

# Recruitment, Development and Support of Resource Families *Best Practice Framework*<sup>1</sup>

“If you want to successfully recruit, retain, and partner with resource families, *treat them like gold.*”<sup>2</sup>

This document is not intended to be prescriptive; instead it is intended to provide a framework for improving the systems and practices that affect resource families. Overall, this framework describes what a successful system of recruitment, development and support for resource families would look like, acknowledging that all decisions about placement, as well as resource family recruitment and retention, must be guided by children’s best interests.

The term “resource families” includes all the types of families that care for children who cannot remain in their homes of origin, including foster, adoptive, kinship, and respite, recognizing that different types of resource families may have different kinds of specific needs.

## Virginia Children’s Services Practice Model

All work related to recruitment, development and support of resource families must be grounded in Virginia Children’s Services Practice Model<sup>3</sup>:

- We believe that all children and communities deserve to be safe.
- We believe in family-, child-, and youth-driven practice.
- We believe that children do best when raised in families
- We believe that all children and youth need and deserve a permanent family.
- We believe in partnering with others to support child and family success in a system that is family-focused, child-centered, and community-based.
- We believe that how we do our work is as important as the work we do.



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from “Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families Breakthrough Series Collaborative: Collaborative Framework,” Casey Family Programs, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Treat Them Like Gold, North Carolina Division of Social Services, Raleigh North Carolina, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Taken from Virginia’s Transformation for Children’s Services, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Children in Kinship Care Experience Improved Placement Stability, Higher Levels of Permanency, and Decreased Behavioral Problems. ChildFocus, 2015.

# Effective Recruitment, Development, and Support

## Key Components

- 1. Recruiting Resource Families:** Recruitment of resource families prioritizes relative identification and child-specific recruitment; regarding prospective families in the community, maximizing targeted recruitment is preferred with minimal general recruitment.
- 2. Resource Family Development:** We embrace a kin-first culture along with a philosophy of “Selecting In” versus “Screening Out” when developing and assessing trauma-informed resource families.
- 3. Preparing and Supporting Resource Families:** Resource families have the trauma-responsive services and supports they need to provide appropriate care for children and their families, with special attention given to the unique needs of relative caregivers.

- I. **Recruitment of resource families prioritizes relative identification and child-specific recruitment; regarding prospective families in the community, maximizing targeted recruitment is preferred with minimal general recruitment.**
  - A. Utilize child-specific recruitment strategies to develop individualized plans for a specific child based on the child’s background.
    1. Make early and continual efforts to search for and recruit kinship care providers.
    2. Implement child centered family finding practices to identify a permanency resource among caring adults already connected to the child, including relatives, friends, or community contacts.
    3. Provide timely notice to relatives about options to become a resource family or other support for a child in agency custody.
    4. Implement strategies for recruiting “new” resource families not yet connected to the child as a permanency resource.
    5. Listen to and strongly consider the voices of children and youth in planning for their own lives.
    6. Educate, engage and develop effective partnerships with community organizations.

## Create a sense of urgency for making the first placement a kin placement

Research shows kinship foster care is more stable than non-kin care and can help prevent disruptions that harm a child’s well-being.<sup>4</sup> Kin-first systems invest necessary resources into making the child’s first placement a kin placement whenever possible. First placement with kin is key to reducing the trauma of being placed with someone the child doesn’t know, and it also helps ensure non-kin foster parents are available for children who don’t have viable extended family options for placement.

~American Bar Association

- B. Direct targeted recruitment strategies on specific families or communities who are best matched to meet the needs of the children in care.
  - 1. Develop a profile of the children in care in your locality, that includes number of children in care, how many are in each category by age group, ethnicity, and special needs (sibling group, medical, educational, or emotional needs, etc.), and where the children are placed.
  - 2. Conduct utilization studies on a regular basis of foster homes and capacity, including how many families there are in total, how many are in each category when broken down by ages of children accepted in the home, ethnicity, and willingness to care for special needs.
  - 3. Conduct a gap analysis; develop and implement a strategic recruitment plan.
- C. Use general recruitment strategies to raise community awareness of child welfare and foster care and adoption and to address public perceptions, myths, and misperceptions.
- D. Utilize the recruitment portal, Faster Families Highway, which is an online tool used for recruitment of non-relative resource parents to increase efficiency and support local recruitment efforts. LDSS are expected to direct all non-relative inquiries to either their LDSS Faster Families Highway (FFH) or the VDSS portal and to incorporate the portal into recruitment marketing materials.

II. Resource Family Development: A Philosophy of “Screening In” vs. “Screening Out” is utilized in Recruiting and Developing Prospective Resource Families.

- A. Meet the special preparation needs of relative caregivers.
- B. Families who express an interest in becoming resource families receive immediate responses to their inquiries in ways that are welcoming, strengths-based, culturally appropriate, and in the language of their choice.
  - 1. Information is shared in an open and direct way between prospective resource families and the agency.
  - 2. The caller is given accurate and specific information about the children in care in the locality.
  - 3. The caller is invited immediately to an orientation session.
  - 4. An invitation packet is sent out to the caller within three working days of inquiry.
- C. Hold orientation (group or individual) on a regular schedule, in locations that are accessible for prospective resource families.
- D. Offer pre-service training on a regular basis and ensure that it is competency-based, includes foster/adopt parents as instructors, and birth parents, and foster/adopted youth as presenters.
- E. Develop a standardized process for conducting mutual family assessments that respect cultural beliefs and practices, include prospective families as partners, and incorporate a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and developmental issues of the family.
  - 1. Engage in assessment as a mutual process completed with families in a way that supports openness and information sharing and that leads to joint decision making
  - 2. Provide information/assistance to resource families during the background checks, fingerprinting, required inspections, and physical requirements.

3. Complete home studies efficiently and effectively within 60-90 days after the application has been submitted or 30-45 days after the completion of pre-service training, whichever comes first.
- F. Develop relationships that support and value prospective resource families throughout the recruitment and development process.

III. Supporting Resource Families: Resource families have the services and supports they need to provide appropriate care for children and their families.

- A. Prepare resource families, youth, and birth families for the initial placement of children in their care and for all transitions they face, including changing placements, reunification, adoption, and independence.
- B. Openly share all relevant information (i.e., children's backgrounds, agency procedures, roles and responsibilities, agency expectations, resource family expectations, legal requirements) on an ongoing basis with resource families.
- C. Create opportunities for resource families and the child's family to develop ongoing relationships in service of safety, permanency, and well-being for children in care.
- D. Meet the special support and training needs of relative caregivers regarding issues such as managing family relationships, ensuring safety and establishing boundaries, and making decisions around permanency options (e.g., adoption, transfer of custody).
- E. Support and respond to the challenges and needs of resource families *in a timely manner*, including providing ongoing training and linking them to community resources.
- F. Minimize secondary trauma to resource family members by responding promptly to the needs of children placed with them.
- G. Utilize an ongoing process to gather information about the needs of resource families and their overall satisfaction level regarding their relationship with the agency.
- H. Recognize and acknowledge resource families for their expertise and service.
- I. Ensure consistent communication among the full continuum of child welfare services – Prevention, Foster Care, CPS and Adoption so that all pertinent information is shared , all potential connections are identified, and the best possible placement is made.
- J. Continually build resource family competence in supporting connections between children and their families, such as:
  1. working with birth parents and families;
  2. sustaining children's connections;
  3. supporting reunification or transitions to permanence;
  4. encouraging a positive family time/visitation experience with parents, siblings, and/or extended birth family, recognizing these as critical elements of the service plan (as opposed to privileges that can be used as punishment or reward with children).