

ATTACHMENT C: FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLAN

Statewide Foster and Adoptive Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Plan, FFY 2014 -2019

Updated: May 21, 2019

Overview

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children who experience out-of-home placements due to safety threats in their own home. To fulfill this commitment, DFCS recruits and works closely with relatives and members of the community who are interested in serving as temporary caregivers and adoptive parents for children in foster care and emancipated youth age 18 years and older in Extended Youth Support Services. DFCS also collaborates with Child Placing Agencies (CPAs); Child Caring Institutions (CCIs), which provide group home placements; and faith-based and other interested community stakeholders to expand the number of available placement resources. The recruitment of foster and adoptive parents is a collaborative public, private and community-based effort aimed at maximizing resources to achieve appropriate, stable and timely placements.

Georgia has begun to implement significant child welfare reform through its *Blueprint for Change/State of Hope Initiative*, which is the Division's roadmap to improving the lives of the children and families we serve. The Diligent Recruitment Plan serves as a component of this overall initiative through the procurement of resources for children who necessitate out-of-home placements to ensure their safety and well-being. To fulfill this commitment, DFCS recruits and works closely with members of the community interested in serving as substitute caregivers for this population of children.

The purpose of this Diligent Recruitment plan is to provide:

1. An assessment of available data and information that demonstrates how well DFCS is carrying out its Diligent Recruitment responsibilities;
2. An outline of the strategies and activities DFCS will undertake to meet the placement needs of children and youth served by the agency;
3. An assessment of the characteristics and needs of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed; and
4. A summary of the availability of placement resources in the state.

This plan includes recruitment strategies and techniques proven successful over the past five years along with new and innovative ideas to reach potential foster and adoptive parents throughout the state with information about the needs of available children, the types of children entering care or needing an adoptive placement, the nature of foster care and adoption processes, and the supports available to foster, adoptive, and relative caregivers. As Georgia has differing placement needs across the state, regions and counties are given some autonomy to develop targeted recruitment plans, as long as they support the objectives defined in this statewide plan. Some regions opt to utilize a regional recruitment plan, others opt to tailor recruitment plans to individual counties, and some regions have a combination of team and individual county recruitment strategies. All recruitment plans are submitted annually to the state office for approval with quarterly updates to

assess strategy and effectiveness. Based on county/regional reports, the state office publishes an annual recruitment and retention plan update.

This plan is based upon placement, resource development, ICPC, kinship, and adoptions data gathered over the last four years and cumulative totals from the county/regional recruitment and retention plans. As noted in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for FFY 2014-2019, Georgia's child welfare delivery system is county-administered and state-supervised. DFCS has 159 county offices grouped into 14 regions. The agency establishes and monitors minimum licensing requirements for all foster homes (agency foster homes as well as CCIs and CPAs) develops and implements the Statewide Foster and Adoptive Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Plan to include the following components:

- Description of characteristics of children needing foster or adoptive placement
- Specific strategies to reach all parts of the state
- Diverse methods of disseminating recruitment and child specific information
- Strategies for assuring that full access to resource development staff in county offices and Child Placing Agencies including locations and hours so that there is full access to all members of the community
- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial and socio-economic variations
- Strategies for addressing linguistic barriers
- Non-discriminatory fee structures
- Procedures for a timely search for child specific adoptive placements, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts provided that such procedures ensure that placement of the child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement

This statewide plan will be implemented beginning January 1, 2020. Between October and December 2019, the state office will be meeting with regional and county resource development teams, CPA and CCI partners to review this plan and provide instruction and support in creating regional/county plans that support this plan's objectives. The regional/county plans will be completed and published no later than December 31, 2019.

Georgia's Resource Development and Retention System

Resource development occurs at both the county/regional and state level. Resource development includes all efforts to recruit and retain an appropriate array of placement resources to meet the needs of children and youth in foster care and the characteristics of those who historically have entered foster care. The state office responsibilities include increasing and retaining the network of CPAs and CCIs; monitoring and coordination of the statewide diligent recruitment and retention plan; and supporting, training and providing technical assistance to county and regional staff. Each region assigns staff to work at the county or regional level to lead resource development efforts. County and regional resource development includes the recruitment, training and approval of foster and adoptive parents; ongoing training, supervision and annual re-approval of foster parents; and other activities involving retention and recruitment of caregivers.

Specific Strategies to Reach All Parts of the Community and Disseminate Recruitment Information

DFCS has strong community partners who provide a significant percentage of placement resources. Through these partnerships, DFCS has been able to extend its reach to more segments of the community. These community agencies typically target recruitment of prospective foster and adoptive parents through associated affinities, such as faith-based organizations.

