
Foster and Adoptive Diligent Recruitment Plan

Targeted Plan for:

FFY 2020-2024 APSR Final Report

FFY 2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan



Utah Department of
Health & Human Services
Child & Family Services

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ATTACHMENT B.

Introduction

The Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan was reviewed, and APSR updates are found throughout the document.

The Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan is a component of the Utah Department of Human Services (DHHS) Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) FFY 2025 to FFY 2029 Child and Family Services Plan. The Plan reflects the activities to be conducted during that period to ensure that there are foster and adoptive homes that meet the needs of infants, children, youths, and young adults in foster care, including those over the age of 18, served by the child welfare agency.

Development of this plan was informed by the results of Utah's Child and Family Services Review, completed in 2018. Utah was found to be in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The Plan will support continuing successful performance in this systemic factor.

Division of Child and Family Services Placement Priorities

The priority for DCFS is to maintain a child safely at home.

Kinship Care

If a child cannot safely remain at home, Kinship Care has the potential to provide the elements of permanency by virtue of the kinship caregiver's knowledge of and relationship with the family and child. Kinship Care allows a child to stay in the care of a family member or friend who is willing to meet the child's needs, including working with the child's parents or guardian so the child can return home, or providing a permanent home for the child, in the event the child cannot return home.

When selecting a placement for a child in the custody of DCFS, preferential consideration is given to Kinship Care, which includes a noncustodial parent, relative, or friend of the

parent, guardian, or child, as established in law and subject to the child's best interests. DCFS makes diligent efforts to locate and engage potential kinship caregivers for placement and to build and sustain family connections for the child.

In cases where reasonable efforts to reunify the child and parent are not successful, custody or adoption by a kinship caregiver is pursued. Kinship placements can include relatives and non-relatives if the non-relative is a friend of the family. A relative is an adult who is the child's grandparent, great grandparent, aunt, great aunt, uncle, great uncle, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, stepparent, first cousin, stepsibling, or sibling; a first cousin of the child's parent; a permanent guardian or natural parent of the child's sibling; or in the case of an Indian child, an extended family member as defined in the Indian Child Welfare Act, 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1903 (ICWA). A friend is defined as an adult who has an established relationship with the child or a family member of the child and is not a natural parent of the child. A friend does not meet the definition of a relative of the child as defined in Utah Code §80-3-102 and may be an extended relative of the child that is not included in the definition of relative. Child and Family Services shall consider the child's preferences or level of comfort with the friend and is required to consider no more than one friend designated by each parent of the child and one friend designated by the child, if the child is of sufficient maturity to articulate their wishes in relation to a placement. A friend must be licensed as a foster parent or be willing to become licensed as a foster parent within 120 days of the shelter hearing.

Once the Child and Family Team have chosen a kinship placement, the kinship caregiver and household members have completed background checks, a limited safety inspection of the home has been completed, and kinship caregivers have signed an agreement to work with DCFS and the court, the child can enter the kinship placement. At this time, the kinship team will begin working with the family to identify needed resources and assist in the application process. The kinship team will also explore options with the kinship caregiver regarding the opportunity to become a kinship-specific licensed foster parent or to have temporary guardianship, while the family team works to support reunification. The kinship team will complete a home study that may be used for licensure, guardianship, and adoption. Should the family choose to become licensed, the kinship

team will continue to support the kinship placement and will serve as family resource consultants.

Foster Care Placements and Reunification Services

Foster care is a temporary intervention for children who are unable to remain safely in their homes. Once a child is placed in the custody of DCFS, the goal is to provide a safe, stable, and loving environment until the child can be safely reunited with their family. DCFS must consider placement with a non-custodial parent, relative, friend, or former foster parent before considering other placements. Children in foster care may live with relatives or with unrelated foster parents. Foster care can also refer to placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living.

DCFS utilizes the Utah Family and Children Engagement Tool (UFACET), an evidence-based assessment tool to determine the recommended level of care for children in foster care. The UFACET has a built-in algorithm that utilizes identified patterns of need to determine an appropriate level of care for the child and identifies needs for services for the child and parents or other caregivers.

The most frequently utilized foster care placements are foster family homes (Levels I, II, and III) licensed by the DHHS Division of Licensing and Background Checks Office of Licensing (OL). A Level IV placement is a proctor family foster home that is privately certified through a licensed child-placing agency. The proctor agency generally has access to highly skilled caregivers as well as a variety of wraparound services needed for the higher, intensive needs of the child. Children with severe emotional or behavioral difficulties in need of more intensive supervision and treatment may be placed in residential treatment programs through contracts with licensed providers. When needed, DCFS also relies on a higher-level service array that includes professional parents and residential treatment settings. (Levels V-VI).

A more detailed summary of the range of DCFS foster care placement options is presented below.

Foster Placements - Levels 1-3

DCFS includes five regional geographic areas within the state. DCFS contracts with Utah Foster Care Foundation (UFC), a private non-profit agency, to provide for the diligent recruitment, training, and retention of foster and adoptive families. UFC has nine locations statewide, each with some variation of recruitment, training, and retention services staff.

The recruitment framework ensures that there is a statewide comprehensive process for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed. Regional recruitment plans are developed based on each region's annual needs assessment. DCFS also contracts with Raise the Future and Wendy's Wonderful Kids to help with adoption recruitment and placement.

