



Arizona Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval, Recruitment, and Retention Plan FFY 2020-2024 Plan

Characteristics of Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes

The number of Arizona children in foster care continued to decline during SFY 2019, and the majority live with a kinship caregiver or licensed foster parent. The age and placement type of children in out-of-home care is displayed in the following table. All totals are point-in-time at the end of the data period shown.

Out-Of-Home Foster Care Population (0-17 years old) (by Child)	SFY 15	SFY 16	SFY17	FY18	March 2019
Total 0-17 in Out-of-Home Care	17,264	17,390	15,803	13,689	13,230
Unlicensed (Primarily Kinship)	7,532	7,425	6,473	5,544	5,186
Foster Care	6,685	6,900	6,466	5,783	5,715
Congregate Care - Shelter Care	353	359	235	113	90
Congregate Care - Group Home	1,682	1,886	1,745	1,500	1,465
Congregate Care - Residential Treatment	334	253	382	415	419
Independent Living	3	3	0	0	3
Runaway	309	368	321	278	262
No ID Placement	341	169	153	45	75
Parent Guardian (Trial Home Visit)	25	27	28	11	15
Out-of-Home Population (by Child)	FY 15	FY 16	FY 17	FY18	March 2019
0-12 months	1,467	1,472	1,365	1,152	1,224
1 years	1,598	1,570	1,342	1,187	1,143
2-3 years	2,408	2,510	2,148	1,827	1,797
4-5 years	2,010	2,009	1,823	1,563	1,505
6-8 years	2,968	2,825	2,406	1,988	1,860
9-12 years	2,887	3,088	3,003	2,517	2,364
13-17 years	3,926	3,916	3,716	3,455	3,337
Out-of-Home Foster Care Population (18-20 years old) (by Child) ²	FY 15	FY 16	FY17	FY18	March 2019
Total 18-20 in Out-of-Home Care	817	897	832	827	806
Unlicensed (Primarily Kinship)	26	43	38	38	31
Foster Care	76	79	79	104	94
Congregate Care - Shelter Care	1	0	4	0	0
Congregate Care - Group Home	86	119	133	172	168
Congregate Care - Residential Treatment	88	117	64	43	32
Independent Living	482	492	476	453	461
Runaway	20	13	8	1	6
No ID Placement	36	32	30	11	14
Parent Guardian (Trial Home Visit)	2	2	0	5	0
Out-of-Home Population (by Child)	FY 15	FY 16	FY 17	FY18	March 2019
18-20 years	817	897	832	827	806

Source: Monthly Operational Outcomes Report, May 22, 2019

The Department continues to recruit foster and adoptive families to care for children of all ages, with the most significant need continuing to be for teens, sibling groups, and children who have complex medical needs. The need for foster and adoptive families is estimated utilizing the Exhibit A report and Recruitment Estimator, and these reports are provided monthly to foster licensing agencies statewide. The Exhibit A report includes the number of homes that are in training, have been licensed, are active, and have closed their licenses. This report is used in conjunction with the Recruitment Estimator to project the need for homes in each region of the state. The Recruitment Estimator examines the number of children currently in care by county, age, race, and specialized level of need. As stated directly on the Recruitment Estimator, "The results produced are estimates only, to be used for forecasting and do not guarantee placement of a child in a recruited home. Several assumptions have been made to arrive at the current estimates: (1) the average number of beds per foster home is 2; (2) certain groups are more difficult to place than others and the number of foster homes needed for those have been scaled up¹; (3) due to data limitations, it is assumed that the current foster home placement proportionality will remain constant."

According to the February 2019 Department of Child Safety Recruitment Estimator, it was estimated that during the following twelve months, the Department will need to recruit 873 new homes for teens age 13-17, which includes those in sibling groups and those who have complex medical needs; 522 new homes for sibling groups of all ages; and 565 new homes for children with complex medical needs, including those who receive services through the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). These estimates are designed to ensure that not only does the number of current licensed homes remain balanced by replacing homes that will close their licenses during the year, and that new homes meet the specific needs of children in care.

