

## **MA DCF Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan (2025-2029)**

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to recruiting foster, kinship, and adoptive parents that reflect the diversity of children in its care and custody and has created a strong foundation on which to build an effective foster and adoptive parent recruitment program that reaches into the communities it serves. The recruitment of foster and adoptive homes occurs through statewide and local efforts through the Department's 29 area offices. The Department's local recruitment efforts allow children to maintain vital connections in their communities, including with relatives, schools, and other significant relationships.

The term "foster" refers to unrelated foster, kinship, and pre-adoptive parents, families, and the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC). DCF is a kin-first agency. The Department strives to place a child with kin when family separation occurs. A kinship family is an individual(s) licensed or approved to provide 24-hour out-of-home care for children in custody or care of the Department, who are either (1) related by blood, marriage or adoption; (2) fictive kin including another individual(s) to whom the child and/or parent(s) ascribe the role of family based on cultural and affectional ties or individual family values; or (3) another individual(s) identified by the parent(s), child and/or the Department as a foster family for a specific child(ren) (e.g. schoolteacher, parent of friend, member of family's religious community).

### **Foster Care Recruiters**

The Department has dedicated positions focused on foster care recruitment. Each Department's 29 area offices have dedicated foster care recruiters assigned to enhance recruitment efforts and onboard foster and adoptive families. The recruiters focus on increasing visibility in all communities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by spreading awareness of the need for foster families

Foster care recruiters continue to attend and hold numerous in-person and virtual events. They assist the foster parent onboarding process by providing information sessions, completing the application review process, and supporting potential leads until the start of the Caregiver Training and Assessment, which includes MAPP training (Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting).

Foster care recruiters use the Salesforce database to record and document campaigns and leads. Campaigns are their recruitment activities, which include community events and information sessions. All families must attend an information session as part of the onboarding process. Information sessions are held by recruiters virtually and in person, giving families an overview of working with the Department and becoming a foster parent. Leads are any person interested in foster care working with a recruiter to get more information and decide if they want to move forward by completing an application. Starting in 2023, all applications are sent directly to families through the Salesforce database. An application can also be provided on paper if necessary.

## **Policies**

In February 2023, The Department implemented The Licensing of Foster, Pre-Adoptive, Kinship Families and the Safe and Supported Placements Support Policies. Both policies aim to improve the recruitment, onboarding, and support of foster, kinship, and pre-adoptive families. The policies created three specialized positions (Licensing and Training, Kinship and Foster Family Social Workers) dedicated to increased communication and strengthening the work of supporting families, including increased contact via joint visits between the child's social worker and the social worker supporting the foster home.

The foster care policies formalize two roles: Kinship Social Worker and Kinship Supervisor. These roles allow for assistance in identifying and locating kin, completing the process of immediate placement activities to permit kin first placements, and providing support to kinship families. These kin-specific roles demonstrate DCF's commitment that when children need to live outside of their homes, they do better when they live with kin.

Beyond its efforts to place children with kin, DCF works to recruit foster/adoptive families that reflect the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of the children in need of placement. As such, DCF holds targeted recruitment events to increase and foster awareness of this diversity.

In 2023, the Background Record Check Policy was also updated to support the foster care policies, as the criminal and child welfare history is one source of information that can provide insight into an individual's functioning and caregiving capacity. Still, it must be used as part of a larger assessment that includes evaluating information from multiple sources. The Department uses both information gathering and clinical judgment to evaluate the relevance of BRC findings in determining risk to the child(ren) or in any decision-making. The Department considers any information or documentation the individual shares about their history and information provided by references or obtained through other sources (e.g., a police report). Social Workers, with the support of their supervisors, review BRC findings and think critically about how child safety may be impacted by what is learned. Analysis of criminal and child welfare history takes place within the broader context of the Department's understanding of the individual, child(ren), and family's current and past functioning. It includes considering individual actions to address areas of potential concern and mitigate risk.

## **Demographics**

On December 31, 2024, 6,502 children (under age 18) were in foster care. 79% (24,370) of children under 18 years of age with an active were not in placement. Children in foster care represented 1,368 in unrelated care, 2,583 of those placements with Kin, 786 were placed in contracted foster care, and 314 were placed in pre-adoptive placement.

During the **1/1/2024 - 4/30/2025**, the following data was collected from Salesforce.

There was a total of 4,484 leads.

Listed below are the stages in the process each lead is in.

