



A CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention:

**STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING
A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM**

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INTRODUCTION

CHAMPS, which stands for Children Need Amazing Parents¹, is a national campaign to ensure bright futures for kids in foster care by promoting the highest quality parenting. The primary goal of CHAMPS is to drive improvements to foster parenting policies throughout the United States. In support of this goal, CHAMPS provides information and tools to encourage and assist decision makers in strengthening foster parenting in their communities. More information about CHAMPS is on the back cover.

There are pressing factors that make foster parent recruitment and retention an urgent issue nationally and in states. This year, 2019, marks the fifth consecutive year where the numbers of children in foster care are increasing. Parental substance use and the ongoing opioid crisis are having a major impact on the increasing numbers of children entering foster care around the country². In fact, over one-third of children entering foster care do so at least in part as a result of parental substance abuse. Ongoing news reports highlight persistent foster parent shortages and contributing to foster parent shortages is the high turnover rate among foster parents. Estimates show that between 30 and 50 percent of families quit foster parenting within the first year. What's more, implementation of the Family *First Prevention Services Act* seeks to curtail the inappropriate use of congregate care for children and places a new emphasis on the importance of family foster care. The good news is foster parents report that their greatest challenges are often dealing with child welfare practices and policies, not an unwillingness to parent children and youth. Therefore, by improving practice and policy we can better support the families who are our most important intervention.

Our hope is that this publication will contribute to state and tribal agency efforts to address challenges and achieve excellence in the recruitment, development, and support of foster parents, including relative — or kinship — caregivers. In particular, the release of this publication is timed so that it can serve as a timely resource to child welfare agencies that are in the process of developing new five-year Diligent Recruitment plans³. This publication has several objectives:

1. Provide useful information and suggestions for innovative, promising approaches for inclusion in Diligent Recruitment plans.
2. Encourage agencies to go beyond writing a plan and spur new and improved programming, resulting in agency-wide prioritization of foster parenting.
3. Promote broad incorporation of the six key drivers of better outcomes for children and families in recruitment and retention policies and programs. These drivers were featured at a national convening on foster parenting hosted by CHAMPS and the Brookings Institution in January 2019.
4. Highlight evidence-based policy solutions featured in the CHAMPS Policy Playbook to strengthen foster parent recruitment, support and retention.

1 More information about CHAMPS is available at www.fosteringchamps.org

2 American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Foster Care, Adoption, and Kinship Care; Waite, Douglas; Greiner, Mary V.; and Laris, Zach (2018) "Putting Families First: How the Opioid Epidemic is Affecting Children and Families, and the Child Welfare Policy Options to Address It," *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 4. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol9/iss1/4>

3 Diligent Recruitment plans—and indeed comprehensive Diligent Recruitment programs—rightly encompass strategies that pertain to adoptive as well as foster and kinship families. This report, however, focuses specifically on identifying and supporting foster families, including relative foster families. Many of the resources referenced herein, however, provide valuable information for broader work on diligent recruitment.

This report is organized as follows:

1. A description of six key “drivers” that should guide the development of any comprehensive program for foster parent recruitment and retention;
2. A description of the elements of a comprehensive program and how they align with the federally-required elements of a five-year Diligent Recruitment Plan;
3. Recommended strategies for implementation of a comprehensive program for foster parent recruitment and retention;
4. A summary of lessons learned from the federal Diligent Recruitment grants; and
5. A list of resources for more information.

Based on an examination of federal and state policy, research, best practice approaches and system reform efforts, we believe that transformational change for children, families and child welfare agencies is achievable when foster parenting is prioritized in policy and practice. This report draws on the existing body of resources and information related to quality foster parent recruitment and retention and identifies six key drivers of better outcomes. Foster parent recruitment policies and programming are most effective when they:

1. Are child-centered;
2. Are data-driven and informed by continuous quality improvement;
3. Demonstrate multi-level agency leadership;
4. Are based on collaboration and transparency within the agency and with families and community;
5. Incorporate youth and parent voice; and
6. Are sustainable.

Effective Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention are Critical to Placement Stability

PLACEMENT INSTABILITY negatively affects children’s safety, permanency and well-being. Several factors positively affect placement stability, including recruiting and retaining a sufficient number of foster parents who have the skills, temperament and social supports necessary to care for children and youth with challenging behaviors and other health issues. With an adequate pool of such foster parents, children can be matched with families that can provide the consistency and stability necessary for them to heal and thrive. Once children are placed, preventing disruptions depends in large measure on ongoing support from peers, the child welfare agency and the community.

SIX KEY DRIVERS OF A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

1

KEY DRIVER:
CHILD-CENTERED

Recruitment and retention efforts will benefit from using a child-centered approach. Being child-centered means policies, programs and practices are focused on helping each individual child heal and grow. It is based on an understanding of trauma, healthy child development and that quality parenting is foundational to achieving positive outcomes for children. Therefore, foster parents and workers need the training, resources and support in child-centered practices that will drive better outcomes in children's health, development, education, and relationships. This includes facilitating relationships that focus on meeting the needs of children and families.

