



DEPARTMENT OF
**PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

Child and Family Services Division
Foster and Adoptive Parent
Diligent Recruitment Plan
CFSP 2025-2029: Updated June 2024



GENERAL INFORMATION

Montana’s contact for the 2025 – 2029 Child and Family Services Report (CFSP) and subsequent Annual Progress and Service Report (APSR) is:

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The final document is formatted so it is accessible to individuals with visual impairments per Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

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FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLAN

Currently, foster homes are provided for approximately 2200 children in out-of-home care in Montana. Nearly one-half of the children in out-of-home placement are five years old or younger, and approximately 31% of the children in care are Native American. Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) uses a variety of strategies to diligently recruit and retain kin and members of the community to provide care for children in our system.

The Licensing Bureau (LB) team (formerly known as the statewide Licensing Workgroup) will continue its work over the next five years. The group consists of five Resource Family Specialist Supervisors (RFSS), the Foster Care Licensing Bureau Chief (LB Chief), and Resource Family Specialists (RFS). The LB team will also continue collaboration with staff from the adoption and guardianship programs.

Families will continue to pursue licensure for foster care through CFSD, local Tribal Social Service agencies or licensed child-placing agencies. Families can pursue adoptive approval through CFSD, some Tribal Social Service agencies and licensed adoption agencies. CFSD has listings for adoption agencies on their adoption web page. Information about licensed child-placing agencies will be added to the CFSD foster care web page.

There is no cost in Montana to pursue foster care licensing through CFSD or through a Child Placing Agency (CPA).

CFSD has the capacity to access interpreters to deal with any linguistic barriers that occur when dealing with resource providers.

Kinship Caregivers

CFSD continues to consider placement with kin a high priority. CFSD will continue to use Family Engagement Meetings (FEM), as well as Seneca Searches and other available search tools/resources (i.e. Connect Our Kids through Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK)), to identify and recruit kin during the lifetime of a case for connection, placement, and permanency.

RFSs will continue contacting kinship providers within 72 hours of placement to provide support, resources, and introduction to licensing. RFSs will continue to maintain all kinship homes on their caseload, regardless of licensure status, to ensure ongoing support. This timely contact process is designed to engage kinship families and identify needs for supports and resources, in addition to those identified by placing workers. Having an RFS assigned to all kin placement providers is expected to decrease timelines to licensure, permanency, and the possibility of disruption by identifying needed supports and services during the lifetime of a placement.

CFSD will continue to use its current licensing and approval process for kinship families, which includes assessment and approval for foster care, guardianship, and adoption at the time of initial approval of the family. This creates greater efficiencies in the placement and case management process and minimizes delays related to updating studies or requesting additional approvals if adoption or guardianship is necessary. While the emphasis remains on reunification, if possible, maintaining an efficient process for concurrent planning and placement, benefits children, and families.

CFSD will assess the viability and necessity of changes to the current kinship licensing rules specific to the changes made in federal rules by the Office of Administration for Children and Families Children's Bureau (CB). The LB leadership team will continue the ongoing review of practices, procedures and forms, including those specific to kinship licensing to assess efficiency and effectiveness and the need for any modification. The review process has been initiated and will continue over this five-year period. The review and development process are being completed by members of the RFS staff and will include input from other stakeholders such as the Connected Voices for Montana Kids (CVMK) board.

The Montana Kinship Navigator Program (MKNP) will continue to be a resource for kinship families, regardless of their licensure status. The RFSs will continue to ensure all kinship caregivers receive information regarding the MKNP. RFS staff have recently begun a review of an 'initial placement folder' provided to families (including kin) at the time of placement to ensure the most current resource information is included. The 'initial placement folder' includes information that informs and shares updates with resource families and stakeholders (CPA, WWK, etc.) about MKNP, as well as the services and resources it provides. Members of the LB leadership team will continue to attend the MKNP advisory board meetings, which provides access to the most current information from the MKNP. These meetings also provide an opportunity for CFSD to share information regarding the kinship licensing process, as well as their support to the MKNP, providers, and other stakeholders who engage with kin through their programs and services.