The Department also utilizes a census reporting form for group homes and shelters to monitor the number and characteristics of children in these congregate care placements. The census reports include information on every child placed in each facility, as well as any information related to special populations in which the facility specializes. The two centralized DCS placement units utilize this information to identify family foster homes for the children. The recently awarded contract for congregate care settings includes an incentive of \$1,000 to the congregate care provider for supporting the youth in transitioning to, and stabilizing in, a less restrictive living arrangement. This incentive is paid once the child has been placed in a less restrictive setting for a minimum of ninety days.

The information provided in the Recruitment Estimator report outlines the need for homes based on many factors, one being race. This helps drive recruitment efforts to provide homes that can reflect the racial makeup of the children in care as well as ensure homes that are culturally aware of the needs of the children. Recruitment campaigns such as *The Greatest Gift* use images of actual children in care, and that specific campaign showed two children of Mexican descent and one child who is a refugee from the Middle East. Additionally, the current recruitment campaign in use by the Department includes a request for Native American families by featuring an image of a woman and young girl wearing traditional jewelry/clothing, with the caption, "Foster Culture." On social media, this image includes the call to action, "Foster a respect for other cultures by keeping Native American youth connected to their heritage while in foster care."

¹ This determination was made understanding preferences of new foster families, the average age of children placed in congregate care, and the growing number of children with special needs or siblings entering custody.

The February 2019 Recruitment Estimator projected a need to recruit 13 Caucasian families, 620 Hispanic families, 231 African American families, 308 Native American families, and 287 families who identify as “other” to meet the needs of children served in foster care.

The following chart provides information related to the race and Hispanic ethnicity of children in out-of-home care, age birth through 17, and of existing foster parents (both the applicant and spouse).

	African American	American Indian	Asian or Pacific Islander	Caucasian	Hispanic	Unknown or other
AZ Foster Parents	9%	1%	1%	54%	19%	16%
AZ Children in OOH Care (birth to 17)	16%	8.5%	1%	34%	33%	8%

Sources: OOH Database 5/11/19 and OLCR Active License Report 5/1/19.

Number of Licensed Foster Homes

In May 2019, Arizona had 4,079 licensed foster homes with a capacity of 9,199 beds. The Department’s bed capacity includes beds for which no child has been matched. The Department has identified that children are often not matched with an available foster home bed because the families are waiting for children with certain characteristics, such as age. New contracts for the licensing agencies will include incentives based on the age and special needs of children being placed in the foster home, rather than payment when the family first becomes licensed. This change will support licensing agencies to provide more hands-on support to families serving a more challenging population. The Department believes this strategy will increase the percentage of children in a family-like setting by incentivizing the placement of children in foster homes versus the licensing of the homes.

The Department’s Office of Licensing and Regulation (OLR) monitors the number of new licenses and closed licenses each month. In SFY 2019, OLR reported an average net reduction of 42 licensed foster homes per month. Of the families who chose to close their licenses in SFY 2019, the majority did so due to adopting a child, relocating out of state, and personal reasons such as divorce, pregnancy, and health concerns. Efforts to retain licensed foster homes have increased, including calling families who have chosen to close their licenses after adopting children to discuss their current needs, as well as future plans to become relicensed. Retention efforts also include appreciation certificates mailed to families who have been licensed for one year, five years, ten years, and 15 years.

Diligent Recruitment Strategies and Activities

The Department continues its long history of active and diligent recruitment, including general recruitment, child-specific recruitment, targeted recruitment, and collaboration with community and faith-based organizations.

Diligent Recruitment efforts continue as a partnership between the Department and contracted agencies. The Department’s current campaign is geared toward recruitment of foster parents using print ads and social

media. Recruitment ads include images of people with captions that use “foster” as a verb, such as “Foster Self-Worth.” This campaign is a continuation of the latest style of recruitment materials, in which the Department provides recruitment materials and advertisements to the contracted agencies for use as their own recruitment tools with their individual agency logo. Agencies continue to have the option to create their own advertisements as well.

DCS compiles data from all inquiries through the campaigns to determine the effectiveness, as well as the cost associated with the recruitment of a family. This data helps the Department focus future formats based on those recruitment campaigns with successful track records. For example, a previous campaign entitled *the Greatest Gift* generated just over 200 leads. “Professionals” were the most responsive, with 104,300 impressions, or views of the ads, and 180 clicks on the ads. This is a 0.17% click through rate (CTR). Per the DCS contracted marketing agency, 0.08% is the average CTR for advertisements.