- Applying: 817

- Not Applying: 3,227
- Info Session Completed: 21
- In Progress: 277
- Application sent: 60
- Application signed: 33

\*Applying means that they are submitting an application.

\*Not applying means that they are not submitting an application at this time. *We do enter a reason for not applying to keep track for data purposes.*

\*Info Session Completed means the family has completed their required information session.

\*In progress means that they are deciding if they will apply or not

\*Application sent means that they have requested and received a copy of the application.

\*Application signed means that they have completed and signed their application and are moving forward with application review.

### **Campaign Data**

- Number of events statewide (1/1/2024-4/30/2025): 3,187

### **How did you hear about us?**

- Mass.gov- 1,153
- Community events- 573
- Another foster parent- 726
- Social media- 188
- Online Ad- 108
- Flyer/marketing materials- 89
- TV/radio- 30
- Billboard/transit signs- 32
- Blank/other- 269
- Jordan's Furniture- 55

### **Comprehensive Recruitment Plan**

DCF maintains a full-time statewide Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment Unit in the Permanency Division. The duties of which include planning and supporting a comprehensive recruitment plan. The toll-free 1-800-KIDS-508 recruitment line for foster and adoptive inquiries and the supervision of Area Office Foster Care Recruitment Ambassadors are supervised within this unit. Each Area Office (29) maintains 1 or 2 full-time Foster Care Support Unit. Each Regional Office (5) maintains a Foster Care Recruiter for each Area Office. The duties include the planning and implementation of Area Office recruitment plans for foster families. The recruitment plans are made in collaboration with Area Office Foster Care staff and designed to target the specific needs of the area office. Each Regional Office (5) maintains a full-time Adoption Development and Licensing Unit (ADLU) specific to planning and implementing the Regional Adoption recruitment and retention plan of adoptive families for waiting children with a goal of adoption. Central Office recruitment staff provide support to the area and regional offices.

1. The Statewide Recruitment Plan describes the characteristics of foster children the agency serves, including age, race, ethnicity, and national origin. It will also include developmental, physical, and emotional needs.
  - a. Each quarter, statistics for the current year will be extracted that describe the characteristics of children in the custody of DCF who are in foster care or have a service plan with the goal of adoption, including age, sex, race, ethnicity, and culture. The total number of children in custody and the number of children in permanent care will be reported. When the developmental, emotional and physical needs of these children can be extracted from the electronic case management system, they will be included. Currently, the information with regards to the emotional and physical needs of a child can be found in the hardcopy record under evaluations. This information is captured in the child's adoption assessment, which is also used when presenting children to potential pre-adoptive families.
  - b. The demographics of children waiting for adoption will be compared with background of approved adoptive families waiting to adopt through DCF when this information becomes available through the electronic case management system.

Each year, regional recruitment plans will be adjusted to reflect the consumer population being served in each area office by the Department. These recruitment plans will be reviewed quarterly and updated as needed throughout the year using data collected throughout the year. This review will allow us to identify challenges creating gaps in recruiting families.

Each quarterly report collects demographic data on our foster families. From these reports, we can assess whether or not a recruitment campaign has successfully brought in and approved specific families to foster our children, including for the specific targeted areas and needs.

2. The Statewide Recruitment Plan uses this data, which includes foster children's ages, race, ethnicity, and national origin and will include developmental needs, disabilities, health needs, behavioral, and emotional needs.
3. Sharing data on children served by DCF to guide targeted recruitment efforts.
4. Campaigns are developed and implemented to recruit foster and/or adoptive families for the children DCF has in its care and custody. This plan includes but is not limited to participation in community and neighborhood events and activities, the development of recruitment materials, statewide media campaigns, adoption parties, radio and television ads, displays, and special events.

It is through local community events and activities that the public is made aware of the Department's need for foster and adoptive families. DCF will continue its partnerships with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) and with Jordan's Furniture. Our private/public partnership with Jordan's Furniture has enabled the Department to improve the

quality the effectiveness of our recruitment efforts.

- Recruitment Events, held annually with our partners: Walk/Run for adoption Jordan's and MARE
- National Adoption Day, MARE & Jordan's
- Adoption Option

5. Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community.

- a. Statewide Targeted Recruitment will be used to attract families to meet the needs of specific groups of children such as adolescents/teens, racial diversity, medical needs, disabilities, multiple languages abilities and sibling groups.

In FFY 2025, The Department is working with a marketing agency, Issues Management Group (IMG), on a statewide media campaign. We utilize social media and other media outlets that have a far-reaching impact. We will continue to work with IMG to identify areas of needs throughout the state and development media strategies based on needs.

