



Six Strategies to Achieve Sustainable Change with Family First Transition Funds

Redlich Horwitz Foundation (RHF), in partnership with ChildFocus, developed this list of sample strategies for how counties may choose to spend their transition funds to meet the goals of the Family First Transition Fund. It is for information purposes only and envisioned as a work in progress. Please provide RHF with additional ideas as this work gets underway across the state.

Overview

In May 2019, the New York Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) announced the availability of new funds from the State budget to help counties prepare for implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Through the Family First Transition Fund, New York counties are expected to use these funds on efforts to achieve two primary results:

1. Reduce the percentage of children who are placed in congregate care settings, and
2. Increase the use of kinship care for children who must enter the foster care system.

This guide highlights ideas for how counties can use their Family First Transition Fund allocations (transition funds) to achieve sustainable change for children and families, in alignment with the OCFS-approved spending categories. The transition funds are highly flexible to address opportunities and challenges that are unique to each county. If spent well, these funds can augment the support already available to counties through OCFS, Casey Family Programs and RHF. They can also seed changes in policy, practice and staffing that can be sustained by capturing and reinvesting cost savings achieved from reducing the number and length of placements in high-cost congregate care settings.

Most importantly, these funds can help counties pivot from an overreliance on congregate care toward allowing more children and youth who cannot safely remain at home to reap the benefits of a family environment from the moment they enter foster care. This is the promise of Family First, and the Transition Fund is an important tool to help counties realize this vision.

Through its partnerships with New York counties such as Onondaga, Westchester and Dutchess, the Redlich Horwitz Foundation has learned a lot about what works to increase the use of certified kin families and decrease congregate care placements. **Specifically, RHF has found that kinship gatekeeping procedures that prioritize placing children with certified kin families, coupled with dedicated staff to find relatives and assist kinship foster parents, will yield quick results in decreasing congregate care placements.** Implementing the suggested reforms below may also require process analysis and redesign. What follows are cost-effective ideas that can fit any

transition fund budget and help make sustainable improvements to placement practices and outcomes. Suggestions include how counties can:

- Engage technical assistance and training entities;
- Hire staff or consultants whose positions can be sustained by reinvesting savings from reductions in congregate care;
- Adopt new frontline practices to achieve Family First goals;
- Integrate new tools and technologies to make the first placement with a family whenever possible; and
- Contract with external partners—provider agencies, community-based nonprofits and consultants—to support the work.

Making decisions about how to best use a county’s transition funds to meet its unique needs can be challenging. If you’d like assistance in identifying the most impactful use of Family First transition funds for your agency, please contact Jessie Rothkuo at Redlich Horwitz Foundation at jrothkuo@rhfdn.org.

Eight Questions to Ask About the Use of Family First Transition Funds

Transition funds are time-limited, and per the Local County Memorandum released on May 7, 2019 (19-OCFS-LCM-09), counties must spend their allocation by March 31, 2020, to be reimbursed by the State. Given these time constraints, counties must decide quickly how to best leverage their funds to make sustainable change toward the intent of the transition fund: reducing overreliance on group care and increasing the percentage of children placed with certified kinship families. Counties can ask a series of strategic questions to ensure they are making timely, effective investments in reform, instead of one-time expenditures that don’t lead to sustainable change:

1. How can transition funds be used to seed strategies, staff positions or contracts that can be sustained using savings from reductions in congregate care placements?
2. Will the strategy being implemented require a change in policies or procedures, and if so, how can those changes be made in a timely manner?
3. How can the county ensure strategic alignment between Family First transition efforts and other important reforms, such as efforts to prevent children coming into foster care?
4. Can the county join forces with other counties pursuing similar strategies to make the transition fund allocation go further?
5. If adopting a new model, what accountability measures will the county use to ensure fidelity?
6. Does a service or consultant have to be procured, and if so, how can the procurement process be streamlined for transition fund purposes?

7. What kind of multidisciplinary team does the county need to ensure new strategies are implemented well and challenges are addressed in a timely manner?
8. What kind of oversight is required for use of the funds, particularly if the services are contracted out?

