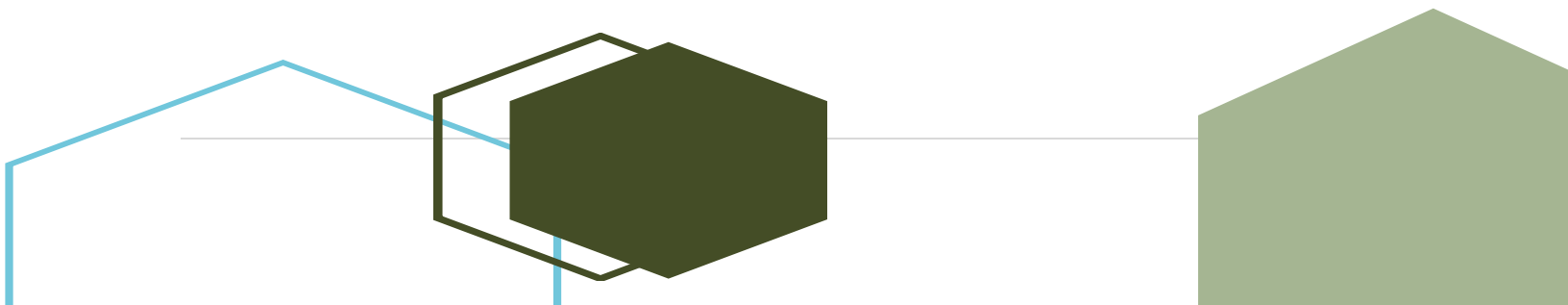




# Vermont Diligent Recruitment Plan

[2025-2029]

Diligent recruitment is a systematic approach to identify, recruit, develop and support a pool of caregiving families who can meet the needs of children and youth who require placement in foster care. One of the key goals of Diligent Recruitment is to intentionally recruit foster parents who:

- Are supported to understand and meet the needs of the children in care.
  - Are actively supporting children by providing non-discriminatory and anti-racist care.
  - Will actively support reunification and the role of birth families; and,
  - Are willing to meet the immediate and long-term needs of the children in care
- 

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>I. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND</u></b>	<b>2</b>
UNDERSTANDING DILIGENT RECRUITMENT	2
KEY INFORMATION: THE STRUCTURE OF CHILD WELFARE IN VERMONT	2
KEY INFORMATION: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD CHARACTERISTICS?	4
<b><u>II. DILIGENT RECRUITMENT GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND VALUES</u></b>	<b>9</b>
<b><u>III. VISION FOR DILIGENT RECRUITMENT IN VERMONT</u></b>	<b>11</b>
KEY ELEMENTS TO DILIGENT RECRUITMENT	
<b><u>IV. OUR APPROACH TO DILIGENT RECRUITMENT</u></b>	<b>19</b>
<b><u>V. CONNECTIONS TO OTHER FSD EFFORTS</u></b>	<b>23</b>
<b><u>VI. KEY PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS</u></b>	<b>24</b>
<b><u>APPENDICES</u></b>	<b>25</b>
A. FSD ORGANIZATIONAL CHART	25
B. DILIGENT RECRUITMENT LOGIC MODEL	26
C. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS GRID	27

# 2025-2029 Vermont Diligent Recruitment Plan

## I. Context and Background

### Understanding Diligent Recruitment

Diligent recruitment is a systematic approach to identify, recruit, develop and support a pool of families who can meet the needs of children and youth who require placement in foster care. One of the key goals of Diligent Recruitment is to intentionally recruit foster parents who:

- Are best able to meet the needs of the children in care;
- Are actively supporting children by providing non-discriminatory and anti-racist care;
- Will actively support reintegration and the role of birth families; and,
- Are willing to meet the immediate and long-term needs of the children in care

The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, as amended, prohibits the delay or denial of any adoption or placement in foster care due to the race, color, or national origin of the child or the foster or adoptive parents. It also requires States to provide for diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom homes are needed. To meet MEPA's diligent efforts requirements, States must have a comprehensive plan that includes:

- A description of the characteristics of waiting children;
- Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community;
- Diverse methods of disseminating both general and child-specific information;
- Strategies for assuring that all prospective parents have access to the home study process, including location and hours of services that facilitate access by all members of the community.
- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities.
- Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers.
- Non-discriminatory fee structures; and
- Procedures ensuring a timely search for prospective parents awaiting a child, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that the placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement

### Key Information: The Structure of Child Welfare in Vermont

The Agency of Human Services was created by the Vermont Legislature in 1969 to serve as the umbrella organization for all human service activities within state government. The Agency is led by the Secretary who is appointed by the Governor. The Secretary's Office is responsible for strategically leading the agency and its departments and establishing and implementing agency-wide policies and practices that cross departmental boundaries.

The Department for Children and Families (DCF) sits within the broader Agency of Human Services. DCF is structured around the Commissioner's Office, Business Office and six program divisions that administer the Department's major programs:

1. Child Development Division
2. Economic Services Division
3. Family Services Division
4. Office of Child Support
5. Office of Disability Determination Services
6. Office of Economic Opportunity

While each division has its own priorities and areas of focus, the DCF is tasked with:

- reducing poverty and homelessness
- eliminating hunger
- improving the safety and well-being of children, youth and families
- keeping children safe from abuse
- providing timely and accurate financial supports for individuals and families
- supporting Vermont's most vulnerable citizens (e.g., older Vermonters, people with disabilities, and families with children)

The Family Services Division (FSD) works in partnership with families, communities and others to make sure children and youth are safe from abuse, their basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, shelter and health care) are met and youth are free from delinquent behavior. They also ensure families are supported to achieve these goals.

FSD serves the following populations:

- At-risk children, youth and families
- Children and youth in the care and custody of the state
- Youth on juvenile probation
- Foster, respite and adoptive parents

A Family Services District Office is located in each of the 12 AHS regions across the state. Each local office is led by a District Director who is responsible for carrying out the mission of the Division and practicing the day to day work of child protection in accordance with best practice and policy.

