

NC DEPARTMENT OF **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of Social Services
Child Welfare Services

North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan 2025-2029

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1 Overview

North Carolina is a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system with partially privatized foster home licensing and adoption services. Prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families can be licensed by either a county child welfare agency, a licensed child-placing agency, or a licensed adoption agency. This variation in service provision across the state provides a wide variety of localized licensure and approval options for families. North Carolina does not have a dual foster care/adoption licensure process. For the purposes of this Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan, the term “county child welfare agency” includes county departments of social services and consolidated human services agencies.

Because North Carolina is a diverse state, county child welfare agencies may have very specific needs around diligent recruitment and retention. To that end, this plan provides concrete targets for statewide achievement, consistency, and structure, while also allowing for localized planning for diligent recruitment and retention efforts within each county child welfare agency, in partnership with their private child-placing agency partners. Localized plans are data-driven and designed to meet the unique needs of the community in each county.

This plan was developed in partnership with the following stakeholders:

- Capacity Building Center for States
- County Child Welfare Agencies
- Private Child-Placing Agencies
- Foster Family Alliance of NC
- Legal Partners (Guardian ad Litem and Judicial Representation)
- NC DSS Permanency Design Team
- Child Welfare Family Advisory Council
- Community-Based Agency Leaders

1.1 North Carolina’s Commitment

North Carolina is committed to having a process for and is committed to ensuring that children who cannot remain safely at home are placed within their community with fit and willing relatives. When placement with relatives or fictive kin is not feasible, the state is committed to maintaining a pool of foster and adoptive families that reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the children in foster care.

1.2 Values for Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan

The North Carolina child welfare system has the following core values regarding diligent recruitment and retention of foster, adoptive, and kinship families:

- We value all prospective, current, and former foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

- We value the belief that retention of foster, adoptive, and kinship families involves a customer service framework that brings families from prospect to agency partner.
- We value all kinship caregivers and encourage the licensure of kinship homes using licensure waivers, when appropriate.
- We value opportunities for support, engagement, and training of foster, adoptive, and kinship families.
- We value strengthening the Kin-First culture, so it is entrenched in practice.
- We value strengthening the partnership between the state-level organization (i.e., the NC Division of Social Services) and local level public and private partners.
- We value the partnership of stakeholders with lived experience in the decision-making process.
- We value the use of data to inform diligent recruitment and retention of foster, adoptive, and kinship families that reflect the children and youth in care.

2 Structure of Recruitment and Retention Activities

2.1 Roles and Responsibilities of the NC Division of Social Services

The NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) provides state-level diligent recruitment and retention activities for county child welfare agencies and private child-placing agencies, including but not limited to data collection and dissemination to inform recruitment and retention activities, regional meetings, and webinars as well as ongoing technical assistance, resources, and support to county and private agencies regarding their specific diligent recruitment and retention efforts.

2.2 Foster Family Alliance

NC DSS contracts with Foster Family Alliance (FFA), a family-led nonprofit organization supporting children and youth in foster care and the dedicated families and professionals that care for them. The purpose of the contract is to build an organization that recruits, trains, and sustains resource families who serve children, youth, and their families receiving foster care, adoption, or kinship services. FFA is responsible for business development and communication, foster parent recruitment and retention, foster parent training, and tangible supports.

2.2.1 NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network (NC Kids)

NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network (NC Kids) is North Carolina's statewide diligent recruitment entity and Adoption Information and Exchange Program. The use of the exchange ensures there is a timely search for prospective foster and adoptive parents for a child who cannot be placed with a relative and requires a permanent resource. NC Kids manages the following:

- State-level first point of contact for individuals interested in becoming foster or adoptive families; NC Kids reaches all parts of the community.
- Dissemination of both general and child-specific information using diverse methods to widen the reach to potential families.
- Photo listing facilitation and preliminary review of prospective adoptive families' preplacement assessments.
- Provision of general recruitment tools for use at the state, county, and private agency level—includes NC Kids website maintenance, brochures, flier, posters, magnets, etc.
- Provision of technical assistance and support to county child welfare agencies and private child-placing agencies regarding general, targeted, and specific recruitment efforts.