The Department continues to partner with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Fieldprint for fingerprinting services. With more than 32 printing locations statewide, prospective foster and adoptive parents are much more able to find a convenient location. In addition, nearly all Fieldprint locations use live-scan and the prints are electronically transmitted to the FBI and DPS. This continues to expedite the processing time. Previous methods took up to six weeks to issue the cards, while the current method takes between three and five days.

Policies that Limit, Ban, or Restrict the Recruiting of Diverse Foster and Adoptive Families

The Department has no bans, restrictions, or limitations related to licensing of foster or adoptive families based on race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. The Department recognizes that children enter foster care with their own cultural backgrounds, which influences their behavior, beliefs, and world views. Because children benefit when foster parents respect and are supportive of their cultural differences, the Department has developed a well-rounded approach to recruit foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed. Other foster home recruitment campaigns have been completed through contracted agencies, under the approval and supervision of DCS. Some examples of approved activities to promote diversity among foster families include:

- multiple agencies set up booths to recruit LGBTQ families during various Pride celebrations across the state;
- a Baptist agency in Maricopa County created bookmarks featuring photos of children from the Children’s Heart Gallery as well as next steps for individuals who are interested in fostering/adopting, and these bookmarks were provided to Baptist churches across the state to hand out to their parishioners; and
- many recruitment agencies specialize in cultures or communities that families find relatable to their needs.

The Department and agencies contracted by the Department to conduct recruitment and licensing have non-discriminatory fee structures. Any fees or procedures related to the foster and adoptive processes are the same for all families. There are no differences based on race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

FFY 2020-2024 Goal: Increase the percentage of foster children in a family-like setting

Goal Measure: 85% or more of all children age 0 to 17 in out-of-home care will be placed in a family foster home, which includes relative/kin placements and licensed foster homes.

Current Data: As of March 31, 2019, 82% of all children age 0 to 17 in out-of-home care were placed in a family foster home, which includes relative/kin placements and licensed foster homes (Source: Monthly Operational Outcomes Report, May 22, 2019).

To achieve this goal, the Department will use a multi-pronged approach that includes recruiting new family foster homes, while at the same time improving family foster home retention.

The Department has developed a new contract for the licensing agencies that is expected to be issued in the summer of 2019. This contract has been developed with the intention of providing better collaborative relationships between the multiple entities involved in foster care. Foster families will receive a higher level support from their agency when they foster children with higher levels of need or are believed to be a more difficult population to place, such as teenagers and medically fragile children. Agencies will also be expected to work closely with the Department on barriers to success for children and foster families but attending meetings and setting appropriate expectations for families.

DCS believes that family-based care is generally the most appropriate and healthy setting for children who cannot remain safely in their homes of origin. In these circumstances, family-based care is achieved through recruiting, retaining, and enhancing the knowledge and skills of kinship, foster, and adoptive families, prior to, during, and post child placement.

Arizona's foster care population and the capacity of licensed foster families continue to evolve as the trends of children entering and exiting care change. This requires continued maintenance and enhancement as the needs of the children in care evolve. The Department's goal is to continue improving the supports required to stabilize foster care living arrangements and assist foster families in navigating the child welfare system while caring for children placed in their homes.

The Department wishes to collaborate with all vested parties to facilitate the ability of foster/adoptive parents to provide care based on the specific needs of each child, to provide additional support services, to promote reunification and permanency, and to achieve placement stability.

Recruitment Objective 1: Use foster and adoptive family input and an expansive array of best practices to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families.

The following recruitment and retention strategies will be implemented or continue during FFYs 2020-2024.

