
State of Utah
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Child and Family Services



Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan
Targeted Plan within the FFY 2020 - 2024 CFSP

APSR 2024 Update
June 30, 2023

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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 (FAPDRP) is a component of the Utah Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) FFY 2020 to FFY 2024 Child and Family Services Plan. The FAPDRP reflects the activities to be conducted during that time period to ensure that there are foster and adoptive homes that meet the needs of infants, children, youth, and young adults (including those over the age of 18 who are in foster care) 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 FAPDRP 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 for providing 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; is a permanent guardian or natural parent of the child's sibling; or in the case of an Indian child, is an extended family member as defined in the Indian Child Welfare Act, 25 U.S.C. Sec.

1903. 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 the division and the court, the child can be placed in 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/or adoption. Should the family choose to become licensed, the kinship team will continue to support the kinship placement and will serve as resource family consultants.

Foster Care 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 Child and Family Services, 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 Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) Division of Licensing and Background Checks (DLBC) 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.

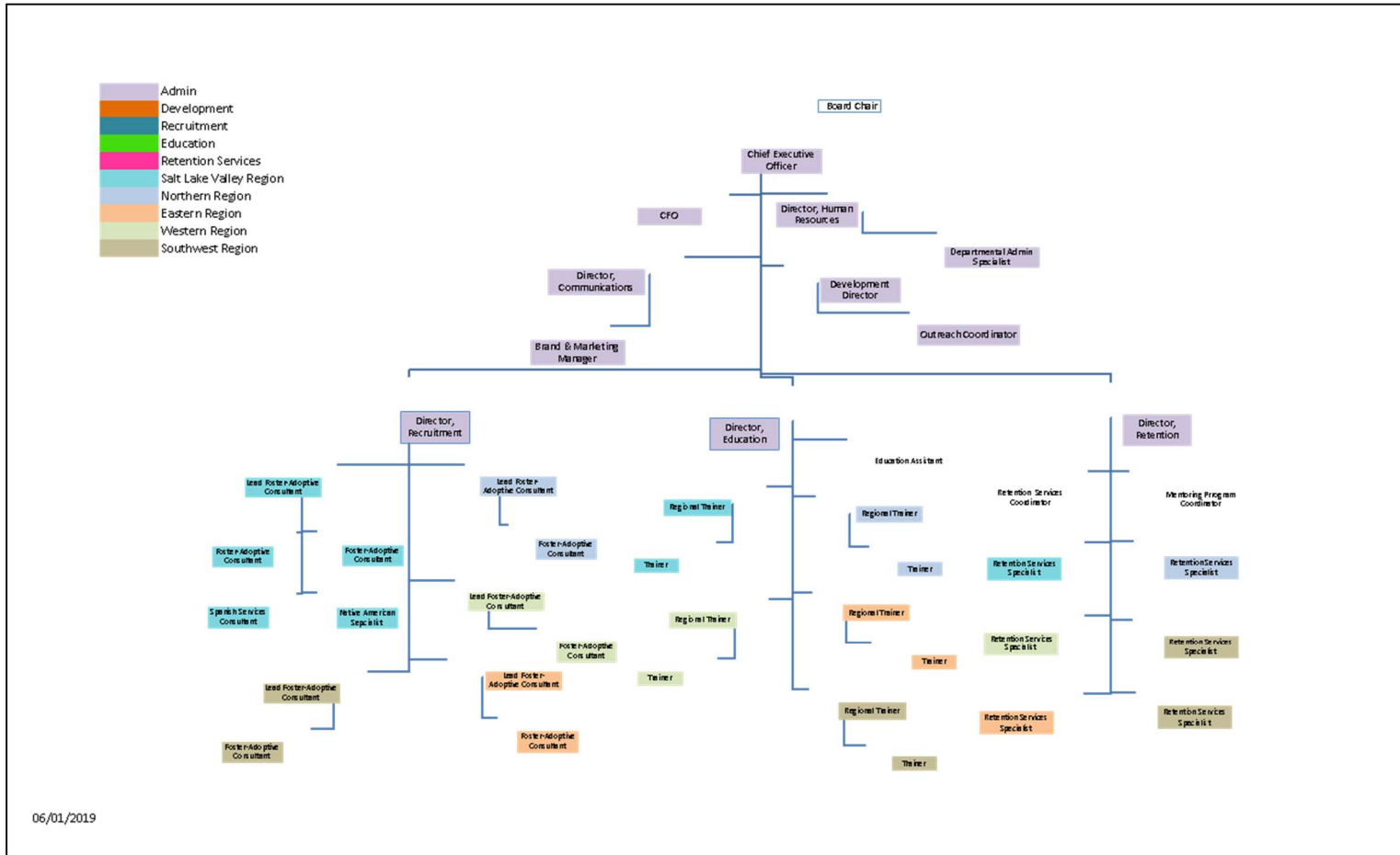
Reunification services for parents or other primary caregivers may include referral for community-based services such as mental health or substance use disorder treatment, parenting skills training, and other skills development and supports. Parents may also receive transportation supports or assistance 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 Parent Recruitment

