



Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

Creating and Sustaining
EFFECTIVE RESPITE SERVICES

Lessons from the Field





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EFFECTIVE RESPITE SERVICES

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September 2012

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More information about AdoptUSKids or the respite projects that are cited in this publication can be found at adoptuskids.org or by contacting info@adoptuskids.org.

INTRODUCTION

Operated since 2002 through a cooperative agreement, AdoptUSKids is a service of the U.S. Children's Bureau. The mission of AdoptUSKids is two-fold: to raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system; and to assist U.S. States, Territories, and Tribes to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families and connect them with children. This guide is intended to help States, Tribes, and parent support organizations understand the value of respite care in achieving improved outcomes for parents and youth, and build their capacity to sustain such programs after time-limited grants have ended.

In 2007, AdoptUSKids launched a targeted effort to increase adoptive, foster, and kinship families' access to respite care. Respite care is defined as a program or service that enables adoptive, foster, and kinship parents to take a safe, rejuvenating break to energize and regroup from the often challenging task of parenting children who have experienced abuse, trauma, and neglect. In many cases, respite programs provide children with the chance to build relationships with other children in adoptive, foster, and kinship families, and to participate in meaningful activities that increase their skills and resources. Respite care is a key part of the post-placement services often needed by adoptive, foster, and kinship families to help support placement stability and permanency.



Research has demonstrated that respite services can:

- Reduce risk of maltreatment and risk of an out-of-home placement
- Achieve statistically significant reductions in reported stress levels of caregivers and improvements in the quality of their relationships
- Improve caregivers' positive attitude toward their children
- Improve family functioning
- Help caregivers meet their children's special needs
- Improve relationships between parents and children
- Decrease the risk of child abuse
- Prevent placement disruptions
- Increase families' ability to provide care at home for children with disabilities

Throughout this guide are key research findings on the effectiveness and value of respite that may be useful to child welfare agency leaders and parent support organizations. This research provides additional information about how respite services can help support and stabilize foster, adoptive, and kinship families, and can be used as a tool to help build support for respite services among stakeholders.

AdoptUSKids has helped create or enhance 115 respite programs in 46 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico by making one-year grants of \$5,000. AdoptUSKids made these grants — for federal fiscal years 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 — to parent support groups and associations and their public agency partners, which were typically state or county child welfare agencies.

All respite grantees undertook the programs after attending training on the value of respite services, how to develop respite services, and a variety of model programs across the continuum of respite care. Group leaders and their agency partners then returned home and conducted a needs assessment with families in their own communities. Grantees also received the AdoptUSKids publication *Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite Care in Your Community*, which is available at www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/TakingABreak.pdf.

The chart below describes the types of services in the continuum of respite care, and how many AdoptUSKids respite grantees provided services of each type. Grantees took on activities across the continuum, with group child care or activities being by far the most common. After assessing adoptive, foster, and kinship families’ respite needs, grantees often found that families needed

<i>Type of Respite Service</i>	<i>Description of the Respite Service</i>	<i>Number of Grantees Who Offered Services of This Type</i>
In-Home Care	Children receive care at their own home from a respite provider. Parents may stay home or go out.	5
Group Child Care or Activities	Children participate in recreational, educational, and skill-building group activities or receive child care. Parents typically leave their children at these events for several hours. Parents may attend training or support group meetings while the children participate in group activities.	67
Special Interest and Mentor Relationship Experiences	Children receive instruction (lessons or classes such as dance or music) or mentoring on a scheduled basis.	3
Camps or Family Retreats	Children participate in daylong, overnight, weekend, or weeklong activities away from home. Parents may be present and, in some cases, receive training or participate in their own group activities. Children may also receive scholarships or funding to participate in camps run by other organizations.	33

Therapeutic Care	Trained parents or professionals offer weekend or extended out-of-home care.	0
Family Events	Families gather with their children and other adoptive, foster, and kinship families to participate in activities. In some cases, parents and children participate in separate activities for part of the event.	27
Retreats for Parents	Parents gather together to receive training while resting, relaxing, and supporting one another. Parents typically receive financial support to cover child care.	7
Training	Individuals (parents, staff, or other potential respite providers) learn how to provide respite or they attend educational sessions on other adoption-related topics. Workshops for parents may include child care to make it easier for parents to attend.	19
Facilitating Respite Connections	The organization creates either formal or informal systems through which parents access respite services. Formal systems often include training of respite providers, and may include vouchers or reimbursement systems that cover the cost of respite care. Informal systems typically connect families with one another so they can trade respite with each other.	37

an array of services to meet their needs. As a result, more than 60 offered a hybrid respite program that included more than one type of service. Two of the more popular combinations were facilitating respite connections with training respite providers, and providing children’s group activities with family events. Although some grantees helped families to access therapeutic care through programs that facilitated respite connections, no grant specifically targeted this longer, more intensive form of respite care.

The parent support organizations were quite diverse – from small adoptive parent support groups to statewide or regional foster or adoptive parent associations to nonprofits that run their State’s post-adoption service program. Public agency partners included county and state social services departments and private agencies that provided contracted services to a public agency. Each team had a commitment to ensuring that children have permanent, loving families, and that families have support to meet the needs of children who have been abused or neglected and have experienced the trauma of being in out-of-home care. In some cases, grantees used the \$5,000 grant to create a brand new respite opportunity in the community. Others enhanced an existing program, using the mini-grant to expand an effective respite service to another group of parents or another part of their State. Still others used the funds to add respite care to an existing post-adoption program that lacked this service. Many grantees sustained respite services after the grant period, ensuring that families continued to have access to this important post-adoption support.

Specific sections of the guide include:

- **Summary of Parent Evaluations** — Evaluators surveyed many parents who received respite services through AdoptUSKids grants. Survey results show a tremendous need for respite services and specific benefits of respite care, including more family togetherness, improved family stability, and less stress for parents.
- **Survey Results on Sustainability of Respite Services** — AdoptUSKids also surveyed leaders of the parent support organizations and public agencies that received respite grants to learn more about grantees' efforts to sustain services after the grant period. The results show that certain factors make sustainability more likely, and that there were common barriers grantees needed to overcome.
- **Model Respite Programs** — To provide other organizations with creative ideas for future programs, this section highlights some of the more effective AdoptUSKids-funded respite services. The descriptions demonstrate the diversity of programs and show how many groups provided a hybrid model of respite.
- **How States Can Benefit from Partnering with Parent Support Organizations** — This section describes some of the specific benefits to public agencies of partnering with community-based parent support organizations. Public agency staff noted benefits such as improved access to families who need services, faster implementation, adoption competency of respite services due to parent involvement, increased impact even with limited resources, and potential matching in-kind donations for grants.
- **Insights and Advice from State Partners** — In this section, state agency staff who were actively involved in respite grants share insights to help colleagues in other States create and sustain respite services. Public agency staff highlighted the importance of respite to help stabilize families and prevent placement disruptions, and the value of creativity and flexibility in developing partnerships for respite programs, and offered a number of suggestions for how to overcome barriers to sustainability. They also discussed working with parent support organizations to enhance services to families.
- **Ideas for Sustaining Respite Services** — In March 2012, AdoptUSKids gathered leaders from many of its successful grantees and asked them to share tips for sustaining respite programs. This section explores the themes they identified and provides examples of how parent support organizations and public agency partners continued offering respite care after the AdoptUSKids grant ended.
- **Overcoming Barriers to Sustaining Respite Services** — The final section provides additional information about the primary barriers identified by respite grantees, and offers suggestions to avoid or overcome these barriers.

SECTION ONE

SUMMARY OF PARENT EVALUATIONS

To learn more about families' experiences with respite services both before and during the AdoptUSKids respite grant, evaluators surveyed foster, adoptive, and kinship parents who received AdoptUSKids-funded respite services. The results below reflect the responses from a total of 399 respondents served during the first three of the four years of grants. Twenty-seven respondents were served by Year 1 grants during fiscal year 2009, 171 respondents were served by Year 2 grants during 2010, and 201 respondents were served by Year 3 grants during 2011. The quotes throughout this guide are from these evaluations of parents served by AdoptUSKids grantees.



The survey questions varied slightly each year, and the discussion below details any differences in questions or response options offered over the years. In Year 3, the survey was designed to more specifically identify the impact of the AdoptUSKids-funded respite services as opposed to other respite services the family may have received.

The Need for Respite Services

Families' responses demonstrate a significant need for more respite services and for respite to be available more consistently. If prospective foster and adoptive parents are aware of respite services available to them, and if they can trust that those services will be consistently available after placement, they may feel more able to meet the complex needs of children in foster care — many of whom have experienced trauma and have special needs.

Few Families Were Offered Services

Families reported a lack of respite services offered when they began the process of becoming foster or adoptive parents. More than half of families (53.5 percent) said they weren't offered any respite services when they first began the process. Only 11 percent of families were offered financial assistance to pay people they know to provide respite in the families' own homes. Only about 13 percent of families were offered options for respite services outside of their home.

When you first considered fostering or adopting were respite services offered to you?

(This question was not asked of Year 3 grantee families.)

Respite Services Offered	Year 1 Respondents (N=27)	Year 2 Respondents (N=171)	Total Respondents (N=198)
No Respite Services were offered	44.4%	55.0%	53.5%
Financial assistance to pay for family, friends, or neighbors to provide respite in your home	7.4%	11.7%	11%
Out-of-home care in a daycare center	18.5%	11.7%	12.6%
In-home services provided through a respite care agency	7.4%	3.5%	4%
In-home services by a private, trained provider	3.7%	2.3%	2.5%
Out-of-home care in an institution	0%	0.6%	0.5%
Other	*	18.1%	15.7%
Missing	3.7%	7.6%	7.1%

* “Other” was not provided as a response option in the survey for Year 1 grants.

Respite Services Were Needed

Only the families who received respite from Year 3 AdoptUSKids grantees were asked why they used respite services. Almost half of respondents noted they used respite to relieve stress, and more than one-third used respite to spend time with their spouse or partner. Another 20 percent noted they employed respite to improve their marriage or partnership. The top five reasons are listed below.

Why do you use respite services?

(This question was not asked of Year 1 and 2 grantee families.)

Reasons for Using Respite	Year 3 Respondents (N=201)
To get relief from emotional stress	42.8%
To allow time with spouse or partner	35.8%
To provide me with time to complete household routines, chores, or errands	29.9%
To allow time for entertainment or socializing	24.4%
To improve my marriage or partnership	21.4%

Respite Services Were Not Consistently Available

More than two-thirds (70.4 percent) of the families surveyed from Year 1 reported that respite services were not consistently available. In Year 2, when families were given more detailed response options to the same question, 64.1 percent of families said respite services were available. The majority of those who answered yes (61.2 percent) noted that the services are only available sporadically. The lack of consistently available respite services means many parents cannot rely on being able to access respite for themselves and their children.

Are respite services consistently available to your family?

(This question was asked of both Year 1 and Year 2 grantee families, but there were different response options for each of those two years, as demonstrated in the tables below. This question was not asked of Year 3 grantee families.)

Respite Availability	Year 1 Respondents (N=27)
Yes	25.9%
No	70.4%
Missing	3.7%

Respite Availability	Year 2 Respondents (N=171)
Yes, they are available but sporadically	39.2%
Yes, they are consistently available	25.1%
No, they are not available	15.8%
No, they used to be available but are no longer available	6.4%
Other - Participant says "I don't know"	2.9%
Missing	10.5%

For families served by Year 3 AdoptUSKids grantees, the survey question sought to determine if other respite services were currently available to foster, adoptive, and kinship families. Almost half (46.3 percent) said services either were not available or were no longer available, and another 16.4 percent noted that services were available only occasionally. Only 11.4 percent said respite services other than those offered by the AdoptUSKids grantee were consistently available. Overall, less than one-third of respondents noted that any respite services were available to them other than those offered by the grantee. Clearly, respite services are not accessible to families on an ongoing basis.

Not including respite from [Respite Group Name], what is the availability of the other respite services that have been offered to your family?

(This question was not asked of Year 1 and 2 grantee families.)

<i>Respite Availability</i>	<i>Year 3 Respondents (N=201)</i>
They are consistently available.	11.4%
They are available, but sporadically.	16.4%
They used to be available but are no longer available.	7.5%
No services have been offered or services are not available.	38.8%
Other - Participant says "I don't know"	1.0%
<i>Missing</i>	<i>24.9%</i>

Benefits of Respite Services

Survey respondents report that respite services provide significant benefits to their families. Parents note that respite services help increase their ability to care for their children, lower their stress levels, improve family cohesion and stability, and make a positive difference in their lives. Respite services that help improve family stability, decrease parental stress, and increase parents' ability to care for their children can help child welfare agencies seeking to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for children who have experienced trauma.

“The constant stress from parenting a child with reactive attachment disorder (RAD) is difficult. Respite allows me to take some quiet time and de-stress for even an afternoon. Respite is probably one of the single most important things to allow me to recharge, to keep giving my best to the human beings that depend on me for guidance and love.”

Respite Improves Parents' Ability to Care for Children

Providing respite services appears to be an effective way for agencies to meaningfully enhance the lives of adoptive, foster, and kinship families, with more than two-thirds of respondents reporting that respite services made a significant or considerable impact on the parents' ability to care for the children in their home. Less than 8 percent of families indicated that respite services did not have any impact on their ability to care for their children.

Overall, do you feel that respite services make a significant impact in your ability to care for children in your home?

(This question was not asked of Year 3 grantee families.)

Impact	Year 1 Respondents (N=27)	Year 2 Respondents (N=171)	Total Respondents (N=198)
Significant impact	51.9%	38.6%	40.4%
Considerable impact	18.5%	27.5%	26.3%
Moderate impact	14.8%	9.9%	10.6%
Minor impact	0.0%	5.3%	4.5%
No impact	7.4%	7.6%	7.6%
Missing or Not applicable	7.4%	11.1%	10.6%

For Year 3, participants were asked specifically if the AdoptUSKids-funded respite services affected their families. More than two-thirds (68.2 percent) reported respite had a positive impact on their family. Not a single family said respite services had a negative impact, and only 9 percent reported no impact at all.

