On the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Partnerships in Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Parents

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Amidst a crisis shortage of foster homes in the child welfare system, organized faith-based collaborations aimed at recruiting foster parents from churches have recently emerged. These collaborations may offer a unique opportunity to recruit committed and altruistic parents as caregivers, providing much needed capacity to an overloaded child welfare system. This paper uses original survey data from participants in two large-scale programs: Project 1.27 in Colorado and the CALL in Arkansas. The empirical results demonstrate that both programs are very successful at building awareness about the need for foster/adoptive parents and the biblical mandate for serving as caregivers. Further, a large percentage of respondents shifted their attitudes from not seriously considering fostering or adopting before program exposure to serious consideration of fostering or adopting after exposure. The paper concludes with a discussion of these findings and their implications for child welfare policy.

Occasionally there are reasons why the State must step in to remove children from their biological parents or other caregivers. Reasons for bringing children into the foster care system range from abuse and neglect to cases where one or both parents is temporarily incapacitated by injury, or even the death of the parents. According to the most recently released data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012), there were just over 400,000 children and youth in foster care in 2011. Moreover, 47 percent of all children in foster care reside in non-relative family foster homes, making them the frontline providers of the foster care system (DHSS 2012). At the same time, it has become increasingly difficult to recruit new families to serve as caregivers and to retain the families that are recruited (Barbell and Freundlich 2001; General Accounting Office 1989; Office of Inspector General 2002a; 2002b).

Recruitment and training of foster families is an expensive and time consuming undertaking that puts pressure on already limited federal resources for child welfare (Rhodes et al. 2001). Consequently finding effective means to recruit and retain foster families is a central policy priority for ensuring the future of the child welfare system. Orme and colleagues (2004) sum up the urgency of the issue well when they describe foster

families as, "…a critical, national resource that is in short supply" (p.307).

One strategy that has been widely discussed as a best practice for recruiting foster parents is promotion of foster care in local faith-based congregations (Barbell and Sheikh 2000; Casey Family Programs 2005; Cipriani et al. n.d.; Pasztor and Wynne 1995). A recent report from the Urban Institute found that 32 states had some sort of targeted faith-based recruiting efforts in place to find additional adoptive and/or foster parents (Urban Institute Child Welfare Research Program 2005). Some state welfare bureaucracies have begun to devote some of their resources toward efforts to partner with churches for the purpose of recruiting families to provide foster care. Other collaborations with government have been initiated from the ground up, where the faith community has approached child welfare officials to explore how they can become involved in recruiting and supporting foster families. Despite the growth of faith-based collaboration in the child welfare system, there has been very little scholarly examination of these programs. This paper seeks to fill this gap by examining two nationally-recognized programs that have begun to draw some national attention: Project 1.27 in Colorado and a similar program in Arkansas named the CALL.

Project 1.27 was begun by a large Denver church whose leadership was committed to providing adoptive homes for all of the children in the state foster care system for whom parental rights had been terminated. The CALL began in Little Rock by the efforts of a visionary leader whose avocation was to improve the outcomes for children in the child welfare system. Both programs share a common mode of operation: recruiting families from local churches to serve as foster or adoptive parents, facilitating training for participants, working with the State to facilitate placements, and then providing support to families after placement. The major difference between the two programs is that Project 1.27 is more focused on recruiting parents who will eventually adopt children out of the foster care system, whereas the CALL recruits for both foster care and foster care adoption.

This paper focuses on the recruiting phase of the programs, exploring how program exposure affects the awareness and intentions of families in local churches about fostering and adoption. The research questions are as follows: *(1) Did program exposure increase awareness of the need and biblical mandate to care for children in the foster care system? (2) Did program exposure result in changed intentions about becoming involved in fostering or adoption?*

Study of these programs certainly has policy implications for a child welfare system sorely in need of additional capacity. These innovative programs, and those like them, could be a welcome addition to the larger toolbox of policies used to address the shortage of foster parents nationwide. The plan of the paper is as follows. First, the paper examines each program and its recruitment practices. Next, the data for the paper are described and empirical results are presented. The paper then concludes with some insights, policy implications and recommendations for continued work.

Description of Programs and Recruiting Practices
The core strategy for Project 1.27 and the CALL is to build awareness of the need for foster and adoptive parents and to communicate the biblical mandate to care for orphans. (In the Christian community, the term orphan is inclusive of children who are truly orphaned, those for whom parental rights have been terminated and children temporarily in foster care.) Though each program has some unique characteristics, they both share this common strategy.

