2009/2010 Recruitment for Lutheran Family Services

Organizational Background

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska (LFS) is a statewide not-for-profit, multi-service human care agency. Lutheran Family Services serves over 35,000 people a year in more than 30 locations located in Nebraska, Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Wichita, Kansas. The Agency has moved forward in mission for over 117 years "to provide quality human care services that build and strengthen individual, family and community life."

Lutheran Family Services carries out its mission through three broad core competencies**:** Behavioral Health Services, Adoption and Services for Children, and Community Services. The behavioral health services include outpatient mental health treatment, substance abuse/addictions treatment, gambling addiction treatment, sexual abuse/incest treatment, preventative education services, emergency and community support services and specialized therapy or educational groups for children, adolescents, adults and families. Through the Adoption and Services for Children Programs, LFS provides infant, international and foster child adoption services for children, specialized foster care, treatment foster care for children with sexual acting out behaviors, pregnancy counseling, respite care for children with behavioral health problems and their families, family support services, early child mental health treatment and consultation services for children under age five. The Community Services Programs at LFS offer immigration legal services, refugee resettlement and the International Center of the Heartland.

Recruitment Need:

Over half a million children in the United States are in foster care today. According to national averages, most of those children will remain in foster care for 32 months and only half will return to their parents. According to the Casey Family Programs (a national organization focused on the improvement of foster care services in America) if no changes occur with current child welfare trends, over 9,000,000 children will experience the foster care system by 2020. With a 90% increase in the number of foster children since 1987, the need is only going to grow. More important than having additional foster homes available, more quality programs are necessary to assist these youth with preparing themselves to be successful adults. The long-term societal effects of children in foster care are disheartening… three in ten homeless persons are former foster children.

In Nebraska, the amount of children entering foster care grew at an average rate of 6.2% a year from 2000-2005, which is significantly higher than the national average of growth during the same time period (1.6%). At the end of the year 2007, 5,043 children were in the Nebraska foster care system awaiting home placement and permanency. Nebraska is currently undergoing a shortage of foster care placement options. **To avoid a foster care crisis, the Foster Care Review Board suggests increased recruitment, enhanced monitoring and support, and placement of young children in foster families who are willing to adopt.**

In response to the recommendations of the Nebraska Foster Care Review Board, LFS is pleased to report that **in 2008, LFS placed 104 foster children..twice as many children as in 2007 (51) due to the addition of a Foster Care Outreach Coordinator funded by The Sherwood Foundation.** This grant request seeks to build upon the success of the past year by requesting continuation funding and an expansion of outreach programs to recruit families for Reparation, Safety, Advocacy, Families and Empowerment (RSAFE) Treatment Foster Care.

Program Description:

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska will continue to focus on recruitment of foster families for the appropriate level of care per lead agencies recommendation. The Community Outreach Specialist and foster care staff will educate the community regarding the critical importance of foster and adoptive families.

In addition to searching for families for the various levels of placement. LFS will also expand its activities to recruit families for the RSAFE Treatment Foster Care Program during this year. Lutheran Family Services contracted with the State of Nebraska in 2007 to provide specialized treatment foster care for those children and youth who are experiencing emotional and behavioral disturbance and are in need of placement outside of their current home environment. **These children and youth need placement due to abuse, neglect, exploitation, family crisis or a breakdown in family functioning. Without the availability of specialized treatment foster care, many of these children face lengthy institutionalization away from their families.**

Prior to out of home placement, LFS recognizes that all relative placements have been exhausted. Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska knows that children who must be placed outside of their home are best served in an atmosphere that is as community-based and family-oriented as possible. Therefore, these children may best be served by specially trained foster parents who participate in, and are supported by, a professional foster care treatment team. This specialized treatment foster care program has been incorporated into Lutheran Family Services' RSAFE program which focuses on the specialized needs of families and children dealing with sexual abuse and sexual behavior problems. The therapists involved in this program are well-versed in the current therapies used to treat children with these special needs. This knowledge is needed to help many of the children who are placed in treatment foster care due to their past traumatic family experiences. RSAFE therapists are well aware that these children require much different family environments during their time of recovery.

