

Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan

Through the vision set forth in this plan, building permanent and stable families and ensuring that placements are appropriate for children and youth are important components and areas of focus. Children and youth thrive in family-like settings and a very important part of our current system lies within foster care. In FFY 2018, on average, 921 children who were in an out-of-home placement were placed within family-like settings. In order to continue to support and grow our foster care system, a foster care recruitment and retention plan has been developed.

Wyoming has fourteen designated foster care coordinators across the state. The Department contracts with tribal social services on the Wind River Reservation and each tribe has their own foster care coordinator. Additionally, there is a foster care program manager and one (1) state office staff assigned to the adoption program to provide technical assistance as needed.

The foster care coordinators are responsible for foster care and adoption recruitment, certification, and retention activities. Each foster care coordinator is responsible for submitting an annual recruitment and retention plan for the area they cover. Within these plans strategies will be identified to aid in recruiting new foster homes. Important areas to consider for recruitment within the next five years include foster homes who will take and successfully care for older youth, foster homes that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children and youth for whom foster homes are needed, and foster homes that will provide specialized care. The foster care coordinators will continue to have regularly scheduled conference calls to exchange ideas, discuss policy and certification issues, develop strategies to retain foster homes, and also to increase the number of adoptive and foster homes in their area. Recruitment efforts will be made on an on-going basis to recruit and retain culturally diverse foster homes. Wyoming statutes and the Department policy and procedure require staff to conduct diligent searches to find non-custodial or absent parents and other relatives and to place children who are in the Department's custody with family whenever possible. As such, foster care coordinators will continue to coordinate with caseworkers to identify and work with family members who may be appropriate placements for the child or youth. They also will continue to conduct home studies and assess and certify foster homes being considered for placement of a child or youth from other states through the ICPC.

The following areas were identified as goals for future improvement related to foster and adoptive parents.

Certification and Re-Certification

An important area of focus for the Department is the certification and re-certification of quality foster homes who will assist in assuring safety, permanency, stability, and well-being of children and youth in foster care or who achieve permanency through adoption or guardianship. The Department will ensure all certification and re-certification requirements are met prior to certification and re-certification of foster homes. Files will be reviewed by the district manager or designee prior to signing foster home certificates to assure all requirements have been met. The district managers will periodically conduct a complete review of randomly selected files. Results of these reviews are recorded in a google spreadsheet.

Initial and On-going Training

An essential requirement in the initial certification of resource families is completion of the Child Welfare League of America pre-service curriculum called PRIDE training. The PRIDE training is documented by the foster care coordinator in the foster home file.

During the year of certification, the Department requires 18 hours of training, which can be fulfilled by participation in the PRIDE training and through first aid and CPR training. Following the initial certification, 36 hours of training is required during each two (2) year certification period to become re-certified. The foster care coordinators work with each foster home in determining what activities will apply toward the required training hours and the amount of time each activity is worth. Foster parents are encouraged to pursue training and educational opportunities which will increase their skills and knowledge to care for the special needs of children and youth placed in their home and develop their competencies as foster parents. Training resources will include:

- Attending trainings, workshops, classes, conferences and support groups;
- Psychoeducation provided by child or youth's therapist;
- Webinar attendance;
- Topic-specific books and videos;
- College courses;
- Foster Parent College; and
- Review of relevant literature (i.e. Fostering Families Today; Adoption Today; etc.).

The Department has implemented TFTC. TFTC is a training/consultation approach to improving practice in specialized foster care. It incorporates elements from existing evidence-based treatments to fill identified gaps in usual care practice. The resulting model includes training/consultation for supervisors as well as training for specialized foster parents. TFTC is designed as a train-the-trainer approach, so that administrative/supervisory personnel can learn the model and train specialized foster parents. This program provides training on practical parenting and supervisory skills and techniques. In order for foster parents to qualify for a higher rate with the specialized certification, TFTC training needs to be completed.

Recruitment and Development of Quality Resource Homes

Another priority of the Department is in recruiting foster homes which will assist in assuring the safety, permanency, stability and well-being of children and youth in foster care or who are adopted. According to focus groups and surveys, on-going recruitment activities are important in maintaining the public's awareness of the need for foster homes and ways individuals and groups can help support children and youth in foster care as well as their families and caregivers. Some individuals or couples hear about the need for homes and act immediately while others may consider fostering for years and wait until the time is right for them before they make an initial inquiry. While the best recruitment strategy in Wyoming is word-of-mouth, on-going, positive communication regarding foster care and adoption will increase the pool of potential foster parents as well as public support. Therefore, the Department needs to raise awareness of the need for foster families and community support for caregivers, children and youth in care, and their families by developing marketing strategies and tools for both general and targeted recruitment.

