How To Use Data

UCDAVIS EXTENSION

CENTER FOR HUMAN SERVICES

Foster Home Estimator

How to use data to shape foster parent recruitment efforts

Nationwide, too few foster homes are available for children and teens who need them. To help rectify this shortfall, child welfare agencies can build a robust pool of foster parents by more accurately estimating how many homes are needed to meet the needs of specific populations of children, such as teens or large sibling groups. Agencies also must become more adept at using data to inform the recruitment process and set realistic annual goals.

This Foster Home Estimator was developed to help child welfare agencies meet these needs. To use it, resource managers and data staff collaborate to populate data entry worksheets, using data extracted from existing systems. They specify assumptions about the different placement types and the difficulty of finding foster home placements for children of different ages. This stimulates rich discussions about agency policies, practices and aspirations. With information gleaned from completed estimator worksheets, agencies can plan recruitment efforts and target resource development to specific groups of children. Managers can identify those groups who are facing the greatest need for foster homes and set targets for kinship care, group placement and placement selection.

Created in 2006, the Foster Home Estimator has been improved in collaboration with a variety of innovative jurisdictions. It has been refined to enable agencies to target recruitment by geography, age, race, color and national origin. This is critical, as the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) requires agencies to recruit families who reflect the race, color and national origin of children in their care. Also, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requires Native American and Alaska Native children be placed "in preference" with tribal families.

Why Use Data to Inform Recruitment?

Child welfare agencies have relatively easy access to data that describe children in out-of-home (OOH) placements in their community, including data on age, race and ethnicity. Additionally, many agencies have information on children's special needs and whether a child is a member of a sibling group. These data elements can be used both to describe those populations of children who need foster homes and to target what types of homes the agency needs to recruit.

Why is it important to set data-driven recruitment goals? Without them, a negative cycle ensues. Precious agency resources are used to license families who may not be available for the children who need homes most urgently, such as teens. Recruited families who languish on placement lists become disappointed. This creates poor public relations for the agency and poor outcomes for children and teens, who often land in group placements, such as emergency shelters and group homes.

Using the Estimator

The Foster Home Estimator is a Microsoft Excel file that incorporates into its calculations:

- Number of children served
- Characteristics of children the agency has served (such as age, race and ethnicity)
- Types of placements in use (such as foster home, kinship and group care)
- Information on the current foster home pool (such as the number of homes and the rate of homes closed or put on hold)
- Agency goals for placement practices

The estimator includes four worksheets:

- **The Assumptions Worksheet** contains questions about placement practices that influence the number of foster homes needed.
- **The Data Worksheet** is used to input data on the number and characteristics of children served, the number of homes available and information on the yield of the recruitment process.
- **The Foster Homes Estimator Worksheet** uses numbers from the Assumptions and Data worksheets.to provide estimates of the number of foster homes for children of different age groups, race, ethnicity and sibling group size.
- **The Recruiting Needs Worksheet** uses data on the percentage of families who complete each step in the recruitment process to estimate the number of families an agency needs to reach at each step to yield the required number of homes.

The cells in each estimator worksheet are color coded:

- **Yellow.** Type required data into cells that are shaded yellow.
- **White**. <u>Never type anything into white cells</u>: they contain calculation formulas.
- **Blue**. These cells pre-populate with data from the Assumptions or Data worksheets.
- **Green**. These cells report results of calculations.

Six Steps for Using the Estimator

Step 1: Estimate total annual bed days

Average together the number of children in care at the beginning and the end of the most recent two years, then multiply by 365 days to determine average daily bed use for each year (lines 3 and 6). Calculate the rate of change from one year to the next (line 7) and use that to calculate adjusted bed days needed for the next year (line 8). *Note: SFY is short for* **State Fiscal Year.** In the estimator, you can define the annual time periods that are best to use for your estimates

1	# of children in care at beginning of SFY14	1,000
2	# of children in care at end of SFY14	1,500
3	Bed days needed in SFY14	456,250
4	# of children in care at beginning of SFY15	2,000
5	# of children in care at end of SFY15	3,000
6	Bed days needed in SFY15	912,500
7	% change from SFY14 to SFY15	100.0%
8	Bed days needed in SFY15 (includes factor for changes in number of kids in care)	1,825,000

Step 2: Estimate bed days by age of child

Determine the percentage of children in each age group who need placement in a foster home by subtracting the percentage of children in kinship, group and therapeutic care from 100 percent (line 10e). Multiply the total needed bed days by the percentage of children in each age group and the percentage of children in each age group needing placement in foster homes to identify the number of annual bed days by age group (line 11).

