



DILIGENT RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOMES

Addendum B

FY23
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services APSR

J.B. Pritzker
Governor



Marc Smith
Acting Director

STATEWIDE FOSTER PARENT
RECRUITMENT & RETENTION PLAN
FY 2020 – 2023

The Department of Children and Family Services is statutorily designated for Illinois as the state agency tasked with the responsibility of protecting children from abuse and neglect. At times, children may require removal and thus a need to be placed out of their home of origin into an alternative living arrangement. This plan outlines the most effective foster parent retention and recruitment strategies that address the needs of the children under the Department's care within Illinois.

The State of Illinois is facing a shortage of foster caregivers and licensed foster homes. There are 8,992 licensed foster homes as of October 2019, however, it is not enough homes to accommodate all youth needing care or coming into care. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is in the process of developing a comprehensive three-year plan that is designed to attract, recruit and retain qualified caregivers that are willing to support youth in crisis and provide safe and stable placements in licensed foster homes across the state. The recruitment and retention plan will include three phases of development. Outcomes will be monitored and reviewed every six months to adjust strategies and meet the goals and objectives outlined in the foster parent recruitment plan.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2013, the Department created the Recruitment and Resource Unit to address the state's growing need to expand and improve the state's ability to provide homes and services for today's youth in care. There are currently 23 Recruitment & Resource Specialists (RRS), and 4 supervisory positions. These staff have the operational responsibility to partner with the private sector and identify, locate and/or develop services to improve the continuum of foster care resources available throughout the state.

The Department's expectation is that foster parents work collaboratively with the agency to meet the needs of youth in care while working with birth parents, staff, the courts and/or identified services specific to youth. This collaboration helps support the primary permanency plan of Reunification. Accordingly, this plan is also designed to recruit adoptive parents for youth whose permanency plan is Adoption, in efforts to prevent a child from lingering in foster care.

The development of the Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Plan 2020 – 2023 is to ensure that the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (Department) and private child welfare agencies (private agencies) maintain a pool of qualified, professional foster parents as well as alternative placement resources that are available to retain children in their respective communities as indicated in federal policy.

This plan includes consistent messaging campaigns to increase awareness, participation, sustainability and advocacy for fostering statewide. Messaging campaigns will be strategized toward people that are:

- Thinking about fostering youth
- Willing to become a licensed foster home
- Considering adoption
- Involved in foster care recruitment and placement as a child welfare professional or organization

DCFS MISSION

The mission of Illinois Department of Children & Family Services is to protect children who are reported to be abused or neglected and to increase their families' capacity to safely care for them; provide for the well-being of children in our care; provide appropriate, permanent families as quickly as possible for those children who cannot safely return home; support early intervention and child abuse prevention activities and work in partnership with communities to fulfill this mission.

PLAN APPROACH

The Department recognizes the respective differences, values of the family, complexity of their trauma narratives (or experiences), their involvement with the Department, and the need for support to help empower children, families and the field to achieve permanency.

The Foster Parent Recruitment plan outlines strategies that will:

- Attract, recruit and retain quality foster parents and licensed foster homes.
- Define, collect and measure quantitative and qualitative data metrics that are both accurate and reliable.
- Define the role of private agencies, community-based providers and organizations in the recruitment and licensing process.
- Track, evaluate, and measure the progress of potential foster parents from initial engagement through their first placement.
- Intentionally disseminate information to stakeholders involved with fostering in Illinois.
- Promote the provision of quality services to youth, families and care providers.
- Build incentives (awards/recognition) that foster retention and recruitment for care providers.
- Educate Foster/Adoptive Parents and biological family members of the complex nature of youth in care, relative to their developmental milestones, coupled with abuse and neglect.
- Prioritize investing in providers who understand the impact of abuse and neglect, as well as support the Department's desired outcomes for youth.
- Empower families to use community-based resources to supplement their needs.
- Use media and communications to advance the Department's goals in the public forum for recruitment and retention.

RECRUITMENT AND RESOURCE FOCUS

The focus of the Recruitment and Resource Unit ("R & R") is to develop a fluid and comprehensive recruitment and retention plan that is driven by accurate and reliable data, and to deliver a consistent and centralized experience for potential and new foster parents statewide. The recruitment plan is focused on engaging families and enlisting them as collaborative partners who are willing to be a resource providing human capital, coaching, and asylum for youth in care. The Unit's overarching responsibilities are to:

- Develop placement resources for youth coming into the child welfare system specific to their level of care and support children in care with appropriate placements to meet their needs;
- Develop and maintain viable services and resources that promote family preservation, reunification and permanency;
- Recruit caregivers who are vested in the holistic needs of abused & neglected children beyond the scope of safety, shelter and clothing with support of emotional wellness through the perspective of a trauma lens;

- Build collaborative partnerships with private agency providers and other community partners that endeavor to enhance the quality of life for children, parents and other caretakers within the state of Illinois;
- Promote community-based resources to mitigate issues that bring families and children to the Department; and
- Collaborate with the Licensing Department to ensure families are licensed in a timely manner.