In order to implement this strategy, each foster care coordinator will develop and implement an annual local foster care/adoption recruitment and retention plan to be submitted to the state office by January 31st of each year. Information will also be used to identify gaps and needs for the purpose of developing and implementing strategies, tools and resources which can be used locally and statewide. This information will also be used to inform updates to the statewide

marketing plan and the foster care and adoption recruitment and retention plan. Conversely, the local foster care recruitment and retention plans will incorporate dissemination and implementation of statewide resources and practices into the local plans to further support local foster care and adoption programs and services.

It will be essential for the Department staff to carefully review the local plans and then work with foster care coordinators in developing and implementing local strategies and measures included in the plans. The strategies may include distribution of brochures, presentations and other events to engage churches, school staff and other communities which have specific skills or networks able to provide specialized care and support to foster families. This plan will help to build on local successes and enable the coordinators to modify resources and strategies for other jurisdictions or for statewide implementation as appropriate. Additionally, the plans can be used to identify gaps and develop tools, resources, and strategies which can be used statewide to support the recruitment, development, and retention of foster families.

The following list includes potential activities and benchmarks to include in the report as developed through the survey and focus group planning process:

- Utilize on-going AdoptUSKids national ad campaign as a strategy of increasing awareness;
- Update general foster care brochure;
- Develop print ads which are suitable to be made into posters, billboards and ads ;
- Review and update all website content based on new recruitment messaging;
- Create a form whereby prospective foster parents can inquire about next steps to become a foster parent;
- Develop a brochure and other materials to engage the faith community in recruiting and supporting foster parents, children and youth and the children and youth's families;
- Identification of best foster parents to reach out to friends and relatives they think could be good foster parents. Collateral benefits in this approach are that new foster parents will have mentors/coaches who can help them through the process as well as be a support to them when they have questions, or need respite; and,
- Team Department staff with foster care coordinators and foster parents to do presentations in faith communities and organizations.

Recruitment of Foster Homes for Older Youth

With the FFSPA, the Department recognizes the need to recruit foster homes which will take and successfully care for older youth and teens. Youth are often placed in more restrictive settings such as residential treatment or detention facilities due to mental health concerns or delinquent activities. Many are placed in group homes or more restrictive settings due to a lack of appropriate foster homes. With the FFSPA, the Department will seek foster placements if at all possible for this population. Additionally, services are often not available to successfully maintain youth in their community. The following strategies were identified through the planning process to address these concerns:

- Creation of brochures, radio copy, radio ads, and script for social media specific to prospective foster parents who might be interested in being placement resource for teens;
- Determine effectiveness of materials and strategies by surveying prospective foster families and foster care coordinators; and,
- Determine whether or not there is an increase in the number of certified foster families who will be a placement resource for teens compared to the total number of certified foster homes.

These strategies will help the Department to increase community awareness of the need for homes for older youth as well as determining to what extent the current resources may address this need.

Recruitment and Development of Diverse Resource Homes

The need for diverse foster homes which reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children and youth who need foster homes is a priority for the Department. Due to the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in most Wyoming communities, reaching out to relatives and kin of specific children through family finding and other family search and engagement strategies is the most effective means of finding appropriate connections and placements for most children and especially for children and youth who are members of minority groups.

Activities designed to increase cultural and racial diversity in foster homes identified by the focus groups and survey results include:

- Creation of a brochure specific to prospective foster parents who are Hispanic/Latino in both English and Spanish;
- Creation and dissemination of radio spots in Spanish;
- Creation of a brochure specific to prospective resource parents who are Indian. Although the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes receive their own IV-B funds, which may be used to address the recruitment and retention of foster homes, the Department will collaborate with the tribes in the development of the brochures. The brochures will be used not only in Fremont county and the Wind River Reservation, but throughout the state as the Department serves children and youth from these two tribes as well as other tribes; and
- Development and implementation of a web-based PRIDE training for Spanish speaking families.

Recruitment of Homes for Difficult to Place Youth

Children and youth who are identified as difficult to place include children and youth with significant behavioral issues, large sibling groups, and children and youth needing specialized medical care. Assisting these youth in finding a placement was identified as a need within both the survey results as through the work of the focus groups. The FFSPA also emphasizes the necessity of placing children in family-like settings whenever possible. The Department will work with service providers throughout the state to identify placement strategies for difficult to place youth.

Relative and Kinship Identification

The identification of relative, kinship, and other important connections as potential placements at the beginning of the case is essential, as is the ability to engage these connections throughout the life of the case. Although the identification of these connections is primarily a caseworker function, it is also a critical recruitment strategy as these placements are usually the most successful long term. The Department has identified the need to provide training and support so placements are successful and important connections are maintained. Local strategies supporting the engagement and support of relatives and kinship foster families are included in the local foster care recruitment and retention plans.