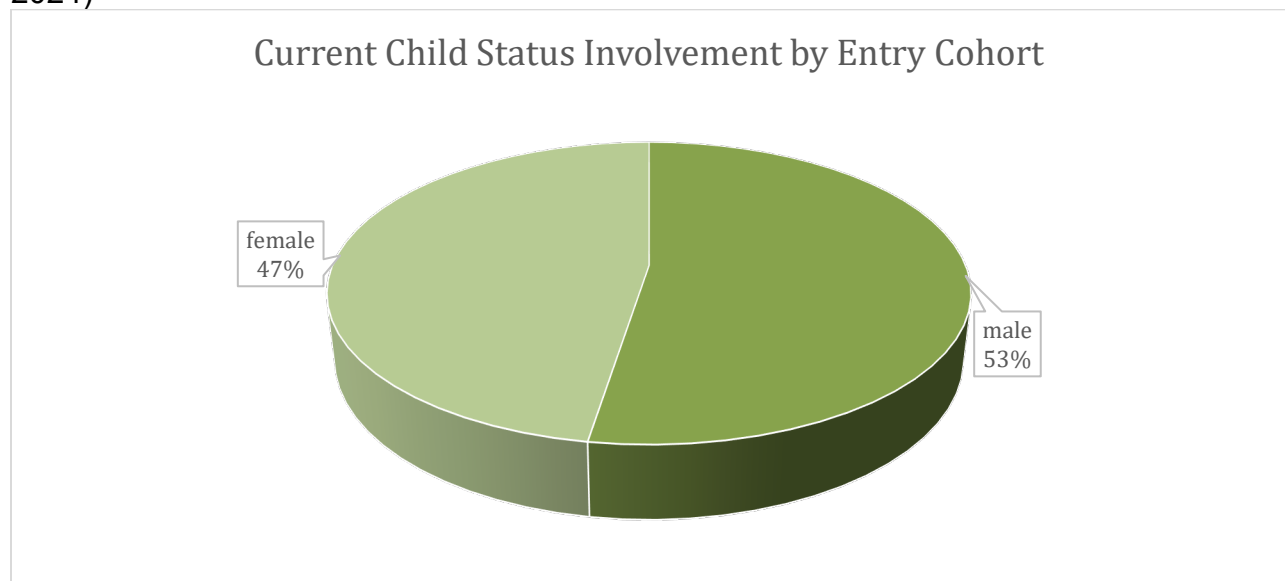
Districts range in size, with variations in the number of staff on hand to do the work. Each district is however responsible for the full scope of child protection work carried out by the division. Additional work units are located within the Division's Central Office. FSD is led by a Deputy Commissioner and is supported by the Family Services Management Team, made up of The Director of Operations, the Revenue Enhancement Director, Director of Policy and Planning, Adolescent Services Director and a Workforce Development Director was added to the configuration in 2023. The Operations Unit provides management oversight to the 12 District Offices. Operations also support both the Foster Care, Residential Licensing Unit and Special Investigations Teams and the Centralized Intake and Emergency Services teams. The Adolescent Services Unit Director supports the Special Services Unit which oversees the high end of the system

of care including Residential Treatment and WRAP level services. The Juvenile Service Director, The Juvenile Justice Coordinator and one position supporting Policy and Practice also report to the Adolescent Services Director. The Revenue Enhancement Unit manages the overall financing of the Division in partnership with the DCF Business Office and the DCF Grants and Contracts team. The Policy and Planning team has several units, including the Quality Assurance unit, both Staff and Child Safety teams, a team of Domestic Violence specialists and the System of Care Unit. The System of Care Unit oversees foster care and permanency planning, adoption and guardianship programming, kinship navigation, post permanency support as well as all three of the federal interstate compacts. A long-standing public/private partnership between the State of Vermont Permanency Planning Team and Lund is responsible for child specific recruitment for children who have no identified permanency resource as well as all of the administrative functions supporting adoption and permanent guardianship finalization.

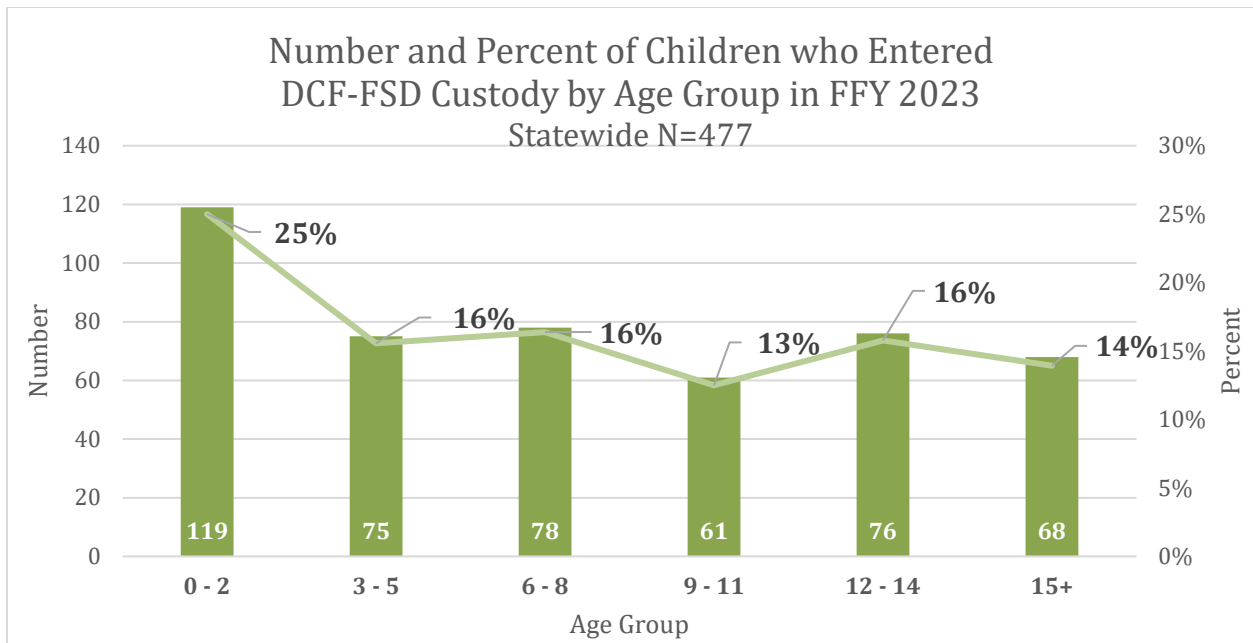
See Appendix A for an FSD Organizational Chart