2

KEY DRIVER:
**DATA-DRIVEN
AND INFORMED
BY CONTINUOUS
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

Agencies can improve their recruitment and retention efforts through improved use data-driven decision making. A data collection and analysis system will not only help agencies have enough trained and available families to meet changing needs, but also ensure that the best possible match between family and child occurs. Good matches promote placement stability, which benefits children's safety, permanency and well-being. Implementing more data-driven approaches can help agencies assess the effectiveness of different services along the continuum, including response to inquiries from prospective foster parents, orientation sessions, pre-service training, licensing and ongoing support. Data, such as from surveys or interviews, can also identify the reasons for losing foster families.

Foundational elements of data collection and analysis should identify:

- child-specific characteristics in order to make the best matches with families;
- characteristics of successful caregivers;
- foster parents' skills, interests, placement preferences, and placement capacity and training;
- information about communities and neighborhoods that should be targeted for recruitment efforts so that children in care remain close to home and school of origin; and
- indicators that point to barriers, delays and inefficiencies in the licensure and approval process to ensure that those interested and qualified to become foster parents are able to complete the process.

3

KEY DRIVER:
**LEADERSHIP WITHIN
AND ACROSS AGENCIES**

Engaging child welfare managers and high-level staff within and across child- and family-serving agencies is critical to achieving and sustaining excellence in foster family recruitment and retention. Consistent involvement of key staff with decision-making responsibility for programs, policy, data, contract management, budgeting, quality improvement and training is important to ensuring that foster parenting is an ongoing priority. Key staff should be included in the development, implementation and evaluation of recruitment and retention plans and programs. Agencies that have foster parent advisory boards should invite key staff from across the agency to participate in meetings.

4

KEY DRIVER:
**COLLABORATION
AND TRANSPARENCY**

Effective and transparent partnerships are integral to successful foster parent recruitment, support and retention. Foster families should be priority partners as they spend more time with children in care than do any other professional partners. Foster parents can play an important role in development of diligent recruitment plans and programs. Transparency with current and prospective foster parents means providing them with important child-specific information as well as information about agency policies, support services, permanency options and the like. Community partners, including faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, civic groups and employers are trusted sources of support to birth, foster, kinship and adoptive families and share an interest in promoting strong families and communities. These organizations can assist with a range of activities, including outreach and referrals, information dissemination, translation, community benefits, public service announcements, foster family appreciation events, after-school and tutoring assistance for children, staff training, meeting or event space and more. Many employers are doing their part to support foster parenting by providing benefits for employees who are foster parents that are similar to benefits for birth and adoptive families.

5

KEY DRIVER:
**YOUTH AND
PARENT VOICE**

Youth and families in child welfare regularly remind us, "Nothing about us without us." This sentiment captures the critical need to hear and be informed by the insights and perspectives of youth in foster care and of foster parents as child welfare systems develop approaches for recruiting, developing, and supporting foster families. As professionals explore new strategies, data, and evidence-based practices, one of the best sources of information and expertise are the very people who live the foster care and foster parenting experience every day.

6

KEY DRIVER:
SUSTAINABILITY

With any new policy or initiative, maintaining support and focus can be challenging, especially in the face of changes in leadership, budget, priorities and needs. To be truly effective, a strong recruitment and retention program should be made a priority across the agency with an emphasis on sustainability. In addition to establishing foster parenting as an agency-wide priority, ongoing efforts should be made to build new and maintain existing strategic partnerships with community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, civic groups, schools, health care providers, and employers.

MOVING FROM PLAN TO PROGRAM

FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLANS

As a condition of receiving federal Title IV-B funds, state child welfare agencies must have an approved state plan for child welfare services, including a plan that “provides 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.”⁴

The Children’s Bureau within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for approving and overseeing state Child and Family Service Plans⁵, which include Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plans. Guidance from the Children’s Bureau to states outlines key elements that are expected to be included in a comprehensive *Diligent Recruitment plan*.⁶

In addition to the requirements for a Diligent Recruitment plan, as described in the Child Welfare Policy Manual and through Program Instruction, the Children’s Bureau previously provided a description in a federal funding announcement of what constitutes a comprehensive, multi-faceted Diligent Recruitment

program.⁷ That description of a comprehensive program outlined 18 elements, which appear in the chart below.

With this publication, and informed by its work with experts in foster parent recruitment and retention, CHAMPS encourages agencies to go beyond developing a plan and focus on designing a comprehensive program based on the elements identified in the chart below. A comprehensive approach will help ensure that foster parent recruitment, retention and support is established and maintained as an ongoing priority.

