

CONSULTANTS' CORNER



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Director's Column

By Melinda Lis, Director, National Resource Center for Adoption

The *Consultants' Corner* was developed by the National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) to highlight promising practices in adoption. Recognizing that states develop many innovative practices and programs, we wanted to provide a medium for sharing innovative ideas. In this issue, we highlight an adoption preparation program being utilized in Alaska and a family group decision-making model from Hawaii.

This will be the last publication from the National Resource Center for Adoption. The Resource Center will close as of October 1, 2014. Resources and publications from the NRCA will continue to be available on Spaulding for Children's website (www.spaulding.org) by clicking on "AFSP" under the main menu and then the submenu titled "historical NRCA documents." We will also have several documents available on the Child Information Gateway at: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/>.

NRCA News

NRCA Permanency Support and Preservation Model

In an effort to help states enhance their foster care systems to include comprehensive continuums of care that prepare, support, and encourage permanency from entry to exit, NRCA developed a model for practice that is designed to bolster permanency and decrease disruption and dissolution of adoptions and guardianships. The model consists of three components:

1. Guiding Principles
2. Framework for Developing a Continuum of Sustainable Permanency-Focused Services
3. Path to Positive Adoption/Guardianship Outcomes

To view this model, go to: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/permanency-support-and-preservation-model>. This model will continue to be accessible on Spaulding's website (www.spaulding.org) after 10/1/14.

Adoption Stories from Around the Nation

Adoption Tapestry is a project of NRCA that collects and shares individual adoption stories from across the nation. The stories are intentionally unscripted so participants can engage in a rich dialogue that provides a glimpse of their domestic child welfare adoption and guardianship experiences. NRCA continues to add stories to the site. Please check out the newest stories that have been posted by going to: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/map/>. The Adoption Tapestry will continue to be accessible on Spaulding's website (www.spaulding.org) after 10/1/14.

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Rose M. Handon, PhD, LSW

P.A.R.K.A: A Model Adoption Preparation, Training, and Support Program

By Rose M. Handon, PhD, LSW
NRCA Regional Lead Consultant

Preparation for Adoption Readiness for Kids in Alaska (P.A.R.K.A.) is a grant-funded, comprehensive adoption preparation, training, and support program. P.A.R.K.A. was created in response to Alaska's need for adoptive families for legally-free youth lingering in the foster care system. A request for proposals from the State of Alaska resulted in the creation of the program in 2010. The program is sponsored by the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services (OCS) and administered by the Alaska Center for Resource Families (a project of the Northwest Resource Associates). P.A.R.K.A. is influenced by the work of adoption experts including Dr. Gregory Keck and Regina Kupecky of ABC of Ohio, Dr. Karyn Purvis of the TCU Institute for Child Development, and Dr. Darla Henry's 3-5-7 Model.

The program's primary intent is to train and support families throughout the process of adopting from Alaska's foster care program. P.A.R.K.A. staff are committed to prepare, support, and assist families in the identification, matching, and placement of children into families, through six months of post finalization. The P.A.R.K.A. program is uniquely tailored and designed for 10 families a year who are in the process of pursuing an adoptive placement for legally-free children. The legally-free children are mostly school age and/or older youth; may be part of a sibling group; or may have emotional, behavioral, developmental, or other special challenges.

The structural design of the program allows for an accessible and supportive relationship between each family and the Adoption Support Specialist. This promotes a high degree of trust, confidence, and advocacy, which enables the state and Alaska Center for Resource Families to best meet and plan for the needs of children and families. The array of P.A.R.K.A. core services include: (1) small group teaching; (2) individualized training and support; (3) a home study referral process following the completion

of Phase I; (4) family profile development; (5) child-specific support and training; (6) meetings with key OCS adoption staff; (7) pre-placement preparation; (8) recognition and visibility with OCS as a P.A.R.K.A. trained family; (9) full-child disclosure; and (10) transition family support involving six months of post-finalization services.

The various facets of P.A.R.K.A. involve five critical phases of service delivery. The time frame for completion of each phase is based upon families' unique needs.

