



# **Attachment A**

## **2020-2024 Foster and Adoptive Diligent Recruitment Plan**

**June 30, 2019**

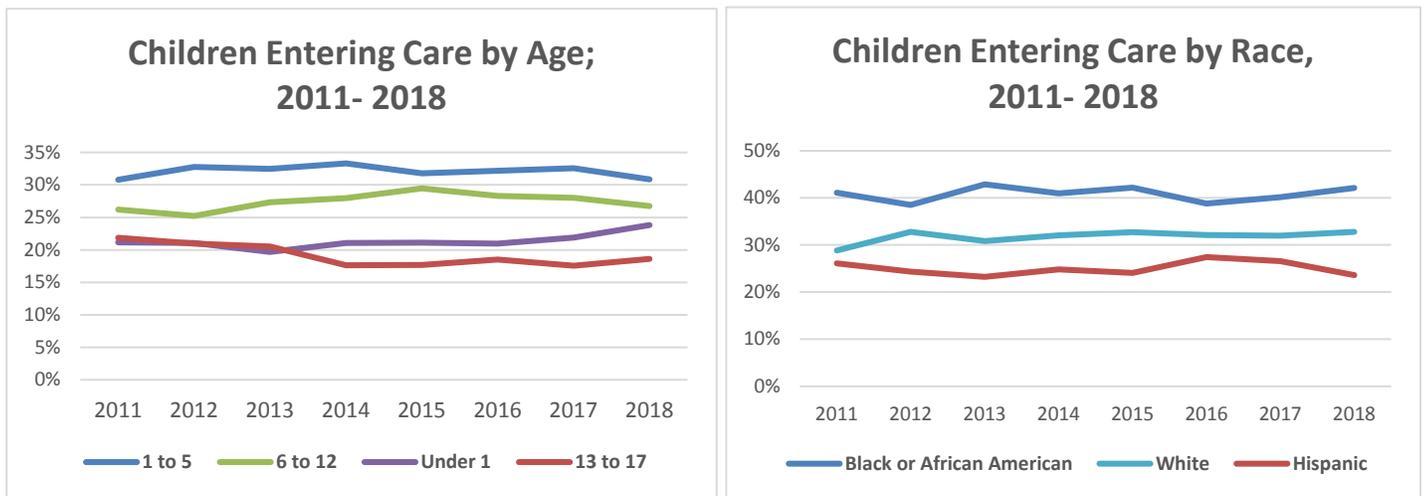
# Foster and Adoption Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) remains committed to recruiting and retaining potential resource and adoptive families who reflect the cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of children in out-of-home care. As a result, DCF has developed a comprehensive recruitment and retention plan that supports strategies that are child focused, data driven, customer service centered, collaborative, inclusive of the voice of families and youth, and sustainable. This comprehensive plan also continues to support DCF's substantial conformity with the CFSR systemic factor: *Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention*.

## Characteristics of Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes

While DCF has experienced great success with increasing and maintaining a robust pool of families who reflect the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of children in care, and we strive to remain adaptive and responsive to the needs of families and children. This, along with the continued work of recruiting, licensing and supporting families who can meet the unique needs of children in out-of-home care, will ensure our success moving forward.

In order to ascertain how DCF should initially focus its recruitment efforts, SACWIS data is analyzed to identify the age and race of children entering care in NJ. In 2018, 3443 children entered care. The following graphs depict the age and race breakdown of those children in 2018 and over a prior 8-year period:



DCF manages the continued need to diligently recruit foster homes for all children served but places a particular focus on several populations of children. These populations identified through data review include sibling groups, adolescents, and children with special medical, developmental and behavioral health needs. Details regarding these populations and recruitment targets are described below.