- 1.1. Ensure effective and appropriate communication statewide with agencies that support foster and adoptive families, as well as directly with the families to establish collaborative partnerships and successful outcomes.***

The DCS Foster Recruitment and Retention Specialist will complete outreach with agencies and families. The Specialist attends AZ Kids Consortium (KIDS), Foster Adoptive Council of Tucson (FACT), and Foster Care Adoption Northern AZ (FAN) consortium meetings to communicate with

the agencies directly about both the Department and agencies' updates and needs. The Specialist uses these meetings as opportunities to address concerns and to ensure that the agencies have a channel to have their needs and the needs of the licensed families heard. The Specialist will communicate directly with families who are in need of assistance, including families who are experiencing challenges with the licensing process, families who have taken in children and need help with locating and utilizing services, and families who are on the verge of disruption and need support. The Department believes that this outreach and assistance will mitigate disruptions and license closure. In the upcoming five-year period, the Foster Support Team will develop and track the information received from these interactions, and create strategies to better serve foster parents and ensure that foster families have positive experiences with the Department and contracted agencies.

Kinship providers, licensed foster parents, community resource providers, and others will continue to have the option to call a toll free line, the DCS Warm Line, which is staffed by a member of the Department who can answer or research their inquiries. The Warm Line receives around 200 calls per week, with need ranging from families who need assistance with completing forms, to families who are applying to receive the Kinship Stipend. Calls to this line are answered Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, and all voicemails are responded to the next working day. DCS responds to 100% of the voicemails that are left outside of business hours.

1.2. Increase the effectiveness of the online orientation, increase viewership, and develop a methodology to better nurture leads so that more families complete the licensure process.

The Department has developed and fully implemented an online orientation for prospective foster, kinship, and adoptive parents via collaboration with contract agencies throughout the state. This online orientation is comprised of five videos featuring a foster and adoptive parent, launched on March 15, 2018, and will continue to be utilized. In the first month of offering the online orientation, the first video of the series received more than 1,000 views, substantially surpassing the 401 people who attended an in-person orientation during the same period. Current monthly average viewership for SFY19 includes 228 people watching all five videos in English, and 14 people watching all five videos with Spanish subtitles. The goals of the on-line orientation curriculum are to provide consistent information throughout the state and strengthen the relationship between the Department and foster parents. The online orientation is available to families as soon as their interest in foster or adoption begins – they do not have to wait for the next available in-person session in their community. In addition, the on-line orientation provides rural communities more immediate and convenient access to information about the Department and foster parenting.

The Spanish version of the online orientation (videos with subtitles) debuted on the Department's website in late April 2018, and will continue to be available. Handout documents are also available in Spanish. The Department's website can be easily translated into Spanish using an embedded Google translate tool. The Spanish version of the videos was improved in October 2018, and they are now a playlist on YouTube, which allows the viewers to more easily watch the videos.

The Department will utilize feedback received from the implementation of the online orientation to modify the site and enhance viewership. Some suggestions have included making the series streamlined into one video, or only requiring specific segments of the current series of videos based on the family's goal. Another goal is to utilize graphics and technology to make the experience more interactive.

After watching the videos, viewers are prompted to complete an online inquiry for more information. During 2018, this inquiry form led to 6,600 emails and 1,163 phone calls. Two dedicated Department staff respond to the inquiries to help prospective foster families learn more about the licensure process, including providing information about local licensing agencies and an overview of steps required to become licensed.

Per the monthly Exhibit A pipeline chart, 11.6% of inquiries in SFY 2019 resulted in the person or family becoming a licensed foster home. The Department will explore the development of a system to increase the number of inquiries and nurture the leads along the pathway to licensure. This will include data on from where the lead was generated to determine the effectiveness of campaigns and licensing agencies collaboration with the Department.

The DCS Foster and Adoption Recruitment team has begun new tactics to nurture the leads that come in through email and phone calls. Formerly, the online inquiry form resulted in a response email; now the lead results in the email and a phone call from a DCS staff member who can answer questions and assist with navigation of agency selection. Additionally, a new matrix will be added to the DCS website in the fall of 2019, which will include detailed information on each licensing agency's characteristics, such as "serves Spanish speaking families," "licenses families for respite only beds," and "faith-based agency." This matrix will provide families with the ability to learn more about the agencies and select one that best meets their needs. The Department has created a unique landing page for Spanish speaking families to be able to learn more and inquire about foster care. Many of the Department's contracted licensing agencies work with specific demographics to meet cultural needs and representation of children in care. Another plan for nurturing the leads is to monitor response times from DCS staff who respond to inquirers, and from agencies once inquirers have reached out to them. This will contribute to identifying a standard response timeframe that will be deployed based on the collected data.

