



STRATEGY BRIEF

SAFE STRONG SUPPORTIVE

September 2025

What are some strategies for finding and keeping resource families?

All young people deserve to grow up in loving, permanent families where they have a sense of unconditional belonging. Research and accounts of lived experiences¹ by young people and their families show that [separating children from their families causes lasting trauma](#). Child protection agencies must exhaust all means to ensure children and families receive essential supports to safely remain together. In instances when temporary out-of-home placement is absolutely necessary, finding the best possible family-based setting helps to mitigate trauma. Placement [preferably should be with kin](#), but when kinship care is not possible, [placing children in a safe family setting with a resource caregiver² in their community is essential](#).

To ensure a sufficient number of family-based placements meet the diverse needs of children in the child welfare system, child protection agencies must actively recruit and retain resource caregivers from varied backgrounds and social identities. This brief highlights a menu of strategies for recruitment and retention of resource families, as well as a selection of tools and resources to help develop comprehensive, integrated recruitment and retention plans. For more detailed information about how three states — New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Washington — have approached resource family recruitment and retention, see: [How have some child protection agencies recruited and retained resource families?](#)

Recruitment strategies

Child protection agencies need to take a [comprehensive approach to recruiting, training, and supporting both kinship and non-relative resource caregivers](#), as they play a vital role in ensuring children are nurtured, supported, and cared for until they can safely be reunited with their families. The following strategies, while not exhaustive, highlight promising practices and jurisdictional examples on how to effectively and efficiently recruit resource families to best meet the needs of children in the child welfare system.

Gather, analyze, and use data. Data-driven recruitment approaches are essential to ensure that agencies are recruiting the right resource caregivers to match the needs of the children in out-of-home placement. [Data-informed approaches](#) help to:

- Evaluate strengths and areas of improvement in the recruitment and licensing process.
- [Assess the true number of resource caregivers available](#). Too often, families on the resource list are marked as available, when in reality they are not and may not have been for many years.
- Set concrete recruitment goals, especially with tools like the [foster home estimator](#) to more accurately determine the number of resource homes needed so agencies can [develop a targeted plan to recruit and retain](#) a pool of resource families.
- [Identify any gaps](#) between the characteristics and location of children in need of placement and the available resource homes (based on caregivers' location, skills, interest levels, and demographics).

Data gathering and analysis are key features of [Foster and Adoptive Diligent Recruitment Plans](#), as illustrated by various jurisdictions such as [Missouri](#) and [Nevada](#).

Effectively market and communicate the needs. Recruiting prospective caregivers requires a thoughtful approach that goes beyond generic outreach. General messaging about children in foster care often has a limited impact. Organizations like [The Foster Parent](#) use **micro-targeting**, a data-driven recruitment strategy to identify and reach individuals who may be interested in becoming resource caregivers. The Foster Parent partners with local agencies to create tailored digital ads — based on factors like geography, gender identity, and interests — to appeal to people with a high potential to engage. These micro-targeting ads can be child-specific, such as seeking a family for a child with medical needs or identity-related needs, or more general, such as recruiting homes for teens or sibling groups. When people engage with an ad, their information is captured and immediately shared with the partnering agency, allowing for timely follow-up. Micro-targeting has been implemented in 12 states, including statewide in **California**, and has proven an effective strategy for identifying prospective resource families that best align with a child's unique needs.³

Many jurisdictions also engage in [geo-mapping](#) and foster family utilization reviews to accurately assess their current resource parent pool and more effectively target recruitment efforts. **Florida** and other jurisdictions have implemented [market segmentation](#) to improve out-of-home care and permanency outcomes for specific groups of youth. Data from interviews with foster and adoptive parents focused on:

- **Psychographics:** current and prospective caregivers' fundamental motivations as caregivers.
- **Demographics:** where resource caregivers live, congregate, worship, shop, etc.
- **Messaging:** compelling ways to communicate foster and adoptive parent's immediate needs.
- **Media outlet:** determine the media platform most likely to be relied on by prospective caregivers.

Preliminary findings revealed marketing approaches that stimulate higher response rates, including investing in paid media, using visual images of children in need, and communication with faith-based organizations. Project partners experienced significant increases in the public's interest in becoming a caregiver, with initial inquiries increasing anywhere from 69% to 148%, improving the agencies' ability to place Florida children in the state's custody in family-based settings.⁴

Regardless of the recruitment approach, messaging should clearly center the goal on fostering a child, not adoption by outlining the roles and responsibilities of resource caregivers. Communication should emphasize: (1) the primary goal of family reunification; (2) the traumatic impact of a child's separation from family; and (3) the varying levels of care required. Marketing materials should also amplify the voices of children in care and current caregivers who actively support reunification efforts with families.

