



Analysis of State **2020-2024** Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plans



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAMPS thanks the state child welfare agencies that provided their 2020-2024 Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plans for this report. We also thank Dennis Blazey, Rob Geen, Denise Goodman and Alicia Groh for their helpful suggestions and comments. We also thank CHAMPS co-chairs, Jeremy Kohomban of Children’s Village and Jennifer Rodriguez of Youth Law Center, for reviewing this report and for their many contributions to CHAMPS. Steve Christian researched and wrote this report, with significant contributions from Hope Cooper and Lynn Tiede. CHAMPS is deeply grateful to the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, the Aviv Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation for supporting the development of this report and for their generous support of the CHAMPS campaign.



I. INTRODUCTION

Federal law requires states to have five-year plans that “provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.”¹ Guidance from the Children’s Bureau requires these Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plans to include data on the characteristics of children in foster care and to describe strategies and procedures for community outreach, dissemination of information, staff training, and access to licensing agencies, among other things.²

For this report, CHAMPS reviewed and analyzed 42 state Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plans covering FYs 2020-2024,³ which have been uploaded to the CHAMPS website: www.fosteringchamps.org and are available in Appendix A. CHAMPS, a policy campaign focused on promoting high quality foster parenting, is dedicated to elevating effective foster and kinship family recruitment and retention policies and practices. CHAMPS develops and disseminates a wide range of communications and policy tools to assist agency leaders and policymakers who are seeking to strengthen foster parenting policy. This report contributes to the collection of CHAMPS resources designed to help public and private agencies and their community partners implement one or more of the six reforms promoted in the CHAMPS Policy Playbook. In particular, this report has several purposes:

- 1. To acknowledge state and local child welfare leaders for their efforts to recruit and retain foster parents in a time of critical need;**
- 2. To promote innovative approaches that state and local child welfare leaders may be interested in replicating; and**
- 3. To recommend improvements to federal oversight in this important but often overlooked policy area.**

¹ Section 422(b)(7) of the Social Security Act.

² ACYF-CB-PI-19-02. State Diligent Recruitment Plans are also required to address recruitment issues raised in the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs). In its report on results of the first three years of Round 3 of the CFSRs (2015-2017), the Children’s Bureau found that only 12 out of 38 states received a Strength rating for Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes. Among the issues noted in the reviews were lack of a statewide recruitment plan and lack of staff to recruit and license new foster parents. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/cfsr-aggregate-report-2015-2017>.

³ Four states, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon and Texas, informed us that their plans were not yet public. Delaware, the District of Columbia, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and South Carolina did not respond to requests for their plans.

ABOUT CHAMPS

CHAMPS, which stands for Children Need Amazing Parents, is a policy campaign focused at the state and federal levels on promoting high quality foster parenting. It is based on the understanding that all children need and do best in families. Children in foster care benefit from safe, stable, nurturing relationships with their foster caregivers in order to heal and grow. The initial trauma of a child's removal from home is too often compounded by frequent moves in care, which can have a significant negative impact on children's well-being. Thus, placement stability should be a central focus of every foster care system. Placement stability, in turn, is directly affected by how well a child welfare agency recruits and retains a sufficient pool of foster parents who have the skills, temperament and supports necessary to care for children who have experienced abuse and neglect and can help the child maintain healthy connections to family. More information about CHAMPS and its policy goals is available at www.fosteringchamps.org

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

For this report, CHAMPS did not attempt to assess states' compliance with federal requirements but instead analyzed state plans based on six "drivers" of effective foster parent recruitment and retention featured in the **CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention** published in April 2019. The six drivers are **Child-Centered, Data-Driven, Leadership, Collaboration and Transparency, Youth and Parent Voice** and **Sustainability**. We discuss these drivers in more detail later in the report.

The state Diligent Recruitment Plans reviewed varied widely in terms of substance and detail. A few states took a more comprehensive approach than that required by the Children's Bureau and used the development of their plans as an opportunity to assess all aspects of their recruitment and retention programs, identify strengths and areas needing improvement, and create action plans with goals, objectives, strategies and timelines. These states' plans reflected a collaborative process involving formation of intra-agency teams and consultation with foster parents, youth, community stakeholders and technical assistance providers. Many states, however, limited their plans to a description of activities outlined in federal guidance.

In summary, we found the following:

- Although state plans were **child-centered** in identifying the characteristics of children and youth for whom foster families are needed, many of the plans contained lists of generic recruitment activities that do not appear to be aligned with or responsive to identified needs.

- State plans also described extensive **collaboration** with a broad array of partners and stakeholders to recruit and retain foster families, including faith-based organizations, foster and adoptive parent associations, universities, tribal agencies, community groups and foster and adoptive families.
- Many plans reflected the importance of **youth and parent voice** in foster parent recruitment and retention. These plans recognize that foster parents and youth with lived experience in foster care have important roles to play in recruitment, training, program development and peer support.
- While all plans included some **data** on children in care, most plans did not address the critical need for better data on the current pool of foster families and the effectiveness of current recruitment, screening and licensing processes. Also lacking in many plans were measurable, data-driven recruitment and retention goals and objectives.
- With a few exceptions noted in the report, most plans lacked evidence that high-level **leadership** within and across agencies were engaged in support of foster parent recruitment and retention. Similarly, only a few plans included a comprehensive approach to creation of a **sustainable** agency-wide recruitment and retention infrastructure. States that made use of technical assistance resources developed by national organizations such as the former National Resource Center on Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids tended to have more thoughtful, comprehensive plans.

FEATURED PLANS

In addition to our analysis of state plans based on the six drivers, we selected four state plans to summarize in more detail in [Appendix B](#). Plans from New Mexico, North Carolina and Vermont exemplify a collaborative approach to plan development. North Carolina's plan also seeks to balance a statewide vision with local flexibility in a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system. New Jersey's plan features recruitment and retention strategies tailored to meet the needs of specific populations of children.

A few of this report's limitations should be noted. Many states require counties, administrative regions and private contract agencies to develop their own diligent recruitment plans, which we did not review. Second, our review was limited to the plans themselves, which may or may not accurately reflect plan implementation or actual performance in recruiting and retaining foster parents. Finally, although the plans are required to address recruitment of both foster and adoptive parents, our review focused on recruitment and retention of foster families.

A NOTE ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

At the time of this report's publication, the nation's child welfare agencies are facing unprecedented challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic. States prepared their diligent recruitment plans for submission in June 2019, well before the imposition of social distancing and stay-at-home orders intended to slow the spread of the virus. Therefore, the plans do not reflect how states are adapting their recruitment and retention strategies to meet these new challenges. Anecdotal evidence suggests that agencies are making greater use of social media and other online resources to recruit, screen, train and support foster families. Some states are also providing enhanced financial support to foster families. CHAMPS is committed to supporting foster families and the child welfare field throughout this crisis and has collaborated with other advocacy organizations to create www.childwelfarecovid.org, a clearinghouse for information, news and other resources on the pandemic.