Strategy 1: Secure Enhanced, Targeted Technical Assistance

Counties may choose to contract for additional technical assistance or consulting support beyond what is provided during the initial planning period. Such consulting and technical assistance can be valuable to support the following types of activities:

- Building organizational capacity for change
- Creating a Family First readiness roadmap
- Updating agency policies
- Enhancing or creating agency protocols
- Increasing organizational capacity for data collection, analysis and continuous quality improvement
- Financial analysis and fiscal modeling
- Designing procurement and contract management strategies

In addition, the implementation of many of the recommendations contained in this guide would benefit from outside help, similar to what counties are receiving from the OCFS regional offices and RHF.

1. Seek Assistance in Locating a Consultant through RHF

RHF has access to a broad network of consultants and experts, both in New York and across the country. Interested counties can reach out to the Foundation for support in identifying and selecting technical assistance resources that will be the best fit for the county.

Contact: Jessie Rothkuo, Redlich Horwitz Foundation, jrothkuo@rhfdn.org

Cost: Ranges between \$10,000-25,000, depending on the consultant or firm hired and whether it is an hourly or daily rate or a fixed-price contract for a deliverable.

2. Work with a Consultant to Help Redesign Agency Contracts

In the past, many agencies have used annual contracts to pay for beds and have not structured contracts to incentivize child-specific services that children and youth need to support their well-being. Consultants can help counties restructure their contracts with provider agencies to be more outcomes-focused and less reliant on “bed days” to achieve their goals. This approach will help to ensure that contracting processes are better aligned with the agency’s desired outcomes.

Cost: Ranges between \$1,200-\$1,800/day, depending on the consultant or firm hired, and whether they charge an hourly or daily rate or a fixed-price contract for a deliverable.

3. Engage Building Bridges Initiative to Help Provider Agencies to Become Family-Centered and Youth-Focused

Provider agencies that have operated shelters, assessment centers and long-term residential treatment centers need support to diversify their services and strengthen their internal culture and practice to make necessary changes that are envisioned under Family First. Ultimately, this includes developing a strong continuum of services that are family-centered and youth-focused. Building Bridges Initiative employs a network of consultants that can help provider agencies make this shift so they are aligned with the values and principles of Family First.

Contact: Beth Caldwell, BBI Director, bethanncaldwell@gmail.com

Cost: Costs are determined by the individual needs of the program as assessed in an initial planning call (\$175). Generally, costs for BBI technical assistance activities are \$175/hour, or \$1,500 per day, plus travel expenses.

4. Contract with the Center on Children and the Law for Enhanced Technical Assistance on Kinship Care and Court Engagement

The Center on Children and the Law at the American Bar Association provides consultation to child welfare agencies, courts and attorneys on best practices and policies to improve outcomes for children and families. Areas of expertise specific to Family First readiness include legal and judicial engagement, kinship-care policy development, staffing structures to support kinship goals, and training for frontline staff on Family First policies and priorities.

Contact: Heidi Redlich-Epstein, Director of Kinship Policy and Assistant Director for State Projects, Heidi.Epstein@americanbar.org, (202) 662-1725

Cost: \$1,200/day, plus travel

Strategy 2: Establish Administrative Review Teams to Review Proposed Placements in Non-Kinship and Congregate Care Settings

In order to be eligible for Title IV-E reimbursement for a placement into a Qualified Residential Treatment Program, the Family First Prevention Services Act requires child welfare agencies to develop administrative review processes to ensure children are only placed in congregate care when they have a clinical need that necessitates short-term residential care. Transition funds can be used to plan and implement this review process and engage the clinical expertise needed to ensure high-quality assessment of children's needs and a documented process to determine the most appropriate level of care.

1. Hire a Consultant to Develop and Support Implementation of a New Teaming Structure to Review All Congregate Care Placements

Family First was modeled after the experience of several states that successfully changed their decision-making protocols to require approval at the top levels of the public system for placement into congregate care. This approval process—sometimes called a Director Approval Process—requires justification for any placement that is not in a family. Ideally, the decision is made in the context of a team and is driven by a clinical assessment that the child’s needs cannot be met in a family. Counties can use their Family First funds to hire consultants to help create, implement and monitor this new practice. This structure may include a deputy director or program manager who has clinical expertise, as well as frontline staff and community partners who understand the needs of the child.