In order to address this need, foster care coordinators will certify and provide pre-service training for relative and kinship homes interested in becoming certified as foster families and provide

technical support to caseworkers on completing safety and background checks for relatives who are not becoming certified. The appropriate training curriculum and methodology for delivery will be chosen and implemented by the Department with the overall goal to provide and exchange information and facilitate pre-service training so prospective foster parents can decide with the Department if fostering or adoption is appropriate for their family as well as to gain the preliminary knowledge and skills needed to be a foster parent.

With the FFPSA, funding was made available to states and tribes to evaluate, enhance or develop a Kinship Navigator Program. The Department has contracted with Wyoming 211 to establish a Kinship Navigator Program to serve relatives and kin statewide. Initial implementation will be in Laramie and Natrona counties, with state wide implementation in 2020.

Retention of Quality Foster Families

Long term retention of quality foster families who will assist in assuring safety, permanency, stability, and well-being of children and youth in foster care or who achieve permanency through adoption or guardianship is critical. These families provide stable, nurturing homes and have a wealth of experience and knowledge that allows them to serve as mentors and coaches to children, youth, and other foster parents.

To support the goal of retention, the Department will ensure positive working relationships between the Department and foster parents. While there are numerous reasons why foster parents resign from their caregiver roles, staff can influence the quality of relationship between the Department and foster parents. The Department also can increase the level of support provided to each foster family. Accomplishing this goal can be easily addressed through internal measures. The Department can increase staff awareness regarding the needs of foster parents and also can implement strategies that provide foster parents the support they need to successfully care for traumatized children and youth. Training and foster parent focus groups and panels for staff during core and during field training experience can increase awareness of the needs of foster families and identify effective strategies for staff to use.

In addition to this general strategy, several specific strategies were developed during the CFSP planning process. One identified strategy to increase engagement is to have caseworkers ensure foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative and kinship caregivers have been notified of MDT's and court hearings regarding children and youth in their care. Caseworkers also can present the caregiver's perspective, preferably in writing, when the caregiver is unable to attend these case activities. A random sample of foster parents indicated that 90% recalled receiving a notice of the last court proceeding for children in their care and reported that the notification included information on how they could exercise their right to be heard. Although this strategy is currently a strength within the Department, further progress can be made on ensuring that all foster parents receive notice.

Within the foster care coordinator annual plan, emphasis will be placed on providing for or arranging for on-going education and support to foster families. Foster, kinship or adopted children and youth who have mental health issues, challenging behaviors or who have experienced trauma can be exhausting and challenging to care for. Knowing what to expect and how to respond is critical in ensuring successful, stable placements and positive relationships.

Furthermore, the foster care coordinator plans will focus on the development of support groups which foster parents can access in a way that best meets their individual needs. Support groups are an opportunity for foster parents to network with each other to not only learn from one

another but also to develop relationships they can rely on outside of the support group to provide respite care.

Also of importance within retention is ensuring that resource families are recognized as an important element of the social services system. To that end, the Department will collaborate with the CJP, WCRP, LifeNet, CASA, and other agencies and organizations to work with their staff and partners to recognize the importance of foster parents. Furthermore, the stakeholder survey and focus groups identified the following areas for potential improvement:

- Utilizing a peer foster parent program to teach parenting, home management, and life skills while providing a support system to families involved with the Department.
- Utilizing respite care to provide opportunities for foster parents to care for themselves and their relationships enabling them to better meet their families' needs. It provides numerous benefits including preventing placement disruption, lowering stress levels and improving quality of relationships between parents, children, and youth.

Consultation and Parenting Support

It is important for the Department to ensure that high quality parenting support, consultation, and mental health services are available for foster families, children, and youth to allow for successful placement and maintenance in the least restrictive setting. In order to achieve these goals, the following strategies have been identified:

- Review of utilization of existing mental health services which accept Medicaid and use evidence-based/informed practices for trauma assessments and treatment, when available, or work with clinical services division and WDH to locate appropriate services;
- Review the Department ability to pay for family preservation and mentoring;
- Review process to ensure application(s) and/or referral has been made for Children's Mental Health Waiver, Children's Developmental Disabilities Waiver, Care Management Entity, Maternal and Children's Health/Children's Special Health, WYhealth, Supplemental Security Income, Vocational Rehabilitation, Individual Educational Plans and any other services or programs which can help address any social, emotional, behavioral, physical or developmental concerns of child and youth;
- Explore options for 24/7 warm line, crisis intervention, wraparound services, therapist(s) and behavioral interventionist(s);
- Review ability to arrange and pay for therapist-led psychoeducation groups;
- Review ability to pay for mental health services for foster or kinship parents and their families;
- Review ability to arrange for consults with clinical services division staff;
- Review ability to arrange for psychoeducation and individual/group training with child or youth's therapist and/or other treatment providers; and,
- Review ability to contract with expert(s) to provide one-on-one training and consultation, in collaboration with clinical services division staff, to resource parents and staff.