III. ANALYSIS OF STATE DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLANS

As stated above, CHAMPS analyzed state plans using the six drivers of effective recruitment and retention described in the 2019 [CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention](#). These drivers reflect best practice and are based on recommendations from child welfare experts, agency leaders, advocates and researchers. CHAMPS recognizes that states may not have considered these drivers when they wrote their plans as they are not required to do so. However, we suggest that states keep these drivers in mind as they update and refine their plans moving forward.

DRIVER 1: CHILD CENTERED

A child-centered approach to foster parent recruitment and retention puts the needs of children and families at the center of decision making and means policies, programs and practices are focused on helping each individual child heal and grow. It is based on the understanding of trauma, healthy child development and that quality parenting is foundational to achieving positive outcomes for children.. The goals of a child-centered recruitment and retention program include the following:

- Agencies should ensure that foster parents receive needed practical and emotional support from trusted staff and peers. Research has shown that support is associated with improved foster parent retention and fewer placement disruptions;
- Children should be placed with relatives whenever possible. Research has established that, overall, children in foster care experience more stability and better outcomes when they are placed with relative caregivers;

- Foster parents should be identified and recruited in the communities where children live. Keeping children in their home communities allows them to stay in their neighborhood schools, maintains community connections and promotes educational success, among other things;
- Child welfare agencies should have an adequate supply of foster families able to accommodate sibling groups. Sibling bonds are critically important for many children in foster care;
- Agencies should seek to recruit foster parents willing and able to form supportive, child-centered relationships with birth parents in order to mitigate the trauma experienced by children who are removed from home, provide birth parents with parenting support and facilitate successful reunification;
- Foster families should have access to needed physical and behavioral health services for the children in their care, many of whom have experienced significant trauma and have complex health care needs. Access to these services lessens the likelihood of placement disruption due to challenging behaviors.

Overall, the state plans we reviewed reflected an understanding of the characteristics of children for whom foster families are needed. Although all plans contained lists of strategies to raise awareness of the need for foster families, in many cases these strategies were generic and did not appear to be tailored to meet the needs of specific populations of children and youth needing foster homes, based on states' own data.

Highlighted below are strong examples of child-centered strategies described in state plans, including changing messaging and training to emphasize reunification, establishment of child-centered goals, trauma-informed pre-service training, use of a one-caseworker model, participation in the Quality Parenting Initiative, and ongoing family-finding.

STATE PLAN EXAMPLES

- State plans from **Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada** and **Tennessee** included recruitment and training of foster parents able to work with birth parents to facilitate reunification.
 - **Arizona** will highlight successful reunifications in its recruitment campaign and plans to create materials to help birth and foster families engage in implementation of shared parenting.
 - **Georgia** is implementing Partnership Parenting, a trauma-informed parenting model designed to allow parents to continue parenting while their children are in care. Recruitment of a pool of "Partnership Parents" who can mentor birth parents includes grassroots outreach, relationship building, and community education. "Resource Parents" also mentor birth parents but are ready to adopt a child if reunification efforts fail.
 - **Clark County, Nevada** has changed its messaging to both current and prospective foster parents to emphasize support for reunification. Families that are interested in adoption are referred to the adoption unit.
- **Arizona's** new contracts with private agencies include financial incentives for recruitment of families based on age and special needs of children needing homes. The contracts also call for a higher level of support to caregivers. The contract for congregate care includes a financial incentive of \$1,000 for each youth's successful transition to a less restrictive placement.
- Some state plans identified the need to recruit families for LGBTQ youth. **Alabama, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Montana, New Jersey** and **Washington** included in their plans outreach to the LGBTQ community to raise awareness and recruit foster parents. **Alabama, Alaska,**

ARIZONA will highlight successful reunifications in its recruitment campaign and plans to create materials to help birth and foster families engage in implementation of shared parenting.

Hawaii, Maryland and **Utah** will include information on the needs of LGBTQ youth in staff and foster parent training. **Montana** described an assessment process specific to families that anticipate parenting LGBTQ youth.

■ Some states committed in their plans to clearly defined child-centered goals:

- **Hawaii's** plan is that 25 percent of foster homes will be able to care for teens.
- **Missouri** established a goal that 50 percent or more of children entering care will be placed with relatives. It created a Relative First Program Development Specialist position in the central office and is piloting a relative therapeutic foster care program.
- **Nebraska's** goal is to place 75 percent of children with relatives and that 65 percent will be placed within their school districts.
- **New Jersey** established the goal that 80 percent of sibling groups will be placed together. Its plan features an initiative called Siblings in Best Settings (SIBS), aimed at increasing capacity for sibling groups through enhanced board rates and retainer fees for vacant beds. The state is also working to increase placement of adolescents in kin care by 30 percent and to increase non-kin capacity for adolescents by 15 percent.
- **New Mexico's** goal is to have at least two placement options for each child removed from home.

■ **Illinois** and **Oklahoma** noted in their plans that they have been selected to participate as pilot sites in the National Training and Development Curriculum for Foster and Adoptive Parents grant program, a five-year project to develop a state-of-the-art training program to prepare foster and adoptive parents to care for children exposed to trauma.⁴ Intended outcomes include improved placement stability, improved permanency rates and enhanced child and family well-being.

■ **Iowa** requires its Recruitment, Retention, Training and Support (RRTS) contractors to use the One Caseworker Model, in which the same caseworker is assigned to a resource family throughout the recruitment and retention process, from licensing, training, matching and support on to end of service. Caseworkers become familiar with their foster families and so are able to arrange suitable placement matches to keep sibling groups together and allow children to stay in their home neighborhoods. Caseworkers also provide individualized training and support, which includes crisis intervention and coordination of service provision. The plan states that the model has improved foster parent retention.

■ **Louisiana, Florida, Nevada** and **Wisconsin** highlighted their implementation of the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), an approach to strengthen and rebrand foster care, emphasizing the importance of excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system. More information on QPI can be found at www.qpi4kids.org.

■ **Massachusetts** is piloting an intensive family-finding program in 10 area offices.

