

MA DCF Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan (2020-2024)

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families is committed to recruiting foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in its care and custody. The ultimate goal is for every child leave placement as quickly as possible to live in a permanent family which is safe and nurturing. Massachusetts has created a strong foundation on which to build an effective recruitment program which reaches into the communities which it serves. Local Department of Children and Families offices are especially active in recruitment efforts at the grassroots level in order to identify resources which allow children to maintain vital connections in their communities, including kin, schools, and other significant relationships.

In November 2016, for the first time, the Department hired 15 full-time Foster Care recruitment social workers. Three Foster Care Recruiters were assigned to each of the five regions. The Foster Care Recruiters work with area offices and Family Resource units specifically to enhance recruitment efforts and onboarding foster families. The recruiters have been focusing on increasing visibility in all communities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and spreading awareness of the need for foster families. In February 2019, three additional Foster Care Recruiters were added bringing the total to 18FTE's statewide. There is a plan to increase the number of Foster Care Recruiters to 29FTE's in FY20, a recruiter for every area office.

Massachusetts regards proactive recruitment as a fundamental tool for achieving permanency in a process which begins when a child enters care. Effective recruitment efforts must provide key information to potential foster families about what the role entails. This includes understanding the needs and dynamics of children entering foster care and the responsibilities that come with this commitment.

With the addition of the Foster Care Recruiters has allowed Massachusetts to substantially increase recruitment activities. Since November 2016, Foster Care recruiters have attended or sponsored over 3000 events statewide. The recruiters are also responsible for completing the application process with interested parties. This has streamlined the process as applicants deal with 1 staff person and stay with that recruiter until they enter a training session.

The overall Massachusetts strategy is to build a more robust capacity throughout the agency for early and continued exploration of kin, as well as others with existing or prior relationships to find families willing to commit to some form of permanency, including adoption if reunification cannot be achieved. By beginning this process early on, the goal is to identify a nurturing family which will become the child's new and stable home, and which includes an extended community of support. To accomplish this DCF has strengthened its family find capacity to include an "intensive" family find program that is being piloted in 10 Area Offices. In each of these offices, a dedicated social worker is assigned who works with family members, mines the case file, and uses internet and social media resources including Accurint/Lexis Nexis to identify possible connections for a child entering care. In several offices the model is paired with a rapid response kinship care capacity designed to expedite the screening and licensing of kin.

In July 2013, the Department of Children and Families released the Permanency Planning Policy. This policy provides for "permanency planning which is child-centered, family-empowering casework and legal strategies that ensure children have caring, stable, lifetime families and that safety, permanency and well-being remain the paramount concern throughout the Department's involvement." Achieving permanency can come in many forms: permanency through stabilization of the family, through family reunification, permanency through adoption, permanency through guardianship, permanency through

care with kin, permanency through alternative planned living arrangement for youth 16 or older, and permanency planning for youth in Department placements. Recruitment efforts are vital to a number of these goals.

Massachusetts continues to developing multidimensional recruitment efforts which are geared to general, targeted and child-specific recruitments. Child-specific recruitment efforts are broadly viewed to include specific family and relationship exploration to work with youth to identify and develop existing relationships and nurture them in lifelong connections and possible permanent legal placements. Massachusetts will further its collaborations and partnerships within communities representative of those groups from which children in care come, to help identify and support potential foster families and to conduct activities that increase visibility of waiting children.

Massachusetts believes diligent recruiting families are defined by what children say when asked what they want most in the world. They respond that they know “someone is out there who will care about him/her, and who will be there for them.” They look to us to find that someone who will make the commitment to care for them permanently. Every effort must be made to ensure that our staff understands the importance of family and those connections, as well as, to understand permanency. DCF acknowledges that sustained and continuous learning is needed in order for our staff, our providers and our communities to understand and embrace permanency for all children in Massachusetts.

An intensive, targeted and sustained recruitment campaign is crucial to building awareness of the need for foster and adoptive parents while creating public value of the role foster and adoptive parents have in the life of a child. The Department’s efforts are aimed at encouraging more families to step forward and help children remain in their own communities until a safe return home, placement with kin or a transition to another permanent situation occurs.

In July 2017, the **Foster MA** recruitment campaign was launched. The following are areas in which we focused our initial efforts. These efforts were made with the professional assistance of a local advertising agency.