The chart cross-walks the eight federally-required elements of a diligent recruitment plan with the 18 elements of a comprehensive diligent recruitment program. The cross-walk shows how a plan can serve as the basis for a more comprehensive approach that incorporates best practices and can be sustained over time. In the next section, we offer specific, actionable strategies that align with key drivers for better outcomes. This approach, we believe, can significantly strengthen foster parent recruitment and retention efforts.

4 42 U.S.C. 622, Section 422(b)(7) of the Social Security Act

5 The Children’s Bureau hosts a searchable database of state and tribal Child and Family Service Plans at: https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/state_search/SearchForm

6 See Program Instruction ACYF-CB-PI-19-02, which contains federal guidance on 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plans.

7 This description of a comprehensive, multi-faceted diligent recruitment program is from the Funding Opportunity Announcement for AdoptUSKids, HHS-2012-ACF-ACYF-CQ-0269, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau (April 25, 2012). It is also included in the tip sheet, “What is Diligent Recruitment?” from the former National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids.

CROSS-WALK OF DILIGENT RECRUITMENT REQUIREMENTS AND COMPREHENSIVE DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Federally-required elements of Diligent Recruitment plan	CHAMPS-recommended elements of comprehensive Diligent Recruitment program
A description of the characteristics of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Procedures for consistently updating the characteristics of children in care utilizing information and analysis of AFCARS data and other data available to the State, region, or county;
Specific strategies to reach out to all parts of the community;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Procedures for ongoing analysis of the current pool of available foster and adoptive placement resources; ■ Collaboration and public-private partnerships with groups representative of the communities from which children come, to help identify and support potential foster and adoptive families;
Diverse methods of disseminating both general information about being a foster/adoptive parent and child specific information;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ General, targeted, and child-specific recruitment, including relationship mining for youth, to meet placement needs of children in care; ■ Recruitment and development of homes, including relative homes, that can provide placement as a part of concurrent planning for the child; ■ Recruitment and development of homes that can accommodate siblings in care so siblings can be placed together or reunited when they have been separated in care; ■ Recruitment of foster homes to ensure children and youth may be maintained in their schools when placed in foster care; ■ Procedures for providing training to prospective foster and adoptive parents regarding the characteristics, needs, and issues of children who have experienced trauma, as well as adoption clinical issues;
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;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Procedures to ensure that all prospective parents, including relatives and people who have important existing relationships with youth in care, have access to the home study process, including foster and adoptive parent training at a local or community level and that the home studies are initiated and completed in a timely manner; ■ Utilization of a “customer service” model in responding to prospective foster and adoptive parents, and to reduce the dropout rates; ■ Procedures or processes to address barriers presented by the agency in order to increase the rate of retention of prospective foster and adoptive parents and to reduce the dropout rates; ■ Dual licensure of foster and adoptive homes;

...Continued

Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial, and socio-economic variations;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Procedures for training staff to engage effectively with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities who are reflective of the children and youth in foster care; ■ Training strategies for staff and community partners;
Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Procedures to deal with linguistic barriers;
Non-discriminatory fee structures; and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Procedures to ensure a non-discriminatory fee structure, including the use of purchase of service arrangements with public and private agencies (including community-based and other organizations) when necessary to facilitate and support placement;
Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a child needing an adoptive placement, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Utilization of adoption exchanges, including www.AdoptUSKids.org and/or regional or local exchanges; ■ Procedures and processes to eliminate barriers to the interjurisdictional placement of children.⁸

8 This description of a comprehensive diligent recruitment program is from the Funding Opportunity Announcement for AdoptUSKids, HHS-2012-ACF-ACYF-CQ-0269, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau (April 25, 2012).

ALIGNING KEY DRIVERS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

What follows are recommended strategies to help child welfare agencies develop comprehensive diligent recruitment programs that incorporate the key drivers for better outcomes. In particular, we organize the elements of a comprehensive program for foster parent recruitment and retention as set forth in the right-hand column of the above chart into a framework based on the six drivers for better outcomes to underscore the importance of the drivers. With each program element are recommended strategies for implementation of the program element.

