Business Case

“Foster the Family” Program

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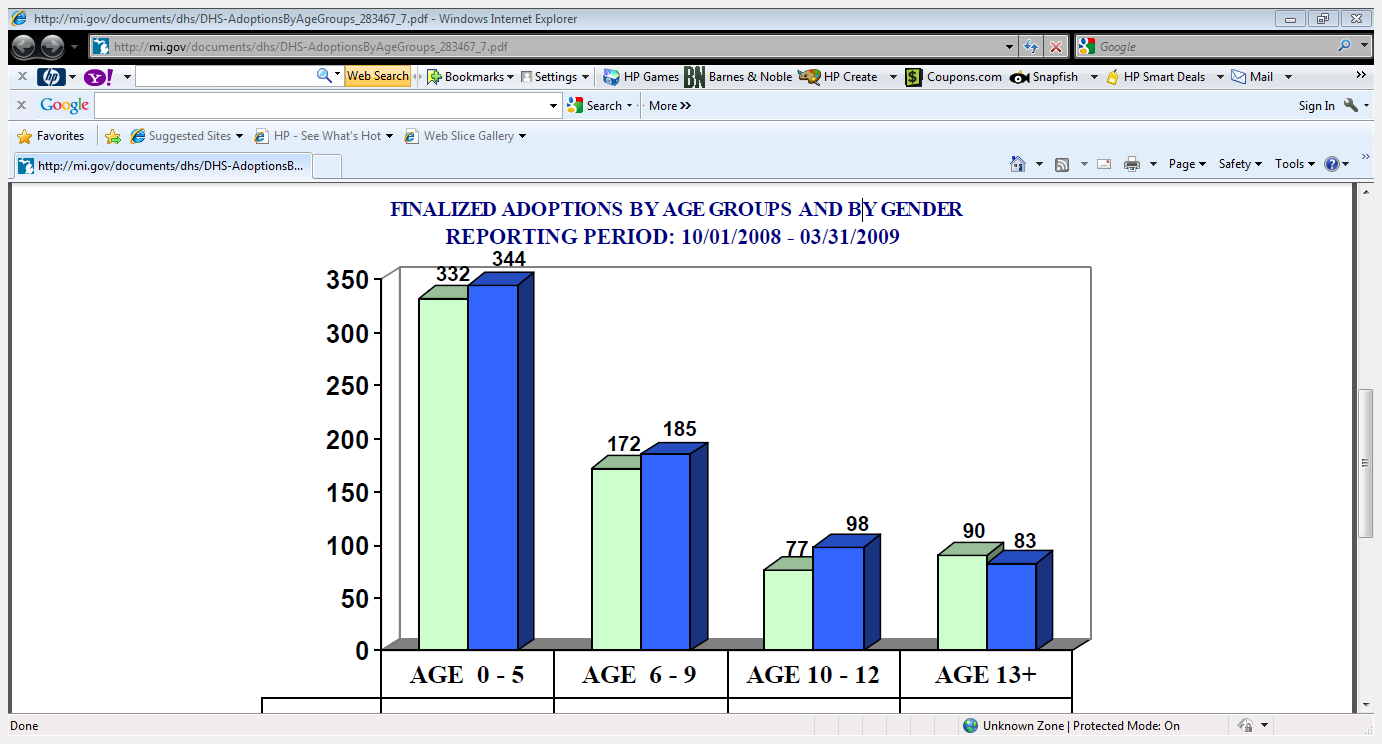
1. **Introduction**
   1. *Purpose of Document-*This document is a proposal for funding to implement “Foster the Family,” an initiative that will increase adoption rates of foster care adolescents, ages 13-18, by foster parents in Washtenaw County.
   2. *Overview of the Document-*Foster the Family seeks to assist foster care parents interested in adopting their foster care adolescents through the complicated and lengthy adoption process by facilitating support groups and creating educational documents and seminars. It is expected that through providing these services to potential adoptive parents of foster care adolescents, adoptions in the area will increase.