A ministerial alliance with Promise 686 has spearheaded the care portal and continue to do so. They serve to recruit and support foster and adoptive parents from churches. However, DFCS still seeks to increase the number and array of community partners engaged in resource development. There are untapped opportunities to include community leaders, groups, sororities, fraternities and other interested stakeholders in recruitment and retention efforts.

DFCS uses traditional and new media with key media partners (COX Media Group, IheartMedia, Urban One, and National CineMedia) to reach diverse segments of the community. The agency also enlists community ambassadors to help establish ongoing relationships and partnerships for targeted and general recruitment to engage communities that represent the children for whom homes are needed. Ultimately, DFCS seeks to recruit and retain safe, stable placement resources that support permanency planning efforts; allow parental and community connections to be maintained; keep children in their schools of origin; and allow siblings to be placed together.

The primary means of recruitment is through DFCS being known as the state's child welfare agency. With various media campaigns and on-site sponsored events, prospective parents proactively reach out to DFCS because they understand the connection between DFCS foster and adoptive parenting.

A key DFCS recruitment strategy is the Foster Georgia parent inquiry line (877-210-KIDS) and the FosterGeorgia.com website. It is the first point of contact to obtain information about becoming a foster or adoptive parent in Georgia. The Foster Georgia line is staffed five days a week, Monday-Thursday 8 AM – 6 PM and Friday's 8 AM–5 PM. The Live Chat feature through Foster Georgia is open Monday – Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM. Through Foster Georgia, prospective applicants receive information about the requirements, process, and children available for adoption. Once a potential applicant makes an inquiry, they are either placed into an online information session or sent directly to the county to attend an in-person information session. After completion of the information session, the prospective applicant's information is then entered into the SHINES database. The Foster Georgia inquiry line is included in all recruitment materials and communications about fostering and adopting.

General information about becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent is also provided on the DFCS website and via the Division's social media sites. Child-specific information is disseminated via websites such as "It's My Turn Georgia" and "Wednesday's Child." The DFCS website links to both sites. Child specific recruitment also includes "Adoption Parties" and "Paper Match" events. Adoption Parties are festive events in which children available for adoption and prospective parents engage in nonthreatening, fun activities, such as bowling or skating. Paper Match events are when case managers seeking adoption matches for children on their caseloads are presented with home studies of potential adoptive resources to see if an initial "paper match" can be made.

Recruitment of Relatives and Mining Relationships of Children in Care

One area of recruitment that DFCS needs to strengthen is building relationships with youth in care and their kin in order to expand placement options and increase relative placements who become fully approved foster parents. The development of the Statewide Kinship Unit and the kinship curriculum has increased the number of children being placed with kin (biological relatives and kin). The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit and the Kinship Unit are working closely with the regions to ensure that Kin are assessed and approved within 120 days of a child(ren) entering care. To expedite these timeframes there are non-safety standards that can be waived in order to avoid barriers for permanency.

Customer Service Model: IMPACT: Faster, Friendlier and Easier

The acronym IMPACT represents the continuum of the caregiver service from initial inquiry through retention. IMPACT is the acronym for Initial Interest, Mutual Selection, Pre-Service Training, Assessment, Continuing Development and Trauma-Informed Teamwork. Embedded in the components of IMPACT is Georgia's customer service motto: Faster, Friendlier and Easier. The goal is be accessible to current and prospective caregivers, be responsive to inquirers, move prospective caregivers through the approval process as expediently as possible, and remove bureaucratic and other barriers to approval and retention to the extent possible. With the advent of this plan, the DFCS customer service model to address the recruitment and retention of caregivers will be called IMPACT: FFE (Faster, Friendlier, Easier).

The IMPACT: FFE model offers a preparation and training continuum that helps prospective substitute caregivers make an informed decision about becoming a caregiver. Applicants receive information and training to enhance their parenting knowledge and skills, as well as to clarify their role when working with children, their families and other community partners. The preparation and training continuum include a mechanism for providing practical knowledge of available financial, structural and administrative support. It also addresses skills and competencies required to meet the behavioral, attitudinal and ongoing maintenance needs of children in foster care. Moreover, the preparation and training continuum serves as a strategy to develop and enhance the pool of caregivers. It is the agency's belief that well-prepared and informed substitute caregivers directly impact the strength, success and overall positive outcomes of Georgia's foster care program.

IMPACT: FFE Caregiver Preparation and Training

The preparation and training continuum address three important phases of family readiness in caring for children in foster care:

Phase I: Information Session

The Information Session provides basic information to help potential resource families decide whether to pursue the process.

