



# DILIGENT RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOMES

Addendum D

**FY2020**  
**Illinois Department of Children and Family Services**

## **Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes**

### **Introduction**

As part of the Illinois' Department of Children and Family Services reorganization in 2013, Department administration recognized that there was a need to have staff dedicated to the responsibilities of recruitment, retention and support of foster and adoptive families, which led to the development of the Resource and Recruitment Unit and the roles of regional Resource & Recruitment Specialists and a Statewide Recruitment Administrator. These positions were organized to take a leadership role in the Department's recruitment efforts focusing on developing the local and statewide infrastructures to support the enhancement of the recruitment efforts and foster care program.

In spring of 2016, another agency reorganization changed the Resource Recruitment Specialists to a regional reporting structure, rather than a statewide reporting structure. The organization structure currently consists of a Resource & Recruitment Specialist, Recruitment Supervisor, and a Program Manager that reports to the Regional Administrator. This change was intended to allow more flexibility to meet the specific recruitment needs of each region, as well as continuing to focus on the statewide priorities to focus recruitment efforts on homes for African-American children and youth, teens, Spanish-speaking homes, and homes able to meet the needs of LGBTQ youth. There are also ongoing efforts to ensure sufficient placements that accept sibling groups to minimize separation of siblings across placements.

Former DCFS Director BJ Walker was assessing the role of the Resource & Recruitment Specialist positions to determine if these positions could be used more effectively through reorganizing or restructuring the position and/or the responsibilities carried out by staff in these positions. As a result, Resource & Recruitment (R&R) Specialist positions have not been approved for posting as positions become vacant. Therefore, the numbers of staff available in these positions to carry out identified recruitment efforts has been decreasing over the past two years. Cook Region currently has six R&R specialists, of which one is bi-lingual, and one bi-lingual supervisor. Northern Region currently has three R&R specialists, of which one is bi-lingual, and one supervisor. Central Region currently has three R&R specialists and one supervisor. Southern Region currently has two R&R specialists and one supervisor.

In addition to recruitment efforts, the Office of Parent and Caregiver Support (OPCS) provides support to DCFS and private agency foster homes in an effort to increase retention of foster home resources and increase placement stability for youth in care. There are currently 40 Foster Parent Support Specialists (FPSS) statewide. Matrix supervision is provided for the Foster Parent Support Specialists. The Foster Parent Support Specialists report to the Regional Administrator or designee in their respective regions for day to day supervision and there is a statewide program administrator and a statewide program monitor, as well as program analysts and program managers, to monitor the program and ensure it operates within the parameters of the program plan. In the Cook Region there are three lead FPSS and six FPSS workers, divided between Cook North, Cook Central, and Cook South. The Northern Region has two lead FPSS and seven FPSS workers, divided between the east and west sub-regions. The Central Region has two lead FPSS and ten FPSS worker positions, divided between the east and west sides of the region with

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one vacancy on the west side. The Southern Region has two lead FPSS and six FPSS staff, divided between the east and south sub-regions with one vacancy and one pending. The role of the Foster Parent Support Specialists is to promote permanency by maintaining, strengthening and safeguarding the functioning of foster families to (1) retain foster homes, (2) promote family reunification, (3) stabilize foster care placements, (4) facilitate youth development, prevent shelter placements and (5) ensure the safety, permanency and well being of children.

### **Collaborations**

There is a Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council and a local Foster Care Advisory Council in each region. These councils provide feedback and communication between foster parents and the child welfare system. There is an Illinois Adoption Advisory Councils that meets regularly and consists of adoption staff and adoptive parents. The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council and the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council have joint meetings on a regular basis. In addition to the advisory councils, there are several foster parent support groups operating in various locations around the state, which are intended to increase retention of foster homes and may also increase recruitment of new foster homes. There are Foster Parent Appreciation events around the state every year in May and there are adoption celebrations for National Adoption day every year in November.

Cook Region Resource & Recruitment staff have regular meetings with suburban police departments and will be starting to have meetings with the Chicago Police Department. Cook Region also has meetings with hospital social workers, school social workers, and the Public Guardian's Office. FPSS attend Cook leadership (DCFS and private agency) meetings on a regular basis.