Foster the Family will create an educational webinar, educational documents, and support groups for prospective adoptive parents. This program will employ six full-time and part-time employees for a six month implementation process. Evaluations of the project will be conducted throughout the implementation process and after the main programs have been established and run.

* 1. *Project Appraisal and Benefit-* Foster the Family is a high yield, low cost, low risk initiative that will help foster children and potential adoptive parents throughout the Washtenaw community.

1. **Business Context**
   1. *Background-* Countless studies have detailed the negative outcomes of children in foster care systems (Pilowsky & Wu, 2007, p. 351). Adolescents involved with foster care are about four times more likely to have attempted suicide and five times more likely to have substance abuse issues that those not in the foster care system (Pilowsky & Wu, 2007, p. 351). When comparing long-term fostering to adoption, adolescents appear to have higher levels of emotional security, a stronger sense of belonging, and stronger feelings of general well-being than those in a long-term foster care situation (Triseliotis, 2002, p. 23). Because of these factors, the main objective of Foster the Family is to increase the number of adoptions of foster care adolescents.

Further, Foster the Family will target adolescent youth because data has shown that youth ages 13-18 are less likely to be adopted than younger children (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services [MDHS], 2011).



(Department of Human Services, 2011)

A recent Department of Human Services report (2007)analyzed advice that adoption families gave to agencies regarding the adoption process and concluded that having resources and services available to explain the adoption process and the ability to provide support and encouragement to families involved in the adoption process were imperative to successful adoption outcomes (DHHS, 2007, p. 13). Because of this, Foster the Family will provide the support and information needed in order to facilitate successful adoptions.

* 1. *Rationale and Strategic Fit-* The Foster the Family program fits in with the strategic mission of hypothetical Adoption Centers because the targeted outcome of the program is to increase adoptions in Washtenaw County.
  2. *Organizational Impact Statement-*Foster the Family program will have a limited impact on the day-to-day operations of our Adoptive Agency Center. Foster the Family will need to capitalize on the knowledge of current staff members in order to create the most effective educational tools possible and will use the Center’s facilities and office space. Also, Foster the Family will use the Adoption Agency Center database in order to reach out to parents of adopted youth who have previously experienced the adoption process and are willing to provide support to prospective parents.
  3. *Assumptions and Constraints-*It is assumed that there are professionals in the field willing to contract with employees of Foster the Family program and share their knowledge and expertise of the adoption process so that staff will be equipped to create educational webinars and documents. Further, it is assumed that there are parents of adopted youth who have previously experienced the adoption process and are willing to provide support to prospective parents.

1. **Project Definition**
   1. *Statement of Scope-* Foster the Family will increase the adoption rates of foster youth ages 13-18 in Washtenaw County by their foster parents through the creation of support groups, educational documents, and educational webinars.
      1. *Project Objectives-*Foster the Family will increase adoptions of teenage foster youth, ages 13-18, by prospective foster care parents in Washtenaw County.
      2. *List of Target Outcomes-* 
         * Increase knowledge of the adoption process for perspective adoptive parents in the foster care system.
         * Decrease fear about the adoption process for perspective adoptive parents in the foster care system.
         * Make the adoption process more accessible for perspective adoptive parents in the foster care system.
      3. *List of Committed Outputs-* 
         * Support groups for prospective parents.
         * Educational documents with tips on how to navigate the transition from foster care to adoption.
         * Educational webinars with tips on how to navigate the transition from foster care to adoption.

* 1. *Outcomes Definitions-*
     + - **Increase knowledge of the adoption process for perspective adoptive parents in the foster care system.**

This target outcome is important in increasing the number of children moving from foster care to adoption because our literature review revealed that parents who do not adopt their foster care children (even though they want to) needed help understanding the convoluted adoption process. Increasing knowledge about the process is an important component of increasing the number of adoptions. Further, this outcome is measurable because we can analyze pre-test/post-tests of perspective adoptive parents in order to analyze whether or not their knowledge has increased. Our group intends on increasing the knowledge of prospective adoptive parents through relatively quick informational scenarios (ex. Webinars, information available to parents, flyers, etc.) It is rational to conclude that holding informational sessions, creating webinars, and creating flyers will lead to increased knowledge of the adoption process.