			0-2 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-21 years
9	% of children in care	100%	17%	17%	33%	33%
9a	# of children in care	3,000	500	500	1000	1000
10	Estimate % of children who should be with:					
10a	-Relative caregivers		30%	35%	25%	20%
10b	- Group Care (group home, res treatment, other non-family settings)		0%	0%	20%	50%
10c	-Therapeutic homes		0%	0%	10%	15%
10d	-Tribal homes		0%	0%	0%	0%
10e	- Foster homes		70%	65%	45%	15%
11	**Bed days needed for foster homes**	**780,188**	**217,175**	**201,663**	**271,013**	**90,338**

Step 3: Convert bed days into number of homes

Divide annual bed days by 365 to identify average daily bed days for each age group (line 13). Then divide daily bed days by average number of beds per home to equal the number of foster homes needed for each age group (line 15). Adjust the number of foster homes for each age group using a choice factor. Your choice factor will range from 0 percent to 100 percent. The purpose of the choice factor is to ensure that there are more homes (and beds) than needed. Having some empty beds at all times enables better matching of children to homes. The larger the choice factor, the more homes needed (line 17).

			0-2 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-21 years
12	Total bed days - annual	780,188	217,175	201,663	271,013	90,338
13	Total *daily* beds needed	2,138	595	553	743	248
14	Average # beds in each foster home	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
15	Total foster homes needed	1,069	298	276	371	124
16	Choice factor (% of beds that should be empty so that there is a choice of best placement for each child)	25%	25%	25%	25%	25%
17	**Total foster homes needed**	**1,336**	**372**	**345**	**464**	**155**
	Estimated beds needed		**744**	**691**	**928**	**309**

Step 4: Estimate number of <u>new</u> homes needed by age group

The number of <u>new</u> foster homes needed for each age group is determined by comparing total homes needed to number of existing homes. If the number of licensed homes includes homes other than traditional homes (such as kinship or therapeutic foster homes), subtract these homes from the total number of licensed homes (line 18d).

Allocating existing homes to age groups is often difficult, because many homes are willing to take children in multiple age groups. To estimate the number of foster homes available for each age group, multiply total available homes by the percent of children in each age group who are currently placed in a foster home (lines 19a and 19b). This provides an estimate of the homes that will actually take children in each age group. Adjust for homes closed last year, because there will probably be a similar number closed this year (line 20). Also, adjust for homes officially or unofficially 'on hold' (line 21). These adjustments result in total number of currently available traditional foster homes allocated to age groups (line 22).

Comparing foster homes available to number of foster homes needed determines the number of new homes needed this year (line 23). Finally, adjust this number using the difficulty-to-place factor specified on the Assumptions Worksheet. This adjustment indicates age groups that are particularly hard to place and provides information about the number of additional homes that will need to be recruited this year for hard-to-place age groups (line 25a).

			0-2 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-21 years
18	Current number of approved homes	1,000				
18a	-Licensed kinship homes	150				
18b	-Therapeutic homes	50				
18c	-Tribal homes	0				
18d	Total licensed/approved general foster homes	800				
	% Children in each age group currently placed in licensed/approved general foster home		75%	75%	67%	30%
19a	Number of children currently in general foster homes		375	375	670	300
19b	Current number of general foster homes (estimate based upon % of children currently placed in foster homes) that will take children in each age group		174	174	312	140
20	Homes closed last year (Note: use as an estimate of homes that will close this year)		44	44	78	35
21	Homes "on hold"		0	0	0	0
22	Actual "usable" homes		130	130	234	105
23	New homes needed	737	241	215	230	50
24	Difficulty of placement factor		0%	0%	10%	20%
25a	**Adjusted new homes needed (if children of multiple ages are not placed in same home)**	**770**	**241**	**215**	**253**	**60**
25b	**Adjusted new beds needed (if children of multiple ages are not placed in same home)**	**1,540**	**483**	**430**	**507**	**120**