“Anytime we have a small break to be alone as a couple is a direct positive impact on our parenting. Peaceful couple = peaceful family.”

Overall, do you feel that the respite services you received through [Respite Group Name] have made an impact in your ability to care for the children in your home?

(This question was not asked of Year 1 and 2 grantee families.)

Impact of Respite Services	Year 3 Respondents (N=201)
Positive impact	68.2%
Negative impact	0.0%
No impact	9.0%
Other - Participant says “I don’t know”	0.5%
Missing	22.4%



Respite Care Improves Parenting and Prevents Out-of-Home Care

Several studies have found that respite care makes a significant difference in parents' ability to care for a child with special needs.

- The National Respite Coalition Task Force notes in a fact sheet titled **Benefits and Cost-Savings Due to Respite**:
 - Respite has been shown to improve family functioning, improve satisfaction with life, enhance the ability to cope with stress, and improve attitudes toward the family member with a disability. In 1989, a national survey of families who have a child with a disability received 2,847 responses. In the survey, 74 percent of families reported respite made a significant difference in their ability to provide care at home. Thirty-five percent of the respite users indicated that without respite services they would have considered out-of-home-placement for their family member. (p. 2)
 - An evaluation of the Iowa Respite Child Care Project, which serves families parenting a child with developmental disabilities, found that when families used respite care, there is a statistically significant decrease in foster care placement. (p. 2)

Source: National Respite Coalition Task Force, **Benefits and Cost-Savings Due to Respite**. (2009). Available online at http://archrespice.org/docs/Cost_Fact_Sheet_11-09.pdf (accessed May 28, 2012).

- A study by the Northwest Institute for Children and Families of the Mockingbird Family Model found that respite prevented placement disruptions. In the Mockingbird model, a licensed foster family known as a “hub home” can provide crisis or planned respite for a group of six to 10 nearby foster families in a “constellation.”

“In 2006, when the Constellations were implemented for 3 to 8 months, in three of four Constellations, a total of nine foster families reported that being able to access respite care had prevented a disruption in their child’s placement in a total of ten instances. These disruptions would have occurred due to the aggressive or problematic behavior of the foster youth that had exhausted the foster parents’ caregiving capacity.” (p. v)

Source: Northwest Institute for Children and Families, (2007). **Mockingbird Family Model Year 3 Evaluation Report, 2006**.

- The Access to Respite Care and Help National Respite Network and Resource Center measured the benefits of respite care. The center that found participating in planned respite care services reduced the risks of maltreatment and the risk of an out-of-home placement. After receiving planned respite, caregivers reported statistically significant reductions in stress levels and other improvements in quality of their relationships.

Source: National Resource Center for Community-Based Family Resource and Support (CBFRS) Programs. (2004). **Benefits of Planned and Crisis Respite Care, National Resource Center for CBFRS Programs, Fact Sheet Number 9**. Available at: www.childwelfare.gov/survey/disclaimerAskme.cfm?target=http://www.friendsnrc.org/joomdocs/benefits_repsite.pdf&referrer=http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/types/respice.cfm (accessed May 28, 2012).

Respite Lowers Parents' Stress

Respite services appear to provide dramatic benefits in helping parents address stress, with more than 75 percent of family respondents answering yes or somewhat when asked if respite services helped to lower their stress level. When offered a choice between yes and somewhat, respondents from Year

3 grants were more than twice as likely (48.8 percent compared to 22.9 percent) to say respite definitely reduced their stress. Across the years, only 8 percent reported no improvement in stress levels. These findings suggest that as foster, adoptive, and kinship families seek to meet the complex needs of children who have special needs, respite is an effective service for helping parents reduce stress.

“Relief from constant demands of very high-needs children allows me to de-stress, regain perspective, and reassess our goals and future plans.”



Overall, do you feel that respite care services have helped lower your stress level?
 (For Year 3: Overall, do you feel that the respite services you received through [Respite Group Name] have helped lower your stress level?)

Lowered Stress Level?	Year 1 Respondents (N=27)	Year 2 Respondents (N=171)	Year 3 Respondents (N=201)	Total Respondents (N=399)
Yes	81.5%	79.5%	48.8%	64.2%
Somewhat	*	*	22.9%	11.5%
No	11.1%	9.4%	6.5%	8%
Missing or Not applicable	7.4%	11.1%	21.9%	16.3%

* Respondents for the surveys for Years 1 and 2 were only give the response options of “yes” or “no.” The response option of “somewhat” was only offered in the survey for Year 3.

Respite Improves Family Stability

More than half of parents reported their family stability was better after receiving respite services than it was before. These survey findings indicate that providing respite services can be an effective strategy for States as they seek to improve placement stability for children who are in foster care or have been adopted or placed with relatives from foster care.

“If we didn’t have respite care we would have most likely disrupted the adoptions. Our two adopted children both have special needs: Reactive Attachment Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Early-onset Bipolar Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Schizoaffective Disorder. These are high needs children that need constant supervision, even though they are now 12 and 13. Living with them is stressful on the whole family. We couldn’t have stayed together as a family without respite care.”

Overall, do you feel that your family stability is, better than before you received respite care services, about the same as before receiving respite care services, or worse than before receiving respite care services?

(This question was not asked of Year 3 grantee families.)

Family Stability?	Year 1 Respondents (N=27)	Year 2 Respondents (N=171)	Total Respondents (N=198)
Better than before you received respite care services	70.4%	50.9%	53.5%
About the same as before receiving respite care services	11.1%	29.8%	27.3%
Worse than before receiving respite care services	0.0%	2.3%	2%
Missing or Not applicable	18.5%	17%	17.2%

To ensure that the question of family stability was specifically related to placement stability, the survey for families served by Year 3 grantees specifically asked if the respite services helped keep the family together. The question also sought to identify specific results from the AdoptUSKids-funded respite programs. The results showed respite services do help keep families together. More than half of parents surveyed said respite made a difference in keeping their foster or adoptive placement intact — 40.3 percent of respondents answered yes to respite services making a difference in keeping their family together and another 16.4 percent said respite services made somewhat of a difference. Less than 13 percent reported the services made no difference at all.

“Respite has given us much to look forward to. It has made the difference between a successful vs. disrupted adoption.”

Overall, do you feel that the respite you received through [Respite Group Name] makes a difference in keeping your foster or adoptive placement together?

(This question was not asked of Year 1 and 2 grantee families.)

<i>Keeping Families Together</i>	<i>Year 3 Respondents (N=201)</i>
Yes	40.3%
Somewhat	16.4%
No	12.9%
Missing	30.3%

Respite Improves Family Cohesion

Nearly half (45.9 percent) of parents reported that their family cohesion (referred to as “family togetherness” for families served by year-three grantees) was better after receiving respite services as compared to their family cohesion before receiving respite. About one-third of families reported their family cohesion remained about the same after receiving respite; only about 1 percent of families reported their family cohesion was worse after receiving respite.

Overall, do you feel that your family cohesion is, better than before you received respite care services, about the same as before receiving respite care services, or worse than before receiving respite care services? (For Year 3: Overall, since using the respite you received through [Respite Group Name] do you feel that your family members’ closeness to each other is:)

<i>Family Cohesion/Family Closeness?</i>	<i>Year 1 Respondents (N=27)</i>	<i>Year 2 Respondents (N=171)</i>	<i>Year 3 Respondents (N=201)</i>	<i>Total Respondents (N=399)</i>
Better than before you received respite care services	66.7%	43.9%	44.8%	45.9%
About the same as before receiving respite care services	18.5%	36.8%	30.3%	32.3%
Worse than before receiving respite care services	0.0%	2.3%	0.5%	1.3%
Missing or Not applicable	14.8%	17%	24.4%	20.6%

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“Having a support system is critical when raising and supporting children who have such varying backgrounds and needs and come from very unstable situations. Some of our children have greatly benefited from one-on-one tutoring/mentoring help with life skills and reading skills. They were given the extra attention to help them learn to build trusting relationships allowing the rest of us to take a breath before diving back in to building our own bridges with each child.”

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Respite Makes a Positive Difference in Families’ Lives

Consistent with many of the other survey responses from parents on more specific benefits of respite, a significant majority — about 78 percent — of families reported that respite services made a positive difference in their lives. In Year 3, when families had a choice of responding yes or somewhat, 58.7 percent gave the stronger answer of yes, while only 17.9 percent said somewhat. For all three years, only 4 percent said respite didn’t make a positive difference in their life. This high percentage of families who report benefitting from respite points to the importance of agencies considering respite services as a key strategy to help families who are caring for vulnerable children.

Overall, do you feel that respite services have made a positive difference in your life?

Positive Difference	Year 1 Respondents (N=27)	Year 2 Respondents (N=171)	Year 3 Respondents (N=201)	Total Respondents (N=399)
Yes	81.5%	78.9%	58.7%	68.9%
Somewhat	*	*	17.9%	9.0%
No	11.1%	7.0%	0.5%	4.0%
Missing or Not applicable	7.4%	13%	22.9%	18%

* Respondents for the surveys for Years 1 and 2 were only given the response options of “yes” or “no.” The option of “somewhat” was only offered in the survey for Year 3.

Respite Care Helps Children

Although many survey questions focused on parents’ stress, placement stability, or family togetherness, responses to several open-ended questions also demonstrated the value of respite care specifically for children. Parents gave the following examples when asked to describe how respite helped their family:

- “[Respite provides] an outlet for [our] child who doesn’t feel his classmates understand him. At respite he meets kids like himself and is better able to feel that he has a loving and safe new home.”



Children and Youth Are Protected by Respite Care

A publication from the Child Welfare League of America, the Access to Respite Care and Help National Respite Network and Resource Center, and Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support on developing best practices for respite services reported:

“Without adequate family supports, children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to be victims of neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse than children without disabilities (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000). Several studies cited by Kagan (2000) point to the value of respite as a service that reduces the risk of abuse and neglect, helps families avoid child protective services involvement and out-of-home placements, and improves family relationships.” (p. 10)

Source: Dougherty, S., Yu, E., Edgar, M., Day, P., & Wade, C. (2002). *Planned and Crisis Respite for Families with Children: Results of a Collaborative Study*.

- “Respite services have saved my relationship with my partner and by having a positive relationship our kids live in a healthy environment.”
- “It helps the children feel special. Being with other children in the same situation as they are helps because the children share more with each other than with the adults.”
- “When our child is experiencing extreme behavioral situations, the stress level of the household goes up. As parents, our judgment then becomes impaired and we are less patient than we should be and more likely to overreact or react in an unproductive manner. With the opportunity to step away and rejuvenate, we are more likely to respond and deal with the behavior appropriately.”
- “I am having less trouble with my children and their behavior is changing.”
- “We have three adopted children, all with some sort of special mental need. ... When my daughter had raging episodes this summer, we were able to put my son in day camp for a week so I could spend time with her. ... My son got a break from his sister’s intense tantrums, had a fun week, and got some much needed socialization. My daughter and I were able to work on our relationship and take care of some her more acute therapeutic needs. In the end I had a better idea of the type and level of care my daughter needed, and we all were able to relax a bit.”
- “Appropriate, motivational respite care got our son healthy enough to finally bond with us strongly enough for him to return to school. We need the respite to help keep him structured and strong.”

SURVEY RESULTS ON SUSTAINABILITY OF RESPITE SERVICES

Many grant recipients sustained their respite services after the initial AdoptUSKids grant funds had been used. These grantees' experiences regarding efforts to sustain the work beyond the life of the grant provide helpful insights for other jurisdictions interested in developing and sustaining family support efforts. The survey results below provide a glimpse at barriers to sustainability and factors that contribute to sustaining services. Section 6 provides additional details on how select grantees pursued sustainability, and Section 7 offers suggestions from grantees to public agencies and parent support organizations on overcoming some of the top barriers identified.

AdoptUSKids asked leaders — including both support group and agency partners — from the first three years of grantees (the fourth year was still in progress) to complete a survey about whether they were able to sustain their respite programs after the grant ended. The details and descriptions below are from the 58 individual responses, representing 52 different grants. When both a support organization and an agency partner responded, only one response is included. Of the 50 responses with a grant year identified, 14 were from Year 1, 16 from Year 2, and 20 from Year 3.

Respite Services Offered

Eight of the respondents reported that they had no respite program in place before receiving the AdoptUSKids grant; the other respondents offered a variety of respite services before the grant. Many who had an existing program used the grant to enhance or expand services. During the grant year, the organizations offered a wide variety of respite services, with the general types of services described in more detail in the introduction of this publication and in Section 3 on model programs. Of the 48 survey respondents who identified the services provided, 37 offered more than one service and 14 offering four or more service types.

During the grant year, AdoptUSKids was the sole source of funds for 23 grantees. For those grantees for which AdoptUSKids was not the sole source of funding, other primary sources of funding included:

- Donations (14 grantees)
- Private agencies (9 grantees)
- Public agencies (8 grantees)
- General funds (8 grantees)
- Foundations (4 grantees)
- Fees (3 grantees)

Efforts to Sustain Services after the Grant

Of the 52 grantees that responded to the survey, 45 (86.5 percent) sought to sustain the respite program beyond the grant period, and 39 (86.7 percent of those who attempted) of them were successful in sustaining some respite service after the grant.

Budget and Funding Sources

Among respondents who sustained their respite services, four had higher budgets after the grant ended, 18 had lower budgets, and seven kept their budgets for respite services approximately the same as during the grant year. Those that raised additional money received funds from a variety of public and private sources. The most common source was in-kind donations, followed by private donations from community members.

If the program did continue, what was the source(s) of the additional funds/resources?