### Key Information: What do we know about the characteristics of children in care in Vermont?

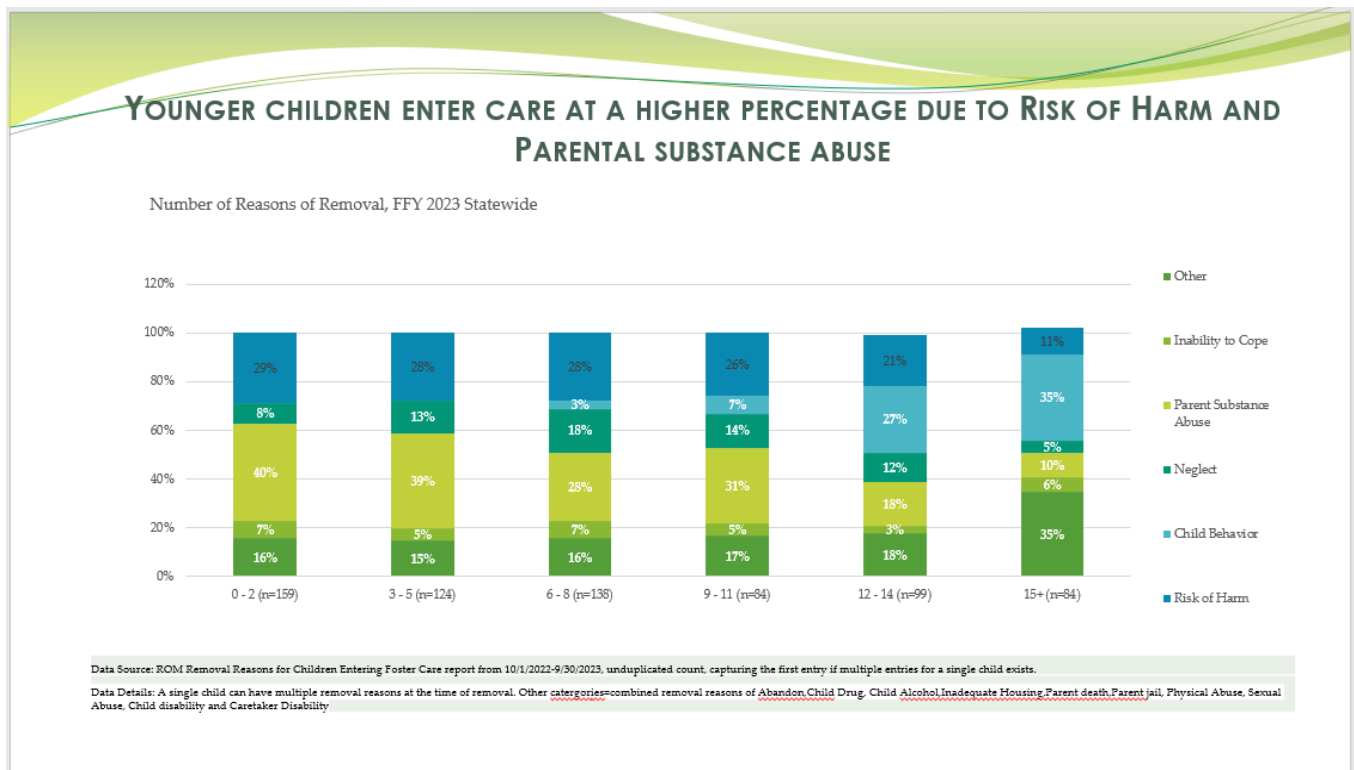
Just over half of the children who entered care were male (ROM July 2023 to April 2024)



The cohorts of children entering care were grouped by age



Approximately 60% of the under 5 population of new custody entrants are impacted in some way by the opiate crisis. The older cohort of youth entering care typically came to the attention of the division related to their own behavior.

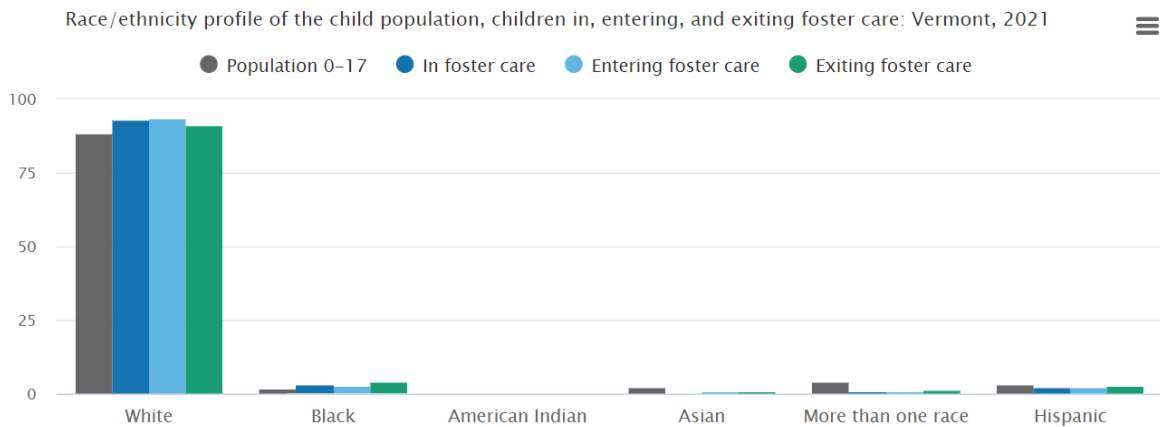


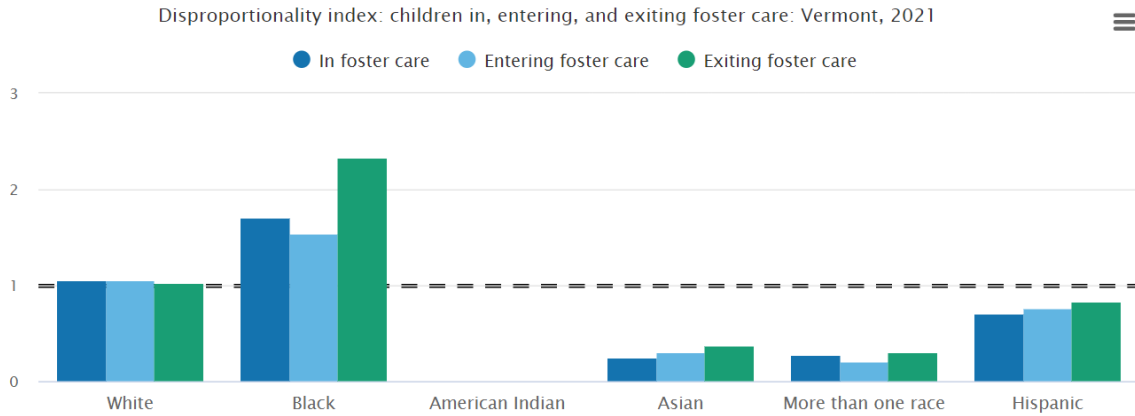
World Population Review (2024) indicates that the total Vermont population is 647,818.

- 92.93 White,
- 1.27% Black or African American,
- 1.68% Asian
- .03% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 3.37% of more than one race or ethnicity
- .24% Native American
- .49% other
- 37% claim no religious affiliation.

Additionally, there are no federally recognized tribes in Vermont

The next two graphics reflect the race and ethnicity profile of VT children from the 2021 AFCARS as reported by the National Center for Juvenile Justice.

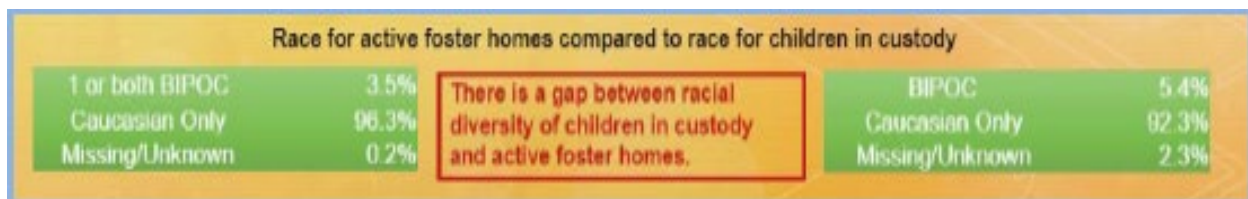




Disproportionality is the level at which groups of children are present in the child welfare system relative to their proportion in the general population. A Disproportionality Index (DI) value of 1.0 reflects no disproportionality. A value greater than 1.0 reflects overrepresentation, while a value less than 1.0 reflects underrepresentation.