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⁴ <http://ntdcportal.org>. The other participating jurisdictions are Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

- **Michigan's** plan referred to a pilot program to test enhanced mentoring of foster parents who accept children with complex needs, especially those returning from congregate care.
- **Pennsylvania's** plan references a state law that requires family-finding be conducted for a child when a case is first opened (as opposed to when the child is removed from home). The Statewide Adoption Network (SWAN) Legal Services Initiative has placed paralegals in 66 of the state's 67 counties to conduct diligent searches for family members who may be available as placement resources.
- **Vermont's** plan describes a practice change that embeds family-finding into practice throughout the life of a case. It also expresses the intention to develop a cadre of skilled caregivers and to stop placing children based mainly on home availability.

DRIVER 2: DATA-DRIVEN

Strengthening foster care systems to meet increased demand for quality foster parenting starts with and builds on combining data on children in care with data on the current pool of foster families to determine system capacity, resource gaps, recruitment needs and effectiveness of recruitment strategies. Data are also needed to make better matches between children and families and to gain a better understanding of the experience of foster parents from initial inquiry to end of service, to identify the factors that lead families to drop out of the approval process or to quit fostering.

While Diligent Recruitment Plans are expected to include data on the characteristics of children in need of foster homes, there is no requirement to include data on the characteristics of foster families. The limited data on foster families that states are required to collect are primarily intended to support claims for title IV-E federal financial participation and include information about placement licensing/approval, background checks and foster parent training, although a recent **Information Memorandum** from the Children's Bureau discusses how states can better use child welfare data to support recruitment, approval and retention of foster homes.⁵

Given the foregoing, it is not surprising that most state Diligent Recruitment Plans included data on children in care, but relatively little data on foster families. Some state plans described in general terms processes to analyze data on foster and adoptive resources but did not provide specifics about the data elements collected or how they were analyzed. Only a relative handful of states appeared to use data to establish recruitment and retention goals and targets. States that made use of technical assistance resources, such as the Diligent Recruitment Navigator or the Family Intake Tracking Tool created by AdoptUSKids, tended to have more data-driven plans.

In this section, we highlight a number of data-driven strategies, including use of technical assistance tools, creation of local data profiles and recruitment plan templates, performance-based contracting, and geo-mapping.

STATE PLAN EXAMPLES

- **Arizona** used a Recruitment Estimator to develop precise estimates of the number of foster families needed, categorized by characteristics of children needing families and race of caregivers.

⁵ ACYF-CB-IM-20-03

- The **Georgia** Division of Family and Children’s Services (DFCS) collects and analyzes data on children in care and foster/adoptive resources from a number of different sources, including GA SHINES, GA+SCORE, the Fostering GA inquiry line database and foster parent exit surveys. Georgia’s Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit develops data profiles that DFCS regions use to develop annual reports on placement resources, retention data and projected needs. Regions submit quarterly reports on recruitment and retention progress, which the state agency uses to annually update its recruitment and retention plan. The state’s goal is to use data more effectively in recruitment and retention and to provide technical assistance to counties.
- **Iowa** uses performance-based contracts with two private agencies for recruitment, retention, training and support (RRTS). Performance measures are Placement Stability; Recruitment/Retention (overall net increase in families); Recruitment/Retention (increase in non-white families); and Enhanced Foster Homes. The state Department of Human Services provides data to contractors to determine recruitment goals and targets based on the age, race and ethnicity of every child who enters and exits foster care each week. Contractors use a database called CareMatch to match a child with a family, based on the family’s strengths, skills, location and other factors.
- **Kentucky’s** plan states that the agency is moving toward a performance-based system of procurement to reduce congregate care use, increase therapeutic foster care and expedite reunification. The agency produces a monthly diligent recruitment report that includes data drawn from the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) and Worker’s Information System broken down by county and region. The agency created a statewide template containing data on child and foster home demographics for use by regions to plan recruitment and retention activities. Regions submit semi-annual diligent recruitment plans and monitor progress quarterly.
- At least three states made use of the Diligent Recruitment Navigator created by AdoptUSKids to develop their plans.⁶
 - **Missouri** used the Diligent Recruitment Navigator to compile data on the number of foster and adoptive homes by region, availability and race. Staff of the Children’s Division Quality Assurance unit are able to provide localities with data for specific zip codes and school districts and are gathering data on reasons foster parents quit other than adoption in order to improve training and retention. The plan also reports that the Children’s Division is working on a methodology to determine the number of homes and preparation level needed to assure adequate placement capacity.
 - **New Mexico** also used the Diligent Recruitment Navigator and data reports to develop its plan. Each county prepares a diligent recruitment plan based on a Targeted Recruitment Planning Tool that asks for information about current placement resources, the children most in need of homes, recruitment targets and strategies, outreach activities, and supports for foster families. The tool also calls for an action plan and includes an evaluation component. The department’s IT unit developed a web-based dashboard that tracks pending foster parent applications and active licensed providers in terms of capacity, number of placements, and child characteristics. The agency’s goal is to license foster parents within 120 days and to increase the number of foster homes by 15 percent statewide.

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⁶ <https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/diligent-recruitment-navigator>

- **Vermont** used the Diligent Recruitment Navigator and technical assistance from the National Resource Center on Diligent Recruitment to develop its plan. The plan emphasizes the importance of data access, collection and analysis but notes that access to the data is a challenge with the existing IT system. The agency's QA team was engaged to establish data baselines and identify gaps regarding the three priority areas of increasing retention of kin, foster and adoptive families; improving recruitment by increasing timely system response from inquiry to licensure; and increasing available capacity of kin, foster and adoptive families. The state's goals include using data to select the most effective recruitment activities, increasing consistency in data collection and providing diligent recruitment data to districts to support planning.
- In **North Carolina**, which has a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, county child welfare agencies are required to develop local recruitment plans that include data profiles prescribed by the state Division of Social Services (DSS). DSS provides counties with data on characteristics of children and licensed foster homes, including number and type of licensed beds and race. Data sources include Child Services Data Warehouse, Adoption Information Management System and North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC-FAST).
- **Ohio**, which also has a county-administered child welfare system, added child-specific recruitment plans to its child welfare information system and intends to use mobility mapping as a recruitment tool. The state's plan references engagement of tribes, experts and providers to develop data reports that are used to explore questions related to flexibility of county recruitment plans, use of county plans to inform the state plan, monitoring of county plans by the state, use by counties of a customer service approach to foster families, county access to recruitment tools and county expertise regarding sibling placement.
- **Oklahoma** uses a Foster Homes Needs Analysis based on the Foster Home Estimator developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation,⁷ a simple Excel file that contains data on types of placement, current foster home pool and Child Welfare Services goals around placement practices.
- **Wisconsin** DCF is implementing a Geographic Placement Resource System to target recruitment efforts to areas where children are being removed. GPRS will display race, ethnicity, relationship status, level of care certification and provider characteristics.

