

**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLAN
2020-2024**

Updated June 2023

Foster and Adoption Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) remains committed to recruiting and retaining potential resource and adoptive families who reflect the cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of children in out-of-home care. As a result, DCF has developed a comprehensive recruitment and retention plan that supports strategies that are child focused, data driven, customer service centered, collaborative, inclusive of the voice of families and youth, and sustainable. This comprehensive plan also continues to support DCF’s substantial conformity with the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) systemic factor: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention. For additional information on that systemic factor, see *Section 2: Update to the Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes* in DCF’s 2024 Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR).

The COVID-19 public health emergency had a tremendous impact on New Jersey, as well as all facets of DCF operations. This included the necessary suspension of recruitment activities beginning March 2020. The priority focus during the pandemic shifted from recruitment to the retention of existing resource and kin families to ensure that these families had necessary provisions to meet their needs and the needs of the children placed in their care. In Fall 2022, DCF was able to safely resume hosting in-person recruitment events developing, reestablishing, and expanding connections with community partners to collaborate in diligent recruitment efforts.

Characteristics of Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes

Over the last several years, DCF has experienced great success with increasing and maintaining a robust pool of families that reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of children in care, and strives to remain adaptive and responsive to the needs of families and children. This, along with the focus on increasing the use of kinship placements, has yielded a total of 2,644 resource homes with a bed capacity of 5,904 as of December 31, 2022. While this capacity exceeds the number of children in out of home placement, DCF recognizes that there are targeted populations for which focused recruitment efforts need to be prioritized.

To ascertain how DCF should focus recruitment efforts, Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) data will continue to be analyzed to identify the age and race of children entering care in New Jersey. Figures 1 and 2 depict the age and race breakdown of these children over a prior eight-year period.

Figure 1

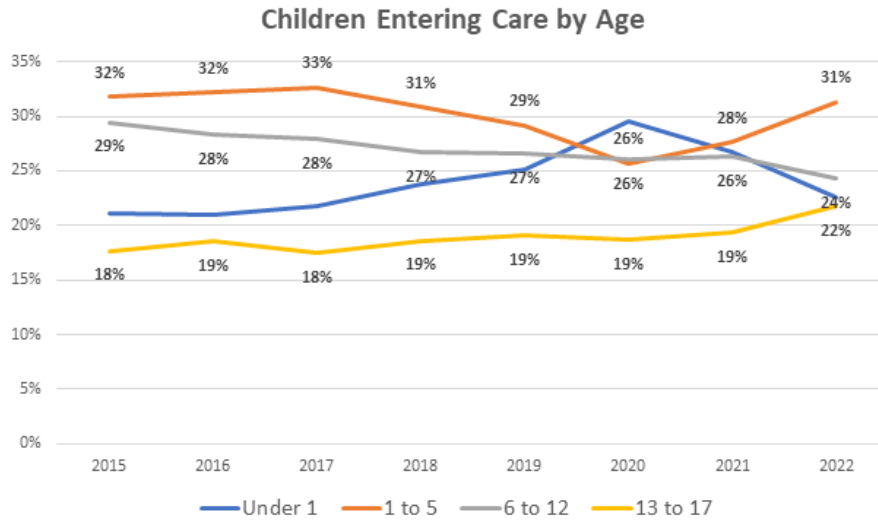
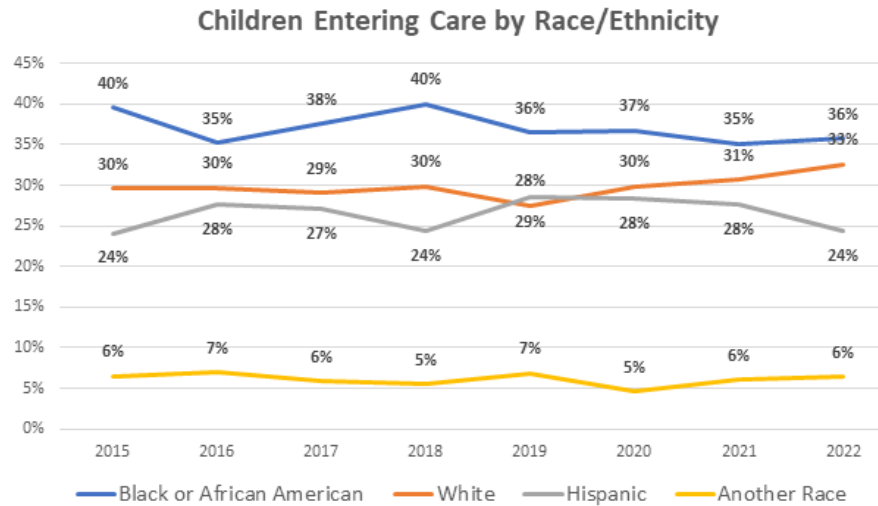


Figure 2



Further review of current point in time data related to New Jersey’s pool of resource homes reveals DCF’s performance regarding efforts to maintain a robust cadre of resource homes that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children entering care. Figures 3-8 offer further insight to these diverse resource homes.