* + - * **Decrease fear about the adoption process for perspective adoptive parents in the foster care system.** This target outcome is important to increasing the number of children moving from foster care to adoption because a fear of the process and the perceived emotional and financial stress involved with the process are major reasons why prospective adoptive foster parents never navigate or complete the process. Foster to Family plans to decrease this fear by administering support groups led by professionals and previous adoptive parents, and it is rational to conclude that the support groups will lead to an overall decreased fear of the process. This outcome will be measured by a post-support group survey detailing whether or not the prospective adoptive parents felt as though the support group eased their fear of the adoption process and all of the burdens that are potentially associated with it
      * **Increase the accessibility of the adoption process for prospective parents.**

Through the first two targeted outcomes, Foster the Family will increase the accessibility of the adoption process for prospective families. By decreasing fear and increasing knowledge, overall accessibility of the process will increase. Again, this outcome will be measured by evaluating the increase of adoptions from foster care parents in Washtenaw County.

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| --- | --- |
| INPUTS | OUTPUTS |
| Staff time and expertise | Support groups for prospective parents |
| Research | Educational webinars |
| Funds | Educational Documents with information and tips on how to navigate the transition from foster care to adoption |
| Expert Consultants |

* 1. *Inputs/Outputs Summary*

Please see Logic Model, Appendix A, for further detail.

1. **Stakeholder Analysis**
   1. Foster to Family employees will engage various stakeholders to ensure the success of this program. Some of the projects stakeholders include, but are not limited to: Foster care children, foster care parents, adoptive parents, potential adoptive parents, birth parents, Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), the Juvenile Justice system , case managers, foster care adoption support groups, other adoption agencies in Washtenaw County, members of our organization, taxpayers, and funders. Please see Appendix B for further analysis of potential stakeholders of the Foster to Family Program.
2. **Project Governance**
   1. Please see our Gantt Chart, in Appendix C.
3. **Resource Plan and Budget**
   1. *Staff and Administration*-The Foster the Family project will employ two full-time and four part-time staff.

* **Project Director** (full time)-Responsible for hiring consultants and project staff, maintaining relationships with stakeholders in the community, overseeing the development of the program, and ensuring the established budget is adhered to.
* **Research and Outreach Coordinator** (full-time) Responsible for researching the adoption process, developing helpful informational flyers and webinars, reaching out to prospective parents who would benefit from the Foster the Family program, and reaching out to and creating relationships with various stakeholders in the community.
* **Support Group Facilitator** (part-time)-Responsible for developing and administering support group meetings to prospective parents in the Washtenaw County area.
* **Project Evaluator** (part time) - Responsible for collecting and analyzing data from the pre-test post-test surveys, focus groups, and assessments administered to participants of the program, and for for evaluating the change in adoption rates overtime.
* **Graphic Artist** (part time) - Responsible for creating informational flyers to teach about the adoption process, including layout/design of all of the project’s publications and training materials for staff and webinar layouts.
* **Outside Consultant (part-time)-**Will be hired on a contractual basis, at a base rate of 3,000 dollars. Responsible for providing key, insightful knowledge about the adoption process and will providing suggestions for project materials to ensure accuracy and authenticity.
  1. *Available Resources*
* Building and supplies –Foster the Family will be developed in a pre-existing adoption agency in Washtenaw County that has empty office space where meeting spaces, offices, tables, copy machines, printers and other resources are already available for use.
  1. *Needed Resources*
* **Personnel -** Two full-time staff at 100% salary for six months, three part-time staff at 100% salary for six months, and one stipend for a professional consultant.
* **Facilities** - None (Foster the Family program will be housed in an existing adoption agency in Washtenaw County).
* **Equipment -**Five laptop computers for staff use
* **Supplies -** Paper, pencils, ink cartridges, stamps, envelops and various other office supplies.
  1. *Budget*

