

ATTACHMENT C: FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLAN

Statewide Foster and Adoptive Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Plan, FFY 2015-2019

Overview

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of children who experience out-of-home placements due to safety threats in their own home. To fulfill this commitment, DFCS recruits and works closely with relatives and members of the community who are interested in serving as temporary caregivers and adoptive parents for children in foster care and emancipated youth age 18 years and older in Extended Youth Support Services. DFCS also partners with Child Placing Agencies (CPAs); Child Caring Institutions (CCIs), which provide group home placements; and faith-based and other interested community stakeholders to expand the number of available placement resources. The recruitment of foster and adoptive parents is a collaborative public, private and community-based effort aimed at maximizing resources to achieve appropriate, stable and timely placements.

Georgia's Recruitment and Retention Plan functions as a part of its overall Safety Response System (SRS) to strengthen families, protect children from further abuse and neglect, and ensure permanency for every child in care. When it is necessary for children to experience out-of-home placements due to safety threats in their own homes, DFCS is committed to ensuring their safety and well-being. To fulfill this commitment, DFCS recruits and works closely with members of the community interested in serving as substitute caregivers for this population of children. Shared parenting helps achieve reunification by building connections with birth parents and keeps parents involved and connected to their children.

The purpose of this Diligent Recruitment plan is to provide:

1. An assessment of available data and information that demonstrates how well DFCS is carrying out its Diligent Recruitment responsibilities;
2. An assessment of the related systemic factors, including available data from stakeholders;
3. An outline of the strategies and activities DFCS will undertake to meet the placement needs of children and youth served by the agency;
4. An assessment of the characteristics and needs of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed; and
5. A summary of the availability of placement resources in the state.

This plan includes some proven strategies and techniques along with new and innovative ideas to reach potential foster and adoptive parents throughout the community with information about the characteristics and needs of available children, the nature of foster care and adoption processes, and the supports available to foster, adoptive and relative caregivers. The plan, as outlined, is flexible and can be modified as needed to ensure that the stated goals and outcomes are met.

This plan is based upon resource development data gathered over the last three years and cumulative totals from the county/regional recruitment and retention plans.

As noted in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for FFY 2015-2019, Georgia's child welfare delivery system is county-administered and state-supervised. DFCS has 159 county offices grouped into 15 regions. The agency establishes and monitors minimum licensing requirements for all foster homes (agency foster homes as well as CCIs and CPAs) and develops and implements the Statewide Foster and Adoptive Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Plan.

As Georgia has differing placement needs across the state, regions and counties are given some autonomy to develop targeted recruitment plans, as long as they support the objectives defined in this statewide plan. Some regions opt to utilize a regional recruitment plan, others opt to tailor recruitment plans to individual counties, and some regions have a combination of team and individual county recruitment strategies. All recruitment plans are submitted annually to the state office for approval with quarterly updates to assess progress. Based on county/regional reports, the state office publishes an annual recruitment and retention plan update.

This statewide plan will be implemented beginning January 1, 2015. Between October and December 2014, the state office will be meeting with regional and county resource development teams as well as CPA and CCI partners to review this plan and provide instruction and support in creating regional/county plans that support this plan's objectives. The regional/county plans will be completed and published no later than December 31, 2014.

This plan, which was developed using informal feedback from the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment experts as well as the Diligent Recruitment Navigator, includes all key components of a comprehensive plan, including the following:

- Description of characteristics of children needing foster or adoptive placement
- Specific strategies to reach all parts of the state
- Diverse methods of disseminating recruitment and child specific information
- Strategies for assuring that full access to resource development staff in county offices and Child Placing Agencies including locations and hours so that there is full access to all members of the community
- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural , racial and socio-economic variations
- Strategies for addressing linguistic barriers
- Non-discriminatory fee structures
- Procedures for a timely search for child specific adoptive placements, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts provided that such procedures ensure that placement of child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement

Georgia's Resource Development and Retention System

Resource development occurs at both the county/regional and state level. Resource development includes all efforts to recruit and retain an appropriate array of placement resources to meet the needs of children and youth in foster care and the characteristics of those who historically have

entered foster care. The state office responsibilities include increasing and retaining the network of CPAs and CCIs; monitoring and coordination of the statewide diligent recruitment and retention plan; and supporting, training and providing technical assistance to county and regional staff. Each region assigns staff to work at the county or region level to lead resource development efforts. County and regional resource development includes the recruitment, training and approval of foster and adoptive parents; ongoing training, supervision and annual re-approval of foster parents; and other activities involving retention and recruitment of caregivers.

Specific Strategies to Reach All Parts of the Community and Disseminate Recruitment Information

DFCS has strong community partners who provide a significant percentage of placement resources. Through these partnerships, DFCS is better able to reach more segments of the community. CPA and CCI placements on average account for more than 45% of all placements of children in foster care. These community agencies typically target recruitment of prospective foster and adoptive parents through associated affinities, such as faith-based organizations.

A ministerial alliance with leadership from two organizations (Fostering Together and Promise 686:111) has recently begun and will serve to recruit and support foster and adoptive parents from churches. However, DFCS still seeks to increase the number and array of community partners engaged in resource development. There are untapped opportunities to include community leaders, groups, sororities, fraternities and other interested stakeholders in recruitment and retention efforts.

DFCS uses traditional and new media to reach diverse segments of the community. The agency also enlists community ambassadors to help establish ongoing relationships and partnerships for targeted and general recruitment to engage communities that represent the children for whom homes are needed. Ultimately, DFCS seeks to recruit and retain safe, stable placement resources that support permanency planning efforts; allow parental and community connections to be maintained; keep children in their schools of origin; and allow siblings to be placed together.

The primary means of recruitment is through DFCS being known as the state's child welfare agency. The majority of prospective parents are not actively recruited via specific campaigns (i.e., responding to a message or plea for foster or adoptive parents). Prospective parents proactively reach out to DFCS because they understand the connection between DFCS and foster and adoptive parenting.

A key DFCS recruitment strategy is the Homes for Georgia's Kids (HGK) foster and adoptive parent inquiry line (877-210-KIDS). It is the first point of contact to obtain information about becoming a foster or adoptive parent in Georgia. The HGK line is staffed six days a week, with extended coverage on Wednesdays (until 9 p.m.) and Sundays (10-11 a.m.) to accommodate calls during the Wednesday's Child television airings. Through HGK, prospective applicants receive information about the requirements, process and children available for adoption. They receive a brochure about the foster and adoptive parent process via email or postal service. Once a prospective applicant is entered into the HGK database, the local county DFCS Resource Development worker contacts the applicant within 10 days to invite the applicant to an information session. The HGK inquiry line has been operational for more than eight years, and

the phone number is included in all recruitment materials and communications about fostering and adopting.

General information about becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent is provided on the DFCS website and via social media, including Facebook and YouTube. Child-specific information is disseminated via websites such as “It’s My Turn Georgia” and “Wednesday’s Child.” The DFCS website links to both sites. Child-specific recruitment also includes “Adoption Parties” and “Paper Match” events. Adoption Parties are festive events in which children available for adoption and prospective parents engage in non-threatening, fun activities, such as bowling or skating. Paper Match events are when case managers seeking adoption matches for children on their caseloads are presented with home studies of potential adoptive resources to see if an initial “paper match” can be made.