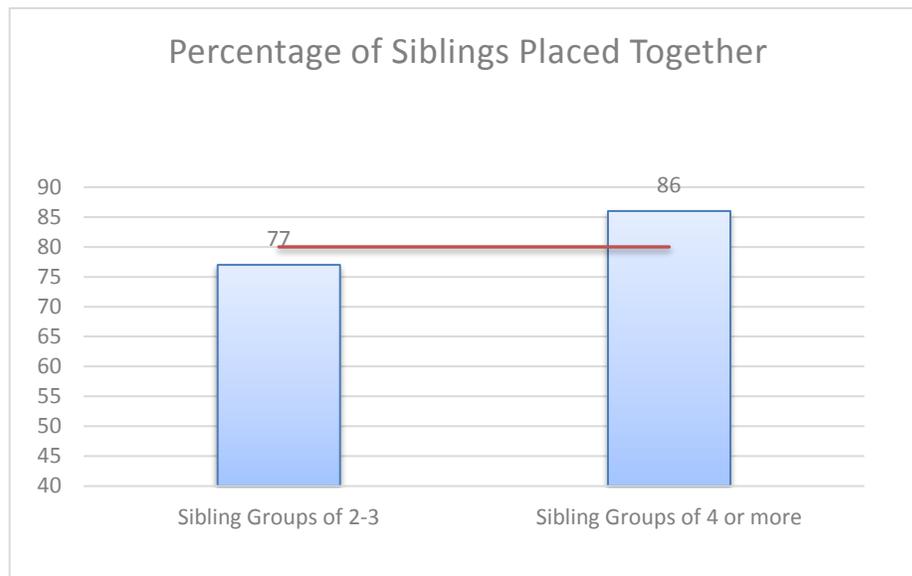
## Sibling Groups

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

In an effort to address the need to recruit and retain resource homes willing to accommodate large sibling groups entering placement, DCF continues implementation of the Siblings in Best Settings (SIBS) Resource Family Homes initiative. Strategies include enhanced board rates and retainer fees to maintain homes vacant for the placement of large sibling groups. In 2018, DCF recruited a total of 42 new SIBS homes supplementing and existing pool 31 for a total capacity of 73. Of these 73 homes, 18 are able to accommodate five or more children and 55 homes that can accommodate up to four children.

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

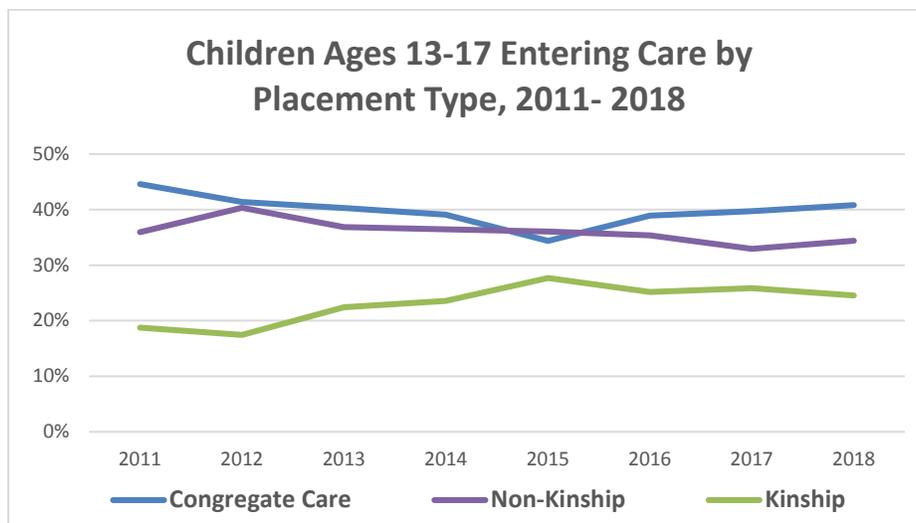
DCF strives to place at least 80% of our sibling groups together. In 2018, 77% of sibling groups of two or three were placed together and 86% of children from a sibling group of four or more were placed with at least one other sibling. While DCF exceeded our goal for placement of sibling groups of four or more children together, placement of sibling groups of two or three fell below expectations.