Project 1.27 began as an idea from a group of people at Colorado Community Church in Denver who were passionate about adoption. The name for Project 1.27 is derived from the scripture James 1.27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (New International Version). The head pastor for the church had been asked to address a state adoption and permanency taskforce and in his address had made the bold commitment: to mobilize churches in Colorado to adopt all the children languishing in foster care who were available for adoption. The Lieutenant Governor lent her support to the idea of collaboration between church and state. As a result, Project 1.27 began its pilot program in 2005 (Colorado Department of Human Services 2005). Project 1.27 conducts recruitment at Sunday morning services at local churches, using videos, speakers and pamphlets. Families who are interested sign up and attend an informational meeting where they can learn more and decide whether to pursue training to become licensed to adopt. As of 2012, Project 1.27 has been responsible for over 200 adoptions since its inception in 2005.

The CALL had a similar beginning. The program's Founding Director had been a foster parent and became increasingly aware of the need for foster and adoptive families. Arrangements were made for a summit between the Arkansas Department of Human Services and several Little Rock churches to discuss how the faith community could provide additional resource families for the child welfare system. After the summit and subsequent meetings, the CALL (Children of Arkansas Loved for a Lifetime) was born. The CALL did their first set of recruitments in the spring of 2007. They too conduct recruitment in Sunday services in local churches, using videos, pamphlets and speakers.

One tool used by the CALL is a video whose opening segment shows a little girl sitting in a chair desperately hugging a stuffed animal as a social worker calls to attempt to find a foster home. The excuses began to pile up as the social worker calls different homes: the house isn't clean enough; they are having a Bible study, and so on. All the while the little girl is becoming more distressed. One respondent recruited through the CALL described her reaction to the video this way, "Of course it's very emotional, just seeing the need out there of how many children don't have a home and how many children are kind of in limbo in foster care. And so, you know, that really led us into asking about just adoption and then that led us into foster care. So, it was just, it all hit right at once." Families who want to learn more are encouraged to sign up and go to an informational meeting. The CALL has also experienced remarkable success. Since its first recruitments in 2007, the CALL has successfully recruited over 300 families to be foster or adoptive homes.

Though we have some evidence that these programs have been successful in terms of the numbers of parents recruited, we still know little about how they affect awareness. Do the programs build awareness, or are the people who are recruited already aware of the need? Were the parents recruited already considering foster care, or do these programs generate a new pool of potential parents? The survey results in the next section help us to answer such questions.

Data

In the fall of 2010, a web survey of families involved with the CALL and Project 1.27 was conducted. The sampling frame consisted of families in each program's e-mail databases who were either currently active or who had been previously active within the programs. The total sampling frame for Project 1.27 was 327 from which 114 completed surveys were received, for a response rate of 34.9 percent. The sampling frame for the CALL was a total

of 425 potential respondents, of which 119 responded, for a response rate of 28 percent. The recipients of the survey invitation included families who were in varying stages: some had just begun the process of becoming foster parents; others were licensed foster parents or awaiting adoption finalization; and some were families who had successfully completed one or more adoptions out of foster care.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the percentages of families in each category. About 20 percent of families in both programs were still in the process of training and half of the families in each were currently licensed. The largest contrast is in families who are no longer licensed because of completed adoption. Twenty-one percent of Project 1.27 families were in this category, compared to the CALL's 3.4 percent. This is likely due to the differing missions of the two programs, where Project 1.27 is recruiting only for foster to adopt families and the CALL recruits for foster or adoptive families. Thus, it stands to reason that many Project 1.27 families cease to become active foster homes after their adoptions are finalized.

Table 1: Breakdown of Respondents by Program Stage

	Project 1.27		The CALL	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
In process of becoming licensed	24	21.1%	28	23.5%
Currently licensed	55	48.2%	65	54.6%
No longer licensed-completed adoption	24	21.1%	4	3.4%
Not currently licensed for some other reason	8	7.0%	10	8.4%
Missing	3	2.6%	12	10.08%
Total	114	100%	119	100%

Table 2 presents some basic demographic characteristics for the survey respondents. In both cases, there were few males and about 90 percent of the respondents were Caucasian. Most of the respondents had a college degree or higher and most came from married households. For both groups, very few respondents had household incomes below $25,000; about one third lay in the $50,000-74,999 range and little over half lay in the range above $75,000.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	Project 1.27		The CALL	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	17	15.5%	23	21.9%
African American	5	4.6%	6	5.6%
White	95	87.2%	97	90.7%
Other	9	8.2%	4	3.7%
College degree or higher	78	70.9%	87	81.3%
Married	105	95.5%	92	86%
Under $25,000	3	2.8%	2	1.9%
$25,000 to $49,999	15	14.0%	10	9.4%
$50,000 to $74,999	35	32.7%	39	36.8%
$75,000 to $99,999	30	28.0%	25	23.6%
$100,000 or more	24	22.4%	30	28.3%