Families that meet the requirements of the RSAFE Treatment Foster Care Program are difficult to locate because the children require such a high level of supervision. The State of Nebraska, Magellan Health Services and Lutheran Family Services have special mandated requirements for these families that include: two parent household; one parent "always" at home (does not work outside the home); no other children in the household; ability to attend treatment meetings; and constant supervision provided for the child. These requirements are in addition to all requirements stipulated for all other levels of foster care.

It is the goal of the program to recruit approximately 6 families in 2010. While these numbers seem small, they are reasonable given the difficulty of recruiting for these special needs children.

Lutheran Family Services has provided outreach into the community through education and training opportunities, as well as general marketing and community wide activities in the last year. All marketing materials for the program have been updated including: posters, brochures, flyers, online materials and informational packets. These materials will be updated on a yearly basis to maintain up-to-date information. These materials have been and will continue to be distributed by the Community Outreach Specialist to local businesses, churches, community organizations and human service agencies. The Community Outreach Specialist will also conduct presentations at many local churches, businesses, schools and community organizations to educate attendees about the importance of foster care families and how they can contribute to the success of children in the foster care system.

Aside from distributing these materials, LFS in the past has been "Community Organization of the Night" for the first Omaha Royals baseball game of the year. This allowed LFS to have an informational booth at the entrance to the stadium with volunteers answering questions about programs offered. In addition, volunteers wearing "Embrace Foster Children" t-shirts handed out free cups and brochures to everyone attending the game. The mascots for both baseball teams also wore the foster care t-shirts before the game, and one of the foster children placed by Lutheran Family Services threw out the first pitch. Ruth Henrichs, Lutheran Family Services' President/CEO, was interviewed by media during the game and provided further information about the foster care program at LFS. This large community-wide activity coordinated by the Community Outreach Specialist gave families in the Omaha area a chance to interact with LFS staff members and understand the efforts being made to give foster children in the community a healthier and safer home. LFS plans to continue this new tradition in the 2010 calendar year.

A paid television advertisement was also developed for the program which aired on KETV Channel 7 during the month of December. This ad helped to reach thousands of families in the area and was referenced by many of the individuals who contacted LFS seeking more information. In the next year of the project, more advertisements of this kind will be produced for both radio and television to reach a much wider audience. LFS also hopes to collaborate with the local television stations to create public service announcements at no cost to LFS. This will help to recruit a wider range of families and include information specific to the treatment foster care program to recruit more families for children with those special needs and home environments.

Another community wide project that is planned for the coming year involves "Walking a Mile in Their Shoes". This event, which is being duplicated from a model created in other states, involves acquiring enough donated children's shoes to represent all of the children currently in foster care in the area. These shoes are then lined up on the steps of the capitol building or other government buildings (i.e. city hall) and speakers are provided to discuss the need for foster care families in the area. This is a public event that allows the community to observe and

understand the visual impact of the numbers of children who are searching for safe and healthy families. This event could travel into various parts of the state to give greater exposure as well. The goal of LFS is to engage local public schools in this effort by contacting school administrators, student councils, the PTAs and service organizations to promote the donation of shoes and the event itself.

In order to meet the special needs of various ethnic cultures within the community, LFS has also initiated a closer working relationship with the Community Services Program staff of Lutheran Family Services which works primarily with refugees, asylees and immigrants in the metro Omaha community. This work involves discussions of recruiting refugee, asylee and immigrant families for the foster care program to meet the specific cultural needs of children placed into foster care who are themselves refugees, asylees or immigrants. Nebraska has an increasingly diverse population. An estimated 9% of Nebraska's population speaks a language other than English in their homes (2008 U.S. Census). Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska will be prepared to serve any child who is in need of foster care.

Additional partnerships and projects are also planned for the coming year. Nathan Hale Middle School has approached the LFS with an opportunity to work with the children and youth in the school during Extended Learning Time. This would involve a 7 week program taught by the Community Outreach Specialist to 12-15 students at a time. The program would teach the students about foster children and the importance of foster care. At the end of the program the students will create a presentation to create community awareness regarding foster care. The students will then perform this presentation for the school and at other events as applicable.