- b. Recruitment for kin begins as soon as a child becomes known to DCF. At every opportunity, birth parents are asked about and for the names and addresses of extended family members and other significant adults who are important to their child. If the separation of a child from the birth family becomes necessary, DCF will have available kin who are important to the child to contact for immediate placement and permanency planning.

Child-specific recruitment is conducted for children who are in permanent custody of DCF for whom adoption is the plan and a family still needs to be identified. This is accomplished through the production of adoption flyers, matching parties, a variety of print media, radio, television (Wednesday's Child) youth panels, and special events. All of these are designed to interest prospective adoptive families for waiting children of all races, ages, and needs. In FFY 2025, DCF created a Child Focused Recruitment unit, under Wendy's Wonderful Kids Model, to complete this work. These activities are conducted in collaboration with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE).

- c. General Recruitment Campaigns includes all agency staff, currently licensed foster parents and experienced foster and adoptive parents to assist in our recruitment efforts. Some of our experienced foster and adoptive parents have taken on the role of Foster Care and Adoption Parent Family Recruitment Ambassadors. These parents are paid a stipend of \$500.00 per month for 30 hours of general recruitment activity in their communities. It also brings real life foster care experience to help those interested ask questions and learn directly from those who have been foster parents. DCF joins with partner agencies to share tables and provide information at established community events.

6. Strategies for assuring that prospective foster parents have access to the application process.

- a. The recruitment staff in each Area Office and Regional Office is accessible to the community by phone during regular work hours (8:45 – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday). A 24-hour toll-free number, 1-800-KIDS-508, recruitment line, is available. During regular business hours, face-to-face meetings with recruitment staff are available. Information sessions are posted on the Mass.gov website.
- b. All potential foster parents go through the Application Review Process. Requirements include background checks and an initial home visit, which includes a safety assessment. No screening is practiced based on a family's race, ethnicity, national origin, culture, age, handicap, religion, color, creed, or geographical location. Recruitment staff provides all inquiries with the same information and requirements to become a foster and/or adoptive parent. There are no fees associated with the Department's licensing process
- c. The Recruitment Unit at the Central Office tracks all leads to the 1-800-KIDS-508 recruitment line. The leads are entered into Salesforce, and if an application is completed, the leads are then entered into our case management information system.
- d. Completion of the Massachusetts Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) is required by all individuals wishing to foster or adopt a child from foster care. This 10-week, 30-hour training combines information, activities, discussions, and speakers. Each Regional Licensing Unit and ADLU unit determines its own MAPP schedule. MAPP is in the process of being updated. Training staff on the curriculum started in February 2024 and we have approximately 350 individuals in the process of certification. This includes DCF staff, foster parents, and contracted agency staff. The new statewide curriculum is expected to be rolled out in FFY 2025.
- e. The Kinship Orientation has been developed into two online courses available in English and Spanish. In addition, seven topic-specific short videos are available for kinship families to provide information as needed. The curriculum for the two online courses is in the process of being updated with the plan of being available to all families in FFY 2025. Feedback from kinship staff is part of the updating.

3. Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, ethnic and economic communities.

- a. All Recruitment staff members are trained to work effectively with diverse cultures, races, and economic situations. Training is constant through attendance at staff meetings and conferences, direct supervision, and interaction with the community by partnering with community members at staff events and training seminars. DCF also has an in-house training unit, the Child Welfare Institute (CWI), which provides trainings for DCF staff. Through CWI, the permanency series and other outside resources, there is an expectation that recruiters will participate in trainings.

4. Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers, including hearing impaired.

- a. Interpreters are available to assist applicants throughout the application process and/or may be requested for various languages, including American Sign Language. In addition, Bi-Lingual (Spanish) staff are in most Area Office Family Resource Units and Regional Adoption Development Units. This varies according to geographical areas and can include Portuguese, Khmer, and Vietnamese. Recruitment materials are available in Spanish and Portuguese.

Collaboration with the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) resumed in 2023. There have been several information sessions held since February 2024 in collaboration with MCDHH. There is a plan to continue collaboration for future events and support for foster families.

5. Statement of assurance that all foster and adoptive family recruitment activities and materials shall be in compliance with MEPA, and Title VI, and Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.

- i. A Foster/Adoption Guide is mailed to inquirers for both programs to ensure compliance with the Act and state and federal regulations.

6. Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a child needing an adoptive placement.

