



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

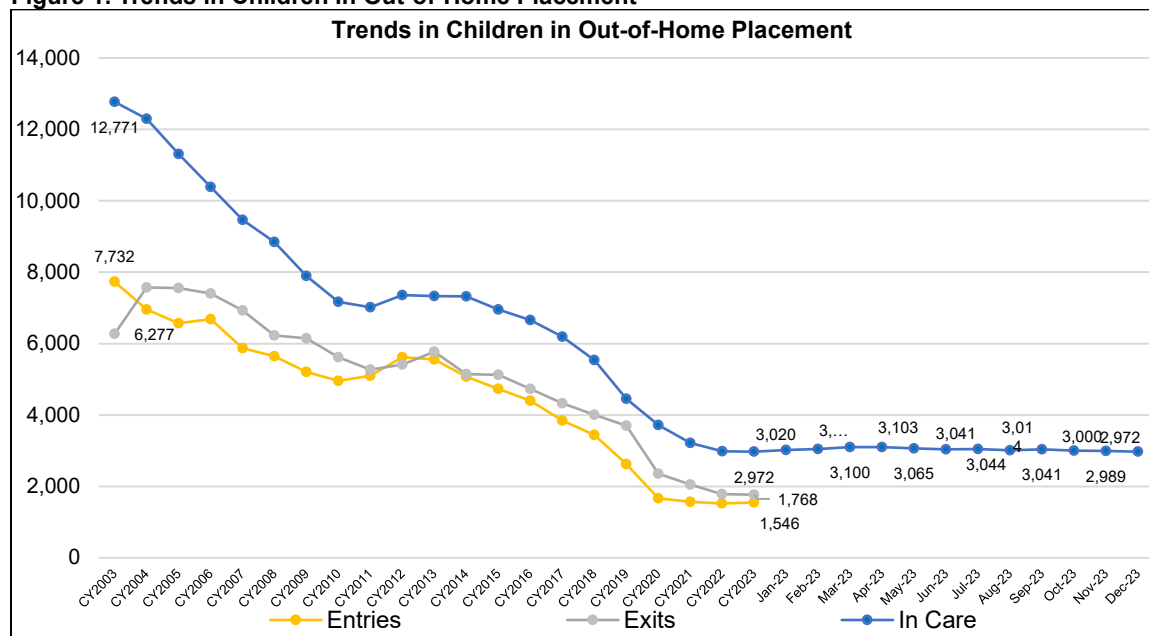
2025-2029
Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent
Recruitment Plan

Introduction. The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to keeping children safe in their own home, subsequently reducing the trauma of family separation. Figure 1 illustrates an over 71% reduction in the number of children in out-of-home placement from the creation of DCF as a Cabinet-level agency in 2006 with over 10,000 children in placement to just under 3,000 as of December 2023. When families must be separated to ensure the safety of children, DCF ensures that out-of-home placements are safe, that kinship placements are utilized whenever possible, and that its pool of resource and adoptive families reflects the cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of children in out-of-home care.

Situated within DCF's Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P), the Office of Resource Families (ORF) is dedicated to supporting resource families. ORF supports individuals who are considering becoming resource parents, helps families navigate the screening and application process, and provides services to resource families who are caring for children in out-of-home placements. DCF's Office of Resource Family Licensing, located within CP&P, is the Department's licensing and regulatory office. OOL licenses, inspects, monitors, and regulates resource family homes.

DCF uses a variety of strategies to maintain its existing resource providers and to increase the pool of non-kin resource homes. As of December 31, 2023, these efforts have produced a total of 2,313 resource homes with a bed capacity of 5,123. This recruitment and retention plan includes 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 demonstrates DCF's substantial conformity with the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Systemic Factor #7: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention. For additional information on that systemic factor, see Section 2, *Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes*, of DCF's 2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and Section 2, *Update to the Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes* in DCF's 2025 Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). For information on DCF's plans for strengthening resource care, including efforts to revise kin licensing regulations and establish a resource parent advisory council, see Section 3, *Plan for Enacting the State's Vision*, Goal 2, in DCF's 2025-2029 CFSP.

Figure 1. Trends in Children in Out-of-Home Placement



Retention of Existing Providers. New Jersey recognizes that retaining and supporting its existing resource providers is critical to maintaining a robust and diverse pool of resources. DCF relies on a statewide retention plan that aims to (1) improve and strengthen the agency's service delivery and supports to resource parents; and (2) strengthen partnerships with resource families. A core value of the retention plan is understanding that each resource family's strengths and challenges are essential to meeting their needs and those of the children in their care. The plan acknowledges that relationships with resource families that are mutually beneficial and lasting must be developed through open communication and inclusion in individualized planning for all children in their care. In other words, resource families must be considered as valuable members of the team.

DCF focuses on the retention of the current pool of resource homes and support for both the resource families and the children placed with them. DCF continuously assesses the needs of the resource families and the children placed with them and identifies strategies for meeting those needs. To ensure continuous quality improvement, DCF:

- Disseminates and analyzes an annual resource family customer service survey,
- Conducts exit interviews with resource parents who indicate an intent to close their homes due to a negative experience. DCF offers additional support to retain these families when feasible and appropriate. DCF analyzes interview data,
- Evaluates all aspects of resource and adoptive parent work, e.g., the pre-service training curriculum and delivery, home study licensing tool, and licensing regulations, and
- Continues ongoing town-hall style events, led by local and area DCF leadership, to elicit feedback from resource families in their area, working collaboratively towards improving resource practice and identifying gaps in supportive services.

The Department is currently undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the needs of resource parents and will undertake action planning based on the findings. For details on these efforts, see Section 3, *Plans for Achieving the State's Vision, Goal 2, Objective 2* in the 2025-2029 CFSP.