DCFS includes five regional geographic areas within the state. DCFS contracts with Utah Foster Care Foundation (UFC) to provide for the diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families. Please see below for UFC's organizational chart.

Utah Foster Care Foundation Organizational Chart



06/01/2019

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 is tasked with the recruitment, training and retention of families that care for children who are unable to remain in their own homes, known as resource families. UFC recruits and pre-screens families, conducts pre-service/pre-licensure and in-service/post-licensure training, assists in the retention of resource 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.

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 resource families. Training implemented statewide stems from an evidence-informed curriculum designed to create an understanding of trauma-informed care, providing resource families with the knowledge necessary to care for children who have experienced trauma.

With the finalization of a new contract in 2020, UFC began providing resource 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 foster and adoptive families. In SFY 2021, UFC provided seven full TBRI caregiver series training courses. Each series is 22-24 hours. UFC has increased its number of TBRI licensed practitioners, and it is anticipated that its provision of TBRI training courses and supports will continue to increase. Additionally, DCFS began providing TBRI training to its staff, improving their understanding of trauma, and better equipping them to support parents and caregivers.

UFC's vision is grounded in two primary beliefs. First, UFC believes a stable and caring family is the best possible environment to care 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 resource families are essential members of the child welfare service team. To provide the least 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 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 works to develop new and effective ways to support and retain resource families.

Utah also contracts with 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.

Characteristics of Children for Whom Foster and Adoptive Homes Are Needed

During the previous five-year plan period, the total number of children served in foster care per Federal Fiscal Year in Utah fluctuated only slightly from 1 to 3% per year, with the first and last year of the five-year period being virtually the same. Point-in-time data for children in foster care showed slightly higher variation from year to year, ranging from 5 to 11% plus or minus. For the next five-year period, as efforts to reduce or slow growth in foster care continue, DCFS anticipates that the total number of children served in foster care will not significantly increase.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The Division created an internal Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee in 2020 to review its policies, institutional structures, and internal and external barriers to communities of color and vulnerable and/or underserved populations. The EDI group consists of an internal workgroup with representatives from each of the five regions and the state office. EDI has expanded to include an LGBTQ+ sub-group. The focus of these groups is to assess current policy and practice guidelines, provide resources and be contacts for regions as they conduct their work, provide support and direction for agency staff, and maintain current knowledge related to these areas.

The below table presents the FFY data for race and ethnicity of children served in foster care and the total population data for the state as presented by Kids Count Data Center - 2021.