- New print and video recruitment materials
- **Foster MA** Facebook Page
- New Mass.gov site with Foster and Adoption information
- Digital advertising campaign including World cup commercials, billboards, etc.
- February 2018 - new online foster parent application
- Fall 2018 - Adopt MA materials
- February 2019 - three additional Foster care recruiters
- May 2019 - Foster MA Connect (Secure interactive social media platform for foster parents)
- May 2019 – new statewide recruitment partnership with Boston Children’s Hospital

By increasing the use of current and emergent technology we will enhance our local reach and respond in a customer friendly and professional manner. With support from the state legislature, we will have been able to expand statewide media recruitment activities. Each time a new Foster MA campaign phase is released traditional, as well as newer advertising methods is utilized to spread our messaging. Our plan will be to continue the utilization of the professionally developed messaging and materials to ensure that a consistent and continuance message is provided to the public.

Partnering with community resources and those with expertise in public communication will allow for the creation of new informational brochures. Current brochures have been updated and posted on our web page. Brochures which provide information on foster care, adoption and kinship care are written in

such a way to be welcoming to all who wish to consider providing a home for either any child or for a member of their extended family.

Massachusetts has activated Recruitment Teams in all of the area offices. With the support of the Foster Care Recruiters, the plan is to continue to encourage our staff to attend team meetings and to help grow the teams in order for there to be a wide range of communities represented at the table in order to broaden our recruitment efforts. DCF makes every effort to keep children in their own communities as they come into placement. This ensures a child's ability to stay connected to family, school and friends. Recruitment plans are developed for each office to target specific goals based on the needs of each of the offices.

Demographics:

Based on the current information available from the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, there were 7,413 individuals (under age 18) in foster family placement on the last day of the 2nd Quarter of FY'2019. Approximately 80% of children in the DCF caseload do not require placement and receive services at home. At the end of the 2nd Quarter of FY'2019, there were 36,598 children less than 18 years of age with an active case status who were not in placement.

2nd Quarter of FY'2019, of those children in placement statewide with DCF:

- 42% were White;
- 30% were Hispanic;
- 14% were Black;
- 10% were Multi-Racial.

The largest age group in foster care was the 12-17 year olds, representing 34% of the children in placement. The age group, 0-2, represents 20% of the children in placement and the 3-5 year olds represent 17% of the children in care.

The Statewide Quarterly Reports are used in order to look at the demographics of children entering care by regions. This report is utilized in order to look at particular geographical areas for recruiting foster and adoptive homes.

Types of Foster/Pre-Adoptive Family Resources: (Policy#2006-01)

- Kinship Family: Kinship Care is the full time nurturing and protection of children in a licensed family setting by relatives or those adults to whom a child and the child's parents and family members ascribe a "family relationship." Kinship families are persons either by blood, marriage or adoption (i.e., adult sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, first cousin) or a significant other adult to whom the child and parent(s) ascribe the role of family based on cultural and affectional ties or individual family values. It is believed that placement with a kinship family reinforces the child's racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious heritage and strengthens and promotes continuity of familial relationships.

*Restricted Resource, Licensed.

Child Specific Family: A non-kinship individual(s) is identified and licensed as a placement for a particular child. (e.g., school teacher comes forward; child recommends a friend's parents).*Restricted Resource, Licensed.

- **Unrestricted Family:** An individual(s) who has been licensed by the Department as a partnership resource to provide foster/pre-adoptive care for a child usually not previously known to the individual(s).

In a DCF data report dated May 2019, DCF had a total of 4,563 foster homes under the Department's direct supervision. Homes are either unrelated/unrestricted or kinship/child specific. All foster and pre-adoptive homes are licensed by DCF. Currently, there are 2,229 kinship/child-specific and 2,334 unrestricted foster homes.

Comprehensive recruitment plan will include:

DCF maintains a full-time statewide Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment Unit that is part of the Foster Care, Adoption and Adolescent Services Division. The duties of which include the planning and implementation of a comprehensive recruitment plan. The toll-free, 1-800-KIDS-508 recruitment line for foster and adoptive inquiries, the management of the contract with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) and the supervision of the Area Office Foster Care Recruitment Ambassadors are housed in this unit. Each Area Office (29) maintains a full-time Family Resource Unit. The duties of which includes the planning and implementation of Area Office recruitment and retention plans for foster families. Each Regional Office (5) maintains a full-time Adoption Development and Licensing Unit that is specific to planning and implementing the Regional Adoption recruitment and retention plan of adoptive families for waiting children with a goal of adoption.

Central Office recruitment staff will continue to provide support to the area and regional offices.