UFC's vision is grounded in two primary beliefs. First, UFC believes a stable and caring family is the best possible environment for children in out-of-home care until they can be reunified with their families, placed with a relative, or placed in a permanent adoptive home. Second, UFC believes foster families are essential members of the child welfare service team.

Proctor Placements - Level 4

DHHS also contracts with 23 non-profit agencies throughout the state that have child-placing foster care licenses, referred to as proctor care. These agencies recruit and train proctor parents, as well as provide support to proctor parents after children in state custody are placed in their care and account for 309 proctor homes. Placements in proctor homes tend to be youths with higher-level behavioral and mental health needs. These agencies also provide a wide range of support services that may include mentoring, treatment, and therapeutic supervision, among others.

Professional Parents – Levels 5-6

DHHS contracts with 17 child-placing foster agencies throughout the state that provide professional parent foster placements. A professional parent is a state-certified caregiver that provides in-home support to an individual diagnosed with a developmental disability or mental health condition. Professional parent placements usually include one placement at a time but can include up to three.

Residential Placements – Levels 5-6

Additionally, DHHS contracts with 14 agencies throughout the state that have residential treatment licenses, referred to as moderate and high residential care. These agencies provide therapeutic treatment services for children in state custody who are placed in their care and account for 214 beds. Placements in residential care are intended to be short-term placements for youth experiencing a high level of behavioral and mental health needs that cannot be managed in the community. The goal is stabilization followed by a step down to a family-based setting, which includes foster and proctor home placements, as well as reunification.

Reunification Services

Reunification services for parents or other primary caregivers may include referral for community-based services such as mental health or substance use disorder treatment, parenting skills training, and other skills development and supports. Parents may also receive transportation supports or assistance to obtain public benefits, housing supports, educational services, domestic violence services, or assistance with other needs to help them prepare to have children safely return home.

Providing parent time is essential to the reunification process. The Child and Family Team utilizes the UFACET and other assessment tools to evaluate safety and determine the appropriate extended parent time, increasing the likelihood of reunification.

Foster Care Placement Recruitment, Training, and Retention

DCFS ensures that the agency has appropriate foster care placements that meet the individual needs of infants, children, youths, and young adults (including those over the age of 18 who are in foster care) served by the agency.

UFC is tasked with the recruitment, training and retention of foster families that care for children who are unable to remain in their own homes.

Recruitment Efforts

To minimize trauma to children, UFC works to develop a network of family foster care that is neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities in which the children live. UFC staff members network within their local communities, seeking opportunities to partner with various businesses, religious and civic organizations, and local governments. UFC seeks to replace the families who close their licenses each year and to increase the number and overall quality of foster families to meet projected placement needs.

UFC recruitment staff conduct a live (in-person or virtual) initial consultation to determine if applicants are viable candidates. Among the areas in which the applicant is assessed, recruitment staff discuss matters such as the applicant's stability (financial, emotional, relationships, etc.), support system, and understanding of the needs of children in foster care. If the applicant is recommended to proceed with the licensing process, they are entered into the Binti software system, which enables UFC to track and manage data related to the foster family, including their placement parameters and relevant demographics for DCFS to consider for future placements.

Statewide, UFC utilizes paid advertising, media relationships, and social media platforms for recruitment efforts. These methods are also used to spotlight and clarify misperceptions about caring for youths with high needs. Community outreach and media campaigns provide a wide funnel to recruit families interested in becoming foster parents. UFC recruitment staff throughout Utah prioritize educating potential foster families in one-on-one conversations about the most significant needs of children in foster care.

Training Efforts

UFC seeks to improve the lives of vulnerable children placed in foster care through the positive impact of qualified, compassionate, and nurturing foster and adoptive foster families. Training implemented statewide stems from an evidence-informed curriculum designed to create an understanding of trauma-informed care, providing foster families with the knowledge necessary to care for children who have experienced trauma.

UFC recruits and pre-screens families, conducts pre-service/pre-licensure and in-service/post-licensure training, assists in the retention of foster families by coordinating support groups and generalized support services, and advocates on behalf of kinship, foster, and adoptive families. UFC also provides training to kinship caregivers identified by DCFS for care of specific children in foster care.

With the finalization of a contract in 2020, UFC began providing foster families with evidence-based trauma-informed training using the Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) program provided by Texas Christian University Institute of Child Development. TBRI is a set of principles and interventions designed to help families who are raising children who have experienced trauma from abuse, neglect, chaos, and prenatal drug and alcohol exposure. These children often have behaviors that are extreme and perplexing to their caregivers. UFC is building its capacity to make TBRI training available to all licensing kinship, foster, and adoptive families.

In SFY 2021, UFC provided seven full TBRI caregiver series training courses and increased its number of TBRI licensed practitioners to have capacity to provide an increased number of TBRI training opportunities. In SFY 2022, UFC provided eight full TBRI Caregiver Series trainings, equaling 160 hours of in-service training. UFC also added seven more trained TBRI practitioners, which has further to provide an increased number of TBRI training opportunities. In SFY 2023, UFC provided 10 full TBRI Caregiver Series trainings, equaling 200 hours of in-service training. TBRI continues to be offered on an ongoing basis, with the goal of a new caregiver series starting most months. UFC opens the TBRI caregiving series to all current foster parents, adoptive parents, DCFS staff, and others who work

with children in care. UFC TBRI practitioners have also partnered with schools to provide a TBRI overview to teachers.

