

**County** CLEVELAND COUNTY  
**Department of Social Services**

**Submitted By** ALISON CLARK

**Title** PROGRAM MANAGER

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**Project Title** PLANT A SEED AND GROW A FAMILY INITIATIVE 2016

**Category** Cost Savings Measures and/or Improvements in Efficiency  
(Please select one)

### **Project Description and Summary**

**What did you do?**

**Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?**

Cleveland County had a large number of foster children that had been adopted by their current foster parents. This led to some families no longer being able to foster due to having a large number of children in their homes. The Department began to see a decline in our foster home numbers. The "Plant A Seed and Grow a Family" initiative was introduced to the Director of Social Services by the Program Manager of Child Permanence. The idea was to provide bookmarks with seeded paper to

local libraries to recruit foster families for the County. She networked with high school's administration in our county and also with high school students she mentored to help with the delivery of the seeded bookmarks. Children were in placements that had not committed to adopting them. The productivity improvement plan was to provide community education about the need for foster and adoptive families in our own county. Our goal was to inform individuals and families that we had children who were cleared for adoption that did need a forever family and to recruit more foster families to serve our children. The Program Manager, met with several resources. The purpose and objective was to recruit and establish adoptive/foster homes for each of these children. Our agency was looking for ways to spread the message that as a community we have children right here that need safe, stable, loving homes. All of our library branches were open to distributing the bookmarks to their customers. As people received their bookmarks with our children's message, they planted a seed that grew into beautiful flowers to remind them of the meaning behind the flowers they grew. When people complimented folks on their beautiful flowers, they told them the story behind the beautiful flowers. Families were recruited by simple seeds that grew a flower and a forever family.

### **Project Success and Impact**

**What was the outcome?**

**Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?**

Cleveland County had been experiencing a large number of children coming into the foster care system as well as children who were cleared for adoption with no adoptive home identified. The Plant a Seed and Grow a Family initiative was a marketing tool developed by the Program Manager in Child Permanence in an effort to recruit foster and adoptive families for children in DSS custody. We wanted our children to achieve timely permanence and hopefully recruit more foster families that were open to adoption. We wanted siblings to remain together and we needed more foster homes in our county to meet this goal.

Eleven adoptions were achieved through this recruitment effort and 17

new foster homes were licensed. The adoptions prevented the children from remaining in DSS custody and provided them with a forever family. This initiative saved our department over \$235,000 in board payments in 2016. Adoption Promotion Funding was used to purchase the materials used for the bookmarks.

This initiative took most of the year for the project to be successful. It required time for meetings, calls, information sharing, and delegation by the Program Manager, area high school students and those who the Program Manager mentored. Many hours were spent delivering bookmarks filled with seeds and messages – spreading the need to “Plant a Seed and Grow a Family.” Our project was most successful and can be replicated in our counties.

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