Cost: \$150 - \$200/hour, depending upon the consultant or firm hired and whether they charge an hourly rate or a contract fee for deliverables.

2. Hire a Clinical Specialist for Quality Assessment for Level of Care

Many counties will need to incorporate clinical expertise into their team, as well as a uniform and validated assessment tool, to make effective decisions about the best placement option for a child, particularly if short-term residential treatment is recommended. Counties can use transition funds for clinical consultation on selecting an assessment tool, training all staff and provider agencies on the tool, and coaching them on how to use the tool to drive decisions about the least restrictive, most homelike level of care to meet a child’s needs.

Cost: \$150-\$200/hour for consultation, training and coaching.

3. Develop Protocols for Kinship Gatekeeping and Documenting Family Connections

Many children enter foster care after involvement in prevention services and/or through the child protection system. Agencies that develop a kinship gatekeeping protocol, designed to ensure that all family connections have been exhausted before placement in a non-kin home, can document all family connections on a kinship gatekeeping form. Family connections are often documented in the case file but are not in one easily accessible format with the right information that allows a caseworker to identify family connections at the point of removal. Agencies can develop an online tool and/or a form that is accessible throughout the child’s involvement with the child welfare system so that family connections who are identified and engaged follow the child. Transition funds can be used for consultation on the creation of this documentation tool and/or to create and train staff on a new kinship gatekeeping policy.

Cost: \$10,000 - \$15,000 for consultation on a new gatekeeping policy and method for documenting family connections throughout the child’s involvement with the system.

Strategy 3: Expand Family Search and Engagement

Counties that use their transition funds for family search and engagement can choose from proven practice enhancements, as well as a strong network of trainers, consultants and technical-assistance providers who are passionate about the importance of family connections for children. When taken together, these strategies can increase the odds that children maintain their family connections while in foster care.

1. Adopt Family Group Decision-Making, Family Team Conferencing, or Team Decision Making to Identify and Engage Family Connections

Research on family-teaming models has found that bringing a family team to the table prior to or immediately following the removal of a child can, among other things, increase the likelihood that the child will be placed with kin. Family-team meetings can also achieve many other important goals, such as developing a concrete plan to help families access the services and supports they need; clearly establishing roles, responsibilities and expectations for all members of the team; and in some cases, avoiding removal of children from their parents. There are many forms of family-team meetings, and some jurisdictions have developed hybrid models that meet their unique needs and staffing considerations.

Some of the more widespread models, along with contact information for those providing consultation on these models, include:

Family Group Decision-Making – Kempe Center, www.fgdm.org

Contact: Lisa Merkel-Holguin, Lisa.Merkel-Holguin@childrenscolorado.org

Family Team Conferencing – Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, www.childwelfaregroup.org

Contact: Freida Baker, (334) 264-8300

Team Decision Making – National Council on Crime and Delinquency, www.nccdglobal.org/what-we-do/team-decision-making

Contact: Heather Meitner, hmeitner@nccdglobal.org

Cost: Ranges between \$30,000 – 60,000; depends upon the model and whether the county decides to develop their own model or receive consultation and training on one of the models described above.

2. Increase Training for Staff on Family Finding/Family Search and Engagement

Family Finding and Family Search and Engagement are strategies designed to help child welfare agencies find family connections for children when they first become known to the child welfare system and throughout their involvement with foster care and aftercare. Several independent consultants and child welfare organizations provide training and technical assistance on family search, family engagement and Family Finding principles and skills. National and local resources include:

The Hillside Institute for Family Connections and **The Children's Village**, both based in New York, offer training and consultation on the Family Finding model developed by Kevin Campbell. Hillside focuses on upstate counties, while the Children's Village focuses on all five boroughs of New York City and downstate counties, including Westchester and Long Island. The organizations provide a comprehensive range of training and services developed with one goal in mind: to help reconnect youth with their family and natural supports. They offer Family Finding core curriculum training; a Family Finding comprehensive overview; coaching and consultation; custom trainings; train-the-trainer curriculum; Family Finding services for groups or individuals; and production of video vignettes. Training can be one day for an overview of search and engagement principles and strategies, or a two-day training on the six steps of family search and engagement. Hillside and The Children's Village also contract with agencies for Family Finding positions that help identify and engage family for children when they are first removed from their homes and throughout their involvement in the child welfare system.