Additionally, DCFS provides TBRI training to its staff, improving their understanding of trauma and better equipping them to support parents and caregivers. DCFS also provides required TBRI training to prospective adoptive parents who do not encounter UFC due to their decision to not seek licensure.

Initial foster parent training is conducted by UFC. Training for prospective foster and adoptive parents consists of the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) for pre-service training, as of December 2023. NTDC was funded through a five-year cooperative agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, and the Children's Bureau. The NTDC includes a module focused on understanding and honoring the primary families that children in foster care come from, including a focus on racial, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. Training records are provided to OL, verifying prospective foster parent completion, which is required for foster parent licensing. In-services training is tracked and monitored by the DCFS Training Administrator.

UFC offers in-person and virtual classes, which has made it possible for UFC to provide monthly classes in all areas of the state and has removed the barrier of traveling long distances to attend classes. In addition to pre-service training, offered in English and Spanish, there are many opportunities to attend in-service training after foster families become licensed. Many foster parents also rely on other foster parents, the UFC software application, which connects foster parents to UFC staff and resources, and cluster groups.

Retention Efforts

The number of new foster parents has continued its decline during SFY 2023. This decline is also reflected in the lack of available placements reported by many stakeholders. The legislature approved a small payment increase for foster parents in 2023, but it has not positively impacted foster parent recruitment in the manner it was anticipated. The state of the economy, including inflation rates, a challenging housing market, a lack of suitable

daycare options, and insufficient increases in foster care compensation relative to living expenses are all contributing factors to UFC's challenges in foster parent recruitment.

Through partnership with Utah First Lady Abby Cox's Show-up Initiative, UFC's Director of Care Communities is piloting efforts to connect 8-10 community members, primarily through a faith-based organization or business, to surround a foster family with compassionate support. With this customized support, it is anticipated there will be an increase in foster parent retention, thus increasing positive outcomes for children in foster care.

Since SFY 2017, the UFC Mentor Program has matched veteran foster parents with inexperienced foster parents to provide clarity, understanding, and individualized support from those who have experience with the complexities of foster parenting to those who are new.

During SFY 2023, individual and group clinical support, provided free to all licensed providers by trained mental health therapists from UFC, was implemented.

Please see the table below for UFC SFYs 2019-2023 recruitment, training, and retention efforts data.

Utah Foster Care					
	SFY 2019	SFY 2020 ¹	SFY 2021 ¹	SFY 2022 ²	SFY 2023
Number of Consultations with Prospective Foster Parents	1,104	1,205	1,194	885	781
Number of New Foster Families Trained and Graduated	700 (533 Foster/Adoptive; 167 Kinship)	746 (543 Foster/Adoptive; 203 Kinship)	687 (465 Foster/Adoptive; 222 Kinship)	523 (333 Foster/Adoptive; 190 Kinship)	421 (236 Foster/Adoptive; 185 Kinship)
Hours of Training for Current and Prospective Foster Parents	2,841 (1,984 pre-service training hours and 857 in-service training hours)	3,838 (2,060 pre-service training hours and 1,778 in-service training hours)	8,401 (5,766 pre-service training hours - 1,644 live and 4,122 recorded - and 2,615 in-service training hours - 615 live and 2,000 recorded-)	7,779 (4,288 pre-service training hours - 1,661 live and 2,627 recorded - and 3,491 in-service training hours - 677 live and 2,814 recorded-)	7,285 (3,944 pre-service training hours - 1,705 live and 2,239 recorded - and 3,341 in-service training hours - 573 live and 2,768 recorded.)
Number of Foster Parent Support Meetings, which include cluster group meetings and retention activities	267	242	399	399	330

NOTES: ¹ In SFYs 2020 and 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UFC switched from in-person to online classes.
² In SFY 2022, many classes continued to be held virtually. However, near the end of the year, more in-person classes were held. In some regions, particularly in rural areas, requests to continue providing virtual classes were made. UFC now offers in-person and virtual classes, which has made it possible for UFC to offer classes in all areas of a region every month and has removed the barrier of traveling long distances to attend a class.

Demographics of Children in Foster Care Placements

During the previous five-years, the total number of children served in foster care within a Federal Fiscal Year in Utah declined by over 1,000 children, from 4,542 in FFY 2019 to 3,301 in FFY 2023. Point-in-time data for children in foster care also showed a decline from 2,479 in FFY 2019 to 1,829 in FFY 2023.

Please see the table below for FFY 2019-2023 number of children in foster care served during the FFY and number of children in foster care on the last day of the FFY.

Number of Children in Foster Care		
FFY	Served During Federal Fiscal Year	Last day of Federal Fiscal Year September 30
2019	4,542	2,479
2020	4,076	2,377
2021	3,878	2,132
2022	3,589	2,066
2023	3,301	1,819

Please see the table below for FFY 2019-2023 number of children in foster care on the last day of the FFY, presented by age.