DRIVER 3: LEADERSHIP

Child welfare leaders play a critical role in defining the values and mission underlying foster parent recruitment, support and retention, bringing together teams of key stakeholders and agency staff, defining goals and objectives, and ensuring that recruitment and retention efforts are coordinated both within and across agencies. According to Tim Decker, former director of Missouri's Children's Division, leaders should challenge practices and policies that are "stuck on stupid." "Through adaptive, collaborative, distributive, and outcome-based leadership, courageous and informed conversations will explore what to do more of, less of, and stop and start doing to ensure all children grow up with amazing parents."⁸

Although state plans did not expressly identify the role of agency leaders, some described evidence of leadership involvement, including creation of intra-agency teams, collaboration with external stakeholders and articulation of a vision for recruitment and retention of foster families.

⁷ <https://www.aecf.org/blog/foster-home-estimator-helping-child-welfare-agencies-plan-for-family-recruitment/>

⁸ CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention: Strategies for Developing a Comprehensive Program, Appendix.

STATE PLAN EXAMPLES

- **Kentucky** formed a Statewide Diligent Recruitment Steering Committee in 2018. The committee has workgroups dedicated to retention, targeted recruitment, general recruitment, training, respite and data. The committee recommended a number of recruitment strategies, including engaging youth and foster parents in recruitment and training, and identified the need for a statewide foster care brand.
- In **North Carolina**, a working group with representatives from the state Division of Social Services (DSS), county DSS agencies, private providers, foster/adoptive families and youth developed a diligent recruitment plan in 2017 based on input from stakeholder meetings throughout the state. Under the plan, each county was tasked with developing its own diligent recruitment plan with technical assistance from the state.
- In **Oklahoma**, agency leaders have made quality foster care a priority. The state has made a concerted effort to improve the resource family approval process and customer service to resource parents. As a result of streamlining paperwork, expediting background checks and completion of family assessments, and adding online pre-service training, the majority of resource homes are now approved within 60-90 calendar days from initial inquiry, down from 120 days.
- In **Vermont**, a Core Team created a vision for recruitment and retention that includes a theory of change, organizational culture change, infrastructure elements, major action priorities and a detailed action plan. The Core Team consisted of 27 internal and external stakeholders, including agency-wide representation from a variety of units, the state foster parent association, Project Family and the Child Welfare Training Partnership housed at the University of Vermont. Vermont's Diligent Recruitment plan also calls for coordination with other state agencies, including the Departments of Mental Health, Aging and Independent Living and the Agency of Education.

DRIVER 4: COLLABORATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Effective recruitment and retention of foster parents requires collaboration with an array of community partners. This includes faith-based organizations, civic groups, tribes, foster and adoptive parent associations, universities, foundations and the business community. Foster parents and youth are priority partners for recruitment, support and training of newly licensed and prospective foster parents.

STATE PLAN EXAMPLES

- Several state plans described collaborations with tribes and tribal organizations.
 - **California** has engaged tribes in discussions about reducing barriers to approval of tribal foster homes.
 - **South Dakota's** Native Foster Care Initiative is a state/tribal recruitment campaign that includes dissemination of recruitment materials tailored to tribal communities at pow-wows and at other tribal events. It also features a South Dakota Native Foster Care Facebook page managed by a Tribal-State Workgroup.
 - In **Utah**, DCFS employs a Native American Specialist for outreach to tribes, assistance with American Indian/Alaska Native recruitment and mentoring Native American families through the licensing process.

- **Wisconsin's** DCF tribal recruitment work group provided targeted recruitment assistance to tribal child welfare agencies. Five tribes created recruitment plans and increased licensed capacity by 100 percent in 2018.
- **Wyoming** will collaborate with tribes in development of recruitment brochures for prospective Native American foster families.
- **Florida** partners with the **Quality Parenting Initiative** and its Community Based Care providers to pilot a new approach to investigations against foster parents that focuses on training and support needs.
- **Hawaii** collaborates with the Partners in Development Foundation (PIDF), which works with high school parent organizations to recruit families for teens.
- **Kentucky's** plan is notable for the number and variety of partnerships with colleges and universities. The Foster Parent Mentor Program in partnership with the University Training Consortium and Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) matches newly approved foster parents with experienced caregivers for their first six months of service. The Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Support Network run by Murray State University has 15 teams of experienced foster parents who provide peer support and training. The state agency also partners with the University of Kentucky to operate the Kinship Information, Navigation and Support (KY-KINS) program.
- **Michigan's** plan features a variety of collaborations, including number of faith-based initiatives. The Community and Faith-Based Initiative on Foster Care and Adoption collaborates with faith communities across the state and works with Faith Communities Coalitions on Foster Care in 11 regions. The Community and Faith-Based Advisory Council works with the state Department of Health and Human Services to promote foster care and adoption and assists the department in improving services to children and families. The state Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parent Collaborative Council is a collaboration among the state Department of Health and Human Services, tribes, and parent-led organizations focusing on connecting foster, adoptive and kinship families to resources, education and training.
- In **Washington** State, Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS) teams in each region bring together community agencies, tribes, faith communities and other stakeholders to plan and implement recruitment and retention strategies. Washington is also piloting a Foster Care Funding Collaborative, described in the **CHAMPS Policy Playbook**, that uses a recruitment tool developed by the Washington Association for Children and Families to match the skills and preferences of prospective foster families with at least three private agencies. The state Department of Children, Youth and Families also collaborates with Northwest Resource Associates, the Northwest Adoption Exchange and the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, a training consortium consisting of the University of Washington, Eastern Washington University and Partners for Our Children.

WASHINGTON is also piloting a Foster Care Funding Collaborative, described in the **CHAMPS Policy Playbook**, that uses a recruitment tool developed by the Washington Association for Children and Families to match the skills and preferences of prospective foster families with at least three private agencies. The state Department of Children, Youth and Families also collaborates with Northwest Resource Associates, the Northwest Adoption Exchange and the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, a training consortium consisting of the University of Washington, Eastern Washington University and Partners for Our Children.

DRIVER 5: YOUTH AND PARENT VOICE

Our analysis of state plans revealed that child welfare agencies are turning to current and former foster parents and youth with lived experience in foster care for help with recruitment of new foster parents and development of diligent recruitment plans, policies and programs. It is often said that well-supported foster parents are an agency's best recruiters. Many of the state plans we reviewed described how the views and stories of foster parents and youth were being captured and disseminated through surveys, interviews, focus groups, advisory boards, stakeholder meetings and research studies.

