

# FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT

OCTOBER 2013

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## NOVEMBER: THE LAST RECRUITMENT DRIVE FOR 2013

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The end of 2013 is creeping ever closer; with **October** just about over, the last recruitment push for foster care organisations is **November**. December and January are usually quieter months for recruitment as people are generally busy in **December** getting ready for Christmas and winding up the year.

During **January**, many people are away (including your staff), or have children at home which makes it difficult to book assessment interviews and pre-approval training. However, you may find you have more initial inquiries in January: the increase in interest is largely due to people's good will over the holiday period and New Year's resolutions to give more to others. Another reason is perhaps that parents have seen their own children being less than giving over the holiday period. Many families would like their children to be more empathetic towards others, less egocentric and more appreciative of the positive situation they are in; prompting them to offer another child the same opportunities their children have.

Recruitment activities generally start back up in **February**, but before you dive head first into promotion stalls, handing out flyers at shopping centres, spending a fortune on advertising, take considered time to plan for the entire year.

- What recruitment activities have worked for you previously and what did not?
- What is your budget – if you have one at all?
- Who is involved with recruitment?
- How many carers do you need to attract this year? \*Remembering you should be looking at a **minimum** 10% increase of your current carer numbers
- You should be thinking 4-8 months ahead for your carer needs given the length of time for recruitment through to placement.

The most effective recruitment plans will align with your Strategic Plan, and run for several years. They will also involve your **WHOLE** organisation, not just the few people assigned to Recruitment and Retention. If you would like a consultant to assist with planning your recruitment, **contact NGO Recruitment, to make the most of the final months of 2013 and get a jump start on 2014.**

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## DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

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He believed in the diamond in the rough.  
As I believe in you.  
For I know you have what it takes,  
To one day, shine brighter than the rest.  
You are the diamond in the rough.  
- Ryan Lee Morris

Being a foster carer is probably the most significant role in the child protection sector. It is the hands-on role that is the first level of protection and healing afforded to children in care. Candidates who apply need to consider it from all angles, and think seriously about how it will affect them, their family and their networks. When I'm developing recruitment campaigns with organisations, I generally begin by asking them to consider what type of person makes a 'good' carer? 'Who' do they want to recruit?

### **What do we expect from carers? What qualities do we expect them to possess?**

While not said directly, it is quite often implied, that the expectations of carers are to: Manage a myriad of difficult and challenging behaviours, while trying to follow and comply with a behaviour management plan that most likely does not fit the situation at hand. Understand the effects of trauma, grief and abuse in anyway it manifests. Advocate enough for children so their rights are heard, but compliant enough to keep the status quo. Show just enough empathy to be seen as caring, but not too much so people think you have 'become too attached' to the child . Be patient when waiting extended periods for essential services for children. Be caring and loving but not too 'parental'. Remain professional, compliant and stoic through meetings where they may not always agree with the decisions. Have excellent social contacts and networks that will be there when they really need to debrief, not the debriefing that occurs with a caseworker they see once a month. Have a commitment to attending mandatory training that may not be relevant for the child in their care. Have the ability to meet the social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional and social needs of the child. Have the ability to be a 'positive role model' which is defined by either the individual caseworker, or the organisation. Develop a positive relationship with the child's family within the boundaries set by the organisation, and what may 'suit' the organisation. Have a home that is always neat, clean and tidy – always.

Realistically the role of foster carers is vast, and the expectations are often idealistic and quite frankly, unrealistic. What many consider to be the 'good' carers are not able to manage the children displaying any behaviours at all, and many have a preference for children under 3 years of age. People experienced in carer recruitment and support often find the 'best' carers are a little left of centre.

