



# Recruitment and Retention of Relative, Kin and Resource Caregivers

## Introduction

*Entering and remaining in foster care is traumatic for children and can mean a series of ongoing losses – from their parents, grandparents and other relatives, friends, neighbors, resource parents and other people who have loved and cared for them. This trauma must be understood and addressed for children to have a sense of belonging and be open to connection. One way to reduce the impact of this trauma is to find and engage safe and stable relative and kin caregivers or resource parents able to help preserve children’s relationships. Child welfare agencies around the country, however, often struggle with recruiting and retaining relative and kin caregivers who have the knowledge and ability to meet the specific needs of children in foster care. Many agencies are looking for strategies to do proactive, diligent searches; enhance engagement; expedite licensing, and provide ongoing caregiver support and education to ensure that more and more children are placed with relatives and people with a previous connection to the child.*

Additionally, agencies are seeking to improve recruitment of therapeutic and regular resource parents who can meet the needs of children who do not have immediate options for kinship placements. Agencies often weigh the balance of taking the time to recruit an adequate number of qualified caregivers; properly train, prepare and support them; retain them, and simultaneously meet the needs for immediate placement for children in foster care.

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<sup>1</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2011). *Counting is not enough: Investing in qualitative case reviews for practice improvement in child welfare*. Retrieved from <http://www.cssp.org/publications/child-welfare/child-welfare-misc/Counting-is-Not-Enough-Investing-in-Qualitative-Case-Reviews-for-Practice-Improvement-in-Child-Welfare.pdf>

## CSF Services for Recruitment and Retention

CSF has been helping agencies improve the quality and quantity of relative and resource placements since 2001. Our recruitment and retention model emphasizes support, not only from the agency but the community, resource parents and the family support network. We specialize in helping agencies meet the full spectrum of recruitment and retention requirements. Whether you need a specific tool developed, the design of a full campaign, staff training or the analysis of policy and practice, CSF has the experience and capacity to help your agency meet its resource goals.



### Relative and Kin Caregivers

Approximately 30 percent of all children in foster care are placed with relatives<sup>2</sup>. Continued research affirms that children in foster care placed with relative and kin caregivers tend to experience higher rates of placement stability, are better adjusted, have more trauma-related support and consistency with connections.<sup>3</sup> These factors can significantly reduce the trauma experienced by the child and his or her family.<sup>4 5</sup>

Based on the positive outcomes associated with placing children with relative and kin caregivers, agencies are quickly adopting a “relative and kin first” approach to placement but often struggle with locating, engaging and supporting these families. Finding, licensing, approving and maintaining relative homes requires a different approach than traditional recruitment and retention. The history and continued relationship between relative and kin caregivers to the children, parents or guardians must be considered and supported. Staff must consider the unique needs of grandparents and aging kin. Workers also must address the likelihood of shared trauma experienced by relative and kin caregivers, as caregivers process their own grief and loss while simultaneously assuming primary caregiving responsibilities for one or more children. CSF helps agencies to understand and meet the unique needs of these populations.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, The AFCARS report (24th Ed.) United States. (2017). Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Winokur, M. H., Amy; Batchelder, Keri E (2014). "Kinship care for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children removed from the home for maltreatment." *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. 1, 2014.(1)

<sup>4</sup> Wu, Q., et al. (2015, 2015/10/01/). "Effects of kinship care on behavioral problems by child age: A propensity score analysis." *Children and Youth Services Review*. Retrieved Supplement C, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenthal, J. A. and R. L. Hegar (2016). "Kinship Guardianship, Adoption, and Foster Care: Outcomes from a U.S. National Sample." *Journal of Public Child Welfare* 10(3): 237-254.

### *Resource Parents*

Finding a stable pool of resource parents to meet the various special needs of children continues to be one of the most significant challenges reported by child welfare agencies. Agencies struggle with finding, training and retaining resource parents who don't always come to the role with reasonable expectations. In reality, a resource parent's duties extend far beyond providing a safe environment for the child. Resource parents are essential in helping children work through trauma and supporting various special needs. They share parenting responsibilities with the child's parents, coordinate services with them and provide ongoing family support. All these skills require a substantial level of training and support; however, some agencies find that their traditional pre-service programs are not enough to adequately prepare resource parents to work with children, families and the agency.

Another challenge is retaining resource parents. Resource parents commonly report feeling overwhelmed, under-supported and experiencing poor communication and information sharing with agencies. Some resource parents feel disengaged from, or even disrespected by agency case managers, supervisors and resource staff who misunderstand their essential role. Many resource parents indicate a lack of opportunity for ongoing training and skill development to care for special needs of children. Such challenges highlight the need to improve teaming, communication and coordination with resource parents and to enhance training and support for resource parents.

