

Benefits for Children of
**RECRUITING LATINO
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES**

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WHO ARE THE LATINOS?

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The Importance Of Language In
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Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

Benefits for Children of **RECRUITING LATINO FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES**



The following material is adapted from AdoptUSKids' publication *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura (Our Family, Our Culture): Promoting and Supporting Latino Families in Foster Care and Adoption* (2008).

Latino foster and adoptive parents and bicultural child welfare specialists offered the following insights about the benefits of recruiting Latino foster and adoptive parents:

- Latinos have a long history of helping raise children in need of temporary or permanent families through informal foster care and adoption.
- Latinos often exhibit a great willingness to help other families, based on a strong value of community.
- The Latino culture places great emphasis on the importance of family.
- The Latino concept of family goes beyond blood relatives, encompassing friends, neighbors, and *compadres* (honored friends and godparents involved in mentoring and raising the child). This mindset of inclusiveness bodes well for adopted children to be truly claimed and incorporated into the family.
- Latino families who are of modest educational and economic accomplishments may be more accepting of children who face academic challenges.
- In general, Latinos are accustomed to large families, so they may be very accepting of sibling groups. It is not unusual for a Latino couple to want to adopt two or three siblings.



- Many Latinos have strong family and community rites and traditions that can help children develop attachments and positive identities.
- Latino families who still parent in the traditional way put emphasis on teaching their children the importance of respect of what is right and proper and tend to hold their children accountable for these values.
- In general, Latino families offer life-long connections, assistance, and support through the family value of inter-dependence.
- Those Latinos who place a high value on inter-dependence may exert less pressure on older youth to leave home.
- Children raised in Latino families may be given the opportunity to become bilingual.

This last benefit of being given the opportunity to become bilingual was mentioned by every youth interviewed for AdoptUSKids' *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura* guide. Even those not of Latino origin by birth expressed appreciation of their growing bilingual skills. One teenager, an African-American not of Latino origin, reported the awe with which his peers and teachers regard his ability to "speak perfect Spanish."

WHO ARE THE LATINOS?



Latinos* comprise the largest minority population in our nation. With about 16.3 percent its population self-identifying as being of Latino origin, the U. S. ranks second only to Mexico in the number of Latinos. In the continental U.S., Latinos come from Puerto Rico and 20 different countries, each with its own culture and history. The island of Puerto Rico—part of the U.S.—has a population of more than 4.6 million with a 90 percent majority of Latinos. Puerto Rico has a child welfare system and an adoption and foster care program similar to those found elsewhere in the U.S. As U.S. citizens at birth, Puerto Ricans are migrants, not immigrants, when they move from the island to the continental U.S.

Some Latinos trace their roots to Spain, and the Spanish heritage that includes Greek, Roman, Celtic, and Moorish influence. Many Latinos identify more closely with ancestral First Nations people, and their sophisticated civilizations that were in place prior to contact by the Europeans. Latino culture in the U.S. is rooted in the traditions, language, beliefs, and customs of the Latin American nations. The Latinos are “a unique people who combined old world and new world customs, values, and traditions.”¹

Population Trends and Projections¹

By 2050, the Latino population in the U.S. is projected to hit 132.8 million — and the Latino population in the mainland U.S. is projected to comprise 30 percent of the total population. Having surpassed African Americans, Latinos are currently the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the United States.

On average, Latinos are a young segment of U.S. population. The U.S. Hispanic* population has a median age of 27.4 — nearly 10 years less than the median age of the population as a whole. About one-third of the Hispanic population is under age 18, compared with one-fourth of the total population.

- The 10 largest Hispanic origin groups in the U.S. trace their roots to Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Columbia, Honduras, Ecuador, and Peru.
- 52 percent of the nation’s 16 million Hispanic children are now second generation, meaning they are U.S. born children of at least one parent born in Latin America
- 11 percent of Hispanic children are first generation, meaning they were born in a Latin America country
- 37 percent are third generation or higher, meaning they are U.S. born children of U.S. born parents

*The terms Latino and Hispanic are often used interchangeably. We use “Latino” to refer to persons who trace their roots to one of the Spanish or Portuguese speaking nations in the Americas. We use “Hispanic” when quoting from the U.S. census or other sources.

¹Spaulding for Children. (1995). video: Cultural Competency in Child Welfare.

¹Pew Research Center 2008 and the U.S. Census 2010 (available online at: <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=58>)

The Importance Of Language In SERVING LATINO FAMILIES



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Language and Identity – A Caution About Assumptions

Spanish may not be the primary language of every Latino person approaching your agency as an adoptive or foster care applicant. While many Latinos in the U.S. are bilingual, some do not speak Spanish at all. Many of the second generation and all of the third generation Latino adoptive parents interviewed for AdoptUSKids' *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura* publication listed English as their first language.

- Do not make assumptions about language. Instead ask each family their language preferences.
- Make allowances for individual differences within a family or extended family. One English-speaking adoptive family requested a Spanish-speaking caseworker to explain particular information to the family's grandmother.
- Remember that fluency in speech in a language does not guarantee full comprehension of written materials. One prospective foster father, fluent in spoken English and active in the preparation class discussions, asked for written handouts and articles in Spanish. If a person speaks English, it isn't safe to assume that they can read it as well, or even read at all in any language.
- Clarify with each family member which language they are most comfortable using and make diligent efforts to accommodate the preference of each to the best of your ability.
- Note that almost every State has laws requiring public agencies to accommodate the communication needs of people with limited English skills.