1.3. Increase family-like placements for older youth and sibling groups, including recruitment of new families as well as building the capacity of existing foster families.

The Department will continue to use a marketing firm to develop campaigns that address the needs identified in the Recruitment Estimator. The Department will study the success of each campaign and determine the most appropriate direction for future campaigns. For example, based on studies conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Department decided to add a referral incentive during the teen focused campaign, *Foster a Future*, which is running over the summer of 2019. Data will be analyzed to determine if the incentive was successful, and a determination will be made related to the continuation of the incentive in future campaigns.

The most recent Recruitment Estimator calculation indicates that 873 new homes will need to be recruited for teens during the twelve-month period and 522 homes will need to be recruited for sibling groups. The Department's marketing campaigns have shown older youth, including the *Change Two Lives* and *Foster a Future* campaigns. Sibling groups have been featured in ads for the *Foster a Future* Campaign, and children who are part of sibling groups were used in *The Greatest Gift* campaign. Moving forward, the Department plans to continue to focus marketing campaigns on the recruitment for homes for older youth and sibling groups. Incentives have been written into the newest contracts for foster licensing agencies, providing increased funding for homes licensed for older youth and higher needs children. Per the new contract, the families who care for older youth, sibling groups, and higher needs children will also have increased support from their licensing agencies.

The Recruitment Estimator indicates 308 new homes with a Native American parent will need to be recruited, as Native Americans make up 9% of the current population of children in care, but only 2% of the available homes. Over the next five years, the Department will increase available American Indian homes in order to arrange care for children according to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) placement preferences. In the *Foster a Future* campaign, an image was used of a Native American woman and child wearing traditional jewelry, with the caption, "Foster Culture." In the month following the release of this image, three Native American homes inquired regarding becoming licensed to foster. Typical inquiries from this population averages less than one per month. The Department will continue to use Native American specific images in marketing campaigns and create a unique landing page for Native American campaigns to better track the success rate. Additionally, the Department will work with professionals specializing in the ICWA to ensure cultural competency in the marketing campaigns and increase the number of ICWA families expressing an interest in foster care and ultimately becoming licensed.

The Department also selects specific images that represent the demographics of children in care, as well as images of adults that potential foster parents can identify with, to promote transracial foster homes. The Department has collaborated with Harvest of Hope, an African American organization focused on identifying African American homes for African American youth.

The Department has a goal to recruit more foster families with an increased understanding that the children they foster are likely to return to their biological families, as the Department understands the importance of foster families working positively with biological families for the betterment of the children. Also, the Department will better highlight the successes presented at Reunification Day, an annual event that occurs in Maricopa each June, which Governor Doug Ducey designated "Family Reunification Month." In the *Foster a Future* campaign, an image was created with a woman and child in a tearful embrace, with the caption, "Foster Reunification." Interviews may be held with biological families who have reunified, and foster families who cared for the child and supported the child's reunification, to create more awareness on the positive outcomes. The Department will begin this process by creating materials or guides to help both foster families and biological families engage in the implementation of shared parenting.

Included in the new licensing agency contracts is a requirement to complete a Family Support Plan. DCS created a template for the Family Support Plan, which is completed by the licensing specialist in conjunction with the family. This plan is a guide to promote conversations between families and

their teams to assess strengths and needs, and for the teams to assist families with developing their skills to enable them to best meet the needs of the children in foster care in Arizona. The plan will be completed before a child is placed into the home, to ensure that the family has the skills necessary to provide a safe and supportive home for the child matched to the home. The plan was designed to include children currently living in the home as well, to help prepare for the successes and challenges of having a new child added to the family.

1.4. *Explore ways to retain licensed foster families through increased partnership with licensing agencies and by working directly with the foster families to provide supports and services.*

The Department plans to work with licensing agencies to improve the Arizona Families Thrive conferences hosted by the Department. At this time, the Department hosts three conferences each year with help from AZ 1.27 and the #LoveUp Foundation. The Department will continue to grow these partnerships to ensure success and growth of AZ Families Thrive. The Department will work with agencies to promote the events, leading to increased attendance and a better understanding of the families' learning interests. Another goal will be to tailor the events to ensure that more foster families are given trainings to assist in mitigating disruptions and preventing license closures. The Department intends to utilize information from Family Support Plans to give direction as to the best topics for keynote speakers and workshops.

