

Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent
Recruitment Plan



Maryland Department of
Human Services

2020-2024

Maryland Department of Human Services/ Social Services Administration at a Glance:

Mission/Vision

The Maryland Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration envisions a Maryland where all children are safe from abuse and neglect, where children have permanent homes and where families are able to meet their own needs.

The mission of the Social Services Administration is to lead, support and enable local departments of social services in employing strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect, protect vulnerable children, preserve and strengthen families, by collaborating with state and community partners.

Introduction

Maryland Department of Human Services/Social Services Administration (DHS/SSA) provides oversight to 24 local departments of social services. DHS/SSA provides each jurisdiction with the Statewide Recruitment and Retention Plan which comprised of statewide goals and objectives based on data regarding Maryland's representation of children in Out-of-Home Placement. Each local department is individually responsible for developing and implementing an annual recruitment and retention plan. The annual plan should include a synopsis of the previous year's recruitment and retention efforts highlighting successful efforts. Additionally the plan should encompass analysis of State and jurisdiction specific data, identify jurisdiction specific needs and provide specific strategies to recruit, train and retain resource homes to meet the identified needs. DHS/SSA will utilize the local department plans to seek what trends are found within Maryland in regards to resource homes. DHS/SSA provides funding to local departments of social services to ensure partnership for performance and accountability. The DHS/SSA Assistant Director and/or Recruitment and Retention Administrator and Resource Homes Supervisor/Analyst will be responsible for reviewing individual recruitment and retention plans using the reporting form. In May of 2019, DHS/SSA revised the Annual Recruitment and Retention reporting form. The LDSS were given a Recruitment and Retention Plan, (see Appendix RP A) Guidance and Tool Kit (see Appendix RP B) to assist with allocating recruitment and retention funds more appropriately to meet the needs of the youth in their jurisdiction. Feedback, which may include recommendations for revision will be provided. The local departments also submit a Recruitment and Retention Quarterly Report (see Appendix RP C) every three months. Appraisal of this quarterly report at the local level should further generate strategic planning to reach projected goals. The quarterly reports submitted will be drilled down to see how each local department utilizes the funding, how the reports demonstrate the needs and progress of each local department, and to analyze trends. This report will also be reviewed by DHS/SSA to ensure fidelity to the recruitment and retention plans presented by each local department. DHS/SSA will provide technical assistance to local departments to assist with general, child-specific, and targeted recruitment. In working with the local departments, speaking with resource parents, and conducting local focus groups, Maryland has identified its greatest need for recruitment and retention to be the older youth ages 14-21. DHS/SSA has specifically decided to focus efforts on the recruitment of older youth, children of color, and LGBTQ youth. DHS/SSA will also work to increase and watch data trends for the legally free youth, sibling placements, and transitional age youth.

Overview of Data in Appendix RP F . Data Tables for Recruitment and Retention Plan

Local department child welfare staff and resource home workers are responsible for entering data into and Children's Electronic Social Services Information Exchange (MD CHESSIE) to ensure that accurate data is available to DHS/SSA. Local departments may subsequently obtain data from SSA by request and also by reviewing their own individual data. Maryland will also seek to include data from resource parent and youth advisory board surveys.

All data is as of December 2018 and the Data Source is MD CHESSIE.

Please note that measurable goals are in Appendix RP D. Goals Resource Parents.

- **Characteristics of Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes**

Further evaluation of the composition of youth in Out-of-Home Placement in Maryland public resource homes was generated to guide the development of the state recruitment and retention plan. Maryland seeks to include the number of children needing placement vs. the number of resource parents to ensure that the data trends are accurate.

- **Children of Color**

As of December 2018, 68% of Maryland's foster youth population was placed in public resource homes. Approximately 86% of those youth were ages 0-13 and 14% were ages 14-21. 59% were African American, 30% White, and 11% were of Hispanic and/or other ethnicities. Three of the twenty-four local departments have less than 1% of youth who identify as Native American.