Contact: Hillside Institute, Tess Mahnken-Weatherspoon, tmahnken@hillside.com

Contact: The Children's Village, Vincent Madera, vmadera@childrensvillage.org

Cost: \$2,750 per day for Family Finding training

Approximately \$85,000 to contract for a Family Finding specialist, trained and supported by Hillside Family Services or The Children's Village.

Kevin Campbell is an internationally recognized youth permanency expert, founder of the Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness and developer of the Family Finding model, a set of strategies now utilized throughout the United States and Canada to establish lifelong supports for youth in foster care. Trainings offered by Kevin include one- to four-day sessions entitled Lighting the Fire of Urgency: Introduction to Family Finding and Importance of Family Connectedness; Making Connections Happen; and Family Finding Boot Camp (four-day session). For more on Kevin's trainings, see www.familyfinding.org/trainings/trainings_kevin.html.

Contact: familyfindingcoordinator@gmail.com

Cost: \$3,000 per day, plus \$1,500 per additional trainer if needed, plus travel expenses.

National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness promotes the Family Finding model as a core strategy and a method that recognizes that the single factor most closely associated with positive outcomes for children is a meaningful, lifelong connection to family. Training may be designed to target specific areas of concern or to sustain learning in established practices. Consultation services offer specific approaches to achieving timely permanency for all who are served. Training offerings include one- and two-day sessions entitled Lighting the Fire of Urgency and Making Connections Happen, while a longer-term series includes an orientation as well as a comprehensive and detailed training of the six steps to finding family (six sessions over six months). More information about training offerings can be found at http://www.familyfinding.org/trainings/trainings_NIPFC.html.

Contact: Bob Friend, Director of the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, familyfinding@senecacenter.org

Cost: \$2,000 per day for training, plus travel expenses.

Plummer Youth Promise conducts Family Search and Engagement (FSE) training and coaching that is designed to help staff locate, engage, connect and support family resources for children. It is both a philosophy and a practice approach, and it is built on the foundational values and beliefs of family and youth engagement and family-centered practice. Plummer Youth Promise offers a one-day training session with follow-up support for frontline staff, supervisors and managers on strategies to uncover and explore a youth and family's natural network of relationships, maternal and paternal, who can offer a range of support and connection for children and youth. The training focuses on "in-the-moment" skills, conversations and tools that assist in engaging family in safety planning to identify who can join a network to create safety and healing. Trainers also provide the option of a half-day consultation and/or WebEx consults to support transfer of knowledge and demonstrate application of FSE concepts, skills and tools introduced in training.

Contact: Lori Ryan, lryan@plummeryouthpromise.org

Cost: \$2,000 per day for onsite training and technical assistance by two trainers.

30 Days to Family[®] is an intensive and short-term intervention that aims to place children with safe and appropriate relatives within 30 days of entering foster care. This program aims to meet federal mandates that require states to identify and provide notice of a child entering foster care to all grandparents and other adult relatives within 30 days of the child entering state custody. The concentrated efforts and low caseloads of 30 Days to Family[®] are designed to make placement with relatives possible, while also aiming to support families so placement stability is maintained. Training on 30 Days to Family is three to four days long, and is held in St. Louis, Missouri, where the model was developed. Model developers will work with jurisdictions on full fidelity, which includes the training and intensive on-site technical assistance. Counties can also receive the training without the follow-up consultation.

Contact: Ian Forber-Pratt, ianforberpratt@foster-adopt.org, 314-367-8673

Cost: \$80,000 for training and full-fidelity technical assistance, or \$5,000 for one on-site trainer for the three- or four-day training, plus expenses.

3. Use Genograms and/or Family Trees

Genograms are visual depictions of a family tree that can help caseworkers and families document the family connections and relationships throughout a family's involvement with the child welfare system. Genograms can complement a caseworker's family engagement skills by helping families identify the connections who are important to them and who might serve as placement resources if removal of a child becomes necessary in the future. They can also be online tools that both public

and voluntary agencies can access at initial placement or during a placement move. This webinar describes two states' experiences using genograms to document family connections: www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/genogram-family-relationship-diagram

GenoPro is a family genealogy software program that allows licensed users to develop genograms and family trees to show family relationships. The program enables caseworkers to develop a Family Network Diagram, which is a visual display of a child's family tree. It can also be used to create an Ecomap, a visual display of a family's formal and informal support systems.