Phase II: IMPACT Family-Centered Practice Pre-Service Training

IMPACT Family Centered Practice (FCP) training provides families with preliminary information, competencies and skills, as well as the philosophical framework they will need to begin providing care for children.

Phase III Ongoing Training

On-going training is a crucial phase affecting the continued readiness of families to meet the everchanging and varied needs of children in care. It begins during the first year of approval. This requires honest disclosure by families and keen observations by case managers regarding the training needs of these families. These on-going skills and competencies may be obtained through specialized training sessions based on specific needs and expectations, seminars, workshops, conferences, etc. Families also may have additional opportunities to experience personal growth by reflecting on their own personal needs and experiences in order to give their best to children placed in their care. The annual in-service training requirement continues to focus on skills and competencies required by families for the on-going challenge of parenting children placed in their home.

IMPACT: FFE Accessibility

IMPACT: FFE includes strategies for assuring that all prospective foster/adoptive parents have access to agencies that license/approve foster/adoptive parents, including location and hours of services so that the agencies can be accessed by all members of the community. Each county and/or region offers recruitment and preparation of caregivers. Additionally, DFCS provides information to caregivers about its contracted adoption and foster care agencies, as appropriate. County and regional offices host information sessions and pre-service training at hours that are convenient to the community, including evening and weekend classes. In 2016, CRRU introduced Web-based information sessions for greater flexibility and convenience. Potential caregivers now have an option of completing IMPACT with DFCS or one of the CPAs when they have scheduling conflicts. This has proven to reduce onboarding time.

IMPACT: FFE Staff Training and Development

DFCS created a resource development curriculum for its resource development staff. This training complements the existing *New Worker* and *Track Training* currently offered to new staff. The resource development training was also mandated for veteran resource development staff. The first phase of the training curriculum focuses on recruitment. The current recruitment training teaches hard and soft skills needed to recruit and support prospective caregivers. Models in the curriculum are based on increasing staff knowledge, skills and abilities based on qualitative foster home study reviews, recruitment and child demographic data, which reflect the need to improve targeted and child-specific recruitment efforts.

Staff training also includes strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial and socio-economic diversity, which is a component of the existing *New Worker* training. Module 2 of this training is entitled *Values and Culture*. In this module, new workers learn to:

- Articulate, through class activities and discussion, an understanding that personal values and ethics will differ between individuals and cultures;
- Understand cultural differences in communication styles and the impact of word choice on intercultural communication;
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of key cultural diversity concepts and terms;

- Demonstrate multicultural awareness that cultural differences exist and may affect how different people think and behave;
- Demonstrate an awareness and understanding of how words can be used to create either a favorable or unfavorable impression of a person, especially with regard to cultural differences;
- Demonstrate multicultural sensitivity – appreciates a variety of cultural perspectives and values diversity; and
- Utilize the Ethnographic Interview tool to discover another’s cultural values.

Additionally, case managers must obtain 20 hours of ongoing Personal Development hours. Courses, such as *The Art of Exceptional Customer Service* and *Partnering with Families who are Immigrants*, assist case managers and staff with working with diverse communities.

IMPACT: FFE Addressing Linguistic and Cultural Barriers

IMPACT: FFE also includes strategies for addressing linguistic barriers. DFCS is committed to ensuring that Limited English Proficient (LEP)/Sensory Impaired (SI) customers have meaningful access to all programs and activities conducted or supported by DFCS. DFCS’ strategy for providing meaningful access for LEP and SI customers involves assessing language access needs statewide, recruiting interpreters and training bilingual staff, developing a centralized databank of language resources, translating vital forms and informational documents, forming partnerships with community groups for outreach and education, and implementing a procedure for monitoring services and resolution of complaints.

IMPACT: FFE Non-Discriminatory Fee Structure

Information sessions, training and home study services associated with becoming a foster, adoptive or relative caregiver in Georgia are provided free of charge. Fees associated with medical and drug screens are reimbursed, upon approval, by DFCS. DFCS does not use standards related to income, age, education, family structure and size or ownership of housing as a basis for approval. In accordance with federal and state laws, DFCS does not discriminate against a prospective caregiver based on race, color or national origin, age, sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, Georgia recruits and utilizes families with diverse backgrounds.

Adoption Exchange Consultants

The DFCS Adoption Exchange Consultants (AECs) perform many functions related to the timely search for prospective parents for children needing an adoptive placement. The AECs are responsible for reviewing adoption studies and determining potential placement matches, placement matching activities, reviewing and disseminating both in-state and out-of-state adoption studies to DFCS case managers for consideration. The AECs also follow up with case managers to see if a selection was made and notify families of the decisions. Additionally, the AECs track out-of-state inquiries to ensure that families are not waiting on a selection decision for extended periods of time, as this prevents them from being selected for other children who may be a potential match. In recent years the AECs and State Adoption Director have been messaging the importance of case managers following up with interested families’ case managers prior to automatically screening out when the study indicates a different preference of child than what the family has inquired about.