- a. Each month, a data report is released that includes the number of children with the goal of adoption and those children who are legally free to be adopted. This includes children matched/not matched with a pre-adoptive family. From the report generated, we can separate the children matched and not matched. Area office adoption supervisors and the regional adoption development units keep daily records of these children.
- b. DCF area offices hold at least Quarterly Adoption/Guardianship Reviews for all children with a goal of adoption or guardianship. The review is being held to assess the progress being made toward these goals.
- c. Foster Care Reviews are held every six months for children in foster care. The progress towards the permanent goal for the child is reviewed at that time. Also, DCF will schedule a Clinical Review Team if policy concerns should arise. The team will review the issue and attempt to come to a resolution that is in the child's best interest.
- d. MARE, Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, recruit homes for children who are not matched with an adoptive family. Adoption social workers can refer children on their caseload who need to be matched. DCF has a monthly report to assist with ensuring that children are being referred to as MARE.
- e. DCF has created and hired staff for a Child Focused Recruitment unit through the Central Office Permanency Division.

- f. DCF contracts with private agencies that recruit and match children to adoptive families. Quarterly, these agencies and DCF area offices within their regions hold matching meetings to bring the homes and the children together on paper to see if they can make a match. In the second half of these quarterly meetings, a training session is held.
- g. Our partnership with Jordan's Furniture provides us with adoption events. First, the Adoption Option is held in the fall each year. This event is open to anyone who wants to learn about adopting children from foster care. This event provides interested persons with the opportunity to receive an overview of the adoption process, opportunity to speak with adoptive parents and to connect with DCF staff. Additionally, there have been several matching events. These are for families that have been approved as adoptive resources but have not yet been matched with a child. Children freed for adoption are at these events, just having fun, and prospective families are there to receive information and perhaps interact with the children. In addition, smaller adoption recruitment events occur throughout the year.
- h. According to DCF policy, kinship placements must be our first consideration when placing a child in foster care. When the initial placement is not with kin DCF begins the search for kin either through interviews with the birth parents, reviewing the record, or requesting a Family Find Search. Once a child is legally free to be adopted DCF again ensures that a thorough search for family has occurred.
- i. DCF utilizes out-of-state private agency homes to eliminate barriers to interjurisdictional placement of children. This allows for matching to occur even when the home is not in Massachusetts. DCF's ICPC unit also partners with our area office adoption social workers to request and oversee the completion of Caregiver Training and Assessments for children to be placed in a timely manner.

DCF entered a pilot program with New Hampshire in May 2023 to facilitate same-day placement for kin.

- j. DCF provides adoptive families with post-adopt services. These services are provided to adoptive families upon request. Often, adoptive families who have received supportive services become advocates for DCF. They also sometimes come back to DCF to adopt a second or third child.

Massachusetts will continue to explore kin upon a child's need for placement. We will utilize Family Group Conference/Family Find Coordinators to seek out family members not yet known by the Department. Recruitment takes on many roles, whether it be child-specific or geographic-specific, or by exploring a youth's past relationships to find those willing to build a commitment to some permanent relationship with the youth. Recruitment will always be needed to have quality placements for our children.

## **National Center for Diligent Recruitment**

Starting in FFY 2025, DCF began working with the National Center for Diligent Recruitment. A technical assistance plan is approved for work through end of 2026.

Objectives of the technical assistance plan include

- Strengthen diligent recruitment practice at the state and regional level to improve planning and develop focused strategies to recruit, develop and support families.
- Increase the capacity of Massachusetts to effectively collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to guide focused recruitment efforts and support continuous quality improvement.
- Increase the effectiveness of Massachusetts' diligent recruitment program through structural, workforce and procedural enhancements
- Strengthen collaborations between area offices, private agencies, persons with lived experience, and community partners to increase the number of kinship, foster, and adoptive homes reflective of the children in foster care.