Contact: www.genogram.com

Cost: Prices range from \$14.99 for one user license to \$1,099 for a 50-user license.

4. Utilize Internet and Other Search Strategies

Family searches through internet search engines are an important complement to quality family engagement that help families identify their own natural support networks. Family search engines should not be the first or only strategy to locate family connections but rather a tool to employ when all other efforts to identify viable family placement options and connections have fallen short. New search technologies come on the market every day and include free websites, services that charge a "per child or family" search fee, and systems that require a licensed user, with prices increasing depending on the number of users. Some commonly used systems for paid Internet searches include Seneca, LexisNexis, and Clear. Many jurisdictions also use free social media sites such as Facebook. Another free option for school-aged children is a partnership with schools for access to the names and contact information on children's emergency contact sheets.

Cost: Costs vary for paid Internet searches. Examples include:

- Seneca Searches: \$20-\$40 per child
Contact: Clif Venable, clif_venable@senecacenter.org
- LexisNexis: monthly fee is negotiable, depending upon how many searches expected and whether the county also wants to do due diligence on criminal background. Monthly charge is approximately \$150-\$250 per month
Contact: Jacob Michael, jake.michael@lexisnexisrisk.com, (561) 982-5160

Strategy 4: Support Kinship Foster Parents in Meeting Approval and Certification Requirements

Counties often face barriers to helping kinship families become approved and certified in a timely manner. Barriers are often related to the fact that these families step in for children and youth with little notice about the placement and less time to prepare for meeting the foster parent requirements than non-kin families. Counties can use transition funds to help overcome some of these barriers and better support kin families through the approval and certification process.

1. Hire a Kinship Coordinator to serve as the County's "Kinship Champion"

Counties trying to overcome barriers to identifying, approving, certifying and supporting kin can hire a "kinship champion"—a mid-level manager who is responsible for supporting all staff in meeting the agency's kinship care goals. Similar to a foster care manager, this person's responsibility is to live and breathe kinship care and help counties develop the policies and protocols to meet the unique needs, circumstances and family dynamics of kinship caregivers. This includes development of a kinship gatekeeping policy to ensure that all efforts to place children with kin have been exhausted before placing with non-kin or in group care. Counties that have hired kinship coordinators find that having one person focus on kinship care full-time sends a signal to staff that the agency is serious about placement with kin and is willing to create the staffing leadership structure necessary to achieve kinship goals. Counties can contract for a kinship coordinator as a time-limited position during Family First transition or hire a full-time person. This person may help staff with their caseloads but typically do not carry a regular caseload themselves.

Cost: \$45,000 - \$55,000 Salary, plus benefits, depending on local cost of living. Savings captured from reducing congregate-care placements by one child can pay for this position in one year.

2. Use Trauma-informed Pre-Service and Skills Training Curricula for Kinship Caregiver Training

Curricula such as Caring for Our Own, already in use in New York State and geared specifically toward the needs and interests of kinship caregivers, can help caregivers learn skills to meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma and address some of the complex family dynamics associated with caring for a relative child. These trainings are different from traditional foster parent training in that they help caregivers address the specific needs of children already placed in their home and provide families with an important network of caregivers who are filling a similar role.

Counties can adopt Caring for Our Own, or they can develop their own streamlined curriculum through a university partner, training institute or child welfare consultant. Transition funds can also be used to hire or contract for additional trainers so training can be more frequent or training can be provided in caregivers' homes.

Cost: \$10,000- \$15,000 to hire or contract with trainers to provide more frequent and/or in-home training to caregivers. Approximately \$30,000 to develop a new curriculum that satisfies licensing requirements.