Central Region Resource & Recruitment staff meet with various church collaboratives to give presentations recruiting for foster homes with support from specific ministers. Central Region R&R staff are also involved with Foster Hope Quad Cities and Restore Network in the southern part of Central Region (and in Southern Region). The James Project is a church-affiliated project in the Springfield area with whom R&R staff have collaborated, as well as Safe Kids and the LGBTQ community, work with judicial districts, and work with area Muslim populations to recruit resources for Muslim children. Central Region R&R staff are also working with various cities to add recruitment materials and a link to the inquiry mailbox to their respective city web sites. How To Be a Foster Parent classes are offered in Central Region through community college adult education programs. Schools, especially those serving youth with special needs, are contacted within the Rock Island Immersion Site to discuss targeted recruitment for specific children.

Northern Region R&R staff has formed an alliance with the Muslim community and have done presentations for recruitment of resources for Muslim children. Within Northern Region, the Lake County Immersion Site Director meets quarterly with CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), has been linked with Willow Creek Church for recruitment of new foster homes, and has quarterly court meetings that include discussions around recruitment and retention. The Immersion Site Director also collaborates with the Regional Office of Education and with Healthworks in Lake County to educate and support foster care providers for retention and stability.

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Various collaborations are active across the state and include some of the following:

- Foster parent bill of rights meetings, where the Foster Parent Law is reviewed and there are annual implementation planning meetings. These meetings also provide an opportunity to give foster parents recruiting material to share within their networks and contacts.
- Quality Assurance surveys are sent regularly to foster parents and are intended to assist with retention of foster homes. There is also a grievance process for foster parents.
- Local and Statewide Youth Advisory Boards provide input on foster parent issues, including recruiting efforts and activities. Specific recruitment of foster homes for teens is also done by having foster parents of teens present information to other foster parents to encourage them to consider accepting teen placements in their homes.
- Web sites through DCFS and private agencies are targeted toward recruitment and have links to inquire about fostering.
- R&R staff statewide attend community resource fairs and other networking meetings and events and share recruitment information at these events.

DCFS has partnerships and/or contracts with the following organizations: Center for Law and Social Work, Adoption Listing Services, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, and Let It Be Us as partners in recruitment, especially for adoptive homes. The four statewide Immersion Sites have monthly stakeholder meetings that include discussions about recruitment and retention. FPSS refer potential foster parent applicants to Resource and Recruitment staff for follow up to the inquiries.

### **Improvement Efforts**

Regional Administrators, Program Managers, and Resource and Recruitment staff are exploring various programs and interventions that can be implemented in Illinois to improve our foster and adoptive home recruitment and retention efforts. There are quarterly meetings that include the four Regional Administrators and the four Program Managers and these meetings will include discussion around recruitment efforts. Recruitment supervisors have occasional meetings to discuss recruitment issues and materials. In addition to DCFS's Program Improvement Plan, there are ongoing efforts to consistently collect data to evaluate and adjust efforts, and assess what is being done for recruitment and other efforts that could be implemented to improve outcomes. Additional improvement efforts are described below.

- Illinois is implementing a new Core Practice Model that is intended to increase support for children and families, including co-parenting supports to families, collaboration in child and family teams, and improved models of supervision. These efforts will include foster parents, and are expected to positively impact retention of placement resources. The implementation started with Immersion Sites in January of 2017. It was expanded in Southern Region to all DCFS offices and Caritas in the fall of 2018. The implementation is targeted to continue to expand throughout the state over the next three to five years.