Methodology

The focus of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of Project 1.27 and the CALL in terms of building awareness about foster care and adoption and to evaluate the effects of programmatic exposure on the intent to adopt or foster. In order to assess the change in respondent attitudes, the retrospective pretest design was used. The retrospective pretest design asks respondents to report on their attitudes before the program and after, but both questions are asked after program exposure. This design has a number of advantages, but the principal one is that it avoids the problem of response shift bias (Howard and Dailey 1979). Response shift bias occurs when respondents overestimate their degree of pretest knowledge before program exposure. Research shows that particularly when respondents are likely to be unaware of the information presented by a program, response shift bias can be large (Pratt, McGuigan and Katzev 2000). The retrospective pretest design avoids this bias because respondents report their pretest attitudes from a single frame of reference, and this can often provide more accurate results than the traditional pre-post method (Allen and

Nimon 2007; Pratt et al. 2000).

Of course this design is not without its limitations. There exists the possibility of imperfect recall on the part of respondents and social desirability bias (i.e. wanting to show that the program had an effect) (Lamb 2005). Despite these limitations the retrospective pretest design has been used widely in program evaluation research and is a desirable methodology to employ, especially when a pretest is not feasible to implement. It has also been shown to be just as accurate, if not more accurate than the traditional pre-post methodology, particularly when response shift bias is likely (Allen and Nimon 2007).

The survey in this study employs Likert scale responses for the pre and posttest questions. With limited response options, the answer distributions are decidedly non-normal, so common paired-sample t test procedures are not appropriate. Instead, a common statistical test which does not hinge on assumptions regarding the underlying distributions is the non-parametric Wilcoxon Paired Samples Signed Rank Test, which is used in lieu of the t test for non-normally distributed data (Sheskin 2003). Just as with a t test, the Wilcoxon Paired Samples Signed Rank Test is used to detect if there are differences between pre and posttest scores.[1] The next section of the paper compares pre-test and posttest distributions across a number of different measures.

Empirical Results

The first set of analyses focuses on both programs' effectiveness in boosting awareness and changing intentions toward fostering or adopting. Both Project 1.27 and the CALL heavily emphasize the biblical imperative to care for the orphan. Aside from the biblical basis to care for children, a second component of building awareness is demonstrating the profound need for foster and adoptive parents. Both programs provide statistics and personal narrative accounts which emphasize the need for foster and adoptive parents.

Building Awareness

Table 3 presents the results of several awareness questions. The first question asked about respondents' awareness of the biblical mandate to care for the orphan. The top of the table shows responses for Project 1.27 participants. Nearly 11 percent of respondents were not at all aware of the mandate and another 48 .2 percent were somewhat aware. After exposure to the program, 98.2 percent of respondents were highly aware of the mandate, a substantial shift. The pretest distributions for the CALL were very similar. Nearly ninety-five percent of CALL respondents reported being highly aware of the biblical mandate to care for the orphan after program exposure. Results from the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicate that the change between the pre and post test scores is statistically significant.

The second question asked respondents to rate their awareness of the need for foster/adoptive parents in their communities. 28.6 percent of Project 1.27 families reported no awareness and 27.7 percent of CALL families reported no awareness. After exposure to these programs, awareness of the need increased significantly in both cases. 94.6 percent of Project 1.27 families and 98.2 percent of CALL families were highly aware after program

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[1] The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test procedure is as follows:
    (1)   The absolute values of the differences between pre and posttest scores are computed $|X_{pre}-X_{post}|$
    (2)   The absolute values are then ranked from lowest to highest
    (3)   Then each rank is given a sign depending on the sign of the original difference
    (4)   The **W** statistic is computed as the sum of the signed ranks
It can be shown that **W** is normally distributed. Thus using a standard Z score test, we can test the hypothesis that Z=0, which s equivalent to saying that there is no difference in the pretest and posttest scores. A large Z score (and its associated small p value) provides evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

exposure. The Wilcoxon test confirms that these changes are statistically significant.

For many years now, international adoption has been a growing trend in Christian circles. Unfortunately, foster care adoption has not enjoyed the same degree of success in the faith community. One revelatory piece of information that often makes a difference in enhancing the plausibility of foster care adoption in particular is simply a comparison of costs to international adoption. International adoptions can often cost tens of thousands of dollars and can take many years to complete due to bureaucratic and other delays in the process. In contrast, foster care adoptions often entail very little monetary cost to the parents, and sometimes arrangements can be made for the State to continue to provide financial support for certain aspects of the child's care. Foster care adoptions, particularly when parental rights have already been terminated, can also proceed at a more rapid pace than international adoptions.

