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RESOURCE FAMILY RECRUITMENT

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RESOURCE FAMILY RECRUITMENT

3.1. Kinship Resource Family Recruitment

Recruiting prospective kinship resource parents for children entering foster care provides the best outcomes for children and reduces the trauma associated with entering foster care. Children who are already in foster care need prospective kinship resource parents recruited to support concurrent goals of Relative Placement. More on Relative Search and Engagement is available in Chapter A. Section 2 Family Engagement Guidance Sections 2.2 and 2.3 and Foster Care Guidance Section 6.6.

Experienced kinship resource parents may decide to continue fostering after successfully fostering a relative child. Their lived experience as a relative can translate to greater ease and compassion when supporting connections with a child's family. If the kinship resource parent is interested in becoming a non-relative resource parent, discuss a possible conversion of approval with the kinship resource parents. This discussion ensures they understand the differences in expectations and levels of support when serving as a non-relative resource parent versus a kinship resource parent.

3.2. Recruitment Overview

Resource families are needed to better provide children who enter foster care with opportunities to remain connected to their families and home communities. This connection supports reunification efforts. To assist with the increase of resource families and provide a more streamlined recruitment process, the Foster Families Highway (FFH) for Recruitment was established to connect prospective resource families to LDSS across Virginia. The FFH creates an efficient process for recruiting, engaging, and selecting families who meet the needs of children and families involved in foster care. LDSS are expected to direct all inquiries to either their FFH portal or the VDSS portal and incorporate the portal's URL into their recruitment marketing materials.

Through training and careful assessment, *LDSS* should identify and approve those families who demonstrate a clear understanding of their role in supporting relationships between children and their parents. Kinship and *non-relative resource* families should never be viewed as an alternative to children's families, but instead, they must clearly understand their role in supporting family reunification. In making decisions regarding placement, preference should be given to relatives and fictive kin as *resource* parents, so long as they can meet approval requirements as outlined in Resource Family Guidance Sections 2.3.8.3. and 4.1.3. The LDSS shall assist relatives and fictive kin with meeting approval requirements by identifying barriers, utilizing *kinship and non-safety* waivers, and offering support. All *resource parents* should complete training and be carefully assessed to ensure that they can

meet the physical, behavioral, and emotional needs of children who enter foster care in Virginia. *It is important to remember that after recruitment comes development. Recruiting a diverse pool of prospective resource families allows for a wider range of development leading to the curation of families better qualified to meet the unique needs of children and youth in foster care.*

3.3. Recruiting a Resource Family

3.3.1. Strategies for Recruiting

- *Identify* the profiles of those children for whom the LDSS most needs resource families.

- Conduct utilization studies of *currently approved* and underutilized resource families *to address gaps in fostering profiles needed. Review* the in-service training needed *to develop* existing resource parents *to expand their fostering profiles and better meet the needs of local children in foster care*. Their expressed needs for training and support, and their overall level of satisfaction should be collected and regularly used to inform both recruitment and retention activities.

- Focus on strengthening the LDSS's capacity for assessment and training of resource families prior to engaging in recruitment. *Consider collaborating with neighboring LDSS (see Resource Family Guidance Section 1.6.1) and/or utilize CRAFFT and Mutual Family Assessment staff to meet training and approval needs (see Resource Family Guidance Section 1.7 and 1.8).*

- Utilize data to determine priorities for targeted recruitment of new families and drive recruitment *messaging on the recruitment portal and elsewhere*.

- Support of current *resource* families is the most effective overall retention and recruitment strategy (*See Resource Family Guidance Section 5*).

3.3.2. Balancing Recruitment types

A balanced recruitment plan incorporates a majority of targeted and child-specific recruitment, with a nominal amount of general recruitment.

- Conduct a minimal amount of general recruitment (e.g., 10%) which typically serves as community education and creates an awareness of the foster care system and who it serves. Use data to inform prospective *resource* families of the number, types, and needs of the children in foster care.

- Targeted recruitment should be used to develop a diverse pool of *non-relative* resource families who can receive and nurture children and youth as the LDSS works to establish permanence. Utilize targeted recruitment for the community at-large, focusing on those populations whose characteristics match with the needs of the children currently in care *and in need of family placements*.

- Child-specific recruitment is child-focused, exploring existing connections through relative and fictive kin discovery primarily. The amount of child-specific recruitment needed is dependent upon *the family placement needs of the* population of children in care, and is most effective for certain populations:

    - Youth who have lingered in care for more than two years.
    - Large sibling groups
    - Children with exceptional needs or circumstances
    - All children and youth with TPR for whom permanence is not yet established.