On a monthly basis, DFCS has targeted recruitment efforts. Based on their respective recruitment plans, county/regional offices select the monthly campaigns in which they participate. These targeted campaigns are typically geared toward racial, ethnic or other affinity groups and are typically tied to related community-recognized events or holidays. These targeted efforts also directly support efforts to keep siblings placed together, children in their school of origin, and permanency planning. Following are examples of targeted monthly efforts:

- February: Recruitment of African-Americans in honor of Black History Month
- March: Teens R Me, recruitment of parents who want to foster or adopt teens
- April: Target caregivers who have siblings and will foster / adopt sibling groups in honor of National Sibling Day
- May: Target former foster or adoptive parents in honor of National Foster Care Month
- June: Target former DFCS workers, relatives and others impacted by child welfare to foster/ adopt in honor of National Reunification Month
- July: Target the Hispanic community in honor of Hispanic Community Month
- August: School zone-based recruitment
- September: Faith-based community recruitment
- October : Business and organizational employee-based recruitment
- November: Recruitment of adoptive parents in honor of National Adoption Month

Recruitment of Relatives and Mining Relationships of Children in Care

One area of recruitment that DFCS needs to strengthen is mining relationships with youth in care to expand their placement and permanency options and increase relative placements and the number of relatives who become fully approved foster parents. This is typically outside the scope of responsibility of resource development staff and more the responsibility of case managers. A goal over the next five years will be to address this divide and either move the responsibility for this to resource development or develop goals and objectives for case management staff to achieve.

Customer Service Model: IMPACT: Faster, Friendlier and Easier

The acronym IMPACT represents the continuum of the caregiver service from initial inquiry through retention. IMPACT is the acronym for Initial Interest, Mutual Selection, Pre-Service Training, Assessment, Continuing Development and Trauma-Informed Teamwork. Embedded in the components of IMPACT is Georgia's customer service motto: Faster, Friendlier and Easier. The goal is be accessible to current and prospective caregivers, be responsive to inquirers, move prospective caregivers through the approval process as expediently as possible, and remove bureaucratic and other barriers to approval and retention to the extent possible. With the advent of this plan, the DFCS customer service model to address the recruitment and retention of caregivers will be called IMPACT:FFE (Faster, Friendlier, Easier).

The IMPACT:FFE model offers a preparation and training continuum that helps prospective substitute caregivers make an informed decision about becoming a caregiver. Applicants receive information and training to enhance their parenting knowledge and skills, as well as to clarify their role when working with children, their families and other community partners. The preparation and training continuum includes a mechanism for providing practical knowledge of available financial, structural and administrative support. It also addresses skills and competencies required to meet the behavioral, attitudinal and ongoing maintenance needs of children in foster care. Moreover, the preparation and training continuum serves as a strategy to develop and enhance the pool of caregivers. It is the agency's belief that well-prepared and informed substitute caregivers directly impact the strength, success and overall positive outcomes of Georgia's foster care program.

IMPACT:FFE Caregiver Preparation and Training

The preparation and training continuum addresses three important phases of family readiness in caring for children in foster care:

Phase I: Information Session

The Information Session provides basic information to help potential resource families decide whether to pursue the process.

Phase II: IMPACT Family-Centered Practice Pre-Service Training

IMPACT Family Centered Practice (FCP) training provides families with preliminary information, competencies and skills, as well as the philosophical framework they will need to begin providing care for children.

Phase III Ongoing Training

On-going training is a crucial phase impacting the continued readiness of families to meet the ever-changing and varied needs of children in care. It begins during the first year of approval. This requires honest disclosure by families and keen observations by case managers regarding the training needs of these families. These on-going skills and competencies may be obtained through specialized training sessions based on specific needs and expectations, seminars, workshops, conferences, etc. Families also may have additional opportunities to experience personal growth by reflecting on their own personal needs and experiences in order to give their

best to children placed in their care. The annual in-service training requirement continues to focus on skills and competencies required by families for the on-going challenge of parenting children placed in their home.

IMPACT: FFE Accessibility

IMPACT: FFE includes 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. Each county and/or region offers recruitment and preparation of caregivers. Additionally, DFCS provides information to caregivers about its contracted adoption and foster care agencies, as appropriate. County and regional offices host information sessions and pre-service training at hours that are convenient to the community, including evening and weekend classes. When possible, staff will involve local community organizations or the faith-based community in hosting information sessions and pre-service training in the community rather than at the DFCS office.

IMPACT: FFE Staff Training and Development

DFCS is in the process of creating a resource development curriculum for its resource development staff. This effort will complement the existing *New Worker* and *Track Training* currently offered to new staff. The resource development training, tentatively titled “Prepare, Retain and Support,” will teach staff the hard and soft skills needed to recruit, train, assess, support and retain caregivers. Models in the curriculum are based on increasing staff knowledge, skills and abilities based on qualitative foster home study reviews and recruitment and child demographic data, which reflect the need to improve targeted and child-specific recruitment efforts.

Staff training also includes strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial and socio-economic diversity, which is a component of the existing *New Worker* training. Module 2 of this training is entitled *Values and Culture*. In this module, new workers learn to:

- Articulate, through class activities and discussion, an understanding that personal values and ethics will differ between individuals and cultures;
- Understand cultural differences in communication styles and the impact of word choice on intercultural communication;
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of key cultural diversity concepts and terms;
- Demonstrate multicultural awareness that cultural differences exist and may affect how different people think and behave;
- Demonstrate an awareness and understanding of how words can be used to create either a favorable or unfavorable impression of a person, especially with regard to cultural differences;
- Demonstrate multicultural sensitivity – appreciates a variety of cultural perspectives and values diversity; and
- Utilize the Ethnographic Interview tool to discover another’s cultural values.

Additionally, case managers must obtain 20 hours of ongoing Personal Development hours. Courses, such as *The Art of Exceptional Customer Service* and *Partnering with Families who are Immigrants*, assist case managers and staff with working with diverse communities.

IMPACT: FFE Addressing Linguistic and Cultural Barriers

IMPACT: FFE also includes strategies for addressing linguistic barriers. DFCS is committed to ensuring that Limited English Proficient (LEP)/Sensory Impaired (SI) customers have meaningful access to all programs and activities conducted or supported by DFCS. DFCS' strategy for providing meaningful access for LEP and SI customers involves assessing language access needs statewide, recruiting interpreters and training bilingual staff, developing a centralized databank of language resources, translating vital forms and informational documents, forming partnerships with community groups for outreach and education, and implementing a procedure for monitoring services and resolution of complaints.

Additionally, pre-service and ongoing training for caregivers includes working with children and families of diverse backgrounds. Two key modules in pre-service training for caregivers are Module 6: Birth Family Connections and Module 13: Transcultural Parenting. An area of improvement over the next five years will be to recruit and train bilingual staff and IMPACT facilitators and to increase recruitment of bilingual caregivers.

IMPACT: FFE Non Discriminatory Fee Structure

Information sessions, training and home study services associated with becoming a foster, adoptive or relative caregiver in Georgia are provided free of charge. Fees associated with medical and drug screens are reimbursed, upon approval, by DFCS. DFCS does not use standards related to income, age, education, family structure and size or ownership of housing as a basis for approval. In accordance with federal and state laws, DFCS does not discriminate against a prospective caregiver on the basis of race, color or national origin, age, sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, Georgia recruits and utilizes families with diverse backgrounds.

Access to Child Placing Agencies

The State has been working to develop partnerships with CPAs to enhance its resource development efforts. Ultimately, the State seeks to have a coordinated recruitment and retention plan that incorporates the activities and commitments of its CPA partners. A component of the partnership would be in sharing caregiver inquiry referrals that come in via the HGK line. Although not a policy, county offices routinely refer families to CPAs for adoption studies if the families are interested in children without special needs. Ensuring that a routine policy or practice is developed to support informing families about the option of being served by a CPA and providing the location and hours of service of CPAs is included as a goal in this plan.