Step 5: Estimate new homes by race and ethnicity

Within each age group, estimate the number of foster homes needed for each race. Multiply the number of foster homes needed in each age group by the percentage of children by race (lines 28 – 29). This provides the number of foster homes needed by age and race group. You can also establish other targeted recruitment groups (for example, Hispanic children or large sibling groups) and estimate the overall number of foster home needed for each group. Do this by estimating the

percentage of each group in the placement population, then multiplying total homes needed by percentage of the targeted population (lines 32 and 38).

	Targeted Population 1: Race		White	Native American	African American	Other
26	- % of all children served	100%	33%	0%	67%	0%
27	- # of children served	3,000	1000	0	2000	0
	Homes needed by age & race groups		**0-2 years**	**3-5 years**	**6-12 years**	**13-21 years**
28	Race/ethnicity					
28a	- Native American/ Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0
28b	- Black / African American	516	162	144	170	40
28c	- White	254	80	71	84	20
28d	- Other	0	0	0	0	0
29	**TOTAL All races**	**770**	**241**	**215**	**253**	**60**
	Targeted Population 2: Hispanic Ethnicity		Hispanic			
30	- % of all children served		17%			
31	- # of children served		500			
	Homes needed by age & Hispanic ethnicity					
32	-Hispanic	131	41	37	43	10
	Targeted Population 3: Large Sibling Groups					
33	- Number of sibling groups of 4 or more	100				
34	- % of sibling groups with 4 or more currently placed together	50%				
35	Estimate homes that will take large sibling groups	50				
36	Homes needed for large sibling groups	50				
37	Difficulty of placement factor (if large sibling groups are difficult to place you can increase number of new homes needed by assigning a "difficulty of placement factor" (%)	20%				
38	**Adjusted new homes needed for large sibling groups**	60				

Step 6: Estimate the number of families needed at each step of the recruitment process

After determining the number of new homes that are needed, the Recruiting Needs Worksheet calculates the number of families needed at each recruitment step. This calculation will be possible if agencies have historical information on the percentage of families who progress from early recruitment to training and licensing. If you are able to input the percentages of families that complete each step into the Data Worksheet, the Recruitment Needs Worksheet will calculate the number of families you need to recruit and train to reach that number of homes needed for the year.

How many families do I need at each step?		
	%	#
1. Inquiries		6111
2. Start preservice training	25%	1528
3. Complete preservice training	70%	1069
4 .Submit application	80%	856
5. Get license approval	90%	
6. Number of homes needed		770

Interpreting the Foster Home Estimator Worksheet

The Foster Home Estimator Worksheet shows all of an agency's calculations, based on data and assumptions you and your staff have provided. The worksheet is divided into five sections that correspond to the first five calculation steps described above. The last line(s) of each section (lines 8, 11, 17, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32 and 38) contain important summary information.

Step 1. Estimate TOTAL BED DAYS needed for children served in a year (SFY 2015)

8	Bed days needed in SFY 15 (includes factor for increasing number of kids in care)	1,825,000

In the above example, the total number of bed days that will be needed for children in the next year for this agency is 1,825,000, as shown on line 8. This includes days spent in all placement settings for all children served by the agency.

Step 2. Estimate BED DAYS needed for children served by age

			0-2 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-21 years
11	**Bed days needed for Foster Care**	**775,625**	**212,917**	**197,708**	**273,750**	**91,250**

Once you have adjusted bed days by subtracting out days spent in non-foster home settings (kinship, group care and therapeutic foster homes), line 11 shows the results and estimates bed days that will be needed by children's ages. In this example, 775,625 <u>foster home</u> bed days are needed. This line of the worksheet also illustrates that more bed days are needed for 6-12 year olds than other age groups — and that fewer days needed for teens.

