Key Drivers for Improving Diligent Recruitment and Retention Outcomes

We know that having a sufficient, diverse pool of foster, adoptive and kinship families will help:

- Provide placement stability by having appropriate placement options for a child's first placement in foster care;
- Keep sibling groups together;
- Be able to place children and youth near their own schools and communities;
- Provide permanency by having prospective adoptive and kinship families who can meet the needs of children and youth who are unable to return home.

Transformational change for children, families and child welfare agencies is achievable when foster parenting and kinship care is prioritized in policy and practice. Ten key drivers have been identified to promote better outcomes for children and families. Diligent Recruitment and Retention (DRR) Plans are most effective when they:

1. Are guided by data that tells us a story and informed by continuous quality improvement;
2. Demonstrate multi-level agency leadership;
3. Are child-centered
4. Incorporate youth and family voice;
5. Are based on collaboration and transparency with community partners
6. Are sustainable;
7. Focus on quality customer service and response system;
8. Include kinship, guardianship and post-adoption services;
9. Meet Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) requirements; and
10. Focus on developing and supporting families.

Ensuring these 10 key drivers are incorporated into your localized DRR plan will help you improve diligent recruitment and retention efforts within your community.   The key drivers are better defined below.

Our hope is for you to utilize this document within your agency and community to begin discussions on how to improve diligent recruitment and retention of foster, adoptive and kinship families. Use this tool to develop new and innovative strategies around DRR. We must focus on recruiting and retaining families who are willing and capable of meeting the needs of the children we serve in foster care.

Key Drivers for Improving DRR Outcomes

Key Driver: **DATA-DRIVEN**

Agencies can improve their recruitment and retention efforts through improved use of data-driven decision making. A data collection and analysis system will not only help agencies have enough trained and available families to meet changing needs, but also ensure that the best possible match between family and child occurs. Good matches promote placement stability, which benefits children's safety, permanency and well-being. Implementing more data-driven approaches can help agencies assess the effectiveness of different services along the continuum, including response to inquiries from prospective foster parents, orientation sessions, pre-service training, licensing and ongoing support. Data, such as from surveys or interviews, can also identify the reasons for losing foster families.

Key Driver: **LEADERSHIP WITHIN AND ACROSS AGENCIES**

Engaging child welfare managers and high-level staff within and across child- and family-serving agencies is critical to achieving and sustaining excellence in foster, adoptive and kinship family recruitment and retention. Consistent involvement of key staff with decision-making responsibility for programs, policy, data, contract management, budgeting, quality improvement and training is important to ensuring that foster parenting is an ongoing priority. Key staff should be included in the development, implementation and evaluation of recruitment and retention plans and programs. Agencies that have foster parent advisory boards should invite key staff from across the agency to participate in meetings.

Key Driver: **CHILD-CENTERED**

Recruitment and retention efforts will benefit from using a child-centered approach. Being child-centered means policies, programs and practices are focused on helping each individual child heal and grow. It is based on an understanding of trauma, healthy child development and that quality parenting is foundational to achieving positive outcomes for children. Therefore, foster parents and workers need the training, resources and support in child-centered practices that will drive better outcomes in children's health, development, education, and relationships. This includes facilitating relationships that focus on meeting the needs of children and families.

Key Driver: **COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES**

Foster families should be priority partners as they spend more time with children in care than do any other professional partners. Foster parents can play an important role in development of diligent recruitment plans and programs. Transparency with current and prospective foster parents means providing them with important child-specific information as well as information about agency policies, support services, permanency options and the like. Youth and families in child welfare regularly remind us, "Nothing about us without us." This sentiment captures the critical need to hear and be informed by the insights and perspectives of youth in foster care, birth parents, as well as foster, adoptive, and kinship families as we develop approaches for recruiting, developing, and supporting potential families. As professionals explore new strategies, data, and evidence-based practices, one of the best sources of information and expertise are the very people who live the foster care and foster parenting experience every day.

Key Driver: **COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

Effective and transparent partnerships are integral to successful foster parent recruitment, support and retention. Community partners, including faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, civic groups and private foster care and adoption agencies are trusted sources of support to birth, foster, kinship and adoptive families and share an interest in promoting strong families and communities. These organizations can assist with a range of activities, including outreach and referrals, information dissemination, translation, community benefits, public service announcements, foster family appreciation events, after-school and tutoring assistance for children, staff training, meeting or event space and more.