Number of Children in Foster Care on the Last Day of Federal Fiscal Year September 30										
Age Group	FFY 2019		FFY 2020		FFY 2021		FFY 2022		FFY 2023	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Younger than 1 Year	223	9.0%	193	8.1%	215	10.1%	175	8.5%	136	7.4%
1 to 3 Years	455	18.4%	481	20.2%	411	19.3%	400	19.4%	314	17.2%
4 to 6 Years	401	16.2%	350	14.7%	292	13.7%	282	13.6%	255	14.0%
7 to 9 Years	302	12.2%	318	13.4%	252	11.8%	268	13.0%	243	13.6%
10 to 12 Years	295	11.9%	274	11.5%	265	12.4%	259	12.5%	228	12.6%
13 to 15 Years	365	14.7%	344	14.5%	340	15.9%	321	15.5%	296	16.3%
16 Years and Older	438	17.7%	417	17.5%	357	16.7%	361	17.5%	347	19.0%
TOTAL	2,479		2,377		2,132		2,066		1,819	

Please see the table below for the children in foster care served during FFYs 2019-2023 and point-in-time on the last day of the FFY by placement level.

Children in Foster Care Served in all Placement Levels During the FFY and Point in Time on the Last Day of the FFY										
Foster Care Placement Level	FFY 2019	Sept 30, 2019	FFY 2020	Sept 30, 2020	FFY 2021	Sept 30, 2021	FFY 2022	Sept 30, 2022	FFY 2023	Sept 30, 2023
	Served	Point in Time	Served	Point in Time	Served	Point in Time	Served	Point in Time	Served	Point in Time
Level I	3,384	1,425	3,040	1,326	2,867	1,186	2,634	1,183	2,417	917
Level II	733	298	723	322	668	283	553	206	515	211
Level III	267	107	279	116	215	91	193	75	174	80
Level IV	503	220	425	166	352	158	310	149	322	187
Level V	1,267	147	1,057	131	874	92	935	91	898	78
Level VI	218	56	184	38	102	20	121	42	131	44
Level VII	247	16	200	14	220	22	183	13	188	15
Individual Residential Treatment Services	290	188	345	233	398	239	426	272	450	262
Other	188	20	167	27	156	29	138	23	131	27
TOTAL Unduplicated Child Count	4,542	2,477	4,074	2,373	3,876	2,120	3,587	2,054	3,301	1,819
NOTES: All child counts are distinct (unduplicated). The percentage of children in each placement level is calculated on the distinct count of children served in residential placements during each FFY. One child may have been placed in more than one residential placement; therefore, the sum of percentages may not equal 100%.										

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

Utah Thriving

During FFY 2024, in response to Utah HB 261, the governor’s office of Utah initiated a new program, Utah Thriving. At this time, the DFCS EDIA and SOGIE Committees began transitioning their efforts to be within the framework of the newly formed Utah Thriving program.

Utah Thriving is focused on championing the well-being and success of all Utahns. To achieve this, the state is developing multiple strategies to address disparities, eliminate barriers, increase upward mobility pathways, and promote stability for more people and families in Utah. Utah Thriving includes five pillars that represent the state’s highest priorities and fundamental driving forces. The five pillars are dignity, unity, opportunity, proximity, and service.

Please see the table below for the DCFS FFY 2019-2023 race and ethnicity of children served in foster care.

Race and Ethnicity of Children Served in Foster Care ¹										
Race	FFY 2019		FFY 2020		FFY 2021		FFY 2022		FFY 2023	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
AI/AN	223	4.9%	233	5.7%	236	6.1%	185	5.2%	182	5.5%
Asian	36	0.8%	48	1.2%	55	1.4%	53	1.5%	21	0.6%
Black or African American	286	6.3%	292	7.2%	285	7.3%	271	7.6%	275	8.3%
Multiracial, Other Race Not Known	62	1.4%	65	1.6%	65	1.7%	80	2.2%	72	2.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other AAPI	96	2.1%	71	1.7%	65	1.7%	84	2.3%	92	2.8%
Unable to Determine	25	0.6%	17	0.4%	22	0.6%	13	0.4%	9	0.3%
White	4,094	90.1%	3,636	89.2%	3,441	88.7%	3,185	88.7%	2,891	87.6%

TOTAL Children Served ²	4,542	106.2%	4,074	107.0%	3,878	107.5%	3,589	107.9%	3,301	107.3%
Hispanic Origin or Latino	1,070	23.6%	979	24.0%	1,007	26.0%	913	25.4%	830	25.1%
<i>NOTES: ¹ All child counts are distinct and unduplicated. The percentage of children in each race group is calculated on the distinct count of children served during each Federal Fiscal Year. ² One child may identify as more than one race; therefore, the sum of percentages will not equal 100%.</i>										

Please see the table below for the children in foster care FFY 2023 point-in-time on the last day of the FFY by placement level and race and ethnicity.

FFY 2023 Point in Time on the Last Day of the FFY (September 30, 2023)
Race and Ethnicity of Children in Foster Care by Placement Level

Race	Level I		Level II		Level III		Level IV		Level V		Level VI		Level VII		IRTS		Other		TOTAL Count by Race and Ethnicity
	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT	%	CNT
AI/AN	37	41%	2	2%	5	6%	14	15%	12	13%	1	1%	1	1%	16	18%	3	3%	91
Asian	3	43%	2	29%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	29%	0	0%	7
Black or African American	74	44%	13	8%	9	5%	29	17%	6	4%	4	2%	0	0%	31	19%	1	1%	167
Multiracial, Other Race Not Known	26	70%	2	5%	2	5%	4	11%	2	5%	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%	0	0%	37
Native Hawaiian or Other AAPI	27	46%	8	14%	2	3%	12	20%	4	7%	0	0%	1	2%	5	9%	0	0%	59
Unable to Determine	26	70%	2	5%	2	5%	4	11%	2	5%	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%	0	0%	37
White	805	51%	192	12%	71	5%	140	9%	61	4%	41	3%	14	1%	225	14%	23	2%	1,572
Distinct Number of Children by Placement Level	917		211		80		187		78		44		15		262		25		1,819
Hispanic Origin or Latino	212	49%	53	12%	19	4%	58	13%	19	4%	10	2%	6	1%	50	12%	8	2%	435

NOTES:¹ One child may identify as more than one race; therefore, the sum of all racial groups will be higher than the distinct count of children for each placement level.