- **African American Youth**

Of the twenty-four jurisdictions, three jurisdictions have the highest population of African American youth at 78% (Baltimore City, Montgomery County and Prince George's County). DHS/SSA will continue to provide technical assistance to these counties as stated in the Appendix RP D Goals attached. The issue of disparity and disproportionality will also be addressed as it relates to the permanency planning for this population of youth.

- Target by 2024: Maryland will show an increase African American resource homes in the above mentioned counties to 85%.

- **Hispanic Youth**

Fourteen of the twenty-four counties serve youth of Hispanic ethnicity. 22% of those youth are in formal kinship care, 5% are in restrictive foster care, 69% are in regular foster care, and 3% are in treatment foster care. At least seven of those twenty-four counties will be assessed and provided with specific technical assistance from DHS/SSA in exploring if those youth can be stepped down from therapeutic foster care to regular public foster care and/or relative placement. Based on data derived from MD CHESSIE, DHS/SSA will continue to work on targeted recruitment efforts specifically designed for these counties to increase the number of public resource homes available to serve these youth.

- **Native American Youth**

DHS/SSA continues to work with the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs to ensure Maryland's compliance with ICWA laws. DHS/SSA has a partnership with the commission and meets regularly to discuss the needs of Native American youth within the foster care system. See specific strategies in Appendix RP D - Resource Parents Goals attached.

- **LGBTQ Youth and Victims of Sex Trafficking**

The Department of Human Resources will ensure that each local department is sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ youth as well as ensure that recruitment strategies are targeted toward this population. The MD CHESSIE system does not track data on these populations however local jurisdictions have reported a need for resources for this population. The local department child welfare worker, resource parents, and the state youth advisory board have expressed concern for this population. LGBTQ youth in care have informed the state that there are not enough resource parents available and not enough parents who understand their individual needs.

The state has special training offered through the University Of Maryland School Of Social Work for resource parents to ensure that licensed parents are educated and sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ youth in care. The Department of Human Services will ensure that local departments continue to ensure that these youth have a safe place and do not feel stigmatized for being in care. Local departments should attend LGBTQ community events and partner with those communities to ensure that the need for resource parents is received.

The state continues to work with federal partners and are sensitive to the needs of youth who have been victims of sex trafficking. The state will ensure that local departments are recruiting resource parents who are knowledgeable about sex trafficking and are able to provide protection to those youth in care.

- **Legally Free Children**

Maryland had 406 (8.63%) youth that were legally free and eligible for adoption in December of 2018. DHS/SSA will focus its adoption recruitment goals on youth ages 2-4 and 14-20 as the data shows that these age ranges are the highest number of youth that are legally free in Maryland. DHS/SSA will ensure that efforts are made to ensure that these children are on Adopt-Us-Kids and listed as legally free as well as work with the local departments to ensure that they are recruiting for homes that are interested in older youth as well as the younger age groups. DHS/SSA has partnered with Adopt-us-Kids to develop a work plan around the following: recruitment of adoptable families, adoption education for the child welfare work force, and the engagement of both younger and older youth in care around being adopted. A more concentrated effort will be placed on re-emphasizing the importance of photo listing youth on the AUK website, inter-jurisdictional adoption efforts, and child-specific recruitment for older youth in care. Maryland currently has a strong mechanism for ensuring that legally free children are placed on the Adopt-US-Kids website and DHS/SSA has a page on the website as well. Child welfare workers have been directed to ensure that legally free children are placed on the website as part of their concurrent permanency planning. Currently DHS/SSA is ensuring that efforts are made for local departments to partner with one another so that children remain in Maryland and are adopted by Maryland resource families. DHS/SSA seeks to collect data on how this process

works and demonstrate the data trends. Many of the local department current resource providers have decided to adopt youth placed in their care. Maryland's first priority is to facilitate the adoption process and make diligent efforts towards ensuring that children can make their current resource home their forever home. DHS/SSA will also provide technical assistance to the local departments to ensure that there is a retention network or support group (While-U-Wait) of resource parents interested in adopting. The DHS/SSA resource home unit will be reaching out to each local department to discuss what their current support group process is and make recommendations for improvements and provide feedback.