Adoption Exchange Consultants

The DFCS Adoption Exchange Consultants (AECs) perform many functions related to the timely search for prospective parents for children needing an adoptive placement. The AECs are responsible for reviewing adoption studies and determining potential placement matches,

placement matching activities, and reviewing and disseminating both in-state and out-of-state adoption studies to DFCS case managers for consideration. The AECs also follow up with case managers to see if a selection was made and notify families of the decisions. Additionally, the AECs track out-of-state inquiries to ensure that families are not waiting on a selection decision for extended periods of time, as this prevents them from being selected for other children who may be a potential match.

Analysis of Data: Children in Care and Foster and Adoptive Resources

For development of this plan, data was gathered and analyzed from the GA SHINES, GA+SCORE, and Homes for Georgia's Kids (inquiry line) databases; Foster Parent Exit Survey (online survey); and the US Census.

In order to continue to effect purposeful recruitment and retention planning for the next five years, it is critical to analyze data to understand the current pool of placement resources, children in foster care, and projected placement resource needs. In addition to analyzing data for development of this plan, each county or region annually submits to the state office a local assessment of its pool of resources, children in care, comparisons of the needs of children and the pool of available placement resources, retention data and issues, and projected resource development needs. Additionally, on a quarterly basis, county/regional staff members submit reports to the state office on their progress, changes in child demographics, resource needs, and caregiver recruitment and retention efforts. Based on the county/regional reports, the state office publishes an annual recruitment and retention plan update. Thus, there is ongoing data analysis and utilization of the information to effect purposeful recruitment and retention efforts.

As reported in the Georgia Final Report for FFY 2010-2014, from October 1, 2012, to September 30, 2013, DFCS received 16,608 inquiries from prospective applicants interested in becoming a foster parent, adoptive parent, or foster/adopt parent. Statewide, approximately 49 homes (of all types) were approved each month; however, approximately 216 homes were closed in the same period. At the beginning of the reporting period, there were 2,262 active foster homes. As of September 30, 2012, there were 2,099 active foster homes, 292 active adoptive homes, and 426 active foster/adopt homes. As of the submission of the Final Report there were 1,686 active foster homes, 343 adoptive homes, and 281 legal risk homes.

Children Needing Foster and Adoptive Homes

Over the last decade, the U.S. foster care population has undergone a substantial reduction in size and experienced a shift in its racial and ethnic composition. Georgia was among ten states accounting for more than 90% of the decline in the foster care population between FFYs 2002 and 2012.¹ According to GA SHINES data, however, Georgia has experienced a 16% increase in its foster care population since 2010 (Table 1), with increases in the number of Black (8%), Caucasian (20%) and Hispanic (16%) children needing foster and/or adoptive homes (Table 3). The state has also seen a 20% increase in the number of children ages 0-6 who need foster and adoptive homes (Table 4).

¹ ACYF Office of Data, Analysis, Research, and Evaluation Data Brief 2013-1 (September 2013)

Table 1: Total Children in Care by Year (source GA SHINES)

Calendar Year	Total at the end of the calendar year
2010	6,743
2011	7,346
2012	7,542
2013	7,824

Table 2: Gender of Children in Care by Year (source GA SHINES)

Calendar Year (CY)	Gender	
	Male	Female
2010	3,526	3,217
2011	3,814	3,532
2012	3,954	3,588
2013	4,126	3,698

Table 3: Race/Ethnicity of Children in Care by Year (source GA SHINES)

CY	Black	White	Asian	American Indian	Multi-racial	Unable to Determine	Hispanic
2010	3,100	3,202	9	4	425	2	488
2011	3,316	3,516	11	5	494	3	518
2012	3,346	3,718	12	3	459	2	506
2013	3,366	4,018	14	5	408	12	571

Table 4: Age Group of Children in Care by Year (source GA SHINES)

State Fiscal Year (SFY)	Age Group		
	0-6	7-12	13-17
2010	2,930	1,593	2,220
2011	3,393	1,797	2,156
2012	3,524	1,862	2,156
2013	3,649	1,936	2,239

Demographics of children in care closely mirror the racial demographics of foster parents with the exception of Hispanics (Table 5). According to GA SHINES data 7.4% of children in care are Hispanic whereas only 1.8% of foster parents are Hispanic. Data from the Homes for Georgia’s Kids inquiry line shows that about 2.66% of inquiries were Hispanic. The US Census data for Georgia indicated that 9.2% of the state’s population was Hispanic (Table 6). The State needs to make more concerted efforts to recruit and approve Hispanic caregivers.

Table 5: Children and DFCS Foster Parent Demographics and Foster and Adoptive Parent Inquirers in Care (sources GA SHINES and Homes for Georgia’s Kids database)

CY 2014	Children in Foster Care	Approved Foster Parents	Foster & Adoptive Parents Inquirers
Male	51.8%	38.1%	
Female	48.2%	61.9%	
0-6	46.7%	N/A	N/A
7-12	25.2%	N/A	N/A
13-17	27.4%	N/A	N/A
18 +	0.7%	N/A	N/A
Black	43.3%	49.7%	53.3%
White	50.6%	48.5%	38.2%
Hispanic	7.4%	1.8%	2.7%
American Indian	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Asian	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%
Multiracial	5.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Other	0.3%	1.1%	5.2%

Table 6: Georgia 2010 Census Data (source US Census website)

Characteristic	Population Percent
Males	48.9%
Females	51.1%
Under 5 years	7.3%
5 to 9 Years	7.5%
10 to 14 years	7.4%
15 to 19 years	7.3%
Black	31.4%
White	54.8%
Hispanic	9.2%
American Indian	0.5%
Asian	3.7%
Multi-racial	1.9%
Other	0.1%

An analysis of the characteristics of children in care was also conducted (Table 7). The data indicate that caregiver placement preferences sufficiently match the placement needs of children who have characteristics endorsed. However, the number of children with characteristics endorsed seems artificially low. It is hypothesized that the issue relates to an AFCARS improvement project whereby now, unless a characteristic endorsed by a case manager is supported with a date of diagnosis, the endorsement is not counted. Therefore, a special needs placement characteristic is only counted if the case manager has entered a diagnosis date.

Information from the State’s Medicaid system indicates a significantly higher number of children with diagnosed disabilities in comparison with GA SHINES data. For example, GA SHINES data indicated that 1.5% of children in care had a bi-polar diagnosis whereas Medicaid data indicated that 17.89% had the diagnosis. Similarly, a depression diagnosis was endorsed for 2.7% of children whereas Medicaid data indicated that 41.04% had the diagnosis.