## **Accomplishments made in FFY2025**

- Engagement with the National Center for Diligent Recruitment to receive technical assistance
- Increase in number leads applying
- Increase in number of recruitment campaign events
- Creation of the Child Focused Recruitment Unit under Central Office Permanency Division
- Information session coaching for recruiters in effort to formalize consistency in information and messaging for prospective families
- Focused effort on utilizing data to guide recruitment planning
- A focus of one of the Agency Priority Improvement Teams is focused on placement stability. This team has been working with the support of the National Center for Diligent Recruitment to review and develop a proposal to adopt separate licensing or approval standards for kin.
- Salesforce was made available for our Adoption Development and Licensing Units for data collection
- FosterMA Connect accounts are now available to secondary caregivers
- Foster Parent College is available for all licensed foster families
- Kinship Forum scheduled in June 2025 for all KSW, Kinship supervisors and managers. This will be a kickoff off to regular forums with kin staff to focus on the value of kin and the need to address any bias or barriers to impact agency culture.
- Training and certification of staff for new MAPP curriculum
- Regional foster parent and kin forums
- Ongoing development of staff training related to foster care policies and practice

## **Goals for FFY 2025 - FFY 2029**

### *Recruitment and Recruitment Planning*

- Recruiters will work in teams statewide to hold consistent informational sessions. Recruiters will also hold informational sessions for targeted needs.
- Integrated both in-person and virtual recruitment events.
- Increased number of in person recruitment events and opportunities
- Each of the 29 Area Office's has a written recruitment plan. These recruitment plans will continue to be developed by the recruiters with input from the area office recruitment teams and the foster parent ambassador. These plans focus on the specific needs of that office's catchment area. These plans will continue to be posted on our internal intranet and updated throughout the year.
- Updates to the foster parent ambassador position
- Statewide Collaboration Groups, to focus areas of needs, support recruiters in planning area connections and outreach, hold informational sessions, continue to make connections and increase focused recruitment events.
- When the developmental, emotional and physical needs of these children can be extracted from the electronic case management system, they will be included.
- The racial and ethnic diversity of children waiting for adoption will be compared with the racial and ethnic diversity of approved adoptive families waiting to adopt through DCF will occur when this information becomes available through the electronic case management system.
- Develop a plan for shifting recruiter supervision from the five regional offices to the DCF Central Office.
- Make change from 29 area office recruitment plans to 5 regional plans to align with state diligent recruitment plan.

### *Salesforce*

- Use Salesforce to track and organize data collection on all campaign events and foster care or adoption inquiries.
- Continue to build on data collection and use of this data to inform targeted recruitment efforts both on the statewide and local levels.
- Expanding Salesforce system to Adoption Development and Licensing Unit staff.

### *Kinship*

- Kinship Orientation online courses have been developed in both English and Spanish. Rollout the kinship orientation to foster families on the Absorb Learning Management System (LMS) statewide in FFY 2025.
- Continue to offer the Kinship specific topic videos that are offered in English and Spanish that explain and support kinship families working with the Department.
- Posted these topic videos on FosterMA Connect and available to be sent via email to all kinship foster families. These videos cover topics including Working with DCF, Safe Sleep, Licensing Process, Supports and Resources, Frequently Asked Questions, Prudent Parenting.
- Dedicated email address for kin families to connect with recruitment supervisor who

can assist them in connecting with staff posted on Mass.gov.

- Development and proposal of separate standards and licensing process for kin.
- Creating a data dashboard and visualization systems and reporting
- Guidance development for extraction of data and reporting
- Plan a forum for staff with a focus on the value of kin and the need to address biases in an effort to impact agency culture.
- Provide training for supervisors on how to use data reports
- Utilize administrative and outcome data to evaluate the impact of implemented strategies

#### *MAPP Training*

- Continuing training of facilitators for the new MAPP curriculum, which began in February 2024.
- MAPP training will include both online self-directed learning as well as in-person sessions.

#### *Marketing/Media*

- Develop a new digital FosterMA campaign with the marketing agency
- Refresh of FosterMA Campaign materials with the marketing agency
- Updated Mass.gov website information including specific emphasis on kin families

#### *FosterMA Connect (Secure website for foster families)*

- Continue to increase foster parents' awareness of FosterMA Connect, which includes access to the Foster Parent Portal (My Home) for all licensed foster and pre-adoptive homes. The Foster Parent Portal has been expanded to include payment-specific information for foster families. Foster parents can view their payment information in the My Payments section of the Foster Parent Portal.
- Refresh of the FosterMA Connect site and continued enhancements will be made on an ongoing basis.
  - FosterMA Connect will be moving to a new platform in July 2025. Increase enrollment of foster parents in the site.

#### *Training*

- Educate foster and perspective foster families on resources available to them such as Foster Parent College Foster Parent College gives all foster parents access to a variety of online training courses.

#### *Collaboration*

- Collaboration with the Children's League of Massachusetts task force of comprehensive foster care agencies and MARE around recruitment efforts.
- Jordan's Foster Care and Adoption recruitment and matching events.
- Continued collaboration with the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- MSPCC
- MAFF