1. The Statewide Recruitment Plan includes a description of the characteristics of foster children served by the agency that includes ages, race, ethnicity, and national origin and will include developmental needs, physical needs and emotional needs.
 - a. Each quarter, statistics for the current year will be extracted that describes the characteristics of children in the custody of DCF who are in foster care or have service plan goal of adoption, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, and culture. The total number of children in custody and the number of children in permanent care will be reported. When the developmental, emotional and physical needs of these children can be extracted from the electronic case management system, they will be included. Currently, the information with regards to the emotional and physical needs of a child can be found in the hardcopy record under evaluations. This information is captured in the child's adoption assessment which is also used when presenting children to perspective pre-adoptive families.
 - b. The racial and ethnic diversity of children waiting for adoption will be compared with the racial and ethnic diversity of approved adoptive families waiting to adopt through DCF will occur when this information becomes available through the electronic case management system.

Example of data collected: 2nd Quarter of FY'2019, Consumers serviced by DCF:

- Consumer population included 45,781 children less than 18 years of age and 48,467 adults 18 years or older.
- 48% of all consumers were identified as female, 52% as male.
- 34% of all children were adolescents

- Statewide Caseloads comprised of 38% White, 33% Hispanic/Latino, 13% Black, 1% Asian, 6% Multi-Racial, less than 1% for both Native American and Pacific Islander.

Recruitment plans each year will be adjusted to reflect the consumer population being served by DCF. Assigned to regional offices, foster care recruiters are responsible for drawing up recruitment plans for each of the area offices. The focus of recruitment will then begin to meet the placement needs of each individual area office.

Each quarterly report collects the demographic data on our foster families. From these reports, we are able to assess whether or not a recruitment campaign has been successful in bringing in specific families to foster our children. Area offices are also able to tell us whether or not we have been successful in approving foster families for specific geographical areas and diverse communities.

2. The Statewide Recruitment Plan includes a description of the characteristics of foster children served by the agency that includes ages, race, ethnicity, and national origin and will include developmental needs, physical needs and emotional needs.
3. Assorted methods of disseminating general information regarding the children served by DCF.
4. Campaigns are developed and implemented to recruit foster and/or adoptive families for the children DCF has in its care and custody. This plan includes but is not limited to participation in community and neighborhood events and activities, the development of recruitment materials, statewide media campaigns, adoption parties, radio and television ads, displays, and special events.

It is through local community events and activities that the public is made aware of the Department's need for foster and adoptive families. DCF will continue its partnerships with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) and with Jordan's Furniture. Our private/public partnership with Jordan's Furniture has enabled the Department to improve the quality and the effectiveness of our recruitment efforts.

Recruitment Events, held annually with our partners:

- Walk/Run for adoption, MARE
- Information Weekend, Adoption & Foster Care, Jordan's
- Summer Mixer @ Assumption College, Adoption, MARE & Jordan's
- Adoption Option, Jordan's & MARE
- National Adoption Day/Weekend, Adoptive Families Parties, MARE & Jordan's

1. Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community as defined by the agency.
 - a. Targeted Recruitment Campaigns will be used to attract families to meet the needs of specific groups of children such as adolescents, minority children, medically fragile or behaviorally challenged, emotionally fragile and sibling groups. This is accomplished through special events, strategically located displays and special campaign events partnering with our sister agencies.

In FY'2017, FY'2018, and FY'2019 we conducted statewide media campaigns. We are currently targeting certain geographical areas of the Commonwealth, those areas needing additional resources. We utilize social media for our ads which has a far-reaching impact on our advertising reach. Over the three campaigns, we have identified certain needs as well: ages, sibling groups,

medically involved children and LGBTQ youth. We will continue to survey our area offices to receive updates on what they view as their greatest needs.

- b.** Child-Specific Recruitment Campaigns are conducted for children who are in the permanent custody of DCF for whom adoption is the plan and a family has not yet been identified. This is accomplished through the production of adoption flyers, announcements of adoption parties, variety of print media, radio, television (Wednesday's Child), youth panels and specials events. All of these are designed to interest prospective adoptive families for waiting children of all races, ages and needs. These activities are conducted in collaboration with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE).
- c.** General Recruitment Campaigns includes all agency staff, current licensed foster parents and experienced foster and adoptive parents to assist in our recruitment efforts. Some of our experienced foster and adoptive parents have taken on the role of "Foster Care and Adoption Parent Family Recruitment Ambassadors." These parents are paid a stipend of \$500.00 per month for 30 hours of general recruitment activity in their communities. Data helps guide the recruitment efforts by allowing the recruitment efforts to become specific to each community. DCF joins with partner agencies to share tables and provide information at established community events. Youth are invited to present to adults preparing to become foster and/or adoptive parents as part of the MAPP panel. MAPP is DCF's pre-service training for all unrestricted foster and adoptive families. Potential families learn about the children and youth in care and also from youth who had been adopted from foster care. Materials are always made available to community and faith-based organizations upon request.
- d.** Child-Specific Recruitment begins as soon as a child becomes known to DCF. At every opportunity, birth parents are asked about and for the names and addresses of extended family members and other significant adults who are important to their child. If a removal of a child from the birth family becomes necessary DCF will have available extended family, fictive kin or other adults who are important to the child to contact for immediate placement and, if necessary, long term permanent planning. We have begun to be in contact with school Superintendent's across the Commonwealth in order to bring attention to those cities and towns that do not have sufficient foster homes to support children remaining in their school.
- e.** Prospective foster parents are recruited on both a local level as well as a statewide level. Prospective adoptive families will be recruited statewide and nationwide, through AdoptUSKids, for the purpose of adopting waiting children.