Table 3: Retrospective Pretest and Posttest Awareness

Project 1.27		Not at all aware	Somewhat aware	Highly aware	Wilcoxon Test p value
Biblical mandate to care for the orphan	Pre	10.7%	48.2%	41.1%	0.000
	Post	0.9%	0.9%	98.2%	
Need for foster/adoptive parents in your community	Pre	28.6%	49.1%	22.3%	0.000
	Post	1.8%	3.6%	94.6%	
Cost of foster care adoption compared to international adoption	Pre	50.9%	26.8%	22.3%	0.000
	Post	0.9%	4.5%	94.6%	
Process for adopting out of foster care system	Pre	62.5%	28.6%	8.9%	0.000
	Post	0.9%	4.5%	94.6%	

The CALL		Not at all aware	Somewhat aware	Highly aware	Wilcoxon Test p value
Biblical mandate to care for the orphan	Pre	11.7%	53.2%	35.1%	0.000
	Post	0.0%	5.4%	94.6%	
Need for foster/adoptive parents in your community	Pre	27.7%	45.5%	26.8%	0.000
	Post	0.0%	1.8%	98.2%	
Cost of foster care adoption compared to international adoption	Pre	49.5%	29.7%	20.7%	0.000
	Post	2.7%	12.6%	84.7%	
Process for adopting out of foster care system	Pre	61.3%	27.0%	11.7%	0.000
	Post	0.9%	10.8%	88.3%	

The third question in Table 3 addresses changes in awareness about the cost of international adoption versus foster care adoption. For both programs, about percent of participants had no pre-program awareness of the cost differences. After exposure to the programs about 95 percent of Project 1.27 families and 85 percent of CALL families were highly aware of the cost differences; these represent statistically significant changes from the pretest level.

A final area that can sometimes serve as a barrier to pursuing foster care adoption is ignorance of the process itself. Provision of information on the process and what to expect can be a key component in moving prospective parents from awareness to action because it reduces uncertainly. Tabulation of responses to the foster care adoption question shows that over 60 percent of respondents in both programs had no awareness of the process for adopting out of foster care. After program exposure 94.6 percent of Project 1.27 participants and 88.3 percent of CALL respondents reported being highly aware of the process. Once again, these changes were statistically significant.

From Awareness to Intention

Awareness is only the first step in deciding to take action. After becoming aware of a problem, people are faced with a decision to act or not. The next set of questions posed in the survey asked respondents about their intentions to pursue various options including becoming a foster parent, foster care adoption, and international adoption.

The first question asked respondents how seriously they were considering becoming foster parents. For Project 1.27 respondents 67.5 percent were not at all seriously or not too seriously considering becoming foster parents (i.e. 45.9 percent + 21.6 percent). After program exposure 50.5 percent were very seriously considering becoming foster parents. The pre-exposure distribution for CALL parents is similar; 66.1 percent of families were not seriously considering fostering (i.e. 41.1 percent + 25.0 percent). After exposure 64.6 percent were very seriously considering foster care. In both cases the change between pre and post test scores was statistically significant.

Because the CALL recruits both foster and adoptive families, the higher percentage of families reported that they were seriously considering fostering is understandable, since fostering is one option for them. Project 1.27 families may be indicating that they would like to serve as foster families in the transition to becoming adoptive parents, or they could mean that they are willing to serve as foster care homes even after adoption. But given that Project 1.27 families are all recruited to adopt out of foster care, it stands to reason that fewer would report an interest in foster care, at least as a long-term option.

The second option the survey asked about was US foster care adoption. Here 40.7 percent of Project 1.27 families and 59.4 percent of CALL families were not seriously considering this option. After exposure a little over 90 percent of Project 1.27 families and 60.4 percent of CALL families were very seriously considering foster care adoption. Again, the difference in response between the two programs is understandable. The CALL recruits families to foster or adopt, whereas Project 1.27 recruits exclusively for foster care adoption.

Earlier the paper noted that international adoption and foster care adoption in some cases may be competing alternatives. The survey data allow for us to examine if there is a decrease in interest in international adoption as a result of exposure to these programs, particularly since both the CALL and Project 1.27 stress the cost differences between

domestic foster adoption and international adoption. 70.6 percent of the Project 1.27 families were not at all or not too seriously considering international adoption before program exposure (i.e. 52.7 + 17.9). After program exposure the percentage in these two categories jumped to 88.3 percent, a shift of about 17 percent from the pretest. The CALL showed a similar pattern, with 68.5 percent of respondents not seriously considering international adoption before to 78.9 after exposure. All of the pre-post changes for all of these questions contained in Table 4 were statistically significant.