1

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT CHILD-CENTERED GOALS

- Recruitment and development of homes, including relative homes, that can provide placement as a part of concurrent planning for the child
 - Prioritize family connections and family-based care, such as by implementing provisional licensing protocols that enable children to be placed with relatives prior to full licensure.
- Recruitment and development of homes that can accommodate siblings in care so siblings can be placed together or reunited when they have been separated in care
 - Consider licensing and keeping available a select number of family-based placements for large sibling groups.
- Procedures for providing training to prospective foster and adoptive parents regarding the characteristics, needs, and issues of children who have experienced trauma, as well as adoption clinical issues
 - Provide trauma-informed, solution oriented training for foster parents, child-placing agency staff, CASA volunteers and others who can assist youth in recovering from trauma and preparing for permanency.
 - Involve youth and experienced foster and adoptive parents in training as part of the training team—either in-person or via video—to give prospective parents an opportunity to hear directly from youth who are, or have been, in foster care and from parents about children's needs and strengths, how trauma may manifest and effective parenting approaches.
- General, targeted, and child-specific recruitment, including relationship mining for youth, to meet placement needs of children in care
 - Design foster parent recruitment messages and build strategic community partnerships to help engage prospective foster parents, including those who are interested in and committed to mentoring and coaching birth families.
 - Design foster parent recruitment efforts in support of safe reduction of congregate care, which could include prioritizing relative and important connections search, re-recruiting among current foster families; in-service training for existing foster families on caring for teens.
 - Provide opportunities for licensed families to provide respite care or to mentor.
 - Update caseworker and foster parent training to include best practices on how to support foster and birth family relationships, including utilizing foster and birth parents as trainers
 - Engage/employ foster parents, birth parents and youth as recruiters
 - Involve foster parents in developing recruitment plans (see Collaboration and Transparency)
- Procedures and processes to eliminate barriers to the interjurisdictional placement of children
 - Ensuring that staff have clear expectations for exploring interjurisdictional placements, including in cases where there are strong kinship care options in a different state or jurisdiction.
- Dual licensure of foster and adoptive homes
 - Assess your agency's policies and practices regarding dual licensure.

2

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT DATA-DRIVEN GOALS

- Procedures for ongoing analysis of the current pool of available foster and adoptive placement resources
 - Align capacity and need, such as by maintaining a foster parent census, an ongoing, periodic collection of data on licensed foster parents, including those who are not currently caring for a child, to assess if the pool of licensed families aligns with needs of children in care and to inform recruitment and retention.
 - Share foster parent census reports with internal agency partners and with external stakeholders in planning efforts. Have ongoing discussions about the implications of the census data for recruitment and retention efforts, including any needed changes
 - Use market segmentation approaches to identify families who are similar to other successful foster families and to develop strategies for reaching those families.
 - Gather information and feedback from foster families through surveys and focus groups.
 - Use information and data to improve placement matching. For example, some sites participating in the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) employ a “pre-match” strategy (<http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/qpi/prematch/start.html>) that enhances placement stability.
 - Consider recommendations developed by youth leaders on ways to promote placement stability. (See resources for Quality Parenting Initiative.)
- Procedures for consistently updating the characteristics of children in care utilizing information and analysis of AFCARS data and other data available to the State, region, or county
 - Coordinate with tribal agencies to compile and analyze data on Native American children in foster care
 - Establish clear definitions of data elements and provide guidance and training on how to track and report data to ensure quality and support data-driven decision-making at all levels of practice.
- Recruitment of foster homes to ensure children and youth may be maintained in their schools when placed in foster care
 - Use geomapping to see where children are entering foster care, where their schools are, and where licensed foster families live. Analyze the data to determine whether there are gaps between the communities children are from and where foster families live, indicating a need for more families in specific communities.
 - Develop local recruitment and retention plans based on specific needs of children, areas from which children are entering foster care, and strengths of each geographic area. Invite key partners from geographic area to participate in developing the plan.
 - Develop partnerships with schools and Parent Teacher Associations or school groups to regularly recruit or send out “alerts” when there is a need for a student from their school.
- Procedures or processes to address barriers presented by the agency in order to increase the rate of retention of prospective foster and adoptive parents and reduce dropout rates
 - Enlist the agency’s quality improvement division to ensure the agency develops procedures to (1) assess effectiveness of recruitment and retention efforts, (2) establish key indicators to monitor process from parent inquiry through licensing and placement to identify any delays or reasons for losing families, and (3) integrate foster family support into broader Continuous Quality Improvement oversight.
 - Conduct a thorough assessment of the agency’s full continuum of recruitment and retention activities, including response to inquiries, orientation sessions, pre-service training, licensing and ongoing support to identify unnecessary steps in the recruitment and licensure process. Use the results of the assessment to streamline process and to incorporate needed support for families. Ensure that any assessment includes feedback from foster parents.
 - Ensure there are regularly opportunities to hear directly from youth and foster parents about their experiences and to elevate agency issues impacting retention such as communication, relationships, investigations, transitions or other larger system issues.

3

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT LEADERSHIP GOALS

- Utilization of a “customer service” model in responding to prospective foster and adoptive parents, and to reduce dropout rates (see selected resources)

Regularly collect feedback from foster parents through surveys, exit interviews and other means to inform recruitment and retention policies and practices.

Initiate new, or expand existing, foster family appreciation activities throughout the year. Express gratitude, highlight the important role of families and the staff who support them, and acknowledge foster families as valued partners. Use feedback from foster families to help plan appreciation activities and engage the community in celebrating their role.

Evaluate workforce training and casework practice relating to the continuum of supports offered to prospective and current foster parents throughout the fostering process, including application, training, home study, case management, licensure and post-permanency services. Assess and improve processes to help increase worker responsiveness to current and prospective families and improve family satisfaction.