Figure 3

All Resource Care Providers by Race/Ethnicity
n= 3,091

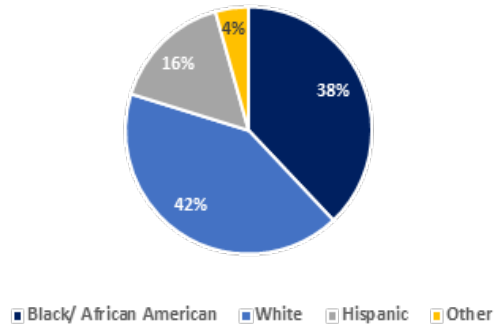


Figure 4

All children in Placement and Resource Care Providers by Race/Ethnicity

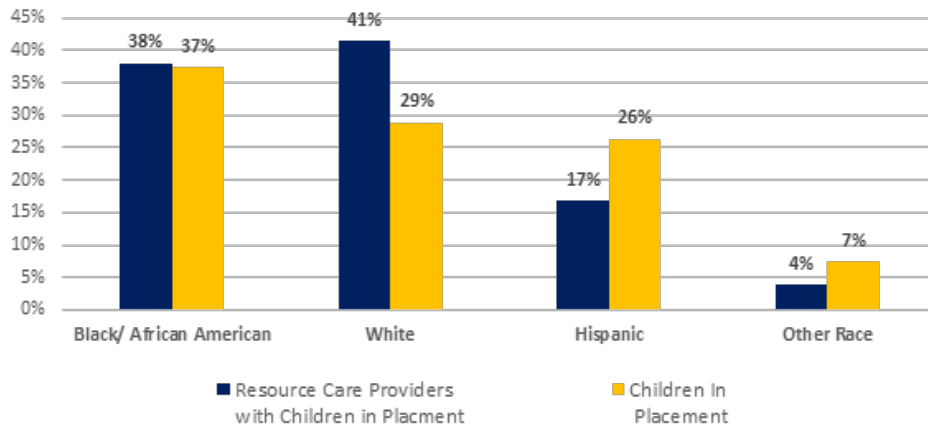


Figure 5

All children in Placement and their Resource Care Providers by Race/Ethnicity		
Race	Resource Care Providers with Children in Placement	Children In Placement
Black/ African American	38%	37%
White	41%	29%
Hispanic	17%	26%
Other Race	4%	7%
n	2,143	2,982

Figure 6

All Non - Kin Resource Homes by Race/Ethnicity
n= 1,802

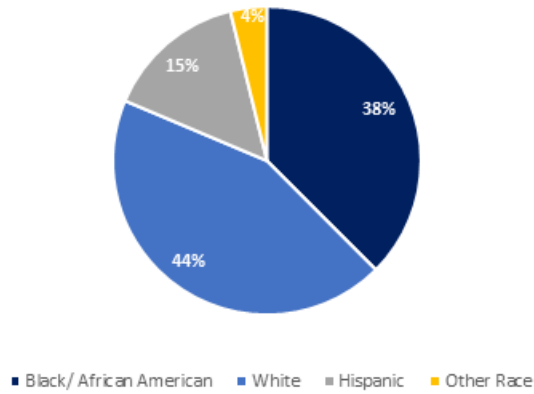


Figure 7

Non-Kin Resource Homes by Race & Children Placed in Non-Kin Resource Homes by Race/Ethnicity

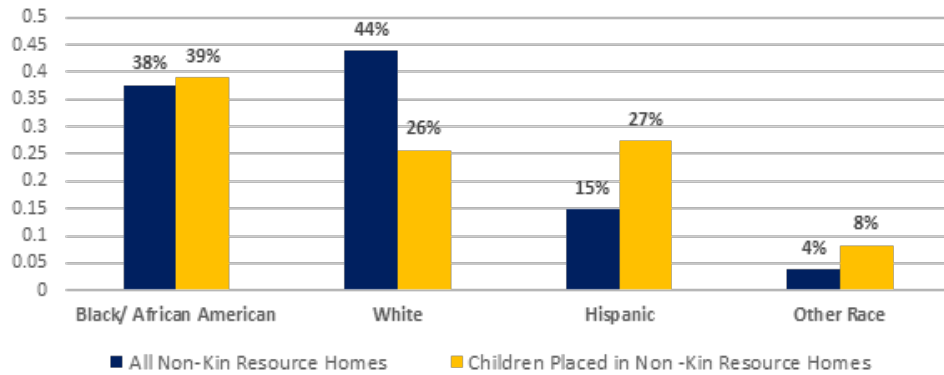


Figure 8

Non-Kin Resource Homes by Race & Children Placed in Non-Kin Resource Homes by Race/Ethnicity		
Race	All Non-Kin Resource Homes	Children Placed in Non - Kin Resource Homes
Black/ African American	38%	39%
White	44%	26%
Hispanic	15%	27%
Other Race	4%	8%
n	1,802	1,125

DCF also places a focus on recruitment and licensure for special populations. These focus populations are identified through data review and include sibling groups, adolescents, and children with complex medical, developmental, and behavioral health needs. Updated details regarding these populations and recruitment targets are described below.