Child Welfare Playbook

This [online resource](#) offers promising practices that are actionable and can be replicated and scaled. Topical pages provide background information, a menu of suggested strategies and best practices, jurisdictional and programmatic examples, and related resources. **Playbook topics include, among others:**

- [Caregiver Licensing](#)
- [Caregiver Retention](#)
- [Foster Parent Recruitment](#)
- [Kin Engagement](#)
- [Supporting Older Youth](#)
- [Supportive Relationships](#)

Sharing real-life stories of how caregivers contribute to a child's safety, growth, and reunification can be particularly powerful. To ensure outreach is inclusive and effective, it is essential to provide [culturally responsive resources and materials](#) in appropriate languages, including those of American Indian tribes.

Consider standards or accreditation from organizations such as [the COA Accreditation](#), [The Joint Commission](#), or similar accrediting bodies to signal and demonstrate high standards of quality to prospective resource families, or [Family Focused Treatment Association](#), which offers national program standards for family-based care. In **Illinois**, child-placing agencies are reimbursed for accreditation costs, underscoring the value and quality of accredited practices.

Implement recruitment matching efforts. Agencies should prioritize recruiting resource caregivers with diverse identities and backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, age, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and abilities. This approach is especially important for addressing the needs of disproportionately represented youth, and [it aligns with federal regulations that require agencies to ensure a safe, designated placement](#) for [LGBTQ+ youth](#), as well as [proper placements for children of color](#), [expectant and parenting youth](#), and those with [complex behavioral health needs](#). These populations often [experience more placement instability](#) and are at a higher risk of entering into group settings. Recruiting [resource caregivers of color](#) as well as individuals with diverse identities and backgrounds increases the likelihood that children will connect with non-relative adults who can relate to their challenges and therefore enhance their placement stability.⁶ Children with complex emotional, behavioral, or psychological needs require specialized care from therapeutic resource caregivers, also known as [treatment foster care](#), who are trained in trauma-informed care and behavior management to support healing and develop coping skills. To identify potential therapeutic caregivers, it may be helpful to target [recruitment efforts at professionals in allied fields](#) like medical, behavioral health, substance use, education, and social services, and to conduct specialized outreach at hospitals, clinics, schools, and similar institutions, and identify other prospective caregivers through resource families with connections in these professions. Recruiting caregivers who match children's identities and needs is not easy, however, the process can be simplified through targeted strategies and the use of technological tools such as the [Binti](#) online portal, which helps streamline search, engagement, and licensing processes for kinship and non-kin caregivers.

Partner with resource families. To build strong partnerships with resource families, child protection agency staff must actively involve them in the recruitment, retention, and placement process, as well as other related points of decision-making. Resource families should be abreast of all pertinent information in real-time, including regular updates on children awaiting placement and their care needs. **Arkansas** uses a mass-text messaging system to notify resource families about children needing immediate placement, allowing them to engage and proactively plan. Many jurisdictions also leverage the skills and expertise of existing resource caregivers by [hiring them to help recruit and train](#) new ones. Resource families also are [incentivized for their role](#) in successfully recruiting new caregivers. The state of **New York** [employs resource caregivers as consultants](#) to assist with recruitment and retention. **New York City** [implemented a peer-to-peer recruitment model](#), which significantly increased the number of available resource families by almost 50% and kinship placements from 31% to 39%, while creating a network of caregivers. To ensure

Provider Spotlight⁵

The [Children's Community Programs \(CCP\) of Connecticut](#) pays seasoned resource caregivers within the CCP network a referral bonus of \$500 for recruiting new resource families and an additional \$500 to the newly recruited families. This approach leverages the power of word-of-mouth and helps current resource families feel valued and supported.

CCP also simultaneously dedicates in-house recruiters solely to recruitment tasks to better address issues such as delays in call-backs and overwhelming paperwork for prospective resource families. These efforts successfully have doubled the number of resource families within the program.

To further streamline the licensing process and accommodate schedules of prospective resource caregivers, CCP introduced weekend intensive training sessions that condense the lengthy 10-week, 3-hour-per-week training series into a more manageable format — 17 hours of in-person training over a weekend, followed by 13 hours of virtual training. This change has increased participation significantly, with at least 15 families attending each session since its implementation.

caregivers' voice is centered in efforts to improve and refine recruitment plans, [Alaska](#) and [Illinois](#) established [advisory boards](#).

“It’s important to have workers who can clearly explain to new caregivers what it takes to be a therapeutic resource parent, even if that means allowing another therapeutic resource family to share their experience with caring for a child with higher needs.”