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| --- | --- |
| **Expense** | **Amount** |
| **Personnel** | **$79,000.00** |
| Project Director | $25,000.00 |
| Research/Outreach Coordinator | $20,000.00 |
| Support Group Facilitator (part-time) | $10,000.00 |
| Outside Consultant (part-time) | $3,000.00 |
| Graphic Designer (part-time) | $2,000.00 |
| Project Evaluator (part-time) | $18,000.00 |
| **Facilities** | $0.00 |
| **Equipment** |  |
| Supplies (paper, pencils, ink, envelopes, stamps) | $3,000.00 |
| Laptops (5) | $3,500.00 |
| **Total** | **85,500.00** |

1. **Issues and Risks**
   1. *Critical Risks-* A potential risk to the Foster the Family is the foster care policies of DHS. Case managers are taught to always strive to re-unite children with their birth families and this is a potential threat to the success of our program (Michigan Department of Human Services, 2011).
   2. *Key Issues-* The Foster the Family program may encounter a limited knowledge of the adoption process and will be unable to help foster care parents navigate or understand the system. Foster the Family will combat this issue by consulting with seasoned professionals who have a keen understanding of the adoption process and are willing to provide their expertise to our program. We will also need to address potential issues that would come up when working with the state, including the bureaucratic structures that we would need to go through and mitigate to successfully initiate and run the project. Further, prospective parents may perceive that there is economic disadvantage to adopting over remaining a foster parent. We plan to mitigate these issues through providing information on tax incentives, and highlighting the overall non-economic benefits of adopting foster care youth.
2. **Evaluation Plan**
   1. Evaluation of the Foster the Family program will include process and outcome evaluation measures. Having a structured process that is monitored on an ongoing basis will tell us when and where program activities occurred, who delivered them, if they were provided as planned, whether intended target population was reached, and the An outcome evaluation will clarify what has been achieved as well as the overall impact of the program. See Appendix D for further information.

**References:**

Michigan Department of Human Services. (2009, May 26). AFCARS Adoption Reporting System-State Ward Finalized Adoptions By Age Groups. In *Michigan Department of Human Services*. Retrieved November 30, 2011, from http://mi.gov/documents/dhs/DHS-AdoptionsByAgeGroups\_283467\_7.pdf

Pilowsky, D. J., & Wu, L. (2006, April). Psychiatric symptoms and substance use disorders in a nationally representative sample of American adolescents involved with foster care [Electronic version]. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *38*(4), 351-358.

Triseliotis, J. (2002). Long-term foster care or adoption? The evidence examined. *Child and Family Social Work*, 23-33. Retrieved November 30, 2011

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). Report To Congress On Barriers & Success Factors In Adoptions From Foster Care: Perspectives Of Families And Staff Supported By The Adoption Opportunities Program. In *Children’s Bureau Administration on Children, Youth and Families*. Retrieved November 30, 2011, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/barriers/index.htm

**Appendix A: Logic Model**

**Appendix B: Stakeholder Analysis**

**Washtenaw County Foster Adoption Agency**

***Champion and Project Owner***

*Issues*

Improve quality of life for adolescent foster children with permanent family membership via adoptions and streamline this process which agency is responsible for.

*Impact*

Influenceover funders and stakeholders and power over program implementation.

*Engagement Objectives*

1. Increase adolescent foster parent adoptions.
2. Reduce adoption processing time.
3. Provide educational outreach of adoption process to foster parents.
4. Provide foster/adoption parent support.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Form coalitions among stakeholders.
2. Create stakeholder communication plan (meetings, email lists, deliverables, ect.).
3. Create and implement stakeholder engagement plan

**Department of Human Services**

***Funder and Beneficiary and Influencer***

*Issues*

Save taxpayer investment in services like social benefits, juvenile and adult court/penitentiary/health and other expenditures when adolescents are unsupported in becoming productive members of society.

*Impact*

Funding this program will be a blueprint for a national program that quickly moves adolescent foster youth into approved legal family membership for lifetime support, which builds social capital that is necessary for social success. Politicians may support the program for the public good and re-election.