Youth of color, black youth, in particular are overrepresented in Vermont foster care. While this slide does not capture specifics in regards to placement in residential setting by race, anecdotally, we believe that BIPOC youth are also overrepresented in these settings. Further analysis of this data will support DRR planning and decision-making.

Recruitment efforts include efforts to recruit racially and ethnically diverse foster homes, however, there is still a gap between racial diversity of children in custody and active foster homes who are of the same race or ethnicity. As of 6/30/2022, in 3.5% (n=33 homes) of foster homes one or more caregivers were BIPOC and in 96.3% (n=889) of foster homes caregivers were Caucasian only. During the same period, 5.4% (n=58 youth) of youth in custody were BIPOC and 92.3% (n=984 youth) were Caucasian, resulting in more BIPOC youth in custody than BIPOC foster home providers. Approximately 12% of the BIPOC youth (n=58) in custody were placed in a foster home with a BIPOC identified foster / kin caregiver.



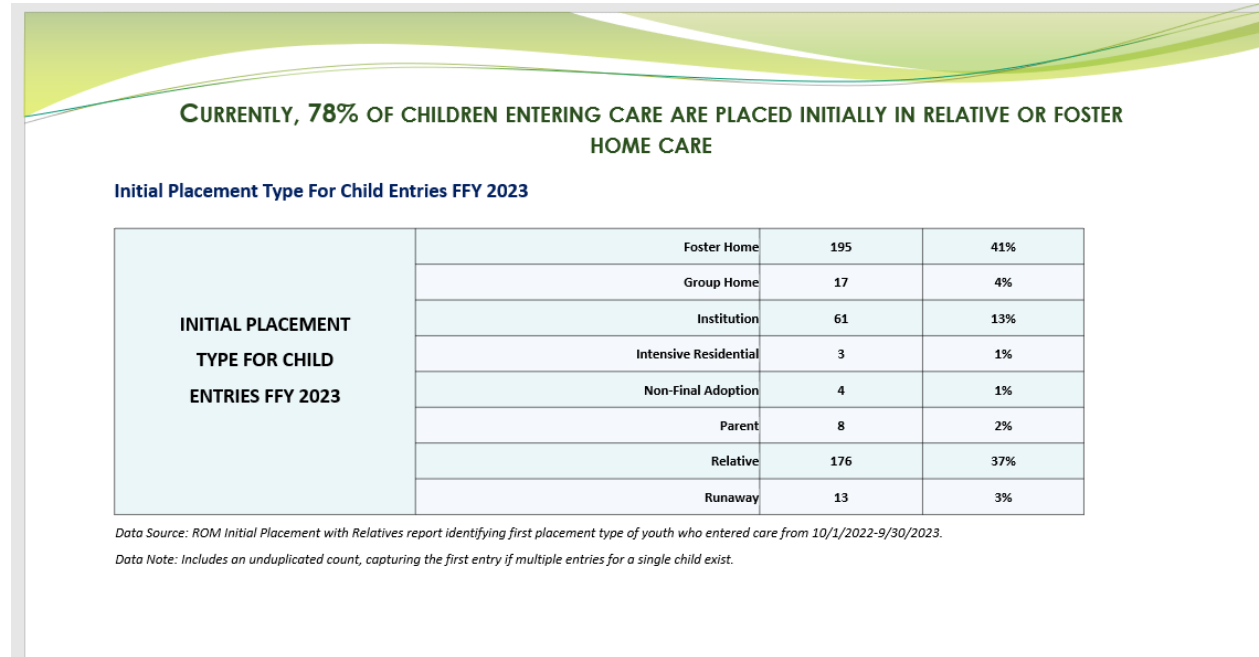
(Data Source: CFSR Round 4 FSD Statewide Assessment 2024)

The DRR Team is beginning to use the ROM (Results Oriented Management) reporting site for data related to diligent recruitment. Additionally, they have requested an existing FSD management report be adjusted so that the division can quickly identify the race of all foster parents who have a placement along with the race of the child(ren) placed with them. Historically, this data has had to be hand counted as no existing report addressed the need.



Certain regions of VT are more racially diverse than others. It is anticipated that in districts where there is a more racially diverse populations rates of custody entry will mirror those rates.

A thriving LGBTQ community exists in the Greater Burlington Area. The State of Vermont has long been engaged in recruitment of same sex couples. Many same sex couples have come forward to foster children and many of those couples have adopted their foster children when those children have not been able to reunify.



Nonrelative foster care continues to be the most common type of placement setting at 41%, this is down from 55% in 2017. There is variation from one FSD district to another regarding the use of relative placement ranging from 21.4% to a remarkable rate of 60% in one district. The current statewide kin placement rate is 37%. This represents a 12% increase since 2017.

## Priority 2 Reporting: Percent of Children Placed with Kin

Indicator: The % of children in kinship placement increases

Reporting Period : October 1 to December 31 , 2023

	2021-Q1	2021-Q2	2021-Q3	2021-Q4	2022-Q1	2022-Q2	2022-Q3	2022-Q4	2023-Q1	2023-Q2	2023-Q3	2023-Q4
ADO	27.9%	26.1%	31.2%	32.5%	33.6%	31.7%	41.9%	38.8%	37.5%	37.3%	36.1%	40.5%
BDO	34.4%	41.1%	43.1%	35.5%	32.3%	31.6%	37.3%	37.1%	41.3%	38.6%	38.6%	34.1%
HDO	11.4%	34.3%	40.0%	47.1%	36.1%	32.4%	28.6%	31.0%	33.3%	24.1%	21.9%	27.6%
JDO	51.4%	55.6%	63.6%	65.2%	67.3%	61.1%	70.0%	59.1%	62.5%	59.6%	58.7%	60.0%
LDO	26.3%	27.5%	26.4%	21.0%	21.6%	26.1%	30.6%	29.4%	29.7%	35.8%	31.3%	28.9%
MDO	43.0%	31.4%	27.4%	21.1%	17.2%	20.6%	31.3%	27.9%	20.4%	31.3%	38.4%	45.6%
NDO	20.9%	24.6%	36.6%	41.4%	43.8%	40.0%	28.6%	39.8%	39.5%	41.8%	30.3%	21.4%
RDO	32.3%	33.6%	38.7%	36.1%	37.8%	35.7%	38.6%	39.4%	36.7%	40.1%	38.4%	35.2%
SDO	47.1%	46.7%	36.4%	32.4%	30.0%	36.6%	47.8%	29.3%	28.6%	32.5%	37.1%	32.4%
TDO	39.2%	36.9%	31.7%	31.6%	32.4%	23.3%	24.4%	31.6%	31.6%	33.8%	38.1%	37.3%
VDO	37.0%	40.5%	43.2%	35.7%	31.5%	29.1%	21.4%	35.2%	47.1%	36.5%	31.0%	39.1%
YDO	34.0%	29.3%	23.3%	36.4%	32.6%	44.9%	64.7%	39.6%	49.2%	50.8%	49.1%	46.8%
Statewide	33.4%	34.2%	35.8%	34.2%	33.4%	32.2%	36.6%	36.1%	37.2%	38.9%	37.5%	36.6%

Data Source: Quarterly Custody Management Reports, CS tab

Data Note: PA placement type removed

## II. Diligent Recruitment Guiding Principles and Values

While children remain in out-of-home placement, the Vermont Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division and its partners seek to provide safe and appropriate family foster homes that encourage and support reunification when that can be safely accomplished. We are committed to keeping siblings together, ensuring that placements minimize trauma and are conducive to supporting children’s cultural, spiritual, academic and emotional development.