Provide timely access to trusted, dedicated staff and peer support as part of a comprehensive customer service model. Support for current and prospective foster parents comes in many forms, including peer support workers, dedicated agency caseworkers, support groups, agency telephone support and kinship navigator programs. For a discussion of these strategies, including examples of existing policies and programs, see the CHAMPS Policy Playbook, 2nd edition: <https://playbook.fosteringchamps.org>.

- Cultivate leaders within and across agencies.

On Leadership

TIM DECKER, former director of the Missouri Children's Division and a recognized child welfare leader, envisions a model of leadership that places children, families and communities at the center of policy and practice: “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.

Foundationally this involves:

- Fundamentally changing our view of children, young people and families, and moving beyond compliance, coercion, and “clipboard” approaches to our work;
- Adopting values and mission as a foundation, and displaying the unrelenting courage, compassion, and curiosity so essential to establishing authentic partnerships with families;
- Ensuring programs fit the child, family, and community; not the other way around; and
- Resisting the temptation to apply technical or top-down leadership to adaptive challenges.”

See the full statement by Tim Decker in Appendix.

Using a Customer Service Approach with Families

THE IDEA OF “CUSTOMER SERVICE” in child welfare work may not initially sound like a clear fit, but using a customer service approach can strengthen recruitment and retention efforts in significant ways. As described by AdoptUSKids: “Although a child welfare agency is not a business, the idea of consistently providing high levels of services to all customers can become its “customer service” culture. What matters most in terms of recruitment and retention is how foster, adoptive, and kinship families perceive and experience the services provided. In fact, the agency will be judged based on families’ perceptions. Taken from this perspective, every interaction with an agency shapes the feelings customers have; thus, recruiting and retaining families requires that families perceive they have been well taken care of at every step of service delivery.”ⁱ

ⁱ National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids. Using Customer Service Concepts to Enhance Recruitment and Retention Practices. 2013.

4

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND TRANSPARENCY GOALS

- Collaboration and public-private partnerships with groups representative of the communities from which children come, to help identify and support potential foster and adoptive families

Invite foster, birth, kin and adoptive parents and young people with lived experience in foster care to participate in developing recruitment plans and programs. Provide advance notice, offer stipends and provide feedback on how their input was used.

Invite civic, community- and faith-based, philanthropic and business partners to engage in planning and implementing recruitment, support, and retention activities. Identify specific ways they can contribute to short- and long-term goals. Hold meetings in the community and include families.

Establish a foster parent advisory group to facilitate ongoing dialogue with foster parents and create opportunities for them to recommend improvements to foster parent recruitment, training and support. These partnerships also signal the agency's value of foster parents and contribute to a customer service model.

Ensure best practices such as family finding and engagement are used to identify adults who children and youth are already connected with.

Engage foster parents in decision-making. The CHAMPS Policy Playbook, 2nd edition, recommends that foster parents be considered as priority partners. Forming an advisory board is one partnership strategy. Such advisory boards can be helpful in facilitating collaboration with families and community partners.

<https://playbook.fosteringchamps.org>

- Procedures to ensure that all prospective parents, including relatives and people who have important existing relationships with youth in care, have access to the home study process, including foster and adoptive parent training at a local or community level and that the home studies are initiated and completed in a timely manner.

Evaluate contracts with private agencies and other community partners to assess alignment with all recruitment and retention goals and activities, including outreach and engagement of families, trainings, and home studies.

Prioritize a “customer service” approach in the home study process and ensure that it is flexible, user friendly, and responsive to the needs of the prospective parents.

- Procedures for training staff to engage effectively with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities who are reflective of the children and youth in foster care

Reach out to community members and organizations in different neighborhoods, e.g., places of worship, well-known local businesses and schools, and hold community meetings to learn more about the different cultures and customs and to see how families are living, working and playing within their communities.

Engage youth, foster families, and birth families as liaisons to their communities and trainers for staff.

- Training strategies for staff and community partners

Evaluate training programs to ensure that they involve foster, birth and adoptive parents as well as kinship caregivers and youth/young adults with foster care experience in pre-service training and caseworker training.

Provide caseworkers with specialized training on family engagement practices, such as family team decision making and how to help caregivers and birth parents manage and leverage their relationships for the benefit of the child's safety, permanency and well-being

Offer joint trainings to foster parents and staff to encourage partnerships and ensure they are receiving the same information.

- Procedures to deal with linguistic barriers

To maximize transparency, ensure that interpreters/translators are readily available to assist non-English speakers with the application and home study process.

- Procedures to ensure a non-discriminatory fee structure, including the use of purchase of service arrangements with public and private agencies (including community-based and other organizations) when necessary to facilitate and support placement;

Ensure ongoing feedback loops with foster families throughout your jurisdiction and service area about their experiences with the agency and its contracted service providers so your agency can address barriers to families accessing needed services.