Sibling Groups

DCF recognizes the importance of sibling connections for all children, in particular children experiencing an out-of-home placement. DCF works to ensure that sibling groups entering placement remain intact.

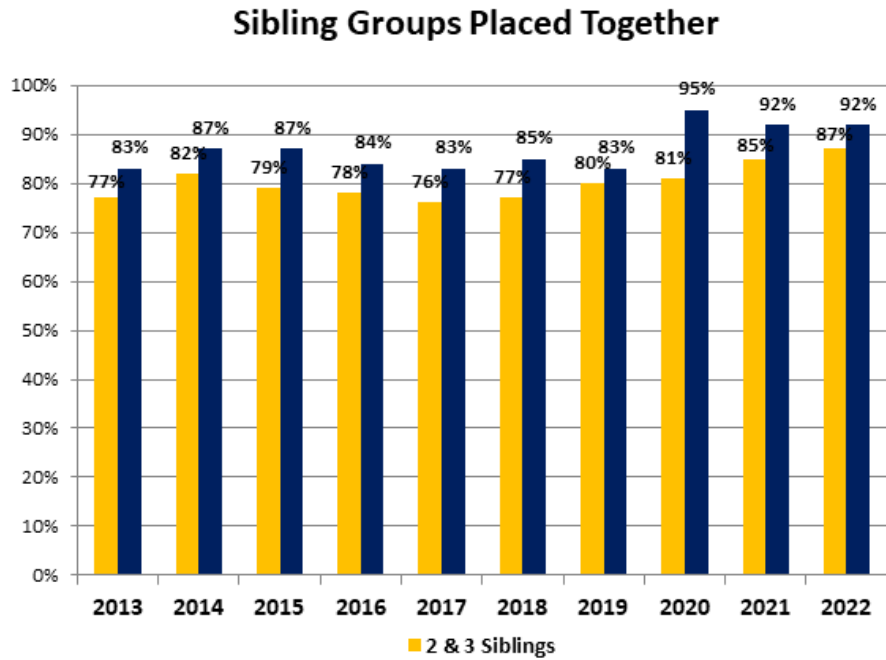
In an effort to address the need to recruit and retain resource homes willing to accommodate large sibling groups entering placement, DCF continues to implement the Siblings in Best Settings (SIBS) Resource Family Homes initiative. Strategies include enhanced board rates and retainer fees to maintain homes vacant for the placement of large sibling groups. In 2022, DCF recruited a total of 23 new SIBS homes. DCF ended 2022 with a total of 36 SIBS homes. Of these 36 homes, 10 can accommodate five or more children, while 26 homes can accommodate up to four children. The decrease in the number of new SIBS homes recruited for 2022 can be attributed to several factors, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other factors include home closure or capacity reduction due to achievement of permanency outcomes such as reunification, Kinship Legal Guardianship or adoption finalization of children in placement.

DCF continues to use data driven tools to identify sibling placement needs on a local level to ensure targeted recruitment in those areas. DCF promulgates monthly reports that forecast the need for targeted recruitment of resource homes willing to provide care to sibling groups. This data assesses the need at a local level to support children remaining in their community with their siblings when kin placement is not an immediate option.

DCF strives to place at least 80% of sibling groups together. In 2022, 87% of sibling groups of two or three were placed together and 92% of children from a sibling group of four or more were placed with at least one other sibling. See Figure 9. While DCF met its goal for both sibling categories, it will continue efforts to ensure that siblings remain together when family separation is necessary.

In total, there continue to be approximately 300 families, including the 36 SIBS homes, identified to provide a home for a sibling group of three or more. DCF will continue efforts to increase the number of sibling homes over the next two years. This will be in line with DCF's strategic priority to increase the number of children placed safely with kin, as well as to ensure that new, unrelated homes are recruited to maintain capacity.

Figure 9



Adolescents

DCF identified an ongoing need to recruit and retain a robust pool of resource homes for the adolescent population. In 2022, 1,523 total children entered out of home placement, of which 331 were ages 13 to 17. See Figure 10. In 2022, 34% of the 331 children placed between the ages of 13-17 were initially placed in kinship care. Figures 11 and 12 below display additional findings.

Figure 10

Children entering care by age in 2022	
Age	Number of Children
Under 1	344
1 to 5	477
6 to 12	371
13 to 17	331
Total	1523

