

Finding a Home for Every Child: A Systematic Approach to Identifying Potential Foster Parents and Partner Organizations

Finding potential foster parents and partner organizations is essential to increasing the number of foster parents within the communities of most need. Through our review of multiple public and private sources, including conversations with representatives from *Our Community, Our Kids* (“OCOK”), data collected from the 2015 Buxton Foster Profile Presentation, conversations with foster care agencies, on-line research, and personal observations of organizational behavior, we have created a systematic approach to finding and reaching people who are most likely to foster.

Potential Foster Parents

Many surveys and data compilations have been done which identify what the “average” foster parent looks like and their media and social preferences. In or about 2015, Cook Children’s hired The Buxton Company to gather and analyze data on past and existing adoptive and foster parents in Tarrant County and to create a comprehensive report (the “Buxton Report”). The Buxton Report identifies key demographics and preferences most common among foster and adoptive parents. Multiple national surveys on this same topic are readily available on-line and generally agree with the results of the Buxton Report. However, the Buxton Report has the advantage of focusing on Tarrant County, where OCOK is in dire need of foster families.

Some of the key demographics of foster parents identified in the Buxton Report are:

- Most foster parents are Caucasian followed by African-American;
- Most are married (63%), but single females are worth targeting as they make up nearly 30% of foster parents;
- Foster parents are usually empty nesters between the ages 55 and 65 or two parent families with two or more children currently living together;
- 70% of foster parents have education beyond high-school;
- 69% of foster parents do not work outside the home or only work part-time; and
- They are not poor, but not wealthy. The median income ranges from \$75-\$100K.

Some of the key media and social preferences of foster parents identified in the Buxton Report are:

- The older empty nesters:
 - Attend events such as the symphony, Bass Hall, Casa Manana, Main Street Arts Fest, Mayfest, Sundance Square Events, Food + Wine Festival, FW Stock Show & Rodeo, Lone Star Film Festival, Near Southside, and Tarrant County National Adoption Day
 - Read FW360 and Fort Worth Magazine
 - Work with other non-profits such as Churches/religious organizations, Junior Achievement, and Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Younger families:
 - Attend events such as Concerts in the Gardens, FW Stock Show & Rodeo, Lone Star Film Festival, Near Southside, and the Colonial golf tournament
 - Read Fort Worth Weekly, *Fort Worth Magazine*, and *Fort Worth Child*
 - Work with Churches/religious organizations, Junior Achievement, Rodeo Syndicate, Junior League, and Junior Women’s Club
 - Local universities and alumni associations: Texas Christian University, Southern Methodist University, Baylor University, Abilene Christian University, University of North Texas, Texas Women’s University, and Dallas Baptist University

Possible Partner Organizations

Recruiting foster parents cannot be done in isolation. Community networking and securing partner organizations greatly increases the likelihood of recruiting, training, and licensing foster parents. These partner organizations help to advertise the need for foster parents. As individuals learn about the need, they become more likely to consider fostering. Additionally, partner organizations often provide a community of support as individuals go through the training, licensing, and parenting process.

Using the data collected from the above-referenced sources, several types of organizations have been identified as possible partners for foster care agencies seeking to recruit, train, and license foster families. The following types of organizations are listed below in order of their likelihood to produce leads to potential foster parents:

- **Faith-based Organizations** - Churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based organizations have a built-in system of community and support making them great candidates for partner organizations. Because participants in these organizations support one another and have shared values, fostering can become part of the organization's culture and one of its shared priorities. Besides cold-calling to the religious leaders of individual groups, foster care agencies could also reach out to ministerial alliances to arrange a time to speak with multiple faith leaders at one time.

Simple on-line searches of faith-based organizations will allow agencies to identify churches and faith-based organizations with family ministries and pre-existing interest in areas that would relate to foster care. It is our recommendation to find individuals related to these types of ministries and programs as a first contact. Often, in larger congregations, these individuals will have both the time and interest to consider a new partnership whereas the senior pastor, rabbi, imam, or senior-level leader may not have the time to invest until support staff or congregational leadership has considered the new project. These individuals may also have direct relationships with individuals who would be inclined to consider fostering.