This list of Guiding Principles and Values was developed as a part of a Family Services Division Strategic Planning process, which included a cross-representation of system stakeholders

### We Believe...

#### Children, Youth, and Families

- Deserve to be safe, heard, and connected to their communities.
- Know themselves best and their expertise should be valued
- Are viewed in the context of their culture and community.
- Can grow and change with support and adequate resources.
- Are active participants and partners in the process.

#### Staff

- Offer their dedication and commitment, which are essential in carrying out our mission.
- Provide quality work that is strengths-based, trauma-informed, and influenced by research.

### **Foster and Kin Families**

- Are primary partners in ensuring the well-being of children and youth.
- Deserve timely training, communication, and the support they need to be effective.

### **Communities**

- Are essential to keeping children safe and to promote healthy families.
- Collaborate to meet the holistic needs of children, youth, and families.

## **III. Vision for Diligent Recruitment in Vermont**

In 2019 the overall vision for Diligent Recruitment in Vermont was constructed in collaborative fashion by the DR Core Team. Over time, this DR core team has evolved into a monthly DR working group comprised mostly of staff from around the state, and a DR Advisory Team comprised of both internal and external

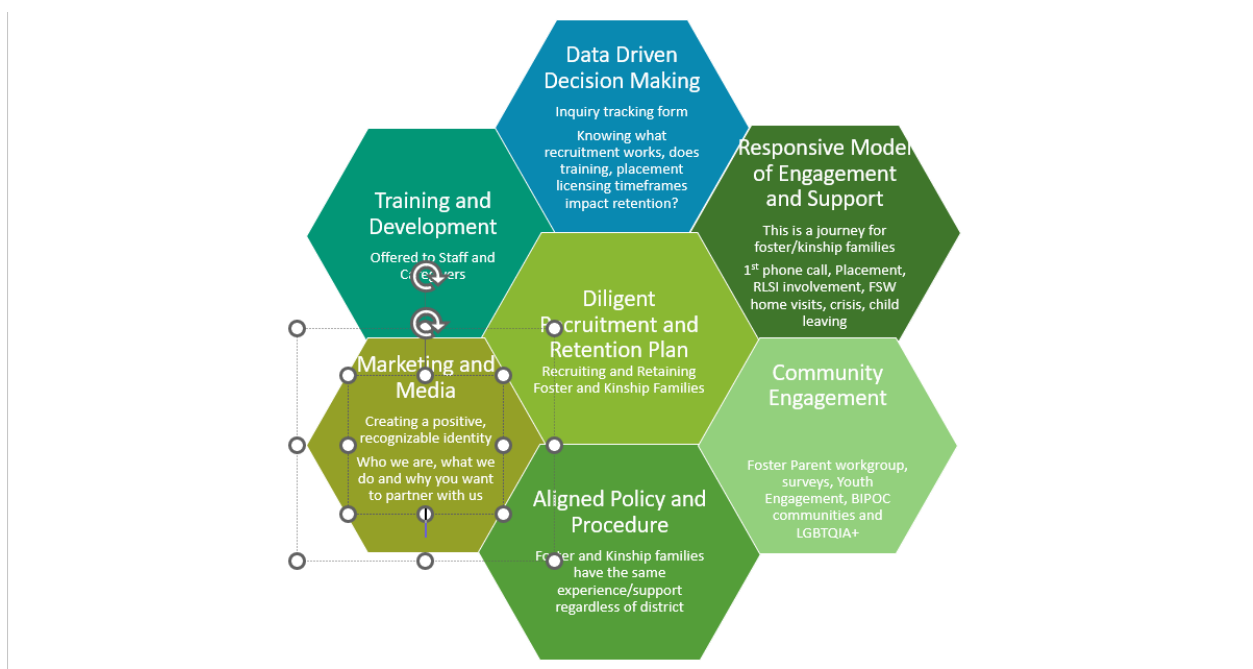
The Vermont DR program will provide general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment and will support and develop caregiving families that meet the needs of children in care. Optimally caregiving families will:

1. Participating in concurrent planning;
2. Accommodate siblings placed together;
3. Offer care to children with special needs;
4. Support educational stability; and will
5. Embrace an inclusive and affirming world view that will be demonstrated in their day to day caregiving

stakeholders from across the state. Internal stakeholders represent an intentional mix of Division leadership and direct service staff. External stakeholders include caregivers, members of the Child Welfare Training Partnership, Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Alliance, Vermont Kin as Parents, the Vermont Adoption Consortium, Project Family and the Youth Development Program. Intensive Technical Assistance was provided by the Children's Bureau to support the development of the initial plan.

## Key Elements to Diligent Recruitment

The DR Core team identified several foundational concepts that ground the DR Plan. These key elements are summarized below, including the description and practices for each. We believe that any strategies that we might undertake will fall within one or more of these key elements. The key elements operate as a sort of guidepost for our work; taken together, we believe they will support the implementation of a robust DRR plan. These key elements represent the vision for Diligent Recruitment and together they provide the foundation for the development of priorities for a Diligent Recruitment Program in Vermont.



### 1.) A Responsive Model of Engagement and Support

A model for engagement and support of foster families—from recruitment to post placement—that ensures:

1. All families have access to a common, efficient, and supportive inquiry, home study, training, and licensing process that is available to them in accessible manner
2. Foster families are recognized and treated as team members.
3. Division resources are readily accessible and equitably allocated.
4. Foster family concerns are prioritized and addressed quickly; and the
5. Division nurtures a culture where all staff understand their integral role in the recruitment, development, and support of foster families.