Please see the table below for the DCFS FFY 2023 data for race and ethnicity of children served in foster care and the total child population data for the state as presented by Kids Count Data Center, calendar year 2022.

Race and Ethnicity of Children Served in Foster Care				
Race	DCFS FFY 2023		Kids Count Data Calendar Year 2022	
	Foster Care Child Count ¹	Percent ²	Utah Child Count	Percent ⁴
American Indian or Alaska Native	182	5.5%	7,431	1%
Asian	21	0.6%	18,688	2%
Black or African American	275	8.3%	11,588	1%
Multiracial, Other Race Unknown	72	2.2%	37,165	4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	92	2.8%	11,228	1%
Unable to Determine ³	9	0.3%		
White	2,891	87.6%	665,470	71%
TOTAL SERVED DCFS ^{4,5}	3,301			
Hispanic Origin or Latino ⁵	830	25.1%	180,038	19%
TOTAL KIDS COUNT			931,608	100.00%

NOTES: ¹ All child counts are distinct (unduplicated). ² The Percent of children in each race group is calculated on the distinct count of children served during each FFY. ³ Kids Count Data does not include this category. ⁴ One child may identify as more than one race; therefore, the sum of percentages will not equal 100%. DCFS data counts Hispanic/Latino as a part of the total, whereas Kids Count data counts Hispanic Latino as a separate race category.

In FFY 2023, most children in foster care were white (87.6%). The Asian child population is underrepresented in the foster care system (0.6%). Children who are American Indian/Alaska Native and Black or African American are overrepresented at 5.5% and 8.3% respectively. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander are also overrepresented at 2.8%. Children of Hispanic/or Latino ethnicity (of any race) account for 25.1% of the child foster care population, which is also an overrepresentation from the Utah total population.

DCFS is working with the Social Research Institute (SRI) within the College of Social Work at the University of Utah to investigate and evaluate the degree of racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparity for families receiving care. A variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic indicators are being used to describe the flow of services throughout the child welfare system as well as outcomes related to child welfare. Through its initiative to investigate systemic racism within child welfare, DCFS will learn from and respond to

disproportionality and disparities to ensure that all children and families are receiving supportive and fair services that are racially inclusive, just, and equitable.

Characteristics of Children for Whom Foster and Adoptive Homes Are Needed

Due to the implications of these foster care children demographics, UFC will place much of its focus on recruiting African American, Native American, and Hispanic foster families. UFC will also focus on locating age-appropriate foster families, particularly for youths over the age of 13. Even though this group represents a smaller number than the younger population, finding families for children aged 13 and older continues to be a challenge. Along with a Native American Specialist, a Spanish Services Consultant, and a Diversity Specialist.

Strategies

Strategies to Reach Out to All Parts of the Community

Through collaboration with UFC and other partners, efforts are made to reach out to all areas of the community to recruit foster and adoptive families. UFC develops recruitment strategies through an annual plan developed with each of the five DCFS regions, which cover all counties within the state. The region-specific plans are subject to modification as needs change. During the last quarter of each state fiscal year, UFC completes a needs assessment process with each DCFS region. The process includes:

- Assessing regional placement data and determining region-specific needs.
- Assessing UFC recruitment, training, and retention efforts and obtaining input to improve UFC response to trends and region-specific needs.
- Utilizing information gained through the regional needs assessments to develop an informed plan for the coming year.
- Participating in the DCFS licensed foster/adoptive home study screening and review process, placement committee meetings, and other collaborative meetings as requested throughout the year.

- Ensuring family voice is represented in all recruitment, training, and retention efforts.

Once the needs assessment process is completed and within 30 days of the new fiscal year, UFC Lead Foster/Adoptive Consultants develop regional recruitment plans. Regional recruitment plans include the agreed-upon recruitment goals for each region. Plans identify specific types of families to focus recruitment efforts on, to meet the needs of children in care.

Regional recruitment plans also include specific recruitment activities and methods that will be utilized to achieve goals. To help with targeted recruitment efforts, UFC will:

- Continue to employ a full-time Native American Specialist; this role conducts outreach to tribes, assists staff statewide with AI/AN recruitment efforts, and mentors AI/AN families through the licensing process.
- Continue to employ a part-time Spanish Services Consultant and a Diversity Specialist; these roles conduct outreach to the Hispanic and other diverse communities along the Wasatch Front, provide pre-service classes in Spanish, mentor Spanish-speaking families through the licensing process, and support a Spanish language peer support group.
- Adapt to needs of specific families being recruited, such as utilizing an American Sign Language interpreter.

