y hermanas permanezcan juntos en el Condado de Lane.
Hágase un padre de crianza en nuestra ciudad y haga una gran diferencia para hermanos y hermanas en nuestra comunidad. Llame hoy para saber cómo hacerlo.

fosterORadopt.com

1-800-331-0503
Format for Print Materials
The Strongest and Longest Relationship: Siblings

Did you know?
Sibling relationships are often the longest relationship that an individual will ever experience, typically outlasting the parent/child relationship.

Sibling relationships provide an important context for a child’s understanding of their social, emotional, moral and cognitive worlds. In particular, siblings help each other understand people’s emotions, thoughts, intentions and beliefs. For children in foster care, relationships with siblings carry even more weight.

siblings deserve to be together!
Research shows that the placement of siblings together results in more positive outcomes for the children involved. For children entering care, being placed with siblings can enhance their feelings of safety and well-being. Siblings in the same home can provide natural support to each other and a sense of stability and belonging in an otherwise unfamiliar and vulnerable situation. The continued relationship with a sibling assists children in maintaining a sense of identity and a connection to their family history and cultural heritage.

Benefits of keeping siblings together:
- Children do not have to experience yet another loss and can begin to heal.
- Children learn to work through their problems rather than running from them.
- Children feel safer in a new home when they are with their siblings.
- Children have a shared sense of culture, history and identity.
- Children may be better able to attach to caregivers when the sibling attachment has not been damaged.

“My brother and sister and I became closer than the average siblings because we had to look out for each other in order to survive.” — Foster youth

“My sisters were a warm part of my heart. Only they held the keys to my emotions.” — Foster youth

Help brothers and sisters stay together: Become a foster parent for a sibling group.

Reach out to an Oregon child. fosterORadopt.com 1-800-331-0503
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 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.

• Provide specific support to families fostering sibling groups, particularly those with a wide gap in ages.

• Recognize and honor foster parents for a job well done.

• Explore sending youth to summer camps that are designed especially for
Oregon Department of Human Services has partnered with Boys & Girls Aid, Oregon’s oldest nonprofit child welfare agency, to create Oregon Family Outreach. Our campaign is dedicated to recruiting foster and adoptive families for Oregon’s children.

800.331.0503