## 2025-2029 Action Steps

- Each year the DRR plan will target the needs of specific types of youth who require care. On brand marketing and media campaigns will be developed using the materials in the DR Outreach Tool kit that we developed during the 2020-2024 plan. These efforts will include recruitment for our LGBTQIA+ identified youth, youth with special medical needs, sibling groups, BIPOC youth and older youth. A respite campaign will also be launched. These populations have been identified consistently over time.
- Families will be supported thorough a customer service approach as they consider foster care, decide to move forward, complete training and prepare for their initial placement.
- Caregivers will continue to receive a biweekly electronic newsletter known as Fostering Vermont. This newsletter serves as a clearinghouse of information for caregivers. We use it to communicate critical information to caregivers statewide. We will grow readership.
- Face to face contact with children and youth in our care, in the placement setting is a measured outcome, required federally. We will focus on improving the quality of those contacts with a goal of improving communication with the caregiver to better assess their needs and to actively engage them in the case plan development and implementation. Improved placement stability and retention of caregivers is a goal.
- Caregivers will participate in a satisfaction survey to be administered annually in June starting in 2025. This strategy also aims to engage caregivers related to what is working well and what are the hassle factors they are still navigating
- The Foster Parent Workgroup serves as an Advisory Board of sorts where caregivers are encouraged to bring topics to the group for exploration and problem solving. This group will host an annual Foster Parent Listening session. Feedback from that session will continue to be incorporated into DRR action steps. Feedback from the 2024 listening session will be addressed during the 2025-2029 DRR plan.
- The Permanency and Foster Care Subcommittee of the Statewide Racial Equity Workgroup will continue to meet bi-monthly to ensure that recruitment materials are being translated into the seven major languages spoken in Vermont. Ultimately, these materials will be available in both print and video format to support accessibility for potential caregivers who are non-readers. Cultural Brokers will be enlisted to ensure that the materials are culturally appropriate. DVD players will be deployed to each District Office to ensure that any interested caregiver has timely access to required training.
- The DRR Coordinators will routinely solicit input from the Youth Advisory Board regarding their ideas for how to improve recruitment and retention of caregivers with a goal of improving the experiences of all youth in foster care.
- Funds have been secured to stand up a facilitated BIPOC youth affinity group to support the needs of BIPOC youth who are child welfare and or youth justice involved.

## **2.) Community Engagement**

Community Engagement is an important part of our Diligent Recruitment plan. In DR conversations, community engagement will include both the extended system of care as well as local community businesses and other organizations.

Families live in communities, and we believe that the community has a role in supporting families.

Community education and public awareness efforts are essential to recruiting and retaining foster and kin families—they increase the public’s awareness of the need for families, have the potential to impact misinformation about the role and function of DCF and create support for child welfare programs. They also help us to access existing community strengths and resources. Investing in community relationships today can pay big dividends later

Communities will be engaged in understanding the needs of children in care and are provided with opportunities to support those children and the families that care for them.

### **2025-2029 Action Plan**

- Local districts will be provided with data regarding the town of record at the time custody for each child or youth on their caseload. Recruitment efforts will be directed toward the areas of their catchment where custody number are highest. The goal of this strategy is to support children remaining in their school of origin and within their local communities with a goal of reducing the trauma associated with removal and maintaining connections.
- Identify existing partnerships occurring locally to ensure that those partnerships are being attended to in a way that nurtures and builds connections. Mine relationships to determine if community organizations could partner on a larger scale.
- A marketing firm will be enlisted to support and coordinate DR brand development and will ensure that our media presence is growing. FSD will allocate adequate funding to support this important work.
- We will continue to partner with Front Porch Forum, a community building platform, to share about our recruitment needs and to spread a more positive image of FSD.
- Recruitment Campaigns aimed at populations we believe are child centered and who might already be represented in the caregiving community- pediatric practices, law enforcement, nurses, fraternal organizations, LGBTQ advocacy groups, school organizations to name a few.
- There are several Vermont communities where New Americans have settled. Efforts to engage leaders in those communities has been initiated. Work on repairing relationships and developing skills in engaging these communities will need to be incorporated into the DR local plans in those districts.

- Follow Up with the New American Council specifically the Somali Bantu community in the Greater Burlington Area to identify needs and to establish a relationship.
- DCF licenses three Child Placing Agencies (CPA) who are approved to recruit foster families to provide Therapeutic Foster Care. FSD recruitment efforts will also provide opportunities for interested caregivers to learn more about the differences between providing care through a CPA and working directly with FSD. There are fewer than 30 TFC caregivers in the state at this time.

### **3.) Aligned Policy and Procedures**

The Statewide Diligent Recruitment and Retention plan was developed to meet our federal requirements and it will guide our efforts as they relate to the recruitment and retention of caregivers. Underpinning this work is the examination of our district practice to ensure that we are functioning in accordance with policy and through the lens of best practice. Statewide DR plan implementation will be coordinated with and aligned with other initiatives unified across the state. (Strategic Plan, Practice Model etc). Caregivers should have a similar caregiving experience no matter which district they are affiliated with.

#### **2025-2029 Action Plan**

- Increasing relative placement will continue to be a priority of the DRR plan. One clear fact is that FSD must improve the overall rate of kinship care if we hope to reserve non-relative care for children and youth who truly do not have any safe family connections. Based on the research, sustained focus on this area of diligent recruitment will yield improved outcomes in placement stability, minimize the trauma of removal, maintain vital connections and improve overall child well-being measures.
- Collaborate with our Licensing Team, Kin Caregivers, partners at Generations United to consider, adopt and implement a new set of kin specific licensing standards that is not more restrictive than what is allowed federally by 2029.
- New employee training on policy and best practice as it relates to Relative Search and Engagement and Permanency Planning
- Clear expectations from leadership that require sustained efforts for relative search throughout the life of a case
- Resolve contracting issues that prevent Project Family from access to a search engine like CLEAR or Lexis Nexis. Resolve data sharing barriers.
- Ensure that district staff have access to CLEAR- a limited subscription does not allow all FSD staff to have access and the list must be kept up to date. Create a process to train new staff and offer refreshers for seasoned staff utilizing CLEAR.
- Develop a kin first culture when considering initial placement, consider requiring a Director level approval if placement with kin is not an option.
- Policy 268 Foster Parent Reimbursement will be updated to reflect changes to the process for establishing an enhanced rate of reimbursement for caregivers

who provide an enhanced level of care. A new Caregiver Responsibility Tool will be launched early in FY 2024. Practice Guidance will be drafted and disseminated to staff statewide. Offering an enhanced reimbursement structure will help with retention challenges.

- Placement Stability is an area of focus where we do not have a robust data set. We will work collaboratively with our QA partners and with TA consultants to do a deeper dive into this data and what it might be telling us about placement practice, assessment of the needs of children in care and how our efforts to support families adequately impacts placement stability and retention.
- Policy 72 Educational Achievement and Stability for Children and Youth in DCF Custody concerns itself with a number of education related issues involving youth in care. One of those is the Ensuring School Success Act which creates an entitlement for children entering foster care to remain in their school of origin. Ongoing issues related to transportation and the implementation of this policy impact caregivers and district staff. Consider pursuing a statutory change that created an expectation that the Agency of Education and the FSD will share more equally in the costs associated with providing transportation.
- Using available data, target specific towns with a higher number of custody cases for enhanced recruitment focus. Compare that data with the town data for caregivers to pinpoint where additional recruitment activity is needed
- Policy 95 Respite Care will need revision. Respite is not currently available in an equitable manner to all caregivers. Developing homes able to offer this kind of support to full time caregivers will support placement stability and caregiver retention.
- Foster Care Regulations require caregivers to assert that they are non-discriminatory and can be an affirming home to an LGBTQIA+youth before the division will license them. This position is being challenged in court. Additional action steps will be articulated as this process unfolds.