Table 7: Characteristics of Children and Percent of Caregivers Whose Placement Preferences Match the Child’s Needs (source GA SHINES)

Disability Description	2013	2014	Meets Caregiver Preferences
ADD/ADHD	4.5%	3.4%	30.7%
Adjustment Disorder	4.2%	2.9%	15.4%
Adopted previously	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
AIDS	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%
Allergies	0.7%	0.5%	18.8%
Anemia	0.2%	0.1%	16.9%
Animal Cruelty	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Anxiety Disorder	1.2%	0.9%	15.3%
Asperger's Disorder	0.1%	0.1%	6.3%
Assaultive Behavior	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Asthma	0.8%	0.6%	22.2%
Attachment Disorder	0.6%	0.5%	13.4%
Autism	0.3%	0.2%	6.4%
Bipolar	0.8%	0.7%	6.3%
Cancer	0.0%	0.0%	5.5%
Child Hx of Sexual Abuse	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%
Cognitive Disorder	0.1%	0.1%	7.9%
Conduct Disorder	1.2%	1.0%	8.1%
Depression	1.8%	1.3%	15.7%
Developmentally Disabled	0.4%	0.3%	16.0%
Diabetes	0.1%	0.0%	13.1%
Disruptive Behavior Disorder	0.8%	0.6%	6.7%
Downs Syndrome	0.0%	0.0%	6.2%
Dysthymic Disorder	0.5%	0.4%	6.1%
Eating Disorder	0.0%	0.0%	10.3%
Eczema	0.5%	0.4%	17.8%
Emotionally Disturbed	0.2%	0.1%	8.8%
Enuresis/Encopresis	0.2%	0.1%	7.0%
Epilepsy	0.0%	0.0%	5.5%
Failure to Thrive	0.1%	0.1%	14.7%
Family Hx of Drug and Alcohol Abuse	0.0%	0.0%	23.5%
Family Hx of Mental Illness	0.0%	0.0%	17.9%

Disability Description	2013	2014	Meets Caregiver Preferences
Family HX of Mental Retardation	0.0%	0.0%	15.4%
Fire Setting	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%
Gang Activity/Affiliation	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%
Gender Identity Disorder	0.0%	0.0%	4.6%
Hearing Impaired	0.1%	0.1%	12.1%
Hepatitis	0.0%	0.0%	3.5%
HIV Positive	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Impulse Control Disorder	0.2%	0.1%	5.7%
Infant Alcohol Addiction/Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol/Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Effect	0.1%	0.0%	11.4%
Infant Drug Addiction/Prenatal Drug Exposed	0.3%	0.2%	13.7%
Inhalant Abuse	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%
Intellectual Disability	0.3%	0.3%	11.4%
Learning Disability	0.2%	0.1%	22.5%
Limited English proficiency	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mental Retardation	0.5%	0.3%	6.5%
Military Dependent	0.0%	0.0%	10.2%
Mobility Impaired	0.1%	0.1%	4.0%
Mood Disorder	0.9%	0.8%	8.4%
Oppositional Defiant Disorder	1.7%	1.4%	6.6%
Other(Specify)	2.9%	2.3%	0.0%
Other(Specify)	3.5%	2.6%	7.9%
Paraphilia	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Personality Disorder	0.1%	0.1%	4.6%
Pervasive Developmental Disorder	0.2%	0.1%	4.1%
Physically Disabled	0.2%	0.1%	4.9%
Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome	1.6%	1.3%	10.6%
Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Pregnant	0.1%	0.1%	4.9%
Pregnant After Removal	0.0%	0.0%	4.4%
Psychotic Disorder	0.2%	0.2%	2.0%
Rheumatic Fever, Heart Disease, Heart Murmur	0.1%	0.0%	7.1%
Schizoaffective	0.1%	0.0%	2.2%
Schizophrenia	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%
Self Abuse	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%
Separation Anxiety Disorder	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
Sexual Disorder	0.1%	0.1%	2.3%
Sexually Acting Out	0.0%	0.0%	3.7%
Sexually Transmitted Disease	0.1%	0.1%	3.6%
Sibling Group	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Disability Description	2013	2014	Meets Caregiver Preferences
Sickle Cell Anemia	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%
Speech Disability	0.3%	0.2%	18.0%
Spina Bifida	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%
Teen Parent	0.0%	0.0%	5.4%
Terminal Illness	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Terminated International Adoption	0.0%	0.0%	9.8%
Tourette's Disorder	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Tribal Member	0.0%	0.0%	7.8%
Tuberculosis	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%
Visually Impaired	0.3%	0.2%	12.4%

Sixteen percent of children in DFCS custody exit to finalized adoptions. At any given time, there are approximately 250 children without an adoptive resource. The majority of these are children over age 14, members of large sibling groups, and/or children with a diagnosed medical, physical, emotional or behavioral disability. Of children registered in It's My Turn Now Georgia, 63% are male, 37% female. Half (50%) are Caucasian, 40% African American, 10% biracial, and less than 1% other. Of this population, 19% are members of a sibling group and 57% are over age 14.

As reported in the CFSP, beginning with the counties where the state-recognized tribes are located and with collaborative efforts with Georgia tribes, DFCS will develop a strategic outreach plan with input from the state's tribes to include resource development and recruitment strategies specific to the Native American community. Currently, there are less than 1% of children in care that have been identified as having Native American heritage and about the same percentage of foster or adoptive parents with the same heritage.

As a part of this plan, over the next five years, the State will seek to institute practice changes that will ensure that child characteristics are more adequately and consistently captured to better inform resource development staff regarding their recruitment needs and efforts and to have a more targeted recruitment plans.

County DFCS Placement Resources

DFCS remains committed to ensuring that all children who enter care are placed in the least restrictive, family-like setting, whenever possible, while continuing its diligent recruitment efforts. Georgia experienced a slight decrease in the number of DFCS homes from 2012 to 2013 and an increase in the number of approved Non-DFCS homes in the same time period (Table 8). Georgia continues to strive to place more children with relatives when entering care as evidenced by the 15% increase in relative placements between 2010 and 2013 (Table 9). However, only 12 relative foster homes were approved in 2013. Relative foster homes are those where children are placed with a relative AND the relative goes through the full foster parent approval process.

Table 8: Number of DFCS and Non-DFCS homes by Year

CY	DFCS Foster/Adoptive (F/A) Home	Non-DFCS F/A Home	Total
2010	2,328	1,538	3,866
2011	2,579	1,749	4,328
2012	2,544	1,884	4,428
2013	2,439	2,215	4,654

Table 9: Placement Types by Year

CY	Adoptive	Relative*	DFCS Foster Home	Non-DFCS Foster Home	Institution
2010	235	1,095	2,328	1,538	1,110
2011	163	1,365	2,579	1,749	1,108
2012	182	1,340	2,544	1,884	1,193
2013	178	1,296	2,439	2,215	1,245

*Relative includes children placed in paid and unpaid relative placements as well as relative foster and adoptive homes.

GA SHINES data as of September 9, 2014 show that, of the 3,059 homes in full approval status in CY 2012, only 2,130 of those same homes were still active in December 31, 2013. The retention rate is thus 69.6%. Of the 3,316 homes in full approval status as of January 1, 2013, about 78.3% remain in full approval status as of September 9, 2014.

Private Placement Resources

Table 10 shows the different program designation types by CPA and CCI. Program designations are used to determine pay rates for each child placement and are based on the child's characteristics. Program designations are not used for children placed in DFCS foster or relative homes; however, where a child's needs are high, specialized foster care per diem rates are applied.

Child Placing Agency (CPA) and Child Caring Institution data from GA+SCORE indicate that both are developing caregivers who can provide for a broad range of children with different and special needs (Tables 11 and 12). CPA and CCI placements account for on average about 45% of DFCS placements. About 46% of their 5,021 beds were deemed for base or traditional level placements. The base and traditional program designations describe child with no to mild behavior and mental health needs. With the exception of respite-only bed spaces (0.5%), 53% of their bed spaces were for children with the highest behavioral and mental health needs. Maximum Watchful Oversight (MWO) bed spaced accounted for 27%.

CCIs likewise contributed positively to the State's ability to care for children with high mental health and behavioral needs. Thirty-one percent of their bed spaces were for MWO children.

CPA and CCI bed space utilization both showed an increase between CY 2013 and 2014. CPA bed space utilization averaged 48.65% in CY 2013 and 50.53% in CY 2014. CCI bed space utilization increased from 69.25% in CY 2013 to 72.82% in CY 2014.