—Lisa Myles, Resource and Adoptive Caregiver, Illinois

Think beyond child welfare and collaborate with community-based organizations. Effectively supporting children and families extends beyond the child welfare system and must be a shared effort that includes the collective support of the broader community. An Oregon-based organization, [The Contingent](#), launched an initiative to mobilize nonprofit, private, and faith-based organizations to partner with government agencies in recruiting and supporting certified resource families. The Contingent also [uses artificial intelligence and high-tech data analysis to match children](#) with potential resource caregivers in the same zip code. Child protection agencies also can designate a liaison to partner with community groups and [conduct outreach at faith-based institutions, cultural events, schools, and local businesses](#), targeting places like barbershops and hair salons. This outreach should include sharing specific data about local needs and offering clear, actionable ways for community members to get involved, rather than disseminating general information. For example, it is more impactful to highlight specifically that “four young children in your neighborhood may have to leave your local elementary school” rather than stating “hundreds of children in foster care need homes.”

Enhance child protection agency staff skills and recruitment activities. Staff need training to enhance their professional skills in [positive customer service techniques](#) and adhere to guidelines for timely responses when working with resource families. Agencies should evaluate recruitment activities to ensure implementation of active, child-specific recruitment efforts, such as case record-mining and [family search and engagement strategies](#) to identify important adults connections in a child’s life. When identifying placement options for older youth, recruitment efforts should include existing resource families, as one study⁷ found that caregivers for teenagers often are developed over time and not necessarily recruited. To bolster a caregiver pool for teens, agency leaders can help staff develop targeted strategies to identify, inform, and encourage experienced caregivers to consider accepting teen placements. [Promising programs](#) include [30 Days to Family®](#), [Family Finding](#), and [Extreme Recruitment®](#).

Remove barriers that prolong the licensing process for resource families, especially kinship caregivers. [Research shows](#) that children in out-of-home care often have better outcomes when placed with relatives, and [kinship care always should be the first priority for placement](#). To simplify kinship placement process, [a 2024 federal rule](#) allows Title IV-E child welfare agencies (states and tribes) to **simplify the process for kinship caregivers to become licensed or approved resource care providers** by adopting separate standards for kin-specific foster care that is different from non-relative licensing or approval standards. This federal rule also removes barriers to accessible services and financial resources, as it requires Title IV-E agencies to periodically review licensing or approval standards and amounts paid as foster care maintenance payments, ensuring kinship resource families receive payments equal to what is provided to non-relative resource families. [Michigan](#), [the first state to implement the new rule](#), launched a streamlined resource caregiver approval process specifically for biological relatives and fictive kin (people close to a family but not blood relatives) that requires only a background check and fingerprint assessment. Once approved, and after a caseworker’s assessment determines the kin is a suitable and safe placement, the child is released into kinship care. Additionally, kinship caregivers receive the same maintenance payments as licensed families, and Michigan provides administrative payments to private agencies that manage cases involving unlicensed kinship caregivers. Other states including [California](#), [Colorado](#), and [Missouri](#) offer provisional licenses for immediate placement with relatives or fictive kin, and [Arizona](#), [Kansas](#), and [Washington](#) waived and modified licensing standards to expedite full licensure and eligibility for support.⁸

Support strategies to bolster retention success

Retention is vital to building and sustaining a diverse pool of resource families. Agencies should evaluate [factors affecting resource family's decisions to continue or cease caregiving](#) to gauge the effectiveness of their training and support strategies, as the experiences of new and seasoned resource caregivers can impact recruitment outcomes.

Cultivate positive [relationships between parents and resource families](#). It helps to build a bridge that unites both parties as a team working toward the child's best interest, rather than as adversaries. Establishing a cooperative, team-oriented relationship can clarify roles and responsibilities, improve communication between parents and caregivers, and allow caregivers to engage in [Quality Parenting Initiative](#) activities, such as comfort calls, partnership plans, and transition planning. This connection enables biological families to stay involved, offering support and insights that aid in the child's adjustment and development while in out-of-home placement.

Assign dedicated staff to support each resource family. Agencies should ensure that a [designated caseworker or support person](#) is available to address challenges and provide continuous support, especially during a child's initial placement. In some agencies, the same caseworker remains with the resource caregiver from recruitment to placement and eventually case closure, providing [seamless support throughout the process](#). In some agencies, like the [Family Partnerships of Central Florida](#), resource caregivers are hired as navigators to liaison between resource parents and caseworkers, offering information, support, and mentorship to both new and experienced caregivers.

Consider evidence-based foster care models and interventions to offer resource parents a structured program with clear expectations, tailored training, and comprehensive support. Agencies also can offer evidence-based interventions to help improve caregiver skills, strengthen attachment, reduce behavioral challenges, and minimize parental stress and the risk of placement disruptions. Examples include:

[Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up - Infant Parent-Child Interaction Therapy](#)
[Triple P Positive Parenting Program – Level 4®](#)
[The Incredible Years®](#)
[Triple P Positive Parenting Program® System](#)
[Together Facing the Challenge](#)
[FosterParentCollege.com](#)

[1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12](#)
[KEEP](#)
[KEEP SAFE](#)
[Teaching-Family Model](#)
[Treatment Foster Care Oregon - Adolescents](#)
[Treatment Foster Care Oregon for Preschoolers](#)

Establish a network for peer-to-peer support among resource families such as a peer mentoring program, a social media group, or a helpline staffed by experienced resource families that can answer questions and provide immediate support. [Oklahoma](#) and [Washington](#) implement the [Mockingbird Family Model](#) to train, support, and retain resource families within a network of six to 10 foster families at a time. This structure fosters a close-knit community based on mutual support among resource families, which helps to reduce caregiver isolation, strengthens retention, and increase placement stability for children in out-of-home placement.