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- Post-Adoption and Post-Guardianship services are being improved and efforts are underway to publicize these available supports to better meet the needs of youth for permanency and stability. Youth in care that achieve permanency through a subsidized adoption or subsidized guardianship are potential target populations for prevention services under the Family First Prevention Services Act to prevent them from coming back into care. The Family First Act also requires Kinship Navigator programs that are targeted to assist relatives to care for related children to prevent those children from coming into substitute care. These supports for caregivers could result in increased retention of foster homes.
- Family Advocacy Centers are located in various communities throughout the state, and along with their support to biological parents and families, they are also able to provide supports for foster homes, which improves retention of foster homes. There is an ongoing effort with plans to continue to add new Family Advocacy Centers in areas of greatest need within the State.
- Family finding efforts are required in policy and are an important part of recruiting supports for youth in care. These supports include placement resources and supports to the current placement resource and to the youth. When youth have supports and connections, it assists with stability of the placement for the involved youth. Family finding efforts also sometimes result in recruitment of traditional foster homes. Procedures 315 identifies family finding requirements as the responsibility of the placing worker or the permanency worker, depending on the situation. Given the high turnover and vacancies in front line positions, family finding activities are sometimes carried out by staff in roles other than the placing worker or permanency worker. Each region currently has some flexibility with which roles can assist with family finding activities.
- Illinois has been selected for the National Training and Development Curriculum grant, which is a five-year grant that involves a partnership between Spaulding for Children, Dr. Bruce Perry, the Child Trauma Academy (CTA), the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), the National Council for Adoption (NCFA), and the University of Washington. The goal of the grant is to develop and evaluate a state-of-the-art training program to prepare foster and adoptive parents to effectively parent children exposed to trauma and to provide these families with ongoing skill development needed to understand and promote healthy child development. The intended long-term outcomes include improved placement stability, improved permanency rates, increased child well-being, and increased family well-being. The resulting curriculum will be available without cost to states, counties, tribes, territories, and private agencies to prepare, train, and develop foster and adoptive parents. Because Illinois being selected as a site was only recently announced, work has not yet begun and in fact, the Memorandum of Agreement is just now being drafted so has not yet been signed.

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- The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council (SWFCAC) is a mandated council established by law in June 1995. Members include foster parents and non-DCFS professionals appointed by the DCFS Director. The council's role is to advise the Department with respect to all matters involving or affecting the provision of foster care to abused, neglected, or dependent children and their families (20 ILCS 525/5-5). The SWFCAC oversees the implementation of the Illinois Foster Parent Law which provides foster parents with established rights and responsibilities and requires DCFS and agencies doing foster care by contract to submit annual plans to implement the law. The SWFCAC meets approximately ten times per year in different regions around the state. Two SWFCAC meetings are typically joint meetings with the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council and one is typically in conjunction with the Birth Parent Summit.
  
- The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council (IAAC) is a DCFS council established in 2003. Membership is made up of adoptees, adoptive parents and non-DCFS professionals who are appointed by the DCFS Director. The council's role is to advise the Department with respect to all matters involving providing permanency through adoption or guardianship. The council meets approximately six times per year and advises the DCFS Director on policies and practices that impact service delivery around permanency, with an emphasis on post-adoption services and supports. The IAAC meets approximately eight times per year in different regions around the state. One meeting is typically conducted by conference call and two are typically joint meetings with the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council.
  
- Illinois is in the process of trying to develop/acquire a Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) that meets federal standards and has the capacity for automated data on recruitment and licensing. Being able to easily access this will assist the state with prioritizing the efforts that have the greatest success. There is also some desire to improve the DCFS recruitment web site to make it more interactive and include content such as videos of foster parents telling their stories.

**Data** (specific to DCFS Resource and Recruitment staff)

Recruitment Inquiries that became licensed during the period of the prior five-year CFSP (FY 2015-FY 2019 to date):

Region	Licensed Homes
Central	211
Cook	143
Northern	163
Southern	299
TOTAL	816

Illinois DCFS has a newly appointed Director, effective 4/15/19. Director Marc Smith and the executive leadership team will be looking at data around prior outcomes and will be working to

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make improvements where possible with regard to recruitment, retention, and support of foster and adoption resources.

*The Administration for Children and Families' Program Instructions, ACFY-CB-PI-10-02, issued February 26, 2019, listed specific items to be included in this Plan. Below are these items and responses:*

- A description of the characteristics of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed;

DCFS has prioritized the need for targeted recruitment for the following populations: Spanish speaking, African American adolescents, youth identifying as LGBTQ, youth step downs from congregate care, and dually-involved/crossover youth. There are also ongoing efforts to ensure sufficient placements that accept sibling groups to minimize separation of siblings across placements.