When a need is identified, DCF works to identify solutions. For example, DCF made Mobile Response Stabilization Services available to all resource families at the time of placement to allow for increased support for the child and family, and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, raised the babysitting reimbursement rate from \$8.25 to \$15 per hour, providing resource parents with an increased ability to secure quality babysitting services. Upon recognition that the increased rate was a significant support to resource parents, DCF maintained the increased rate.

In addition to assessing and meeting the needs of resource families, DCF undertakes events and activities to support retention. DCF hosts local, in-person resource retention events in the community for existing resource parents. These events are planned and facilitated by local and area office staff and serve as a meaningful way to celebrate and show appreciation for the tireless commitment of resource caregivers and their families. DCF, in partnership with Embracing and Empowering Families (Embrella), hosted two resource family re-engagement events in 2023 to discuss how DCF has evolved as an agency over the past several years, current agency trends and the needs regarding resource care. One of those events specifically targeted licensed resource families who had not accepted children in out-of-home care in over six months to elicit feedback and better understand their needs. Similar events will be held on a local level with DCF area office and local office leadership to increase communication, awareness, and support to resource families. Other examples of retention efforts include:

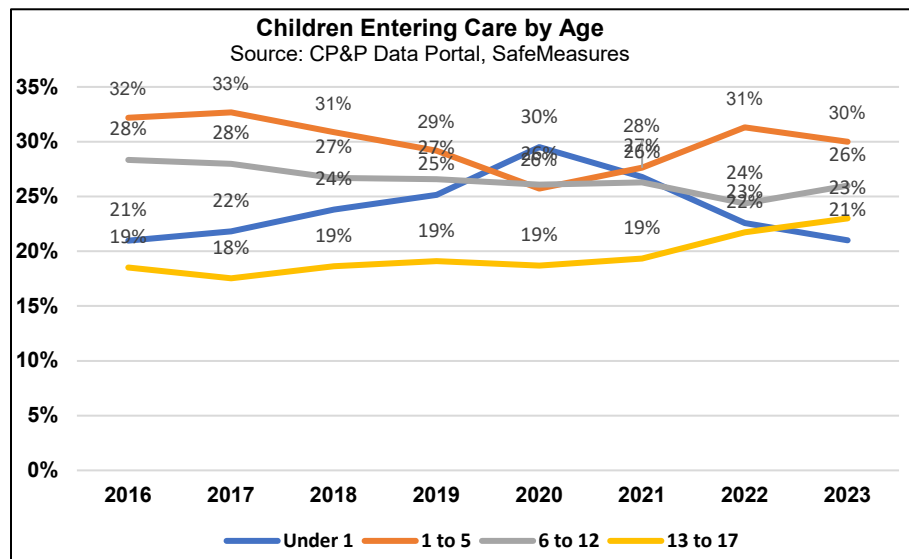
- Retention-based activities, such as sending resource families Mother's Day and Father's Day cards, to express gratitude for the critical role they play in the lives of children,
- A quarterly newsletter that highlights key topics, events, and available supports for resource and adoptive families, and
- Funding for local office resource units to host local retention events, at a minimum annually, in order to celebrate and recognize licensed resource families and elicit feedback for practice improvement.

Recruitment. DCF views adoption and foster home recruitment as dual purpose: it (1) enhances public awareness of issues related to adoption and foster care and (2) develops new homes for children in need of out-of-home placement.¹ DCF relies on multi-faceted, formal and informal statewide and local recruitment efforts aimed at targeting various cultural and racial populations and various special populations of children. DCF's recruitment efforts and processes are summarized in publicly available policies.²

Characteristics of Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes and Targeted Recruitment Efforts. While current resource home capacity exceeds the number of children in out-of-home placement, DCF recognizes that there are targeted populations that require focused recruitment efforts. To determine how to focus recruitment efforts, DCF continuously analyzes administrative data from its Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), NJSPIRIT and other information systems as described throughout this section.

DCF looks at NJSPIRIT data to see trends in the age and race of children entering care in New Jersey. Figures 2 and 3 depict the age and race breakdown of these children over the prior eight-year period.

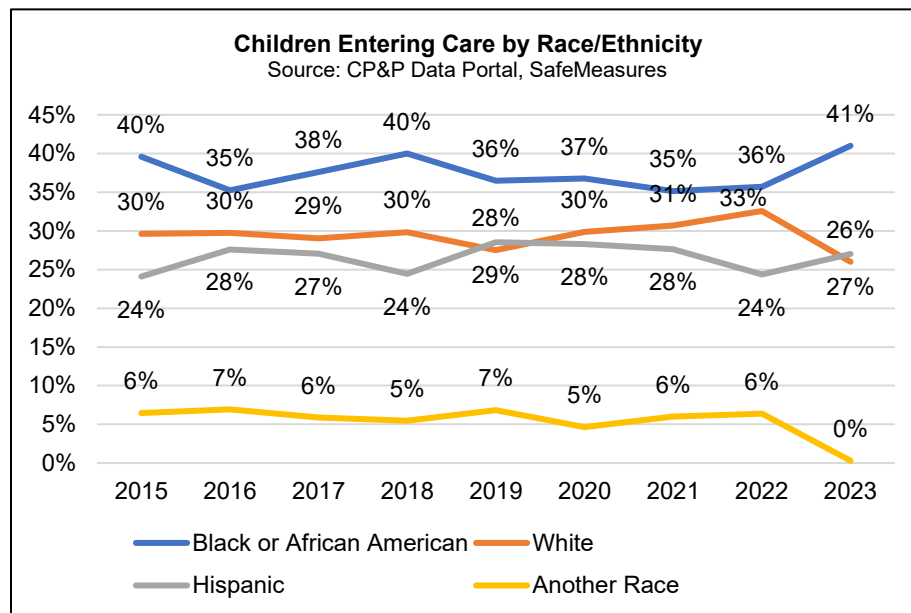
Figure 2. Children Entering Care by Age.