Analysis of Data: Children in Care and Foster and Adoptive Resources

For development of this plan, data was gathered and analyzed from the GA SHINES, GA+SCORE, and Fostergeorgia (inquiry line) databases and the Foster Parent Exit Survey (online survey).

In order to continue to effect purposeful recruitment and retention planning for the next five years, it is critical to analyze data to understand the current pool of placement resources, children in foster care, and projected placement resource needs. In addition to analyzing data for development of this plan, each county or region annually submits to the state office a local assessment of its pool of resources, children in care, comparisons of the needs of children and the pool of available placement resources, retention data and issues, and projected resource development needs. Additionally, on a quarterly basis, county/regional staff submit reports to the state office on their progress, changes in child demographics, resource needs, and caregiver recruitment and retention efforts. Based on the county/regional reports, the state office publishes an annual recruitment and retention plan update. Thus, there is ongoing data analysis and utilization of the information to effect purposeful recruitment and retention efforts.

As reported in the GA Shines database for 2018, from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2018, DFCS received 4,124 inquiries from prospective applicants (Statewide) interested in becoming a foster, adoptive parent, or resource parent with DFCS. In addition, as reported from the Fostergeorgia inquiry line and website 2,067 inquiries were received via 877-210-KIDS and 3,657 inquiries were received via the website fostergeorgia.com. The addition of the Inquiry Line has increased the number of inquiries received Statewide. Prospective applicants can complete an inquiry, receive answers to their questions about the process, and register for an information session via the Inquiry line and website

Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes

Twenty-one percent of children in DFCS custody exit to finalized adoptions. However, at any given time, there are approximately 300 children in the agency's permanent custody without an adoptive resource. These children are teenagers, sibling groups, over age 10, and/or children with a diagnosed medical, physical, emotional and/or behavioral disability. Of the children registered on It's My Turn Now Georgia who are currently available, 63% are male, 37% female; 45% are Caucasian, 43% African American, 9% biracial, 3% Hispanic; 23% are members of a sibling group; and, 59% are age 12 and older.

Table 1: Total Children in Care by Year (source GA SHINES)

Calendar Year	Total at the end of the calendar year
2014	9,295
2015	11,345
2016	12,362
2017	13,459
2018	13,466

Table 2: Gender of Children in Care by Year (source GA SHINES)

Calendar Year (CY)	Gender	
	Male	Female
2014	4,837	4,458
2015	5,893	5,452
2016	6,430	5,932
2017	7,075	6,384
2018	7,004	6,462

Table 3: Race/Ethnicity of Children in Care by Year (source GA SHINES)

CY	Black	White	Asian	American Indian	Multi-racial	Unable to Determine	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
2014	3887	4731	28	9	628	11	1
2015	4686	5887	31	6	723	11	1
2016	5069	6373	39	8	856	14	3
2017	5312	7091	36	11	986	20	3
2018	5353	7057	36	15	994	4	7

Table 4: Children and DFCS Foster Parent Demographics and Foster and Adoptive Parent Inquirers in Care (sources GA SHINES and Fostergeorgia.com data)

CY 2018	Children in Foster Care	Approved Foster Parents	Foster & Adoptive Parents Inquirers
Male	7,004	3,032	3431
Female	6462	4772	5742
0-6	6485	N/A	N/A
7-12	3799	N/A	N/A
13-17	3182	N/A	N/A
Black	5353	3061	3618
White	7057	4478	4867
Hispanic or Latino	832	191	281
Native American or Native Alaskan	15	8	10
Asian	36	13	35
Multiracial	994	136	150
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	7	7	8
Undetermined	4	101	485

Currently, there are less than 1% of children in care that have been identified as having Native American heritage and about the same percentage of foster or adoptive parents with the same heritage. DFCS started attending meetings with the Georgia Council on American Indian concerns to educate the council and inquire about strategies to improve recruitment of Native American families. DFCS will continue working with the council and looking for additional partnership opportunities.

As a part of this plan, over the next five years, the State will seek to institute practice changes that will ensure that child characteristics are more adequately and consistently captured to better inform resource development staff regarding their recruitment needs and efforts and to have a more targeted recruitment plans.

County DFCS Placement Resources

Georgia experienced an increase in the number of DFCS homes and approved Non-DFCS homes from 2015 to 2018 (Table 8). Georgia continues to strive to place more children with relatives when entering care as evidenced by the 14% increase in relative placements between 2015 and 2017.