STATE PLAN EXAMPLES

- States that enlist current and former foster parents and youth for recruitment and training include the following:
 - Some state plans describe involving foster parents and youth as foster care “ambassadors” as a recruitment strategy, including **Georgia** (community ambassadors), **Iowa** (foster and adoptive parent ambassadors), **Massachusetts** (foster and adoptive parent ambassadors who are paid \$500 per month for 30 hours of general recruitment activity) and **New Jersey** (youth ambassadors who share their experiences with foster care to dispel myths about fostering teens).
 - **Connecticut’s** Parent Encouragement Program pays foster parents a \$500 finder’s fee for referring a family that becomes licensed.
 - In **Hawaii**, current and former foster youth age 14-26 who serve on HI H.O.P.E.S. youth leadership boards make recruitment presentations. The state’s Ohana Rewards program provides gift cards to individuals or groups that refer families that complete the licensure process.
 - **Louisiana** has foster parents and foster youth participate in pre-service and in-service training panels.
 - **Michigan’s** Foster Care Navigator program engages foster caregivers to assist prospective foster parents throughout the licensing process.
 - **South Dakota** is exploring creating recruitment videos, including testimonials by Native American foster parents, foster parents who mentor birth parents and foster parents caring for sibling groups.
 - **West Virginia** trains foster parents to recruit in their communities and has created videos in which youth in foster care share their experiences.
 - **Wisconsin’s** plan describes an initiative of the Wisconsin Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center that trains foster parents to recruit foster families within their communities. Each participating agency identifies a Foster Parent Champion for that purpose. Foster parents are reimbursed for time, travel and childcare and are given \$100 gift cards for recruiting new licensed foster parents. The state also has a Foster Parent Advisory Committee that provides input on pending policies and legislation.
- The **Illinois** Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was created by statute in 1995 and consists of foster parents and non-DCFS professionals who advise DCFS with respect to all matters involving the provision of foster care. The council oversees the implementation of the state’s Foster Parent Law, which established foster parent rights and responsibilities. More information about the council can be found in the [CHAMPS Policy Playbook](#).
- **Kentucky** engages members of Voices of the Commonwealth, a foster youth advisory group coordinated by Murray State University, to share their experiences to raise awareness and aid recruitment and training. Fostering Futures, an initiative of the Kentucky Foster and Adoptive Care Association sponsored by the state agency, serves as a united voice to advocate for children in care and the families that serve them. Western Kentucky University and the University of Kentucky have both conducted surveys of foster parents. The WKU survey found that foster parents were generally more satisfied with private agencies than with the public agency. The UK survey queried foster parents about their experiences caring for children exposed to trauma.

MICHIGAN’S Foster Care Navigator program engages foster caregivers to assist prospective foster parents throughout the licensing process.

KENTUCKY engages members of Voices of the Commonwealth, a foster youth advisory group coordinated by Murray State University, to share their experiences to raise awareness and aid recruitment and training.

- **Missouri's** Children's Division is partnering with the National Council for Adoption and Northeastern University to conduct focus groups of foster parents to refine recruitment and retention strategies.
- **Montana's** Youth Advisory Board, with the help of Foster Club, is developing video training for foster parents on the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard. The YAB is also exploring creating a youth speaker's bureau.
- **New Mexico** and **North Carolina** conducted several regional stakeholder meetings to gather input from foster families and other community partners on their diligent recruitment plans.
- In **Ohio**, a Foster Care Advisory Group created by statute in 2017 developed recommendations regarding training, simplification of certification requirements, coaching parents on substance-exposed newborns, childcare, respite, trauma-competent counseling, retention, foster parent rights and a public awareness campaign.
- **Vermont** is revising its voluntary closure survey and is developing a caregiver stay survey to determine why foster parents continue serving.

DRIVER 6: SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability entails maintaining a focus on recruitment and retention as an agency-wide priority in the face of changes in leadership, budget and external circumstances. To that end, existing processes and procedures, such as staff training, strategic planning, data analysis and quality assurance, can be expanded to include a focus on recruitment and retention. Building or strengthening a recruitment and retention infrastructure can be accomplished by ensuring that key senior staff are committed to quality foster care, creating units with dedicated recruitment and retention staff, adopting a customer service model, changing agency culture and maintaining strong partnerships with the community. Agency leaders can also ensure that every staff member has a role to play in recruitment and retention as a way to help sustain the agency's emphasis on recruitment and retention.

STATE PLAN EXAMPLES

- **Georgia's** plan describes a customer service model called IMPACT (Initial Interest, Mutual Selection, Pre-Service Training, Assessment, Continuing Development, Trauma-Informed Teamwork) whose motto is "Faster, Friendlier, Easier." One of the state's goals is to improve IMPACT to provide more flexibility to prospective foster parents. Georgia's plan also describes a Placement Resource Operations Unit (PRO Unit) which specializes in supporting placements of high-need children and youth through enhanced matching, provision of needed services and intensive practice guidance and consultation to field staff, inpatient facilities and contracted providers.
- Plans from **Ohio** and **Vermont** set goals of integrating diligent recruitment data into existing CQI efforts. In Ohio, data will be drawn from AFCARS, the Child Protection Oversight and Evaluation (CPOE) system, Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) reviews and foster parent surveys.
- **Illinois** DCFS has an Office of Parent and Caregiver Support, which employs 40 Foster Parent Support Specialists statewide to serve DCFS and private agency foster homes. The goals of the program are to retain foster parents, promote family reunification, stabilize foster placements and facilitate youth development.

GEORGIA'S plan describes a customer service model called **IMPACT (Initial Interest, Mutual Selection, Pre-Service Training, Assessment, Continuing Development, Trauma-Informed Teamwork)** whose motto is "Faster, Friendlier, Easier."

- Beginning in 2016, the **Massachusetts** Department of Children and Families began the process of hiring a cadre of full-time foster care recruitment social workers. The agency's plan establishes the goal of having 29 workers by FY 2020, one worker for each area office. These staff work with Family Resource Units within each area office to enhance recruitment efforts, develop area recruitment and retention plans and assist applicants with the licensing process. DCF also has a full-time statewide Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment Unit that develops and implements the comprehensive recruitment plan.
- **Oklahoma** implemented a campaign called "Support is Everyone's Game" to engage all Child Welfare Services staff in providing excellent customer service to resource parents. All new CWS staff complete Customer Service Training. According to foster parent exit surveys, over 85 percent of foster parents would recommend fostering to their friends and family.
- In **Vermont**, the Core Team identified five key diligent recruitment and retention infrastructure elements: 1) responsive model of engagement and support; 2) community engagement; 3) unified policy and procedures; 4) training and development; and 5) a unified data model. The agency is also working on organizational culture change to ensure that all staff have a role to play in recruitment and retention.
- Statewide or regional conferences on recruitment and retention can keep stakeholders and partners engaged, disseminate best practices and sustain forward momentum. **Arizona**, for example, holds three Families Thrive conferences annually; **Michigan** convenes an annual Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parent conference; and **North Carolina** held its first annual Recruitment and Retention Summit in May 2019 organized around 10 key drivers, which include the drivers discussed in this report.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

State and local child welfare leaders must continually develop and implement approaches to recruit and retain foster families. This work is important. It must be a top priority of child welfare agencies because stable, quality foster parenting is one of the most powerful ways we can help children in foster care heal and thrive. Unfortunately, many states continue to experience foster family shortages, due in part to the opioid crisis, and further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is more critical than ever that federal and state policies are designed to help agencies succeed in building strong partnerships with existing and new foster families so each child in foster care can have the benefit of a stable placement with well trained and supportive foster families who are a good match for the child's unique needs and can help the child stay connected to his or her family.