Meeting the Language and Cultural Needs of Families

AdoptUSKids has noted that jurisdictions are often challenged to find ample Spanish-speaking staff to respond in a timely fashion to individuals and families who only speak Spanish and express interest in taking the next steps towards becoming foster or adoptive parents. Sometimes families may feel pressured to bring a neighbor or relative – or even a very young son or daughter -- to translate, and this may compromise their confidentiality or result in their lack of participation in the process.

A group of adoption and foster care professionals shared the opinion that the best choice is to have an adequate number of bicultural and bilingual staff. Bicultural social workers, who are “fluent” in both Latino and dominant American culture, can provide the bridge to help Latino families work within systems that may seem confusing or threatening, and bilingual staff, who may or may not be bicultural, can reduce the need for relying on interpreters. Some felt that an interpreter can sometimes add to the confusion, or that crucial information can be lost or misstated. The group recommends that if interpretation is needed, the agency can show its respect for the Latino applicants by hiring a top level, professionally trained interpreter.

10 Things Top Level, Professionally Trained Interpreters Do

- 1 Respect the fact that every person has a different language ability, educational level, personality, and life experience and will do all they can to convey the meaning of the spoken message.
- 2 Interpret for the speaker rather than the listener, conveying the intent, ideas, mood, and spirit of what the speaker is communicating.
- 3 Translate complete thoughts from beginning to end.
- 4 Have knowledge of the culture of the person who is speaking.
- 5 Be able to maintain objectivity and have enough experience, maturity, wisdom, and good common sense to know how best to communicate sensitive information.
- 6 Demonstrate confidence in their interpretations, minimizing hesitation, stumbling, and uncertainty.
- 7 Be aware that their own facial expressions, mouth movements, tone of voice, and body language are communication, and do their best not to draw attention to themselves. Instead, interpreters see themselves as messengers or relayers of communication between the person speaking and the listener.
- 8 Concentrate on the speaker through eye contact and body position so they are clear that the speaker's communication is the primary focus.
- 9 Present themselves as trustworthy, respectful, responsible, amenable, approachable, and welcoming.
- 10 Be open to criticism and constantly seek new ways to improve themselves.

AdoptUSKids has found that a number of families who inquire on our Spanish language phone line have basic English skills, but are more comfortable conversing in Spanish. A Latino family specialist explains why offering adoption or foster care classes in Spanish is more beneficial than providing an interpreter:

“The training is a process where parents are introduced to new material. They need time to understand the material, to process it, and to be able to extrapolate information relevant to their situation. They also need time to ask questions and get clarification. This is often difficult when one is in the minority and may not want to hinder the flow of the conversation. Parents also raise concerns about being unable to contribute to the conversation due to language barriers.”

Overwhelmingly, the Latino foster and adoptive parents interviewed for the *Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura* publication by AdoptUSKids confirmed the primary importance of speaking Spanish. After all, language expresses more than what people think; it also conveys how people feel. When asked what caseworkers can do to work successfully with Latino families when it comes to adoption, one adoptive parent summarized the sentiment of many:

“Saber hablar español es primordial.” (Knowing how to speak Spanish is fundamental.)

Offering services in the language of clients is not only an effective approach, but also one that is legislatively mandated. The federal Civil Rights Law of 1964 requires states to offer services in their native language to persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The law prohibits excluding persons from participation in federally funded programs due to language barriers. “Such exclusions, delays, or denials may constitute discrimination on the basis of national origin.”¹

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has issued policy guidance with specific suggestions on how to comply with federal requirements related to providing services to people with limited English proficiency (“Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons”).²

¹ Suleiman, Layla. (2003). Beyond Cultural Competence: Language Access and Latino Civil Rights. *Child Welfare*. Vol. LXXXII #2. P. 190.

² <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/laws/revisedlep.html>

Tips From Foster and Adoptive Parents and Specialists

- Offer all written work and preparation classes, as well as any additional requirements such as a First Aid class, in both languages.
- Understand that in some heavily populated Latino communities, the need to learn English may not be as crucial because the majority of community members speak Spanish and the community is fully self-sufficient. Look at this as a strength-based model.
- Evaluate each family and family member individually. Do not automatically equate a lack of English dominance with a lack of ability to communicate with schools or counselors or an inability to advocate for a child's needs. Families often will already have a relative or family friend to help them navigate the English-speaking world.
- Be ready to fully explain details about the adoptive and foster parent process for Spanish-speaking families to ensure they receive as much written information and an equal number of hours of adoption or foster care preparation as English-speakers receive.
- Develop a list of Spanish-speaking families who have adopted and fostered through your agency who can speak about their experiences during the orientation and training.
- Maintain a list of professionals who can train in Spanish on varied adoption, foster care, and parenting topics.
- Be creative! Consider alternative methods of transmitting information including audio tapes, DVDs, CDs, PowerPoint presentations, podcasts, and videos. Diligent efforts should be made in this regard and should reflect an understanding of adult learning and effective training techniques.

Understanding and Insight

The availability of Spanish-speaking staff to provide orientation materials, answer questions, teach foster care and adoption preparation classes, and conduct interviews and home visits is a huge step towards cultural competency. However, staff fluency alone does not guarantee that Spanish-speaking clients will be well served. Staff members need to be aware that the process goes beyond the literal translation and includes a cultural translation. This will help minimize communication and cultural misunderstandings.

For example, a pre-certification trainer re-contacted several families who had completed her preparation class series after finding out they had later withdrawn from the process. The families explained that even though they were assigned bilingual caseworkers, they did not feel that the workers really understood them even though they spoke Spanish. In one case, the worker spoke a formalized Castilian style of Spanish learned in college, which can be quite different from the style of Spanish spoken by persons from Mexico, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, or other Spanish-speaking countries. Even more of a barrier than the language style differences was the lack of insight into Latino family culture. Education about cultural expectations might have avoided losses of potential adoptive or foster parents.