2.2.2 NC's Permanency Innovation Initiative (PII)

PII is an effort launched in 2013 by NC's General Assembly for ensuring timely recruitment. Under this state-sponsored initiative a private child-placing agency, Children's Home Society of North Carolina (CHS), provides services to improve permanency outcomes for children living in foster care, improve engagement with biological relatives, and reduce costs associated with maintaining children in foster care. Since July 1, 2015, CHS has achieved positive outcomes for children and families through Family Finding, child-specific adoption recruitment, and permanency-related training. During SFY 23, PII provided 292 hours of Family Education and Support training to families and other supportive adults considered to be a pre-permanency placement or likely to become a permanency placement. Seventeen hours of professional training were delivered to county child welfare agencies, GALs, and court partners to support the successful implementation of the program. The number of children and youth who received PII child-focused recruitment services in SFY 23 was 644.

Cumulatively throughout SFY 23, 64 youth achieved permanency through PII (46 through adoption, 9 through guardianship, 7 through reunification, and 2 through custody). Additionally, 62 children and youth were placed in their forever home at the end of SFY 23 awaiting the finalization of their adoption. For SFY 24 through March 31, 2024, the PII

program provided 225 Family Education and Support training hours to families and other supportive adults considered to be a pre-permanency placement or likely to become a permanency placement.

2.2.3 Fosteringnc.org

This site features on-demand courses, webinars, videos, resources, and answers to foster, adoptive, and kinship families' frequently asked questions. NC DSS, in partnership with UNC-Chapel Hill and NC State University maintain and update this learning site with additional resources and training on a regular basis.

2.2.4 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Recruitment Efforts

NC DSS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, and age. The population of North is diverse, with families from many races and cultures. NC DSS is committed to supporting cultural matters in the permanency planning process.

NC DSS provides training for county child welfare agency staff on working with diverse communities including cultural, racial, and socio-economic variations. Two courses, *Child Welfare in North Carolina: Pre-Service Training* and *Building Cultural Safety*, provide information on cultural sensitivity and working with diverse communities. Information on the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) is covered in the NC DSS staff trainings *Permanency Planning in Child Welfare Services*, *Foster Home Licensing in Child Welfare Services*, and *Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Performance: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting* (TIPS-MAPP).

In addition to training that equips workers to engage diverse communities, NC DSS also ensures the recruitment and licensing process for foster, adoptive, and kinship families provides access and removes barriers to communication with agencies. For people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)/Sensory Impaired (SI), NC DSS and local agencies must use a telephone interpreting service. NC DSS also has a contract with Propio Language Services Company (<https://propio-ls.com>). Those in need of an interpreter are provided with one free of charge. NC DSS also requires local county agencies to develop a non-discriminatory fee structure for prospective and adoptive families.

3 State-Level Data

In North Carolina, there are 100 public and 118 private agencies authorized to provide foster care services. Of the private agencies, 79 provide family foster care services, 41 provide adoption services, and 7 provide maternity services. When a family-like setting is not available, there are 40 residential child caring agencies.

3.1 Demographics of Children in Foster Care

Total number of children in foster care in North Carolina as of March 31, 2024: 10,094

NC continues to implement its diligent recruitment and retention (DRR) plan to ensure there is a sufficient number of foster and adoptive parents that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children and youth in the foster care system. NC DSS will request the assistance of the Capacity Building Center for States for ongoing support in the implementation of the DRR plan.

As of March 31, 2024, there are 10,094 children and youth in care, of which 52% are Caucasian, 30% are Black/African American, 15% are American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2% identify as Bi-Racial/Multi-Racial and less than 1% of children who identified as Asian and Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. In addition, 8% of the children and youth identify their ethnic background as Hispanic.

Table 1. NC Children and Youth in Foster Care by Race, March 31, 2024

Race	Number of Children and Youth	Percentage
American Indian or Alaskan Native	224	15%
Asian	26	0%
Bi- or Multi-Racial	1468	2%
Black/African American	2,977	30%
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	10	0%
White / Caucasian	5,268	52%
Unable to Determine	121	1%
Total	10,094	100%
Ethnicity	Number of Children and Youth	Percentage
Hispanic	921	8%
Not Hispanic or Latino	9,272	83%
Total	10,094	100%

Source: Child Placement & Placement System and CWIS

*Of the children and youth 921 (8%) identify their ethnic background as Hispanic.