- **School Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)** – PTAs tend to be made up of highly invested parents who value the children of a particular school. By reaching out to these organizations, foster care agencies can help parents see that fostering helps the kids in their immediate surroundings. Additionally, the Buxton Report suggests that families with children tend to be a demographic that is inclined to foster. Targeting PTAs will help foster care agencies get their message directly to those involved and concerned parents who might be open to fostering. Additionally, members of PTAs understand the importance of family and would be receptive to the need for keeping siblings together throughout their time in foster care.

Once specific schools are identified in the target area, a telephone call to the office staff of each school will likely be able to identify the parent contact of the PTA. This parent contact is much more likely to have more time than school administration or staff to consider the partnership. Additionally, these parent leaders often set the agenda and focus of the PTA during the school year.

- **Public Libraries** - Public libraries offer community groups the opportunity to present informational meetings and information about community needs. By partnering with public libraries, foster care agencies will have access to all demographics including the two most likely ages to foster (empty nesters and families with two or more children) as they tend to utilize the services of the public library. Libraries also receive public funding to assist in raising awareness of the need for quality foster parents.

- Community Centers - Like public libraries, community centers tend to attract a wide variety of people who use their services. Setting up informational tables, offering informational meetings, and having literature available during community sporting events will help foster care agencies gain name recognition and share their information with a number of the people in the demographic groups most likely to consider fostering.

Zip Code 76107 - A Case Study in Foster Care Outreach

In comparing the demographic information from the Buxton Report and other surveys and data compilations, our team compiled demographic information of several Tarrant County zip codes. Utilizing on-line information from the US Census Bureau, we were able to outline the median age, education level, ethnicities, marital status, income levels, employment status, and household make-ups of these zip codes.

As we compared the primary characteristics of likely foster parents with the data from the US Census report, we found that the residents of Fort Worth, Texas in the 76107 zip code possessed many of the characteristics of foster parents. 76107 is a diverse zip code: 71.9% of the population is Caucasian, 15.2% is African American, and 8.3% consists of two or more races. The Buxton Report indicates that Caucasian and African Americans tend to be the two ethnicities most likely to foster. Additionally, 85% of residents in 76107 have education beyond high school; the Buxton Report found that 70% of foster parents have education beyond high school. Finally, the median household income of residents of 76107 ranges from \$75,000-100,000 which is the earning range of likely foster parents.

76107 is located in the center of Fort Worth, Texas. It is just west of the downtown area and contains residential, retail, and cultural areas. The area known as the cultural district which includes museums, theaters, the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, and the exposition center is in the heart of 76107. In addition, several of the social events identified as preferences for foster parents are located in or near 76107. Social media preferred by potential foster parents in Tarrant County are readily accessible in this zip code. Real Estate in 76107 includes single family homes and apartment buildings of varying price levels.

76107 also contains many organizations identified as possible partner organizations. By reaching out to these possible partner organizations, OCOK can communicate the need for foster care parents throughout the diversity of the area. Through the process explained above, we recommend the following as strong possible partner organizations:

Faith Based Organizations

- Christ Chapel Bible Church
- Arlington Heights United Methodist Church
- All Saints Episcopal Church
- Connell Baptist Church
- Holy Family Catholic Church
- Fellowship Church FW
- 7City Church
- Trinity Lutheran Church
- Central Christian Church
- Calvary Bible Church
- Zion Missionary Baptist Church

Local Schools with Parent-Teacher Associations

- Arlington Heights High School
- Stripling Middle School
- The Leadership Academy at Como Elementary
- North Hi Mount Elementary School
- South Hi Mount Elementary School

Public Libraries

- Although there is no Fort Worth Public Library in the 76107 zip code, we recommend reaching out to the Fort Worth Central Library which is heavily utilized with a well-developed children's library that attracts families with children.

Community Centers

- Como Community Center
- Thomas Place Community Center