UFC and DCFS region representatives meet at least biannually to review progress toward goals and assess if the needs of the region are being met by the current regional recruitment plan or if the plan needs to be modified.

Child-placing foster care agencies also recruit and train proctor families to care for children in foster care. They typically recruit for proctor parents in the local communities in which these agencies reside.

Strategies for Training Staff to Work with Diverse Communities

UFC staff receive training to help them be culturally responsive as they recruit, train, and provide ongoing support to foster and adoptive parents. Prospective foster and adoptive parents also receive training to help them work with children and youths from all communities.

Prospective foster and adoptive parents also learn about the needs of youths. In the session that addresses why children are in foster/adoptive care and the session that addresses adolescent development, trainers identify the safety needs of children.

A discussion of youth safety is held during the UFCs DCFS Practice Guidelines webinar, a course that prospective foster/adoptive parents are required to complete before being licensed.

In addition, UFC frontline staff are required to attend the same training that foster parents receive, which includes a module focused on understanding and honoring the primary families that children in foster care come from.

UFC employs a full-time Native American Specialist who conducts outreach to Tribes and assists UFC staff statewide with American Indian/Alaskan Native recruitment efforts. The Native American Specialist also attends or assists in coordinating UFC staff attendance at several Native American events throughout the year, including pow-wows, symposiums, school events, the Governor's Native American Summit, and other related events, which helps support UFC staff learning to work in tribal communities. The Native American Specialist coordinates with DCFS Region Resource Family Consultant Supervisors. UFC also employs a full-time Spanish Services Consultant and a Diversity Specialist to conduct outreach to Hispanic and other diverse communities along the Wasatch Front.

Strategies for Addressing Linguistic Barriers

After English, the language most often spoken in Utah is Spanish. UFC employs a Spanish Services Consultant who responds to all Spanish-language inquiries. UFC provides pre-service training in Spanish for prospective foster families. The specialist also mentors

Spanish-speaking families through the licensing process, assists with the Spanish language peer support group, and coordinates ongoing training for Spanish-speaking families to renew their licenses.

There has not been a demand for UFC classes in other languages. If the need arises, UFC will contract with a language interpretation agency to meet that need.

The state maintains a contract for translation services to overcome language barriers, which is available statewide. The contract can be accessed by OL or DCFS staff when needed for communicating with prospective or licensed foster/adoptive parents when agency staff do not speak the language.

Strategies for Outreach and Advertising to Promote Becoming a Foster Parent

In conjunction with regional recruitment plans and goals, methods for disseminating information about being a foster parent are developed. Communication may include general information about being a foster parent and examples of child-specific needs that recruitment efforts are targeting, such as sibling groups and members of tribes. Activities include:

- Local paid media campaigns.
- Solicitation of earned media.
- Social media and social networking.
- Participation in fairs, festivals, or other relevant community gatherings and celebrations.
- Community outreach and education through relationships with local businesses, faith-based groups, schools, and other associations and organizations.
- Community outreach and education, consistent with the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, the Interethnic Adoption Provisions, and ICWA, that focuses on increasing culturally relevant placement opportunities representative of the racial and cultural makeup of children in care.

Regional recruitment efforts are supported by the UFC Director of Recruitment, Communications Director, and Marketing Manager. Support includes:

- Maintaining a statewide website: utahfostercare.org.
- Utilizing UFC Bridge App, which showcases upcoming training courses and events, provides an avenue for foster parents to communicate with one another, and facilitates an avenue for foster parents to coordinate respite care.
- Utilizing Binti foster care software, which streamlines and simplifies the licensing process.
- Maintaining a statewide social media presence.
- Developing general recruitment materials.
- Development of region-specific messaging and materials when one region has needs not reflected in the others, as well as event-specific materials for each region, as needed.
- Development of culturally relevant materials targeting diverse populations identified in regional recruitment plans.
- Development and implementation of a statewide mass media marketing plan, which may include digital advertising, billboards, television, or radio.

Strategies to Support Kinship Placements

DCFS First Impression

First Impression is a DCFS initiative aimed at strengthening the child welfare system's early response to child safety concerns. The goal of this initiative is to prevent the removal of children from their families. When a removal is necessary, First Impression drives the system to address safety issues upfront to ensure the safe return of children to their families as early as possible. This initiative is based on the understanding that caseworkers need a system that supports them in the complex process of safety assessment and decision-making. Families need a system that respects them and gives them a voice, as well as prioritizes involvement of their social network from the beginning of agency involvement. First Impression builds on the understanding that rapid and robust teaming and upfront search and engagement of kinship are the primary building

blocks to achieve this goal. This initiative also aims to reduce the potential for lost information that can occur during case transfer from CPS to ongoing services.

The First Impression workgroup selected a teaming model process, Family Group Decision Making (FGDM). Through work with the Kempe Center, modifications to FGDM were made and focused on how to use this framework for creating an expedited response at the CPS level to support children and families quickly and at the point they initially become involved with DCFS. Additional modifications were tailored to specifically address Utah's child welfare system. The name given to this new process is Family Action Meeting (FAM).

DCFS Kinship Efforts

The agency bolstered its best practice of using kin across the system and reducing barriers in placing with kin, including improving the kin locator process and tools. DCFS is focused on strengthening supervision and training of kinship workers and facilitating a consistent process for locating kin, engaging kin, and supporting kinship caregivers throughout the life of the case. In instances where a child is unable to safely remain at home, DCFS is hopeful the resulting processes will lead workers to consider kin options first.