In a proactive *child welfare* system, child-specific recruitment is a natural extension of the diligent searches that have been conducted throughout the life of a case for the purpose of establishing supports for the families *of youth*, and/or maintaining connections for the child.

3.3.3. Faster Families Highway

The Faster Families Highway (FFH) for Recruitment provides LDSS with a streamlined, efficient, and strategic way of increasing their pool of locally approved resource families. FFH enables LDSS to recruit, identify and select prospective resource families who have the potential to meet the needs of children in foster care. LDSS should log into their FFH accounts weekly to review profiles of prospective resource families. Engaging with families may include an interview, providing information on the approval process, inviting them to an information session or requesting that the family complete an initial questionnaire.

Upon identification of a prospective resource family, LDSS are encouraged to mark the family as recruited by going to Manage Recruitment in the OffRamp of its FFH account. This action removes the prospective resource family from the pool of families available for general recruitment by other LDSS and ties the family to the LDSS that engaged the family. Recruiting families on the portal who reside outside the LDSS county/city may occur after the family has been available on the portal for

recruitment for two weeks or if the LDSS where the family resides has communicated that they do not intend to recruit the prospective resource family. Once the recruit button has been selected, the family moves to the Manage Families/In Process list.

LDSS may remove a family from its In Process List of Families at any time if the LDSS determines that the family should no longer move forward with approval. By choosing the "Dismiss" button on a family from its In Process List on FFH, the family becomes available to neighboring LDSS for recruitment. Prior to dismissing the prospective resource family, the LDSS staff informs the family in writing that they will no longer be working together and includes the reason for dismissal. Only prospective resource families with non-negotiable offenses will be removed from the recruitment portal system by informing the Regional Resource Family consultant.

When a member of a state or federally recognized tribe self-identifies on the recruitment portal, the Regional Resource Family consultant will contact the LDSS in the locality where the family resides and copy the VDSS Liaison to the tribes.

The recruitment portal is not intended for use by kinship or fictive kin resource families. When families enter the portal and identify specific children to foster, the Regional Resource Family consultant and the FFH staff will work together to connect the prospective resource family with the LDSS who has custody of the children.

3.3.3.1 Designate a Point of Contact

Each LDSS should designate a point of contact (POC) at the LDSS who is responsible for responding to inquiries.

- *The POC must have a FFH account that will give them access to all leads within the recruitment portal. The POC should participate in ongoing FFH training and utilize the Toolkit for Localities to maximize effectiveness of FFH and to be aware of updates.*
- *The POC communicates with all LDSS staff on how to send prospective resource families to the FFH portal.*
- *For information on how to create an account to access FFH, please contact support@adoption-share.com.*

3.4. *Communication plan for inquiries*

Each LDSS needs to anticipate a flow for inquiries and develop a communication plan based on staffing roles and inquiry needs.

- *Each LDSS should establish an FFH OnRamp with LDSS-specific branded recruitment messaging and direct all inquiries to the LDSS FFH OnRamp. They should embed OnRamp links on their LDSS website and all brochures to direct prospective resource parents onto the recruitment portal. For information on how to create an FFH OnRamp with LDSS-specific branded recruitment messaging, contact support@adoption-share.com.*

- *Use the LDSS-specific landing page to educate families who will begin an inquiry about any needs specific to the community for targeted recruitment communication.*

- *Consider establishing an inquiry-only email address and/or phone number for efficient and direct communication.*

- Activities such as managing the initial phone call *or email*, information packets, and information sessions are extensions of recruitment.

- A welcoming, "screen in" approach is more effective than the traditional "screen out" practice (which turns away many viable families who could be developed and reinforces a negative community image of DSS).

- *Utilizing the FFH recruitment portal is an efficient way to track, engage and follow up with prospective resource families.* Tracking prospective *resource* families *through FFH* minimizes "application drift," ensures that inquiry documentation is obtained, and provides the opportunity for follow-up with families for quality assurance.

3.4.1. Information sessions

Regularly scheduled information sessions are better attended than sporadic scheduling. *Information sessions are an opportunity to engage prospective resource families, address specific concerns by the prospective resource families and educate them in greater detail about what is involved in becoming a resource parent. Information sessions are an early opportunity to reinforce their role as a support and not a substitute for a child's family.*

3.4.2. *Offering alternatives to fostering children*

All recruitment plans should include other *local* service *opportunities* for those individuals who are not a good fit *for becoming a resource parent* such as mentoring, *tutoring,* or volunteering *in schools or afterschool/summer programs*.