Figure 11

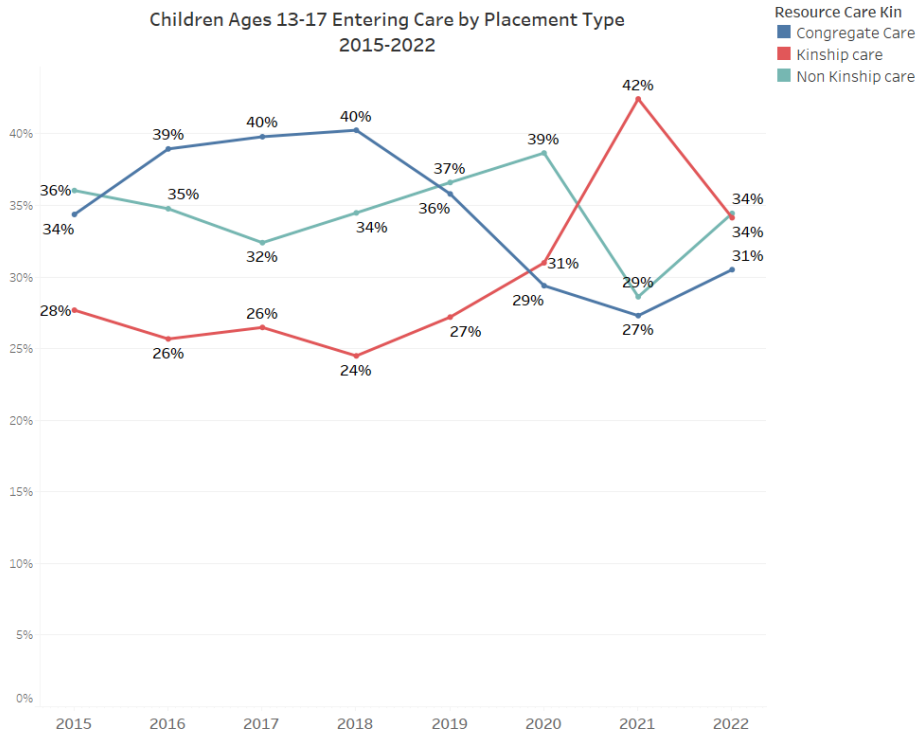
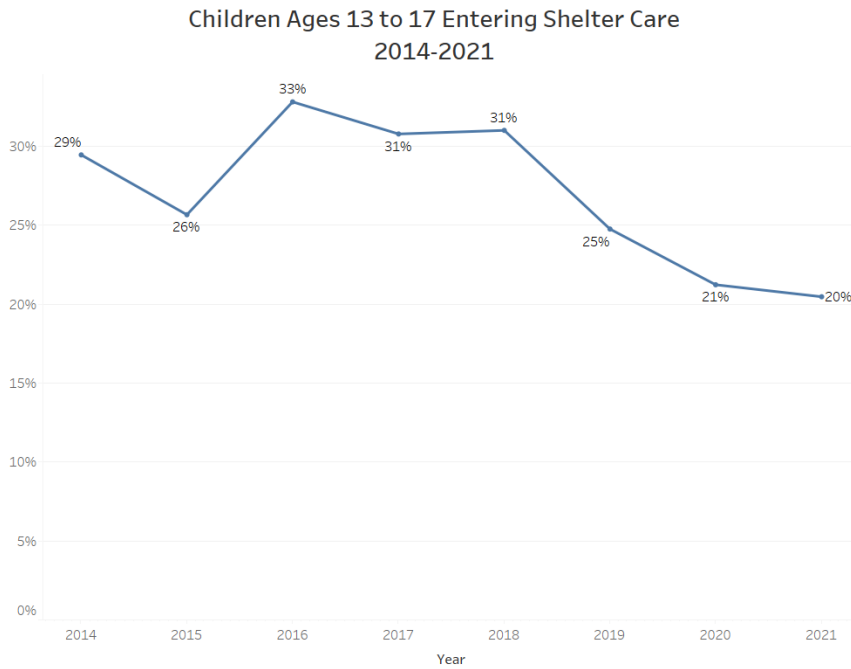


Figure 12



DCF will continue to review relevant data to determine trends and variations across the state and assess the cause for persistent challenges with locating foster home placements for adolescents. This will include more intensive statewide recruitment efforts to target adolescent population as well as review of facilitation and engagement of existing homes that can accommodate this population.

Children with Special Needs

DCF identifies special needs youth entering through a five-level acuity system that supports required care and services in placement. Acuity Level 1 indicates a well child, while, progressively, Acuity Level 4 identifies a child with an active acute and / or chronic illness that requires physician monitoring. This includes children with developmental delays, all children on psychotropic medications, and all infants as they require frequent monitoring of growth and development. Level 5 indicates a child with acute or chronic illness that is not stable and can lead to a life-threatening condition. As of January 3, 2023, there are 51 children statewide designated as having an Acuity Level 5. See Figure 13. While this is a relatively small percent (2%) of the population of children in out of home placement, these children display the most need and require the most supportive services, thus the resource homes that care for these children will also require intense supportive services.

Figure 13

# of children <18 in OOH as of January 3, 2023	2,740	
# of Children with Acuity Level 5	51	2%

The objective of DCF is to consider the health care needs of all children by matching them with the willingness and capabilities of each family, including relatives. DCF is committed to developing and maintaining a subset of highly skilled resource parents to meet the needs of youth with acute or chronic illnesses. In 2022, DCF processed and licensed 67 new homes with an interest in caring for children with complex medical needs. Given the impact the public health emergency had on recruitment activities, DCF will continue efforts to develop recruiting new families who have a willingness/ability to care for a child with special health care needs.