#### **4.) Training and Development**

Ongoing development opportunities are available for both caregivers and staff to increase skills, competence and capacity to support children and youth with more complex needs.

Access to adequate and timely training and support correlates with improved placement stability. Community Caregivers will have access to timely relevant training prior to initial placement and to meet licensing requirements. Training and other materials will be offered in various modalities and languages to support caregiver learning styles and needs. Caregivers will be engaged in the development of their advanced training program.



FSD staff will complete their Foundations training with the basic skills and competencies that prepare them to engage, support and develop caregivers using best practice and trauma informed approaches

The Diligent Recruitment Team will play a role in supporting the implementation of a training and development program that:

1. Equips caregiving families to meet the needs of children in their care;
2. Enables and supports the workforce to effectively engage and meet the needs of families; and,
3. Educates the community about the needs of children at risk of entering foster care, the needs of caregiving families, and the continuum of ways to support the children of Vermont.

### **2025-2029 Action Steps**

- A revised virtual caregiver orientation will be launching in Spring 2024
- Caregiver Foundations Online training will be translated into Spanish and Portuguese in FY 2025. Other languages will be added based on trends and needs. Caregiver Foundations Training video materials will have a voice over component to support nonreaders or caregivers whose languages are primarily spoken and not written. Cultural brokers will be engaged to support this work to ensure that the materials make sense from a cultural perspective.
- Continue to issue \$100 training completion incentives to each caregiver who completes Foundations training
- Role specific Resource Coordinator training will be required for all new Resource Coordinators starting in Spring 2024. Components of this course include details about Diligent Recruitment
- Caregiver Conference Fall 2024
- NTDC Training offered to Kinship Caregivers as a part of the Kin Nav collaborative Project
- NTI training offered to Mental Health Practitioners free of charge
- NTI and coaching offered to Child Welfare Staff free of charge
- Quarterly advanced training for Adoptive Parents offered through the Vermont Consortium for Adoption and guardianship in a lunch and learn format.
- Advanced training offered to staff related to working with Kin offered on a rotating basis annually including microlearning about making difficult decisions involving kinship caregivers.
- FSD and CWTP partnered to provide an innovative 3-part series which examined race and racism as it relates to Vermont's child welfare system, and families. This podcast series had 1,058 downloads between November 2021 and June 30, 2022. This podcast series is now used as required or introductory listening before participation in racial equity discussions in districts or state-wide meetings. This podcast is now part of the Foundations, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) curriculum for new employees.

## **5.) Data Driven Planning and Decision Making**

A system for data collection and reporting utilizing the same variables to establish a baseline, set goals and objectives, monitor progress, and assess the effectiveness of strategies for recruiting, developing, and supporting families is a goal of this DRR plan.

Having useful data on prospective and current foster parents gives a child welfare system crucial insight into how effective their current approaches are in recruiting, developing, and supporting foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

Ongoing attention to how we access our data, how we report our data, how we understand what the data is telling us and how we implement change based on the data is a critical component of this DR plan.

### **2025-2029 Action Steps**

- Technical Assistance from the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment will support efforts to establish measurable goals and outcomes for the DR plan. These efforts have been hampered due to the circa 1982 data collection system currently in operation.
- An RFP for CCWIS is in development. Modules to support all aspects of the DR plan will need to be developed. Some aspects of this work will likely begin during the 2025-2029 DRR plan timeframe.
- Access to a more robust data set provided by the Results Oriented Management Platform will support a deeper analysis of the race and ethnicity disparities evident in the child Welfare system at this time. Access to this data will allow the DR team to use data to inform current and future recruitment and retention efforts of BIPOC caregivers
- A data display will be developed to support the presentation of DR data to the districts. Through consultation with the Foster Kin Care Manager, district offices receive coaching related to what the data is “telling” them so that they can make mid-course corrections if their trends are not moving in the direction they expected. Having regular access to kin care data, placement stability data, timely system response data, unplanned move data and caregiver satisfaction feedback combined with coaching will allow our system to take an important step toward addressing the recruitment and retention needs of the division
- Programmers can add fields to exiting reports using data that is already collected in our SSMIS but is not included in any existing reports in the FSD Report Manager.
- As DR data related to race/ ethnicity of child and race/ ethnicity of the caregiver becomes readily available With support and coaching from the Quality Assurance Team, Local District Offices will learn to analyze their data to ensure they have a caregiving population that reflects the race and ethnicity of the children who are entering care. This particular action step

will likely be piloted in our Burlington office as that is the area of the state with the most racially diverse population.

- We will continue to monitor data related to Permanency Planning. Adoption finalization data is shared monthly with the entire division.
- Monitoring the efficacy of our Project Family Partnership will continue to ensure that the needs of waiting children are prioritized and met.
- The DR team will continue to monitor and report recruitment outcome data to the DR Quarterly Advisory Team. Planning, decisionmaking and resource allocation will be informed by this data.
- Efforts to improve and streamline the Inquiry Tracking Spreadsheet we developed during the 2020-2024 DR plan will be launched. Managing by spreadsheet is challenging at best... data entry is never a priority. There is risk that the available data is incorrect or incomplete which could lead to incorrect decisions driving the process.

#### **IV. Our Approach to Diligent Recruitment**

The State of Vermont has reduced the total number of children in care since the development of the 2020-2024 Diligent recruitment Plan was developed. At the writing of this Diligent Recruitment (DR) Plan, there are currently 985 children placed in care. While an initial look at data seems to indicate that we have plenty of homes to care for the children in our custody, our districts are experiencing a different reality. Licensed homes do not always have the capacity or availability to respond to the specific needs of the children needing care. Caregivers consistently share that they wish that they had more support and contact from the district offices. Children entering care have increasingly complex presentations which only exacerbates those difficulties.

In setting the stage for the development of this plan, it is important to understand that in spite of shared values and mission, policy and general agreement on what equals best practice there is still variation from District to District in what day to day practice looks like. District practice is impacted by a multitude of factors; caseload volume, staff experience and turnover, differences in how the judge on the bench engages with the district office, geographical area of the specific region, and access to a range of supportive services to name a few.

Diligent Recruitment Plan has been crafted to provide clear expectations and a framework that supports strong implementation while still providing the flexibility for each district to individualize their local plan to meet their unique needs based on the specific variables at play.

**See Appendix B for DRR Plan Logic Model**

The Team identified three major priorities to be addressed in the Diligent Recruitment Plan:

**1.) increase retention of kinship, foster and adoptive parents**

**Objective i:** Reduce % of Kin and Foster Families that close Voluntarily or Withdraw

**Objective ii:** Increase % of Kin and Foster Families whose level of support and connectedness needs are met to sustain healthy partnerships

**Objective iii:** Increase the number of Foster Families who renew their license at the 3 year mark

**2.) improve recruitment by increasing timely system response from inquiry to licensure;**

**Objective i:** Districts adhere to a common, best practice inquiry to licensure process

**Objective ii:** Caregivers have access to relevant, timely, accessible training materials

**3.) increase available capacity of kin foster and adoptive parents**

**Objective i:** Using targeted recruitment plans on the state and district levels to increase the number of homes that, with appropriate support, can safely care for the diversity of children in care (complex needs, LGBTQ, racial and ethnic backgrounds, youth with physical and developmental challenges).