Table 10: Child Caring Institution and Child Caring Institution Child Characteristics Program Designations (source RBWO Minimum Standards)

CPA	CCI
Traditional Care	BASE Care-BWO
BASE Care-BWO	Additional Watchful Oversight- AWO
Maximum Watchful Oversight- MWO	Maximum Watchful Oversight- MWO
Specialty Base Watchful Oversight- SBWO	
Specialty Maximum Watchful Oversight- SMWO	
Specialty Medically Fragile Watchful Oversight- SMFWO	
	Maternity Home
	Parenting Support Program (Second Chance Homes)
	Teen Development
	Independent Living Program
	Specialty Camp

Table 11: Child Placing Agency Bed Space by Child’s Program Designation (source GA+SCORE) as of August 19, 2014

Region	Homes	Total Beds	Traditional	Base Beds	MWO Beds	SBWO Beds	SMWO Beds	SMFWO Beds	Respite Only
1	58	155	4	17	47	8	8	8	2
2	54	140	25	52	18	13	13	12	3
3	174	461	65	133	100	55	61	40	15
4	76	182	41	53	51	39	54	26	8
5	117	316	65	87	98	76	64	37	14
6	100	255	50	56	89	62	64	21	44
7	126	313	76	71	107	71	66	55	22
8	88	209	57	61	60	43	48	17	7
9	12	33	6	9	9	6	7	3	5
10	53	180	7	47	51	48	50	15	11
11	30	68	10	16	24	18	22	6	5
12	116	306	55	74	97	53	49	27	21
13	214	586	158	157	176	102	96	62	31
14	351	937	193	240	236	161	162	111	29
15	254	718	158	186	161	122	118	83	30
State	1,884	5,021	1,011	1,305	1,377	912	914	542	256

Table 12: Child Caring Institution Bed Space by Child’s Program Designation (source GA+SCORE) as of August 19, 2014

Regions	Sites	Total Beds	Base Beds	AWO Beds	MWO Beds	MH Beds	ILP Beds	TLP Beds
1	12	129	113	16	2	12	4	0
2	3	32	32	5	0	0	0	0
3	19	289	130	65	119	0	34	0
4	17	284	79	92	134	10	3	0
6	9	271	181	42	97	30	0	50
7	5	126	32	38	51	0	0	40
8	10	197	47	39	161	10	6	0
9	3	66	66	18	10	0	0	0
10	5	119	69	34	25	0	0	50
11	7	112	104	36	14	5	0	3
12	13	196	127	52	72	0	9	0
13	12	184	92	18	6	16	6	92
14	56	643	275	49	122	52	201	45
15	11	102	40	6	32	0	10	14
State	182	2,750	1,387	510	845	135	273	294

Privatization Project

Georgia plans to pilot a public-private partnership model in the foster care system for DFCS Regions 3 (seven counties) and 5 (12 counties). These regions were selected based on an analysis of several factors, including the number of children placed outside the region due to a lack of local foster homes, the associated cost of transportation for those children, the capacity of existing local private providers and support gained from local judges and other partners. DFCS has moved forward with issuing a request for proposals from agencies to manage the recruitment, training and monitoring of foster homes and group homes, as well as coordinate placements, family visits and the delivery of services that ensure a child’s safety and physical, medical, dental and/or mental well-being.

Outcomes related to resource development, placement matching, placement stability, meeting the well-being needs of children, independent living services and adoption will be used to measure success of the project. Results over the next few years will be used to determine the usefulness and viability of continuation and/or full-scale implementation statewide.

Retention

The State uses an online Foster Parent Exit Interview to ascertain reasons for exits and to make practice adjustments. The tool has been available since January 2010; however, collection of the surveys and use of the results (no reports have been published) is low. A review of the results shows a significant under-utilization. Between CY 2010-2014, 235 surveys were completed.

The majority (82) were completed in CY 2010, and the fewest (17) in CY 2014. Information from respondents indicated that one-fourth of the exits (25.5%) were due to adopting a child.

Table 13: Reasons for Not Continuing to Foster

What was your main reason for deciding not to continue to foster?		
	Percent	Count
Adoption	25.5%	60
Moved out of County	3.0%	7
End of Relative Placement	6.0%	14
Health	3.8%	9
Transferred to Another Agency	3.4%	8
Change in family circumstances	17.9%	42
Child turned 18 and left home	1.3%	3
Burn Out	3.4%	8
Involuntary closure	5.1%	12
Other	30.6%	72

The most frequent lengths of service were 1 to 3 years with less than 12 months of service being the largest majority. Respondents’ motivation for fostering shows that the majority “wanted to give back or make a difference.” Despite the short tenures, the data indicated that the vast majority felt that they were confident in their ability to meet the needs of children placed, well-matched with the child and supported by the agency.

Table 14: Foster Parent Experiences

Tell us about your experience as a Foster Parent:			
	Yes	No	Response Count
Did you feel confident in your ability to meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	213	5	218
Did you feel that your family was well matched with the child(ren) placed in your care?	197	18	215
Do you feel that you were offered support services to help you meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	193	26	219
Do you feel that you were offered training which could help you meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	208	13	221
In general, were your phone calls to DFCS responded to in a timely manner?	192	29	221
Do you feel that you were consistently informed about case decisions and other issues affecting the child(ren) placed in your care?	172	44	216

Table 15: Foster Parent Relationships

Characterization of relationship with:	Strongly Favorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Extremely Unfavorable	Non-existent
Resource Development Worker	130	87	2	4	3
Placement Case Workers	75	105	21	4	14
Service Providers (CCFA, Wraparound, etc)	41	96	9	1	53
Birth Families	20	102	19	7	66
Local Foster Parent Association	44	82	2	2	76
Other	6	10	4	2	29

Table 16: Foster Parent Motivations

What was your motivation to begin fostering? (Check as many as apply)		
	Percent	Count
Wanted to Give Back or Make a Difference	76.3%	158
Former Fostering Experience	7.2%	15
Own Children Were Grown	10.6%	22
Wanted Sibling for Own Child	5.3%	11
Extra Income	1.0%	2
Infertility Issues	7.2%	15
Spiritual or Religious Calling	19.8%	41
Interested in Adopting	44.0%	91
Other		45

Placement Matching

Placement matching concerns heightened markedly beginning in 2013. The State Office of Provider Management has increased its support to county offices to assist them with placement matching; however, anecdotal information seems to indicate that county offices are routinely having placement matching crises that result in the use of “hoteling” and children being in DFCS offices for long hours awaiting placements. A frequent refrain has included concerns that RBWO providers who indicate that they have Maximum Watchful Oversight (MWO) bed spaces are not accepting children who have an MWO program designation. A review and improvements to the program designation descriptions and potentially adding a level higher than MWO may be warranted. At the very least, a full assessment of the program designation categories and contracted expectations of providers who accept MWO, including exploration of “no-reject, no-eject” agreements, will be undertaken as a component of this plan.

In January of 2014, a common referral application (RBWO MSS-Match Screening Summary) was developed to assist county case managers with reducing the amount of paperwork needed to

make referrals to CPAs and CCIs. The RBWO MSS is a three-page questionnaire with questions focused on the key aspects of a child's characteristics that influence their placement needs. The RBWO MSS is a referral document, an inquiry to determine if the provider likely has a placement match for the child(ren). A referral has to include sufficient information for the provider to make an initial decision about whether or not a potential placement match exists. The RBWO MSS was designed to provide sufficient information to the provider to make the initial placement match decision. If the initial match decision is yes, then an application is completed. (The application is the complete child welfare information packet, which includes attachments such as case plans and the CCFA or trauma assessment.)