The largest group in foster care (40.4%) is between 0 and 5 years of age, followed by children ages 6–12 (31.7%), and youth ages 13–17 (28%). There are 903 youth participating in North Carolina’s extended foster care program, Foster Care 18–21. There are fewer adolescents in foster care than children 5 years or younger; however, the adolescent population remains the most challenging to place. This is due to several factors, including lack of interest in fostering older youth and concerns about youth behaviors, mental health conditions, and involvement in the juvenile justice system.

NC DSS began to collect regional-level data regarding the racial and ethnic background of children/youth in foster care and licensed foster parents on December 31, 2023. The purpose of this data is to assist in identifying regions where racial disparity is indicated in the number of children and youth who enter care. In addition, the information will inform the state about the make-up of the racial/ethnic background of licensed foster parents and if the region has met the racial/ethnic needs of the children and youth in care.

3.2 Placement Type of Children in Care

As of March 30, 2024, most children in care reside in a licensed family foster home. NC DSS continues to advocate for the initial and only placement for children and youth to be in a kinship placement (25.79%). North Carolina continues to implement strategies to move towards a Kin-First culture.

In November 2023 Session Law 2023–14, which provides financial support for unlicensed kinship caregivers across NC, took effect. To receive the benefits, kin must be related by blood, marriage, or adoption. The family does not have to meet the licensure requirements to receive reimbursement. The reimbursement is half the standard board rate, which varies by age range.

Unlicensed kinship care payments can help kinship families offset expenses while they are caring for a kinship child in their home. Unlicensed kinship payments can help cover the cost for food, school supplies, clothing, and any needed item for the child. As of February 2024, 1,224 unlicensed relative placements had received half of the foster parent board rate.

Reimbursement rates for unlicensed relative placements are as follows:

- \$351.00 per child per month for children from birth through age 5.
- \$371.00 per child per month for children aged 6 through 12.
- \$405.00 per child per month for children at least 13 but less than 18 years of age.

NC DSS will determine a process to collect the characteristics (medical challenges, mental health, etc.) of children and youth in care by December 31, 2024. This information will provide insight into the skills and knowledge kinship, foster, and adoptive families need to provide effective support and care for children and youth. This information may also reveal

whether specific caregiver characteristics positively or negatively impact a specific placement type.

Table 2. NC Foster Care Placements, March 31, 2024

Type of Placement	Number of Children and Youth Placed	Percentage
Licensed Family Foster Home	4,400	42.21%
Relative (unlicensed and nonrelative)	2,689	25.79%
Adoptive Home	191	1.83%
Licensed Therapeutic Foster Care Home	1,067	10.24%
Therapeutic Group Care	600	5.76%
Other Setting Types	1,165	11.18%

Source: Child Placement & Placement System and CWIS

The 1,165 (11.18%) children and youth listed in the “Other” category may be residing in the home of a legal guardian, residential school, children’s camp, specialized family foster care home (DSS), independent living arrangement, maternity home, specialized family foster home (relative), trial home visit, or respite. Less than 1% of children or youth were living in an emergency shelter or jail/detention.

3.3 Demographics of Children Needing Pre-Adoptive Families

Total number of children in pre-adoptive status as of 03/31/24: **2,634**

As the table below shows, most children awaiting adoption are Caucasian or Black/African American. The largest age group waiting for adoption is children ages 0–5 (29.34%), followed by children ages 6–10 (27.33%), ages 11–14 (27.01%), and ages 15–17 (16.31%). As of March 31, 2024, the racial and ethnic breakdown of the children and youth in pre-adoptive status is depicted in the table below. Less than 1% of children and youth awaiting adoption were identified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (6 children/youth), Asian (6 children/youth), and “Unable to Determine” (15 children/youth).

Table 3. NC Children Awaiting Adoption, March 31, 2024

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Children and Youth	Percentage
American Indian or Alaskan Native	56	2.13%
Bi-racial/ multi-racial	393	14.92%
Black/African American	729	27.68%
White/Caucasian	1,429	54.25%
Asian	6	0.23%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	6	0.23%
Unable to Determine	15	0.56%
Total	2,634	
Ethnicity	Number of Children and Youth	Percentage
Hispanic	207	7.86%
Not Hispanic or Latino	2427	92.14%
Total	2,634	100%

Source: Child Placement & Placement System and NCFAS – as of 03/31/2024

3.4 Demographics of Licensed Foster Parents (Public and Private License)

Total number of licensed foster homes as of 03/31/24: 6,082

Total number of licensed beds as of 03/31/24: 13,329

In October 2023, NC passed The Loving Homes Act (HB-815), which allows families that already have 5 children in their home to become licensed as a family foster placement. The family must meet all other licensure requirements. After federal approval, HB-815 became effective January 1, 2024. As of May 15, 2024, one family has been licensed under HB-815.