The numbers on line 11 are influenced by guidelines agency leaders provided in the Assumptions Worksheet. For example, if an agency assumes it will be able to place a large percent of infants in kinship care, the number of <u>foster home</u> bed days will be reduced. Alternately, agencies that regularly use group care for teens may indicate in the Assumptions Worksheet that a large percent of teens are placed in group settings, resulting in fewer <u>foster home</u> bed days for teens.

The Foster Home Estimator is designed so agency leaders can change the assumptions about where children should be placed and see how these changes influence the number of needed foster home beds. For example, if an agency decided to target kinship recruitment in one particular year, it would raise the percent of children of all age groups to be placed with kin. This would result in a decreased need for foster homes.

Step 3: Convert BED DAYS into homes needed

			0-2 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-21 years
17	**Total homes needed**	**1,336**	**372**	**345**	**464**	**155**
	Estimated beds needed		**744**	**691**	**928**	**309**

Since recruitment activity focuses on finding homes for children, line 17 shows the results when you convert total foster home bed days needed into foster homes. It estimates the total number of homes and beds needed for each age group, based on the number of beds per home provided in the Assumptions Worksheet.

Step 4: Estimate number of NEW homes needed			0-2 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-21 years
23	New homes needed	737	241	215	230	50
24	Difficulty of placement factor		0%	0%	10%	20%
25a	**Adjusted new homes needed (if children of multiple ages are not placed in same home)**	**770**	**241**	**215**	**253**	**60**
25b	**Adjusted new beds needed (if children of multiple ages are not placed in same home)**	**1,540**	**483**	**430**	**507**	**120**

To determine how many new homes must be licensed this year, compare the number on line 17 to the number of existing homes for each age group. Line 23 indicates the number of new homes needed for each age group. This line is adjusted by whether children are difficult to place and identifies subgroups of children for whom the agency should consider recruiting and licensing extra homes. Line 25a provides an adjusted number of foster homes for each age group. Age groups that require the largest number of homes may require a targeted recruitment plan to meet the need for foster homes.

Step 5: Estimate number of NEW homes needed for targeted groups (within age groups)						
	Targeted Population 1: Race		White	Native American	African American	Other
	Homes Needed by Age & Race Groups		**0-2 years**	**3-5 years**	**6-12 years**	**13-21 years**
28	Race/ethnicity					
28a	- Native American/Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0
28b	- Black /African American	516	162	144	170	40
28c	- White	254	80	71	84	20
28d	- Other	0	0	0	0	0
	Targeted Population 2: Hispanic Ethnicity					
32	-Hispanic	131	41	37	43	10
	Targeted Population 3: Large Sibling Groups					
38	**Adjusted new homes needed for large sibling groups**	60				

The final section of the Foster Home Estimator Worksheet provides estimates to determine whether the agency needs to target recruitment by race (lines28a – 28d), by Hispanic ethnicity (line 32) or for large sibling groups (line 38).

Instructions for Using the Estimator

The Foster Home Estimator is a Microsoft Excel file. To use it:

1) Open the Excel workbook to the Assumptions Worksheet. Working together, agency managers and data staff can decide what to type into each yellow-shaded cell.

2) After completing the Assumptions Worksheet, click on the Data tab at the bottom of the worksheet. Data staff should provide data for each yellow-shaded cell. The data in this worksheet are generally found in the agency's administrative data systems.

3) The other two worksheets will automatically populate with data from the Assumptions and Data worksheets to calculate the number of new homes needed.

4) It is often necessary to calculate the number of homes needed in multiple jurisdictions served by the agency (by counties, districts or regions within a state, for example). This can be accomplished by repeating the process described above for each jurisdiction.

Need to modify the worksheets? The Assumptions, Data and Foster Home Estimator worksheets are "locked," as are cells that should not be changed. If you need to make changes, contact Wildfire Associates to discuss how to customize the worksheets to meet your needs.