- Specific strategies to reach out to all parts of the community;

Currently, DCFS Resource and Recruitment staff attend various community events in an effort to recruit additional foster families. There is a Resource and Recruitment team in each region of the state and each team conducts recruitment activities that are determined to best meet the recruitment needs of that particular region. When attending community events, Resource and Recruitment staff bring brochures and other marketing material and are prepared to talk with people and answer questions about foster care. Depending on the region, these events might include attendance at school functions, library events, hospital health fairs, community resource events, community fairs, church or religious events, action team events, and foster parent appreciation events. Resource and Recruitment staff follow up on inquiries that come in through the DCFS web site for recruitment. Some teams also use social media to promote recruitment information. Let It Be Us has partnered with 360 Barrington and DCFS for targeted recruitment of African American families through a three-minute video on Vimeo and social media platforms, as well as the Let It Be Us website. Similar efforts on behalf of other target populations will likely be developed over the next five years.

The efforts listed here are efforts to recruit for both DCFS and private agencies. All prospective foster/adoptive families can select their preferred agency for licensing. Being aware of financial barriers that might disproportionately impact recruiting efforts by private agencies, DCFS will continue collaboration between DCFS and private partners to ensure recruitment efforts reach all areas of the state and all agencies providing foster care services.

- Diverse methods of disseminating both general information about being a foster/adoptive parent and child specific information;

The methods already described are aimed at general recruitment. Child specific recruitment is conducted through family finding activities, adoption listing services, and through such partnerships as Wendy's Wonderful Kids.

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DCFS is in the process of developing a new plan for foster and adoptive family recruitment. The specific details of the new recruitment plan are not yet known. The Director has tasked a small group to develop an outline and timeline of steps to develop a formal recruitment process. The group consists of employees from Permanency, Clinical, and the Director's office and the plan will elicit input from POS partners and other stakeholders, such as foster parents and youth in care. The plan also includes determining the most efficient method of providing the field with a more accurate count of actual foster home placements so that their efforts are not futile contacting homes that are inactive. A number of initiatives are being considered as part of Illinois' Program Improvement Plan.

- Strategies for assuring that all prospective foster/ adoptive parents have access to agencies that license/approve foster/adoptive parents, including location and hours of services so that the agencies can be accessed by all members of the community;

Currently, the DCFS website includes an inquiry page that any prospective foster/adoptive parent can use to receive a response from the Resources and Recruitment unit. There is also a number to call to request information about fostering. Ongoing improvements to the website are planned to provide additional information to the general public. There are also various marketing campaigns by DCFS and private partners in the form of television ads and radio ads periodically.

- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial, and socio-economic variations;

There was a plan in 2018 to roll out training on recruitment to all staff that contribute to recruitment efforts. The training did not move forward to implementation at that time. Due to limited resources, there is not a current timeline for implementation of such a training, although efforts to provide this training will continue.

- Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;

DCFS has some Resource and Recruitment positions that are identified as Spanish-speaking to reduce barriers in recruiting Spanish-speaking families. If the prospective family has a primary language other than English or Spanish, all staff have access to a language line to facilitate communication in other languages.

- Non-discriminatory fee structures; and

Illinois does not charge fees to prospective foster families for foster care licensing.

- Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a child needing an adoptive placement, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.

Family finding efforts are implemented as per policy for child specific recruitment of foster and adoptive families for children in care. If a youth in care is unable to be reunified with the biological family and does not have a resource for permanency, the child, per policy, is listed with the Adoption Listing Service. The Adoption Listing Service provides access to various recruitment



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resources, including Wendy's Wonderful Kids and the Heart Gallery. Policy prohibits delaying permanency by a search for a family of the same race or ethnicity as the youth in care.

DCFS has been redeveloping its Foster and Adoptive parent recruitment plan. As part of the redevelopment, DCFS sent out surveys to foster parents and spoke with foster youth to get a better understanding of their needs. DCFS is improving the foster parent application process on the website. DCFS is also improving its data collection system to track foster parent inquiries.