The Department will utilize information learned from Retention Specialist outreach to better serve foster families and give them guidance through the complex child welfare system.

The DCS Recruitment Specialist will continue to partner with community organizations such as Foster & Adoption of Northern AZ (FAN), KIDS Consortium, and Foster Adoption Council of Tucson (FACT) to discuss and implement strategies to retain and support foster families. Information from the Recruitment Estimator is communicated quarterly via the DCS Recruitment Specialist, Recruitment Program Administrator, and/or Recruitment Supervisor attending the meetings of these agencies, and includes information related to the reasons for closed licenses.

The Department will implement Active Contract Management techniques with the new contracts awarded during the five year plan period. The techniques will include monitoring activities of the contracted agency by the Office of Licensing and Regulation, and quarterly reporting and performance measures, which will include child placement stability and ensuring that family's needs are supported and documented through the Family Support Plan.

1.5. *Provide support and assistance to maintain children in kinship care; recognizing and enhancing the support available to kinship families.*

The Department is continuing active efforts to support kinship foster caregivers so children placed in their care can thrive. The Department is also enhancing efforts to inform kinship foster caregivers about the option of becoming licensed as foster parents. Through licensure, kinship caregivers will be able to receive a monthly foster care payment to help offset some of the expenses of providing out-of-home care for one or more of their kin. Licensed kinship caregivers also receive the ongoing support of a contracted Licensing Specialist who visits the home at least quarterly and arranges supports such as respite and mentors. Of the 3,586 active kinship foster care providers, 467 were licensed, 1,529 are receiving the monthly kinship stipend of \$75 per child, and

1,590 were neither licensed nor receiving the stipend (Source: DCS Kinship Stipend huddle chart 5/11/19). The number of kinship foster care providers receiving the stipend will increase as of July 1, 2019, due to new legislation passed during SFY 2019 that allows the kinship stipend to be provided to all kin providers, regardless of the income of the kinship caregiver.

The Department employs six Kinship Liaisons who are housed in Maricopa and Pima Counties. The Kinship Liaisons meet with kinship families upon placement of the children, and work to connect the families to resources that help families with items such as clothes, safety items for the children, and bedroom items including cribs and mattresses. The liaisons also connect families with community support groups that can assist them in their child welfare experience. In addition, the liaisons explain the Department, legal, and behavioral health systems, and make efforts to stabilize living arrangements to avoid changes .

The Department partners with Arizona’s Children Association (AZCA) to employ three Kinship Navigators for families. The Kinship Navigators engage in similar ways as the DCS Kinship Liaisons; however, the navigators focus on families served through three Maricopa County DCS offices with high rates of kinship placements. As the Department studies the outcomes from this pilot, determinations will be made as to the effectiveness and need for the continuation of the program.

1.6. *Continue to utilize the Children's Heart Gallery to increase permanent connections for children.*

The Children’s Heart Gallery includes a website, mobile display, and other recruitment strategies that feature children in Arizona’s foster care system who are awaiting a permanent adoptive home. Child who are to be added to the gallery attend a photoshoot event along with many community volunteers, including photographers, hairstylists, and others, who support the children by providing makeovers and professional photos to be displayed through the gallery. The Department understands that families and individuals who are certified to adopt have varying preferences, including the child’s age and gender. Active efforts will be made to specifically invite families who are on the Adoption Registry to be guides to children at the gallery events that meet their desired preferences. By attending a Children’s Heart Gallery photoshoot, families and individuals will be given an opportunity to get to know a wide variety of children, and perhaps expand their preferences. This allows volunteers and children to meet in a lower stress setting with the hopes that a connection can be made or that the volunteers know of someone else who may be interested in adopting the child. The Department offers certified families and individuals who volunteer at a Children’s Heart Gallery photo shoot two hours of training credit to be applied to the hours required for license renewal.