Table 8: Number of DFCS and Non-DFCS homes by Year

CY	DFCS Foster/Adoptive (F/A) Home	Non-DFCS F/A Home	Total
2015	2,119	2,037	4,148
2016	2,344	2,259	4,586
2017	2,612	2,412	5,018
2018	2,727	2,806	5,531

Table 9: Placement Types by Year

CY	Adoptive	Relative	DFCS Foster Home	Non-DFCS Foster Home	Institution
2015	2,055	7,482	12,904	7,516	5,335
2016	2,627	9,365	11,389	8,150	5,486
2017	3,186	10,756	12,350	8,687	5,705
2018	3,526	9,895	14,739	10,220	6559

GA SHINES data as of December 31, 2018 shows that, of the 4,839 homes in full approval status in CY 2018, only 3,232 of those same homes were still active in January 1, 2019. The retention rate is thus 75.4%.

Private Placement Resources

Table 10 shows the different program designation types by CPA and CCI. Program designations are used to determine pay rates for each child placement and are based on the child’s characteristics. Program

designations are not used for children placed in DFCS foster or relative homes; however, where a child's needs are high, specialized foster care per diem rates are applied.

Child Placing Agency (CPA) and Child Caring Institution data from GA+SCORE indicate that both are developing caregivers who can provide for a broad range of children with different and special needs. CPA and CCI placements account on average about 45% of DFCS placements. The base and traditional program designations describe children with none to mild behavior and those placements have increased due to partnership engagement meetings. CPA and CCI placements utilize over half of their bed space for children with the highest behavioral and mental health needs.

Table 10: Child Caring Institution and Child Caring Institution Child Characteristics Program Designations (source RBWO Minimum Standards)

CPA	CCI
Traditional Care	BASE Care-BWO
BASE Care-BWO	Additional Watchful Oversight- AWO
Maximum Watchful Oversight- MWO	Maximum Watchful Oversight- MWO
Specialty Base Watchful Oversight- SBWO	
Specialty Maximum Watchful Oversight- SMWO	
Specialty Medically Fragile Watchful Oversight- SMFWO	
	Maternity Home
	Parenting Support Program (Second Chance Homes)
	Teen Development
	Independent Living Program
	Specialty Camp

Retention

The State uses an online Foster Parent Exit Interview to ascertain reasons for exits and to make practice adjustments. The tool has been available since January 2010; however, utilization and monitoring has been relatively low over the last 5 years. In 2016 the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention unit implemented a new strategy, which enlisted the assistance of 5 Caregiver Navigators. The team were responsible for contacting those caregivers with voluntary closures. They made contact via phone and email to complete a one-on-one interview with the caregivers. This effort resulted in (15) responses in CY 2016, (59) responses in CY 17, and (43) responses in CY 18.

Table 13: Reasons for Not Continuing to Foster

What was your main reason for deciding not to continue to foster?		
	Percent	Count
Adoption	34.4%	43
Moved out of County	5.6%	7
End of Relative Placement	0.0%	0
Health	2.4%	3
Transferred to Another Agency	0.8%	1

Change in family circumstances	9.6%	12
	0.8%	1
Child turned 18 and left home	0.8%	1
Burn Out		
Involuntary closure	0.8%	1
Other	44.8%	56

The most frequent lengths of service were 1 to 3 years with less than 12 months of service being the largest majority. Respondents’ motivation for fostering shows that the majority “wanted to give back or make a difference (53.23%), while also being interested in adopting (47.58%).” Despite the short tenures, the data indicated that the clear majority felt that they were confident in their ability to meet the needs of children placed, well- matched with the child and supported by the agency.

Table 14: Foster Parent Experiences

Tell us about your experience as a Foster Parent:			
	Yes	No	Response Count
Did you feel confident in your ability to meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	111	5	116
Did you feel that your family was well matched with the child(ren) placed in your care?	101	8	109
Do you feel that you were offered support services to help you meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	89	22	111
Do you feel that you were offered training which could help you meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	89	22	111
In general, were your phone calls to DFCS responded to in a timely manner?	86	28	114
Do you feel that you were consistently informed about case decisions and other issues affecting the child(ren) placed in your care?	69	43	112

Table 15: Foster Parent Relationships

Characterization relationship with:	Strongly Favorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Extremely Unfavorable	Non-existent
Resource Development Worker	55	49	5	9	5
Placement Case Workers	28	55	23	5	10
Service Providers (CCFA, Wraparound, etc.)	23	44	7	4	40
Birth Families	6	48	11	0	53

Local Foster Parent Association	20	45	6	3	43
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Table 16: Foster Parent Motivations