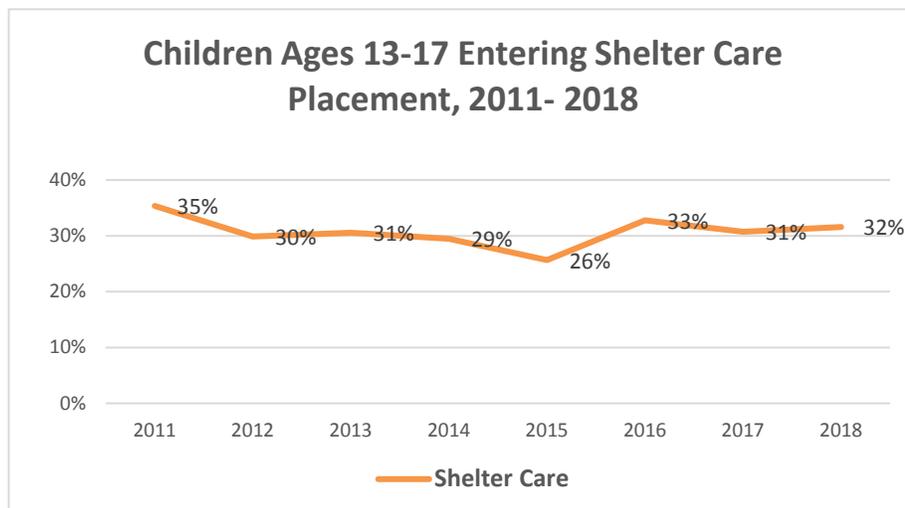
Currently, there are approximately 300 families identified to provide a home for a sibling group of 3 or more. DCF will look to increase the number of sibling homes by 20% by 2022. This will be in line with DCF’s strategic priority to increase the number of children placed with kin as well ensure that new unrelated homes are recruited to maintain capacity.

Adolescents

DCF has an ongoing need to recruit and retain a robust pool of resource homes for our adolescent population. In 2018, 640 children ages 13 to 17 entered placement in NJ. The following graph indicates that 41% of the children placed by DCF between the ages of 13-17 are initially placed in congregate care, 25% are initially placed in kinship care and 34%, in an unrelated foster home.



A further breakdown of congregate care placements shows that 32 percent are emergent shelter placements, suggesting the need for more diligent recruitment of resource families willing to accept this population of children.



Finally, additional analysis shows that while 19% of or children entering care are ages 13-17, only 8% of our non-kin resource homes will serve this age group.

Non-Kin Resource Homes by Age groups Served n= 5833 ( <i>duplicated</i> )		
0-5	3,143	54%
6 to 12	2,239	38%
13-18	451	8%
<sup>1</sup> Total Resource Homes	<b>5,833</b>	

(1) this number is duplicated as some resources can accept  
more than one age group

Children Entering OOH Placement in CY 2018 by Age		
-5	1,882	55%
6 to 12	921	27%
13-17	640	19%
Total Children	<b>3,443</b>	

As DCF strategizes to increase the number of youth being placed with kin, DCF’s recruitment goal is to increase adolescents in kin care by 30% by 2022<sup>1</sup> and increase the capacity of non-kin families who are able to serve adolescents by 15% during the same time period. With this targeted effort we hope to create a capacity to serve our youth and prevent unnecessary shelter placements.

### Children with Special Needs

DCF identifies special needs youth entering through a five- level acuity system that supports required care and services in placement. Acuity Level 1 indicates a well child, while progressively Acuity Level 4 identifies a child with an active acute and / or chronic illness that requires physician monitoring. This includes children with developmental delays, all children on psychotropic medications, and all infants as they require frequent monitoring of growth and development. Level 5 indicates a child with acute or chronic illness that is *not stable* and can lead to a life- threatening condition. At present there are 92 children statewide designated as having a level five acuity.