Following are the Department’s recruitment goals with related objectives and interventions designed to achieve those goals.

Goal #1: Ensure that children and youth are placed in the least restrictive and most appropriate placement.

Objective: Expand the number of foster and adoptive resources (regional, private sector, and residential) to ensure that youth have potential placement opportunities that reflect the least restrictive and most appropriate environment by December 2023.

Interventions:

1. Develop enhanced recruitment communication methods/distribution and materials to reach prospective caregivers from all communities by April 2020.
 - a. Beginning January 2020, coordinate monthly statewide recruitment campaigns targeting specific segments of the community. The goal is to reach new people and allow partners to participate in recruitment events. The initiatives will reinforce local ongoing recruitment efforts. Campaigns will be updated annually, but will typically include the following:
 - February: Recruitment of African – Americans in honor of Black History Month
 - March: Youth Advisory Board – Recruitment of caregivers who want to foster or adopt teens
 - April: Recruitment of caregivers who have siblings and will foster/adopt sibling groups in honor of National Sibling Day
 - May: Recruitment of former foster or adoptive parents in honor of National Foster Care Month
 - June: Reunification Month – Recruitment of former DCFS workers, former youth in care, relatives and others impacted by child welfare to foster/adopt
 - July: Faith-Based Community Recruitment
 - August: Recruitment of Teachers and Parents in honor of National Back to School Month
 - September: Recruitment of Hispanic caregivers in honor of Hispanic Community Month
 - October: LGBTQ Awareness Month – Recruitment of caregivers for LGBTQ population
 - November: Recruitment of Adoptive Parents in honor of National Adoption Month
 - b. Enhance child-specific recruitment strategies that focus on the children in Illinois who are awaiting adoption and in need of forever families, as well as youth with a goal of guardianship. The Department, in partnership with Greenlight Family Services, will continue to bring awareness of these children to the community. Strategies will include:
 - Adoption match services by both Greenlight Family Services and Resource & Recruitment (R & R) staff
 - Maintaining the Adoption Listing Service (ALS) that operates to match registered children with forever families
 - Hosting of Adoptions and Paper Match Meetings
 - Monthly registration of Illinois’ waiting children on Heart Gallery of Illinois
2. Increase public awareness of the need for foster, adoptive and relative caregivers through traditional channels, social media, and e-blasts by June 2020.
 - Create effective linkage with the DCFS Office of Communications to enhance recruitment strategies and materials and improve the website interface
 - Determine the possibility of 12 (one per month) segments on CANTV Media Outlet
 - Foster Parent recruitment marketing campaign via Social Media platforms

- Update the DCFS website URL Foster Parent Inquiry page for potential foster and adoptive parent inquiries
3. Continue partnership with Greenlight Family Services and POS agencies to recruit, train and support foster parents and ensure that foster parents have a support system until December 2023.
6/2022 update: Greenlight oversees the 800 number and the web inquiries for Adopt-only inquiries. R & R vets all of the phone and web inquiries sent by Greenlight and, if inquirer meets criteria, the R & R unit processes the inquiry via the CFS 542 and sends them to the DCFS licensing teams. The R & R team keeps track and monitors the Adopt-only inquiries on the R & R SharePoint. The R & R unit is in the process of developing a system to share the status of inquiries received and to monitor inquiries at each stage of the licensing process with Greenlight.
 4. Maintain Greenlight Family Services Inquiry Line for potential foster and adoptive parents to December 2023.
 5. Continue established partnerships with private agencies to increase placement options for youth with complex medical needs, specialized youth, and special populations such as intellectually delayed, dually involved, sexually exploited and/or trafficked youth, and older youth transitioning from foster care until December 2023.
6/2022 update: In weekly shelter care calls, conversations take place with both DCFS and private agency caseworkers regarding the youths being reviewed and potential placements. Providers have been asked in the course of some of these reviews if a foster parent who may have declined one youth might consider a different youth. It was found to be helpful (pre-COVID) when private agency providers were all brought to the Aurora Field Office to staff kids' cases together. Also, it has been helpful when Central Matching has convened a verbal update on matches with several matched agencies all at once. As always, licensing needs to be involved.
 6. Increase the scope of specialized recruitment efforts for youth who need to step down from a higher level of care by January 2020.
6/2022 update: Family Finding has recently been relegated to the step-down kids and BMN exclusively. The family finding positions are being created with the private agencies now. Caseworkers should be encouraged to list kids with the Heart Gallery and Let It Be Us. Broadcasts are also done by agencies.
 7. Initiate caregiver recruitment and retention efforts with Illinois' recognized tribes by June 2020.
6/2022 update: The R&R unit has attended recruitment events, such as POW WOWS hosted by the Native American community and is keeping track of inquiries collected from such events. ICWA Specialist is notified of inquiries for future follow up and retention if licensed.
 8. Review and assess current policies and practices regarding relative placements and implement changes that support increasing the number of relatives who become fully licensed foster parents by June 2020.