Recruitment Objectives:

The recruitment objective is to increase the number of families available for foster child placement both in Traditional, Emergency, Continuity Care and Agency Supported Foster Care as well as RSAFE Treatment Foster Care. This will be accomplished by the LFS staff through the marketing and educational activities previously mentioned, as well as personal contacts made by the Community Outreach Specialist to local churches, organizations and businesses. This outreach effort will help the foster care program meet their goal of serving more children in the Omaha area. In 2009, LFS has recruited 23 more families for the program and provided education to areas outside the Omaha metro area to expand the program further. This expansion includes much of Southeast Nebraska including: Butler, Saunders, Lancaster, Nemaha, Johnson, Richardson, Pawnee and Cass counties. In the next year the LFS hopes to accomplish the following:

- Recruit 46 new families for the various levels of foster care.
- Provide informational materials to five businesses a week;
- Speak at one church each month;
- Maintain schedule of fairs and events to have booths and informational tables (Community Outreach Specialist participated in 39 such activities in 2008/09);
- Recruit 6 families for RSAFE Treatment Foster Care Program in 2010;

- Outreach to two additional rural communities each month;
- Development plan for "Walk a Mile in Their Shoes" event;
- Create new paid advertisements for radio and television;
- Collaborate with television stations to create Public Service Announcements;
- Begin collaboration with Community Services program staff to recruit refugee, asylee and immigrant foster families;
- Create partnership with Nathan Hale Middle School to teach 7 week outreach program to children and youth who will create outreach performance to bring to the community; and
- Institute Shareware gatherings where current foster families recruit new families through informational gatherings at their homes.

LFS will also evaluate and re-structure the overall recruitment plan for the foster care program in order to make sure the program is being served in the most effective and efficient manner possible and to ensure that the community is being educated adequately.

Ongoing Services/Retention
LFS will continue to maintain ongoing services to retain current foster families by providing annual recognition events, team meetings, required Foster Care informational meetings, quarter newsletter, family fun calendar, emergency 24 hour on call phone service, recognizing youth in care as well as bio children in the home, and any additional support a family may need that is defined in the foster parent contract.

Fost/Adoption
Lutheran Family Services makes every effort to recruit families from multi-ethic backgrounds by attending and marketing to various areas of Southeast Nebraska. LFS follows the guidelines defined by the Multi Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) in regards to placing children from various minority and ethic groups.

Population Served: (2009 data has not been completed)

The population to be served is children and youth involved in Traditional, Emergency, Continuity Care or Agency Supported Foster Care who have become state wards due to various adverse family/home environment situations. Lutheran Family Services places these children based on available homes and the needs of the children. In 2008 the range in age of foster care children placed by LFS was 2 months to 19 years (youth age out of the foster care system at 19 years of age). The average age of foster care children placed by Lutheran Family Services was 10.08. Of the children placed by LFS in 2008, 31% were African-American, 6% were multi-racial, 49% were Caucasian and 14% were Hispanic. Children and youth involved in Traditional Foster Care represented 18% of LFS' placements, Emergency Foster Care was 40%, Continuity Care Foster Care was 9% and Agency Supported Foster Care was 56% of the placements made in 2008. An additional population to be served will be children and youth involved in the RSAFE Treatment Foster Care Program who are being placed outside of

their home due to abuse, neglect, exploitation, family crisis or a breakdown in family functioning.

LFS will reach out to all members of the community who have an interest in becoming foster parents. These parents will then undergo training and various background checks in order to guarantee the safety of the child. However, the LFS will not discriminate among socio-economic or cultural groups in distributing materials or educating the community.

Timeline:

Activity	Staff Responsible	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Update list of businesses, organizations and churches in the area that can be approached for material distribution and education	Community Outreach Specialist	X	X	X	X
Contact businesses and distribute materials	Community Outreach Specialist	X	X	X	X
Contact churches and organizations to provide educational presentations	Community Outreach Specialist	X	X	X	X
Coordinate activities in the community to promote the foster care program and educate the community	Community Outreach Specialist, Volunteer Coordinator	X	X	X	X
Create partnership with Nathan Hale Middle School for Extended Learning Time program	Community Outreach Specialist	X			
Teach 7 week program at Nathan Hale Middle School	Community Outreach Specialist		X	X	X
Update marketing materials to promote foster care program	Community Outreach Specialist, Director of Public Relations	X			X
Develop specific materials for RSAFE Treatment Foster Care family recruitment	Community Outreach Specialist, Director of Public Relations,	X	X		