The table below shows the racial and ethnic makeup of the 11,683 licensed foster parents as of March 31, 2024. The largest group of foster parents identified as White/Caucasian, followed by Black/African American. Of the 11,683 licensed foster parents, 494 or 4.42% identify their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino. Less than 1% of licensed foster parents identified as Bi-racial/Multi-racial, Asian, or “racial/ethnic identity could not be determined.”

Table 4. Licensed NC Foster Parents by Race, March 31, 2024

Race	Licensed foster parents	Percent
White	7,726	64.67%
Black/African-American	3,597	32.19%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	175	1.57%
Bi-racial/Multi-racial	82	0.73%
Asian	37	0.33%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	16	0.14%
Unable to Determine	41	0.37%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	9	0.00%
Total	11,683	100.00%

Source: NCXCloud XPTR Reports, FCF100 Licensed Home & FCF104 Agency Homes – as of 03/31/2024

4 Recruitment and Retention Efforts for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families

To support North Carolina’s commitment and values for diligent recruitment and retention, six strategies have been identified for the 2025–2029 Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan. NC DSS is committed to ensuring that children who cannot remain safely at home are placed within their community with fit and willing relatives. When placement with relatives or fictive kin is not feasible, the state is committed to maintaining a pool of foster and adoptive families that reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the children in foster care.

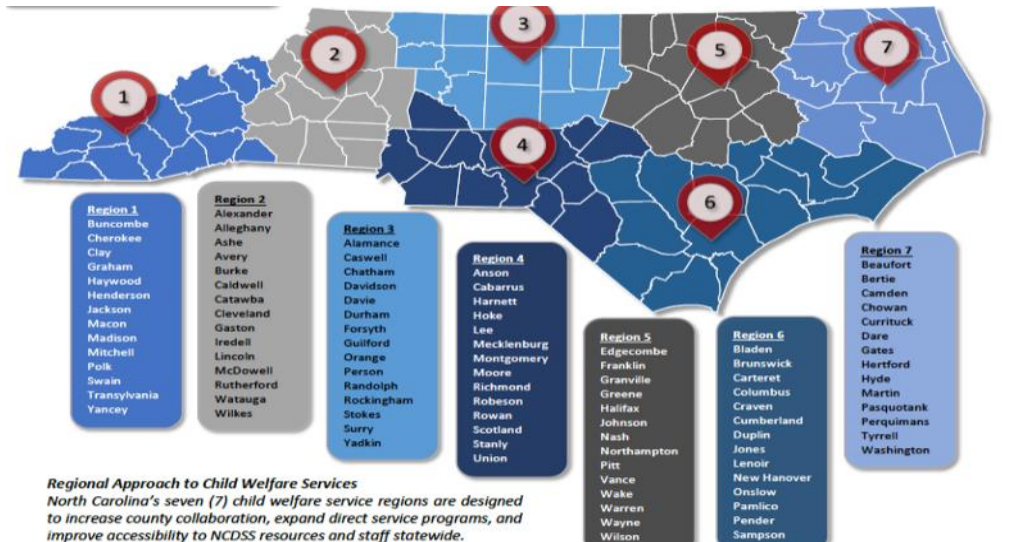
Strategy 1: Move from 100 county-level DRR plans to seven regional-level DRR plans.

NC DSS is transitioning its services and oversight to a regional model to improve outcomes for families and children served. In establishing seven regions, the state will have the ability to provide support, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In addition, this approach enables NC DSS to assess regional trends, strengths, and needs and provide technical assistance.

The structure of the DRR plan will move from 100 county-level plans to seven regional plans. This approach will aid NC DSS in assisting each region in efforts to analyze data to

determine regional approaches to assure a sufficient number of foster/adoptive families are available to meet the needs of each region. The regions are depicted in the map below.

Figure 1. North Carolina's Child Welfare Regions



Strategy 2: Retain kinship, foster, and adoptive families through training opportunities and by building support networks that meet their unique needs.