What was your motivation to begin fostering? (Check as many as apply)		
	Percent	Count
Wanted to Give Back or Make a Difference	53.2%	66
Former Fostering Experience	5.7%	7
Own Children Were Grown	8.8%	11
Wanted Sibling for Own Child	7.3%	9
Extra Income	0.0%	0
Infertility Issues	13.7%	17
Spiritual or Religious Calling	26.6%	33
Interested in Adopting	47.6%	59

Placement Matching

Placement Resource Operations Unit (PRO) was established in 2015 to ensure the proper continuum of services were coupled with the identification of the most appropriate and least restrictive placement for "high-need" youth in foster care. Children considered in this population are identified as having severe medical, emotional, behavioral, psychiatric and developmental disorders. The PRO Unit consists of a Director, Supervisor, Project Manager, Human Trafficking Program Coordinator, Program Administrator and nine (9) PRO Unit specialists. These distinct professionals have a diverse array of clinical expertise and child welfare backgrounds which allows the ability to engage intensive practice guidance and consultation to Division field staff, Inpatient treatment facilities and RBWO contracted providers on cases that require a meticulous level of insight to navigate the complexities within our state systems, policies and regulations.

The PRO Unit supports the Divisions field staff within all counties (159) in the State of Georgia. The main office is located at the State Office in Atlanta with, each PRO Specialist out stationed throughout Georgia covering North, Metro and South Districts. As a State office entity that was uniquely constructed upon its inception in 2015, PRO operates on a 24/7 schedule with specialists rotating weekly on an after hour, on-call schedule (5pm-9am) weekdays, weekends and holidays.

PRO was instrumental in creating and releasing a universal placement application used by DFCS, CPAs, and CCIs to make the most appropriate and least restrictive placement matches.

The universal placement matching process facilitated an efficient method for improving sibling, high-end, and teen placements. Improved matching efforts allowed children to remain connected to their communities when possible.

Out of State Placements

Georgia requested a total of 998 ICPC home studies April 2018 – April 2019 to place children in other states.

Georgia has 328 children placed in other states. The State has made improvements in its inter-jurisdictional adoption matching; however, it is a reactive process (processing inquiries) rather than a proactive one: it does not include requirements for actively seeking placements for children with out-of-state resources. The State also needs to make improvements in its State Office ICPC Unit ability to track and manage requests. ICPC is officially utilizing the NEICE system which will provide more expediency in case assignments to other states.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

The State's policy is consistent with IV-E requirements:

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) shall conduct a check of national and state crime information databases utilizing electronic fingerprinting (Live Scan) on any prospective foster and adoptive parent before the applicant may be finally approved for placement of a child, regardless of whether foster care maintenance payments or adoption assistance payments are to be made on behalf of the child. This includes all adults (age 18 and over) residing in the home (permanently or temporarily) who have access to children placed in the home.

DFCS shall not approve any prospective foster or adoptive parent or claim FFP for any foster care maintenance or adoption assistance payment made on behalf of a child placed in a foster home operated under the auspices of a CPA or on behalf of a child placed in an adoptive home through a private adoption agency, if DFCS finds (in any case involving a child on whose behalf such payments are to be made) via a criminal records check conducted in accordance with the above requirement, a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the prospective foster or adoptive parent has been convicted of a felony involving:

- 1.) Child abuse or neglect;
- 2.) Spousal abuse;
- 3.) A crime against a child or children (including child pornography);
- 4.) A crime involving violence, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide (but not including other physical assault or battery).

DFCS shall not approve any prospective foster or adoptive parent or claim FFP for any foster care maintenance or adoption assistance payment made on behalf of a child placed in a foster home for DFCS or CPA if that person within the last five years, has been convicted of a felony involving:

- 1.) Physical assault;
- 2.) Battery;
- 3.) A drug or alcohol related offense.

RBWO Minimum Standard 1.3 addresses the criminal history background check for Child Caring Institution staff. It reads as follows:

1.3 Providers must ensure that individuals in positions or classes of positions having direct care, treatment, custodial care, access to confidential information of clients or any combination thereof shall undergo a criminal history investigation which shall include a fingerprint record check pursuant to the provisions of

Section 49-2-14 of the Official Code of Georgia, Annotated (O.C.G.A.). Providers must utilize the Georgia Applicant Processing Services (GAPS) at www.ga.cogentid.com to comply with this requirement. Providers must have a DHS, OIG Fitness Determination Letter for all applicable staff and volunteers before beginning to work with children.