Specific Recruitment Strategies to Reach Out to All Parts of the Community

DCF will continue to emphasize and support recruitment activities in the communities where children reside by using data driven methods to create targeted recruitment plans that assist in determining geographic and subpopulation areas of need. This is accomplished by analyzing:

- Characteristics of children who enter placement including race, gender, and age,
- Origins of children in placement by municipality,
- Locations of current resource families by municipality, and
- Market segmentation density maps.

While DCF has data tools to assist with this analysis, there are recognized limitations to current data systems. The CCWIS system, as well as the Licensing Information System (LIS), capture pertinent information on resource and adoptive homes. Both require substantial updates to assist with tracking, management and necessary robust reporting of the recruitment and approval process of resource and adoptive homes. These two systems have limited interoperability thus making the tracking and management of resource operations fragmented.

As such, DCF is embarking on the acquisition of a new web-based software system,¹ which is expected to launch by Fall 2023. This software platform will help DCF modernize and streamline the recruitment and approval process of resource and adoptive homes through mobile friendly applications and data dashboards for resource applicants as well as resource staff. This will allow for tracking of various resource operations and provide robust reporting to help monitor recruitment and approval resource processes, barriers, and trends over time.

DCF continues to partner with the Human Rights Campaign, All Children-All Families (ACAF), a nationwide recruitment initiative launched by the Human Rights Campaign's Family Project. This initiative was created to increase the number of qualified foster and adoptive families for children in care by educating the LGBTQIA+ community about opportunities to be foster/adoptive parents for not only LGBTQIA+ youth, but for all adolescents in care. This is accomplished by educating and engaging the LGBTQIA+ community about opportunities for foster and adoptive parenting and by improving the cultural competence among staff that recruit, develop, train and support resource families.

DCF became the first state child welfare agency to earn the Seal of Recognition by the HRC AC-AF Initiative. DCF maintains the HRC AC-AF Seal of Recognition for reaching all benchmarks of LGBTQIA+ cultural competency and being fully welcoming of LGBTQIA+ youth and families. DCF continues its efforts by committing to a seal reassessment that is conducted every three years. Recruitment consisted of ad campaigns with a focus on special populations as well as virtual recruitment meet and greet opportunities through partnerships with local and state organizations.

Despite the challenges that the COVID-19 emergency presented, DCF was able to successfully license 633 resource homes to serve the specific target populations of children in 2022 as displayed in Figure 14.

¹ <https://binti.com/>

Figure 14

2022 Newly Licensed Non-Kin Resource Homes by Population Served	
n= 214	
Population	Number of homes
Adolescents 13-17	76
Sibling Groups of at least 2 or more	117
Children with at least one special need	134
LGBTQ	55
Total Resource Homes	214

Over the past year, DCF continued to focus on the retention and support of the current pool of resource homes and the children placed with them to address needs affected by COVID-19. Retention activities currently include the financial enhancement of higher board rates for homes which experience COVID-19. Resource caregivers are also supplied with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment when a child who test positive or are exposed to COVID-19 enters the home. Additionally, DCF resumed hosting local in-person resource retention events in the community for existing resource parents. These events are planned and facilitated by local and area office staff and serve as a meaningful way to celebrate and show appreciation for the tireless commitment of our valued resource caregivers and their families.

Diverse Methods of Distributing General/Child Specific Recruitment Information

In October 2022, DCF partnered with Rutgers Business School to modernize recruitment and develop innovative, effective marketing strategies to recruit foster and adoptive parents that would be best suited to meet the needs of New Jersey children and youth in foster care. The joint DCF-Rutgers Project team set out to conduct a comprehensive analysis, which included literature reviews, in-depth interviews of recruiters and current resource parents, and a survey of 541 current and former resource parents. The Rutgers team collected and synthesized the resulting data, providing DCF with key takeaways and strategies to enhance our practice and improve recruitment and retention outcomes. Of note, the data suggested that most resource parents were primarily motivated by the desire to give back, with a desire to adopt as the second most common motivation. This information is valuable in determining where to target our future recruitment efforts, namely, community spaces such as faith-based organizations or targeting people in helping professions. The Rutgers analysis also provided insight regarding areas for improvement, such as increasing communication and enhancing customer service. As a result, DCF has committed to more consistent, transparent communication with resource families, resource staff, and community partners. Recruiters are increasing efforts to raise public awareness through outreach to community partners, participating in and distributing information at community events, the development of resource newsletters and other content, as well as actively seeking input from resource families. DCF's Office of Resource Families is undergoing a rebranding effort, which will include a newly

redesigned recruitment logo and slogan. These changes will be a part of a marketing campaign expected to launch during National Foster Care Month in May 2023.

DCF uses its public website and social media sites to provide information on the status of resource and adoptive family recruitment, along with changes in policy and new initiatives. The website includes both Spanish and English resources and adoption support services. Blast emailing is also used to disseminate critical information to existing resource and adoptive families.

Since social media has been shown to target large audiences, the DCF Office of Communications and Public Affairs is partnering with social media advertisers and influencers to expand social media recruitment opportunities. DCF will also maintain ongoing partnerships with religious organizations, non-profits, medical organizations such as hospitals and family care practices, as well as colleges, and local schools to assist with future resource and adoption recruitment.