<i>Funding Sources Pursued Successfully</i>	<i># of Respondents</i>
In-kind donations	423
Private donations from members of the community	16
Nonprofit community agency	12
State agency	6
Fees for parents	5
For profit business or organization	4
Nonprofit foundation	4
County agency	2
Not applicable or No other funds needed	1
Federal agency	0
Other (Please specify):	0

“The [respite] services give the family the opportunity to breathe when having to deal with a child whose emotional problems and behaviors become too much for the unit to deal with, [and] we need a break to recompose ourselves and our mental well being.”

a parent served by an AdoptUSKids-funded respite program



More Respite Services May Offer Greater Benefits

A study in the publication *Children’s Services: Social Policy, Research, and Practice* examined 73 survey responses from Vermont families who applied for respite care because they had children with severe emotional and behavioral disturbance. The respite services were available to any family whose children had emotional and behavioral disturbance; 21 percent of respondents happened to be adoptive parents. The study found that families who received respite care – when compared to a group of families who were eligible but received no respite – had fewer out-of-home placements and reported less personal caregiver stress. For families who had had a previous out-of-home placement the results were dramatic: During the study period, not a single family who received respite care had another out-of-home placement, while 75 percent of families who didn’t get respite had to place a child outside the home.

In addition, the Vermont study showed that the use of more respite care was associated with even better outcomes: “Specifically, increased respite allocation was most significantly associated with increased optimism about caring for the child at home, elevated family functioning, and reduction in perceived stresses.” (p. 59)

Source: Bruns, E.J., & Burchard, J.D. (2000). Impact of respite care services for families with children experiencing emotional and behavioral problems, *Children’s Services: Social Policy, Research, and Practice*. Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 39-61.

Organizations also unsuccessfully sought funds from a variety of other sources, the most common of which was from state agencies.

.....
Please check any additional funding sources that were sought, but were not obtained.

<i>Funding Sources Pursued Unsuccessfully</i>	<i># of Respondents</i>
State agency	10
Not applicable or No other funds needed	9
For profit business or organization	8
Nonprofit foundation	7
Nonprofit community agency	6
County agency	6
Private donations from members of the community	5
Federal agency	1

Barriers to Sustaining Services

Not surprisingly, grantees reported that funding was a key barrier to sustaining respite services implemented during the grant year. For the six grantees that attempted to sustain services but were unsuccessful, the most common barriers to sustainability were a lack of funding (four grantees) and a lack of caregivers to provide respite services (two grantees). Those that did not seek to continue the program identified lack of funding as the primary reason for not pursuing sustained services.

Grantees who did sustain their programs also had difficulty raising funds for respite services. Many grantees identified barriers related to staffing, volunteers, and staff or leadership changes, which may point to the key role that relationships and adequate staffing levels play in continuing to provide respite services. Notably, all of the successful sustainers reported facing at least one barrier to sustainability. Section 7 explores some of the barriers in more detail and gives examples of how some grantees overcame them.

What barriers did you encounter in attempting to sustain the respite program?

<i>Barrier</i>	<i># of Grantees</i>
Difficulty finding funding	21
Changes in leadership at the support group or partner agency	8
Difficulty finding volunteers	6
Difficulty finding respite providers	6
Staffing changes	4
None	0
Inconsistent demand for services	0

Factors that Supported Sustainability

Grantees that sustained their respite services reported multiple factors that contributed to their success. Respondents clearly emphasized the importance of collaboration in sustaining respite services — 18 grantees cited their ability to partner with community organizations, 12 noted the value of a strong existing partnership with their state agency or parent support organization partner, 10 highlighted the commitment of their public agency, and seven attributed success to a newly developed partnership.

The most commonly reported factors that supported sustainability were not directly related to funding, despite the strong role that funding challenges played as a barrier to sustainability. This data indicates that although funding is likely necessary for sustainability, funding itself is not sufficient to ensure sustainability of respite services.

To what do you attribute your ability to continue the respite program beyond the mini-grant?

(Check all that apply.)

<i>Response</i>	<i># of Grantees</i>
Strength and size of the parent support group or organization	25
Strong demand for respite services	22
Ability to partner with other community organizations	18
Ability to integrate the program into other services	17
Proven success from the AdoptUSKids-funded respite program	16
Strong partnership existed before the mini-grant funding	12
Support from AdoptUSKids through technical assistance, written resources, etc.	11
Commitment of the public agency	10
Developed a strong partnership as a result of the mini-grant program	7

Adjustments Made after the Grant Ended

Many of the grantees that sustained their respite services changed elements of their respite work, rather than sustaining the exact same set of services delivered during the grant year.

Services Offered

Of the 32 grantees that sustained their services and identified the specific services provided, 17 offered the same array of services after the grant ended (although some may have offered fewer such services), while 11 offered fewer types of respite services and four offered more. Of the services discontinued at the end of the grant, the most common were setting up a system of respite providers, training respite providers, and camps (each was identified as being discontinued by three grantees). Camps may be too expensive for organizations to continue unless they have specific grant funding. And it may make sense to discontinue setting up a system or train providers after a grant has ended. Once an organization has created a respite system and trained a group of providers, parents may be able to access respite care through the system and from the trained providers after the grant ends.

Changes in Partnership Structure

Of the 39 grantees that sustained respite services, 26 continued their partnership with the organization originally involved in the grant. Eleven grantees did not continue their partnership after the grant ended (two respondents did not indicate whether they maintained their partnership).

.....
“[Respite] has allowed my kids to see other kids in their same situation and see that they are not alone.”

a parent served by an AdoptUSKids-funded respite program
.....

Changes in Respite Services and Service Delivery

Perhaps due in part to difficulty finding funding, many grantees implemented changes that made respite services more affordable – whether it was relying more on volunteers (12 grantees), reducing services (10 grantees), serving fewer clients (seven grantees), or decreasing staff (three grantees).

.....
What changes, if any, did you make to your respite services after funds from the AdoptUSKids mini-grant were no longer available?

(Check all that apply.)

<i>Change Made</i>	<i># of Grantees</i>
Increased volunteers	12
Coordinated with other organizations	10
Reduced current services	10
No changes were made	8
Served fewer clients	7
Changed locations	6
Served more clients	5
Changed method of delivering services	5
Changed geographic area served	3
Decreased staff	3
Added new services	2
Expanded current services	2
Merged with another organization or group	0
Increased staff	0
Not applicable or Program did not continue	0

SECTION THREE

MODEL RESPITE PROGRAMS

Below are brief descriptions of some of the respite services funded by AdoptUSKids.¹ This diverse sample of services highlights a variety of programs valued by adoptive, foster, and kinship families to improve their lives. Results were achieved through successful collaboration between a parent support organization and public agency partner. In each case, the parent group or association and its agency partner took a grant of \$5,000 and provided services that kept children safe while giving parents the break they needed. These respite services helped stabilize and support adoptive, foster, and kinship families in the community.

Keys to Success

These model programs have several elements in common. Keys to success included the following factors typically found in effective implementation of program and practice reforms:

Organization

- **Strong Collaboration** — Each respite grant was a collaboration between a parent group or association and a public agency or community agency serving children in the public child welfare system. Both partners committed to one another and to the program goals, and attended training together to ensure a shared vision and knowledge base. Many of the grantees broadened the coalition after they returned home — partnering with nonprofits such as the Salvation Army, Council on Aging, or YMCA to provide respite services. Most often, the successful services and the ones able to continue after the one-year grant period were those that both had a strong core partnership and involved collaboration with other organizations in the community.
- **Involvement of Stakeholders** — Each grantee assessed its local families' needs to find out what types of respite services would be most valuable in the community. Through focus groups, surveys, and planning meetings, parents identified the types of services they would be most apt to use and would most likely help adoptive, foster, and kinship families. During program implementation, most grantees also had an advisory committee of parents and professional and community leaders. Every respite grantee had parents involved in planning and operating the programs.



¹ Other successful respite programs that served as models for many AdoptUSKids grantees are profiled in *Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite Care in Your Community*, which is available at www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/TakingABreak.pdf.

Leadership

- **Leadership and Commitment** — By engaging parent support organizations as partners, States and other public agency partners were able to harness the passion, experience, knowledge, and dedication of an organization with a singular goal — ensuring the well-being of foster, adoptive, and kinship families. These groups and associations had a track record of serving families, using small grants or donations to their maximum, and being creative and flexible when facing barriers. In most cases, both the public agency and parent organization partners demonstrated significant commitment to the effort — often donating volunteer staff time, meeting spaces, or other resources to ensure the success of the project.

Competence

- **Information and Support about Respite Models** — All of the grantees funded by AdoptUSKids received training about various successful respite models, advice from others who had operated respite programs, and ongoing support, technical assistance, and information from AdoptUSKids.
- **Building on What Works** — While some organizations created brand new programs, many built on what was already working. For example, some added child care to an existing event so that parents could receive respite and more families could participate. Others added respite to their menu of family support services, ensuring that parents had another support in place to ensure the safety and stability of their family.

Model Programs and Services

Allison Area Foster Parent Support Group and the Iowa Department of Human Services

The Allison Area Foster Parent Support Group partnered with the Iowa Department of Human Services for its respite grant. In four pilot counties, the support group and the Wartburg College School of Social Work trained and certified caregivers to provide in-home respite for foster and adoptive parents. A needs assessment had shown that foster and adoptive parents wanted to be able to keep their children safely at home, while also receiving needed respite.

A key component of the program was the commitment of the Iowa Department of Human Services. The Allison Area group worked closely with the department long before the grant began to ensure that the program would be as effective as possible, and three department staff served on the respite planning committee.

Before being certified, respite providers received 12 hours of training adapted from a curriculum for foster parents, and had to pass a background study, have criminal and child abuse records checked, get fingerprinted, and complete trainings in CPR, first aid, and mandatory child abuse reporting. Students in Wartburg College's undergraduate social work program completed prospective respite providers' background studies. They interviewed applicants, checked references, and wrote up the studies. By the end of the first year, 15 families had been trained and certified to provide overnight, weekend, or longer respite care in the child's home, and 22 children had been served.

Some families identified providers from within their circle of family and friends. Others found providers who were interested in working with children in foster care. Some Wartburg students became certified respite providers, which gave them valuable firsthand experience caring for children and youth in foster and adoptive families.

Much of the program's costs were covered through in-kind donations — from the Allison Area group, the Iowa Department of Human Services, and Wartburg College — that covered development of the curriculum, training of respite providers, and completing and reviewing background studies. The \$5,000 grant was used primarily to make payments to the certified respite providers, plus some funds to cover criminal background checks.

In 2012, the Iowa legislature allocated \$25,000 to continue the program for foster families in the four original counties and also expand it to six other counties in northeastern Iowa. The Iowa Department of Human Services has contracted with the Allison Area Foster Parent Support Group to manage the enhanced program. The support group will use general revenue to provide respite for adoptive families. To ensure children's safety, the support group will continue to partner with a nearby college's social work department to conduct background checks on the respite providers.

Adoptive Families with Information and Support and the Delaware Division of Family Services

For many years, Adoptive Families with Information and Support has operated a support program in northern Delaware that provided respite care to children adopted from Delaware foster care. Funded by the Delaware Division of Family Services, the Rec and Respite program offered two full Saturdays of respite care each month for children and youth with very challenging issues. As the parents received a break from caring for high-needs children, the children and youth also formed relationships with and supported one another. With funding from AdoptUSKids, Adoptive Families with Information and Support was able to open the program up to children adopted from other States and Countries plus children in pre-adoptive homes.

To ensure that families took the break they needed, Adoptive Families with Information and Support asked families to commit to a full year before they came to any event. Families can (and do) choose to remain in the program after the first year. It took time for families to learn that they needed a break before a crisis hit, and that having dependable respite care made them more able to handle tough times when they came. With consistent attendance, children and youth also formed strong bonds with one another and offered one another ongoing support. Now, each year, parents who have been in the program help explain how valuable it is to other families at orientation meetings so that new families receive support before they experience a crisis.

Respite care is provided in a child-friendly camp-type environment, with supervision from staff and volunteers who have all undergone background checks. Children and youth ages 5 to 15 participate in activities such as arts and crafts, games, movies, outside speakers, sports, cooking, and gardening. An added benefit of the program is that the children and youth develop better social skills as they learn to interact with each other. Older youth are often able to provide extra guidance to younger children.

The \$5,000 AdoptUSKids grant covered staff facilitators for each session, space rental, and arts and crafts supplies. Upper Bay Adoption and Counseling Services, which collaborates with Adoptive Families with Information and Support on the respite program, donated copying, postage, phone, administrative support, and program supervision valued at \$1,250.

After the AdoptUSKids grant ended, Adoptive Families with Information and Support also lost some of its Delaware Division of Family Services funding for one year, and was only able to maintain the program because of its partnership with Upper Bay. Together the two organizations paid facilitators and kept the program going. The strong partnership of Adoptive Families with Information and Support, the Delaware Division of Family Services, and Upper Bay has been key to sustaining and growing the program over time.

The next year, the Division of Family Services awarded Adoptive Families with Information and Support a post-adoption services contract, which included ongoing respite services. Evaluations from the earlier years of respite – and reports from parents that respite services had prevented disruptions – helped convince state leaders that respite was a critical part of a post-adoption service program. With this latest funding, Adoptive Families with Information and Support has expanded Rec and Respite to southern Delaware.

“The two children that we have adopted have severe special education needs as well as emotional instability. As their parents, we are on 24/7 having to intervene, redirect, teach, and discipline. This is exhausting emotionally and with a break, we were able to start anew and feel refreshed so that we could be better parents to our adoptive children.”

a parent served by an AdoptUSKids-funded respite program

Kentucky Adoption Options and Adoption Support for Kentucky

Before Adoption Support for Kentucky (a state-funded post-adoption program) and Kentucky Adoption Options received a grant from AdoptUSKids, Kentucky had no formal respite program for adoptive families. State rules provided reimbursement for one day of respite per month through adoption assistance agreements, but parents had to find a provider themselves.

