

Resource Family Retention Plan

March 2016

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) believe that all foster, adoptive and kinship families are a cherished resource and invaluable to the work we do in serving children and families. All resource families play a unique role in the child welfare system as they are both internal and external customers. Resource families are internal customers to be acknowledged and respected as essential members of the professional team and are also external customers to be sought out, supported, valued and retained by all DCF staff.

Good customer service which emphasizes respect, empathy, caring and professionalism must lie in the hands and hearts of all DCF staff who interact with our foster, adoptive and kinship families. To have an environment that supports our goal of better serving all resource families we must be guided by the following core values which will ensure the safety, well-being and permanency of all children in care:

Assessment of Resource Families

Knowing and understanding each resource families' strengths, abilities, willingness and challenges is essential to meeting the needs of all resource families and the children in their care.

Engagement of Resource Families

Relationships with resource families that are mutually beneficial and lasting must be developed through open communication that is respectful, responsive, honest and empathetic.

Individualized Planning for Children

Resource families are critical to each child's successful outcome, and therefore must be involved in the individualized planning of all children in their care.

Teaming with Resource Families

Resource families are a valued member of the professional team who must be consulted and actively involved in decisions made on behalf of all the children in their care.

Quality Assurance

We must ensure that we are meeting the needs of all resource families by continuously evaluating the quality of our performance.

DCF staff, at every level, has a responsibility and vested interest in accomplishing our mission of supporting and retaining all resource families. In order to ensure our success, it is critical that we focus on the following:

- Ensure that Management at all levels model and encourage staff to reinforce our mission
 - Enhance the professional development and customer service skills of all staff
 - Provide resource families with the necessary supports and services to be successful
 - Develop measurement tools to allow continuous feedback about how we are supporting and delivering services to our resource families
 - Develop policies and practices that reinforce how we value and respect resource families
-

The Resource Family Retention Task Force has set forth the following **recommendations and action steps** that we believe will begin to cultivate a culture shift within this organization that will ultimately improve the experiences of New Jersey’s resource families and the outcomes for all children in our care.

The following recommendations and action steps have become **DCP&P’s Resource Family Retention Plan**.

Professional Staff Development

DCF will ensure that all staff are trained and have the tools needed to carry out their work in supporting and retaining resource families.

We will develop a Campaign for CP&P staff to reinforce our belief that all staff shall engage resource families to develop a professional partnership, and know, understand and internalize that resource families are supported, valued, respected and retained.

Resource family work will be incorporated into New Worker Training for all CP&P staff.

All workers and supervisors new to the resource family unit must receive resource family training.

The importance of the Resource Family Support Units and resource families must be acknowledged.

We must strengthen our practice and accountability as it relates to customer service towards resource families, birth families and children.

We will enhance/revise policy and practice regarding non-emergency removals of children from foster care to help retain resource families, promote placement

stability, focus on our best practice needs and promote a learning process for future placements.

Management

Management and leadership at all levels must work closely with staff and stakeholders to foster an atmosphere that supports and acknowledges that resource families are valued and respected as partners in meeting the needs of children.

Resource Family Support Units must be viewed as specialty units that require specialized skill sets and there must be an understanding that a strong resource family unit has a positive impact on the entire Local Office and will result in positive outcomes for our children.

It is essential for Management to be knowledgeable of the intricacies of resource family work.

Local Office Managers shall provide opportunities to encourage interaction between resource families and all staff, be present and involved in these events and link the importance of customer service with outcomes and stability metrics.

Management will reinforce that all CP&P staff value, respect and recognize the importance of resource parents.

All staff must have an accurate understanding of “full disclosure” to ensure that resource families have the information necessary to care for their children and are accepted as a member of the professional team.

We must have a resource family tracking system in place for Local Office Managers to manage resource family work.

Supervisory case conferencing must include discussions of any resource family placements and resource parents needs and concerns must be considered as they are the experts on our children and their input is essential in achieving stability and positive outcomes.

It is important to have FAFS at the local level and become reconnected to the resource units.

Local Office Managers will ensure that resource family work is teamed with all work within the Local Office to promote collaboration and increase an understanding of the roles and importance of resource family unit.

Supports

Resource families will be provided with services, supports and the necessary tools to increase and/or sustain their capacity to be effective in caring for the children in their home.

We will view all resource families as part of the professional team and the family's team.

Retention events/opportunities shall be provided to show appreciation to resource families as well as foster opportunities for staff to strengthen partnerships with current resource families.

It is essential to have a childcare network to serve the needs of our resource families that can be available for respite, events and/or trainings.

We must ensure that resource families receive all necessary information at the time of placement to promote placement stability.

Resource Family Units shall be sufficiently staffed to be receptive and available to provide the necessary support needs identified by resource families.

A mentoring program is critical for new resource parents.

It is essential to provide a resource clearing house with all support services available to families by county.

Post placement supports must be available for resource families who experience trauma when a child is removed.

Continuous Quality Improvement

DCF will develop measurement tools to allow resource families to provide continuous input on the quality and delivery of support and services.

To ensure accountability and to sustain positive change, we must measure the quality and delivery of supports that resource families receive by conducting a longitudinal survey. Families providing continuous feedback over time will identify trends, highlight offices that are doing well, and allow us to support offices that need improvement.

Policy

DCF will develop policies and standards of practice that reinforce how we value and respect resource families.

We shall research reasonable caseload caps and support for Resource Family Support Workers.

All staff must be responsible for improving customer service.

We will provide teaming, mentoring and placement support services for resource families.

It is essential to provide staff development training.