¹ [CPP-IV-B-1-100.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#)

² [CPP-IV-B-1-100.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#); [CPP-IV-B-1-200.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#); [CPP-IV-B-1-300.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#); [CPP-IV-B-1-325.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#)

Figure 3. Children Entering Care by Race



DCF is able to assess its efforts to maintain a cadre of resource homes that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children entering care by reviewing this placement data alongside point-in-time resource provider data. Figures 4-7 demonstrate this assessment using data for children in placement as of December 31, 2023 and provider data as of March 2024.

Figure 4. Resource Care Providers by Race/Ethnicity

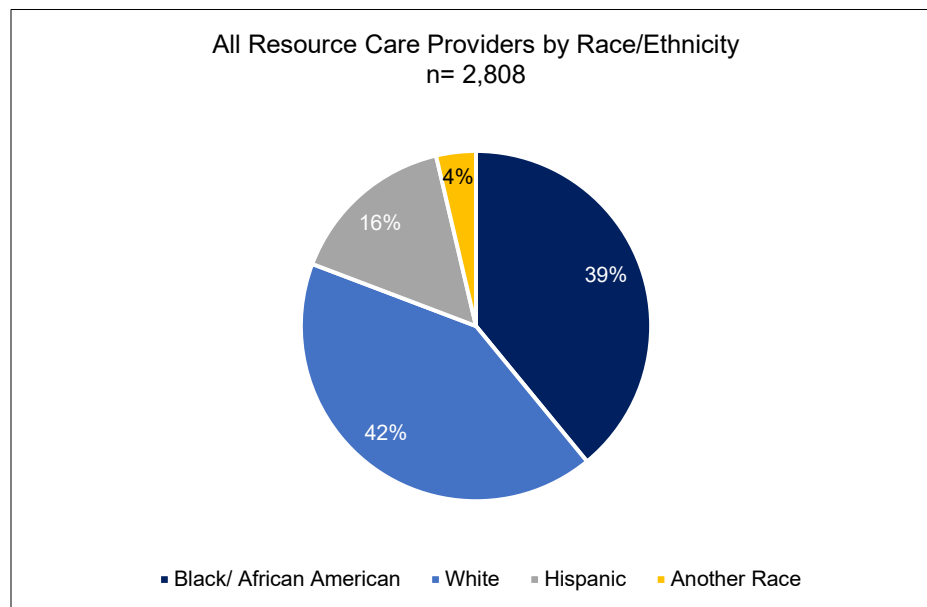


Figure 5. Children in Placement and Resource Care Providers by Race/Ethnicity

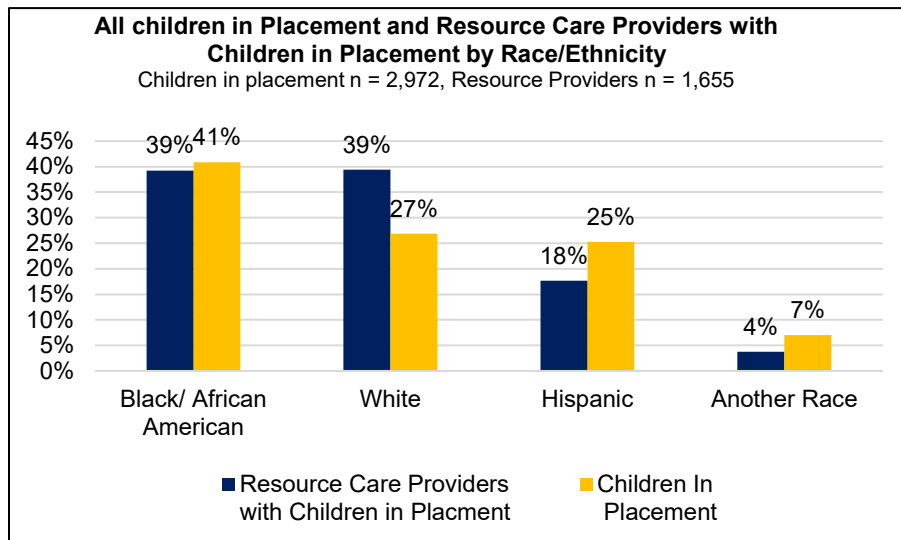


Figure 6. Non-Kin Resource Homes by Race/Ethnicity

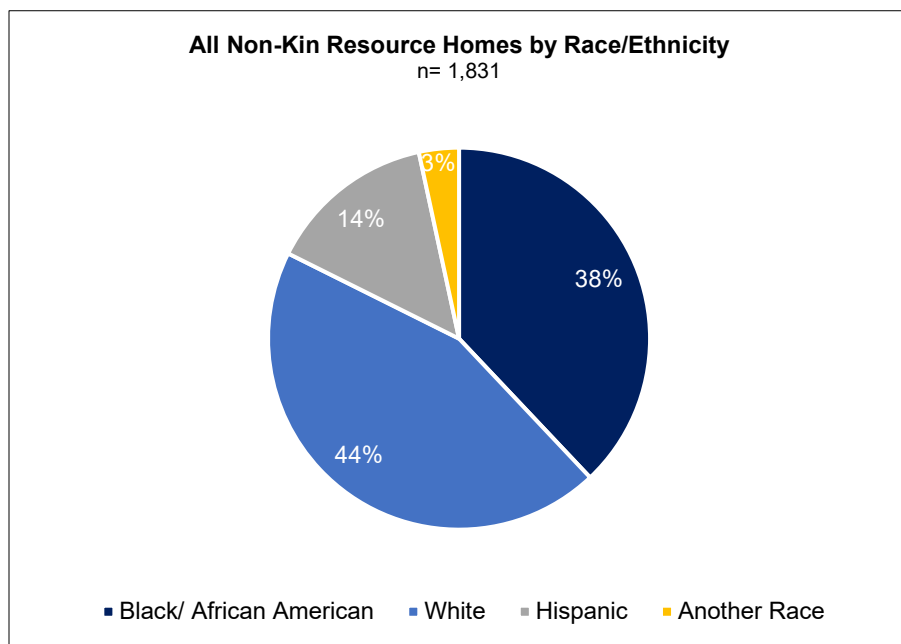
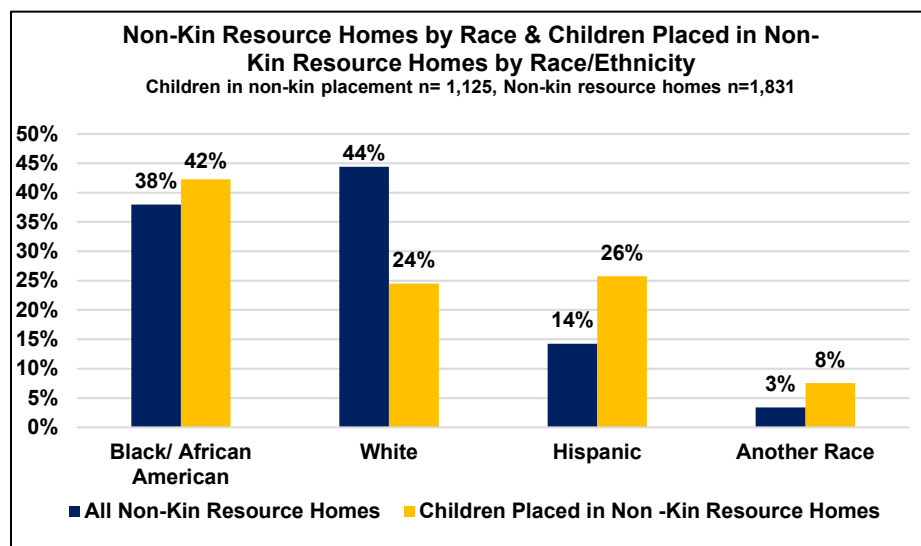


Figure 7. Children in Non-Kin Placement and Non-Kin Resource Care Providers by Race/Ethnicity



DCF also identifies via data review and focuses recruitment and licensing efforts on special populations, including sibling groups, adolescents, children with special needs, e.g., complex medical, developmental, and behavioral health needs and children or youth that identify as LGBTQIA2S+, and in specific geographic communities. Details regarding these populations and recruitment efforts are described below.

Sibling Groups. DCF recognizes the importance of sibling connections for all children, in particular children experiencing an out-of-home placement. For general information on DCF's work to ensure sibling connections, see Section 2, *Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes, Permanency Outcome 2*. DCF works to ensure that sibling groups, including large sibling groups, entering placement remain intact.³ As shown in Figure 8, in 2023, 84% of sibling groups of two or three were placed together and 91% of children from a sibling group of four or more were placed with at least one other sibling.

Figure 8. Sibling Groups Placed Together