The program, piloted with two parent groups, identified families who had been approved to foster or adopt, but who had not yet received a placement. Parent group leaders contacted the approved families, explained that other families needed respite care, and developed a registry of available providers. The collaboration also provided training and support to the potential providers and invited them to support group meetings so parents could meet them before using the services. Because the potential respite providers were licensed foster or approved adoptive parents, they had successfully passed thorough background checks.

Collaboration and coordination with the state agency was a key factor to the program’s success. The Cabinet for Kentucky Children and Families provided lists of approved families with no placements so that Adoption Support for Kentucky could ask these families to be providers.

Kentucky Adoption Options and Adoption Support for Kentucky also used grant funds to offer quarterly four-hour drop-off dates where children participated in games, crafts, and movies while parents had time for themselves.

Adoption Support Kentucky used grant funds primarily to train respite providers and cover costs of the drop-off events, including child care providers' fees, refreshments, arts and crafts supplies, books, and games. The grant also covered some office supplies, while in-kind donations covered trainers' fees, meeting space, printing, and postage.

New Mexico Fiesta Project and New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department

The New Mexico Fiesta Project is a state-funded post-adoption program that offers support groups, training, and community-based family activities for adoptive families across New Mexico. With the grant from AdoptUSKids, the Fiesta Project developed a new statewide respite co-op, through which parents could access respite care from one another. Parents received a list of other parents in the co-op, with information about whether parents wanted to be paid to provide care or were interested in trading respite. Since participants were all foster and adoptive parents, they had all passed background checks and had successfully completed the licensing or home study process.

Before parents could register for the respite exchange, they attended a three-hour training conducted by a family therapist and two Fiesta Project staff members who are also adoptive parents. The training covered information both for families using respite and those providing it, and was adapted from AdoptUSKids' Taking a Break guide. The group also made DVDs of the training so that it could easily and affordably offer training statewide even after the grant ended.

AdoptUSKids grant funds covered personnel costs for staff time to develop the co-op, as well as supplies, postage, and printing. In addition, grant funds enabled New Mexico Fiesta Project to purchase DVDs on therapeutic parenting to provide to families in the co-op. The State covered all costs for training and travel related to the respite programs.

After seeing how families benefited from respite care, the New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department granted the Fiesta Project \$50,000 to offer a total of five respite weekend retreats around the State. Families at risk of disruption received funds to pay for respite care for their children while parents attended training, received individual coaching, relaxed, and rejuvenated at the retreat.

Foster Care and Adoptive Association of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services

With a respite grant from AdoptUSKids, the Foster Care Association of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services partnered with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Systems of Care to pilot the Adoption Wraparound program. Targeting Oklahoma County families who were newly matched with the child they adopted (rather than families who had previously fostered the child or were the child's relative), Adoption Wraparound offered training on core adoption issues to parents and mental health

providers, helped families identify resources and supports, assisted with the development of a crisis plan, included specific programming for children and youth, offered parents peer support, and provided respite care.

For the respite component, staff members of the Camp Fire youth development organization offered group activities for children while parents attended a weekly support group for eight weeks. All Camp Fire staff and volunteers who work with children underwent background checks, which helped parents feel secure leaving their children. At the meetings, parents received training adapted from the National Resource Center for Adoption's adoption competency curriculum.

The \$5,000 AdoptUSKids grant covered the costs of Camp Fire staff and food for the eight-week session. Both the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Foster Care Association donated staff time to the project. After eight weeks, parents continued — on their own — to gather for monthly support group meetings while their children participated in Camp Fire activities. The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Systems of Care has taken the lead in sustaining the program, and will be offering adoption competency training for mental health providers and parents around the State with child care provided by different youth development organizations in each community.

Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Coalition and the Children's Division of the Missouri Department of Social Services

With the grant from AdoptUSKids, the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Coalition and the Children's Division of the Missouri Department of Social Services developed a respite referral system. The system helped match prospective respite caregivers with families needing care. Prospective providers completed an application that included their experience caring for children in foster care, references, employment history, and the type of children they would like to care for. Each provider went through an FBI fingerprint background check. Then the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Coalition shared information with parents about the availability of respite providers through its newsletter, email alerts, and training sessions.

Many respite caregivers attended training about providing respite care and reactive attachment disorder. The training helped providers understand the value of respite care, boundaries involved in offering respite, preparing for respite sessions, key communication issues, and more.

Families seeking respite care contacted the group's respite coordinator who completed an intake form with information about the children and dates care was needed. The coordinator then emailed the request to all of the potential providers. Anyone interested contacted the family directly. If no one responded, the coordinator called respite providers to seek a caregiver. Once families found a good fit with a provider, they typically made arrangements directly with each other when care was needed.

The largest portion of grant funds was used to pay for staff time, with additional money covering training, overhead, phone, postage, and printing costs. The coalition donated a portion of each of these costs, with the total program expenses running about \$7,000.

Once the coalition used the AdoptUSKids grant to develop the referral system, costs to continue the program were manageable. The group was able to incorporate the referral system into an existing post-adoption service project funded by the State.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group and United Services, Inc. (Connecticut)

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group provided 31 families and 48 children in two communities with respite care through three special events during the AdoptUSKids grant year. At these events, kinship families participated in activities together and with their peers, ensuring a low-stress environment where they built relationships and regrouped. The program was designed after group leaders surveyed support group members. Surveys showed the grandparents most wanted to spend quality time with others who were raising grandchildren and facing the same challenges they were.

The events included trips to a state park and a local water park, and Christmas at a local historic village. At the village, grandparents and grandchildren had a holiday meal, toured the grounds by candlelight, took a sleigh ride, and attend a concert.

In addition to the events, the group offered parents child care during monthly support group meetings. The group's partner, United Services, Inc., provided the child care. United Services' staff had already undergone background checks and were known to the children and trusted by the grandparents. At the support group, parents had the opportunity to talk with a case manager and counselor who could help them access any needed social services.

The \$5,000 AdoptUSKids grant covered the child care expenses for the monthly meetings, plus some family event costs. Proceeds from a fundraiser and grant funds covered the remainder of the project's \$6,200 budget. When the grant ended, the group was able to raise funds to continue to provide child care for support groups, and offer four respite nights each year. At these events, grandparents have five hours of free time while their children are safely cared for.

Harmony Adoptions and Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Harmony Adoptions and the Tennessee Department of Children's Services used the AdoptUSKids respite grant to create the R.E.S.T. (respite, education, support, and training) Initiative, which was a weekend retreat for 32 adoptive parents who had 50 adopted children. Harmony combined its AdoptUSKids respite grant with its Children's Bureau-funded Healthy Marriage, Healthy Futures program to host an event that achieved multiple goals. Through the Healthy Marriage, Healthy Futures grant, Harmony had trained resource parents across Tennessee about how to strengthen their relationships and improve communication. The AdoptUSKids funding enabled them to turn this training into a weekend retreat where parents could focus deeply on the program goals while also getting the respite they needed.

Parents received a stipend to cover the costs of respite care for their children while they attended the retreat. At the retreat, parents attended educational sessions to build their relationship

skills and help them resolve conflicts. The retreat also allowed them to spend time with their partner and other adoptive parents. In addition to helping parents strengthen their relationship and promote attachment with their children, the retreat showed parents how to identify future sources of respite.

AdoptUSKids grant funds covered food, lodging, and meeting space for the retreat plus funds to cover one family's child care costs for the weekend. The Healthy Marriage, Healthy Futures grant covered additional lodging costs, the cost of producing a video at the event, and child care stipends for other families. The total cost of the retreat was almost \$11,000.



After seeing the effectiveness of the retreat, the Tennessee Department of Children's Services renegotiated Harmony's contract to build in funding for additional retreats to support families. The organization used both survey results and videos from the first retreat to convince other regional administrators that it was a worthwhile project to support, and that well-supported families can become ambassadors to other prospective adopters.

Pride and Hope Ministry Family Support Services and the Office of Community Services (Louisiana)

Pride and Hope Ministry Family Support Services partnered with a local high school in Louisiana to provide two day camps during the year and a four-week summer camp. At the day camps, youth watched movies, swam, hiked, played sports, and crafted. At one event, 74 youth spent 10 hours together having fun and participating in supervised group activities at Varnado High School while their parents had time on their own. On New Year's, youth attended a movie event. The school donated space and staff helped prepare food, and the principal and some teachers attended every event.

During the summer, Pride and Hope Ministry hosted a summer respite camp at the school. For four weeks, more than 100 children from 57 adoptive, foster, and kinship families attended camp from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. every day. Camp activities included social skill-building efforts, educational sessions, and outings for the children and youth supervised by volunteers from local churches, and students and teachers from the high school. To ensure that children were safe, all of Pride and Hope Ministry's staff and volunteers had to pass state background checks.

Grant funds covered housing and food for the youth, office supplies, postage, and printing. There were significant in-kind donations including staff costs (director, guidance counselors, teachers, and a coach), space, and food. These expenses were covered primarily with proceeds from the sale of a house and donations.

After operating the grant, Pride and Hope Ministry became a licensed respite provider, so the group can now be reimbursed for some respite services. Pride and Hope held two more camps after the grant ended, with funding from the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (formerly the Office of Community Services) to reimburse costs for foster youth, in-kind donations from the support group, and small fees to families who could afford it. The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services also refers youth to the summer camps.

Loving Adoptive Families Forever and Children's Network of Southwest Florida

Loving Adoptive Families Forever partnered with the Children's Network of Southwest Florida (a Florida community-based care agency) to offer a program that provided financial assistance so adopted children could participate in enrichment activities. The support group provided up to \$200 per child over the course of the year to help families access programming for children, with families required to match the funds offered.

Children and youth participated in activities — sports, dance lessons, swimming lessons, etc. — that enabled them to build relationships with other children and youth, develop social skills, and have fun, while parents took a break. Over the course of the year, nine families with 14 children used the reimbursement program.

S.A.F.T.NET and Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

The S.A.F.T.NET support group of One Church, One Child of North Central Texas partnered with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to offer a diverse respite program. First the partners formed a respite committee to plan and oversee the program, with a representative from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services serving as an advisor. The committee developed a plan to provide about 40 adoptive, foster, and kinship families who have 60 children with:

- **Host Family Care** — Families arranged for planned, short-term respite from a selected host family matched with them based on age, interest, and background. All of the host family respite providers were either current foster or adoptive parents or other individuals who had successfully passed the licensing process. S.A.F.T.NET hosted a kick-off event where families met one another and had the opportunity to choose a respite provider. After the event, families continued to network with each other to trade or purchase respite care.
- **Two Weekend Day Camps** — Licensed caregivers, who had passed thorough background checks, looked after children at a Super Saturday day camp. Children participated in workshops, games, and activities while parents had time to regroup and reduce their stress.
- **Parents' Night Out** — On two occasions, parents had the opportunity to go on a date or spend the evening out while licensed caregivers supervised the children.

S.A.F.T.NET also held family recognition nights at monthly support group meetings, where they provided parents with gift cards or other rewards. Most of the foster and adoptive families served were already part of the support group, while the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services referred kinship families in need of support.

The \$5,000 program budget covered the costs for the respite events and some administrative fees for postage, printing, and bookkeeping. The Super Saturday day camps cost \$600 each while the parents' nights out were \$450 each. One Church, One Child donated meeting space and program oversight.

Adoptions Together and the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency

During the grant year, Adoptions Together offered monthly Saturday respite sessions, each serving from 13 to 21 children and youth adopted from foster care. The program had been in place under a different funding source, and the AdoptUSKids funding enabled it to continue. Respite services are one of a number of supports available to adoptive and guardianship families through Adoptions Together's Post Permanency Family Center, which is funded by the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency.

Each six-hour Saturday event was staffed by a respite coordinator, one or two group leaders, a licensed social worker, and, when possible, social work student interns. All staff have undergone background checks to ensure children's safety. While parents attended a support group and had time on their own, children and youth participated in a mix of recreational, educational, and therapeutic activities. Led by a licensed social worker, therapeutic mini-support groups divided by age and sometimes gender helped the children and youth address issues of trust, belonging, and loss related to adoption. The educational activities covered character building, life skills, and social issues such as bullying.

Adoptions Together staff found the respite program was a wonderful way to connect both parents and youth to needed clinical services. Families who wouldn't seek the social worker support initially were willing to come to the respite day. At the respite event, families made connections with social workers who they could follow up with to address issues of concern.

Program costs included salaries for group leaders, food, art, sports, and other supplies for the event. Meeting space was donated, and a graduate student intern was able to provide supervision at no cost to the grant.

Catholic Charities Caregivers Support Services and the Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long-Term Care Services (New York)

The respite program provided by the Catholic Charities Caregivers Support Services and the Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long-Term Care Services grew out of adversity when Catholic Charities lost funding for its services to kinship caregivers. The agency sought the AdoptUSKids grant to enable these vulnerable families to receive respite at no cost.

With the grant, Catholic Charities offered a two-pronged respite program that included two day camps and a mentoring program. The camps, offered during school breaks when families reported feeling the most stress, were all-day events at the YMCA. From 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., youth attended a sports-themed camp while the kinship caregivers had time for themselves.

The second aspect of the program involved recruiting, training, and matching respite mentor volunteers for youth being raised by relative caregivers. Volunteer recruitment received a boost when a reporter from the local newspaper published a feature story on a grandparent-headed family and mentioned the mentoring program. After an extensive screening process that included a criminal background check to ensure children's safety, Catholic Charities eventually approved and trained four mentors. These mentors committed to spending five to eight hours per month with the youth for at least a year. The mentors were matched with youth, and while mentors spent time with the youth, caregivers got the respite they needed.

Grant funds covered the day camp expenses at \$30 per child and other costs of running the respite program. The New York Office of Children and Youth Services recently released a request for proposals to fund relative caregiver support services as a foster care prevention effort. Catholic Charities received a grant that will enable them to extend both aspects of their respite services to two other counties.