DCF maintains a contract with Embrella to assist with recruiting through a hotline inquiry process. The Office of Communications and Public Affairs has redesigned recruitment graphics to showcase these special populations, which will be disseminated on DCF public and social media sites.

Additional efforts to recruit foster and adoptive families occur through current resource parents, who volunteer to share their lived experiences with others through updated videos that will be created by the DCF Office of Communications and Public Affairs to be shared on social media as well as during recruitment events and group engagements. Resource parents will continue to receive travel and childcare reimbursement as well as guest speaker fees to participate in in-person recruitment events and training.

Finally, DCF is looking to reinstate the Youth Ambassador Initiative, which will provide an opportunity for former youth in care to support the recruitment of resource and adoptive parents, specifically for the adolescent population. This initiative was paused during the pandemic.

The Youth Ambassador Program originated as a result of efforts to enhance recruitment and retention of resource parents. Providing youth opportunities to share their stories, help break down some of the existing myths about youth in foster care, offer resource parents insight into this population, as well as offer youth an avenue to advocate for themselves.

Speaking Program Goals

Empowering Youth to Educate the Public By:

1. Raising awareness about specific target populations of youth in care (with an emphasis on teens and sibling groups),
2. Partnering with youth to develop public speaking and leadership skills (strategic sharing training),

3. Addressing misconceptions about youth in foster care [speaking at Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) trainings, group engagements, recruitment events, or to DCF staff], and
4. Advocating on behalf of current and former foster youth (DCF workgroups).

Youth Ambassadors are primarily college students or recent graduates that, at one point in time, received the New Jersey Foster Care Scholarship that is administered through Embracing and Empowering Families (Embrella). Ambassadors are also referred by Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) staff. Ambassadors are provided opportunities to potentially speak at PRIDE pre-service trainings, group engagements, recruitment events, or directly to DCF staff. Speakers are compensated up to \$100.00 for participating in an event.

Resource and Adoptive Parent Accessibility to Licensing Process

DCF operates a state administered child welfare system with 46 local offices throughout 21 counties allowing for accessibility by prospective resource parents, adoptive parents, and all members of the community. The state administered system maintains statewide policies and procedures to ensure that standards are applied equally. While the recruitment of resource and adoptive families is centralized in its oversight, each local office maintains select staff that are specific to the study, training, and support of foster and adoptive families. DCF has a single licensing process that studies and licenses families for both resource and adoption, ensuring a comprehensive and timely process for families. This supports timely permanency for youth who are unable to be reunified and can achieve permanency through their unrelated resource or kin caretakers.

The structure of resource/adoptive parent recruitment is localized and community-specific to ensure accessibility for all. When an inquiry is received, it is distributed to recruitment specialists that invite prospective resource and adoptive parents to group engagement events held in the community. These events provide an overview of DCF and the foster and adoptive parent home study and licensing processes. Upon completion of a group engagement event, the home study is initiated by a resource support staff servicing the community where the prospective parents reside. Upon licensure, the resource and adoptive family is supported and serviced by the same office in their community.

Through an ongoing self-evaluation, DCF recognized that we needed to make enhancements to the structure of our resource family units in order to better support our kinship and non-kinship resource caregivers and retain a strong and healthy pool of caregivers. Literature and jurisdictional reviews suggest a structure with specialized functions with clearly defined roles and expertise, manageable caseloads of homes with frequent supportive contact as well as a concurrent, as opposed to a consecutive, home study licensing process that supports more expeditious licensure of homes is necessary to support the retention of a robust pool of resource homes. In order to improve practices, DCF completed a statewide restructuring of its local and area resource units which took

effect in February 2022. In keeping with DCF's commitment to continually track and evaluate its practices, surveys and in-person meetings were conducted in Summer 2022 with resource staff, as well as local office and area office leadership, to obtain feedback on the perceived strengths, challenges, and overall impact of the restructure. The majority of DCF staff acknowledged the benefits of specialized roles, and their suggestions for improvements were incorporated into the revised guidance, which was issued in March 2023.

Resource and adoptive parent training classes are held in all 21 counties to support accessibility, and include Spanish speaking trainers, translated recruitment and training materials. The classes are held in the evenings and on weekends in consideration of working families. Currently these trainings are provided on a virtual platform. Each county receives further support through localized resource family peer support from Embrella, New Jersey's contracted resource and adoptive family support agency; KinConnect, New Jersey's Kinship Legal Guardianship Resource Clearinghouse; and NJARCH, New Jersey's Adoption Resource Clearinghouse.

In November 2022, DCF created a Training Workgroup, which has grown to include not only Resource Family Trainers, but also colleagues from CSOC, Embrella, Office of Family Voice, Office of Resilience, and former youth with lived experience in foster care. This multidisciplinary group is charged with evaluating our current pre-service and in-service training curricula, researching trainings used by other jurisdictions, and developing recommendations on how to enhance resource family training so resource parents can be better equipped to meet the needs of children in their care.