Goal #2: Improve organizational effectiveness regarding placement, resource development, retention and placement matching.

Objective: Improve placement matching process, utilizing tools and training for Recruitment & Resource staff by September 2020.

Interventions:

1. Coordinate efforts with IT department for data requests to implement the recruitment plan by December 2019.
2. Utilize data efficiently in establishing recruitment plans and training; and continue to provide quarterly technical assistance to Recruitment & Resource staff until December 2023.
6/2022 update: The Resource and Referral unit created and has been using a SharePoint platform to log into and monitor the inquiries collected during recruitment events from the DCFS website and walk-ins. The data is then used to determine areas of additional recruitment needs.
3. Conduct an assessment to determine plausibility of shared foster homes and a centralized placement matching process for the state and initiate recommendations by June 2020.
4. Develop and implement a training curriculum on recruitment and retention for DCFS and private agency staff by May 2020.
6/2022 update: The foster parent recruitment and retention training has been ongoing and is available online to DCFS and private agency staff. The R & R supervisor was part of the creation of the curriculum and has been a trainer. Those in attendance have discussed shared needs and concerns across agencies and strategized on how to recruit and retain foster parents. Participants shared the vision that recruitment is the responsibility of all agency personnel, and everyone impacts the agency's ability to develop and support foster parents.

5. Develop a private agency Foster Parent Recruitment & Retention Plan form to track and monitor agencies' recruitment and retention activities by February 2020.
6/2022 update: The Child Welfare Advisory Committee has re-established this foster parent recruitment and retention committee and members of the R & R team are currently leading the group.
6. Implement quarterly private agency monitoring by DCFS Agency Performance Team to ensure recruitment and retention activities by July 2020.

Goal #3: Increase the average length of retention of Foster Parents per the licensing process for at least three years.

The following outcomes are expected as a result of accomplishing retention goals:

Objective: By December 2023, 80% of foster parents will serve a minimum of three years and no more than 20% of foster parents will exit within 18 months of becoming licensed.

Interventions:

1. Develop a recruitment and retention oversight committee by December 2019.
6/2022 update: The Retention Committee has lost many of its primary members and its leadership. Retention comes from many divisions of the agency – from casework staff responsiveness, the ability to immediately put placement stabilization services in place, the support of the Foster Parent Support Specialist and the licensing staff. DCFS needs to rebuild this committee.
2. Continue to track how prepared, supported and appropriately matched families are for placement of foster, adoptive and relative placements as evident by the number and type of licensing violations and other indicators of safety and compliance with caregiver standards until December 2023.
6/2022 update: Preparation of foster parents occurs in training, the licensure process and in the semi-annual licensing home visits. Caseworkers and Foster Parent Support Specialists also guide our foster parents. Complaints are addressed by the Division of Child Protection (if it rises to the level of abuse and neglect), and/or licensing and logged in their data system.
3. Implement an exit interview/survey for foster parents who decide to leave foster care by September 2020.
 - Use information from the caregiver exit surveys to inform pre-service and ongoing training changes and improvements.
 - Assess the Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) pre-service training annually, as needed, to determine if any updates are indicated as reflected in maltreatment in care, policy violations or other safety data.
4. Improve attendance of regularly scheduled foster parent support group meetings to engage, connect, and provide a forum for foster parents to share their experiences by use of a virtual platform by June 2020.
6/2022 update: The Office of Caregiver and Parent Support (OCPS) supports the Foster Parent Support Specialist Program (FPSS) via a matrix supervision program with the field. OCPS tracks support group meetings statewide. Support groups have been held virtually for the last couple of years as COVID 19 prevented meeting in person. The FPSS staff have partnered with private agencies, the training department, and the adoption unit to further provide support, training and mentoring to caregivers. FPSS are consistently working to build attendance at their monthly support group meetings and reach out via email, word of mouth, via workers and social media to engage caregivers to join meetings.
5. Improve attendance of regularly scheduled foster parent trainings and mentoring options to support new foster parents and help them navigate child welfare supports and resources by use of a virtual platform by June 2020.
6/2022 update: Core Teen and Trauma Trainings are currently being offered virtually to train FPSS's to train foster, adoptive and relative caregivers to increase their capacity. OCPS has developed virtual Foster Parent Law Training which is for all caregivers and teaches them about their rights and responsibilities as set forth in

the Foster Parent Law. Additionally, ongoing foster parent training is offered by the Office of Learning & Professional Development. Training has continued to be offered virtually and is just recently becoming available in the classroom setting again. Any of these trainings can be accessed through the Virtual Training Center, and are available to all caregivers, DCFS and private agency staff. The FPSS staff are available to support and mentor new foster parents.