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine and the Brunswick Area Support Group

For many years, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine hosted an annual conference for parents, funded as part of a family support contract with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. In prior years, many parents had arranged respite care for their children and were reimbursed through the State's respite program. Due to budget constraints, the State was no longer able to fund respite, preventing some parents from being able to attend training. With the AdoptUSKids grant, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine was able to offer a children's program at its annual two-day conference; more than 80 families attended and brought more than 110 children and youth. Nine other families received funds to arrange their own child care.

Child care providers included licensed foster and adoptive parents (one parent in a couple might attend the conference while another supervised the children) as well as licensed daycare providers, teachers, and a nurse. The providers received a small honorarium. At night, parents were responsible for their own children. A few adopted teens also helped out during the day. Those who had not been through a background check were supervised by providers and staff who had passed the screening process.

Activities were designed to meet the needs of children at a particular age or developmental level. Preteens ages 9 to 13 participated in an adventure-based activity program led by a wilderness program coordinator, while licensed daycare providers supervised toddlers in the gym. Teens ages 14 to 16 participated in outdoor adventure activities and worked with the Maine Youth Leadership Advisory Team on transitioning to adulthood.

Grant funds covered space and meals, plus child care provider payments and travel reimbursements. Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine found that conference attendance increased significantly with the inclusion of the children's program. Since the AdoptUSKids grant ended, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services has had the funding to reinstate its respite reimbursement program, which should enable more foster and adoptive families to access needed respite.



Respite Care Is a Key Post-Adoption Service

Barriers & Success Factors in Adoptions from Foster Care: Perspectives of Families and Staff is an AdoptUSKids report about two research projects (one on barriers and the other on success factors) conducted between 2003 and 2007. The report identifies the lack of availability of post-adoption services, such as respite care, as a barrier to adoption. The report also concludes that adoptive families view respite care as an important service. Specifically, the report notes:

- When asked to offer advice to adoption agencies, adoptive families suggested that adequate resources and services such as respite, subsidy, support groups, and counseling should be provided to both the family and the child. (p. 15)
- Of the 382 adoption professionals who responded to a survey about barriers to adoption, 160 (42 percent) said the lack of available post-adoption services was a major barrier and 153 (40 percent) rated the lack of respite care as a major barrier. (p. 61)
- In the success factors study, which describes what contributes to adoptive families' success, 161 adoptive families reported on what enabled them to keep their families intact and remain committed to their children. Of the 146 respondents who received post-adoption services, only 46 (32 percent) received overnight respite. Of these families, 38 (83 percent) thought this service was extremely helpful. (pp. 84–85)

Source: McRoy, R.G. (2007). ***Barriers & Success Factors in Adoptions From Foster Care: Perspectives of Families and Staff***, Center for Social Work Research.

FACES of Virginia Families and the Richmond City Department of Social Services

With AdoptUSKids grant funding, FACES of Virginia Families partnered with the Richmond City Department of Social Services and other community partners to offer a weekend camp for 105 adoptive family members. The camp targeted families who were newly formed through adoption, with the Richmond City Department of Social Services referring families to the event.

To provide respite, the camp offered separate activities for parents and children. Parents attended “Taking Care of the Caregiver” training, took yoga classes, walked in the woods, and relaxed, while children participated in activities led by staff and volunteers from the Greater Richmond YMCA. To ensure that children were safe, FACES used only staff and volunteers who had already passed criminal background checks. Activities included sports, board games, arts and crafts, swim time, and free play. Teenagers also attended support groups where they could talk about adoption issues.

The \$5,000 grant covered lodging, meals, some staff time, and supplies. The total budget was more than \$18,000, which included the purchase of camping equipment that FACES will use for future camps. A key element of the camp's success was the more than 30 volunteers from the Richmond City Department of Social Services, FACES, and the YMCA. Although FACES has not yet offered another camp, they have incorporated respite services into several other ongoing programs and intend to provide future camp opportunities.

SECTION FOUR

HOW STATES CAN BENEFIT FROM PARTNERING WITH PARENT ORGANIZATIONS

For States interested in providing valuable, sustainable respite services to adoptive, foster, and kinship families, partnering with parent support organizations can be an effective strategy. Each partnership is, of course, unique. However, there are some similar benefits that public agencies are likely to experience through these partnerships, from the initial implementation to efforts to sustain respite services.

Partnering Facilitates Start-Up or Expansion of Services

The first — and most important — strength a parent support group or parent association brings is established connections with adoptive, foster, and kinship families. These connections can ensure quick implementation of new programs since parent support organizations have an established base of clients and typically have strong credibility with parents, making outreach and start-up much simpler. While some parents who care for children from the child welfare system may have reluctance to engage the public agency in their lives again, they tend not to have similar hesitations about working with organizations run by their peers. In addition, parents may feel the most comfortable receiving services designed and offered by their peers — people who have walked in their shoes and know the challenges of parenting children who have experienced abuse, trauma, and neglect.

In addition, parent organizations can often provide resources and tools that help a public agency implement respite efforts, including staff and volunteer time, community connections, and meeting space. These resources can serve as the in-kind match required by some funders. Many parent support groups are volunteer-run organizations that have years of experience working with small budgets and relying on community volunteers. As a result, these organizations can often offer an effective service for far less money than other organizations. For agencies facing funding constraints, partnering can provide great value, as highlighted by this state agency partner in a phone interview, “Collaboration is key — even with limited resources, we can get a lot accomplished by working together, but it takes thinking creatively.”

Working with parent organizations — with their ability to easily engage parents and children to provide input — can also help public agencies conduct thorough needs assessments to guide the agencies’ priorities and tailor respite services. Such assessments help ensure that services are responsive to the community and thus are more likely to be used.

State partners also identified another benefit of partnering with a parent organization — the value that parent organizations bring in efforts to do outreach, raise families’ awareness about the availability of respite, and build families’ understanding of how to access services. As one state agency partner said in a phone interview, “When you treat a parent organization as a partner, it’s greatly beneficial. It really helps with word of mouth, which is how information gets around among parents.” Another state partner noted in a phone interview, “Partnering with parent organizations is a win-win for everybody — working with a parent organization helped us reach the families. Neither can be fully effective without the other.”

“There should be more respite services available to give parents a break from the constant behavioral problems of the children in the system.”

a parent served by an AdoptUSKids-funded respite program

Partnering Supports Ongoing Implementation and Refinement

States may be able to benefit from parent organizations’ existing infrastructure, staff, and volunteers to implement or refine a respite program. Since many parent support organizations are already offering post-placement support such information and referral, training, and support group meetings, they can often easily add new services such as respite to the menu of support. With an established network of families who are deeply familiar with the needs of children who have been in foster care, parent organizations can also connect state agencies with licensed and approved parents who can provide respite care to other families. This understanding and expertise provides real value to parents and children, as noted by one public agency partner in a phone interview, “They [the parent organization] are very child-centered and child-focused and they truly come from a strengths-based perspective. The kids are really benefiting from those services and perspectives.” Another public agency partner commented in a phone interview, “We initiated respite with a parent agency [that has] a lot of adoption experience. You want to make sure that the partner agency is deeply experienced and focused on adoption.”

As public agencies seek to tailor respite services to the evolving needs of their communities, parent organizations can also help support feedback loops to ensure that families’ input and perspectives inform ongoing program management and implementation. Parents who have been consistently involved with a support group or parent association may be more likely to provide feedback about the services provided and help guide any necessary changes during implementation. In researching respite care for children with disabilities, the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children’s Mental Health found that the most promising respite services are family driven, family centered, and built on family strengths.²

² Pauline Jivanjee, Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children’s Mental Health, “**Promising Practices in Respite Care**” presentation slides, 2005. Available at www.rtc.pdx.edu/PDF/DallasSOCPromisingPracticesPresentation.pdf (accessed August 6, 2012).

Partnering Supports Sustainability

Parent organizations can also play a key role in States' efforts to sustain respite services, even through fluctuations in funding levels. Many parent organizations have deep experience developing creative, resourceful approaches to meeting the needs of foster, adoptive, and kinship families. They can bring that creativity to the table with public agencies and help identify strategies to support ongoing availability of respite services. As noted above, many of these organizations have years of experience cobbling together funding sources and relying on volunteers or small donations to continue to serve families in need.

States can also benefit from parent organizations' assistance in designing and administering evaluation efforts to assess the effectiveness of the respite services. These evaluation findings can provide strong justification for continued funding and support to sustain respite services. Parents also can — and often do — help sustain enthusiasm and momentum for respite services across funding periods and leadership changes in public agencies. Parents can assist state agencies in finding ways to keep services for families in place over time by making a compelling case for the need for services. Parents connected with the parent support organization can be a great source of stories about how and why respite helped their children and families, and can join state leaders in seeking ongoing support from state legislative bodies and other funding sources.

Being able to demonstrate a strong, well-established partnership with a parent organization can be a good way for a state agency to show strength and capacity to implement important services. This may increase a state agency's chances of accessing additional funding, especially if they are pursuing federal grants that may require applicants to demonstrate partnerships or community connections.



INSIGHTS AND ADVICE FROM STATE PARTNERS

Through interviews, public agency partners for the AdoptUSKids-funded respite grants shared their insights about working with parent support organizations, the benefits to their State of providing respite services, and how they overcame challenges they faced in seeking to sustain respite services. The staff also shared advice and suggestions for other States interested in implementing and sustaining respite programs.

State staff also shared many insights into the benefits of partnering with parent organizations and the strengths that parent organizations bring to the provision of respite services. Those comments are included Section 4, “How States Can Benefit from Partnering with Parent Organization.”

Why States Invest in Respite

Public agency partners reported they have seen great benefits — both for families and the state agency — of providing respite services. Many partners highlighted they have received very positive feedback from parents about the value of respite, and they also see the effectiveness of respite services in improving placement stability and preventing disruptions and dissolutions. One state administrator reported in a phone interview, “We really feel that we’ve preserved some adoptions, and for some families that are teetering on the edge, the families and kids have gotten key support.”

Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Families Need Respite

A common theme from public agency partners is that families who are parenting children who are, or have been, in foster care greatly need respite care. As one agency partner said in an interview, “We ask an enormous task of adoptive parents, and many of the children — because of the trauma of abuse and neglect — have issues, so the chance to have time away is priceless.” One public agency partner noted in a phone interview, “We need to help our families, and respite is at the top of the list. It’s a form of support that parents need and it should be a required service.”

During a phone interview, another State reported, “For families adopting children from foster care, we don’t have a lot of post-adoption services available. We consistently hear from families that respite is one of the most important services; it rises to the top of the list of what they need.” Many public agency partners commented on how important it is for the agency to provide needed services such as respite to families in order to demonstrate the agency’s commitment to supporting families and preventing disruptions or dissolutions.

.....
“We need to help our families, and respite is at the top of the list. It’s a form of support that parents need and it should be a required service.”

Children and Youth Benefit from Respite Services

Some of the respite grants offered activities for youth, and public agency partners from some of those projects reported great benefits for the youth who participated. Agency staff saw that as parents received much-needed breaks, children benefitted from the camaraderie and opportunities to connect with other children who

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“The kids formed their own group and stayed together over many years. They formed an amazingly cohesive group; it’s given them socialization and given them a place where they truly, 100 percent fit in.”
.....

can understand many of their life experiences. During a phone interview, one agency reported that a group of children developed incredibly strong bonds, and noted, “The kids formed their own group and stayed together over many years. They formed an amazingly cohesive group; it’s given them socialization and given them a place where they truly, 100 percent fit in.”

Barriers and How Agencies Overcame Them

Partnering Barriers

Public agency staff reported very few barriers to establishing partnerships with parent support organizations. In fact, many staff commented on the smooth process of working with the parent organizations to develop the respite grant projects. Some public agencies had existing relationships with parent organizations that they simply expanded or formalized for the AdoptUSKids respite grants. In a phone interview, a state staff member noted that the main challenge to partnering with parent organizations was related to funding, “The only barrier to partnering was our limited financial resources.”

Sustainability Barriers

Public agencies did report encountering multiple barriers related to sustaining respite services, with the most common barrier being the challenge of funding for continued respite services. One state leader noted in a phone interview, “Funding was a huge barrier to sustainability. Respite didn’t survive budget cuts.”

.....
“A key facilitator [to sustainability] was having champions within the agency who really see the value of respite.”
.....
During a phone interview, one state leader explained how the State overcame the funding challenge, “Funding was a big challenge for sustainability, but using [federal] Adoption Incentive funds and state funds helped with sustainability. It was also helpful to have support from agency leadership and the community that respite is a needed service and helps prevent disruptions and keeps children from coming back into foster care.”

A common theme among the strategies and key factors that States credit for helping overcome barriers to sustainability for respite is building support and having people see the value of respite services. One agency partner observed in a phone interview, “A key facilitator [to sustainability] was having champions within the agency who really see the value of respite.”

For another State, the respite recipients helped provide momentum for sustainability. The state staff member noted in an interview, “A factor supporting sustainability was that the group [of parents] themselves became cohesive and saw the value to continuing.”

The prospect of needing to sustain services after grant funding ended created some challenges in implementing new respite services. For example, one agency reported their leadership was worried about expanding respite services from foster families to adoptive families who had not previously been able to receive respite from the State. The agency had concerns about whether they would be able to sustain services for adoptive families after the AdoptUSKids grant ended.

Many public agency partners reported that the more pressing challenge they face, separate from sustainability but still related, is the struggle to expand respite services to other parts of the State, beyond the areas served during the AdoptUSKids grant. For example, one state partner commented in an interview, “We had no barriers to sustainability. Our biggest challenge is how to replicate the project in other parts of the State. We know what works, from our greatly successful pilot, so that challenge now is how to expand in other areas of the State.”