The Department recently redesigned the Children’s Heart Gallery Website. The website is more interactive and provides families and community members with many ways to engage in the Heart Gallery. The Department will strive to increase people’s interest in volunteering at Heart Gallery events to create more opportunities and awareness. This will allow for children and families to meet in natural settings, without pressure, and provides an opportunity for children to highlight their strengths. The April 2019 photoshoot included 61 children, the largest population since its inception. The Department plans to increase the number of children in attendance, as well as the

number of certified families signed up to guide children through the day.

Staff responsible for maintaining the Adoption Registry continue to look for ways to streamline and otherwise improve the process of inputting certified families into the online registry, and are examining how families are accessed from the Registry for adoption staffings statewide. This will help ensure all known families wishing to adopt a child are invited to Children's Heart Gallery events.

1.7. *Increase specialized recruitment for children whose characteristics create challenges to permanency*

The Department contracts with three agencies to conduct Child Specific Recruitment (CSR) services. CSR contracts are being redeveloped with a goal of utilizing new practices to locate family or kin placements for children in care. In addition, a Phoenix contractor is the recipient of a Wendy's Wonderful Recruiter grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. The grant is used to fund two recruiters at the community agency.

The Department has begun a collaboration with Voices for CASA to fund a CSR position in the Foster and Adoptions Recruitment team within the Department. This position is scheduled to begin in July 2019, and will focus solely on recruitment for children who meet the following characteristics: in DCS care for 18 months or longer, involved in the CASA program, no identified permanent placement, and legally free for adoption. Goals of this grant funded position include finding permanent connections and/or adoptive homes for children.

The Department plans to focus specifically on recruitment of homes for children who are age ten and under, have a permanency goal of adoption, and are currently living in congregate care. Actions to be taken include:

- examining barriers to placement, such as therapeutic recommendations related to the timing of placement in a family-like setting, and the creation of plans with the child's team to mitigate these barriers;
- improving communication with field staff about services available to locate family and kin placements for children, such as Seneca searches; and
- the creation of a system within the Department to improve work with families who inquire about becoming licensed or certified.

1.8. *Continue active partnerships with faith-based and community organizations.*

Arizona continues to partner with many faith-based and community organizations across the state to support children in out-of-home care and their foster care providers. The DCS Community Liaison & Volunteer Program Manager works to create and highlight partnerships with the community. The Department frequently posts on various forms of social media to give appreciation to the community partners and volunteers who give their time, efforts, tangible items, financial support, etc., to create positive outcomes for children in care. The Department will continue to work with these community providers to ensure that children in care have access to a variety of

groups that can support their interests and help them grow during their foster care experience. These partnerships will also benefit foster families, kinship families, and biological families in meeting their goals and assisting them in meeting the needs of the children in their care.

1.9. Develop cross-jurisdictional relationships to increase permanent connections for children.

The Department continues to utilize [AdoptUSKids.org](https://www.adoptuskids.org) to connect children with prospective adoptive parents cross-jurisdictionally. Though contract agencies are responsible for adding children to AdoptUSKids.org, in 2019 the Department increased its follow up with the agencies to ensure that information on all children featured on the site was up to date and correct. Photos taken at the Children's Heart Gallery photoshoots are available for the agencies to use when adding a child to AdoptUSKids.org. All inquiries on children featured on the website are responded to by staff within the Department.

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) Unit is currently implementing a new system, the National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE). This national electronic system allows documents related to ICPC cases to be uploaded and available for the receiving state to view in as little as an hour. According to the Final Evaluation Report of NEICE prepared for the American Public Humane Services Association, when both the sending and receiving state use NEICE, the length of time from the beginning of the ICPC process to the receipt of the 100A packet decreased by approximately 45%.

Adoption Promotion funds continue to be available statewide to encourage and promote cross-jurisdictional adoptive placements. These funds can be used to cover unexpected costs that do not qualify as non-recurring adoption expenses. These funds facilitate visitations prior to placement and are used to assist prospective parents and children to build their relationship, ensuring the appropriateness of the placement prior to the finalization of an adoption. The funds are also used for visits with siblings and relatives living out of state or in other regions of Arizona.