3. Create Emergency Approval Resource Kits for Kinship Families

Kinship caregivers assume responsibility for children with little notice and are often unprepared for many of the requirements of being a foster parent. Some jurisdictions have created resource kits to help kinship caregivers meet some of the immediate safety requirements, such as smoke detectors, first aid kits, batteries and stickers with emergency phone numbers. Kits can also be developed for different developmental stages, such as kits with diapers, car seats, baby bottles, clothing and formula for infants; and kits with clothing and school supplies for older children. Providing kinship caregivers with these kits not only helps them with some of the requirements for emergency approval and home studies, but also sends a strong signal about the value of agency-kinship caregiver partnerships. Transition funds can be used to purchase kits, hire caregivers and/or youth to put together the kits, or provide incentives to staff to undertake this as a special project.

Cost: Approximately \$100-150 for the kits. Stipends of \$25-\$30/hour for youth or caregivers to put together the kits. \$500 as an incentive for staff as a special project.

4. Hire Kinship Parent Advocates to Support Kin through Certification

Current kinship caregivers who have “walked the walk” through the certification process can provide new kinship caregivers with guidance and support in the immediate months following the placement of a child. Caregivers often respond well to someone who has already been through the process and can help them understand what to expect. Experienced kinship caregivers can also provide emotional support to new caregivers who are facing a range of emotions about their family situation. Kinship caregivers who represent the agency in their support for new caregivers are also important “eyes and ears” for families and can raise any red flags with the agency about the caregiving arrangement. Transition funds can be used for stipends and/or an hourly rate for caregivers who play this role.

Cost: \$30-\$35/ hour for kinship advocates, depending on local cost of living.

5. Contract with Community-Based Organizations for Kinship Support Services

Kinship caregivers are often more receptive to receiving services and supports for their caregiving role through trusted community-based organizations that have a track record of working with and supporting kin. Given that many kin families have stepped in before ever becoming involved with the child welfare system, these organizations may not be part of the traditional network of voluntary child welfare agencies in New York. In several counties, the Relatives as Parents Program, Agape, Family Enrichment Centers and others are already working with kin on an informal basis, and the child welfare agency can partner with them for new contracts around a variety of support needs. This includes supporting families in the immediate days following a placement, helping families through the certification process, explaining custody and permanency options, helping families navigate the child welfare and court systems, facilitating support groups, accessing services for children, and more.

Cost: Between \$30,000 - \$50,000 depending upon the scope of the contract.

6. Purchase Live Scan Technology

Live Scan fingerprint technology can help counties streamline the process for conducting criminal background checks. Agencies using Live Scan have found that it can help them conduct faster emergency placements with relatives, and it makes the background check process less onerous when licensing or certifying both relatives and non-relatives. There are many manufacturers of Live Scan hardware and software, and many vendors of the systems.

For more information about Live Scan see:

<http://grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/live%20scan%20primer.FINAL%20%281%29.pdf>

Cost: Between \$6,000 and \$15,000.

Strategy 5: Improve Recruitment and Retention of Foster Families, including Kinship Caregivers

Counties can use transition funds to go deeper in developing innovative approaches to recruiting and retaining foster parents. These approaches should align with and augment the county's three-year Foster and Adoptive Recruitment and Retention plans. These approaches provide an opportunity to replace general recruitment approaches, which are less effective than targeted recruitment aligned to the specific needs, characteristics and demographics of children in foster care. Strategies include:

1. Provide Incentives to Existing Foster Parents to Recruit New Foster Parents

There is an old maxim in child welfare that foster parents are an agency's best recruiters. Some child welfare agencies have taken this strategy to heart by providing incentives for their most valued foster parents to bring new foster parents in the door. Seasoned foster parents know what is expected and can help to communicate the joys and challenges of foster parenting to their friends and neighbors. Incentives are typically provided to foster parent recruiters once the prospective foster parent has completed training and accepted their first placement. Transition funds can help to make these incentives meaningful by setting them at levels that are motivating to foster parents. Incentives can be provided to public agency foster parents as well as through contract with provider agencies.

One agency that has had success with this incentive program provides \$500 to their foster parents when they successfully recruit a new family, which is significantly less than what the agency had previously spent on general community recruitment. The strategy has yielded the agency a much stronger pool of foster parents—about double the number of families in a two-year period—than what they were able to achieve through traditional recruitment approaches.

Cost: \$500 per family for the example above, but counties can set the incentive at any level that seems reasonable given local area cost of living.