Key Driver: **SUSTAINABILITY**

With any new policy or initiative, maintaining support and focus can be challenging, especially in the face of changes in leadership, budget, priorities and needs. To be truly effective, a strong recruitment and retention program should be made a priority across the agency with an emphasis on sustainability. In addition to establishing foster parenting as an agency-wide priority, ongoing efforts should be made to build new and maintain existing strategic partnerships with community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, civic groups, schools, health care providers, and employers.

Key Driver: **QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE**

The customer service an agency provides is different from the services it delivers. An agency's services might include foster care and adoption, family reunification, and youth development, whereas customer service refers to the manner in which an agency provides its services and the way an agency treats people. Providing good customer service means underscoring respect, empathy, and caring as we relate to each other and the people we serve. When any agency moves beyond simply defining and emphasizing the importance of customer service to insuring that its customers experience consistency in the quality of services received, the agency earns trust and loyalty. What matters most in terms of recruitment and retention is how foster, adoptive, and kinship families perceive and experience the services provided. Reflecting on the needs of the internal and external customers, customers of child welfare agencies should feel respected, valued, heard, cared for, and supported to the greatest extent possible.

Key Driver: **KINSHIP / GUARDIANSHIP / POST-ADOPTION SERVICES**

When recruiting potential foster and adoptive parents, it is important to also remember kinship families in order to improve permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care. Our recruitment and retention efforts should be multi-faceted, and we must recognize that permanency efforts should begin when a child first enters care and continue post-finalization in order to minimize disruptions and dissolutions. When developing DRR plans, we must think about options and solutions for permanency that include the search for kin, to include family members on both sides of the family, as well as foster

and adoptive families with the ability to care and provide for the child and are willing to be involved in concurrent planning. Strategies should include a comprehensive search of the youth's current and past relationships to identify caring individuals willing and able to be adoptive parents or guardians of older teens. Families need to be educated about the availability of post-guardianship and post-adoptive services. These services are offered as a support to families, not just when they are in crisis. We must normalize these services with families and help remove the negative stigma that reaching out for help post-permanency equals failure.

Key Driver: **MULTI-ETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT (MEPA)**

The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) prohibits the delay or denial of any adoption or placement in foster care due to the race, color, or national origin of the child or the foster or adoptive parent and it prohibits the denial of any individual the opportunity to become an adoptive or a foster parent, on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the individual, or of the child involved. It also requires States to provide for diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom homes are needed.
Recruiting and retaining a pool of families who can meet the needs of children and youth in foster care requires recognizing the diverse backgrounds, characteristics, and needs of children and youth we serve, including race, ethnicity, sibling groups, special needs, primary language, and other factors.

Key Driver: **DEVELOP AND SUPPORT FAMILIES**

By meeting a family's needs, you increase their ability to address each child's unique needs, while also strengthening their relationship with your agency. The development and support of foster, adoptive and kinship families involves building and nurturing a relationship with families so that they continue to feel equipped to meet the needs of children and youth. Having a pool of well-prepared and supported families makes it possible for your agency to provide placement stability and permanency for children and youth in foster care. By actively and continually developing the foster, adoptive, and kinship families working with your agency, you can help ensure that you will have a pool of families who will be able to meet the needs of the children and youth they are parenting. Truly effective support is integrated into an agency's efforts to develop families from their first point of contact with the child welfare agency. Support for families can—and should—take many forms. As you directly engage with individual families, you have the opportunity to learn more about what each family needs to feel supported and to build a positive relationship with your agency. By building parents' skills and confidence, you not only help them feel supported, you also help ensure that your pool of families can meet the diverse and specific needs of children and youth in foster care.

Resources:

CHAMPS
A CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention:
STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM
www.fosteringchamps.org

National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids
Develop and Support Families
http://www.nrcdr.org/develop-and-support-families

Using Customer Service Concepts to ENHANCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRACTICES
http://www.nrcdr.org/_assets/files/using-customer-service-concepts-to-enhance-recuitment-and-retention-practices.pdf

Integrating Family Support from Inquiry Throughout Placement
file:///C:/Users/ebbaluyot/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/Y6C342E7/Integrating%20Family%20Support-web508_Final.pdf

Child Welfare Information Gateway
Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/diligentrecruitment.pdf