2. Strategies for assuring that prospective foster parents have access to the application process.

- a.** The recruitment staff in each Area Office and Regional Office is accessible to the community by phone during regular work hours (8:45 – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday). A toll-free number, 1-800-KIDS-508, recruitment line is available to callers at any time. Interested persons may also have face to face contact with recruitment staff in any area or regional office during regular business hours.
- b.** No potential foster and/or adoptive parent applicant is screened out prior to the completion of Section A of our Foster/Adoptive Application. Section A contains the eligibility requirements to apply to become a foster or adoptive parent. Requirements which include: CORI/BRC/SORI checks, an initial home visit which includes a safety assessment. No screening is practiced based on a family's race, ethnicity, national origin, culture, age, handicap, religion, color, creed or geographical location. Recruitment staff provides all

adoption, and from that number those children that are legally freed to be adopted. This includes children matched/not matched with a pre-adoptive family. From the report generated we can separate the children matched and not matched. Area office adoption supervisors and the regional adoption development units keep daily records on these children.

- b.** DCF area offices hold Quarterly Adoption Reviews for all children who have a goal of adoption. The review is held in order to assess the progress being made towards the permanent goal of adoption.
- c.** Foster Care Reviews are held every six months for children in foster care. The progress towards the permanent goal for the child is reviewed at that time. Also, DCF will schedule a Clinical Review Team if concerns regarding policy should arise. The team will review the issue and will attempt to come to a resolution that is in the best interest of the child.
- d.** MARE, Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, recruits homes for children who are not matched with an adoptive family. Adoption social workers can refer children on their caseload who need to be matched. DCF has a monthly report to assist with insuring that children are being referred to as MARE. MARE also worked with AdoptUSKids this year as they utilized their PSA's, tailoring for local use, to recruit for adoptive homes.
- e.** DCF contracts with eleven private agencies who recruit and match children to adoptive families. Quarterly, these agencies and DCF area offices within their regions hold matching meetings in order to bring the homes and the children together, on paper, to see if they can make a match. The second half of these quarterly meetings a training session is held.
- f.** Our partnership with Jordan's Furniture provides us with two significant adoption events. First, Adoption Option, held in the fall each year. This event is open to anyone who wants to learn about adopting children from foster care. This event provides interested persons with the opportunity to receive an overview of the adoption process, opportunity to speak with adoptive parents, and to connect with DCF staff. The second event, Assumption College Mixer, is for families that have been approved as adoptive resources but have not yet been matched with a child. Children freed for adoption are at this event, just having fun, and prospective families are there to receive information and perhaps interact with the children. In addition, smaller adoption recruitment events occur throughout the year.
- g.** By DCF policy kinship placements must be our first consideration when placing a child in foster care. When the initial placement is not with kin DCF begins the search for kin either through interviews with the birth parents, reviewing the record, or requesting a Family Find Search. Once a child is legally free to be adopted DCF again ensures that a thorough search for family has occurred.
- h.** DCF utilizes out-of-state private agency homes in order to eliminate barriers to interjurisdictional placement of children. This allows for matching to occur even when the home is not in Massachusetts. DCF's ICPC unit also partners with our area office adoption social workers to request and oversee the completion of homestudies, in particular kinship homestudies, in order for children to be placed in a timely manner.

- i. DCF provides adoptive families with post-adopt services. These services are provided to adoptive families upon request. Often our adoptive families who have received supportive services become advocates for DCF. They also sometimes come back to DCF to adopt a second or third child.

Massachusetts will continue to explore kin upon a child's need for placement. We will utilize Family Group Conference/Family Find Coordinators to seek out family members not yet known by the Department. Recruitment takes on many roles whether it be child specific, geographic specific or exploring a youth's past relationships in order to find those willing to build a commitment for some type of permanent relationship with the youth. Recruitment will always be needed in order to have quality placements for our children.