CFSD will continue to provide kinship families access to fire safety equipment (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers and CO2 detectors) when families have difficulty obtaining these items, which would otherwise be a barrier to placement or licensing.

CFSD will also continue to pay the cost of water testing if the costs are a barrier to families being approved for licensure. This process is another way of decreasing timelines to licensure and ensuring safety of youth and families, which can impact timelines to permanency.

CFSD will continue the use of provisional licensing approvals when financial burdens occur because of kinship placement. Provisional licensing allows for payment of a full foster care payment when the background and home safety assessments have been completed but is issued prior to a home study being completed and the family being approved for full licensure. CFSD will continue the use of non-agency providers to assist in the timely completion of studies to approve kin families for full licensure. Non-agency providers supplement the work of the RFS by assisting in the completion of kinship studies, which decreases timelines to licensure and timelines to permanency. CFSD will continue the practice of considering exceptions to certain non-safety licensing standards, including training, and sleeping arrangements. Those exceptions are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

CFSD will continue to identify training for both staff and families, as well as resource opportunities through engagement with the Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network.

CFSD will also continue to maintain connections with programs such as Child Bridge, Promise 686, and other faith-based and community agencies that aid all families, including kinship families, in meeting needs for hard goods, home modifications or services that are barriers to placement or licensure. Some of those same programs also provide ongoing support to families through support groups and training opportunities (free of charge).

Bridging the Gap Between CFSD and Resource Families

CFSD will continue engagement with the CVMK board through regular interaction by the LB Chief, through attendance at monthly calls and in-person meetings and members of the board participating in State Advisory Council (SAC) meetings. The CVMK Board will continue to provide input regarding training, procedures, and processes to the agency, specifically the licensing bureau. The CVMK board will continue to have public comment periods at their quarterly in-person meetings and make ongoing use of surveys to identify needs, concerns, and suggestions of the resource families in Montana. The board will also continue to seek membership from those who are outside of the current member demographic (foster parents and birth parent). The CVMK board will continue to use the CFSD Listserv, as well as their social media pages and in person meetings, as a mechanism to communicate with resource families. The board will also consider ongoing opportunities to have a visible presence at community events (Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect Conference (CAN), etc.) to increase awareness and engagement by other resource providers.

CFSD will continue to use the Foster Care List Serve (Listserv) to provide information to resource families across the state. Families are added to the Listserv by referral from their RFS or as families make a request through the system. The information shared on the Listserv is derived not only from CFSD but from local, state, and national entities who provide training, resources and supports to resource families. There are currently 1291 addresses on the Listserv. CFSD has a ninety-seven percent delivery rate, and the average opening of emails has ranged from thirty to forty-eight percent, depending on the topic. CFSD will evaluate ways to increase the percentages of emails that are opened through Listserv as the current rate is near or exceeding national rates for bulk mail. Responses from information delivered through the Listserv come to individual staff, regional offices, and stakeholders through resource family participation or engagement in their activities. There is currently not a means to determine the participation rate based on information obtained through the Listserv.

RFS staff will continue the practice of 6-month check-ins, following initial licensing for all resource families. The LB leadership team will review and recommend updates to check-in guides, based on input from staff, providers, and the case review process. This information will assist with facilitating engagement and support of resource families at the check-ins. The goal of the check-in process is to assess how providers are doing, elicit information regarding needs and concerns, and assess ongoing compliance with licensing and placement standards. This includes assessing how families are doing with completing training, as well as making recommendations for ongoing training and education, or supports to meet a family's needs.

CFSD will continue to review the ongoing use and distribution of resources made available to families in all phases of foster care licensing and foster care. The Resource Parent Handbook (currently in latest revision), the foster parent inquiry and background check pamphlets, and the guide to guardianship are available online, as well as in hard copy (when requested) and are available to the field offices for distribution at Tribal and local community events and FEMs. The guides and pamphlets provide families with information on all phases of the experience families may have, including information about foster care, adoption, and guardianship. Review and recommendations for updates of these materials will be completed

using input from RFS and resource families, including the CVMK Board.