During SFY 2022, DCFS created a centralized background screening unit and a centralized regional comprehensive review committee for emergency kinship placements. This centralization helps DCFS expedite kinship placements and overcome inherent biases.

DCFS is exploring the reallocation of resources to ensure kinship connections and kinship placements are identified early and throughout the case. The team believes that providing focused support through kinship-specific caseworkers will increase kinship connections and placements. The kinship-specific caseworkers are available to CPS, in-home, and permanency caseworkers' efforts.

DCFS continues its work on a formalized plan to ensure that when a caseworker is seeking a foster care placement, they must first demonstrate that they have put forth diligent efforts to identify and engage kin. Warm kinship outreach, via phone calls, has been introduced to each region as a tool to increase kinship responses and placements.

Foster Parent and Kinship Caregiver Advisory Board

During SFY 2022, a Foster Parent and Kinship Caregiver Advisory Board was created; the first board meeting was held in May 2022. The board meets monthly and includes 11 foster parents and kinship caregivers, as well as representatives from DCFS, OL, and UFC. These organizations provide support, education, and consultation to the board. The purpose of the board is to include foster parent and kinship caregiver voice, as DCFS develops practice and future projects.

DCFS Virtual Town Halls

During SFY 2021, the DCFS Director held virtual town halls with foster parents. To support attendance, town halls were held in each region throughout the state, with options for attending a morning or an evening session. Town hall meetings have continued in SFYs 2022 and 2023. The intention of town hall meetings is to strengthen the relationships of DCFS and foster parents, to help DCFS gain a better understanding of foster parent challenges, and to ensure foster parent voice is represented in DCFS practice decisions. During town hall meetings, information on DCFS kinship priority and policies, as well as the rationale behind the priorities and policies, is addressed. DCFS addresses concerns and other feedback received through the town hall events.

Strategies to Support Timely Search for Prospective Adoptive Parents

DCFS has established procedures in Practice Guidelines Sections 300, 400, and 500 for timely search of prospective adoptive parents for a child in foster care needing an adoptive placement, when the child is not already in a kinship or adoptive home. Intensive recruitment efforts are made to place a child in an adoptive family within 30 days of the establishment of adoption as the child's permanency plan goal. When an adoptive placement is not identified, DCFS works with its contracted adoptive family recruitment provider.

DCFS contracts with the Raise the Future and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to focus on recruitment of adoptive families for children who cannot safely return home and do not have an identified permanent family. Wendy's Wonderful Kids child-specific recruiters work throughout the state with identified children who have lingered in foster

care without an identified family; this work is focused on increasing the likelihood each child will exit foster care with a permanent family.

Strategies that may be used for timely search of a prospective adoptive parent include:

- Guidance from the Child and Family Team in selecting appropriate strategies.
- Continued search for kin, including kin as defined by ICWA.
- Listing the child on the Raise the Future website, which serves eight Western states.
- Use of Raise the Future website for family recruitment.
- Raise the Future profile party recruitment.
- Utah Heart Gallery recruitment.
- Televised and print media “Wednesday’s Child” recruitment.
- National AdoptUSKids recruitment.
- Database matching of the child with prospective families.

DCFS Practice Guidelines establishes priorities for selection of adoptive parents and include:

- ICWA takes precedence for an adoption of an Indian child who is a member of a federally recognized Tribe or an Alaskan Native.
- Relative of the child.
- Caregiver or adoptive family who have a biological sibling of the child.
- Kinship or friend.
- Non-relative couple or single adult.

When the above priorities cannot be met, the current caregiver of the child should be considered before another prospective adoptive family is considered, if the child has substantial emotional ties with the caregiver and if removal of the child from the caregiver would be detrimental to the child’s well-being. The child’s preference should also be considered if the child is of sufficient maturity. In addition, geographic barriers alone should not create barriers or delays in the selection of an adoptive home. A non-relative couple or a single adult should also not create barriers or delays in the selection of an adoptive home.

DCFS cannot deny any individual the opportunity to become an adoptive parent based on the individual or child’s race, color, or national origin. DCFS cannot delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care based on the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved.

Adoption Data

In FFY 2023, the average time to adoption was 20 months by foster care kin, and 22 months by foster care non-kin. There were 375 adoptions from foster care, 195 (52%) involving adoptions to kin and 180 (48%) involving adoptions to non-kin. Additionally, there were 28 relative adoptions by kin through in-home cases, bringing the total number of adoptions to 403.

Number of Children Adopted from Foster Care and PSS Kinship Placements				
FFY	Children in the Custody of a Kinship Caregiver Receiving PSS	Children in the Custody of DCFS Receiving Foster Care Services		Total Adoptions
	Adoption by Non-Foster Care Kin	Adoption by Foster Care Kin	Adoption by Foster Care Non-Kin	
2019	45	293	318	656
2020	27	206	283	516
2021	39	255	276	570
2022	27	283	246	556
2023	28	195	180	403

Duration from Foster Care to Adoption			
FFY	Children in the Custody of a Kinship Caregiver Receiving PSS	Children in the Custody of DCFS Receiving Foster Care Services	
	Average Months to Adoption by Non-Foster Care Kin	Average Months to Adoption by Foster Care Kin	Average Months to Adoption by Foster Care Non-Kin
2019	17.2	18.1	21.1
2020	15.5	18.8	25.1
2021	14.9	21.1	23.8
2022	16	20.8	22.4
2023	12.5	19.7	27.3