Advice to Other State Leaders

Based on their experiences from partnering on the AdoptUSKids respite grants, public agency partners shared suggestions for other States interested in developing sustainable respite services. A key theme from the state partners is that States should recognize the value of respite services as a way to support families and keep placements stable. Another common theme was that creativity and flexibility are important in many ways, including the identification of ways to fund respite services, partnering with other organizations, and adapting services to meet families’ needs.

Respite Services Are a Good Investment

Public agency partners voiced strong, consistent support for the importance of respite services and the priority that States should place on finding ways to provide respite for families. One administrator said in a phone interview, “All States should look at opportunities for paid respite – both planned and emergency respite. It’s a key way to support placements and prevent placements disruptions.”

.....
“If they [States] are seeking ways to prevent adoptions from dissolving, this [respite] is something they should explore. For us, it’s been fantastic.”
.....

Another state administrator agreed that the investment is worthwhile and noted in a phone interview, “If they [States] are seeking ways to prevent adoptions from dissolving, this [respite] is something they should explore. For us, it’s been fantastic.”

Another state leader emphasized that respite is a key part of family support services, and noted in an interview, “States should look at ways to build respite into post-adoption services; it’s an important ingredient.”



The Benefits of Respite Care Are Diverse

A study published in the *Journal of Health & Social Policy* of 71 foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers in an urban area who were raising children with special needs or disabilities found that families enjoyed expanded and improved interpersonal relationships, a reduction in objective burden, increased free time, and increased periods of relaxation after using respite care. The study also showed that respite care was associated with reduced caregiver stress and improved quality of life. (p. 97)

Other benefits of receiving respite care that were reported in this study included:

- 93 percent of caregivers reported reduced stress
- 90 percent reported improved family relationships
- 88 percent reported improved positive attitude toward their child
- 88 percent report help meeting their child’s special needs (p. 92)

Source: Owens-Kane, S. (2006). Respite care: Outcomes for kinship and non-kinship caregivers, *Journal of Health & Social Policy*, Vol. 22, No. 3/4, pp. 85–99.

Leadership Support Is Key

Many state partners emphasized that States interested in implementing sustainable respite services need to have strong support and commitment from agency leaders. As one state partner said in a phone interview, “You need to have champions within the agency to build and sustain support for respite.”

Another state agency partner commented in a phone interview about how the AdoptUSKids respite grant provided a way to address a challenge facing agency leaders, “Agency leadership was dismayed that we weren’t spending all of our respite funds because families weren’t aware that it was available; leadership was glad for the opportunity to use the respite grant to raise awareness of the availability of services.”

.....
“Sustainability is key – you don’t want to offer services for only one year and then have them drop away. It’s important to have support from leadership and fiscal staff to keep the commitment to the services.”
.....

Another state partner emphasized the importance of having agency leaders’ buy-in from the beginning. As the leader explained during a phone interview, “Sustainability is key – you don’t want to offer services for only one year and then have them drop away. It’s important to have support from leadership and fiscal staff to keep the commitment to the services.”

Creativity Is Important

Many public agency partners highlighted the key role that creativity played in the success of their respite programs and suggested that States that are considering developing or expanding respite services seek ways to be creative and flexible. One agency staff member explained during a phone interview, “Creativity and thinking outside of the box is crucial: With decreasing foster care populations in States, we have a lot of approved resource homes with empty beds, so we could get creative and have those families help provide respite.”



This creativity can help overcome the challenges of implementing new services. As one public agency staff member noted in a phone interview, “Whenever possible, try to think creatively and allow parents time to get acclimated and to build trust.”

Another public agency partner cautioned during a phone interview that agencies should be careful to avoid losing the focus of their programs and their mission, “While trying to be creative and flexible and meet the needs of many, many people, it’s important to stay true to the population that this [respite] is intended to serve.”

Pay Attention to Evaluation and Dissemination

Some public agency partners emphasized the need to take a strategic approach when providing respite services to ensure that — in addition to actually delivering needed services — agencies collect evaluation data and feedback from participants. One agency leader explained in a phone interview, “There’s great value in evaluating the work, so you have good data, not just anecdotes.”

Agencies must also have a plan for communicating with stakeholders about the effectiveness of the respite services. Agency partners pointed to the value of being able to use evaluation data to build and sustain support for the respite services. One advised in a phone interview, “Have good dissemination strategies in order to let people know how effective the services have been.”

..... **“There’s great value in evaluating the work, so you have good data, not just anecdotes.”** Public agencies should also be careful to ensure that evaluation includes all members of the adoptive, foster, or kinship families. During a phone interview, one representative noted an omission in many evaluation plans, “One thing that’s lacking is feedback directly from youth about their experiences with respite. Getting their perspectives might be helpful for agencies that are interested in building the case for providing respite services.”

SECTION SIX

IDEAS FOR SUSTAINING RESPITE SERVICES

As noted earlier, of the 52 grantees who responded to a survey, 39 sustained their respite programs after the AdoptUSKids one-year grant period ended. Grantees found diverse ways to sustain their programs. Some found new grants and were even able to expand their services, others cobbled together donations to offer a smaller version of the respite program, some relied more on volunteers or charged small fees to parents, and others incorporated respite into other post-permanency programs.

Although each grantee's story is different, a number of themes emerged that can help parent organizations and state partners sustain respite or other grant programs in the future. Many of the examples highlighted below focus on strategies that the parent organizations — as the direct recipient of the AdoptUSKids respite funds — used to pursue sustainability. However, many of these strategies are also applicable for state agencies.

Focus on Relationships

For almost all grantees, partnerships and collaboration were critical to their success — during planning, in the midst of the grant period, and afterward. For the parent support organization, strong relationships with the state agency, local adoption agencies, nearby schools and colleges, and community groups were often vital to sustaining respite programs after the grant ended.

Partnering With State Agencies

Of foremost importance was the relationship between state departments of social services and parent organizations that directly received the AdoptUSKids grant. As detailed in Sections 4 and 5, public agency staff highlighted the value of partnering with parent support organizations to offer and sustain respite services. Parent support organizations also stressed the importance of collaborating with their public agency partners and the need to build and maintain their relationships with agency staff. The public agencies can fund post-adoption and other post-permanency services, refer families who need support, share valuable insights on families' needs, and provide information about additional sources of funding and partnership opportunities.

Harmony Adoptions, which offered a respite weekend retreat for adoptive parents, invites state adoption and foster care directors to all of its events so these leaders can see the difference the programs make. When Harmony hosts events around the State, they invite regional administrators as well. Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine invited the state commissioner of human services to its annual conference, and had parents thank the commissioner and the State for all of their support. New Mexico Fiesta Project asks state agency staff to participate in a Facebook adoption support group so the staff can continue to hear firsthand the issues facing families and the types of services they need.

During the respite program design, Fiesta Project staff thoughtfully engaged state agency staff in brainstorming ideas and program planning – enhancing their partnership and creating a better program at the same time. Many other grantees also invited staff from the local or state department of social services to serve on the respite steering or advisory committee.

Adoptive Families with Information and Support is careful to ensure that community leaders and members know the value of its respite program. A judge recently attended one of the group's respite days, and saw firsthand the serious special needs facing many of the children adopted from care. The group has also invited funders' staff so they can see what a difference the services make, perhaps paving the way to future contributions. Pride and Hope Ministry's director joined a committee for the Louisiana Supreme Court's Court Improvement Project. There, she has built a relationship with the committee's co-chair who has become an advisor to Pride and Hope – offering ideas and helping raise funds to sustain the respite program and other services.

In Missouri, the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Coalition makes itself a resource for the Missouri Department of Social Services. Staff and parents participate in work groups, task forces, and boards; volunteer for special initiatives; and testify before the legislature in support of department goals. In addition, the coalition's executive director meets quarterly with the children's director to discuss issues facing foster and adoptive families.

In Oklahoma, it was Oklahoma Department of Human Services that forged a partnership with another state agency. When a Department of Human Services staff member saw data on how many adoptions were disrupting, she knew that a wraparound support program would help and that the State's Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Systems of Care would be an ideal partner. An Oklahoma Department of Human Services staff member set up a brief meeting with her colleague to explain how helping adoptive families would reduce Medicaid costs. Over time, the relationship grew, and the two agencies jointly launched the pilot Adoption Wraparound program.

Building Other Community Collaborations

Partnerships can and do extend beyond state agencies. The Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Coalition has spent years developing relationships with the Missouri legislature. The coalition's director notes the group is careful to be a resource to legislators and to provide feedback and anecdotal information for bills that don't have a cost, such as a foster parent bill of rights. Then when a bill with a cost comes up, like a recent one to fund a post-adoption program with respite services, legislators trust the coalition, understand families' needs, and are more likely to support the legislation.

The coalition also partners with a local lobbyist who donates his time to help children and families. Coalition staff worked with the Missouri Department of Social Services to develop a plan for funding post-adoption services, and then the lobbyist advocated with legislators to incorporate the funds into the budget bill. Relationships with the state agency, legislators, and the volunteer lobbyist made the funding possible.

In Florida, the North East Florida Post Adoption Support Group and Children’s Home Society hosted a number of family events as part of its respite grant. Respite program staff noted that partnering with larger community-based organizations like Children’s Home Society contributed to the program’s success. Larger agencies and organizations may have resources such as development departments, grant writers, flexible funds, and event tickets that they may be able to share with smaller parent-based organizations.

Be Creative in Your Fundraising

Obviously, raising funds is one of the best ways for any grantee to sustain its efforts. Many AdoptUSKids respite grantees obtained grants, individual and corporate donations, and in-kind contributions to fund ongoing respite services. One support group leader encouraged others to be creative when fundraising, “Think outside the box! It doesn’t always have to be grants.” Group leaders took this advice and employed a number of strategies for fundraising efforts small and large – from collecting coins to hosting events to writing successful grant applications.

Host Fundraisers

Special events helped a number of grantees fund respite and other family support services. FAIR Visions in Louisiana, which offered a series of weekend respite camps in partnership with the Office of Community Services, held a number of fundraising events after their respite grant ended. The group has a gaming license and hosts up to 15 bingo sessions each month. These events raise between \$50,000 to \$60,000 per year, more than enough to sustain the respite and other programs.

Kentucky Adoption Options hosted several special fundraising events, whenever possible drawing on the skills, interests, and connections of group members. One group member was a bluegrass musician, and he helped the group organize a successful bluegrass festival. Connecticut’s United Services Agency, which partnered with the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group, hosts an annual Irish Night with dinner and Irish music. Recently, United Services has added advertising and sponsorships to the event, which increased revenue from \$2,000 to \$6,000 without increasing the size – or cost – of the evening. United Services staff noted that the primary sponsor, Mutual of America, is one of the agency’s vendors and has a mission (retirement planning services) that aligns well with the agency’s services to seniors.





Children and Youth Benefit from Spending Time with Their Peers

Many of the AdoptUSKids-funded respite services included group childcare or other group activities for children and youth in adoptive, foster, and kinship families. A study titled **Promoting Successful Adoptions: Practice with Troubled Families** examined research on support groups or services for such youth and reported that spending time with similar youth is beneficial:

- “Groups can provide an opportunity for children to see that their status as adopted children is not unique, and that children often have similar questions and feelings about being adopted. Further, groups provide a place where children can safely talk about issues with others who understand.” (p. 220)
- “As noted in a description of a support group by Cordell, Nathan, and Krymow (1985), ‘Children do not feel so different, isolated or worthless when they can see there are other children not living with the biological parents and are coping with a different family unit.’” (p. 221)

Source: Smith, S.L., & Howard, J.A. (1999). **Promoting Successful Adoptions: Practice with Troubled Families**.

In Texas, Family by Choice, which provides respite and other support to lesbian and gay adoptive parents and their children, has also hosted successful fundraising events. For one event, a pro bono event planner arranged for donations of alcoholic beverages while chefs at local culinary schools provided appetizers. Tickets were \$50 each, and attendees had good food and an open bar. Last year, the event raised \$7,000, with much of the work done by volunteers.

Ask for Small Donations from Many Organizations

Heritage Foster Adoption Support in Indiana offered a series of parents’ night out respite sessions during their AdoptUSKids grant. Volunteers from the high school helped out at the event, but only after they had passed a Department of Children’s Services background check. Parents very much valued the respite, so after a year, the group had to find other funds to keep the program going. Group leaders obtained a contribution from a local hospital after making the case that providing respite met a health care need, while CSX made a donation and provided volunteers. Local restaurants and grocery stores donated food, and the Indiana Pacers gave gifts for the youth. Together these contributions covered the costs of several more respite drop-off events.

Having a specific tagline or time period for fundraising can also be helpful in garnering donations. Catholic Charities Caregivers Support Services, which provides support to grandparents raising their grandchildren, does targeted requests for funding during Grandparents Week in September. Using the slogan, “Do something grand and lend a hand,” the organization has been able to raise money to sponsor a number of respite activities. Harmony Adoptions branded their respite retreats as the R.E.S.T. (respite, education, support, and training) Initiative to ensure that funders and community members understand the full spectrum of services offered.

Small and in-kind donations also helped some grantees do more with the funds they had. After the AdoptUSKids grant ended, the New Mexico Fiesta Project received state funding to host five respite retreats. The budget included money to buy food for the five retreats, but the organization was able to save money with in-kind donations of food from the community instead. With the funds saved on food, the group was able to fund a sixth retreat.

Several grantees noted the key was to ask and ask again. One explained during a respite grantee meeting, “I’m shameless about asking for things.”

Another emphasized at the meeting, “If you don’t ask, you won’t know.”

One parent support organization leader noted during the grantee meeting that you never know when you’ll make an important connection that leads to ongoing support, “Talk about the issue, at some point you’ll connect with people who have an adoption connection without even knowing it.”