CFSD will continue enhancement of the CFSD web pages that provide information to inquiring and current resource families. Regular review and updates will continue to be made as identified through internal review, input from providers, and other stakeholders. The development and changes are limited due to staff capacity, as well as the capacity of the system itself.

CFSD recently changed from using a link through the AdoptUSKids platform to a revised internal inquiry link <https://dphhs.mt.gov/CFSD/Fosterparent/index> for families inquiring about foster care, which can be accessed via the website. Families can also inquire to obtain information about adopting from foster care. The link directs families to an inquiry form, which is sent directly to the field. CFSD also maintains its 1-866 number for inquiring families.

Statewide CFSD will continue to use multiple styles of media presentations for foster parent recruitment and retention in specific months of April (Child Abuse and Neglect Month), May (Foster Parent Month) and November (Adoption Month), while continuing general recruitment and retention messaging during the remainder of the year. Articles and interviews in local newspapers, on the radio, through podcasts and on social media will feature foster and adoptive families who share their experiences caring for our children, along with RFS and Child Protection Specialist staff.

CFSD will continue to collaborate on recruitment and retention efforts with other community stakeholders through events co-sponsored by programs such as Wendy's Wonderful Kids, Child Bridge, Missoula Alliance Church, CASA, Promise 686, Child Placing Agencies and the various foster parent support groups across the state, to increase awareness about the need for resource families and the opportunity to support those foster families in their communities.

CFSD will continue the use of its #FosterMT tag line and a Quick Response (QR) code system to make inquiring about foster care easier to access and flexible because the QR code can be scanned and accessed at a time convenient to families. The QR code can be used in both print and digital resources increasing access as well. Staff use postcards and flyers with the QR code at events, in mailings and by posting in local offices and buildings.

LB leadership team will complete ongoing assessments of the recruitment efforts and the viability of various recruitment mechanisms (television, radio, social media, print) and their effectiveness. The Center for Diligent recruitment has indicated a willingness to work with CFSD on their process and that opportunity will be explored. The LB leadership team will continue to participate in the Peer-to-Peer Diligent Recruitment group run through AdoptUsKids. The completion of CFSD Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) will create greater opportunity for data gathering regarding the reason for individual inquiries, data regarding the children in care, and other information that will be beneficial in developing ongoing recruitment plans.

RFS staff will continue to practice engaging all individuals directly, who are inquiring about foster care. It is the hope that this practice will increase the number of individuals moving from inquiry to application, as well as help families self-select out of the process if foster care is not the right option for them. RFS staff will continue to encourage families to complete the National Training and Development Center (NTDC) self-assessment to gain understanding of their strengths and needs regarding being a foster parent. The self-assessment is also available on the website for families who are not ready to initiate inquiry, as well as for families who are already licensed and want to gauge their current skillset.

CFSD will continue to focus on ways to enhance recruitment of families who can serve Native American youth, LGBTQIA2S+ youth, children with serious emotional disturbances, and those previously directed to congregate care. CFSD will continue the use of the NTDC self-assessment tool and Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) compatibility guide for inquiring and currently licensed families to help them self-assess their capacity to provide foster care, as well as meet the needs of these specific children.

CFSD will begin the process to determine how to establish Designated Placements, which ensures that providers will commit to establishing an environment that supports the child's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Trans, Queer and Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or Agender, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) status or identity. This also includes that providers will be trained with the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child related to the child's self-identified sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and that providers will help facilitate the child's access to age or developmentally appropriate resources, services, and activities that support their health and well-being.

CFSD will continue to use the comprehensive request for criminal background checks that allows for the use of results for emergency placement with kinship providers, as well as approval for foster care and guardianship/adoption for kin and foster care and adoption for non-relative caregivers. CFSD will continue the use of livescan and card scan machines to

increase timeliness for receipt of background checks, which can further improve timeliness to licensure. CFSD will complete ongoing assessment of the location of card scan machines to identify areas that would be best served by those machines (areas with high rates of hand/ink printed cards). There is currently a recommendation to move a machine from region II to region I to create greater efficiencies in the fingerprint process and decrease timelines to approval in region I.