North Carolina has experienced a decline in licensed foster homes. Factors contributing to this decline as indicated by a focus group conducted by Foster Family Alliance (FFA) are:

- Finalization of adoption or guardianship and the foster family does not want to continue to be licensed,
- Lack of support from supervising agency, and
- Lack of training to meet the needs of children placed in home.

The revision of the DRR plan placed NC DSS in a more active role with recruitment and retention activities. This will strengthen the partnership and collaboration between NC DSS and public and private child-placing agencies. Previously, the recruitment and retention of resource families occurred almost exclusively at the local level.

To gather more information, FFA is in the process of completing a needs assessment with foster, adoptive, and kinship families. NC DSS will receive the results by June 30, 2024, and utilize this information to further enhance training and support for these families.

NC DSS was selected by Spaulding for Children to participate in train-the-trainer program for National Development Training Curriculum (NTDC). The kick-off meeting was held April 3, 2024. NC's pilot group is made up of public and private agencies, internal staff, and community partners. Additional information will be provided as the pilot continues. The goal is to have NTDC as the main training for resource families.

Strategy 3: Develop approaches to support DRR work and practice in a Kin-First culture.

NC DSS believes kinship placements are the most effective and healthy setting for children/youth living in foster care. As of March 31, 2024, 25.79% of the children/youth in foster care live in a relative placement. An increase in kinship placements can be achieved through the targeted recruitment of relative/kinship placements. Additional training and support to relative/kinship placements to improve their knowledge and skills during a placement event and post-placement is essential in further recruitment and retention of these families.

In SFY 24, NC DSS hosted Kinship Listening Sessions. Feedback received indicated kinship providers have the perception that child welfare agencies expect them to “step up” to care for children, sometimes without being offered the same level of support and services received by licensed foster parents. A detailed summary of Kinship Listening Session findings is in development. NC plans to improve practice with kinship providers by conducting a 3-part series for the child welfare workforce on supporting a kin-first culture. The series will educate staff on the need to fully engage kin and prepare them for placement of kin while also ensuring their specific needs are addressed and supported throughout the life of the case. This training will start July 1, 2024.

In addition, a data dashboard was created to provide a monthly profile of children and youth in foster care. This will assist NC DSS in tracking in real time the number of children and youth placed in relative placements.

Strategy 4: Develop approaches to support DRR work and practice with youth and young adults.

To gain system-level feedback from youth and young adults, North Carolina held a series of nine listening sessions (seven in-person and two virtual) from November 2022 through July 2023 across North Carolina’s seven regions. A total of 132 youth and 91 adult supporters (e.g., kinship and foster parents, social workers, Guardians ad Litem, and community stakeholders) attended. Participating youth and young adults were compensated for their time with a \$100 incentive.

UNC’s Family and Children’s Resource Program (FCRP) collaborated with NC DSS to host these events and compiled a comprehensive report noting the most frequently cited feedback from youth/young adults and adult supporters. At the conclusion of these events, NC DSS chose to focus on four identified themes: sibling contact, behavioral and physical health, training for resource parents related to normalcy, and lack of affordable/adequate housing. NC DSS will utilize the information from the feedback and strategic planning sessions to guide future stakeholder engagement.

Strategy 5: Continue statewide awareness campaign for kinship, foster, and adoptive families.

In July 2023, NC DSS completed its second statewide awareness campaign and contracted with Avenir Bold. This vendor was responsible for the development and distribution of a marketing campaign to reach prospective resource families. The media campaign ran from October 1 – December 15, 2023. The theme was “The Little Things Are Huge.” The campaign offered reassurance that the immediate wants and needs of children and youth in foster care are far simpler than many adults assume.

During the campaign 34,300 users went to the landing page (<https://www.NC.DHHS.gov/fostering>). This page provided information on kinship care and becoming a foster parent. The media campaign streamed audio and online video to drive awareness of the need for resource families. Below is a summary of views by media channel:

- Audio: 16,073 views
- Paid social: 15,351 views
- Online video: 7,711,425 views
- Paid search: 45,438 views

The campaign included 15– and 30–second videos on “The Little Things Are Huge” to share on social media. The videos were viewed on Instagram 323 times, Facebook 13,436 times, and the streaming audio 13,435 times. NC DSS will continue to expand its statewide awareness efforts to increase the number of foster, adoptive, and kinship placements.