	Graphic Designer				
Create media materials including ads for radio and television	Community Outreach Specialist, Director of Public Relations, Graphic Designer		X	X	
Contact interested families and recruit them for initial foster care training	Community Outreach Specialist	X	X	X	X
Present evaluation materials to Program Supervisor on a monthly basis	Community Outreach Specialist	X	X	X	X
Create quarterly report regarding recruitment information and provide to Program Supervisor	Community Outreach Specialist	X	X	X	X
Begin recruitment of refugee, asylee and immigrant families for foster care program	Community Outreach Specialist, Community Services staff			X	X
Revise recruitment plan for foster care program to provide targeted marking for more effective recruitment of families	Community Outreach Specialist, Foster Care Program Supervisor			X	X

Evaluation:

In continuation of the management and supervision of the Foster Care Program, the Community Outreach Specialist will be required to report to the Foster Care Program Supervisor and Lead Agencies on a quarterly basis to share progress made in recruitment including number of families contacted, numbers of materials distributed, and businesses, organizations and churches approached for promotion and education purposes. The foster care program itself will continue to maintain its own protocol and standards for evaluation of the children within the program. Such evaluation will include conducting routine assessments of the children and evaluating the safety of the home placement and the degree of permanency of their placement. This information will not be used directly to evaluate the recruitment, but it will inform the program regarding the quality of families available and the need for changes in training or acceptance standards.

The Foster Care Program at LFS has a track record of success in placing children in safe and loving homes. In 2008, 88% of youth served by the LFS foster care program remained in one foster home. During that same time period state trends showed that 45% of children served through other agencies and services experienced between one and three

placement changes while 55% experienced 4 or more moves. Providing a child with consistency and safety as quickly as possible is the goal of any foster care program. Lutheran Family Services is providing children with families that desire to help children in need and are able to house them securely and without harm. Lutheran Family Services has a strong reputation across the state and reaches out to the community through education and training opportunities, however, the program needs additional homes to provide safe and stable placements for more children. **The current Community Outreach Specialist has added 23 families to the program, and the goal for 2010 is to double that amount.** Those additional families will assure that more children and youth can be served and provided loving homes through Lutheran Family Services' Foster Care Program.

LFS will collect information regarding every family that is identified and contacted so that further analysis can be done regarding the demographics of families who express interest as well as those who decline more information. This will help improve the targeted marketing and education efforts in the most needed sectors of the community and will provide important information to the program regarding methods of approach to different socio-economic and cultural demographics of families. LFS will also document all businesses, organizations and churches approached as well as their response to track efforts made in the community. LFS will monitor calls to see what marketing source drew the person to Lutheran Family Services. This will be helpful in evaluating what is the most effective mode of marketing and how to target promotional efforts and resources in the most efficient manner.

All information gathered for evaluation will be provided to the Foster Care Program Supervisor on a monthly basis. Reports will be compiled by the Community Outreach Specialist on a quarterly basis to show a breakdown of results for that time period and what was learned. This narrative report will provide a description of the families and businesses contacted; how many expressed interest in the program and why; as well as information regarding the marketing campaign and activities conducted during that quarter.

Risks associated with recruitment include lack of response from the community regarding the foster care program. It is possible that initial promotional and educational efforts will return little to no interest in the program, however, LFS will use this lack of interest as an indicator that current efforts are not appropriate for the community and will alter the recruitment strategy. Any adaptation of the materials or community efforts will be approved by the Foster Care Program Supervisor and discussed at length with the program staff to assure that all information being shared is appropriate and accurate.

It is expected that finding additional families for the RSAFE Treatment Foster Care program will be a challenge, due to the number of mandated requirements for those families. LFS will maintain a high standard of quality for these families, while expanding the program through further education and outreach. The goal of recruiting 6 families in the next year for the RSAFE Treatment Foster Care Program is quite ambitious. However, Lutheran Family Services is confident that with the expanded marketing and information distributed by the Community Outreach Specialist these families will be located so that children with even greater needs can be saved.