

About CHAMPS

Assistance to Policy Makers and Program Leaders

Foster parenting is emerging as a top priority nationally and in states. Rising numbers of children entering foster care and new expectations associated with the recently enacted Family First Prevention Services Act make it critical to recruit, support, and retain high-quality foster parents to meet the needs of children in their care.

CHAMPS—Children Need Amazing Parents—is a policy campaign focused nationally and in individual states to promote high quality foster parenting. CHAMPS promotes a six-point policy framework (see next page) to guide policy makers in shaping solutions to foster parenting. CHAMPS also provides information and technical support to policy makers and program leaders.

By bringing together research, policy solutions and key stakeholders, CHAMPS can be a valued partner and information source to decision makers who are looking for guidance on how to effectively recruit and retain foster parents in the short and long run, and improve outcomes for the children in their care.

CHAMPS research and policy tools are available on www.fosteringchamps.org and include:

- The **CHAMPS policy playbook** provides research-based policy approaches that draw on best practices around the country to support quality foster parenting.
- A new **CHAMPS policy compendium** is a companion piece to the CHAMPS playbook. It will be issued in October. The compendium will be organized around the campaign's six policy solutions and will include examples of model legislative and administrative policies.
- Web-based **policy workshops** will start in September. The workshops will showcase different states' policy approaches to recruiting, retaining and supporting foster parents.
- **Policy and research briefs** will be issued for each policy solution.

CHAMPS provides technical assistance such as:

- **Informational sessions** for policy and program leaders and/or their staff on issues important to your state.
- **Research and data**, including summaries of research on foster parenting issues, state-specific data, and other research to inform decision making.
- **Relevant policy examples** from other states (administrative or legislative) and peer-to-peer calls.
- **Policy development** tailored to your state
- **Communications**, including drafting public statements, talking points, testimony, op-eds or blog posts, and assistance with social media strategies and content.
- **Stakeholder engagement**, including foster parents, youth and families with direct experience in foster care, leaders from the faith community, pediatricians and other direct service providers, and others.
- **National experts** to provide TA or to attend and speak at public or private meetings.

To learn more, contact CHAMPS at info@fosteringchamps.org

POLICY SOLUTIONS

When a child needs foster care, quality foster parenting must be a priority. Foster parents are the primary intervention for ensuring the safety and well-being of children in foster care and helping them heal and thrive. To ensure stable, quality foster parenting is a priority, policies should:

1 SUPPORT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BIRTH AND FOSTER FAMILIES

Nurturing a child's relationships with birth parents, siblings and extended family minimizes the trauma of foster care and broadens the child's support system. It's vital because more than half of children who enter foster care go home. Achieving this requires new skills and activities from foster parents to nurture the parent-child bond and provide mentorship to birth parents. Child welfare agencies should recruit, train and support foster families and staff to work with birth families and promote co-parenting.

2 IMPLEMENT DATA-DRIVEN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRACTICES

Maintaining an up-to-date census of licensed foster parents provides agencies with valuable information they can use to improve recruitment and retention activities. A census can help monitor the overall capacity of available foster parents in a community or state. It can also be an important tool for matching children with the most appropriate family, ensuring that the first placement is the best placement.

3 ENGAGE FOSTER PARENTS IN DECISION-MAKING

Foster families spend more time with children than any other professional. They have valuable information needed for decisions about the children's health, education, and other needs. Child welfare agencies should have policies reflect parents as priority partners. Policies should ensure foster parents are engaged in all aspects of case planning including team meetings, court proceedings, visitation and transitions.

4 PROVIDE TIMELY ACCESS TO TRUSTED, DEDICATED STAFF AND PEER SUPPORT TO FOSTER PARENTS

Foster parents must get the help they need, when they need it, to serve the children in their care. State policy should require that case workers be assigned to support foster parents and offer them access to "warm" help lines where they can connect with experienced foster parents, peer mentors, coaching, and other support networks.

5 PRIORITIZE PLACEMENTS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

When children enter foster care, a placement with a relative or a close family friend is often the best option. It helps maintain the child's connection to family and cultural traditions. "Kinship care" can increase stability and safety for children in foster care. State policies should strive to make relatives the first placement and offer the same supports for kin as non-kin foster parents.

6 ENSURE TIMELY ACCESS TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Meeting the physical and mental health needs of children in foster care is critical to their well-being. Policies should remove barriers and provide supports that equip and empower foster parents to help ensure children in their care can access needed health services, including comprehensive assessments and timely mental health services.