Sibling Groups Placed Together (CY 2014- CY2023)										
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sibling groups of two or three	82%	81%	78%	76%	77%	80%	81%	85%	87%	84%
Sibling groups of four or more	87%	87%	84%	83%	85%	83%	95%	92%	92%	91%

DCF uses data driven tools to identify sibling placement needs on a local level so that children in sibling groups can remain in their community when kin placement is not an immediate option. The Department promulgates monthly reports that forecast the need for targeted recruitment of resource homes that are willing to provide care to sibling groups. To recruit and retain resource homes willing to accommodate large sibling groups, DCF continues to implement the Siblings in Best Settings (SIBS) Resource Family Homes initiative.⁴ SIBS strategies include enhanced board rates and retainer fees to maintain vacant homes for the placement of large sibling groups.

³ DCF Policy – Efforts to Place Sibling Together. [CPP-IV-B-2-200.pdf](#) New Jersey Siblings' Bill of Rights. [Sibling Bill of Rights.PDF \(nj.gov\)](#).

⁴ [CPP-IV-B-1-325.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#)

In 2023, there were approximately 569 families, including SIBS homes, identified to provide a home for sibling groups of two or more. DCF recruited a total of 27 new SIBS homes, ending the year with a total of 38 SIBS homes. Of these 38 homes, 9 can accommodate five or more children, while 29 homes can accommodate up to four children. DCF will continue efforts to increase the number of sibling homes over the next two years.

Adolescents. DCF identified an ongoing need to recruit and retain a robust pool of resource homes for the adolescent population. In 2023, 23% (382) of all children entering care (1,655) were between the ages of 13 and 17. See Figure 9. Figures 10 and 11 show trends in placement for youth ages 13-17. Of these youth, 34% were initially placed in kinship care, 39% were initially placed in non-kin resource homes, and 26% were placed in congregate settings. Shelter placement continues to decline.

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

Figure 9. Children Entering Care in 2023 by Age

Children entering care by age in 2023	
Age	Number of Children
Under 1	352
1 to 5	491
6 to 12	430
13 to 17	382
Total	1655

Figure 10. Children Ages 13-17 by Placement Type.