Race and Ethnicity of Children Served in Foster Care				
Race	DCFS FFY 2022		Kids Count Data Calendar Year 2021	
	Foster Care Child Count ¹	Percent ²	Utah Child Count	Percent ⁴
American Indian or Alaska Native	185	5.2%	8,052	1%
Asian	53	1.5%	17,468	2%
Black or African American	271	7.6%	11,503	1%
Multiracial, Other Race Unknown	80	2.2%	36,253	4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	84	2.3%	11,250	1%
Unable to Determine ³	13	0.4%		
White	3,185	88.7%	687,961	73.%
TOTAL SERVED DCFS ^{4, 5}	3,589	107.9%		
Hispanic Origin or Latino ⁵	913	25.4%	174,756	18%
TOTAL KIDS COUNT			947,243	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 2021, the majority of children in foster care were white (88.7%). White and Asian child populations are underrepresented in the foster care system. Children who are American Indian/Alaska Native and Black or African American are overrepresented at 6.1% and 7.3% respectively. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander are also overrepresented at 1.7%. Children of Hispanic/or Latino ethnicity (of any race) account for 26% of the child foster care population, which is also an overrepresentation from the Utah total population.

DCFS is working closely with EDI and 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 will be 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.

Due to the implications of these demographics on foster care recruitment, UFC will place much of its focus on recruiting African American, Native American, and Hispanic resource families. UFC will also focus on locating age appropriate resource families, particularly for youth 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 an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Specialist, UFC has added the role of Diversity Specialist. This role is shared by UFC’s Spanish-speaking Recruitment Specialist.

Demographics of Children in Foster Care

Please see the below tables for information on the count and demographics of children in foster care during FFYs 2017 - 2021.

Number of Children in Foster Care		
FFY	Served During Federal Fiscal Year	Last day of Federal Fiscal Year September 30
2018	4,719	2,576
2019	4,542	2,479
2020	4,074	2,377
2021	3,878	2,132
2022	3,589	2,066

**Number of Children in Foster Care on the Last Day of Federal Fiscal Year
September 30**

Age Group	FFY 2018		FFY 2019		FFY 2020		FFY 2021		FFY 2022	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Younger than 1 Year	221	8.6%	223	9.0%	193	8.1%	215	10.1%	175	8.5%
1 to 3 Years	511	19.8%	455	18.4%	481	20.2%	411	19.3%	400	19.4%
4 to 6 Years	361	14.0%	401	16.2%	350	14.7%	292	13.7%	282	13.6%
7 to 9 Years	319	12.4%	302	12.2%	318	13.4%	252	11.8%	268	13.0%
10 to 12 Years	327	12.7%	295	11.9%	274	11.5%	265	12.4%	259	12.5%
13 to 15 Years	376	14.6%	365	14.7%	344	14.5%	340	15.9%	321	15.5%
16 Years and Older	461	17.9%	438	17.7%	417	17.5%	357	16.7%	361	17.5%
TOTAL	2,576		2,479		2,377		2,132		2,066	

Race and Ethnicity of Children Served in Foster Care¹

Race	FFY 2018		FFY 2019		FFY 2020		FFY 2021		FFY 2022	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
AI/AN	242	5.1%	223	4.9%	233	5.7%	236	6.1%	185	5.2%
Asian	36	0.8%	36	0.8%	48	1.2%	55	1.4%	53	1.5%
Black or African Am	278	5.9%	286	6.3%	292	7.2%	285	7.3%	271	7.6%
Multiracial, Other Race Not Known	53	1.1%	62	1.4%	65	1.6%	65	1.7%	80	2.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other AAPI	89	1.9%	96	2.1%	71	1.7%	65	1.7%	84	2.3%
Unable to Determine	27	0.6%	25	0.6%	17	0.4%	22	0.6%	13	0.4%
White	4,237	89.8%	4,094	90.1%	3,636	89.2%	3,441	88.7%	3,185	88.7%
TOTAL Children Served²	4,719	105.2%	4,542	106.2%	4,074	107.0%	3,878	107.5%	3,589	
Hispanic Origin or Latino	1,027	21.8%	1,070	23.6%	979	24.0%	1,007	26.0%	913	25.4%

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%.

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 for recruitment of 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 (i.e., families for sibling groups, families for children of a certain age range, families of a certain race or culture, families for LGBTQ children, families for children with behavioral issues, etc.).

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 full-time shared role of Spanish-speaking Recruitment Specialist and Diversity Specialist; this dual role conducts outreach to the Hispanic and other diverse communities along the Wasatch Front, provides pre-service classes in the Spanish language, mentors Spanish speaking families through the licensing process, and supports 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 bi-annually 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

Staff from DCFS, UFC, and OL 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 youth from diverse communities.