Ask for Help from the Parents and Youth Served

As their grants ended, several groups asked parents and youth to help raise money to sustain respite or other programs. These organizations’ staff noted that involving the entire family helps their commitment to the program and often strengthens family relationships with everyone working together for a common cause. At Adoptions Together, the respite coordinator asked youth to staff a bake sale and yard sale with funds benefitting their Saturday respite events. For the yard sale, the youth cleaned their rooms and then came together to sell the items they no longer wanted. New York’s Share Family Supports asked parents and children to gather their loose change and donate it to the respite program.

Golden Gate Community Center and the Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents, which offers support to grandparents caring for their grandchildren, involved the caregivers even one step further in fundraising. The group had only one paid staff member, and she couldn’t do the fundraising alone. As a result, the caregivers formed a leadership team and staff taught them about fundraising and raising awareness in the community. The caregivers communicated the value of respite and other services, and successfully raised donations to help continue the program. In Connecticut, caregivers with the Grandparents Program volunteered to do surveys or participate in focus groups in exchange for gift cards or small donations. They contributed these gifts back to the group to keep the family support program viable.

Kentucky Adoption Options asks its parents to be responsible for distributing and collecting coins in the community. The group has coin boxes with the group’s logo on it, and parents take them to local businesses, where customers can drop their change after completing a sale. Group members have also gotten paid to do community roadside cleanup, and sold candles around town to raise funds for family support programs such as respite.

Pursue Grants

In Connecticut, United Services invested in the affordable GrantStation online database, which lists more than 10,000 funding sources. One staff member spent a day at the library using reference materials that listed even more possible grant makers. The agency's grant writers were careful to adapt proposals to each grant maker's focus and not to apply when their program didn't fit the funder's guidelines.

Several groups had volunteer grant writers or grant reviewers help them prepare or polish their applications for funds. Indiana's Heritage Foster Adoption Support asked a grant writer at the Indiana Department of Corrections to review grant applications and make suggestions to improve the proposals. St. Louis-based Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition had college students write grant proposals for them, and the Allison Area Foster Parent Support Group asked social work students at the local college to identify research on the value of respite care that the group could incorporate into proposals.

Access State, County, and Federal Funds

Several AdoptUSKids respite partnerships accessed state or federal funding streams to support respite services after the grant period. Pride and Hope Ministry became a state-licensed respite care provider, and then received Medicaid reimbursement for respite services provided to youth who were Medicaid eligible. In Florida, Children's Home Society accessed two different funding streams to cover respite services after the AdoptUSKids grant ended. The first source of funds, called Provision of Therapeutic Services, is available to children who have a significant mental health diagnosis while the second is a state flexible fund that provides reimbursement for services that keep children from re-entering foster care.

In at least two cases, the parent support organization and state partner accessed federal Adoption Incentive funds for respite care. In New Mexico, the Fiesta Project and the Children, Youth, and Families Department began discussing using federal Adoption Incentive funds for respite care before the awards were formally announced. Since the two agencies had an ongoing relationship and had seen the value of respite care in preserving families, the Children, Youth, and Families Department contracted with the Fiesta Project to offer respite retreats statewide.

Two Missouri partners also negotiated an arrangement to invest Adoption Incentive funds into respite care. The Missouri Department of Social Services contracts with the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Coalition to run the Adoption Resource Center, which provides post-adoption support services including respite. Recently, the department added Adoption Incentive funds to the contract, and the coalition was able to fund respite events for more than 500 children in six cities across Missouri by making mini-grants of \$4,500.

Oklahoma's Adoption Wraparound program was a partnership of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services' Systems of Care program. Because Systems of Care was able to access ongoing federal funding through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Systems of Care will take lead on sustaining and expanding the program by training mental health providers and parents on adoption competency, while also offering a children's component.

“When [my] children or spouse get stressed by [a] foster child’s presence, it spreads to the entire family. Having a break to relax and ‘Just be us again’ is great.”

a parent served by an AdoptUSKids-funded respite program

Think Small

Several grantees reported it was essential for them not to overreach during the grant period. Staff knew they needed to take on a meaningful respite program while also making it manageable enough to succeed. Adoptive Families with Information and Support's Rec and Respite program, for example, combined its AdoptUSKids grant with an existing program and was able to serve a new population of families not eligible under previous funding. After the grant ended, the State increased its contribution to Adoptive Families with Information and Support, and the partnership was able to continue providing respite to a larger group of adoptive families.

However, some respite grantees noted it can be important to also think small in terms of ongoing funding. Mississippi Families for Kids and its partner Relatives Raising Others Children obtained several donations to help keep its family event and day camp respite program going. Respite program staff noted during a respite grantee meeting, “No resource is too small; small businesses have given the most” to the program. Heritage Foster Adoption Support also found that they could fund an ongoing program with many small donations, most around \$500 or so. Connecticut's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren relied in part on even smaller donations — contributions made by community members in honor of their grandparents.

Other grantees found the only way to sustain their programs was to scale back what they offered. During the grant period, Together As Adoptive Parents in Pennsylvania partnered with the Salvation Army to provide drop-off respite once a month for children and youth in the community. For six hours each month, between five to 15 children and youth participated in games, swimming, and free time at the local YMCA. In addition to the families' adopted and foster children, the program was open to those families' birth children so that the adults really had time off from parenting.

After the grant ended, Together As Adoptive Parents offered respite only every other month, and pieced together funds to cover the costs. The group's staff asked the YMCA to provide space at a very low cost, had parents pay \$5 per child, brought in more volunteers, and used general revenue to fund program oversight. Now, the program costs only a few hundred dollars per month while still providing a valuable service to families raising children with significant needs.

Prove Yourself

Many grantees evaluated their AdoptUSKids respite programs to assess the effectiveness of their respite services, and then used positive results to advocate for additional resources. At a respite grantee meeting, one parent support organization leader encouraged others to “be successful with a little part of it, document that and be enthusiastic and then you can engage others.”

In Michigan, the Adoptive Family Support Network used its grant to offer a series of drop-off events for children and youth. Since their funders were very interested in evidence-based programs, the staff was very serious about evaluating the respite services. At every event, parents were asked to complete the surveys before they left with their children, ensuring everyone completed an evaluation. They answered questions such as “Do you feel like you’re a better parent?” and “Does this reduce your stress level as a parent?” The group found that 98 percent of attendees felt the respite was helpful at reducing stress, and in grant applications staff explained how better parenting and lower stress result in more stability for children and their families, and perhaps even prevent disruptions or dissolutions. When presented with this data, a funder agreed to provide \$5,000 to cover respite services for the year after the AdoptUSKids grant.

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine used its respite grant to provide a program for children and youth during the group’s annual conference for parents. With the child care available, the conference had significantly larger attendance than the prior year, and evaluations showed that the respite program was incredibly important to families. About 86 percent of parents said respite made it possible for them to attend. Perhaps partly as a result of these findings, the State is now reimbursing families for respite care as it had been doing before budget cuts had eliminated these reimbursements.

Develop and Support a Volunteer Network

When a parent support organization seeks to continue programming after a grant ends, volunteers can be an extraordinary resource. Many grantees reported they sustained their program in part because they relied more on volunteers than paid staff or respite providers. These groups stressed the importance of doing background checks, finding volunteers with the right skills, and creating an organized volunteer program.

One Church, One Child of Maryland has worked with the local faith community for many years to recruit adoptive families for children in foster care. When accessing volunteers through churches, One Church, One Child found the best success came by following certain guidelines. First, it was important for a church member or another faith community leader to approach church leaders. The group’s board is composed of pastors and ministers who are often better able to gain access into other churches. Once group staff and directors met with church leaders, they were careful to follow the church’s lead about how to ask for support. By getting buy-in from church leaders, One Church, One Child was able to make the program a mission of the church. At each place of worship, the group also identifies a volunteer liaison with whom they meet quarterly to talk about needs and church procedures.

When time came to offer respite services, One Church, One Child asked the same church volunteers who did recruitment if they were interested in providing respite care as well. If they had not already passed the local Department of Social Services background check, all of the volunteers had to go through the screening process. One Church, One Child trained a pool of eight to 12 volunteers, and asked them to sign a memorandum of agreement and commit to the job for at least six months. With this commitment, volunteers attended respite events regularly and built relationships with the children and youth they served. This consistency enabled them to develop trust, which was important in ensuring effective respite services. One Church, One Child also regularly recognized and celebrated the volunteers – providing food, covering transportation costs, and hosting a respite night for the volunteers where they attended a play or movie.

Pride and Hope Ministry also relied heavily on church volunteers to operate and sustain its respite program. First, the group asked churches to choose adoption or foster care as their ministry so that church leaders and more of the congregation would become actively involved. In addition, Pride and Hope used student interns from social work and early childhood education programs at local colleges, retired teachers, Girl Scouts, and other community service clubs. To ensure that children would be safe, every volunteer had to pass a criminal background check. When working with the schools, the group achieved the best results when they made sure the volunteer opportunity was also educational for the students and fit with their academic goals. As Pride and Hope’s director noted during a respite grantee meeting, “You must be committed to helping the students learn; successful volunteer programs must be mutually beneficial.”

Mississippi Families for Kids and its partner Relatives Raising Others Children used volunteers extensively to keep their respite program going. To keep volunteers engaged, the groups instituted a number of practices. First, they developed a volunteer database that tracked volunteers’ areas of interests and skills so it was easy to determine who should be doing which tasks. For example, teachers were asked to work with children rather than preparing or providing food. In addition, the partners found it was important to get volunteers actively involved – and one of the best ways to do this was by asking for and listening to the volunteers’ suggestions on how to improve the program. Finally, the Mississippi team was committed to rewarding volunteers through an annual Volunteer of the Year award and thank you certificates distributed after each event.

Several of the grantees had volunteers from local colleges and universities that helped them sustain respite programs and raise funds after the grant period. The Allison Area Foster Parent Group had a strong partnership with Wartburg College School of Social Work, with students conducting background studies on all respite providers, researching the value of respite care, and even serving as respite providers. The Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition in St. Louis, Missouri, partnered with sororities and fraternities from Lincoln University and other colleges. Students volunteered to do grant writing, threw fundraisers, and volunteered at events. Typically, each sorority and fraternity has a certain number of hours of community service that must be performed, and the students were happy to learn about opportunities to help foster and adoptive families.

In Louisiana, FAIR Visions has ongoing partnerships with two local universities. Social workers from each university serve on the group's board and can help them access students and other volunteers as necessary. Volunteers had to pass background checks if they were working with children. Students in the art department have donated time to develop a logo and event materials, and students in information technology have donated computer services. FAIR Visions found other volunteers by posting notices in local senior citizen centers, listing needs in church bulletins during national Foster Care or Adoption Month, and partnering with the Army Reserves Officer Training Corps at the nearby high school.

Take Your Time

One of the lessons for sustaining a grant program requires action before the grant is requested — be patient and don't apply for a grant until you're ready. The Allison Area Foster Parent Support Group experienced this firsthand. When they saw the request for proposals for the AdoptUSKids funding, the group's leaders had a great idea for a program but knew it would take some time and groundwork to set up properly. Since they knew there were three more years of grants to be given, the Association decided to spend a year in a planning process with the Department of Human Services. The group's respite idea originally required the Oklahoma Department of Human Services to waive its rule about having respite provided only by licensed foster parents, so the two partners had to take time and work out a plan that would ensure children were safe and the program was possible.

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services and the Foster Care and Adoptive Association of Oklahoma also took time to carefully plan the services they would offer. First, staff at the Department of Human Services analyzed the data on which adoptions were disrupting. When they discovered that it was primarily newly matched adoptive families, the department discussed how to best meet the needs of this population. Department staff made a case for the supportive services and sought a partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and then all the program's partners jointly planned how to meet families' needs. The thoughtful planning and groundwork helped ensure success of this pilot program, which is now going to be adapted statewide.

Make Respite Part of Broader Post-Permanency Support Programs

A number of AdoptUSKids grantees sustained respite services by combining them with other post-adoption or post-placement services. FACES of Virginia Families, for example, held a respite camp with its AdoptUSKids funds. Hosting another camp without an ongoing source of funding wasn't possible, but the organization decided to build respite services into other services they offer. FACES now teaches about the importance of respite care in all of its training for adoptive, foster, and kinship families and encourages families to trade respite services with one another. The organization has developed a family-to-family mentoring program called Trailblazers, and the matched families often provide respite for one another.



There Are Too Few Respite Services Available

A study of planned and crisis respite found that agencies providing respite care services often have more demand for services than they can accommodate. The researchers received survey responses from 74 Child Welfare League of America agencies and 55 Access to Respite Care and Help agencies. The results showed:

- In 2000, 40 percent of Child Welfare League of America agencies (N=30) and 59 percent of Access to Respite Care and Help agencies (N=22) reported turning families away from planned respite care. (p. 22)
- In addition, 17 (23 percent) of Child Welfare League of America agencies and 22 (59 percent) of Access to Respite Care and Help agencies reported they had waiting lists for planned respite care. (p. 22)

Source: Dougherty, S., Yu, E., Edgar, M., Day, P., & Wade, C. (2002). *Planned and Crisis Respite for Families with Children: Results of a Collaborative Study*.

Adoptive Families with Information and Support, which had operated a stand-alone Rec and Respite program, has now incorporated the respite services into the group's state-funded post-adoption support program. This change helps ensure that respite care is part of ongoing, effective post-placement services provided to foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

Many respite grantees relied on a commitment from their own agency to use general revenue to sustain respite services after the AdoptUSKids grant. In these cases, parent support organization leaders saw the value of respite services during the grant period, which increased interest in the program and understanding about the value of respite as a post-placement service. At Adoptions Together, respite program staff actively engaged other agency staff in the respite services. The Saturday respite events were held at the agency's office, and staff members were asked to help out from time to time. After being involved in the program, many of the managers and line staff understood respite as a critical part of the agency's post-adoption services, and management decided to maintain the program after the grant ended.



OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO SUSTAINING RESPITE SERVICES

Through online surveys and in-person discussions, AdoptUSKids grantees identified a number of barriers to sustaining their respite programs. Below are some of the most common barriers and suggestions for overcoming these obstacles.