Collaborating Across Agencies

THE WORK OF OTHER CHILD-SERVING AGENCIES intersects with foster parent recruitment, development and support.

Child welfare agencies should reach out to other agency staff involved in that work to explore possible connections and partnerships. Foster parents interact with multiple agencies and systems, e.g., child care, schools, courts, workforce development, health care, mental health, and law enforcement, and their experiences with those systems affect their overall perception of the customer service they receive.

Supporting Families Throughout the Process

A GREAT WAY to increase the positive impact of recruitment efforts is to provide specialized support to foster families as they move through different steps in the process: from the inquiry stage to licensure, answering their questions about the process and about foster parenting, assisting with completing required paperwork, sharing information about what to expect regarding steps in the process and the timeline, and being a consistent point of contact throughout the process.

5

DRIVER: YOUTH AND PARENT VOICE

This driver applies to all elements of a comprehensive recruitment and retention program, but especially to those elements previously described under Collaboration and Transparency. Being informed by the voices of youth and foster parents means having ongoing, meaningful approaches for getting input and feedback and ensuring that decision-makers recognize the value of youth and parent perspectives. Agencies should continuously identify new ways to hear and be informed by input from youth and parents—including

seeking their ideas on additional ways they can have a voice in the agency's work—and ensure that youth and parents receive updates on how their feedback is being put to use. When seeking youth or parent insights and guidance, agencies should also ensure that they are honoring the time and effort that youth and parents are contributing, e.g., by providing stipends, covering transportation costs, and scheduling meetings at convenient times.

6

DRIVER: SUSTAINABILITY

Like Youth and Parent Voice, this driver applies to all program elements, but is most closely related to Leadership and Collaboration. Leaders play a key role in ensuring that agencies remain committed to their values and priorities and avoid becoming distracted by the latest crisis, budget shortfall or critical media

coverage. Sustainability of effective recruitment and retention programs also requires the active involvement and buy-in of collaborative partners, both within and outside of the child welfare agency, as discussed in the related text box.

The Role of Implementation Science in Sustainability of Recruitment and Retention Programs

IN A PRESENTATION at a national conveningⁱ hosted by CHAMPS and the Brookings Institution in January 2019, Dr. Allison Metz from the National Implementation Research Networkⁱⁱ discussed the application of implementation science to foster parent recruitment and retention. Her full presentation, which can be viewed [here](#), emphasized that sustainability depends in large measure on “contextual fit,” the match between the strategies, procedures or elements of an effective recruitment and retention program and the values, needs, skills and resources of those who implement and experience the program. Effective implementation is a collaborative effort and should involve administrative and fiscal leadership, supervisors, front-line staff, family members, community representatives and policy staff. In the words of Dr. Metz, “this work has to be done through teams. The problems we face are complicated, and the systems we work in are complex. No single person holds the diversity of perspectives that’s needed to accurately plan and to accurately troubleshoot and to accurately interpret data. The work doesn’t get done well unless you have multiple perspectives.”

i The CHAMPS-Brookings national convening, “Driving better outcomes for children through improved foster parent recruitment and retention” was held on January 15-16, 2019 at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

ii The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), within the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM DILIGENT RECRUITMENT GRANTS

Child welfare systems seeking to strengthen their approaches to foster parent recruitment, development, and support can build on lessons learned from other systems, especially those that have implemented full Diligent Recruitment programs.

To address the need to find foster, adoptive, and kinship families—especially those for older youth—who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children and youth needing foster and permanent homes, the **Children’s Bureau** awarded eight diligent recruitment cooperative agreements in 2008, seven in 2010, and seven in 2013 through the Adoption Opportunities program. Each of the diligent recruitment projects was funded for a period of five years. Child Welfare Information Gateway and James Bell Associates compiled syntheses of findings from the 2008 and 2010 grantee clusters and several key themes emerged related to challenges, successful strategies, and lessons learned⁹:

CHALLENGES

- **Staff turnover**—Several grantees experienced the negative impact of having agency leadership and key project staff leave during the grant, leading to difficulties with ongoing management and continuity of the planned diligent recruitment strategies.
- **Negative perceptions of the child welfare agency**—For many grantees, the communities they were seeking to engage had historical distrust of the child welfare agency, which made it challenging for the agency to pursue targeted recruitment efforts and to develop community partnerships.
- **Customer service**—Several grantees struggled to provide consistent and high quality customer service to prospective and current foster and adoptive parents, which had a negative impact on their efforts to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

- **Partnerships and collaboration**—Several grantees found it effective to partner with other agencies, organizations, and businesses to support their efforts with recruitment and retention efforts. For multiple grantees, partnering with faith-based organizations provided particularly helpful opportunities and relationships for reaching diverse communities.
- **Engaging resource parents and youth in foster care**—Involving foster parents and youth currently or previously in foster care helped several grantees achieve positive outcomes, especially in reaching the geographic or cultural communities to which the parents or youth belong.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Limit the number and size of interventions**—Many grantees learned that focusing on a smaller number of clearly defined diligent recruitment strategies enabled the grantees to learn from and adapt their strategies before expanding the scope of their efforts.