For example, DCFS implemented a two-hour Safety Guidelines for LGBTQ Clients training, which is delivered to all caseworkers and supervisors and has been added as ongoing training for new employees. Training introduces appropriate terminology, helps students understand LGBTQ issues, addresses services that help prevent removal, and identifies expectations for out-of-home placements. Participants learn how to implement practice guidelines that specifically address the issue of safety for LGBTQ youth.

Prospective foster and adoptive parents also learn about the needs of LGBTQ youth in several sections of the 32 hours of training provided by UFC. 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 who may be questioning their sexuality. Additionally, UFC trainers address the need to transcend differences in philosophy and beliefs with prospective foster or adoptive parents by helping them examine their personal, moral, and ethical perspectives and determine if they can work with children who live differently.

A discussion of LGBTQ youth safety is also held during the UFCs DCFS Practice Guidelines webinar, a course that prospective foster/adoptive parents are required to complete before being licensed. A culture of acceptance is a primary component of any placement, and UFC addresses issues relating to inclusiveness, safety, stability, and support for LGBTQ youth.

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 and includes a focus on racial, cultural, and socioeconomic differences.

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. The UFC full-time Spanish-speaking Recruitment Specialist and Diversity Specialist conducts outreach to the 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-speaking specialist who responds to all Spanish language inquiries and 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 license.

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 or adoptive parents when agency staff do not speak the language.

Outreach and Advertising Strategies for 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, focused 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.
- UFC Bridge App (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).
- Maintaining a statewide social media presence.
- Development of 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 the regional recruitment plan.
- 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 Project

The agency is exploring resources to bolster best practice, use of kin across the system, and make placing with kin barrier-free, including improving the kin locator process and tools. The team is focused on strengthening supervision and training of kinship workers and facilitating a consistent process for finding 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 process will lead workers to consider kin options first.

During SFY 2022, the Kinship Project Team created a centralized background screening unit and a centralized regional comprehensive review committee for emergency kinship placements. This centralization will help DCFS expedite kinship placements and overcome inherent biases.

During SFY 2022, the Kinship Project Team created a statewide process for addressing difficult case decisions. The team is also in the process of creating a statewide repository for research and resources that support kinship placements and connections.

The Kinship Project Team is exploring the reallocation of DCFS 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 will be available to CPS, in-home, and permanency caseworkers' efforts.

The Kinship Project Team is also working 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. Kinship mapping has been introduced to each region as a tool as a method to increase kinship placements and help meet the goals of the Governor's Kinship Legacy Project, which includes increasing the number of youths in foster care served in kinship care placements by 15% in two years, bringing the total served to 55% and, by 25% in five years, bringing the total served to 59%.

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 SFY 2022. 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 SFY 2022 town hall meetings, information on DCFS kinship priority and policies, as well as the rationale behind the priorities and policies, was addressed. DCFS continues to address 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 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 includes:

- Priority given for the Indian Child Welfare Act provision for adoption of an Indian child who is a member of a federally recognized tribe or Alaska native village.
- Priority given to a relative of the child.
- Priority given to a caregiver or adoptive family who has biological siblings of the child.
- Priority given for a non-relative couple or single adult.

Current caregivers 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.

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.

Department of Health and Human Services Office of Licensing

DHHS Office of Licensing (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 the foster care payment and the payment 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 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 and MOU Agreements

Contract with UFC

DHHS and UFC entered into a new contract (October 29, 2020, to 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 parent(s) on their role as a member of the Child and Family Team, in keeping children safe, and supporting reunification efforts. Adoption is considered 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 family 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, youth, 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 resource 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.

MOU with America Kids Belong

On March 30, 2020, a new MOU with America Kids Belong was implemented. America Kids Belong is providing additional recruitment resources for high-risk and longest-waiting children by providing video shoots that enhance exposure and highlight the child's specific needs, increasing their likelihood of permanency.