The following recommendations are based on child development research, promising approaches in the field, including those gleaned from this analysis, and insights from families and youth with lived foster care experience. The recommendations also take into account important trends in the policy landscape, particularly the increased national attention on supporting family-based placements for children and youth in foster care following the passage of the *Family First Prevention Services Act* in 2018. In addition, current leadership at the Children's Bureau has actively promoted a vision of foster care as "a support to families, not a substitute for parents" and has issued policy guidance and public statements to further the vision. Child-centered reforms led by Quality Parenting Initiative, the National Birth-Foster Parent Partner Network

and the CHAMPS campaign have sought to strengthen foster parenting and the outcomes for children by promoting strategies such as co-parenting that build relationships between birth and foster parents.

In order to continue to strengthen our national effort to support stable, family-based placements for children and youth in foster care, we encourage policy makers at the federal level to consider these actions:

1. **Strengthen the focus on desired results for foster family recruitment and retention by amending the current Diligent Recruitment plan requirement in the following ways⁹:**

- **Rename and refocus the Diligent Recruitment plan to emphasize partnership and retention.** We propose renaming the plan “Foster and Adoptive Family Partnership Plan.” The current terminology of “recruitment plan” neglects the fact that retention is the first strategy to effective recruitment. Further, renaming the plan corrects the outdated understanding of foster parent recruitment and contributes to the vision and expectation of foster and adoptive families as vital partners, both to child welfare agencies in meeting children’s needs for safety, stability, permanency and well-being, and to birth families, as co-parents, coaches and mentors.

The new “Foster and Adoptive Family Partnership Plan” should have two parts so that the agency separately describes its plans for identification, recruitment, training, development, licensure, support and retention of 1) foster families, including kinship families, that are committed to actively supporting reunification or another permanency goal for the child, and 2) families that are specifically interested in adopting. It is expected that there would be thoughtful coordination between the two parts given the important points of intersection. For example, the majority of families that adopt children from foster care are foster parents. Also, many adoptive families take an active role in helping their adoptive child(ren) maintain important connections to birth family members even after adoption.

- **Require strategic planning and expand the required contents of the “Foster and Adoptive Family Partnership Plan” to focus on results.** The current plan elements, required by existing federal guidance,¹⁰ are primarily intended to ensure compliance with the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and that all eligible families are afforded the opportunity to foster or adopt a child. While important, these elements (e.g., equal access to the home study process, addressing linguistic barriers and non-discriminatory fee structures, etc.) are not sufficient indicators of an effective strategy. Plans can and should be held to a higher standard than compliance with MEPA. Our recommendation is for the plan to include a needs assessment, a set of measurable goals and objectives and an action plan with strategies, assigned tasks and timelines. Measurable goals should include progress in rates of foster family retention; placement matching; rates of kinship placements and licensure of kin; rates of family-based placements for teens, including teens formerly placed in congregate care or youth correctional facilities; and use of evidence-based foster parent pre-service and in-service training.

All aspects of the plan’s development should be informed by analysis of relevant data and include information from other federally-required documents related to recruitment and retention. Doing so will enhance the quality and usefulness of the plan and address the

⁹ Although our recommendation #1 pertains to agencies’ work with foster parents, making plans more strategic, data-driven and results-focused would also be beneficial for agencies’ work with adoptive families.

¹⁰ Child Welfare Policy Manual, Section 4.1, MEPA/IEAP, Diligent Recruitment

current fragmentation of important information. For example, the federal government requires states to report on their performance in recruiting and retaining foster families in at least five different places.¹¹ By requiring consolidation of all relevant information in the “Foster and Adoptive Family Partnership Plan,” there will be greater focus and accountability both within the agency and from community partners on the plan’s activities and results.

- **Require plans to be data-driven.** Specifically, the foster family section of the plan should include a description of specific elements that have been found to be critical to effective foster family recruitment, training, and support. The plan should have descriptions of:
 - The current pool of foster parents, including race, age, gender, availability, location, licensed capacity, ability to care for teens, sibling groups, medically fragile infants and other children with special needs, and days since last placement. The plan should report on the foster care system’s actual capacity and usage, including the number of foster families that are not being fully utilized and the reasons why. The plan should also describe foster parent experiences, ranging from point of inquiry through their caregiving experience as well as reasons why foster parents stop fostering. HHS should provide technical assistance to states and also issue guidance regarding required data elements and recommended approaches for collection and analysis of data.
 - How the plan was developed, including the extent of collaboration with community and faith-based partners, foster and birth families, kinship caregivers and youth with lived experience.
 - The technical assistance resources that were utilized to develop the plan; and
 - Customer service standards utilized for working with foster and birth families, and kinship caregivers.

HHS can provide guidance and examples to agencies on each of these elements.

2. **Require HHS to collect and publish information on trends and needs relating to foster parenting.**

- Require HHS to develop and report annually to Congress a foster parent census based on the common foster family data provided annually to HHS through these state plans. Without data on foster parents — including their training, location, placement preferences and availability — we lack the ability to understand where the greatest needs lie. An annual national census would elevate public awareness about the overall importance of foster families and inform decision makers about trends and current needs.
- Require HHS to conduct a periodic national survey, such as every three or five years, on foster parent satisfaction, needs, experiences with their agencies, reasons for quitting and related topics. This survey could be added onto an existing national survey, such as the National Survey of Adoptive Families. The last national survey of foster parents was conducted in 1989 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Since that time, there has been no reliable national estimate of the number of trained and available foster families to care for children in foster care.

¹¹ In the Child and Family Services Plan, recruitment and retention are addressed in the Assessment of Current Performance, the Plan for Enacting the State’s Vision and the Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan. The Child and Family Services Reviews require states to address recruitment and retention in their Statewide Assessments and the Program Improvement Plans.

3. Ensure that the Children’s Bureau’s Child Welfare Capacity Center Collaborative (Collaborative) prioritizes on an ongoing basis recruitment and retention and has sufficient funding, expertise and other resources needed to provide technical assistance to states.