CFSD will continue the contract with two licensed child placing agencies to assist CFSD in completing non-relative home studies to decrease timelines to licensure and increase the number of non-relative placement options available. This process allows for CPA to complete SAFE studies used by CFSD for non-kinship families while CFSD maintains responsibility for the family for licensure and placement. Efforts to streamline and better manage the process through more targeted communication and tracking will be enhanced to eliminate barriers to continuing the process and completion of studies. The increase in the number of non-relative homes supports the need for placement of children who have no available kin options and increases potential permanency options and potentially decreases disruptions.

CFSD will continue collaboration with the CPA to allow permanency for children who are placed with therapeutically licensed families. Regular contact will continue between LB staff and CPA staff. LB staff will continue to collaborate with CPA to provide the adoption and guardianship assessment process for the one CPA who is not also licensed as an adoption agency. This allows children, when appropriate, to remain with therapeutically trained and supported families to achieve permanency.

CFSD will continue the process that allows CFSD licensed kinship resource families to apply to become licensed for the placement of non-relative children, using the SAFE update process. This also includes for CFSD and CPA licensed families to transfer licenses between programs, using the same SAFE update process. This ability to transfer within CPA and CFSD programs is based on ensuring that families have the level of support necessary to maintain a child in their home. This ability to move to a higher level of care while not having to move from their foster home, decreases the possibility of disruption, which in turn decreases timelines to permanency.

Serving Vulnerable Youth

CFSD will continue to identify resources and educational opportunities for families caring for or considering caring for Native American youth and youth in the LGBTQIA2S+ community, as well as those with serious emotional needs. CFSD will present a lunch and learn training on parenting LGBTQIA2S+ youth (July 2024) and Indigenous Cultural competency (October 2024).

CFSD will begin to determine the process necessary to create procedures and practices to establish Designated placements, which ensures that providers will commit to establishing an environment that supports the child's LGBTQIA2S+ status or identity. In addition, providers will be trained with the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child, related to the child's self-identified sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, and that the provider must help facilitate the child's access to age or developmentally appropriate resources, services, and activities that support their health and well-being.

LB staff will continue to engage with Tribal Social Service agencies, as well as members of the Urban Indian communities (such as the Urban Indian Health programs in 4 of the 6 regions in Montana), to identify placement resources for Native American youth in care. The ongoing efforts will ensure regular and specific contact with Tribal licensing staff through individual visits to Tribal social services agencies by LB staff. LB staff in region III (South Central Montana) and in region V (Western Montana) will continue to have regular contact with members of the ICWA court staff in those areas.

RFS staff will continue to collaborate with Tribal licensing staff on approvals for resource families for adoption and guardianship when Tribal programs do not have the ability to do so (due to Tribal codes or policies). RFS staff will also continue to collaborate with the IV-E unit staff to provide technical assistance to Tribal staff on the Montana Family Safety Information System (MFSIS) and Child Adult Protective System (CAPS) and will do the same when the new CCWIS system is developed.

RFS staff will support the development of training specific to meeting the need for cultural connections and understanding of Native American youth placed in non-native homes, while continuing to work to increase the likelihood children are placed in Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) compliant homes. Because ICWA compliance includes placement with kin (whether they are Tribal members or not) the work to identify kin resources will also support the goal of meeting these standards. Cultural competency training will continue to be included in the required online curriculum, Keeping Children Safe (KCS CORE) that all families complete in their first year of licensure. CFSD will continue to provide training opportunities and identify supports and resources for families parenting youth from these communities.

CFSD will continue to use media programs to circulate information about waiting children statewide (and nationally when appropriate) to increase awareness of the need for permanency and adoption for children when traditional approaches are not adequate. These programs include: A Waiting Child, a monthly television segment featured through local news; the AdoptUSKids Website; WWK and Child Bridge. These programs continue to heighten public awareness of the need for families for children who are older and those who have greater special needs.