Phase 1: Adoption Basic Training – During this initial phase, prospective applicants complete the foster parent licensing process in addition to on-site course work which includes:

- **Core Training for Resource Families** – The standard curriculum for all licensed foster families.
- **Adopting through OCS** – A three-hour class on the nuts and bolts of adopting from Alaska.
- **Exploring Adoption** – A three-hour class exploring family expectations and motivations.
- **Building Families Through Adoption** – An 11-hour training addressing the core issues of adoptive parenting.
- **Adoption Parenting Intensive** – An eight-hour course providing information and tools to effectively understand and parent children who have experienced complex trauma.
- **Preparing For Permanency** – A three-hour session presenting the principles of Darla Henry's 3-5-7 Model to help prepare children for permanency.
- **Training Sessions** – These sessions include lecture, media presentations, group exercises, open discussion, and guest speakers. Families receive a Guide to Paperwork Survival (GPS) tool to track progress through the adoption journey.

P.A.R.K.A. (continued from page 2)

Phase 2: Home Study/Profile Completion – This profile prepares families for the matching process where specifically targeted children will be identified and potentially matched with pre-adoptive families. To proceed to Phase 2, families must have completed all licensing and course-work requirements of Phase 1. In Phase 2, home studies and family profiles are created which are then presented to adoption professionals across the state for review and consideration for specific-waiting children.

Phase 3: Identification and Matching with Waiting Children – Provides an opportunity to present family profiles to OCS staff. Families learn about available children who have been legally freed for adoption. Child-specific-disclosure meetings are held. In this phase, transitional planning, and assistance to families is provided using the principles of the 3-5-7 Model which “provides tools, based on recognized theoretical foundations, to support the work of clarifying identity formation and feelings of loss, integrating and giving meaning to all past and current relationships, and actualizing future relationships and goals” (Henry, 2014, para. 2). Prospective families collaborate with prior caregivers; service providers; school personnel; behavioral health care systems; and/or other critical stakeholders to learn about the history, strengths and overall needs of the children.

Once families identify the children that they are interested in pursuing for adoption, full-disclosure meetings are held. Families are expected to create a child-specific photobook and/or DVD to introduce themselves and their home to the children.

Phase 4: Post Placement to Finalization – Prepares families and children for finalization. Family training resources surrounding children’s specific needs and/or service referrals are made. There are weekly check-ins with families along with supportive activities, adoption assistance education, and supportive resources and plans for six months of post- finalization support.

Phase 5: Six Months Post Finalization – Services provided during this phase are uniquely tailored and designed for families and their children. A host of community providers are linked with the families based on the needs identified in Phase 4.

Since 2010, 40 families have been served by P.A.R.K.A. and 21 children waiting for permanent homes have been matched. Out of these placements, there has only been one adoption disruption (prior to legal finalization); and there have not been any dissolutions. The following are a few comments from families that have completed the P.A.R.K.A. program:

“My wife and I came to learn about P.A.R.K.A. after initially wishing to become foster parents with a final goal of adoption. Since neither of us had any knowledge about the process, we soon became aware that “fostering-to-adopt” was not something that we could pursue. The training we have received through P.A.R.K.A. has given us the tools, resources, and a clearer understanding as we go forward. The program has been so beneficial to us and other adoptive parents that we wish it could be a program offered nationwide to ALL interested in adoption. We feel truly blessed that P.A.R.K.A. was an option for us. Without this program, we may never have had the opportunity to offer permanency through adoption.”

“In 2012, we contacted the P.A.R.K.A. program, after a referral by friends who had gone through the program and adopted two wonderful boys. We always wanted to adopt. We started the process with OCS’s CORE training and then the more extensive P.A.R.K.A. training. While there was a lot to process emotionally, we loved that the training was so much more in depth and extensive than the CORE training itself. The guidance of the P.A.R.K.A. staff was amazing and after the home study and training was done, we felt more prepared than ever to embark upon our next journey; being matched with a child. Thanks to P.A.R.K.A., our adoption process of our daughter and son went smooth and in a timely manner, without any hiccups. We both recommend this program be adopted into the whole state of Alaska, and feel that every foster program in the United States could benefit from a program like P.A.R.K.A. It will benefit the prospective adoptive parents, and we believe with this program, more children would be able to find forever homes.”