### **Leadership Support**

Building a child welfare system that maintains and strengthens families is a key focus for child welfare agencies. Leaders who believe that children do better when cared for by their own families or adults close to them must take extra measures to ensure this happens in practice. These leaders strive to ensure that birth families remain together when safe and possible. When this is not possible, they prioritize placement with relative and kin caregivers, and then with non-related resource parents who support these relationships. These core values must be continually reinforced through practice model development; policy; contracts; data collection and analysis; financing; personnel decisions and individual case consultations. The values must also be shared within the broader community or jurisdiction; members of the legislature and judiciary must be aligned along with advocates and community members. CSF helps leadership teams agree upon a common set of values and determine the most appropriate next steps to operationalize them in practice and in the broader community.

### *Data-Driven Recruitment Planning*

CSF believes that successful recruitment initiatives are based on historical recruitment and retention data, the needs of children in foster care, available agency resources and the receptivity factors of target populations. By collecting and analyzing this data, agencies can better recruit and retain relative, kin and resource caregivers who can meet the unique needs of all children in care and support their families. CSF helps agencies use data to guide recruitment planning towards better matching, stability, quality of care and long-term family health. To this end, CSF offers a thorough recruitment preparation analysis, which includes:

- history of past and present permanency goals for children; neighborhood geo-mapping for the locations from where children were originally removed
- current and historical distribution of children in various placement settings (kinship, therapeutic, general foster homes, group homes, pre-adoptive, etc.)
- average need for foster home placements (respite, therapeutic, kinship, general, etc.)
- analysis of number and reasons for placement changes
- analysis of exposure to complex trauma
- analysis of children and teenagers with various special needs (medical, behavioral, intellectual and emotional)
- current and past success of placing various sibling groups (based on number of siblings and ages of children)
- current and previous success in placing and working with children with situational needs (infants, pregnant teens, etc.)
- current and past skills of resource families and agency staff supporting trauma (expertise and experience, services, training, practices)
- current and past skills of resource families working with staff and the agency
- agency structure and practices working with, supporting and retaining relative, kin and resource caregivers

## Recruitment and Outreach

### *Meaningful Community Education*

Educating the general public about the needs of children in foster care and the vital role relative, kin and resource caregivers play is key to garnering positive community support and is the foundation for successful recruitment. CSF believes that a good community education initiative is designed to raise awareness about the specific ways businesses, neighbors, service providers and community institutions can better support children and agencies involved in the child welfare system. To do this, CSF works with agencies to increase their network of relationships, improve messages, identify delivery outlets, events and interactive experiences to educate and engage communities.

### *Strategic Media Campaigns*

The CSF Strategic Recruitment™ methodology uses marketing data to analyze various attributes about the people living and working in communities or jurisdictions. We use this data to help build effective community education campaigns, public media events, and broadcast media that have the greatest, long-lasting effect. Using Strategic Recruitment™, agencies are better able to:

- tailor language to appeal to the motivations of target audiences
- use graphics to appeal to the interests of people living in a community
- build outreach tools that are most likely to be used and are of interest to specific populations
- choose where and how to place outreach tools to get the most attention and interest
- plan logistics of public recruitment events
- use data to choose the event venues that will attract the right audiences

- establish and maintain long-term community partner relationships and networks
- select the media outlets and communication tools used and trusted in certain communities;
- work with and gain the long-term support of media partners

### *Effective Relative Search and Engagement*

When children are placed with relatives and people with whom they have a strong and previous connection, they and their families experience less trauma and better outcomes. CSF helps agencies improve search and engagement for family members and individuals with a previous connection to the child by focusing on exhaustive diligent searches, mining available data, identifying and locating key individuals and successfully engaging them in a way that increases relative placements and maintains connections for the child.