- The Collaborative should produce and disseminate to the field reports and guides on the latest developments in research, policy and practice. The Children’s Bureau also should issue Information Memoranda on critical topics such as customer service standards, effective foster family training approaches, effective peer support for foster and kinship families, as well as information on available federal reimbursement to support effective recruitment, training, support and retention.

4. Create a new federal grant program to facilitate effective partnerships between agencies and foster families.

- This program would build on prior federal investments, including the diligent recruitment grants in 2008, 2010 and 2013, cultivate innovation and help to scale up best practices.¹²

5. Amend Title IV-E reimbursement to streamline and improve financing for foster family recruitment, training, support and retention services.

- Children and youth who enter foster care need a robust family-based system of care. This fact was acknowledged in the reforms enacted by the **Family First Prevention** Services Act, yet more is needed to strengthen family-based care and ensure children and teens have well-supported family-based placements. Activities that help support family-based care should be reimbursable under Title IV-E Administration at the rate of 50 percent, without regard to the state’s Title IV-E eligibility ratio. This includes services and supports such as:
 - A. Specialized, dedicated staff positions that focus on data-driven, community-based foster family recruitment, foster parent support, and family finding;
 - B. Peer support models for foster parents;
 - C. Respite support for foster families;
 - D. Crisis mobile services to help stabilize family-based placements;
 - E. Caseworker training, including on co-parenting; and
 - F. Data collection and analysis activities to support agencies in developing the necessary data to meet new requirements for their “Foster and Adoptive Family Partnership Plans” (diligent recruitment plans) to be data driven, as well as to meet the requirement for states to report a set of common data elements each year to HHS for inclusion in the annual national census on foster parenting. For the first three years, data collection costs should be reimbursable at the rate of 75 percent.

State legislators and child welfare agencies can take similar actions as recommended above for Congress and the Administration. For example, state legislators and/or state administrators can require that state and county agencies develop and implement data-driven plans and conduct a yearly foster parent census. Agencies can also begin new, or deepen existing, collaborations

¹² Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System: Challenges and Recommendations for Policy and Practice, **a report** by James Bell Associates for the Children’s Bureau.

with families. State legislators can also allocate funds to create incentives as well as to provide dedicated funding for activities that will help states address key challenges. State agencies can go beyond existing federal plan requirements and develop plans that address the key drivers described in this report. Agencies can utilize this report to identify examples from other states that may help them improve their policy, programs and practices.

V. CONCLUSION

This report summarizes a range of strategies and approaches that states are taking to recruit and retain well-qualified foster parents. It should be read in conjunction with the **CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention**, from which were taken the six drivers used to analyze state Diligent Recruitment Plans. We encourage states to use these drivers to create comprehensive recruitment and retention programs responsive to the needs of children in care and the dedicated foster parents who care for them. And it is our hope that policymakers will consider the recommendations described above as they seek to strengthen family-based care in their states.

APPENDIX A: LINKS TO STATE DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLANS

Alabama

Alaska

Arizona

Arkansas

California

Colorado

Connecticut

Delaware

District of Columbia

Florida

Georgia

Hawaii

Idaho

Illinois

Indiana

Iowa

Kansas

Kentucky

Louisiana

Maine

Maryland

Massachusetts

Michigan

Minnesota

Mississippi

Missouri

Montana

Nebraska

Nevada

New Hampshire

New Jersey

New Mexico

New York

North Carolina

North Dakota

Ohio

Oklahoma

Oregon

Pennsylvania

Rhode Island

South Carolina

South Dakota

Tennessee

Texas

Utah

Vermont

Virginia

Washington

West Virginia

Wisconsin

Wyoming

APPENDIX B: FEATURED STATE PLANS

VERMONT

A Core Team of 27 internal Family Services Division (FSD) staff and external stakeholders worked with the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids (NRCDR) and the Capacity Building Center for States (CBC) to assess the existing state of Vermont's recruitment and retention efforts and to develop a Recruitment and Retention Plan. FSD completed the NRCDR's Diligent Recruitment Navigator and used CBC's Change Management and Implementation Milestones to inform the plan development process. Using the results of focus groups, surveys, interviews, and document reviews, CBC subject matter experts prepared a thorough assessment entitled Mapping Diligent Recruitment in Vermont to identify areas for improvement in recruitment, application, child placement, family approval, training, licensing and post-placement processes. The FSD Quality Assurance Team conducted an analysis of existing data systems to establish performance baselines and identify areas where more robust data are needed.

After an extensive process of exploration and analysis, the Core Team developed a plan that describes the following system reform goals:

■ Five Key Recruitment and Retention Infrastructure Elements:

- A model of engagement and support of families that recognizes foster parents as valuable resources, provides them with ready access to resources and in which all agency staff play a role in recruitment, development and support of families;
- Community engagement that conveys the needs of children in care and provides opportunities to support those children and the families that care for them;
- Unified policies and procedures for the recruitment, development and support of resource families;
- A training and development program that equips resource families to meet the needs of children, enables the workforce to engage and assist families, and educates the community;
- A unified data collection and reporting system that enables the agency to establish baselines, set goals, monitor progress and assess the effectiveness of recruitment and retention strategies.

■ Practice Changes:

- Use by district offices of a common spreadsheet to collect data on system response to each prospective foster parent from inquiry, first contact, orientation, initial training, home study and licensing.
- Redesigned caregiver training that provides the opportunity to begin training immediately through online offerings instead of limiting caregivers to twice yearly trainings;
- Allowing child placement before completion of caregiver training by shifting how and when training is delivered;
- Embedding family-finding into practice throughout the life of a case;
- Ending the practice of placing children in homes based primarily on home availability by developing a cadre of well-supported and skilled caregivers.

■ Organizational Culture Changes

- Coaching all FSD staff to have a role in recruitment and retention;
- Hiring Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Specialists in each district office;
- Incorporating recruitment and retention of caregivers into daily work in an intentional and systematic way;
- Emphasizing that caregivers are volunteers who are respected and treated as important partners.

■ Data-Informed Decision-Making Changes

- Each district will complete a Practice Profile to determine how well its practice aligns with the Key Infrastructure Elements and recommended recruitment and retention practice;
- Use of data to determine which recruitment activities are working and which are not;
- Increase consistency in data collection to understand and improve initial system response;
- Provide recruitment data to local districts to support ongoing planning, management and CQI monitoring

■ Communication and Marketing Changes

- Hiring of a communications specialist to develop a comprehensive diligent recruitment communications plan and to create a unified brand and message;
- Twice monthly e-news communications to caregivers;
- Increased social media presence, including Front Porch Forum;
- Relationships with Vermont Association of Broadcasters and Vermont Public Radio.