Additional Training

Foster parents need high quality training and access to information which will increase their skills and knowledge so they can successfully meet the needs of children and youth placed with them and be able to mentor the children and youth's parents. They can also use these skills in mentoring and coaching parents that the Department is working with to help prevent placements.

Additionally, training for staff is a priority for the Department. These trainings will continue to be implemented:

- In October 2017, the Department held onsite training for teaching all of the core components of TFTC to agency staff. All FCCs are trained in TFTC and regularly train foster parents and new staff. Training of new staff is necessary to maintain TFTC fidelity for continued certification.
- Tonya L. Yelton, Licensed Professional Counselor and a Registered Play Therapist trains staff, foster parents, and community partners on information regarding Reactive Attachment Disorder. Trainings are held throughout the state at the request of the foster care coordinator. RAD training is to provide information on understanding and recognizing reactive attachment disorder behaviors as well as how to work with those who have this complex diagnosis.

The following trainings are those to be explored for implementation:

- Safe Passages: Mentoring and Support Groups (for mentors and facilitators);
- A 3-D View of Foster Children: Integrated Understanding of and Interventions with Externalizing Behavior Problems (for foster parents and others)
- Sibling Placements: Special Issues, Impact on Family;
- Placement Stability and Reduction in Risk of Placement Disruption: Identifying Placement Risks and Resilience;
- Working Together: Foster Parents and Biological Parents (or Primary Parents) Collaboration; and
- In Touch Parenting: A Reflective Approach to Caring for Traumatized Children;
- Lying and stealing;
- Non-compliance and defiance;
- Social and physical aggression and temper tantrums;
- Enuresis and encopresis;
- Hoarding and other food issues; and
- Sexual acting out.

Services for Children under the Age 5

Community interest in adopting children under the age of five (5) is so great that it is rare to have a child who is not placed with his or her permanent family by the time reunification is no longer the permanency plan. While some children under the age of five (5) with special medical needs or significant behavioral health needs may be more challenging to place, the Department is projecting children under the age of five (5) to have a permanent family identified if reunification is not identified as the permanency goal.

Targeted services provided to find a permanent family for children under the age of five (5) begin at the opening of the case and include child-specific family finding activities and targeted recruitment. If needed, partnerships with Wyoming adoption agencies, foster parents, and WWK also assist with identification of potential families. Case plans specify goals and activities relative to the individualized needs of the child, parents, and families caring for the child; concurrent planning; assistance from multidisciplinary teams; and on-going supervision. These efforts all assist in keeping permanency planning efforts on track and help to provide supportive services to the child and to the placement family.

Wyoming statute and the Department policy mandate that safety and risk shall be assessed at intake and throughout the life of a case to identify safety and risk factors and to address identified needs of the child, youth, and family. Additionally, Wyoming Statute §14-3-204(a) (ix) and the Department Family Service Plan policy require caseworkers to refer children under the age of six (6) to child developmental centers for screening. Additionally, statute and policy require workers to address any needs identified from the screening(s). Certified foster parents are limited to caring for no more than two (2) children under the age of two (2) and a capacity of no more than five (5) children living in the home (including their own children) unless an exception has been allowed by the district manager or designee. Foster parents and other caregivers also play an integral role in mentoring and assisting the child's parent in activities with a goal of reunification.

There are strong partnerships in communities statewide to assist in meeting the needs of all infants, toddlers, and children, including the public health home visiting programs, child development centers, and Head Start, to name a few. These partnerships and ensuing coordination become even more critical when children and families are involved with the child welfare system. Partnerships between the Department, WDH and WDE at the state level also assist in providing services and funding to help with provision and coordination of services at the local level. Statewide advisory councils and boards, such as the Early Intervention Council, help plan and implement state and local activities.

In addition, Wyoming has a plan for the on-going oversight and coordination of health care services (see Health and Oversight Plan section) for any child in foster care, to include initial and follow-up health screenings; how identified health needs are monitored and treated; and how medical information is updated and shared with providers. Meeting the developmental needs of children under the age of five (5) has also been added to the Healthcare Oversight section for on-going planning purposes.

Child development training occurs at core training for new caseworkers and at PRIDE pre-service training for foster parents and caregivers. On-going training to keep staff, caregivers and providers up-to-date on meeting the developmental, trauma, and health needs of children under the age of five (5) will be provided through conferences, webinars and other in-service training.