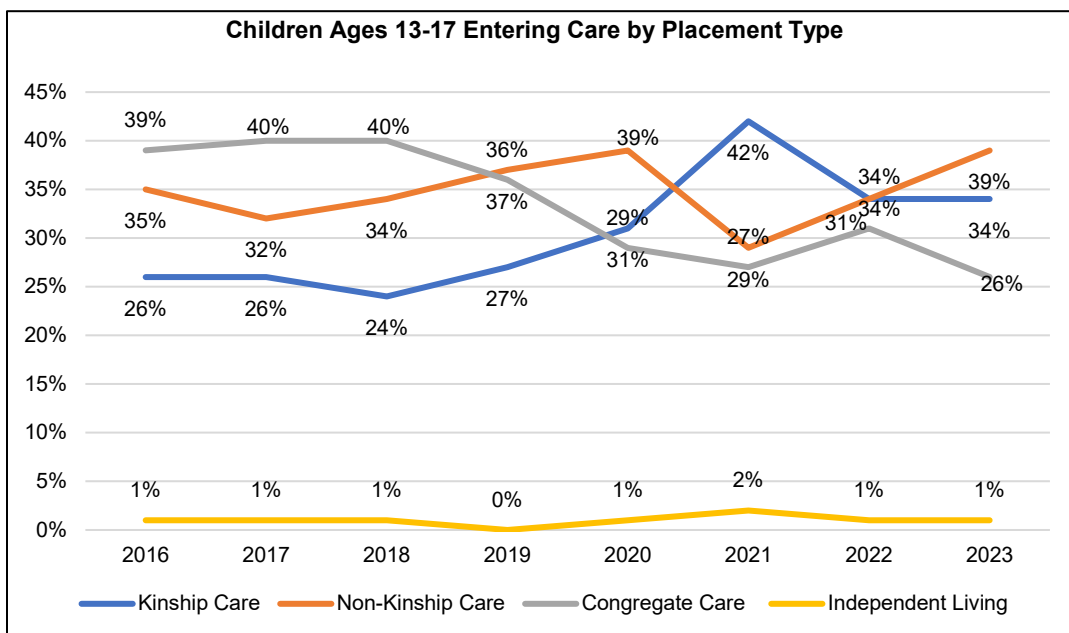
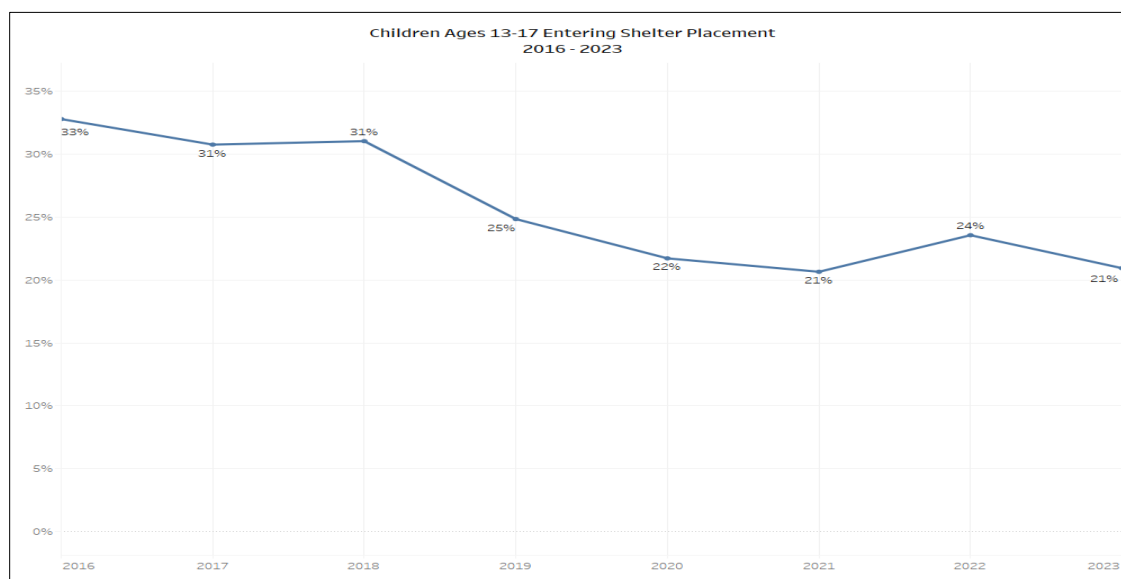


Figure 11. Children Ages 13-17 Entering Shelter Placement



Children with Special Needs. DCF is committed to developing and maintaining a subset of highly skilled resource parents to meet the needs of all children and youth, including those with acute or chronic illnesses or other special needs. DCF takes into consideration children's health care needs and matches children with resource families based on the willingness and capabilities of the family, including kin caregivers. DCF identifies special needs children and youth entering placement through a five-level progressive acuity system that supports required care and services in placement, e.g., Acuity Level 1 indicates a well child, while Acuity Level 4 indicates a child with an active acute and/or chronic illness that requires physician monitoring, including children with developmental delays and all children on psychotropic medications. Infants are identified as Acuity Level 4 due to the increased number of medical visits and follow-up care required in the first year of life. Acuity Level 5 indicates a child with acute or chronic illness that is not stable and can lead to a life-threatening condition. Because of the needs of children at Acuity Level 5, resource homes that care for these children require intensive supportive services.

As of January 2, 2024, there were 37 children statewide designated as having an Acuity Level 5. While only a small percent (1.3%) of the population of children in out-of-home placement, DCF recognizes the need to ensure adequate resource homes to care for children in this group. In 2023, DCF processed and licensed 45 new homes with an interest in caring for children with complex medical needs. DCF will continue efforts to recruit new families who are willing and able to care for a child with special health care needs.