Contact: Brian Lynch, Executive Director of Children’s Community Programs of Connecticut, blynch@ccp-ct.org

2. Develop Targeted Recruitment Messages and Strategies

Many counties have updated their foster parent recruitment messages to be more specific about the kinds of children who need placement and what it means to be a foster parent partner. To be relevant to Family First transition planning, these messages must reinforce the critical need for foster parents who will step in for and support teens, children of color, LGBTQ youth and youth with disabilities and medical complexities. These groups of youth are, in most child welfare systems, the children most in need of a family placement. Targeted recruitment must be directed at the communities from which children are removed, and recruitment partners must have deep roots in the communities where children live. It is also critically important that all those responsible for recruitment in both public and voluntary agencies are using the same messages and reinforcing the agency’s primary goal: to achieve timely reunification of children with their families.

Counties can use their transition funds to contract with communications consultants to develop a communications toolkit for use by all recruitment partners and/or a consultant to help them facilitate consensus about recruitment messages and strategies.

Cost: Approximately \$15,000 for communications consultation and a communications toolkit.

3. Hire Recruitment Partners in the Neighborhoods from Which Children Are Removed

Entities that are embedded in local communities and have the trust of community residents can make excellent recruitment partners. This includes faith communities, organizations that represent communities of color and immigrant communities, local radio stations and newspapers (including those who speak other languages), community foundations, other philanthropic partners, military organizations and more. Agencies can reach deep into the community to find and contract with local organizations that are not part of the traditional child welfare network to provide recruitment support.

Cost: Approximately \$10,000 - \$12,000 for a contract for recruitment, depending upon the expectations for how many families are recruited and the size of the community.

4. Use Data to Inform Recruitment Goals

Action Research has developed a method for estimating an agency’s foster home need that considers the numbers of children needing placement, family groups and kin placements, the closure rates, and other factors. The New York City Administration for Children’s Services and other jurisdictions have used this approach to set targets for foster home recruitment. Action Research is available to explain the approach and help counties use their data to apply this method to their planning efforts.

Contact: Timothy Ross, tross@actionresearch.io

Cost: \$225/hour.

Strategy 6: Enhance Support for Foster Parents

Transition funds can be used to help a county in its efforts to recruit and retain excellent foster parents who can provide safe and loving care for children who have been removed from their families. Ideally, these efforts will be a public-private partnership between a county and its provider agencies. A variety of individuals, organizations and strategies can help with innovative approaches to supporting foster parents.

1. Pay Seasoned Foster Parents to Provide Peer Foster Parent Support

Experienced foster parents can make excellent coaches for new foster parents as they experience the joys and challenges of their first placements. Foster-parent coaches can play multiple roles, including: connecting parents to important resources, supporting them as they advocate for the needs of the child, including them in family social events, and sharing strategies for dealing with challenging behaviors. Peer foster-parent supporters are typically not full-time jobs, but current foster parents should receive an hourly rate and/or stipend to fill this role, with clear expectations about the number of hours and contacts they should have with new foster parents. Transition funds can be used to pay foster parents for this role, as well as to defray the costs of social events and other supports.

Cost: Stipend of approximately \$10,000 per year for foster parents.

2. Hire Additional Foster Parent Support Staff

Many agencies find that foster parent support is the first thing to go when budgets get tight. Transition funds can be used to hire or contract support staff whose sole responsibility is to facilitate strong partnerships with foster parents. This function can be separate and apart from support for certification/licensing, and it can include an after-hours function or hotline for crisis support and intervention. Support staff can also facilitate support groups to cultivate a stronger community for foster parents.

Cost: Depends on local hiring costs and may range from \$30,000 - \$50,000. May require a time-limited additional investment as the county realizes cost savings and provider agencies shift their service array to be more family-centered.

3. Create a Foster Parent Advisory Board

Foster parent partnerships are critical to understanding what is working for foster parents and what needs to be improved so they can fulfill their role of meeting the needs of children in their home. Agencies can regularly meet with foster parent advisory boards—made up of kin and non-kin foster parents—to strengthen their partnership, brainstorm ideas for recruiting more foster parents, get input on planned changes to policy and practice, and serve as a regular sounding board for new initiatives. Ideally, foster parent advisory boards are co-facilitated by the child welfare agency and a foster parent who is paid to take on this role. Transition funds can be used for a county staff person; consultant; foster or kinship parent; or voluntary agency to create and staff

the Foster Parent Advisory Board, as well as to support the cost of meetings, including space, food and facilitation.