The MATCH e-tool and Provider Profile Guide are also key to the RBWO referral process. The MATCH e-tool was released last year as a part of Performance-Based Placement (PBP) scoring. It returns real-time results on potential placement matches based on user input and CCI and CPA placement rosters. The Provider Profile Guide is the complete description of a provider's contact information, location, services and quarterly Performance-Based Placement scores.

Even with the RBWO tools, county staff still appear to be utilizing a "phone book listing" approach to finding placements (e.g., going down a list and calling everyone). This may also be related to a training need, as the State does not have a Placement Matching curriculum that it offers to staff. An archived webinar from January 2014, however, is available for review on the DFCS Education and Training Services website.

DFCS plans to explore development of a centralized state-level function for managing placement matching to better understand daily placement needs and to make the best foster care placement matches with the greatest likelihood of lasting the entire foster care episode. A centralized placement matching process should create efficiencies that help to understand all placement resources available at a given time and thus improve rate of siblings being placed together and children remaining in their school of origin, for example. Additionally, the state plans to develop some "no reject, no eject" placement options to achieve better placement stability for youth with high-end needs.

Systemic Factor Assessment: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Following is an assessment of performance on this systemic factor; item references and descriptions are for the upcoming Round 3 federal Child & Family Services Review.

*Item 33: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that **state standards** are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds?*

Key findings from the 2001 CFSR indicated that there were differences in the licensing standards between county DFCS and Child Placing Agency (CPA) foster homes. A Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address development of uniform approval standards and a review of policy regarding waivers of minimum standards for foster homes resulted. The PIP was successfully

implemented and significant positive changes resulted. Presently, the State’s foster home approval process applies to both county DFCS and CPA foster homes. The State’s contract with CPAs includes a provision that DFCS policy is followed in approving foster homes. In addition to the State’s Office of Quality Management audits, the State also utilizes a Performance-Based Placement (PBP) quarterly scorecard process with CPAs that indicates a qualitative review of their foster parent home evaluations to ensure that they are approved according to policy. PBP also applies to Child Caring Institutions (CCIs) to ensure that staff background checks, licensure and other IV-E requirements are met. Additionally, as a component of the Kenny A. consent decree, Kenny A. quality assurance monitors also conduct qualitative assessments to ensure that CPA foster homes adhere to DFCS standards.

*Item 34: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that the state complies with federal requirements for **criminal background clearances** as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children?*

The safety of children in care is paramount; the State seeks to have no child in foster care placement abused or neglected. Social Services Policy and RBWO Minimum Standards uniformly outline the requirements for criminal background checks. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) within the Department of Human Services is responsible for reviewing criminal background information and providing clearances on CPA families. The OIG also provides the criminal background check results of DFCS county-based foster families to DFCS for their review and determination as to whether they may be approved to provide foster care.

Quality control mechanisms referenced in Item 33 also apply to this item. Following is a chart from the Kenny A. vs. Perdue Monitoring Report that summarizes the extent to which documentation was found in the foster homes records reviewed indicating that these homes met specific approval standards noted.

Table 17: Foster Care Screening, Licensing, Training and Investigative Requirements

Requirement	Period 15 (1/1-6/30/2013)	Period 16 (7/1-12/1/2013)
Family assessment completed	100%	100%
No violations of agency discipline or other foster care policies	98%	99%
Gender of children in home never varied from that approved	100%	99%
Pre-service foster parent training requirements met	100%	99%
Timely annual re-evaluation (no lapses)	99%	99%
Timely Criminal Record Checks for foster parents	99%	99%
Number of children in home never exceeded approved capacity	98%	99%
Comprehensive Drug Screen for Foster Parents	98%	99%
Comprehensive medical report for each foster parent	96%	97%
Age of children in home never varied from that	97%	97%

Requirement	Period 15 (1/1-6/30/2013)	Period 16 (7/1-12/1/2013)
approved		
Timely Criminal Record Checks for other adults in the home	91%a	94%
Ongoing foster parent training requirements met	87%	94%
Sex Offender Registry checked for foster parents	100%	92%
CPS history has been checked	94%	88%
Sex Offender Registry checked for other adults in the home	91%a	84%
Appropriate health statements for other adults in the home	78%a	82%

The State’s policy is consistent with IV-E requirements:

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) shall conduct a check of national and state crime information databases utilizing electronic fingerprinting (Live Scan) on any prospective foster and adoptive parent before the applicant may be finally approved for placement of a child, regardless of whether foster care maintenance payments or adoption assistance payments are to be made on behalf of the child. This includes all adults (age 18 and over) residing in the home (permanently or temporarily) who have access to children placed in the home.

DFCS shall not approve any prospective foster or adoptive parent or claim FFP for any foster care maintenance or adoption assistance payment made on behalf of a child placed in a foster home operated under the auspices of a CPA or on behalf of a child placed in an adoptive home through a private adoption agency, if DFCS finds (in any case involving a child on whose behalf such payments are to be made) via a criminal records check conducted in accordance with the above requirement, a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the prospective foster or adoptive parent has been convicted of a felony involving:

1. Child abuse or neglect;
2. Spousal abuse;
3. A crime against a child or children (including child pornography);
4. A crime involving violence, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide (but not including other physical assault or battery).

DFCS shall not approve any prospective foster or adoptive parent or claim FFP for any foster care maintenance or adoption assistance payment made on behalf of a child placed in a foster home operated under the auspices of a CPA or on behalf of a child placed in an adoptive home through a private adoption agency, if DFCS finds (in any case involving a child on whose behalf such payments are to be made) via a criminal records check conducted in accordance with the above requirement, a court of competent jurisdiction has determined that the prospective foster or adoptive parent, within the last five years, has been convicted of a felony involving:

1. Physical assault;
2. Battery;
3. A drug or alcohol related offense.

RBWO Minimum Standard 1.3 addresses the criminal history background check for Child Caring Institution staff. It reads as follows:

1.3 Providers must ensure that individuals in positions or classes of positions having direct care, treatment, custodial care, access to confidential information of clients or any combination thereof shall undergo a criminal history investigation which shall include a fingerprint record check pursuant to the provisions of Section 49-2-14 of the Official Code of Georgia, Annotated (O.C.G.A.). Providers must utilize the Georgia Applicant Processing Services (GAPS) at www.ga.cogentid.com to comply with this requirement. Providers must have a DHS, OIG Fitness Determination Letter for all applicable staff and volunteers before beginning to work with children.

*Item 35: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the **diligent recruitment** of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed is occurring statewide?*

The 2001 and 2007 CFPSR both found that the State was not in substantial conformity with diligent recruitment. Key concerns noted were that there was a lack of sufficient numbers of placement resources, including specialized resources; lack of funding for foster home recruitment; insufficient targeted recruitment reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of children served; and insufficient attention paid to retention efforts, such as the provision of support services, respite and incentive payments.

Since then the State has made some improvements but has not had a statewide recruitment and retention that addresses diligent recruitment comprehensively. Challenges that remain continue to include insufficient funding to support foster home development and ongoing support (although a \$250K increase was budgeted for SFY 2015) and insufficient prioritization of having resource development staff at the county and state office level, which leads to insufficient recruitment and development activities, including activities necessary for diligent and targeted recruitment.

Improvements made since 2007 include implementation of the Sibling Incentive (Sib-I) placement per diem provided to promote sibling placements. The Sib-I is applied to the monthly per diem amount for the siblings in the amount of \$100 per child. The incentive is available to all regular and relative foster homes (DFCS and CPA) when three or more related children are placed with a foster family. For example: Four children are placed in a family foster home. The total normal per diem amount is reimbursed to the foster parent along with the Sib-I of \$400.00 (\$100.00 for each child). Additional improvements include hiring a state level Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Specialist to provide state-level leadership and guidance to county resource development staff and to guide the development and implementation of the Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan beginning in 2015.