The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) is responsible for providing state- level coordination and support of the diligent recruitment plan. CRRU responsibilities include the following:

- Facilitating Resource Development Joint Committee Meetings at least quarterly
- Providing guidelines and procedures to counties for effective follow-up and evaluation of recruitment activities
- Reviewing, interpreting and distributing quarterly reports on the state's recruitment and retention efforts, which includes the types and frequency of activities, community involvement and responses, along with the number of inquiries received, the number of families in training, number and types of homes approved, and number of placements
- Developing profiles of data collected to be used in strengthening recruitment and retention programs in foster care and adoption and to ensure compliance with MEPA- IEPA and the Adoptions and Safe Families Act
- Providing assistance and technical support to regions in the development of recruitment messages; identifying new and innovative recruitment tools; and identifying and expanding relationships with community partners
- Providing promotional items (as funds allow) and developing sample letters, press releases, public service announcements (PSA) and newspaper ads to assist county/regional recruitment efforts
- Assisting counties working with state recognized tribes in complying with Section 5 of 2015-2019 CFSP, Consultation and Coordination Between the State and Tribes
- Working with Education and Training to ensure that cultural sensitivity training is conducted with resource development staff and all resource development staff successfully complete RD track training.
- Monitor and assist with placement engagement meetings to build a strong partnership with CPA, CCI, and community partners.
- Host regional meetings with foster parents to find trends and address concerns paramount to retention.
- Complete all Level II Grievances filed through-out the state by foster/adoptive parents.

The 2020-2025 plan outlines the State's continued commitment to investing in the recruitment and retention of prospective families. The Plan focuses on developing a pool of potential relative, foster and adoptive parents who are willing and able to accept the children needing placement. Georgia's plan will provide all children with the opportunity for placement as well as afford all qualified community members the opportunity to foster and/or adopt a child. The plan is designed to continue training resource development staff in the areas of recruitment, retention, assessment, matching, cultural diversity, and community engagement.

Areas needing improvement over the next five years include the following:

- 1.) Improve tracking to determine best methods of media outreach.
- 2.) Increase foster parent exit data collection and usage;
- 3.) Increase recruitment of Hispanic and Native American caregivers;
- 4.) Increase the number of relative foster parents;

- 5.) Improve the placement matching process for foster and adoptive placements regarding home type;
- 6.) Improve the program designation system and contracting expectations of RBWO placement providers, particularly for those who accept children with the highest behavioral and mental health needs (MWO designation).
- 7.) Increase the number of caregivers available for teens, medically fragile, and sibling groups.
- 8.) Improve the utilization and follow up of the exit surveys.

2014-2019 Recruitment and Retention Goals

Over the next five years DFCS will implement Partnership Parenting. Partnership Parenting is a trauma informed parenting model between caregivers and birth parents designed to keep parents parenting while their children are in out-of-home placement. By keeping parents connected and involved with parenting their children, permanency can be achieved faster, the trauma of placement can be reduced for children, child and parent bonds can be preserved, and parents can have the opportunity to demonstrate and increase their parental protective capacities. Partnership Parenting also emphasizes and supports concurrent planning.

The emphasis in the new recruitment model is on engaging families and enlisting them to do what is needed as Partnership Parents. An emphasis on grassroots outreach, relationship building, community education and awareness are key elements in the initial stages of recruiting the needed pool of Partnership Parents.

As a result, there are now three categories of caregivers: Partnership Parents, Resource Parents, and Adoptive Parents. **Partnership Parents** are foster parents who are expected to work with birth families as mentors whenever possible. They are expected to share parenting responsibilities with birth parents while birth parents work on the issues that caused their children to enter foster care. **Resource Parents** work with cases involving two permanency plans. Reunification is the primary permanency plan, but an additional (concurrent) permanency plan, such as adoption, has been established to prevent a child from lingering in foster care. Like Partnership Parents, Resource Parents are expected to mentor and share parenting responsibilities with birth parents. However, Resource Parents are willing to adopt a child placed in their home if reunification efforts fail. **Adoptive Parents** are forever families who make a life-long commitment to a child. They adopt children whose birth parents' parental rights have been voluntarily surrendered or terminated by a court, thus making them legally free for adoption. The Partnership Parenting Model was implemented in IMPACT Pre-Service Training for prospective caregivers since 2014. Families have embraced the model and start the onboarding process understanding the commitment to families and working in partnership with birth families. The model is also influential with veteran caregivers. This training model will continue in the 2020-2025 plan as an effective strategy in recruitment and retention.

DFCS is committed to specific recruitment and retention goals that identify the agency's desired outcomes. Following are these agency goals, with related objectives and interventions designed to achieve those goals. *The Division embarked on the Blueprint for Change initiative which directs the strategic marketing and messaging surrounding its' engagement with the children, families, and the community. The recruitment slogans and messaging, therefore, now align to maintain adherence to this marketing theme. Messaging elements in ongoing recruitment efforts encouraged prospective caregivers to "Change the Blueprint of a Child's Life". This is essentially a bounce-back to the Divisions over-arching theme that the community serves as the foundation for building "Stronger Families for a Stronger Georgia".*

Goal #1: Improve organizational effectiveness regarding placement resource development, retention, and placement matching.