*Engagement Objectives*

1. Provide funding to this program.
2. Evaluate success for program expansion nationwide.
   1. Better health/education/employment outcomes for adolescents.
   2. Decreased case management and subsidiary costs due to decreased number of children in foster care.
   3. Stronger society with more productive members of society.
   4. Cost benefit to taxpayers over lifetime of adopted foster children.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Evaluations reports at milestones and upon completion of program.
2. Steady line of communication: documents and email with point official.
3. Market success stories to DHS and general public.

**Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**

**Beneficiary and Influencer**

*Issues*

Foster adolescent youth have higher involvement in the JJ system.

*Impact*

Decreased crime rates involving foster youth offenders and less cost to the court and JJ system, saving taxpayer expense. Foster youth have support to achieve productive life outcomes.

*Engagement Objectives*

1. Decreased crime rates.

2. Less crowded courts and workloads.

3. Less funding requirements.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Stakeholder meetings and committee involvement.

2. Evaluations reports at milestones and upon completion of program.

3. Steady line of communication with court personnel and point official.

4. Market success stories to JJDP and general public.

**Adolescent Foster Youth**

**Beneficiary and Customer**

*Issues*

Adolescent foster youth “age-out” the foster program and have no resources for support at a delicate age in which their education in not complete and financial independence is unlikely. These youth are left without social capital during a developmental life stage in which social relations are critical to personal development and assessing their “future possible selves”.

*Impact*

While foster youth often desire to return to their birth parent(s), it is often impossible and not I the best interest of the youth. When the foster youth becomes a legal member of a family, social capital is gained for lifetimes. For a youth who has experienced many life difficulties, being a member of a stable family eliminates social isolation, and likely increased other resources not otherwise available. The likelihood that the youth will avoid crime and have direction and resources to pursue advancement toward positive social participation is increased. In some cases the adopted foster adolescent may have contact and engagement with the present adopted parent and the distant birth parent, which could be positive for the mental health of the adopted foster child..

*Engagement Objectives*

1. Reduced involvement in crime producing a negative crime history.
2. Increased participation in higher education.
3. Social adjustment and positive participation.
4. Increased mental health and self-worth and esteem.
5. Increased physical health.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Outreach and market adoption alternative to adolescent foster youth.
2. Provide counseling, support groups and sessions to inform and support foster youth.
3. Include adolescent foster youth in program planning to address foster youth concerns.

**Foster Parent**

**Beneficiary and Customer**

*Issues*

Foster parents currently are dis-incentivized to adopt their foster children. Federal policies favor returning youth to their birth parents. Foster parents as a natural protection mechanism, even unconsciously, are reticent to fully bond with their foster child, as the child may be purged from their home and lives at any time. Barriers to adoption include cost, ease to navigate the process, federal government financial disadvantages.

*Impact*

Foster parents and their families desire to make loving attachments to their foster children. With much uncertainty regarding permanence, fear of loss may instill reticence to fully engage as a family with adolescent foster youth. Making the process clear and easy to manage will support those who desire to make a permanent bond to do so. As parents, it is likely that a lifetime social capacity will be developed that is an advantage to both the parents and the adopted child.

*Engagement Objectives*

1.Increase knowledge of adoption alternative.

2. Increase adoptions.

3. Reduce length of time to fulfill the adoption process.

4. Provide foster parent support through adoption support and counseling.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Outreach and market adoption alternative to foster parents.
2. Provide counseling, support groups and sessions to inform and support foster parents.
3. Include foster parents in program development planning to address foster parent concerns.

**Birth Parent**

**Beneficiary and Customer**

*Issues*

While some birth parents may be against adoption of their children to a foster parent, in other cases some birth parents may support adoption. For those birth parents who desire for their children to have a stable family and the resources and social capital that an involved family can provide, seeing their child(ren) able to have a “second” chance will relieve some guilt and burdens that they my not be in a position to overcome. For some birth parents, this may be the ultimate expression of love and concern for their child(ren).