Difficulty Obtaining Funding

Grantees identified a lack of funding as the top barrier to sustainability. Below are a few of the themes that emerged as groups sought to overcome this barrier, and Section 6 offers more specific suggestions on accessing funds.

Create a Team to Seek Funding

Grantees consistently noted that raising funds or finding funding sources cannot be one person's job. Some parent support organizations identified volunteer event planners, grant writers, and students to help with special events and grant writing. Others asked parents and youth served to donate or raise funds, which both increased donations and built commitment to the services. Smaller parent support organizations relied on help from development departments or staff at larger agencies.

At the public agency, a funding team could consist of both program and fiscal staff who can explore existing funding streams and identify new avenues to support respite services. As noted earlier, several of the AdoptUSKids grantees accessed federal Adoption Incentive funds to continue providing respite services, and one used flexible state and federal funds to cover respite costs.

Reduce Costs

Many of the respite grantees found that they could not raise enough money to maintain the full program as funded by AdoptUSKids. Not willing to give up on providing the valued respite services, they sought ways to offer respite at a lower cost. In some cases, groups chose to offer fewer events such as hosting respite drop-off nights every other month instead of monthly. Other grantees relied more on parents, volunteers, or student interns instead of paid staff, while also protecting children by doing necessary background checks. Some respite programs garnered significant in-kind donations of items such as food, supplies, and meeting space. In a phone interview, a public agency partner noted the value of such contributions, "Having meeting space ... provided by a community organization helped the [parent] group keep meeting. The meeting space was in a nice facility and the facility was a community center where a lot of other groups meet, so that helped normalize the group and take away any sense of stigma of a 'support group.'"

Integrate Respite Services into Other Programs or Services

Many of the grantees that sustained respite services did so by making respite a part of other programs or agency services. In several states, the state agency and parent organization created new contracts or modified existing contracts to have the parent organization add respite services to broader post-adoption services contracts. In other cases, parent support organizations decided that respite would be a core service of the organization, dedicating staff time and general revenue to respite care. A few grantees incorporated respite into other programs — asking parent mentor teams to trade respite care with one another, or adding child care to a training or conference so parents get a break from parenting while also building their skills.

“The biggest difference has been the ability to spend quality time with my partner, friends, and family without having to worry about what one of the children might do. Having time away relieves some of the stress that comes with parenting difficult multi-needs children. Overnight respite is the most beneficial.”

a parent served by an AdoptUSKids-funded respite program

Changes in Leadership

Both parent support organizations and public agency partners experienced changes in leadership that affected the grantees’ ability to offer and maintain respite services. Several parent groups had a director or leader who applied for the AdoptUSKids grant and then left the organization. New staff were then in charge of achieving the first leader’s goals. Similarly, a number of partnerships saw changes on the public agency side, including when staff members moved to a new position or agencies changed some staff members work assignments. Given the reality that most agencies and organizations will experience changes in leadership, especially due to changes in state administrations, agencies should develop program implementation plans that address how to continue services through staffing changes.

Share Leadership

The best way to avoid problems caused by changes in leadership is to ensure multiple people are involved in the respite program. Grantees with a strong steering committee that had members representing the public agency, the parent organization, and community organizations weath-ered staff changes better than those who have only one respite champion. There are multiple benefits to having several group members and staff from both the parent support organization and the public agency fully informed and actively involved. First, if one leaves, the others have the history and the passion to continue the respite plan. Second, the staff can share the workload and encourage one another when other obstacles appear.



A Review of the Literature on Respite Care Finds Numerous Benefits

A comprehensive review of literature on respite care for children with disabilities in the *Journal of Development & Physical Disabilities* examined 14 different studies of families who have children with developmental or physical disabilities. Analysis of the studies' findings showed the following outcomes of families' using respite care:

- “Respite care is associated with significant reductions in parental stress” (p. 618)
- “Respite care appears to result in reductions in psychological distress in parents of children with developmental disabilities” (p. 618)
- “Respite care may be considered an intervention for child abuse, especially for those children suffering from challenging behaviors” (p. 627)

The journal also reported in the same review:

“The comprehensive care needs of children and their families' inability to meet or cope with these needs are major factors contributing to high stress among the parent caregiver. Studies indicate that respite care can be an appropriate and effective intervention to decrease stress in the family caregiver. They also indicate that despite the severity of the disability, parental income level, or demographic location, respite is a needed support service for families of children with special needs. Studies also indicate that the use of respite increased parent/child relationships and decreased the risk of child abuse. Studies report that there is definitely a need for respite services among families of children with a disability.” (p. 627)

Source: Strunk, J.A. (2010). Respite care for families of special needs children: A systematic review, *Journal of Development & Physical Disabilities*, Vol. 22: pp 625-630.

Several parent support organizations noted that multiple staff members from the public agency were engaged in the respite work. One explained that line workers at the city department of social services referred families for respite while department supervisors and managers communicated the importance of respite care and the respite collaboration to other staff. With commitment and involvement of staff at all levels of the public agency, the parent organization was ready to survive any number of changes in staffing.

Make Changes to the Respite Plan

In other cases, groups addressed a change in leadership by revisiting and rethinking the original plan. Several organizations responded to a leadership change by adapting their plans to better meet the skills, strengths, or capacity of its current staff. For example, rather than running a camp that relied heavily on staff time, a grantee might help parents set up a respite co-op with a strong base of foster and adoptive parents exchanging respite care with one another.

Increase Buy-In Throughout the Organization

For other grantees, a key to overcoming leadership changes was to ensure that the respite program was understood and valued by others at the support organization or agency partner. Several grantees noted that documenting the respite plan in writing was useful. This written record served both as an implementation guide for staff and as a succession plan if leadership changed at the organization or partner agency. Other grantees found having a specific memorandum of understanding with their partner, volunteers, or community agencies helped ensure continuity of services during any personnel changes.

Document Success

In addition, grantees identified that documenting successes and accomplishments helped their respite programs survive leadership changes. Such documentation included videos of respite retreats or group activities for children and youth, evaluation findings, and letters from children served. These items clearly demonstrated the importance of the respite services, which helped some grantees make their case to new staff at the public agency or even with new managers at their own parent support organization.

Partnership Challenges

Almost all grantees had successful collaborations, and most cited the partnership between the public agency and the parent organization as key to sustaining respite services. In a few cases, however, the two organizations experienced communication problems or differences in priorities that affected the provision of respite services. Grantees found that focusing on the bottom line — how respite helps parents and their children — helped them overcome these challenges. One explained, “It may be frustrating, but if it helps kids at the end of the day, it’s worth it.”

Let the Parent Support Organization Take the Lead

A few public agency partners faced significant challenges during the grant period. Over the last several years, some public agencies faced drastic budget cuts and increased staff workloads, which affected the respite partnership. Grantees noted one way to address such challenges was to let the parent support organization carry a larger share of the work. With access to more volunteers and a leadership team, parent support organizations often took the lead to accomplish the partnership’s goals. In these situations, state agency staff remained actively involved but spent less time on the respite partnership than originally planned.

Clarify Expectations

A number of grantees noted that having a clear set of expectations helped, or would have helped, in addressing partnership challenges. Through a formal agreement or a written list of tasks and a check-in schedule, partners were clear with one another about their expectations and made adjustments if one partner was having trouble following through. Other respite grantees explained that they set up regular meetings or conversations with partners so that both agencies

were on the same page and were working as a team. As one respite leader explained during a respite grantee meeting, “We need to grow together; the partnership matters beyond this money and [we] need to value that.”

Expand the Partnership Base

A few respite grantees found their partner organization did not have the time or resources to commit to program implementation. To address this barrier, groups simply expanded the partnership, finding community-based organizations or other agencies that could join the collaboration. As one parent group leader explained at a respite grantee meeting, “We struggled with our original partner, so we have built really strong partnerships with others who want to make a difference in the community. We found it was better to focus on smaller, local organizations.”

Difficulty Engaging Families

Although research on this project and on other respite services clearly shows that adoptive, foster, and kinship families need and value respite care, some grantees still struggled to engage families. In many cases, parents were reluctant to leave their children in the care of others. These parents often worried others might not be able to handle their children’s behaviors and special needs, and that their children would not be safe or happy when they were left. As a result, grantees had to develop trust between parents and caregivers.

During a phone interview, one state agency partner reflected on a parent who was initially reluctant to use respite, but ended up finding great value in the services, “She almost felt like it was a weakness to need respite, but she has become an incredibly strong parent partner.”



Help Parents Get to Know Providers

To reassure parents who were afraid to leave their children, grantees took a number of steps. One Church, One Child of Maryland had parents visit the drop-off location in advance. During the visit, parents met with respite providers and discussed their children’s individual needs. Children met the providers and saw the location before they attended on their own. Several grantees had one of more child welfare or mental health professional attend group child care

activities in case a child’s needs were severe. Most grantees kept their staff-to-child ratio as small as possible so that there would be an adult available if a child was particularly stressed or had challenging behaviors. Many of the volunteer respite providers were teachers, social work students, and foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. These providers had experience working with children who have special needs and had passed child safety checks.

Grantees running respite co-ops also had to help parents become comfortable leaving their children with other adults. Many hosted support group meetings, trainings, or retreats where parents got to know one another and made their own decisions about who could best meet their children’s needs. In the co-ops, the respite providers were typically other foster or adoptive parents who had already passed rigorous background checks and been through the licensing or home study process. This helped reassure parents that their children would be safe. Some grantees matched families with one another – after the families had passed background checks – based on their children’s behaviors or experiences so that the respite providers were most prepared.

“Thank you for this great program. Until this program we were not able to find anyone to stay with our adopted children.”

a parent served by an AdoptUSKids-funded respite program

Build Relationships among Parents and Youth

A number of grantees found the best way to make parents and youth comfortable with using respite care was to combine family events with group child care activities. During the family events, children and youth built relationships with one another so that many of them looked forward to respite drop-off sessions. Respite for the parents became a special activity for the children. At family events, parents were also able to see the staff and volunteers interact with the children successfully.

Adoptive Families with Information and Support and the Delaware Division of Family Services found that making respite services mandatory was a great way to encourage participation. Once families committed to attending every respite activity during the year, children and youth built strong relationships with one another and were excited to go to the respite days. In a phone interview, a public agency partner emphasized the key role that connecting children with peers can play in the success of group respite care, “It’s hard to describe the bonding that’s occurred among these kids. I don’t think any of us anticipated the closeness of the group. The relationships are really important to [the children].”

Educate Parents and Providers

Several grantees found that training parents on the importance of respite was key to engaging them in services. Grantees like FACES of Virginia Families and the Richmond City Department of Social Services offered “Taking Care of the Caregiver” training, which educated parents about how caring for themselves enables them to better meet their families’ needs. Other groups,

including the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Coalition in partnership with the Missouri Department of Social Services, offered training to prospective respite providers to ensure that providers knew what to ask parents about their children's needs and behaviors, understood the purpose and limits of respite care, and had a better grasp of the most common special needs in children who have experienced abuse, trauma, and neglect. All of the coalition's respite providers also had to pass criminal background checks to ensure that children would be safe.

Finding Staff, Volunteers, and Respite Providers

Many of the grantees had difficulty finding volunteers or paid respite providers. Others, however, found the right people to care for children who have special needs. A key to overcoming this barrier was establishing additional partnerships and relying on parents themselves.

There is no question that finding the right community partners helped grantees find and prepare respite providers. Pride and Hope Ministry in Louisiana established a partnership with a high school that referred teachers and others who worked with children. To protect children, every volunteer had to pass a state background check. For their respite program, Allison Area Foster Parent Support Group and the Iowa Department of Human Services partnered with a local college's school of social work; several social work students became certified as in-home respite providers. To ensure that the children were safe, all of the respite providers underwent criminal background checks and attended training on providing respite care.

A few grantees decided the best option was to have parents identify their own respite providers. Some respite programs, especially those who offered voucher or other payment systems, encouraged families to find neighbors, relatives, teachers, and others who might care for their children from time to time. In many cases, the grantees offered training to ensure that the providers identified and were fully prepared to safely care for children and youth. Many programs also required all respite providers to pass background checks to ensure that children would be safe.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated throughout this publication, survey results, research findings, feedback from States, and input from parents highlight the importance of respite as a crucial element in promoting placement stability and permanency for families caring for children who are, or have been, in foster care. In light of the survey results that point to parents not having access to reliable respite services, and the demonstrated value of respite services in supporting placement stability and permanency, it is clear there is a need to provide States with useful, specific suggestions and strategies for developing sustainable respite services.

For States that are interested in exploring options for developing or expanding respite services, this publication offers a starting point and ideas that agencies could put to use in their own States. To continue the effort to create sustainable respite programs, state leaders can also:

- Read ***Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite Care in Your Community*** at www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/TakingABreak.pdf
- Review the resources on respite available through the Child Welfare Information Gateway at www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service_array/respite/
- Read the research reports cited throughout this guide, including ***Barriers & Success Factors in Adoptions From Foster Care: Perspectives of Families and Staff***, which offers more insights into supports and services that help promote adoption
- Partner with parent support organizations in their State

First and foremost, the examples described in this report demonstrate that public agencies and parent support organizations can work together and remain committed to helping adoptive, foster, and kinship families succeed. The parent support organizations and public agency partners who received AdoptUSKids respite grants jointly overcame numerous obstacles during implementation of respite programs and efforts to sustain these services. A strong commitment to offering needed services to adoptive, foster, and kinship parents helped these grantees persevere and succeed. As one respite program leader advised others at a respite grantee meeting, “Don’t let roadblocks and obstacles deter you. If you have a good program, find another way.”

During a phone interview, a public agency partner also emphasized the importance of commitment to the goal. “You have to be flexible and adaptable, because it might not work quite the way you envisioned it in the beginning. Be willing to shift and be flexible. Don’t be so rigid that you can’t change once you start to implement it.”



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