Training Staff to Work with Diverse Communities

It is critical that staff understand cultural competence and humility to provide quality services to the diverse population of families that DCF serves and supports.

One of the core approaches to the DCF vision is race equity. DCF recognizes that racial bias impacts families' circumstances and the ways in which public systems, such as those operated by the Department, interact with families. In consultation with a national expert, DCF previously launched work to attend to the issues of racial inequity and bias in all areas of the Department, with the ultimate goal of promoting equitable treatment and outcomes for all New Jersey constituents.

Beginning May 2021, DCF began providing an introductory online four module training on implicit racial bias in child protection called InSIGHT, which was created by Center for the Study of the Social Policy and Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. This was followed by expert led conversations that provided an overview of root causes of racism and how these have led to disparities and poor outcomes for Black families and children of color.

Additional examples of trainings available to staff specific to this need include the following:

Cultural Competency: Introduces staff to the concepts of cultural competence in the workplace and explores the impact of personal views and values regarding sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity in their role as child welfare advocates. Through activities, videos and group discussions, staff explore the roots of their biases and how these dynamics affect their working relationships.

Aligning Our Values: Designed to give staff the opportunity to use self-reflection to consider how their personal values impact their decision-making process with families. Also, staff will be able to consider the intersection of their personal values as they align or differ from social work core values, so they can consider more deeply the ethical decision-making process.

DCF will continue to assess this area of staff competence. The Department is committed to developing a comprehensive learning path for resource staff that will enhance their ability to respond to diverse families in a manner that is effective, respectful and values their worth as partners in the work.

Addressing Linguistic Barriers

DCF employs an ethnically diverse staff that are readily available and able to communicate with families in their own language. To further ensure cultural competence and communication, DCF contracts with interpreting and translation for in-person or telephonic services. The contracted services are sufficient and are continually assessed to ensure that they meet the needs of staff and families.

Non-Discriminatory Fee Structure

DCF has a non-discriminatory fee structure. No fees are incurred by families to become licensed as a foster or adoptive home. DCF assumes the cost for the home study process, including fingerprinting, criminal background checks and training. Other requirements of the licensing process are individually assessed and supported accordingly. DCF also allocates special environmental modification funding for kin and fictive kin placements to support licensure.

Timely Search for Adoptive Parents

Children are referred to the New Jersey Resource Adoption Exchange when a goal of select home adoption has been identified. The child is assigned to an exchange specialist by geographic area. The specialist reviews all documentation and enters pertinent information in a computerized database. This database assists the specialist in the selection process by matching criteria for the child with criteria for prospective adoptive homes. A list is obtained of prospective matches with CP&P resource families. If a child is legally free and there are no CP&P resource families, then a non-CP&P family will be

sought nationwide. The home studies are reviewed, and families are contacted prior to sending the home studies to the child's local office adoption team to review. When a family is not easily identified, a child can be registered on the national exchange. The links to those websites are listed below:

- <http://www.adoptuskids.org>
- <https://www.afamilyforeverychild.org/>
- <https://www.state.nj.us/njfoosteradopt/adoption/>
- <http://www.adopt.org>

In previous years, the New Jersey Resource Adoption Exchange collaborated with <https://www.adoptamericanetwork.org>, in addition to the websites listed above. Due to challenges with this platform and productivity, this collaboration ended.

Once a prospective adoptive family is selected, the adoption team meets with the family in their home for a Supervisory Interview. This meeting serves as DCF's legal obligation to provide the family with full disclosure while discussing subsidy eligibility and the transitional visitation schedule.

In addition, DCF maintains a partnership and membership with the National Adoption Association, which provides adoption recruitment, training, and profiling opportunities for legally free youth. DCF has enhanced abilities to recruit adoptive families for youth with Select Home adoption goals through the membership with the National Adoption Association. This membership offers the opportunity to profile waiting youth to other adoption agencies within the network of membership across the nation. These agencies have access to families with interest in providing permanency for youth with complex medical, social, and emotional needs. Membership also affords professional development and networking opportunities for adoption recruitment staff regarding national recruitment trends and strategies.

DCF also maintains a partnership with the National Adoption Center of Delaware (Adoption Center) for recruitment of legally free children. Over the past number of years, DCF has worked to continually assess formal recruitment efforts. In partnership with the Adoption Center, DCF has developed strategies to evolve recruitment efforts into small, child focused, family engagement events. A strong child specific recruitment team structure has been formed and gathers bi-monthly to assess each event. The team formulates strategies for continued progress for individual adoption and permanency readiness for youth. This teaming structure is also utilized to develop formal recruitment that is youth sensitive and effective in securing permanent families.

DCF's Office of Adoption Operations also has a family "Connect to Adoption" program that identifies and engages licensed resource families with interest in adoption. This program connects resource families directly with their adoption exchange and child specific recruitment team. This has led to better engagement and preparedness of potential adoptive families.

Through the ongoing partnership with Adoption Center, legally free children are able to be profiled in various media outlets via print and online publications, and FM radio, which

assist in locating adoptive homes. Children are also featured on the social media pages of Adoption Center. In April 2022, NBC 10 Wednesday's Child resumed in-person video shoots. In addition, the news station offers virtual shoots for our Advanced Special Needs youth who may not be able to leave their medical facility. Since April 2022, 17 youth have been featured and three have re-aired.