Dale Langer, BSW, MCPM, MPA

Hawaii's Family Group Decision Making Model

By Dale Langer, BSW, MCPM, MPA

NRCA Regional Lead Consultant

The Hawaiian Model for Family Group Decision Making is unique in that it actively searches for and maintains appropriate contact with family, relatives, and community. Not just following removal and placement into foster care but from the point of contact with struggling children and families. The model is summarized below along with how it can positively impact family engagement.

In 1995, the Hawaii legislature funded a committee to gather information from the Islands on the effects of the current practice on families. One year after this committee was funded, the Department of Human Services (DHS) was awarded a two-year grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. Under this grant, Hawaii implemented a Family Group Decision Making (FGMD) Model inspired by the 1989 New Zealand "Children and Young Persons and Their Family Act."

Hawaii Child Welfare Services (CWS) recognized that engaging families in the process helped to address children's need for stability, love, and strong bonds with family, community members and friends. In addition, family involvement helped address secondary trauma to abuse and neglect such as separation from parents, along with changes in school, neighborhood, and culture; all of which can also leave emotional scars. CWS also recognized that due to budget constraints and decreased staffing levels, they would need to seek outside assistance to provide a strong family engagement component. As a result, CWS contracted with Effective Planning and Innovative Communication (EPIC) 'Ohana, Inc. to provide this service.

EPIC 'Ohana, Inc. uses family engagement as the primary focus of their services. The agency empowers families and children in foster care through active involvement in decision making. Even when placement with families is not possible, families are given

the means and opportunity to maintain connections and are given a seat at the decision-making table through FGMD meetings that they refer to as 'Ohana* Conferencing.

In 2009, Hawaii's DHS was awarded a Federal Children's Bureau three-year grant under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. Hawaii used this opportunity to expand on family engagement activities by further developing the EPIC contract programs. EPIC currently has four programs: (1) 'Ohana Conferencing; (2) Youth Circles; (3) Family Finding; and (4) 'Ohana Connections. These programs are focused toward maintaining connections between parents and children, providing an opportunity for families to remain involved in supporting children's development and assisting in transitioning children to adulthood.

EPIC upholds the following values:

- Children have a right to know and be connected to their families. By acknowledging this and recognizing the impact of the internet we can better direct and control family contact for positive outcomes.
- Always treat others as you want to be treated.
- Power works best when it's shared—this involves risk, but when done in harmony with other professionals risk, is reduced.
- It's all about the children. *Keiki* means children and denotes a feeling of preciousness, protectiveness, and care that recognizes children are part of families but also part of the island community.
- We are all agents of change.
- It's also all about the relationship. Approach families with humility and respect is consistent with cultural values and helps ensure children and family engagement.

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- Promoting informed-decision making while focusing on strengths and solutions, is the best practice.
- Be transparent and accountable.

Hawaii Department of Human Services and Child Welfare Services apply these values and practices to every case, from the time of their first contact with struggling children and families, all the way to permanence. EPIC has found that families can be helpful in maintaining, supporting, and providing relief to struggling children. The use of 'Ohana conferences has become the norm in Hawaii, and family engagement has become the standard of practice.

Between SFY 2004 and SFY 2012 the annual monthly average number of children in foster care has decreased 65% from 3,095 in SFY'04 to 1,078 in SFY'12. From SFY'01 to SFY'12 the number of children in relative/kin placement has increased from 38% to 52%, and reunification has increased from 59% to 65%. Based on these statistics, it is clear that the use of family engagement has had a positive impact on reducing the number of children in foster care and increasing the number of children who find permanency.

* 'Ohana means family

The information for this article was obtained from a manual developed by EPIC and Hawaii DHS entitled *MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS: The Values Behind Family Engagement Practices Within the Child Welfare System*.

If you would like more information on this article and all the services EPIC 'Ohana provides, you can obtain them at: www.epicohana.org.

P.A.R.K.A. (continued from page 3)

To obtain additional information about this program, contact the State of Alaska's Department of Health & Social Services, Adoption Program Coordinator, Yvonne Hill, MSW, Office of Children Services at (907) 465-3209; or Brenda Ursel, MS, NWRA, Alaska Center for Resource Families at (907) 279-1820 or bursel@nwresource.org. To learn more about adoption in Alaska, visit: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/adoptions/default.aspx> or <http://www.nwae.org/>.

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