**Relative Search:** Many agencies struggle with identifying related individuals and locating and contacting them. CSF partners with agencies to build the capabilities of the case managers, supervisors and leaders to promote and improve relative search processes. We help develop and promote ongoing and exhaustive relative search practices to uncover accurate location and contact information of family members and important people in the child's life. Some of these practices include:

- utilizing strategies that proactively locate and collect current contact information of involved and uninvolved parents and caregivers
- conducting comprehensive case file reviews and diligent searches to identify all known family members and other significant adults in the child's life throughout the life of a case
- teaming with parents, children and case team members to identify family, friends and other members of their formal and informal support network
- streamlining and organizing information about relatives and connections so that it can be easily accessed and used

CSF helps agencies identify and access federal and state resources that contain the most current and accurate information on the whereabouts of persons living in the U.S. As experts in child support and child welfare, CSF staff are uniquely qualified to help child welfare and child support programs integrate efforts, assisting child welfare agencies to access extensive child support location resources. CSF staff understand the federal guidance regarding how child welfare agencies may request locate information from federal and state child support agencies, and the rules and regulations governing the use of this data. We do this by helping the agency to establish a mechanism to request "locate only" services from state and federal child support locate databases. These databases contain information from all states and territories (including child support cases, employment and unemployment information, and data from departments of motor vehicles, corrections, and utilities companies), and information from federal resources, such as the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration, the Department of Defense, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Veterans Affairs, among others. These location services are valuable resources to find family members who could be possible placements for children in care. CSF staff also help agencies to develop the

necessary interagency agreements between child support and child welfare programs, develop needed policy and procedures, and understand the safeguarding requirements that apply to accessing federal and state databases when searching for family members. In this way, CSF provides the tools for child welfare case managers to partner with child support programs to help locate family members, better mine case records, make better decisions to pursue or not pursue child support and ensure needed financial support for grandparents and other relative and kin caregivers.

**Family Engagement:** The process of engaging potential relative and kin caregivers can be difficult. Ambivalence or concerns within the courts or agency about involving members of the family or community can impede the ability to recruit relative or kin caregivers. In some instances, case managers may lack the knowledge or skills to effectively engage relatives or kin who may have been previously distant or uninvolved, and thus miss the opportunity for these advantageous placements.

CSF helps agencies develop clear guidelines for engaging relatives and build the capabilities of case managers, supervisors and resource staff to consistently reach out and engage family members once they have been identified. We help agencies ensure that case managers regularly ask family members for help in identifying family and kin who can provide placement and support. We train and enable case managers to discuss the range of support that may be needed, explain the child's needs, outline the purpose of family involvement, clarify boundaries and outline the family's legal options and associated support. Please see our White Paper on [CSF Workforce Development and Coaching](#) for a full description of our comprehensive staff development, training and coaching options.

### *Targeted Recruitment*

Resource parents who come to the agency with a foundation of skill and experience are more likely to be successful and provide safe, stable placements. By targeting recruitment to populations that are likely to have the effective skills, experiences, and characteristics for supporting the unique needs of children in foster care, agencies are more likely to build a more flexible and qualified pool of resource homes. Whether recruiting for respite, therapeutic or general resource homes, targeted recruitment increases your effectiveness and efficiency of finding successful placements. To this end, CSF helps agencies:

- develop strategies that target individuals with skills or pre-requirements for therapeutic licensing
- use data to guide recruitment of families with specific skills, experiences, and attributes that best meet the regular and unique needs of children in non-therapeutic care
- develop and produce tools, materials, and events that target desired families within particular geographic areas

## Preparation and Approval

### *Pre-Service Training and Preparation*

Pre-service training sets expectations and provides essential information to help resource parents care for children in foster care. Relative and kin caregivers who are often in a situation of caring for children prior to licensing or approval may have different training and preparation needs than families who are first licensed before children come into their home. Because of this, CSF helps agencies tailor training and preparation tools to the needs of caregivers.

Research has shown that classroom training alone does not provide enough context or practice for relative, kin and resource parents to adequately care for foster children. To fully prepare families to care for children, an agency must supply additional training and coaching options that help develop skills over time. Because of this, CSF believes in enhancing pre-service training with tools and learning opportunities that allow relative, kin and resource caregivers to better absorb lessons, practice concrete skills, gain experience and contextualize information. Services provided include:

- analyzing, designing or evaluating the effectiveness of current and past pre-service training content and delivery
- helping agencies design pre-service training tailored to the needs of relative, kin and resource caregivers
- helping agencies design out-of-classroom training options, such as support groups, online training, simulation modules, mentoring, shadowing and coaching
- helping agencies create training support services (such as providing childcare, choosing the training location, and addressing transportation barriers) that may be needed to ensure relative and kin caregivers are able to participate

Additionally, CSF helps agencies create training opportunities that meet federal IV-E requirements and address the specialized needs of relative and kin caregivers. This means partnering with identified trainers or agency employees to:

- increase flexibility in times, modalities and locations of trainings
- streamline existing curricula
- adjust training hours
- ensure that the training format and content address the grief and loss that relatives may be experiencing, and the impact of trauma on children
- provide full disclosure related to the legal options available to relative and kin caregivers and the type of support available to them
- create a mechanism to address unique issues that these families may be experiencing