Vermont's plan also includes a Theory of Change and a Diligent Recruitment Action Plan.

NEW MEXICO

The New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) sought stakeholder input into its plan through meetings in CYFD's five administrative regions. Present at these meetings were foster and adoptive parents, foster parent liaisons, and community stakeholders who serve foster and adoptive families. CYFD's Protective Services Division (PSD) also utilized the Diligent Recruitment Navigator and PSD data reports to inform plan development. In addition to the statewide plan, each county is responsible for developing its own recruitment and retention plan using a Targeted Recruitment Planning Tool that includes data analysis, recruitment targets, strategies, action plans and a monthly evaluation tool.

The Diligent Recruitment Plan developed by PSD consists of a single objective: to expand the number of foster and adoptive resources so that each child entering care has at least two potential placements in the least restrictive and most appropriate environment possible. Under that objective, there are five goals that include action steps, responsible persons and time frames.

- **GOAL 1:** Ensure child welfare data is entered timely and accurately. The plan outlines steps to analyze data for inaccuracies and areas for improvement, train staff on how and when to enter data into the system, and develop a quality assurance plan to monitor the timeliness and accuracy of data entry.

- **GOAL 2:** License foster homes within 120 days. The plan describes a recently launched web-based dashboard that allows placement staff to track the status of licenses that are provisional, pending or undergoing recertification. The agency is also researching web-based software to allow for online applications and workflow management.
- **GOAL 3:** Increase the number of licensed foster families by 15 percent: Each county completes a readiness assessment and recruitment plan that identifies children's age, gender, race/ethnicity, special needs and sibling status as well as current foster family characteristics. A web-based My Providers Dashboard identifies which foster families are available by worker, team and region. It will help to identify untapped resources, such as relatives who are unsure of the process and/or unable to complete the licensing process, licensed foster parents who have not had a placement for an extended period, and individuals who have expressed interest in adoption only.
- **GOAL 4:** Retention of current licensed families: The plan establishes an 80 percent retention goal. Action steps to achieve this goal include development of a foster parent satisfaction survey, technical assistance to counties in developing and implementing retention plans, monthly contacts with foster families to provide support, quarterly foster parent meetings, timely response to foster parent complaints, referrals to community services, and providing foster parent with necessary information about the child and the status of the child's case.
- **GOAL 5:** Train placement staff to help support foster parents. CYFD's Foster and Adoptions Bureau will partner with the CYFD Academy of Professional Development and Training to develop a training plan to include placement training

NEW JERSEY

Based on an analysis of data, New Jersey's plan focuses on recruiting and retaining foster families for sibling groups, adolescents and children with special medical, developmental and behavioral health needs. The plan highlights several innovative strategies to achieve the state's goals:

- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) continues implementation of its Siblings in Best Settings (SIBS) Resource Family Homes initiative, which features enhanced board rates and retainer fees to maintain homes vacant for the placement of large sibling groups. As of 2018, New Jersey had a pool of 73 homes for large sibling groups, 18 of which can accommodate five or more children and 55 that can care for groups of up to four children. The state seeks to place at least 80 percent of sibling groups together.
- DCF employs market segmentation to identify and target recruitment efforts to families with lifestyle characteristics that are similar to the characteristics and interests of its existing pool of licensed resource homes.
- DCF partners with the Human Rights Campaign All Children-All Families initiative to increase the number of qualified foster and adoptive families for adolescents, particularly LGBTQ youth. DCF became the first state child welfare agency to earn HRC's Seal of Recognition.
- The Youth Ambassador Initiative provides an opportunity for youth who were formerly in care to support recruitment of resource and adoptive families for adolescents. By sharing their stories, participating youth help dispel some of the myths about fostering teens. Youth Ambassadors are primarily college students or recent college graduates who received a New Jersey Foster Care Scholarship administered through Embrella, a statewide advocacy agency for foster, adoptive and kinship parents.

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina has a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system that relies heavily on private child placing agencies. In the context of this complex and decentralized system of recruitment, licensing and retention of foster families, the state began development of its Diligent Recruitment Plan in 2016 with a series of regional stakeholder meetings facilitated by the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment. A working group made up of state Division of Social Services (DSS) staff, local county DSS staff, private child placing agencies, foster and adoptive families and current and former foster youth used stakeholder input to develop a plan that was launched in July 2017 and fully implemented in all 100 counties by July 2018. More information about how this plan was developed and implemented can be found in the [CHAMPS Policy Playbook](#), 2nd edition.

The state's 2020-2024 Diligent Recruitment Plan builds on and updates that 2017 plan. It explains the roles and responsibilities of the state DSS, county child welfare agencies and private child placing agencies. It also describes three system improvement targets and related strategies, benchmarks and metrics.

■ Roles and Responsibilities:

- **STATE DSS:** DSS operates the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network, the first point of contact for prospective foster parents. NC Kids develops and provides diligent recruitment tools, provides technical assistance to county child welfare agencies and private child placing agencies, and monitors each county's diligent recruitment plan. Technical assistance consists of guides, training, webinars, regional meetings, quarterly calls, an annual summit and individualized assistance.
- **COUNTY CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES:** Each county DSS is tasked with writing an annual Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan based on a template provided by the state, supplemental guides and attachments. Counties report data to the state DSS annually using a Diligent Recruitment and Retention Data Profile.
- **PRIVATE CHILD PLACING AGENCIES:** Many private CPAs develop their own recruitment plans and are encourage to share these with DSS and the counties they serve to promote collaboration and consistency in practice. Private CPAs that place children in the custody of a county child welfare agency are required to report data to DSS.

■ Targets:

- **TARGET 1:** Develop Family Response and Engagement System. The goal here is for state, counties and private CPAs to “provide quality family experience to prospective, current, and former foster, adoptive, and kinship families from initial inquiry through post-placement services.” Strategies include assessment of foster, adoptive and kinship families’ needs, development of a resource library, and quarterly diligent recruitment and retention calls, webinars and publications.
- **TARGET 2:** Family Capacity Development and Support. This target seeks to strengthen families’ skills and capacity to meet each child’s specific needs. Strategies include providing counties and CPAs with resources for development and support of families and providing families with opportunities to develop and learn skills.
- **TARGET 3:** Increase the Number of Licensed Kinship Caregivers. This target seeks to remove barriers to kinship training and licensure and increase the number of children and youth placed with licensed kin and who exit care to guardianship with kin who receive KinGAP benefits. Strategies include development of a kin-specific statewide training and licensure process, provision of educational materials, training and technical assistance to counties and CPAs, and educating kinship caregivers about licensing and related financial support.