In addition, since the development of the last Child and Family Services Plan, DCF identified the need to improve data collection related to children with special needs. DCF is currently evaluating capabilities of NJSPIRIT and Binti software to determine how to improve the specificity and accuracy of data that identifies the special and developmental needs of children. Systems improvements will provide DCF with a more comprehensive account of the acuity levels and needs of children in placement, allowing improved targeted recruitment of homes equipped to meet the children's needs and better support for the needs for resource homes caring for children with special needs.

LGBTQIA2S+ Youth. 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. This initiative was created to increase the number of qualified foster and adoptive families for children in care by educating the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirited and other identities (LGBTQIA2S+) community about opportunities to be foster/adoptive parents for not only LGBTQIA2S+ youth, but for all adolescents in care. This is accomplished by educating and engaging the LGBTQIA2S+ community about opportunities for foster and adoptive parenting and by improving the cultural competence among staff that recruit, develop, train, and support resource families.

DCF became the first state child welfare agency to earn the Seal of Recognition by the HRC AC-AF Initiative. DCF maintains the HRC AC-AF Seal of Recognition for reaching all benchmarks of LGBTQIA2S+ cultural competency and being fully welcoming of LGBTQIA2S+ youth and families. DCF continues its efforts by committing to a seal reassessment that is conducted every three years. Recruitment consisted of ad campaigns with a focus on special populations as well as virtual recruitment meet and greet opportunities through partnerships with local and state organizations.

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

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

DCF utilizes multiple data tools to assist with this analysis, including the CCWIS system and the Licensing Information System (LIS), and is in the process of modernizing system infrastructure. In 2021 and 2022, DCF identified the need to make substantial updates to CCWIS and LIS to assist with tracking and management of recruitment and licensing of resource and adoptive homes. Additionally, DCF identified that the limited interoperability of the two systems was fragmenting the tracking and management of resource operations. As a solution, DCF embarked on the acquisition of a new web-based software system, Binti,⁵ which launched in June 2023. This software platform modernizes and streamlines the recruitment and approval process of resource and adoptive homes through mobile-friendly applications and data dashboards for resource applicants and resource staff. The new system allows DCF to track various resource operations and, through robust reporting, better monitor recruitment and approval resource processes, barriers, and trends over time. DCF is using a phased approach to implement Binti, with the ultimate goal of full integration across Binti, NJ SPIRIT, and LIS.

In sum, DCF successfully license 132 resource homes to serve the specific target populations of children in 2023 as displayed in Figure 12.

⁵ <https://binti.com/>

Figure 12. Newly Licensed Non-Kin Resource Homes by Population Served

2023 Newly Licensed Non-Kin Resource Homes by Population Served	
Population	Number of homes
Adolescents 13-17	39
Sibling Groups of at least 2 or more	50
Children with at least one special need	45
LGBTQIA2S+	18
Total Newly Licensed Resource Homes	132

Diverse Methods of Distributing General/Child Specific Recruitment Information. Through partnership with Rutgers Business School, DCF continued efforts to modernize recruitment and develop innovative, effective marketing strategies to recruit foster and adoptive parents that would be best suited to meet the needs of New Jersey children and youth in foster care. The joint DCF-Rutgers project team conducted a comprehensive analysis that included literature reviews, in-depth interviews of recruiters and current resource parents, and a survey of 541 current and former resource parents. Rutgers synthesized the resulting data, providing DCF with key takeaways and strategies to enhance practice and improve recruitment and retention outcomes. For example, analysis data suggested that most resource parents were primarily motivated by the desire to give back, with the desire to adopt as the second most common motivation. This information is valuable in determining where to target future recruitment efforts, namely, e.g., community spaces, faith-based organizations, people in helping professions, etc. Beginning in 2023, DCF utilized the results of the analysis to develop more effective and better targeted recruitment plans.

The analysis also provided insight regarding areas for improvement, such as increasing communication and enhancing customer service. As a result, DCF committed to more consistent, transparent communication with resource families, resource staff, and community partners. For example, in 2023, ORF launched a quarterly newsletter to keep resource families abreast of pertinent practice and policy updates. That same year, ORF underwent a rebranding effort, which included a redesigned recruitment logo and slogan, and launched a marketing campaign during National Foster Care Month in May 2023. Later, in August 2023, DCF contracted with Positive Solutions, a marketing and public relations agency, to launch a six-month digital media recruitment campaign. This included the use of digital banners, digital advertisements, as well as digital billboards strategically placed in high traffic areas in five of the counties with the greatest need for resource families. Since social media has been shown to target large audiences, DCF's Office of Communications and Public Affairs is partnering with social media advertisers and influencers to expand social media recruitment opportunities. DCF maintains on-going partnerships with religious organizations, non-profits, medical organizations, such as hospitals and family care practices, as well as colleges, and local schools to assist with future resource and adoption recruitment. The Office of Communications and Public Affairs has redesigned recruitment graphics to showcase these special populations, which will be disseminated on DCF public and social media sites. Recruiters regularly undertake public awareness events through outreach to community partners, participating in and distributing information at community events, and more actively seeking input from resource families.

DCF also uses its public website to provide information and updates on resource and adoptive family recruitment, supports, resources, policies, new initiatives, the Binti data system, and more. The website includes both Spanish and English resources and adoption support services. In December 2023, updates were made to the website to simplify and streamline navigation. DCF uses email distribution lists to disseminate critical information to existing resource and

adoptive families. DCF maintains a contract with Embrella to support recruitment through the Binti inquiry process.