# of children in OOH as of May 9, 2019	<b>5,258</b>	
# of Children with Acuity 5	<b>92</b>	<b>2%</b>

The objective of DCF is to consider the health care needs of all children by matching them with the willingness and capabilities of each family, including relatives. DCF is committed to reassessing the acuity level system as well as developing and maintaining

<sup>1</sup> More detail on this initiative can be found in the New Jersey CFSR PIP.

a pool of at least 30 highly skilled resource parents to meet the needs of youth with acute or chronic illnesses that are *not stable* by 2022. To do this we must identify and/or recruit new families who have a willingness/ability to consider a child who may have special health care needs and be willing to train to the specific health care needs of the population.

### **Specific Recruitment Strategies to Reach Out To All Parts Of the Community**

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

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

Market Segmentation is a tool designed for targeted recruitment that looks to identify the lifestyle characteristics of households that are perceived to have common needs and interests of our existing licensed resource homes. Upon review of the lifestyle characteristics, strategies are developed to target and successfully recruit these households. Lifestyle characteristics are used to target advertising opportunities within local geographic areas and considered when updating recruitment materials and publications to ensure they are customer centered and reflective of the characteristics identified in our market segmentation tool.

DCF continues to partner with the Human Rights Campaign All Children-All Families (HRC AC-AF), a nationwide recruitment initiative launched by the Human Rights Campaign's Family Project created to increase the number of qualified foster and adoptive families for children in care by educating the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) community about opportunities to be foster/adoptive parents for not only LGBTQI youth, a subpopulation of our adolescent need, but all adolescents in care. This is done by educating and engaging the LGBTQI community about opportunities for foster and adoptive parenting and by improving the cultural competence amongst staff that recruit, develop, train and support resource families.

DCF became the first state child welfare agency to earn the Seal of Recognition by the HRC AC-AF Initiative. DCF maintains the HRC AC-AF Seal of Recognition for reaching all benchmarks of LGBTQI cultural competency and being fully welcoming of LGBTQI youth and families. DCF continues its efforts with LGBTQI families by committing to a seal reassessment that is conducted every three years. In 2020, DCF hopes to achieve the second of three levels of recognition. Resource, adoption and adolescent staff are participating in web-based training to achieve this end.

## **Diverse Methods of Distributing General/ Child Specific Recruitment Information**

There is a great deal of critical information regarding the recruitment of foster and adoptive parenting that needs to be disseminated to the public as well as child specific information for waiting children. To ensure that this information reaches its intended audience, DCF uses multiple delivery methods.

DCF uses its public website and social media to provide information on general and child specific resource and adoptive family recruitment along with changes in policy and new initiatives. The website reflects both Spanish and English resources and adoption support services. Additional material is disseminated through localized resource family and adoption recruitment events held across the state.

DCF maintains a contract with Embrella, a resource family support organization to assist us in recruiting through a hotline inquiry process. DCF also maintains an on-going partnership with religious organizations, non-profits and local schools to host presentations on resource and adoption recruitment.

Additional efforts to recruit foster and adoptive families occur through our current resource parents, who volunteer to share their lived experiences with others through videos that the DCF Office of Public Affairs create. This allows families to speak about their experiences fostering and adopting through DCF. Resource parents are offered an honorarium, travel and child care reimbursement to participate in recruitment events and trainings.

Finally, DCF supports a Youth Ambassador Initiative, which provides an opportunity for former youth in care to support the recruitment of resource and adoptive parent for the adolescent population specifically.

The Youth Ambassador Program originated as a result of efforts to enhance recruitment and retention of resource parents. Focus interest revolved around the motivations of individuals who want to become resource parents as well as the perceptions of youth in care. The thought was that if youth were given the opportunity to share their stories, it could help break down some of the existing myths and give resource parents insight into this population as well as provide them with an avenue to advocate for themselves. As a result, the speaking program was born.

Speaking Program Goals:

Empowering Youth to Educate the Public By:

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

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

Primarily, Youth Ambassadors are either college students or recent graduates who at one point in time received the New Jersey Foster Care Scholarship that is administered through Embrella, which is a statewide advocacy agency for foster, adoptive and kinship parents in NJ. Ambassadors are also referred by CP&P staff.