*Impact*

Birth parents will be relieved of their legal responsibilities for their children. Under some circumstances, birth parents may remain in contact with their natural child(ren).

*Engagement Objectives*

1.Increase knowledge of adoption alternative.

2. Increase adoptions.

3. Reduce length of time to fulfill the adoption process.

4. Provide birth parent support through adoption support and counseling.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Outreach and market adoption alternative to birth parents.
2. Provide counseling, support groups and sessions to inform and support birth parents.
3. Include birth parents in program development planning to address birth parent concerns.

**Adolescent Foster Youth Social Work Caseworkers**

**Beneficiaries and Customers**

*Issues*

Social workers who manage foster to adoption caseloads will feel personal satisfaction and fulfillment with their daily work as they will be upholding their NASW code of ethics by serving these youth and the families involved in achieving stability in their separate and yet, collaborative family lives. Reducing caseload fatigue and stress with a quick, clear and streamlined foster to adoption process to manage on behalf of the families and youth will allow more time spent with each participant/client.

*Impact*

Social work case managers serving children and youth are currently overworked and under much stress, which leads to burnout and dropout. By efficiently and favorably impacting children and families, social workers may have increased career satisfaction leading to long-term careers and mature adeptness and precision because of long-term career experience and satisfaction.

*Engagement Objectives*

1.Increase knowledge of adoption alternative and process.

2. Increase adoptions.

3. Reduce length of time and paperwork to fulfill the adoption process.

4. Provide birth parent support through adoption support and counseling.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Outreach and market adoption alternative to foster child social workers.
2. Provide counseling, support groups and sessions to inform and support foster child social work caseworkers.
3. Include social work foster child caseworkers in program development planning to address birth parent concerns.

**Adoption Agency Advocacy Organizations**

**Beneficiaries and Influencers**

*Issues*

Addressing barriers and inefficiencies to adoption for adolescent foster youth is extremely timely, as this is the last chance these youth may have to be part of a family that will have the resources to guide them into productive adulthood. Improving policies and procedures will be beneficial to all adoption agencies including those specifically serving foster families and children.

*Impact*

Improving the process and procedures for adoption will allow more children and families to be served by these organizations, which will improve their success in achieving their agency’s adoption goals.

*Engagement Objectives*

1.Increase knowledge of adoption alternative and process.

2. Increase adoptions.

3. Reduce length of time and paperwork to fulfill the adoption process.

4. Provide agency support as needed.

*Engagement Strategy*

1. Outreach and market adoption alternative to Adoption Advocacy organizations.
2. Provide information to inform and support Adoption Agency Advocacy organizations.
3. Include Adoption Advocacy Organizations in program development planning to address shared concerns.