DCFS will continue efforts to achieve permanency and reduce the time children are in out-of-home care. Efforts include working with Wendy’s Wonderful Kids (WWK). The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (DTFA) developed this evidenced-based program to recruit permanent families for children in foster care who need additional efforts to find a permanent family. Funding for WWK recruiters is shared by DTFA, Raise the Future, and DCFS. In 2005, Utah received its first WWK site in the Salt Lake Valley Region. This was the only site in the state until 2014, when WWK also placed sites in Eastern, Northern, and Southwest Regions. In 2018, Western Region received a WWK site, making the program available in all five Utah DCFS regions. WWK recruiters work closely with DCFS staff throughout the state to provide intensive, child-specific recruitment for children who linger in foster care.

The below table lists the number of children WWK served during SFY 2019-2023 and since inception.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids			
SFY	Children Served ¹	Children Matched	Children Adopted
2019	190	53	15
2020	193	31	24
2021	209	58	31
2022	287	49	18
2023	146	43	18
Since Inception ²	608	535 ³	183 ⁴

NOTES: ¹ Each SFY's Children Served number includes all children served during that year. Some children are served in more than one SFY and appear in each year's count. ²The Children Served Since Inception number represents the total number of children served since WWK's Utah inception in 2005 and are not duplicated. ³ The Children Matched Since Inception number includes the total number of matches across all children, which can include more than one match process per child. ⁴The Children Adopted Since Inception number includes all children adopted since WWK's Utah inception in 2005

Department of Health and Human Services Office of Licensing

DHHS OL issues licenses to kinship caregivers, foster parents, residential treatment facilities, and other child placing agencies utilizing rules authorized by the State Legislature as listed in Utah Code 62A-2-102. OL has office locations throughout the state, which operate during normal business hours; however, OL staff may work flexible hours to meet the needs of prospective adoptive families. For example, home studies may be conducted on weekends or evenings. OL provides a portal that facilitates an online application process, and it maintains a website that is available 24 hours a day to provide information to prospective foster and adoptive parents. Once the application and training processes are completed, a licenser is assigned to conduct a home study.

The licensing process includes:

- Reviewing applications presented by current and potential foster parents.
- Conducting home studies and interviews.
- Performing a safety check of each home.
- Conducting background screenings.
- Checking references.
- Obtaining medical clearance.

- Issuing licenses.
- Regularly inspecting homes to ensure state standards are met.
- Updating home studies when issuing renewal licenses.

Prospective foster parents may begin the licensing process while in training. To qualify for a license, an individual or family cannot be financially dependent on foster care payments, and the payments should not be a family's major source of income.

On a case-by-case basis, non-safety licensing standards may be waived for a kinship home, to expedite the approval of a kinship placement. The required training for kinship-specific licenses may be completed online with one required in-person class. Currently, DCFS kinship teams write kinship-specific home studies. If the family is getting licensed, the kinship team provides all documentation for OL approval.

OL adheres to non-discriminatory fee structures. OL does not charge a fee for prospective foster parents, including kinship placements, to be licensed. However, there is a fee for background screening, which is consistent for all applicants and established by the legislature each year.

Contract Agreement

The current DHHS and UFC contract began on October 29, 2020, and the contract will end on June 20, 2025. DCFS administration continues its collaboration with UFC to:

- Ensure that services described in Utah Code §80-2-405 place emphasis on the mission of DCFS to keep children safe at home with their parents and, if this is not possible, to place the children with kin while working on reunification with parents.
- Provide education to the foster parents on their role as a member of the Child and Family Team, in keeping children safe, and supporting reunification efforts.
- Consider adoption only if all reunification efforts with the biological parents or kinship have failed.

- Provide consistent messaging in family recruitment, response engagement, and orientation to convey the temporary nature of foster care and the role foster parents play.
- Include “Equipping Foster Parents to Actively Support Reunification” resource from AdoptUsKids published in May 2019 in foster parent training.
- Promote Children’s Bureau Strengthening Families messages.
- Offer TBRI to any foster family and kinship placement referred to or requesting this training.
- Provide education on the benefits of kinship care and maintaining familial connections, the resources and supports available to kinship caregivers from DCFS and their community, and other issues associated with children in kinship care.
- Provide support for kinship efforts in placement and connections.
- Coordinate every six months with each Region Director or designee to review, assess, and update the Regional Recruitment, Training, and Retention Plans.
- Use the needs assessment provided by each region to develop an annual written Regional Recruitment Plan for each area.
- Ensure family voice is included in the development of each of the Regional Recruitment, Training, and Retention Plans. Family voice includes biological family, youths, kin, and foster parents, and should include representation across racial and ethnic groups represented in Utah.
- Expand the provision and flexibility of online and remote training.
- Develop and cultivate partnerships with the technology community to establish procedures for targeted recruiting, data interpretation, and marketing to prospective foster families.
- Provide opportunities for peer support to foster parents from foster parents who have experience in actively supporting reunification.
- Provide opportunities for peer support to kin families from kin families who have experience in actively supporting reunification.
- Collaborate with OL to begin the background and application process.
- Coordinate with DCFS staff and technology team to ensure accurate shared information.