Strategy: Improve placement matching process, tools and retention training for resource development staff by December 2025.

- 1.) Assess and improve the RBWO program designation determination system, in particular expectations for MWO providers, by December 2024.
- 2.) Utilize data more effectively in developing recruitment plans and training and providing technical assistance to county/regional resource development staff by December 2021.
- 3.) IMPACT revisions to offer more flexibility to prospective caregivers by June 2020.
- 4.) Utilization of CHAMPS in our recruitment strategies. Current
- 5.) Improve State Office ICPC Unit in tracking and management of requests, and institute better accountability and tracking mechanisms for the processes that are managed at the county level (such as conducting home evaluations and adhering to ICPC timeframes) by September 2025.

Goal # 2: Streamline the effectiveness of recruitment tools for teens, sibling groups, Hispanic and Native American caregivers by December 2025.

Strategy: Distribute media tool kits to each Region one month prior to targeted monthly recruitment effort. The marketing specialist will track the use of the tools and how effective they are in achieving new inquires during each designated month.

- 1.) Marketing Specialist will visit regions to give direct assistance general and targeted recruitment efforts starting September 2019.
- 2.) Continue established partnerships with child placing agencies to increase placement options for medically fragile, maximum watchful oversight (MWO) and special populations such as Commercially Sexually Exploited Children and Youth (CSEC) and older youth transitioning from foster care by October 2020.
- 3.) Increase caregiver recruitment and retention efforts with Georgia's recognized tribes and with Hispanic families by August 2021.
- 4.) Implement new non-safety standards and current policies and practices regarding relative placements and implement changes that support increasing the number of relative placement and relatives who become fully approved foster parents by April 2020.
- 5.) Improve the success of Placement Resource Engagement Meetings between the regional resource development teams and child placing agencies, child caring institutions, community agencies, and other partnering agencies by March 2020.

Goal # 3: Foster/Adoptive Home types clearly defined by December 2020.

Strategy: Utilization of the S.A.F.E (Structured Analysis Family Evaluation) introduced in 2019 to better assess prospective caregivers and determine the appropriate home type.

- 1.) Resource Development will be trained by August 2019 and all initial home studies and reevaluation will be conducted under the S.A.F.E model.
- 2.) Staff will also receive ongoing sensitivity and crucial conversation training to facilitate difficult conversation necessary when discussing if an individual or family should be Partnership Parent, Resource, or Adoptive based on the home evaluation, IMPACT Pre-Service training feedback, and references. Starting October 2019 – December 2025.
- 3.) Caregiver Support Techs will work with families upon approval and provide them with necessary resources that complement the home type. Starting October 2019 – December 2025.
- 4.) Resource Development staff will also work with families and ensure children placed in the home are matched by characteristics the family is capable of parenting and in accordance with their home type to avoid placement disruption, partnership issues with the agency and birth family, and reduce any potential maltreatment in care. Starting August 2019 – December 2025.
- 5.) Resource Development staff will also receive ongoing training on how to assess home at reevaluation to determine if the home type should be changed. Starting October 2019 – December 2025.

Goal #4: Increase the retention of prospective caregivers during the approval process and once approved, retain caregivers for at least five years.

The following outcomes are expected as a result of accomplishing retention goals:

Strategy #1: By August 2022, 85% of foster parents will serve at least five years and no more than 15% of foster parents will exit within 18 months of approval.

Strategy #2: By August 2022, the number of families who terminate their involvement with the agency prior to approval will be decreased by 25%.

- 1.) Develop reports that track how adequately prepared, supported and appropriately matched families are for placement of foster, adoptive and relative placements as evidenced by the percent of parents who exit after one placement, the maltreatment in care rate, number and type of policy violations, and other indicators of safety and compliance with caregiver standards by July 2021.

Goal #5: Increase the percent of caregivers who complete the foster parent exit interviews/survey to at least 75% by January 2021.

1. Use information from the caregiver exit surveys to inform pre-service and ongoing training changes and improvements.

2. Implement an annual foster parent survey process to assess training, support and service satisfaction by May 2020.
3. Increase awareness of the Caregiver Navigator warmline support available by call 1-877-210-KIDS option #2 and the fostergeorgia.com Chat feature for all caregivers December 2021.
4. Collaborate with AFPAG to facilitate growth of local associations statewide by September 2021.