NC DSS will continue its awareness campaigns to focus on these specific topics:

- Licensed kinship providers,
- Placements for youth and young adults,
- Placements for sibling groups,
- Placements for LGBTQ+ children and youth, and
- Placements for children/youth diagnosed as medically fragile and/or with developmental disabilities.

Strategy 6: Develop and implement a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process for the Diligent Recruitment and Retention plan.

NC DSS is establishing cross-program CQI to assure that a CQI framework is the foundation for all ongoing work to improve the child welfare system in North Carolina. For the DRR plan, the development and implementation of a CQI process will provide a framework for defining, measuring, and improving the strategies and activities outlined in this plan. The CQI process will assist in establishing baseline information as the DRR plan

is transitioning to a regional model. The information from this process will assist both local public and private agencies and NC DSS in assuring that strategies and initiatives at the local/county and regional level are actually achieving the desired outcomes of decreasing the time children and youth spend in care, improving recruitment/retention of foster and relative/kinship parents to meet the needs of the children and youth in care, and preventing children/youth from moving outside of their community in order to maintain their connections to their community/families.

Strategy 7: Build capacity for DSS–managed crisis stabilization and assessment placements and invest in and expand professional foster parenting.

This is a new strategy. In North Carolina, there are not enough behavioral health resources for children and youth. In 2023, an average of 86 children and youth per week slept in emergency departments and/or county DSS offices due to complex behavioral needs. In October 2023, NC DHHS received an unprecedented \$80 million in new funding through the Governor’s NC Medicaid Expansion Initiative to improve child and family well-being outcomes. Of the \$80 million, NC DSS received \$15.2 million to increase crisis stabilization and assessment placements. In the first quarter of 2024, the average number of children and youth sleeping in county DSS offices each week decreased to 16.

To address this issue in the future, NC DSS will implement three behavioral health initiatives to ensure children and youth with behavioral health needs receive suitable, essential, child-centered, trauma-informed, and high-quality services, enabling children and youth in foster care to remain in a family-like setting.

The first of these initiatives is the Emergency Placement Fund launched on February 1, 2024. This program provides local DSS agencies with \$7.79 million to prevent children and youth with complex behavioral needs from sleeping in DSS offices or other inappropriate settings.

The second initiative is the professional foster parent program, Bridging Families. This program pairs professional parents trained in the evidence-based Teaching Family Model along with mental health services and other related services to stabilize children and youth, while working to reunite them with their parents. The goal of Bridging Families is to reduce disruptions, length of foster care stays, and reentry into foster care; to improve child well-being; and to increase access to services to support healing and reunification.

The third initiative is Placement First Plus. This is a new DSS–licensed transitional setting to provide children and youth with a short-term (no more than 90 days) placement in a safe and supportive environment that will provide stabilization services and assistance in transitioning into a new and appropriate long-term placement. While in placement, children and youth will receive a comprehensive assessment to determine their support

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needs and ensure they are placed in the lowest level of care needed while continuing to work towards permanency.

5 Recruitment and Retention Strategies for 2025–2029

Commitment: North Carolina has a process for and is committed to ensuring that children who cannot remain safely at home are placed within their community with fit and willing relatives. When placement with relatives or fictive kin is not feasible, the state is committed to maintaining a pool of foster and adoptive families that reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the children in foster care.

Goal: Sufficient statewide capacity in kinship, foster, and adoptive homes to enhance placement stability and achieve permanency in a timely manner.

Strategy #1: Move from 100 county-level DRR plans to seven regional-level DRR plans.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
December 2025	Articulate the vision and expectation of regional DRR approach.	Communication and implementation plans completed. Regional DRR plan template, instructions, and guidance completed.
	Ensure that new NC DSS positions are in place to drive this shift to the regional DRR approach.	
	Identify strong counties in DRR to be champions (per region).	
	Develop the template, guidance, process, and monitoring of the regional DRR plan.	
	Identify expectations for practice changes at the county level.	
	Consider using an innovation zone for initial implementation.	
	Crosswalk the implementation of the regional DRR plan with other initiatives being implemented statewide.	
Strategy #2: Retain kinship, foster, and adoptive families through training opportunities and by building support networks that meet their unique needs.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
December 2024	Develop and maintain a comprehensive list of training resources that provide capacity building and support for resource families.	Approved Pre-service List distributed to public and private agencies. Revised licensing packet completed and distributed.
	Research and provide recommendations for the implementation of the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC).	
	Revise licensing packet for the purpose of accountability and tracking of training.	
	Create “stay” and “exit” surveys for all resource families to complete on an annual basis.	
	Develop a plan for leveraging Youth Listening Sessions results to	