**I would affectionately describe the best carers I have worked with over the years as 'rough diamonds'.**

Firstly, they would laugh and agree with being called 'rough diamonds'. These are people who may not have excellent social graces and are not necessarily eloquent, but can cut through the rhetoric spouted by organisations in 2 seconds flat. Will not win Home of the Year by Vogue Living, but do not freak out if a child puts a hole in a wall. Their family is often a rag-tag bunch of lovable larrikins, people who welcome children with open arms and make them feel instantly part of something special. They may have been through challenging times themselves growing up and know exactly what it feels like to be hurt, lost, and broken and know what helped them work through those times. They may become loud or emotional at meetings while advocating for the child because they are passionate and want that child to have everything they need, when they need it. They may be rude to a caseworker or manager who is rude or disrespects them. They may welcome the child's family to be part of theirs but will always assure children are kept safe. Their house is clean but may have piles of washing to be folded, and children's toys scattered from one end to the other. They complete their paperwork, when they get 5 minutes to themselves. They do their own research on issues that may affect the child in their care.

They make sure the child attends appointments and services but may not have time to attend mandatory training held in an office an hour away because of it. They are keen for knowledge and learning and are constantly seeking answers. They spend the whole reimbursement on children's activities, toys, clothes, and family holidays. They say 'yes' to the children who other carers will not take. They stick with the children through extremely challenging times because they know in the end, it will be worth it. They can see the inner child behind the angry and sad young person. They are not carers because they want the world to thank them for it and tell them they are virtuous, they do it because they are good at it, and they feel that intrinsic satisfaction from doing the right thing for the children in their care.

If you put too many limitations and stipulations on carers at the beginning of the recruitment process, you will not come across the rough diamonds. You will find if you treat carers with the respect they so rightly deserve, that the rough diamonds will change your foster carer population over time. They will bring in other people with the same 'stickability' attitude. From them, you will learn more about how to care for children from trauma and abuse backgrounds than you ever read in any text book or heard at any university lecture. I can only suggest that recruiters and managers really consider the types of children coming through intake and seriously think about the needs of those children, and what family and environment will best work for them.

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## **COST OF FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT**

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**Daniel Stein**, Managing Partner, Stewards of Change, New York City has been able to add some insight into the Cost of Foster Care Recruitment with a project they completed in New York City. They found that their marketing costs per 'certified bed' in NYC were around \$4500 US. These costs are all-in media related costs (production and media). He believed that over time they would have decreased the cost with more data and increased use of social media which was in its infancy at the time of the project. Data pertaining to the cost of the assessment, training, accreditation and other HR costs are not included in the figure quoted.

To read a more complete account of the study:

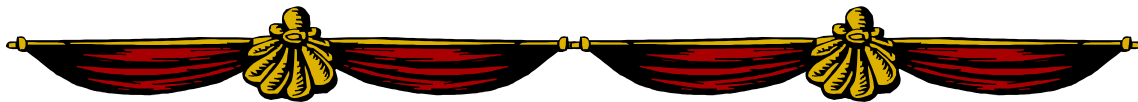
"An Integrated Approach for Recruiting and Retaining Foster Parents in New York City":

[http://www.stewardsofchange.com/LearningCenter/Documents/CASE\\_STUDIES/RecruitingNYC.PDF](http://www.stewardsofchange.com/LearningCenter/Documents/CASE_STUDIES/RecruitingNYC.PDF)

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## SOME OF OUR NEWEST RECRUITS

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Couple with grown children living in Sydney. He is a senior professional in the security industry; she has years of experience in Disability and Aged Care Services. Looking to care for children with a disability short – long term.

Couple with older children at home (in their 20's). She is a social educator in the disability sector and he is currently overseas for a big part of the year with his importing business. Looking to care for children with a disability.

Couple in Sydney with a 12 year old son. He works in the Disability sector and she works as an attendant carer in aged care services. Looking to care for children with a disability.

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## ASSESSORS & TRAINERS

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Our team of qualified and experienced **assessors and trainers** are also available to assist with your recruitment and development needs for your carer candidates, current carers and employed workforce. Contact Deanne Carroll to arrange a Recruitment Specification meeting or to discuss your assessment and training needs.

### **NGO Recruitment. The Community Recruitment Specialists**

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