**Appendix C-Gantt Chart-**

**Appendix D-Evaluation Plan:**

*Process Evaluation*

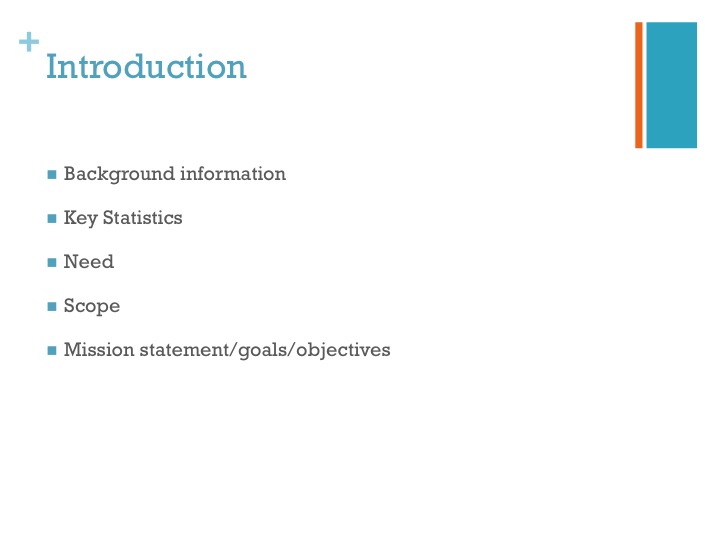
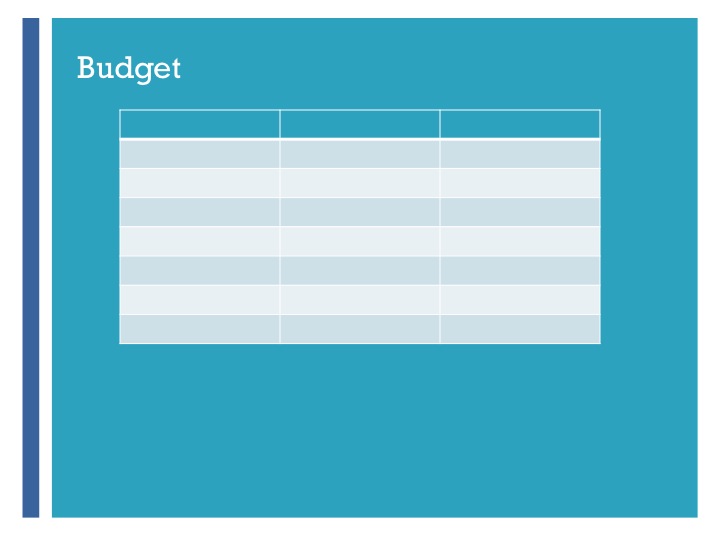
* Gantt Chart and Logic Model: The program manager will monitor the Foster the Family program timeline and make use of a Gantt chart to determine whether program activities are occurring as scheduled. A logic model will also be created to guide the program and communicate the underlying theory or rational as to why the program will work and the anticipated results.
* Internal Training Evaluation: Employees participating in the Foster the Family internal training sessions will be asked to fill out pre and post-tests to provide information on the learning that occurred, confidence levels before and after the training and identifying necessary changes. The program manager will also conduct one on one follow-up interviews with employees in order to gather more detailed information as to the delivery of the Foster the Family services.
* Client Satisfaction Questionnaire: The clients who use our services will be asked to fill out a satisfaction questionnaire upon completion of services to help insure quality service delivery and make improvements if necessary. This instrument will also help determine the responsiveness, competence, and accessibility of the Foster the Family support staff. The questionnaire will be adapted from the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8), which is a widely used instrument with published data on reliability and validity. For example, such a questionnaire may ask to what extent has our service met your needs or have the services you received helped you understand the adoption process?
* Recording participation: Webinars, workshops, and support group participation will be monitored and recorded to ensure that clients are participating in services. Client background/contact information will also be collected at this time for service follow-up purposes.

*Outcome Evaluation*

* Webinar Participant Surveys: After completing, webinars participants will be asked to fill out surveys, which will be assessed to determine whether the webinar was effective in increasing the knowledge of the potential adoptive parents and to insure the information they provide is accurate.
* Workshops Participant Focus Groups: After the completion of each workshop a small group of participants (6-10) will be asked to participate in a focus group to explore and exchange information on the benefit or inadequacies of the workshops including effect on confidence, knowledge of the adoption process and services, and fear surrounding adoption.
* Support Group/Workshop Surveys: Support group and workshop participants will be asked to fill out surveys (after completion of workshop or every two months if in support group) related to the impact of participation in terms of anxiety about and accessibility to the adoption process.
* Follow-up Assessments: After completion of services, follow-up assessments of clients will be conducted to determine the number of successful or unsuccessful adoptions and explore why such results occurred and the role Foster the Family played in determining these results.

The program staff will collect the data from each site. Values for each person and their responses will be entered into a database specifically created for the Foster the Family program. The Adoption Service Center evaluation staff and data consultants will analyze this data using appropriate statistics (e.g. t-tests, regression analysis). The evaluation staff will then interpret the finding, construct tables and graphs, summarize the results, and make recommendations for improving the program. This information will also be presented to the funders, stakeholders, and staff. The program manager will oversee data analysis to ensure it is completed on schedule.

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