

# Diversity and Adoption Recruitment in Massachusetts:

## *Challenges and Potential Solutions*

### **Adoption Attitude Survey**

In 2004, there were approximately 2,743 children in Massachusetts' foster care system with a goal of adoption. Of these, 897 did not have a family identified for them. In an effort to identify adults in Massachusetts who are likely to consider adoption from foster care, and to better understand what information increases an adult's propensity to consider adoption from foster care, the Center for Adoption Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the Massachusetts Adoption Research Exchange developed a statewide survey entitled *Adoption from Foster Care: Knowledge and Attitudes Survey*. One thousand adult residents of Massachusetts were surveyed regarding their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions about adoption. The results are presented in three policy briefs; this one focuses on implications for recruitment of special populations of prospective adoptive families and concludes with recommendations for more targeted recruitment efforts.

***Racial/Ethnic sub-groups*** In this study the majority of survey participants, 73.2 percent (n=732) identified their race/ethnicity as Caucasian, non-Hispanic. A smaller number identified himself or herself as either Hispanic/Latino (10.1 percent, n=101) or African American (9.6 percent, n=96). While this breakdown of survey respondents may accurately represent the overall population of Massachusetts, and the viewpoint of the majority, it is important to recognize that the overall results may not accurately reflect the viewpoint of populations of racial/ethnic backgrounds other than the Caucasian, non-Hispanic population. In order to effectively provide information to and recruit prospective adoptive families from African American and Latino/Hispanic communities, agencies must be aware of any differences that may impact information dissemination. This paper will look specifically at the survey responses in regards to adoption consideration, knowledge and preferred information sources of a sub-sample of African American and Hispanic/Latino respondents and identify areas in which their responses differ from Caucasian, non-Hispanic respondents.

### **Adoption Consideration**

Results of this study indicate that 30 percent of Caucasian, non-Hispanic Massachusetts survey participants had considered adopting a child. However, when looking at African American and Hispanic/Latino survey participants, the frequency is significantly higher. Approximately 47 percent of the African American respondents and 42 percent of the Hispanic/Latino respondents indicate that they have considered adopting a child.

When asked about expanding their family through "general adoption" (this category appears to encompass adoption from all sources including private, foster care and international), between 20-29 percent of respondents from each racial/ethnic group stated they had seriously considered adoption. The difference in response patterns between racial/ethnic groups was not significant. However, when asked about adopting through foster care, the difference between racial/ethnic groups was greater. Among Caucasian survey participants, 19 percent had seriously considered

adoption from foster care. Comparatively, 33 percent of African American and 28 percent of Hispanic/Latino survey participants indicated they had seriously considered adoption from foster care. Finally, when asked about adopting internationally, African American and Hispanic/Latino survey participants (24 percent) were significantly more likely to have seriously considered this type of adoption than their Caucasian counterparts (14 percent).

If one were to generalize from this survey to the population of Massachusetts, it would appear that members of the African American and Hispanic/Latino communities are more interested in adoption, especially from foster care and international sources, than members of the Caucasian, non-Hispanic community. Despite this, social service agencies report that recruitment of prospective adoptive families from these communities is challenging. The reason for this challenge might be partially explained by the differences in knowledge about adoption rules/policies uncovered in this survey.

### **Adoption Knowledge**

In general, responses to the knowledge-based survey questions indicated a well-informed populace, especially in regard to home ownership, living conditions, parenting experience and family finances. Even in the areas, that garnered less accurate responses (age, marital status, sexual orientation), the majority of respondents appeared knowledgeable. However, there appears to be some knowledge difference between racial/ethnic groups. In some areas, significantly more African American and Hispanic/Latino participants have inaccurate knowledge than do their Caucasian counterparts. In other areas the opposite was true. These differences are summarized below.

Both African American and Hispanic/Latino survey participants were significantly overrepresented in the incorrect belief that in order to adopt from foster care, people must:

- Live in a house, not an apartment
- Have a high income
- Be heterosexual
- Pay high or costly adoption fees
- Expect a longer waiting period than for other types of adoption

Hispanic/Latino survey participants were significantly overrepresented in the incorrect belief that in order to adopt from foster care, people must:

- Own their own house
- Have a husband or wife
- Have no other children

Despite these examples of misinformation, African American and Latino/Hispanic respondents were more likely to hold an accurate understanding that both financial and medical support is available for children adopted from foster care. This might be explained by the fact that more African American and Latino/Hispanic participants indicated that they were “Very Familiar” with the general topic of foster care than did Caucasian respondents.

## Sources of Information

How can social service agencies best address these misperceptions about foster care adoption policies? One answer is to increase information campaigns targeted specifically to areas in which families are most likely to be receptive to adoption-related information.

Overall, the majority of survey participants (of all ethnicities/racial backgrounds) indicated a preference for obtaining adoption related information from informal sources such as friends and family. A smaller percentage of respondents were interested in obtaining adoption information from sources such as places of worship, newspapers, flyers in the community, television, and radio. However, when compared to Caucasian, non-Hispanic respondents, African American and Hispanic/Latino respondents were significantly more likely to prefer obtaining information from newspapers, flyers, television, and radio spots. Further, African American respondents were more likely to prefer obtaining adoption information at their places of worship than were Caucasian respondents. These percentages are presented in the following table:

**Preferred Sources of Adoption Information**

	<b>African American</b>	<b>Caucasian, non-Hispanic</b>	<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>
<b>Newspaper</b>	51%	38%	47%
<b>Flyers</b>	53%	33%	52%
<b>Television</b>	44%	26%	44%
<b>Radio</b>	40%	23%	34%
<b>Places of Worship</b>	75%	59%	61%

Using these preferred sources as guidelines during information dissemination campaigns will help social service agencies avoid accidentally excluding potential adoptive families.

## Recommendations

In order to maximize the number of potential families for Massachusetts' waiting children, it is important that agencies recognize the need to reach out to and provide more accurate information to African American and Latino/Hispanic families. Resources should be directed to programs and educational campaigns that help to dispel myths and misconceptions about eligibility to adopt through foster care.

Across ethnic/racial lines, Massachusetts adults indicate that their preference is to receive adoption-related information from families and friends. Agencies must continue to encourage experienced adoptive families to participate in the sharing of information and recruiting of new families. Particular attention should be paid to engaging experienced foster and adoptive parents in the African American and Latino communities. Additionally, communities of faith are a largely untapped resource for educating and recruiting of African American families. Efforts such as the One Church One Child program have begun the work of reaching out to communities of faith; however, more work and long-term funding is needed to support such endeavors.

Targeted campaigns should use a variety of media and programs that not only take into account the linguistic needs of minority groups, but must also ensure that the information is presented in a culturally relevant way. This survey aids in understanding what information families may be lacking and the avenues through which they prefer to receive information. While, this is a promising start,

additional information is needed to understand cultural variables that may influence how information is presented and received. It is essential that agencies engage members of targeted populations as they develop educational and recruitment campaigns in order to more accurately reflect and meet the needs of the community.

For more information about the *Massachusetts Adoption from Foster Care: Knowledge and Attitudes Survey*, please visit [www.centerforadoptionresearch.org](http://www.centerforadoptionresearch.org) or call 508-856-8512.

For more information about adoption through foster care, please visit [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org) or call 617-54-ADOPT (617-542-3678).

*References:*

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