Ambassadors can speak at PRIDE pre service trainings, group engagements, recruitment events, or to DCF staff. Speakers are paid up to \$100.00 for participating in an event.

Currently there are twenty-one trained ambassadors and since 2018 they have participated in seventy speaking events across the state to include the resource family symposium and statewide normalcy and prudent parenting workgroups.

### **Resource and Adoptive Parent Accessibility to Licensing Process**

DCF operates a state administered child welfare system with 46 local offices dispersed throughout 21 counties allowing for accessibility by prospective resource parents, adoptive parents and all members of the community. The state administered system also maintains statewide policies and procedures to ensure that standards are applied equally<sup>2</sup>. While the recruitment of resource and adoptive families is centralized in its oversight, each local office maintains select staff that are specific to the study, training and support of foster and adoptive families. DCF has a single licensing process that studies and licenses families for both resource and adoption, ensuring a more comprehensive and timely process for families. This supports timely permanence for youth who are unable to be reunified and can achieve permanency through their unrelated resource or kin caretakers.

Resource/Adoptive parent recruitment is localized and community specific to ensure accessibility for all. There are multiple in-person opportunities for the public to learn about becoming a resource parent as DCF holds local bi-weekly small group information sessions for all initial inquiries related to becoming a resource or adoptive parent. All inquiries obtained from community recruitment events are distributed to recruitment specialists who invite prospective resource and adoptive parents to group engagement events held in their community. These events provide an overview of DCF and the foster and adoptive parent home study and licensing process. Upon completion of a group engagement, the home study is initiated by a resource support staff servicing the community where the prospective parents reside. Upon licensure, the resource and adoptive family is supported and serviced by the same office in their community.

---

<sup>2</sup> Statewide policy, statutes and licensing standards can be viewed at:  
[https://www.nj.gov/dcf/policy\\_manuals/Child%20Protection%20&%20Permanency\\_113B34A2-A559-4F81-8379-E7070B788D27\\_IV%20-%20Out%20of%20Home%20Placement.shtml](https://www.nj.gov/dcf/policy_manuals/Child%20Protection%20&%20Permanency_113B34A2-A559-4F81-8379-E7070B788D27_IV%20-%20Out%20of%20Home%20Placement.shtml)  
<https://www.nj.gov/dcf/providers/licensing/laws/index.html>

Resource and Adoptive parent training classes are held in all 21 counties to support accessibility including Spanish speaking and translated recruitment, training materials and trainers. The classes are held in the evenings and on weekends in consideration of working families; babysitting and transportation are compensated . Each County is further supported through localized resource family peer support through: Embrella, New Jersey's contracted resource and adoptive family support agency; KinConnect, New Jersey's Kinship Legal Guardianship Resource Clearinghouse; and NJARCH. New Jersey's Adoption Resource Clearinghouse.

### **Training Staff to Work with Diverse Communities**

DCF ensures that staffing is culturally competent, and resource parent training is provided in both English and Spanish as needed. Examples of trainings available to staff specific to this need include the following:

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

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

DCF also recognizes while these courses remain available to staff it is necessary to continue to assess this area of staff competence. Over the course the next year, DCF is committed to developing a comprehensive learning path for resource staff that will enhance their ability to respond to diverse families in a manner that is effective, respectful and values their worth as partners in the work.

## **Addressing Linguistic Barriers**

DCF employs an ethnically diverse staff who are readily available and able to communicate with families in their own language. However, New Jersey being the 4th most diverse state in the United States, this is not always feasible outside of staff that are Spanish Speaking. In an effort to ensure cultural competence and communication, DCF contracts with interpreting and translation services for in person or telephone service. The contracted services are sufficient and are continually assessed to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of staff and the families we service. For example, in one month alone, the service provider was able to support staff with interpretation services in 14 different languages in addition to the Spanish language.