Additional efforts to recruit foster and adoptive families occur through current and former resource parents, who volunteer to serve as adjunct recruiters in the community and share their lived experiences with others. The Office of Communications and Public Affairs will create short videos of these experiences to be shared on social media, as well as during recruitment events and group engagements. Resource parents will continue to receive travel and childcare reimbursement and guest speaker fees to participate in in-person recruitment events and training. DCF is also looking to reinstate the Youth Ambassador Initiative, providing an opportunity for former youth in care to raise awareness and support the recruitment of resource and adoptive parents, specifically for the adolescent population. This initiative will empower youth to share their stories, discredit myths about youth in foster care, offer resource parents insight into this population, and give youth an avenue to advocate for themselves. Simultaneously, youth will develop public speaking and leadership skills and will receive monetary compensation for participation. Participants are primarily college students or recent graduates that, at one point in time, received a New Jersey Foster Care Scholarship. Ambassadors are also referred by CP&P staff. Ambassadors are provided opportunities to potentially speak at Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) pre-service trainings, group engagements, recruitment events, or directly to DCF staff. Speakers are compensated up to \$100.00 for participating in an event.

Resource and Adoptive Parent Accessibility to Licensing Process. DCF operates a state administered child welfare system with 46 CP&P local offices throughout New Jersey's 21 counties allowing for local level and statewide accessibility by prospective resource parents, adoptive parents, and all members of the community. The Department makes statewide policies and procedures publicly available. DCF's ORF is the single licensing process that studies and licenses families for both resource and adoption, ensuring a clear, comprehensive, and timely process for families. Recruitment and management of resource and adoptive families is centralized within DCF's ORF.

While the management of licensing and recruitment of resource and adoptive families is centralized, each CP&P local office maintains staff that are specific to the study, training, and support of foster and adoptive families in their local area. Resource and adoptive parent recruitment is largely localized and community specific. When DCF receives a resource inquiry, it is distributed to the local recruitment specialists, who invite prospective resource and adoptive parents to group engagement events held in the community. These events provide an overview of DCF and the foster and adoptive parent home study and licensing processes. Upon completion of a group engagement event, resource support staff servicing the community where the prospective resource parent resides initiates a home study. Once licensed, the resource and adoptive family is supported and serviced by the same office in their community.

Through an ongoing self-evaluation, DCF recognized a need to enhance the structure of resource family units to better support resource caregivers and retain a strong and healthy pool of resource homes. Literature and jurisdictional reviews suggest a structure with specialized functions with clearly defined roles and expertise, manageable caseloads of homes with frequent supportive contact, as well as a concurrent, as opposed to a consecutive, home study licensing process that supports more expeditious licensure of homes is necessary to support the retention of a robust pool of resource homes. To improve practices, DCF completed a statewide restructuring of its local and area resource units. In keeping with DCF's commitment to continually track and evaluate its practices, DCF conducted surveys and in-person meetings with resource staff, as well as local

office and area office leadership, to obtain feedback on the overall impact of the restructure. DCF staff acknowledged the benefits of specialized roles and made suggestions for improvements. DCF issued revised guidance in March 2023.

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

Relevant Training. DCF's Office of Training and Professional Development (OTPD) coordinates and oversees Department-wide training and certificate programs. DCF uses two pre-service training models for prospective resource and adoptive families. Specifically, PRIDE for unrelated families and Traditions of Care designed for kin and fictive kin. For additional information on these trainings, see DCF's 2025-2029 Training Plan. In 2023, a multi-disciplinary workgroup, including resource family trainers, staff from DCF's direct service and transformation divisions, Embrella representatives, and former youth with lived experience in foster care, reviewed and assessed the pre-service and in-service training curricula. In July 2023, they submitted recommendations for enhancing training to ensure that resource families are best equipped to meet the needs of children in their care. Recommendations included: exploration of additional pre-service training models, addition of more trauma-informed content, provision of ongoing support groups to reinforce the principles learned in training and provide peer support opportunities, provision of Nurtured Heart Approach training for all staff and resource parents, and surveys to youth and resource parents after placement to identify gaps in support. DCF is actively exploring ways to implement these recommendations.

Training Staff to Work with Diverse Communities. It is critical that staff understand cultural competence and humility to provide quality services to the diverse population of families that DCF serves and supports. When DCF finalized its strategic plan in 2019, it included race equity as a core approach. With the ultimate goal of promoting equitable treatment and outcomes for all New Jersey constituents, DCF created its Office of Diversity, Equity and Belonging (ODEB). ODEB's focus extends beyond race and is inclusive of all historically marginalized and oppressed populations that have experienced inequity in the system, including but not limited to: the LGBTQIA2S+ community, people with English as a non-primary language, women, people with disabilities, and the immigrant community. ODEB's vision will be sustained by prioritizing strategies that institutionalize change in the areas of human resources, operations, communications, and training, among others. Beginning May 2021, DCF provided all staff, including resource and licensing staff, training on implicit racial bias in child protection. This was followed by expert led conversations that provided an overview of root causes of racism and how these have led to disparities and poor outcomes for Black families and children of color. For additional information on ODEB and past and future Department-wide equity efforts, see Section 3, *Plan for Enacting the State's Vision*, Goal 3 of DCF's 2025-2029 CFSP. Additional examples of staff trainings through OTPD include the following courses:

- **Cultural Competency.** This training 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.** This training is designed to give staff the opportunity to use self-reflection to consider how their personal values impact their decision-making process with families. Also, staff will be able to consider the intersection of their personal values as they align or differ from social work core values, so they can consider more deeply the ethical decision-making process.