### *Streamlining Licensing and Approval*

Home studies, background checks and vetting of resource families are essential for assuring the physical and emotional safety of children in foster care. However, agencies waste money and staff time when they lose a qualified relative, kin and resource caregivers because of delays in the licensing or approval processes. CSF helps agencies analyze existing licensing and approval processes to

determine areas that could be streamlined, improved, adjusted or restructured to be more efficient and effective. We help agencies:

- design specific licensing and approval processes for relative and kin caregivers, respite, therapeutic and other types of resource parents
- recommend restructuring that may be needed to compensate for more children being placed with relative and kin caregivers
- collect data to help identify the existence of gaps, inefficiencies and ineffective practices in licensing or approval processes
- review and revise policies as needed
- design tools, guides, training, and resources to help increase active engagement, teaming and practices around licensing and approval of relative, kin and resource caregivers

CSF helps agencies safely streamline the process of approval for immediate or expedited relative placements so that the children avoid disruptions while the family completes the requirements for full approval or licensure. Our emphasis is on making sure agencies can provide assistance to relative and kin caregivers to complete necessary paperwork, obtain items that are required for approval, make home modifications and secure any needed financial support. Our experienced consultants help agencies adjust policy and protocol to ensure that non-safety related waivers are approved timely.

## Retention

### *Ongoing Training and Development*

As relative, kin and resource caregivers gain experience with children, they require continuous training and support. Relative, kin and resource families most often request subject-specific training that builds skills and strategies to heal trauma and improve care for children with various special needs; however, agencies don't always have the time or staff to provide these resources. CSF can help you develop a set of training, coaching and mentoring opportunities that broaden the experience and abilities of out-of-home caregivers. Some of these services include:

- organizing support groups and informational sessions for relative and kin caregivers
- assessing current ongoing training and development opportunities and offering recommendations for improvement
- providing subject-specific, in person or online training and workshops
- creating practice simulations, coaching and mentoring opportunities
- developing learning tools, guides, videos, and references that can be used at any time or location
- providing discussion forums, online coaching, and interactive tools which allow for questions to be asked at the time information is most needed
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### *Improving Participation and Representation*

Although agencies often understand that it is beneficial to include relative, kin and resource caregivers in program development and overall case management, they can sometimes struggle with effective teaming practices that elicit productive participation. CSF works with agencies to improve engagement and interaction with resource parents that strengthens child and family teams, increases communication and promotes the types of positive relationships that are vital for children and families to succeed.

To do this, CSF gathers and analyzes data about your internal and external teaming and communication and identifies strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement. We use this data to help build tools, strategies, training, and services that improve communication and coordination among staff, families and various caregivers of children in foster care. Some of these include:

- developing clear expectations for a child and family teaming process and shared parenting;
- building the capabilities needed to implement a child and family teaming process and shared parenting;
- creating training, coaching, simulations, and workshops that enhance interagency teaming;
- facilitating placement or resource unit coordination or restructuring;
- offering private provider contract analysis, and improvement;
- developing clear expectations for relative and kin caregivers and resource parent participation in program development and agency improvement efforts; and

### *Effective Support and Retention*

Nationwide, satisfaction surveys make it clear that retention of caregivers is linked to ongoing agency support, consistent appreciation and demonstrated respect for the vital role relative, kin and resource caregivers play in the lives of children and families. While many agencies demonstrate appreciation through dinners and other public events, resource parents and relatives are more likely to feel valued when they experience integrated policy and practices that demonstrate ongoing respect and recognition of their needs as caregivers.

CSF helps agencies conduct and analyze resource parent surveys, staff surveys, exit interviews and practice and outcome data to identify service or training gaps and areas for improvement. We then help determine tools, resources, and training to improve long-term retention such as:

- services and supports tailored to the specific needs of kinship, respite, therapeutic and general resource parents
- practices which improve agency response and teaming
- grief, trauma and separation support
- mentoring programs
- relative and kin caregiver and resource parent support groups
- staff customer service training and workshops
- community partner network enhancement

## Summary

Finding and retaining relative, kin and resource caregivers who can meet the needs of children in care, helps reduce and heal trauma, build resiliency and support the permanency goals of children and families are essential tasks of child welfare agencies. We strongly believe that providing them the engagement, satisfaction and skill development are essential to meeting children's needs and helping families succeed. Our dedicated and experienced staff is committed to helping agencies increase the number of children placed with relatives and kin, and to recruit and retain resource parents who are able to best meet the needs of children and families.