6. Increase support by enhancing regular and ongoing communication channels with foster, adoptive and relative caregivers through quarterly informational meetings and correspondence by use of a virtual and social media platform by June 2020.
6/2022 update: The Illinois Families' Now and Forever Newsletter does go out when there are topics that come up that are pressing for caregivers. DCFS has a presence on Facebook that is monitored by the Office of Communications. DCFS has a Website and the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council, Illinois Adoption Advisory Council and Partnering with Parents (birth parent program) all have page links on the DCFS Website. The SWFCAC and IAAC are always open meetings that caregivers are welcome to attend to learn about current events and issues of concern to the foster/adoption community. These meetings are held monthly.
7. Implement an annual foster parent survey process that assesses training, support and service satisfaction for dissemination by May 2020.
6/2022 update: A survey went out May 2020 (through the DCFS Quality Assurance office). All DCFS trainings have an evaluation component that measures satisfaction with each of the trainings offered.
8. Develop method of tracking prospective caregivers throughout the licensing process by September 2020.
6/2022 update: A logging system for inquiries and data collection has been developed and along with the Foster Licensing logs, these are used for training and resources, and is also a part of the review of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights Implementation Plan.
9. Coordinate with the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support and the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council (SFCAC) to review and amend the Foster Parent Law annually; and utilize DCFS website and social media platforms to ensure foster parents and DCFS and private agency field staff have been informed about the Foster Parent Law and scheduled training dates by May 2020.
6/2022 update: Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans are reviewed and amended annually by every agency and DCFS region that provides foster care services. Those plans are submitted to the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support for review, scoring and approval by Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council members each year. The DCFS Implementation Plans are posted on the DCFS external website. Private agencies are required to share their plans with caregivers each year as well. Virtual training on the Foster Parent Law is available and can be accessed through the DCFS Virtual Training Center (VTC). The VTC can be accessed by staff and caregivers. Announcements on the training, including training dates are also posted on the DNET which can be seen by DCFS and private agency staff.
10. Conduct quarterly analysis of prospective caregiver inquiries who do not complete the licensing process to identify barriers that impact license completion until December 2023.
11. Support efforts of the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support and the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council (SFCAC) by providing information about the Department to all prospective Foster Parents, supporting the SFCAC events, and ensuring that regular partnership meetings are occurring at the state and local level with SFCAC leadership until December 2023.
6/2022 update: The DCFS external website includes the meeting schedule, meeting agendas, and meeting minutes for all SFCAC meetings. SFCAC members are appointed from each geographical area and are expected to serve as liaisons, relaying information between the regional foster parent meetings and the SFCAC meetings.

12. Coordinate with the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support and the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council to assess the Foster Parent Grievance Procedures by June 2020.

6/2022 update: The SFCAC drafted and approved a Foster Parent Law grievance template for use statewide. It was created and distributed in the year 2020.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Over the next three years using this approach to recruitment, the Department expects to:

- Use statistical data to drive recruitment activity and solicit feedback from the field;
- Increase the number of DCFS and private agency foster homes in the areas of greatest need;
- Create strong networks that can address retention and provide service support;
- Expand and further develop the local foster care continuum to meet placement demands and service the needs to help youth remain in or as close to their communities of origin; and
- Decrease the number of youth who have been waiting for permanency resources.

SUMMARY

FY21: In response to the ALL-IN Foster Adoption Challenge/Adoption Call to Action, DCFS along with Stakeholders, Adoption Advisory Council members, Training staff and Quality Improvement Grant partners have been working on the Adoption/Guardianship Readiness Training to assist with foster parents/caregivers making an informed decision to provide permanency to our youth in care who cannot be reunited with their families. Final stages of development have a target date of 10/2021. In addition, regular Quarterly Regional Adoption Support and Preservation (ASAP) informational meetings have continued for foster parents/caregivers to be acquainted with their Regional ASAP Service providers and Post Support/referral specialist to be available to support their child with trauma informed services and maintain their family stability after adoption finalization or transfer of guardianship.

The implementation of the Department's Recruitment Plan is to build internal infrastructure and resources that support and sustain foster parents in the state of Illinois. Foster parents play an important role in the child welfare system and should be treated as critical partners. Most importantly, it is imperative that foster parents are engaged, developed, and supported by the Department. This will create an environment that attracts quality foster parents who feel supported and adequately prepared to care for youth in Illinois. Therefore, the Department is tasked with maintaining the necessary continuum of placement resources and support services in their communities, while enhancing the foster and adoptive experience for youth and caregivers involved with the child welfare system.