Cost: Approximately \$15,000 per year for a contract or .15 FTE and cost of meetings, facilitation, and documentation of feedback by the Advisory Board.

4. Create a Foster Parent Coaching Program

Foster parent coaches are assigned to foster parents caring for high-needs children, typically in the first few months immediately following the placement of the child. Foster parent coaches are typically trained in evidence-based interventions to help foster parents learn strategies to de-escalate behaviors, manage trauma responses, set boundaries and expectations, and utilize other strategies to stabilize the placement as quickly as possible. Foster parent coaches are available 24/7 and are expected to follow up with foster parents to assess the effectiveness of their interventions with the child.

Cost: Approximately \$40,000 plus benefits, depending upon local markets.

5. Develop a Fostering Futures Program

Fostering Futures NY (FFNY) is a program piloted by Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI), a nonprofit agency in New York's Capital Region. FFNY recruits and trains teams of volunteers from community organizations to provide natural and practical support to foster families. FFNY teams provide stability, enriching experiences and vital community connections for foster families and children. FFNY relies on the power of a diverse network of individuals and organizations to ease the burden on foster parents and improve quality of life for children and youth in care. WRI provides a range of supports to counties and may include provision of a program manual, sample application forms and training materials. More intensive supports may include on-site support for volunteer recruitment and training, matching with foster families, phone consultation, program evaluation, and consultation on sustainability.

Contact: Darlene Ward, dward@welfaresearch.org

Cost: Ranges from \$5,000 to \$45,000, depending on the county's desired scope of the project, and need and location of on-site support.

6. Develop a Cluster-Support Model

Sheltering Arms in New York City recruits its strongest foster parents for its Primary Support Homes program, which supports clusters of four to six foster families who live within a close geographic radius of the Primary Support Home. The Primary Support Parent creates a supportive community within the cluster by hosting monthly social events for cluster families, encouraging interaction among both the foster parents and the children placed in their homes. The Primary Support Parent also keeps a bed open in the home, which is used for both planned and emergency respite care to others within the cluster. This system provides relief to foster parents and ensures that children are

in a familiar setting when respite is necessary. The Primary Support Parent also hosts or participates in one foster parent recruitment event every month.

Contact: Meridith Sopher, msopher@shelteringarmsny.org

Cost: A stipend of \$10,000 per year for each Primary Support Home. This stipend covers the cost of keeping a foster-home bed open (\$582-795 per month at regular rate) and the cost of events that they host in their home or community.

7. Create a Shared-Parenting Model for Partnerships between Foster Parents and Birth Parents

Shared parenting is a practice in which foster parents cultivate positive, supportive relationships with birth parents. Shared-parenting relationships are based on trust, while keeping the safety and best interests of the child in focus. Agencies can incorporate the concept of shared parenting into foster parent recruitment messages, preparation and pre-service training, ongoing training and oversight. Transition funds can be used to develop this model, as well as to hire staff to support foster parents in their shared-parenting role.

PRIDE Model of Practice and PRIDE pre-service and in-service training, developed by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), offers child welfare agencies a consistent and standardized approach to the recruitment, assessment, preparation and selection of foster and adoptive parents. Within this broader model, there is a strong focus on shared parenting. An online version of the training is also available through fosterparentcollege.com. CWLA offers on-site consultation and training, as well as open enrollment trainings. For more information see: <https://www.cwla.org/pride-training>.

Contact: Donna Petras, dpetras@cwla.org

The **Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)** also includes a strong focus on Shared Parenting. QPI, a strategy of the Youth Law Center (YLC), is an approach, a philosophy and a network of sites that share information and ideas about how to improve parenting as well as recruit and retain excellent families. QPI helps agencies and foster parents work together to define expectations of caregivers; clearly communicate these expectations to staff, caregivers, and other stakeholders; and align system policy and practice with those expectations.

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