Table 4: Retrospective Pretest and Posttest Intent to Foster and Adopt

Project 1.27		Not at all seriously	Not too seriously	Somewhat seriously	Very seriously	Wilcox on Test p value
Becoming a foster parent	Pre	45.9%	21.6%	18.9%	13.5%	0.000
	Post	15.3%	11.7%	22.5%	50.5%	
US Foster Care Adoption	Pre	25.7%	15.0%	35.4%	23.9%	0.000
	Post	0.9%	0.9%	8.0%	90.2%	
International Adoption	Pre	52.7%	17.9%	17.9%	11.6%	0.001
	Post	63.1%	25.2%	8.1%	3.6%	

The CALL		Not at all seriously	Not too seriously	Somewhat seriously	Very seriously	Wilcox on Test p value
Becoming a foster parent	Pre	41.1%	25.0%	23.2%	10.7%	0.000
	Post	6.2%	6.2%	23.0%	64.6%	
US Foster Care Adoption	Pre	38.7%	20.7%	21.6%	18.9%	0.000
	Post	14.4%	8.10%	17.1%	60.4%	
International Adoption	Pre	51.4%	17,1%	12.6%	18.9%	0.03
	Post	58.7%	20.2%	11.9%	9.2%	

Looking at the results thus far, it is clear that many respondents believe that program exposure changed their level of awareness and raised their commitment to become foster or adoptive parents. However, one could raise the objection that these are not really "new" prospects. Perhaps these programs are just skimming from a pool of people who would have pursued adoption or foster care anyway. Table 5 shows the results from a question which at least sheds partial light on this issue. Results shown for answers to the question, "Do you think you would have become a foster or adoptive parent <u>without</u> having been exposed to {Project 1.27/The CALL}? A significant percentage of families in both programs indicated that absent exposure to the programs *they would not have fostered or adopted* (36.3 percent of CALL families and 27.7 percent of Project 1.27 families). Over 40

percent of families in both programs were one the fence, indicating that they maybe would have pursued fostering or adoption, but were not certain. Almost 30 percent of Project 1.27 families and only 20.4 percent of CALL families indicated that they definitely would have fostered or adopted regardless. Taken as a whole, these last results provide the most significant indicator of these programs' ability to tap into a population of potential foster/adoptive parents who otherwise would not have been involved. In short, the answers to this last question support the proposition that these program are adding new capacity to the child welfare system.

Table 5: Likelihood of Fostering/Adoption in Absence of Program Exposure

	Project 1.27		The CALL	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Without having been exposed to program, PROBABLY WOULD NOT have become a foster/adoptive parent	31	27.7%	41	36.3%
Without having been exposed to program, MAYBE WOULD have become a foster/adoptive parent	48	42.9%	49	43.4%
Without having been exposed to program, probably DEFINITELY WOULD have become a foster/adoptive parent	33	29.5%	23	20.4%

Conclusion

At a time when the child welfare system finds itself in need of additional capacity, programs which successfully expand the pool of foster and adoptive parents are sorely needed. This paper examined two large-scale programs initiated by the faith community to recruit foster and adoptive parents. Using survey data from program participants, the paper examined the effects of these programs on building awareness and on intentions to pursue foster care or foster adoption. Taken as a whole, these results show that both programs have been successful in translating general awareness of the need for foster and adoptive parents and the biblical mandate for caring for the orphan into serious intentions to pursue either foster care or foster adoption.

The results show that both programs have been successful in boosting the awareness of people in local congregations about foster care and adoption. In every case posttest knowledge was much higher than pretest knowledge. The programs also positively affected intentions to pursue foster care or foster adoption. Interestingly, there also appears to be some shift away from the international adoption alternative as a result of program exposure, which may be due to a few factors, including awareness of cost differences and local needs for foster and adoptive parents. Finally, a significant percentage of respondents indicated that absent exposure to these programs, they would not have become involved in foster care or foster care adoption.

Of course, this study is not without limitations. Although there is evidence to suggest that the retrospective pretest design may have less bias, it still is subject to validity problems of its own including imperfect memory recall and social desirability bias. This

presents an opportunity for future research, which could employ a mixed design using both traditional and retrospective pretest measures. Despite the limitations, these results suggest that targeted faith-based recruitment efforts show promise as an effective mechanism to recruit foster and adoptive parents in the child welfare system.

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