CFSD will also maintain the review of the children in care for 12 months or longer in each region. This review identifies barriers to permanency and provides an opportunity to identify potential permanency planning opportunities. The review process is facilitated by RFSS in quarterly timeframes. The LB chief will also continue quarterly meetings with the Permanency Planning Specialists and Child Welfare Manager (CWM)s to review children with no identified permanency option and review follow-up options regarding referrals to programs focused on recruiting permanency options (Child Bridge, WWK, Adopt US Kids).

The LB chief will also continue quarterly meetings with WWK national teams and Child Bridge staff to review current children on their referral caseload, as well as discuss challenges or concerns regarding referrals and communication and efforts toward permanency.

Provider Training

CFSD will maintain their current training process for kinship and non-relative caregivers, using the new/revised curriculum. Families complete an eight hour in-person training (KCS) and finish with 10 hours of online training (CORE) required to be completed in the first year. CFSD recently completed revisions to the pre-service/initial training for all resource families applying for licensure. The training focuses on creating a stable and safe home environment, providing trauma-informed care, using foster care as a support to families, and the emphasizing the importance of the priority of reunification, permanency planning and communication. Training will continue to be provided virtually or can be provided in a hybrid format. The training is provided twice a month on varying days and has the opportunity for additional scheduling to meet the needs of families who have applied, or those kinship with placements.

The CORE training will continue to be housed on the University of Montana (UM) Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development (the Center) website. RFS staff collaborated with the Center to create the CORE training for families and members of the CVMK board, who have also provided input and recommendations regarding the training format and topics. The opportunity to provide input regarding initial and ongoing training will continue to be made available to CVMK board members. CFSD will assess the impact of this training through surveys of participants to determine any necessary updates or modifications.

CFSD will continue the use of lunch and learn training (initiated this past year) (facilitated by the RFS staff across the state) for resource families. The recommendation to begin ongoing training offered by CFSD was the result of information received from the CVMK Survey regarding training needs and the challenge of family's completing required training hours (as identified by LB leadership). The training will be held virtually and in hybrid format, depending on the presenter and the information. The subject of training will continue to be derived from the input of resource families, staff, and other stakeholders, including youth with lived experience, and based on changes to state or federal rules or policies. CFSD will develop surveys for those completing trainings to assist in determining the benefit of the training to families, as well as information as to additional training topics requested by families. Ensuring families have adequate skillsets to meet the needs of children is expected to increase safety, decrease disruption, and decrease timelines and barriers to permanency (including reunification).

CFSD will also continue efforts to identify other training opportunities for resource families and identify new or creative ways to share the information about the availability of the training beyond the current use of the Listserv and email notices directly from staff. Two regions are developing newsletters to use in engaging and informing resource families. Staff will assess the response to the newsletters and use that information to consider expanding to other regions.

Training for RFS Staff

CFSD will review the current onboarding and training received by RFS staff to support development of training opportunities for RFS staff that will serve to enhance their skills and abilities. A calendar of ongoing staff training has been developed for the upcoming year to ensure staff comprehension of agency procedures and practices, as well as increased skill in working with resource families and providing ongoing support to families. Future training will be developed based on staff surveys and other information made available through monthly meetings with the entire RFS staff, regional meetings with staff, and individual meetings with staff and supervisors. RFS staff will continue to attend advanced practice training through CFSD, when appropriate and available.

Staff will also continue to be trained under the NTDC "Train the Trainer" program for those entities using the NTDC curriculum, to enhance the skills required for training resource families and other stakeholders. Staff will also continue to attend SAFE home study initial training and refresher training, when necessary, that develops the skills necessary to assess families for licensure.

CFSD will also consider the possibility of RFS obtaining additional training through the National Center for Enhanced Post-Adoption Support, to develop and implement culturally responsive, comprehensive, and accessible services to related and unrelated adoptive and guardianship families.