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

Addressing Linguistic Barriers. The most recent census shows that nearly one-third of New Jersey households speaks a language other than English at home⁶. DCF employs ethnically diverse staff that are readily available and able to communicate with families in their own language. To further ensure cultural competence and communication, DCF contracts with interpreting and translation services for in-person or telephonic services. DCF provides resource and adoptive parent training and recruitment materials in Spanish, the most common language spoken in the state other than English. In January 2024, Governor Murphy enacted legislation that requires all state agencies to provide for the translation of certain documents and services into the seven most-spoken non-English languages in the state by the end of 2025;⁷ DCF is currently assessing the impacts of this legislation and determining the necessary steps to ensure compliance.

Non-Discriminatory Fee Structure. DCF has a non-discriminatory fee structure. No fees are incurred by families to become licensed as a foster or adoptive home. DCF assumes the cost for the home study process, including fingerprinting, criminal background checks and training. Other requirements of the licensing process are individually assessed and supported accordingly. DCF also allocates special environmental modification funding for kin and fictive kin placements to support licensure. DCF pays kin and non-kin resource parents equally and based on a publicly available rate table.⁸

Timely Search for Adoptive Parents. When DCF identifies a permanency goal of select home adoption for a child, DCF refers the child to the New Jersey Resource Adoption Exchange, where an exchange specialist by geographic area is assigned. The specialist reviews all documentation and enters pertinent information in a computerized database that assists to match criteria for the child with criteria for prospective adoptive homes. The specialist identifies prospective matches with CP&P resource families. If a child is legally free and there are no CP&P resource families, then a non-CP&P family will be sought nationwide. The specialist reviews the home studies and contacts the families prior to sending the home studies to the child's local office adoption team to review.

When a family is not easily identified, DCF makes additional efforts to find an adoptive family. Examples follow:

⁶ [New Jersey - Census Bureau Profile](#)

⁷ P.L. 2023, c. 263

⁸ [CPP-IV-B-9-100.pdf \(nj.gov\)](#)

- The child can be registered on the national exchange through the following: <http://222.adoptuskids.org>, <https://www.state.nj.us/njfofosteradopt/adoption/>, and <http://www.adopt.org>.⁹
- DCF's ability to recruit adoptive families for youth with a select home adoption goal, including those with complex medical, social and emotional needs, is enhanced through partnership and membership with the National Adoption Association. This association provides nationwide adoption recruitment and profiling opportunities for legally free youth. Membership also affords professional development and networking opportunities for adoption recruitment staff regarding national recruitment trends and strategies.
- DCF maintains a partnership with the National Adoption Center of Delaware (Adoption Center) for recruitment of legally free children. In partnership with the Adoption Center, DCF has continually assessed recruitment efforts and developed strategies to evolve efforts into small, child focused, family engagement events. DCF formed a strong child-specific recruitment team that gathers bi-monthly to assess each event. The team formulates strategies for continued progress for individual adoption and permanency readiness for youth. This teaming structure is also utilized to develop formal recruitment that is youth sensitive and effective in securing permanent families. Through an ongoing partnership with the Adoption Center, legally free children can also be profiled in various media outlets via print and online publications, radio, and social media. Through the Adoption Center, and through NBC 10 Wednesday's Child, children are featured as "Wednesday's Child." In 2023, 21 New Jersey youth were featured and, thus far in 2024, five youth were featured.
- DCF has "Connect to Adoption" program that identifies and connects licensed resource families with an interest in adoption directly with their adoption exchange and child specific recruitment team. This effort leads to stronger engagement and better preparedness of potential adoptive families. DCF also sends a quarterly electronic newsletter to licensed resource parents to both maintain contact with licensed resource families and to profile legally free youth.

Simultaneous with these efforts, DCF continues to accept inquiries from any families interested in adopting a legally free child. Upon inquiry, an exchange specialist engages the family both individually and in group settings to give them an understanding of the strengths and challenges of the children and youth and assess the family's ability and interest in providing a child with permanency. Group engagement builds connections with the families, provides an overview of support available through DCF's Adoption Operations, and allows the families to build a network with each other. These families are then referred to the local office resource teams to begin the home study process.

Once a prospective adoptive family is selected, the adoption team meets with the family in their home for a supervisory interview, providing the family with full disclosure and discussing their subsidy eligibility and a transitional visitation schedule.

⁹ In previous years, the New Jersey Resource Adoption Exchange collaborated with <https://www.adoptamericanetwork.org>, in addition to the websites listed above. Due to challenges with this platform and productivity, this collaboration ended. In July 2023 <https://www.afamilyforeverychild.org/> dismantled their national registry. However, CP&P continues to collaborate with this organization towards the possible goal of matching legally free youth with families licensed through their agency.

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

Adoption Call to Action. Aligned with the retention and recruitment efforts previously described, DCF continues to make progress on the strategies outlined in the Adoption Call to Action plan. As part of DCF's strategic, transformational goals, DCF strives to preserve family connections by increasing the use of kinship care. In the years covered by the previous CFSP, DCF put into place new policies and practices related to kinship placement, undertook extensive research on kinship practices, began a resource unit pilot program to increase kin placement rates, and provided trainings and presentations on the value of kinship. DCF's 2025-2029 CFSP commits to further efforts related to kinship care, e.g., revisions to the state's kin licensing regulations, integration of the Objectives and Key Results with DCF's Collaborative Quality Improvement process, and more. For additional details on DCF's plans over the next five years related to kin, see Section 3, *Plans for Achieving the State's Vision, Goal 2, Objective 1* in the 2025-2029 CFSP. DCF's Office of Adoption Operations provides information and support to CP&P local office staff and resource families regarding the adoption and kinship legal guardianship processes for all caregivers, including kin.

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