DCF continues to host internal Match, Profiling, and Enrichment events. In 2022, there were five in person & three virtual events. For calendar year 2023, there will be six in person, two virtual, and five enrichment events. The Adoption Center will not have hosted a match or profile event during the period under review.

DCF has continued to accept inquiries from families interested in adopting our legally free children that are waiting. The exchange specialists engage these families in understanding the strengths and challenges of some of the waiting youth and assess the potential abilities and interests in providing these children permanency. These families are then referred to the local office resource teams to begin the home study process. With Adoption Operations engaging these families prior to the home study being licensed, DCF is able to connect to the families individually and in group settings while they go through the licensing process. The goal of group engagement is to connect with the families, provide an overview of Adoption Operations, and to allow the families to build a network with each other.

DCF will continue coordinating with statewide recruitment staff to ensure consistent practice and strategic planning of daily recruitment work as well as the implementation of matching events, youth engagement and adoptive family support events annually.

New Jersey recognizes that while the recruitment of resource and adoptive parents is a priority, retention is necessary to maintain a robust pool of resources. As a result, New Jersey developed a statewide retention plan with the intent of improving and strengthening DCF's delivery of services and supports to resource parents as well as to strengthen partnerships with them. The plan consists of the core value of understanding that each resource family's strengths and challenges are essential to meeting their needs and those of the children in their care. In addition, acknowledging that relationships with resource families that are mutually beneficial and lasting must be developed through open communication and inclusion in individualized planning for all children in their care. Resource families must be considered as valuable members of the team.

Adoption Call to Action

Aligned in the Department's recruitment and retention work, DCF continues to make progress on the strategies outlined in the DCF Adoption Call to Action Plan. As part of DCF's strategic, transformational goals, as well as Goal 2 objectives of New Jersey's Child and Family Services Plan, DCF strives to preserve family connections by increasing the use of kinship care. Progress on this strategy is outlined in Goal 2, Objective 5 and includes the development of a KINConnections presentation to provide research-informed discussion on the benefits of kin/fictive kin connection and placement. This presentation

discussion began in early 2020 with staff at all levels in DCF to promote organizational buy-in. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, this in-person presentation was disrupted for some time. DCF reinstated these presentations virtually in Fall 2020 and completed them in early 2021.

DCF also began to review licensing standards to support policy and practice changes regarding barriers to completing kin home studies. This included the criminal history and child abuse history waiver policy. This policy was revised based on recommendations made to assist in processing kin homes/fictive kin homes in a timely way to support family connections and promote permanency. The Legal Guardianship Policy has been revised to include changes in the Kinship Legal Guardianship Assessment as well to include a specific visitation plan.

Included in the Adoption Call to Action plan are strategies to assist in improving permanency for children who have been in placement for 36 months or longer. CP&P continues to utilize these family finding tools to enhance case mining for youth who are legally free with an adoption goal. Additionally, for those youth where routine case mining has not been successful, a larger child specific recruitment team is assigned to conduct an intensive case mining effort along with an exit meeting with casework staff to review findings and assign next steps. The adoption child specific recruitment team continues to partner with the local office adoption units to identify youth earlier in their placement process, specifically looking at youth 18 months or more in placement to focus the recruitment work, family finding and recruitment profiling to include the initiation of the “all in challenge”- a project aimed at targeted recruitment for a cohort of children in placement between 18-36 months. This focus allows us to ensure that all efforts are completed to explore past relative and kin connections, as well as to profile youth to waiting licensed and approved families through networking with licensed and approved adoptive families with an interest in youth with complex challenges.

DCF continues to consider and assess potential frameworks and programs that will support youth in placement and their caretakers whether with a goal of reunification or other permanency goals.

Continuous Quality Improvement

DCF must ensure that the needs of all resource families are met by continuously evaluating performance quality. The following strategies will be used towards this end:

- Maintain an active resource retention taskforce that includes licensed resource and adoptive families, youth formerly in care, and DCF field staff,
- Disseminate and analyze an annual customer service survey to resource families to provide DCF with continuous feedback to identify trends and challenges,
- Continue to create retention-based activities, such as sending resource families Mother’s Day and Father’s Day cards, to express gratitude for the critical role they play in the lives of children,

- Continue a quarterly newsletter that highlights key topics, events, and available supports for resource and adoptive families,
- Continued evaluation of all aspects of resource and adoptive parent work, including, but not limited to, pre-service training curriculum and delivery, home study licensing tool, and licensing regulations,
- Continue to provide Mobile Response Stabilization Services to all families, at the time of placement to allow for increased support, and
- Restructuring of CP&P Local Office resource units to create more specialized roles in an effort to better support both kin and non-kin providers.

In summary, DCF recognizes the need to maintain a diligent recruitment and retention plan that is structured, planful, and fluid. DCF is committed to continued efforts to recruit and retain a robust pool of resource families to provide beneficial outcomes for all children.