- **Transitional Age Youth**

As of December 2018, Maryland has 3,206 youth ages 0-21 in both private and public homes and 14% of those youth are ages 14-20. In recruiting and retaining resource homes, Maryland will ensure that all local departments are focusing their efforts on targeted recruitment strategies with a concentrated effort on the older youth who are more challenging. Maryland has decreased its number of older youth in group homes, however more retention efforts needs to be developed to ensure older youth find permanency and do not linger in care. In speaking with older youth in care, DHS/SSA has learned that youth want to be placed in family homes and want to be normalized as much as possible. MD CHESSIE data shows that Baltimore City has the highest number of older youth in care. DHS/SSA seeks to provide technical assistance to this local department and assist as they redevelop their recruitment and retention unit. The goals, objectives, and strategies outlined in Appendix RP D - Resource Parents Goals demonstrate how Maryland will begin to make improvements in finalizing placements for older youth in care. Also, as stated above, DHS/SSA will also work with the local departments around adoption education and engagement for these youth.

- **Sibling Placements**

Maryland's first priority is to ensure that all siblings are placed together whenever possible. SSA seeks to ensure that siblings are placed together and begin tracking this data to see what the trends are and how improvements can be achieved in this area. Technical assistance will be provided to local departments that demonstrate data within MD CHESSIE that there is a high rate of siblings not being placed together upon initial entry into care. Reporting data will be shared with each local department on a quarterly basis to include goals, strategies, and tasks to ensure diligent efforts are made to place siblings together.

As of December 2018, 63% of youth in care are placed with their siblings in Maryland. DHS/SSA will ensure that recruitment and retention efforts are improved to ensure that more public resource homes are recruited for this population of youth. Youth are often placed in treatment foster care to ensure more concentrated on ensuring that more siblings within this age group are placed together through efforts such as Family Find and the recruitment of resource homes interested in this population. Local departments are required to ensure that siblings, who are not placed together, have monthly visitation, be placed in close proximity to one another and able to have daily contact by phone or email.

- **Non-Discriminatory Fee Structure**

Maryland currently does not have a non-discriminatory fee structure as all components of fostering to adopt is funded by State funds. Resource parents are encouraged to provide “Forever Homes” for youth placed in their care and they are supported financially and given resources by the Local Departments of Social Services.

Private foster care agencies (group providers and private treatment foster care agencies) submit an annual budget to the DHS/SSA Office of Licensing and Monitoring and the Maryland Interagency Rate Committee which outlines the cost for all services provided for each child in the program, including the cost for a clothing allowance. Private agencies provide clothing allowances to their foster parents or youth on either a monthly or quarterly basis. Private agencies are provided sufficient funds within their monthly payment amount as established by the IRC to cover the approved clothing allowance for placements in their programs and are not eligible to receive additional funds for this purpose from the local department. For public board rates, see Appendix RP E SSA-CW #19-13-Guidelines for Foster Care Board Rate Expenditures revised 1.15.19.

The following data can be located in Appendix RP D - Resource Parents Goals:

- *Specific strategies to reach out to all parts of the community;*
- *Diverse methods of disseminating both general information about being a foster/adoptive parent and child specific information;*
- *Strategies for assuring that all prospective foster/ adoptive parents have access to agencies that license/approve foster/adoptive parents, including location and hours of services so that the agencies can be accessed by all members of the community;*
- *Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial, and socio-economic variations;*
- *Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers; and*
- *Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a child needing an adoptive placement, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.*

Appendices

Appendix RP A - Recruitment and Retention Plan

Appendix RP B - Guidance and Tool Kit

Appendix RP C - Recruitment and Retention Quarterly Report

Appendix RP D - Resource Parents Goals

Appendix RP E - SSA-CW #19-13-Guidelines for Foster Care Board Rate Expenditures revised 1.15.19.

Appendix RP F - Data Tables for Recruitment and Retention Plan