## **Non- Discriminatory Fee Structure**

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

## **Timely Search for Adoptive Parents**

Children are referred to the NJ Resource Adoption Exchange when a goal of select home adoption has been identified as a need for any child in care. The child is assigned to an exchange specialist by geographic area. The specialist reviews all documentation sent and enters pertinent information on a computerized database. This database assists the specialist in the selection process by matching criteria for the child with criteria for prospective adoptive homes. A list is obtained of prospective matches with DCP&P Resource families being sought first. If a child is legally free and there are no DCP&P families then a non-DCP&P family will be sought nationwide. The homes studies are reviewed, and families contacted prior to sending the home studies to the child's Local Office adoption team to review. When a family is not easily identified a child can be registered on the national exchange. The links to those websites are listed below:

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

Children are also featured on the DCF social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram.

Once a prospective adoptive family is selected, the adoption team meets with the family in their home for a Supervisory Interview. This meeting serves as our legal obligation

to provide the family with full disclosure while discussing subsidy eligibility and the transitional visitation schedule.

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

DCF also maintains a partnership with the National Adoption Center of Delaware (Adoption Center) for recruitment of legally free children. Over the past number of years, we have worked closely to continually assess our formal recruitment efforts. In partnership with the Adoption Center, we have developed strategies to evolve our recruitment efforts to be small, child focused, and family engagement events. We have formed a strong Child Specific Recruitment team structure that comes together bi-monthly to assess each event and formulate strategies moving forward for both our individual adoption and permanency readiness for our youth. We also use this teaming structure to develop formal recruitment that is youth sensitive and effective in securing permanent families.

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

DCF will continue to contract with a private provider for the recruitment of families for legally free children and will continue our partnership with “Wednesday’s Child”, a weekly televised feature that assists in locating adoptive homes for legally free children. DCF will also identify staff locally to track the timely response of out of state requests. DCF will implement the use of the National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE) system and will explore creating a border agreement between NJ and NY to expedite the placement process. DCF will also continue to educate staff on timely completion of initial assessments. Lastly, DCF will continue coordinating with statewide recruitment staff to ensure consistent practice and strategic planning of daily recruitment work as well as the implementation of 30 matching events, youth engagement and adoptive family support events yearly.

New Jersey recognizes that while the recruitment of resource and adoptive parents is paramount, retention is necessary to maintain a robust pool of resources. As a result, New Jersey developed a statewide retention plan with the intent of improving and

strengthening our delivery of services and supports to resource parents as well as to strengthen our partnership with them.<sup>3</sup> The plan consists of the core values of understanding that each resource families' strengths and challenges is essential to meeting their needs and those of the children in their care. In addition, acknowledging that relationships with resource families that are mutually beneficial and lasting must be developed through open communication and they must be included in the individualized planning for all children in their care and considered as valuable members of the team.

### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

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

- Maintain an active resource retention taskforce that includes licensed resource and adoptive families, youth formerly in care, and DCF field staff
- Disseminate and analyze an annual customer service survey to resource families to provide DCF with continuous feedback to identify trends and challenges
- Continue to create retention-based activities, such as sending resource families Mother's Day and Father's Day cards, to express gratitude for the critical role they play in the lives of children.
- Continue a quarterly newsletter that highlights key topics, events, and highlights available supports for resource and adoptive families
- Continued evaluation of all aspects of resource and adoptive parent work, including and not limited to pre-service training curriculum and delivery, home study licensing tool, and licensing regulations
- Continue to provide Mobile Response Stabilization Services to all families, at the time of placement to allow for increased support
- Restructuring of local resource units to create more specialized roles in an effort to better support both kin and non-kin providers

In summary, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families recognizes the need to maintain a diligent recruitment and retention plan that is structured, planful, and fluid. We are committed to our continued efforts to recruit and retain a robust pool of resources to provide better outcomes for our children.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.state.nj.us/njfofosteradopt/RetentionPlan.pdf>