9 Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System: Synthesis*. April 2016 and Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System: Synthesis*. May 2018.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Following are selected resources to assist child welfare agencies in developing and implementing comprehensive, data-driven diligent recruitment programs. We thank the many organizations and experts who developed these materials and who provide leadership and technical expertise in the recruitment, retention and support of foster parents.

Program Instruction PI-19-02

U.S. CHILDREN'S BUREAU (2019)

This Program Instruction (PI) summarizes the actions required to complete and submit the Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan as part of the 2020- 2024 Child and Family Service Plans (CFSP). Diligent Recruitment Plans are a targeted plan and must be submitted as a separate document to their 2020-2024 CFSP.

Online resources to assist with targeted plans in the 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plans

U.S. CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Selected online resources compiled by the Children's Bureau to assist agencies in developing targeted plans, including the Diligent Recruitment Plans for 2020-2024.

Quality Parenting Initiative recruitment and retention tools

Online resource from the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), a strategy of the Youth Law Center to strengthen foster care by refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system. Selected online free trainings, resources, tools, and best practices from across the 75 participating jurisdictions including recruitment, retention, stability, placement matching, and foster parent supports.

CHAMPS Policy Playbook

CHAMPS (2019)

Research-based policy examples and best practices to inform and inspire state and tribal policy efforts to strengthen foster parenting and improve the lives of children and youth in foster care.

Developing Recruitment Plans: A Toolkit for States and Tribes

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR DILIGENT RECRUITMENT (2016)

Offers ideas and strategies to develop recruitment plans, provides tools for use in planning processes adaptable to meet State and territory needs, and includes other information and resources on developing recruitment plans.

Diligent Recruitment Grantees

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR DILIGENT RECRUITMENT

Lists all diligent recruitment grantees since 2008 and includes a description of each grant and sample tools that were created.

Additional information on Diligent Recruitment Grantees

Child Welfare Information Gateway

Offers grant program summaries, descriptions of projects, site visit highlights, lessons learned and outcomes.

Diligent Recruitment Tools

AdoptUSKids

Provides a series of tools, publications, and webinars on diligent recruitment strategies.

Online training for caregivers, parents and agency staff

FOSTERPARENTCOLLEGE.COM

Research-based, interactive online courses for foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. Training programs are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Rated by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) as promising research with high relevance to child welfare for both in-service parent training and pre-service parent training.

Foster parent online training

FOSTERCLUB

Online trauma-informed training pairs information from leading child welfare experts with authentic youth perspective.

Support Matters: Lessons from the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families

ADOPTUSKIDS (2015)

This guide provides comprehensive information about effective strategies for developing data-driven family support services. It also offers research and program findings to assist child welfare agencies in implementing and sustaining these services.

Using Customer Service Concepts to Enhance Recruitment and Retention Practices

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR DILIGENT RECRUITMENT AT ADOPTUSKIDS (2013)

This guide provides a detailed overview of customer service concepts that can help with recruitment and retention of foster, adoptive, and kinship families. It also offers specific guidance on assessing, developing, and implementing relevant policies and practices to support good customer service.

How Family Support Connects to Child and Family Services Reviews Outcomes

ADOPTUSKIDS (2019)

This brief provides information and examples about how support services relate to several items that are part of the third round of the CFRs

Treat Them Like Gold: A Best Practice Guide to Partnering with Resource Families

NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES (2009)

This guide describes specific strategies that have proven effective in North Carolina and elsewhere in recruiting, retaining, and partnering with resource families

Using Integrated Recruitment and Support to Build a Strong Pool of Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR DILIGENT RECRUITMENT AT ADOPTUSKIDS (2015)

A guide to help child welfare systems develop integrated approaches to recruiting, developing, and supporting foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

Foster Home Estimator

ANNIE E CASEY FOUNDATION (2016)

A downloadable tool to assist child welfare agencies in building a more robust pool of foster parents by more accurately estimating how many additional foster families are needed, especially for specific populations of children, such as teens or large sibling groups

Building Successful Resource Families Practice Guide: A Guide for Public Agencies

ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION (2008)

A report on best practices in working with foster families includes examples and key insights on each step of the resource family continuum from intake to placement.

Effective Practices in Foster Parent Recruitment, Infrastructure and Retention

CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS (2014)

This report describes six public and private agency programs that have demonstrated effective strategies in their recruitment, retention, and/or foster parent development efforts. Half of the programs have been rigorously evaluated and shown positive outcomes while the other three were chosen based on the recommendations of experts and the literature and have demonstrated improvements measured by the agency's internal tracking of outcomes.