Provide around-the-clock trauma-informed crisis intervention and wraparound support. Caregivers of children with emotional and behavioral health needs often require flexible and responsive services. States should ensure 24-hour real-time support to resource families. Interventions like the Family Partnerships of Central [Florida's mobile response](#) team, the [New Jersey Mobile Response Stabilization Services](#) and the [Wraparound Milwaukee model](#), which includes a [mobile crisis](#) element, offers crucial support to stabilize children in crisis, allowing them to remain with families instead of being placed in group facilities. Additionally, child protection agencies should provide resource families with essential wraparound supports for regular, consistent, and flexible respite care within their own networks and communities. Caring for children with complex emotional and behavioral needs can cause stress and lead to burnout for caregivers. Having a respite plan with identified and committed supportive connections for moments when

temporary relief is needed allows caregivers to take breaks, recharge and attend to personal wellness needs. The Family Focused Treatment Association suggests [involving individuals from the children's network](#) — parents, friends' parents, and teachers — as trained and approved respite providers, which helps to reduce caregiver isolation, strengthens retention, and increases placement stability for children in out-of-home placement.

Support children's access to activities that promote normalcy and healing. It's important to support child participation in activities — whether in school, the community, or faith-based settings — that align with their interests, passions, and developmental needs. Engaging in extracurricular activities has therapeutic benefits for young people, as it fosters a sense of belonging, builds positive relationships with peers and supportive adults, and helps establish healthy routines. These experiences can play a critical role in stabilizing placements and supporting overall emotional healing.

Offer fair compensation and appreciation to reflect the value of high-quality care. In [New York](#), reimbursement rates for resource families were recently increased to align with rising childcare and essential services costs. [California](#) is implementing a new tiered rate structure that corresponds to the child's assessed level of need. For example, children with the highest needs may receive up to \$6,296 per month for care and supervision, along with additional funding for immediate needs and administrative support. Child protection agencies also should find other ways to express appreciation for resource families through celebration events, thank you cards, gifts, or an annual community gathering and awards ceremony.

“As a traditional or therapeutic foster parent, you are going to deal with a child's changing behaviors. Full disclosure of a child's trauma and experiences is important. Whether those behaviors manifest today, tomorrow, or next month, foster parents should be aware of and equipped to deal with those issues appropriately.”

—Genia Newkirk, Kinship Caregiver, North Carolina

¹ Content of this brief was informed through ongoing consultation with members of the Knowledge Management Lived Experience Advisory Board. This team includes youth, parents, kinship caregivers, and foster parents with lived experience of the child welfare system who serve as strategic partners with Family Voices United, a collaboration between FosterClub, Generations United, the Children's Trust Fund Alliance, and Casey Family Programs. Members who contributed to this brief include: Churmell Mitchell, Divina Cordeiro, Genia Newkirk, and Lisa Myles.

² The terms “resource caregivers” and “resource families” are used rather than “foster parents” and “foster families” to reflect their broader and more inclusive role. In addition to providing safe and loving family-based care, they also support reunification with the child's birth family, when appropriate. Whether relatives, fictive kin, or non-relatives, resource caregivers are instrumental in helping maintain a child's family connections and offering support to the child's biological family during the time of separation.

³ Content informed by a conversation with Mark Daley, Founder, The Foster Parent, on April 22, 2025.

⁴ Florida Intelligent Recruitment Project. (2017). [Segmented marketing and resource parent recruitment. Project overview and preliminary findings: August 2017.](#)

⁵ Interview with Brandon Warner, VP of Community Relations and Director of Permanency, Children's Community Programs of Connecticut, on June 5, 2024.

⁶ LaBrenz, C.A., Kim, J., Harris, M.S., Crutchfield, J., Choi, M., Robinson, E.D., Findley, E., Ryan, S.D. (2022). [Racial matching in foster care placements and subsequent placement stability: A national study.](#) *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 39, 583-594.

⁷ Ross, T., Gerber, L., & Pang, Y.C. (2019). [Home away from home: Lessons for building a one family, one home foster care system.](#) A final report to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

⁸ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2024). [Unlocking foster care licensing for more kinship caregivers. Family ties: Analysis from a state-by-state survey of kinship care policies.](#)

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