Recruitment and Retention Strategies for 2025-2029

	strengthen family preparation, training, and support.	Surveys completed and implementation and communication plan completed.
Strategy #3: Develop approaches to support the DRR work and practices in a Kin-First culture.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
December 2024	Conduct data analysis on trends of children/youth who tend to be placed with kin (i.e., which children/youth are more likely to be placed with kin?) to inform us about: for which children/youth do we need to recruit unrelated families?	Data dashboard completed. Communication plan developed and implemented.
	Articulate North Carolina’s position on how unlicensed kin are part of the pool of families caring for children and youth (as part of DRR work).	
	Define expectation for what this position means for North Carolina and for counties providing training, support, etc. to unlicensed kin.	
Strategy #4: Increase utilization of NC Kids to decrease the time children and youth spend in foster care.		
4a: Improve youth engagement in exploring permanency options.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
December 2023	Review results from Youth Listening Sessions to inform next steps.	Youth Listening Session report from UNC reviewed by NC DSS staff and county staff.
June 2024	Capture data and input from county workers on their conversations with youth through regional listening sessions and peer-to-peer discussions.	Data dashboard completed. Practice guidebook completed and implemented.
	Develop guidance on expectations for including youth in developing and approving of their profiles for the photolisting.	
4b: Strengthen targeted and child-specific recruitment for permanent families.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
January	Coordinate with AdoptUSKids to collect data on the	A

Recruitment and Retention Strategies for 2025-2029

2024	characteristics (needs, preferred families, etc.) of NC youth photolisted.	comprehensive data report is developed. Trends/themes identified and shared with agencies.
	Use the monthly data from NC Kids, AdoptUSKids, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, and Permanency Roundtables to identify trends and themes.	
December 2023	Identify which children and youth are not registered with NC Kids to guide outreach to counties to prompt registration.	Identified children and youth have been registered.
	Develop messaging regarding the balance between Kin-First culture and other permanency options.	Communication plan is developed and implemented. Form and instructions developed and provided to public agencies.
	Develop and implement a form to capture data from Permanency Roundtables.	
Strategy #5: Continue the statewide awareness campaign for kinship, foster, and adoptive families.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
December 2024	Determine regional baseline data on the children and youth in foster care.	Ongoing quarterly report is received.
	Determine regional baseline data on resource families.	
August 2024	Enter into a contract with a marketing vendor for the development of general and targeted printed materials for recruitment, media campaigns, and additional marketing materials for community information sessions.	Contract signed and executed. Data elements identified and tracking process developed.
	Develop a mechanism to track the success of the awareness campaign.	
Strategy #6: Develop and implement a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process for the DRR plan.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
June 2026	Define purpose and scope for the state, county, and private agencies of the DRR Program CQI process.	CQI process is developed and

Recruitment and Retention Strategies for 2025-2029

	Create a database that allows the state to track permanency outcomes for children receiving child-specific recruitment services.	implemented. Database created.
	Use data to understand trends, such as the needs of a child needing a permanent resource, the type of permanency achieved, and length to permanence.	
Strategy #7: Build capacity for DSS-managed crisis stabilization and assessment placements and invest in and expanding professional foster parenting.		
YEAR	ACTIVITIES	BENCHMARKS
February 2024	Develop emergency placement funds programs to assist counties in securing appropriate placements for children and youth with behavioral health needs.	Emergency Placement Fund program implemented. The contact for Bridging families is executed. The first Bridging Families parent will be secured in the eastern part of the state.
	Allocate funds to local DSS agencies based on the percentage of the foster care census.	
	Develop metrics to determine utilization of emergency placement funds.	
August 2024	Enter into contract with Crossnore Communities for Children to expand the professional foster parenting or Bridging Families program.	Administrative policies and guidance developed. The RFP is developed and sent out for bid.
	Determine the budget or investment into the program.	
	Secure additional funding sources for sustainability.	
	Develop metrics to measure effectiveness of services.	
	Develop the Placement First Plus program.	
December 2024	Finalize licensing requirements and eligibility for services.	
	Complete the RFP process.	
	Select vendor(s) for Placement First Plus.	