Strategies for Successfully Recruiting and Retaining Preferred-Placement Foster Homes for American Indian Children

CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS AND UNIVERSITY OF DENVER BUTLER INSTITUTE FOR FAMILIES (2017)

This brief highlights strategies used by tribal and state teams working to increase the number of foster parents for American

Indian children, including strategies to increase foster placements that reflect children's culture and comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Recruiting Families for Native American Children: Strengthening Partnerships for Success

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR DILIGENT RECRUITMENT AT ADOPTUSKIDS

This publication provides a brief overview of relevant laws, best practices, tips, and considerations for partnering effectively with tribes and recruiting families for Native American children in foster care

Revitalizing Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents

NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES, U.S. CHILDREN'S BUREAU AND WELFARE RESEARCH, INCORPORATED (WRI)

An online toolkit designed to help counties and agencies revitalize their recruitment and retention plan of action. It includes a blueprint for targeted recruitment and retention of kinship, foster and adoptive parents. It also includes practical strategies for finding and keeping kinship, foster and adoptive homes.

Foster and Kinship Parent Recruitment and Support Best Practices Inventory

REDLICH HORWITZ FOUNDATION

This best practice inventory highlights key steps for finding and keeping both kin and non-kin foster parents.

APPENDIX

A WORD ON LEADERSHIP BY TIM DECKER

Achieving the CHAMPS vision for quality foster parenting will require leaders throughout the system to understand that changing your destination often involves starting from a different place! This involves both believing and behaving differently in order to fundamentally impact working relationships and results. This means courageously “swimming upstream” every day as you challenge the existing leadership habits and culture within the child welfare system and its over-reliance on crisis-oriented, reactive, technical leadership approaches to challenges which are far too complex for such a limited leadership toolbox.

Emerging leaders invariably inherit or partner with systems that are “stuck on stupid” as they continue to implement laws, policies, and practices developed without a full understanding of the problem they are intended to address. These efforts often ignore research and practice-based evidence and create unanticipated collateral consequences that reverberate throughout the foster care system in the form of unreasonable licensing standards, insufficient voice and authority of caregivers, developmentally inappropriate responses to normal child behavior, and traumatic placement disruptions.

A system driven by a “clock” of excessive time frames and procedures, and measurement “rulers” of conformity, compliance, and misplaced precision cannot exist without a “compass” of values, mission, and purpose. “Unsticking the stupid” in the system challenges leaders and partners to stop trying to get better at what doesn’t work. 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. Foundationally this involves:

- Fundamentally changing our view of children, young people and families, and moving beyond compliance, coercion, and “clipboard” approaches to our work
- Adopting values and mission as a foundation, and displaying the unrelenting courage, compassion, and curiosity necessary to establish authentic partnerships with families
- Prioritizing time for listening to foster and birth families, and children and youth into our schedules, and embedding the practice in management expectations, processes, and routines

- Placing the safety of children, families, and communities in the “center” of everything we do by adopting thoughtful policies and practices that are a stepping stones to long-term wellbeing
- Ensuring programs fit the child, family, and community; not the other way around
- Resisting the temptation to apply technical or top-down leadership to adaptive challenges
- Adopting a “proud, hopeful, and chronically dissatisfied” attitude by celebrating everyday successes, setting ambitious goals, and using data and life experience to drive change

In the book “Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership” authors Bolman and Deal offer an appropriate call to action based on a compelling truth - “organizations need leaders who can impart a persuasive and durable sense of purpose and direction, rooted deeply in values and the human spirit. Leaders must be deeply reflective, actively thoughtful, and dramatically explicit about core values and beliefs.” One thing we know for sure - the culture, practices, and results of foster care agencies and systems will change at rate directly proportional to the behaviors of their leaders and partners!



ABOUT CHAMPS

CHAMPS, which stands for Children Need Amazing Parents, is a national campaign to ensure bright futures for kids in foster care by promoting the highest quality parenting. CHAMPS brings together national, state and local organizations with a shared interest in promoting positive outcomes for children and youth in foster care and their families. CHAMPS builds on research that shows that loving, supportive families—whether birth, kin, foster or adoptive—are critical to the healthy development of all children. For children in foster care, foster parents serve as one of the primary interventions for helping children achieve better health, well-being, educational, social and economic outcomes across their life spans. CHAMPS also builds on the work of the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) developed by the San Francisco-based Youth Law Center. QPI seeks to promote excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system through practice, policy and culture change. Launched in 2008, the QPI approach has been adopted by over 75 jurisdictions in 10 states. More information can be found at www.qpi4kids.org.

The primary goal of CHAMPS is to drive improvements to foster parenting policies throughout the United States. In support of this goal, CHAMPS offers a policy playbook and related tools — including this report — to encourage and assist policymakers in championing reforms to policy and practice that will strengthen foster parenting in their communities.

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