The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Specialist (CRRS) is responsible for providing state-level coordination and support of the plan. The CRRS responsibilities include the following:

- Facilitating Resource Development Joint Committee Meetings at least quarterly
- Providing guidelines and procedures to counties for effective follow-up and evaluation of recruitment activities
- Reviewing, interpreting and distributing quarterly reports on the state's recruitment and retention efforts, which includes the types and frequency of activities, community involvement and responses, along with the number of inquiries received, the number of families in training, number and types of homes approved, and number of placements
- Developing profiles of data collected to be used in strengthening recruitment and retention programs in foster care and adoption and to ensure compliance with MEPA-IEPA and the Adoptions and Safe Families Act
- Providing assistance and technical support to regions in the development of recruitment messages; identifying new and innovative recruitment tools; and identifying and expanding relationships with community partners
- Providing promotional items (as funds allow) and developing sample letters, press releases, public service announcements (PSA) and newspaper ads to assist county/regional recruitment efforts
- Assisting counties working with state recognized tribes in complying with Section 5 of 2015-2019 CFSP, Consultation and Coordination Between the State and Tribes
- Working with Education and Training to ensure that cultural sensitivity training is conducted with resource development staff .

The 2015-2019 plan marks the State's heightened focus and recommitment to investing in recruitment, retention and placement matching practice. Careful attention has been given to developing the plan based on data analysis and scrutiny of current operations and desire to make significant improvements. The Plan focuses on developing a pool of potential relative, foster and adoptive parents who are willing and able to accept the children needing placement. Georgia's plan will provide all children with the opportunity for placement as well as afford all qualified community members the opportunity to foster and/or adopt a child.

*Item 36: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the effective use of **cross-jurisdictional resources** to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children is occurring statewide?*

This item was rated as a strength in the 2001 CFSR and as an area needing improvement in the 2007 CFSR. The majority of stakeholders in 2007 "were of the opinion that the agency does not make efforts to place children and to find permanent placements for children in other states." The State has made improvements in its inter-jurisdictional adoption matching; however, it is a reactive process (processing inquiries) rather than a proactive one: it does not include requirements for actively seeking placements for children with out-of- state resources. The State also needs to make improvements in its State Office ICPC Unit in tracking and managing requests and instituting better accountability and tracking mechanisms for the processes that are managed at the county level (such as conducting home evaluations and adhering to ICPC timeframes).

In 2013, the State implemented procedures for managing inter-jurisdictional adoption placement through a contract with Lutheran Services of Georgia. When the contract ended in FFY 2014, the process for managing inquiries was transferred to the DFCS State Office Permanency Unit. When inquiries are received for waiting children and Georgia is the recipient of out-of-state home studies, the matching process is as outlined below:

1. 100% of out-of-state inquiries are sent to the Permanency Project Administrator from “It’s My Turn Now Georgia” and “Wednesday’s Child,” the avenues by which out-of-state inquiries are received.
2. Permanency Project Administrator logs and tracks 100% of received home studies. A copy of the home study is sent to the Adoption Exchange Consultant within 24 hours.
3. The Adoption Exchange Consultant reviews and sends the home study to the child’s worker within 48 hours of receipt, if it is determined that the family is a potential match.
4. The child’s case manager has 15 days to review the home study and render a decision.
5. If not selected, a non-select letter is sent from the Exchange Consultant to the family and the family’s agency within 48 hours after the decision is made.
6. If selected, policy for placement matching and placement is applied.

In May of FFY 2014 Georgia began tracking out-of-state inquiries (Table 18).

Table 18: Out-of-State Inquiries

	May 2014	June 2014	July 2014	August 2014 (to date)
Weekly average	10	28	35	13
Total for the month	41	113	176	39

For requests received by Georgia for out-of-state children to be placed in Georgia, the State processes the request through its State Office Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children Unit (ICPC). Once received by ICPC, the requests are assigned through Georgia SHINES to the local county department for completion of the home study. ICPC tracks the requests and provides monthly reports regarding timeliness of completion. Currently, SHINES does not have the capability to produce data regarding timely completion of home studies within the required 60 days. Recruitment and foster home development policy allows for the completion of an ICPC foster home without the mandatory IMPACT training at the time of the initial approval, but the caregiver’s pre-service training must be completed within six months of the request.

Data and Systemic Factor Analysis Results

In summary, recruitment and retention data analysis indicate the following strengths in Georgia’s caregiver recruitment and retention system:

1. Strong partnerships with CPA and CCIs; both are approving caregivers to serve children with varied and high-end needs;
2. Increase in the number of DFCS foster homes;
3. Increase in the number of relative placements;
4. Proactive approach to managing inter-jurisdictional adoption inquirers;

5. Consistent application of foster and adoptive home approval standards; and
6. Ensuring that criminal records checks and other safety standards are followed in approval and re-approval of foster homes.

Areas needing improvement over the next five years include the following:

1. Improve data collection on child characteristics;
2. Increase foster parent exit data collection and usage;
3. Increase recruitment of Hispanic and Native American caregivers;
4. Increase the number of relative foster parents;
5. Increase the profile of resource development efforts as a child welfare practice priority, as evidenced by consistent and stable staffing of resource development at the county and state office levels and funding to support recruitment and retention;
6. Develop policy that supports proactive searches for temporary and permanent caregivers out of state;
7. Improve State Office ICPC Unit tracking and management of requests and institute better accountability and tracking mechanisms for the processes that are managed at the county level (such as conducting home evaluations and adhering to ICPC timeframes);
8. Improve the placement matching process for foster and adoptive placements; and
9. Improve the program designation system and contracting expectations of RBWO placement providers, particularly for those who accept children with the highest behavioral and mental health needs (MWO designation).

2015-2019 Recruitment and Retention Goals

Over the next five years DFCS will implement Partnership Parenting. Partnership Parenting is a trauma-informed parenting model between caregivers and birth parents designed to keep parents parenting while their children are in out-of-home placement. By keeping parents connected and involved with parenting their children, permanency can be achieved faster, the trauma of placement can be reduced for children, child and parent bonds can be preserved, and parents can have the opportunity to demonstrate and increase their parental protective capacities. Partnership Parenting also emphasizes and supports concurrent planning.

The emphasis in the new recruitment model is on engaging families and enlisting them to do what is needed as Partnership Parents. An emphasis on grassroots outreach, relationship-building, community education and awareness are key elements in the initial stages of recruiting the needed pool of Partnership Parents.

As a result, there are now three categories of caregivers: Partnership Parents, Resource Parents, and Adoptive Parents. ***Partnership Parents*** are foster parents who are expected to work with birth families as mentors whenever possible. They are expected to share parenting responsibilities with birth parents while birth parents work on the issues that caused their children to enter foster care. ***Resource Parents*** work with cases involving two permanency plans. Reunification is the primary permanency plan, but an additional (concurrent) permanency plan, such as adoption, has been established to prevent a child from lingering in foster care. Like Partnership Parents, Resource Parents are expected to mentor and share parenting responsibilities with birth parents. However, Resource Parents are willing to adopt a child placed in their home

if reunification efforts fail. ***Adoptive Parents*** are forever families who make a life-long commitment to a child. They adopt children whose birth parents' parental rights have been voluntarily surrendered or terminated by a court, thus making them legally free for adoption.

The foundational slogan and message for recruitment efforts for the next five years will be as follows:

Good for the Community. Better for Families. Best for Children.

This theme speaks to serving whole families, the expanded focus of foster parenting, the expectation of community partnerships, and acting in the best interest of children.

DFCS is committed to specific recruitment and retention goals that identify the agency's desired outcomes. Following are these agency goals, with related objectives and interventions designed to achieve those goals.

Goal #1: Ensure that children and youth are placed in the least restrictive and most appropriate placement.

Objective 1: Expand the number of foster and adoptive resources (in the counties, CPAs or CCIs) to ensure that each child needing foster care placement has at least two potential placements that reflect their need for the least restrictive and most appropriate environment by September 2019.

Initial 5-Year Targets: Approve 2,500 Partnership Parents, 1,000 Resource Parents, 700 Adoptive Parents, and 300 Relative Foster Parents.

Interventions:

1. Develop enhanced recruitment communication methods/distribution and materials to reach prospective caregivers from all communities by September 2015.
 - a. Beginning January 2015, coordinate monthly statewide recruitment campaigns targeting specific segments of the community. The goal is to reach new people and allow partners to participate in recruitment events. The initiatives will enforce local ongoing recruitment efforts. Campaigns will be updated annually, but will typically include the following:
 - February: Recruitment of African-Americans in honor of Black History Month
 - March: Teens R Me –recruitment of parents who want to foster or adopt teens
 - April: Target caregivers who have siblings and will foster / adopt sibling groups in honor of National Sibling Day
 - May: Target former foster or adoptive parents in honor of National Foster Care Month
 - June: Target former DFCS workers, relatives and others impacted by child welfare to foster/ adopt in honor of National Reunification Month
 - July: Target the Hispanic community in honor of Hispanic Community Month

- August: School zone based recruitment
 - September: Faith-Based Community recruitment
 - October : Business and organizational employee based recruitment
 - November: Recruitment of adoptive parents in honor of National Adoption Month
- b. Implement child-specific recruitment strategies that focus on the children in Georgia who are waiting to be adopted and needing forever families. DFCS uses local media, web-based photo-listings, adoption parties, and a statewide adoption match meeting to bring awareness of these children to the community. Strategies include:
- Daily adoption match services by the AEC
 - Weekly updates to the It's My Turn Now Georgia photo-listing website
 - 42 segments of Wednesday's Child on Fox 5 Atlanta
 - Weekly updates to Wednesday's Child Atlanta
www.wednesdayschildga.com
 - Weekly updates to the DFCS Adoption website with a featured child
 - Monthly registration of Georgia's waiting children on AdoptUSKids.org
 - Holding Adoptions Parties and Paper Match Meetings
 - Development of policies and practices to support creation of child-specific individualized recruitment plans for each child free for adoption and without an adoptive resource
 - Implementation of an enhanced inter-jurisdictional adoption matching process by the AECs
2. Publicize awareness of the need for foster, adoptive and relative caregivers through traditional and social media and infuse technology in all stages of the recruitment process through social media, e-blasts and other electronic means through September 2019.
 - a. Establish regular reports to DFCS leadership regarding placement resource development, retention and utilization by July 2015.
 3. Partner with Fostering Together and Promise 686:111 to recruit, train and support foster parents; establish and institutionalize the Caring Community concepts that support recruitment and retention and ensure that at least 5% of foster parents have a "Caring Community" that consists of at least one active support person by September 2019.
 - a. Initial Targets: Approve 300 volunteers who will work with foster, adoptive and relative caregivers to serve as a support system by September 2019.
 4. Enhance the Homes for Georgia's Kids foster and adoptive parent inquiry line by creating email materials, improving the website interface, and creating more effective communication linkages between the call center and county/regional resource development staff by September 2018.
 5. Continue established partnerships with child placing agencies to increase placement options for medically fragile, maximum watchful oversight (MWO) and special

populations such as Commercially Sexually Exploited Children and Youth (CSEC) and older youth transitioning from foster care by September 2017.

6. Initiate caregiver recruitment and retention efforts with Georgia's recognized tribes and with Hispanic families by September 2016.
7. Increase proactive and responsive inter-jurisdictional adoption matching efforts by September 2016.
8. Conduct an assessment of current policies and practices regarding relative placements and implement changes that support increasing the number of relative placement and relatives who become fully approved foster parents by July 2016.

Goal #2: Improve organizational effectiveness regarding placement resource development, retention and placement matching.

Objective 1: Improve placement matching process, tools and training for resource development staff by September 2019.

Interventions:

1. Assess and improve the RBWO program designation determination system, in particular expectations for MWO providers, by December 2017.
2. Utilize data more effectively in developing recruitment plans and training and providing technical assistance to county/regional resource development staff by September 2019.
3. Conduct a feasibility assessment on having a centralized placement matching process for the state and initiate recommendations by December 2018.
4. Implement the Recruit, Prepare and Retain Curriculum for resource development staff by September 2018.
5. Request technical assistance on increasing organizational effectiveness from the National Resource Center on Diligent Recruitment by October 30, 2014.
6. Assess the effectiveness and lessons learned from the Region 3 and 5 privatization pilot projects and apply to rest of the system through September 2019.
7. Improve State Office ICPC Unit in tracking and management of requests, and institute better accountability and tracking mechanisms for the processes that are managed at the county level (such as conducting home evaluations and adhering to ICPC timeframes) by September 2015.

Goal #3: Increase the retention of prospective caregivers during the approval process and once approved, retain caregivers for at least five years.

According to research findings referenced in the final report of *Understanding Foster Parenting: Using Administrative Data to Explore Retention*,² interactions with the child welfare agency were the most commonly cited factors affecting foster parent retention. However, as with most research concerning retaining foster parents, this finding focuses on retention after approval. Factors affecting retention occur at all stages of the continuum, from inquiry to closure. Therefore, agency goals focus on both pre- and post-approval retention.

The following outcomes are expected as a result of accomplishing retention goals:

Objective 1: By September 2019, 85% of foster parents will serve at least five years and no more than 15% of foster parents will exit within 18 months of approval.

Objective 2: By September 2019, the number of families who terminate their involvement with the agency prior to approval will be decreased by 25%.

Interventions:

1. Develop reports that track how adequately prepared, supported and appropriately matched families are for placement of foster, adoptive and relative placements as evidenced by the percent of parents who exit after one placement, the maltreatment in care rate, number and type of policy violations, and other indicators of safety and compliance with caregiver standards by July 2016.
2. Increase the percent of caregivers who complete the foster parent exit interviews/survey to at least 75% by July 2015.
 - a. Use information from the caregiver exit surveys to inform pre-service and ongoing training changes and improvements.
 - b. Review and update the IMPACT pre-service training annually, as needed, to determine if any updates are indicated as reflected in maltreatment in care, policy violations or other safety data.
3. Implement an annual foster parent survey process to assess training, support and service satisfaction by July 2017.
4. Develop method of tracking prospective caregivers through the approval process by September 2018.
5. Increase support by establishing a regular and ongoing communication channel with foster, adoptive and relative caregivers by July 2015.
6. Support efforts of the Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG) by providing information about the organization to all prospective caregivers, supporting

² Gibbs, D. *Understanding Foster Parenting: Using Administrative Data to Explore Retention* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2005).

AFPAG events and ensuring that regular partnership meetings are occurring at the state and local level with AFPAG leadership through September 2019.

7. Partner with the Office of the Child Advocate and the Foster and Adoptive Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG) to improve the Foster Parent Bill of Rights Grievance Procedures, to include revision of forms, tracking grievances, the third-level mediation process, and to ensure that foster parents and staff are re-trained on the law and the procedure by July 2016.