**Objective ii:** Increase % of children with kinship placements

**Objective iii:** Increase # of foster homes able to maintain children within their geographical and cultural communities

- From the beginning the DR Workgroup has purposed to align the DR work with other QA and System Improvement efforts. Vermont just completed CFSR Round 4. Later this summer we will have an opportunity for a statewide debrief with Region One. Required PIP activities will be incorporated into this DR plan in a similar manner.
- This approach was intentional and aimed at addressing the field's concern that they are challenged by managing the existing workload and many other competing priorities and initiatives. By embedding the diligent recruitment objectives into both our State Strategic Plan and into our ongoing CQI efforts, leaders across the state, will guide the development of a systematic approach to all recruitment and retention activities and messaging.
- The Core Team was engaged in conversation about how to shift division culture about who is responsible for the recruitment and retention of caregivers and how this

adaptive work will be reflected in the day-to-day activity that occurs across the division.

- For more than a decade, Vermont FSD has had a focus on Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). There have been various formal processes where the districts have been required to identify their strengths and challenges in a variety of PIP related practice areas. They have also been required to identify strategies both adaptive and technical, rooted in best practice and current research, that would help them improve their performance. In keeping with this approach, the Core Team elected to establish a similar approach to DR implementation.
- The Core Team developed a Practice Profile/Assessment using Rickert scales to support a district in understanding how their practice aligns with best practice needed to successfully implement diligent recruitment on the local level. Each of these practice areas fit nicely within one or more of the key elements.
- The Practice Profile tool was completed by each district as part of their onboarding during the 2020-2024 DR plan. The Practice Profile tool allowed districts to thoroughly examine their practice in a number of areas.
- We find that offices that are successfully incorporating the key elements into their local practice are more successful with their local implementation. The Practice Profile will support Districts to choose which specific strategies they need to implement to round out and improve current practice or assist them with determining to stop engaging in certain practices. This approach will meet districts where they are at and will advance the entire state's approach to the recruitment, support and development of caregivers.
- As implementation continues, the strategies and priorities on the DR Action Plan are expected to shift infrequently. The objectives and activities will be revised regularly based on how the plan unfolds and based on what the data tells us about the success of the various interventions employed.
- A series of PDSA approaches will be employed to test out theories we have related to particular strategies to ensure that they are having the intended impact before taking them to scale.
- When the 2020-2024 DR Plan was adopted, the team has been utilizing several tools that we developed (**highlighted in black**) to support the overall monitoring of the implementation plan.
- The Team utilizes a **meeting structure and facilitation** that has kept the work of the team alive and moving forward. Weekly, protected DR Planning time keeps projects moving forward and supports agenda development for future meetings. Prior to the close of each DR Working Group and DR Advisory Team meeting, the group is provided with an opportunity to share a **plus/delta** about their experience of the meeting. This information has helped us to calibrate the content and flow of the meeting to best suit the needs of the group. Each meeting is followed up with **meeting notes** which identify next steps.
- The DR Team has utilized a series of **Strategy Development Worksheets** which are basically proposals which come from the districts aimed at addressing a specific local DR need. The worksheets help us to evaluate and select which new projects we will consider for a pilot and evaluation with the idea that those pilots which prove

efficacious we would consider for possible statewide implementation. We have found that this approach helps us to replicate successful strategies without having to recreate the wheel.

- Timely data is used to guide decision making. The QA team has committed to providing quarterly data on placement with kin and placement stability. The inquiry tracking data and data from the Child Welfare training Partnership are also used in the monitoring of the plan
- This DR plan has been designed to support immediate and longer-term implementation. We are building the plane while we fly it. The plan has to maintain the ability to ebb and flow based on capacity issues the division is navigating.
- A **Comprehensive Communication Plan** has been developed to support overall communication with both internal (staff and caregivers) and external partners (community partners, the court system etc.)
- The Communication Plan will:
  - ❖ Systematically introduce the Statewide Diligent Recruitment plan to all of FSD by engaging with multiple existing workgroups including Division Leadership Team, Supervisors Workgroup, CQI Steering Committee, Project Family
  - ❖ Systematically introduce the Statewide Diligent Recruitment plan to external partners by engaging with existing groups including our contracted partners, partners in the local community including mental health agencies, education and the judiciary as well as the FSD Stakeholder Workgroup
  - ❖ Provide regular updates on DR implementation to both internal and external stakeholders by sharing intervention highlights and Data Displays
  - ❖ provide elevator speech type talking points related to each of the identified Key DR Elements. These products were developed to answer the questions of “Why should I focus on this?” and “How will this make a difference in these outcomes?” posed by the Districts who are being asked to implement their local DR plan.
  - ❖ provide guidance for how to access and use all General Television, Radio, Print and Internet Advertising in accordance with DCF and AHS policies.
  - ❖ provide guidance for how engage with Front Porch Forum related to targeted recruitment efforts
  - ❖ detail how to engage with Project Family’s Heart Gallery- photo listing for children who need permanency
  - ❖ provide guidance on the use of social media in accordance with DCF and AHS policies.
  - ❖ provide guidance to Districts related to the steps involved with event planning as it relates to DR work including authorization and funding
  - ❖ support the creation of a speaker/interview bureau to address timely response to media inquiries

- ❖ Continue to support the development and expand distribution of Fostering Vermont the bi-weekly electronic caregiver newsletter

- The DR Working Group is comprised of both direct service and operational level staff who are able to make key decisions. It will be necessary to ensure that the group continues to be configured in this way to support well-balanced, realistic decision making.
- The overall success of the DR plan implementation will continue to rest with the Working Group. The Working group meets monthly to ensure that we are sustaining our attention to implementation benchmarks and adjusting the plan as needed to meet our outcome goals.

## **V. Connections to Other Family Services Division Efforts**

This section provides an overview of other FSD activities relevant to diligent recruitment that are currently underway and those that are in the planning stage. This work ensures that the strategies/activities proposed by the DR team are aligned and integrated with other division efforts. Key Partners who support DR work are also mentioned below.

Three District Offices were involved in the initial planning and development of the 2020-2024 DR plan. These three districts served as pilots for implementation. Four additional districts have participated fairly regularly in the DR Working Group. Planful engagement of the remaining District Offices will be critical to successful implementation. The Division Management Team receives quarterly about the work of DR and are provided with opportunities to inform the direction of parts of the plan. The comprehensive DR Communication plan will support active and ongoing engagement.

As mentioned before, intentional alignment of the DR plan with Division Strategic Planning activities and the Division's CQI planning are also central to successful implementation. A goal of the DR project is for DR work to align with and leverage other work of the Division.

The Division's Central Office has supported the development of the Diligent Recruitment Plan. Advisory Team membership includes representation from our Policy, Practice and Planning Team, our Residential Licensing and Special Investigations Unit, our System of Care Team- which includes foster care, adoption, post permanency supports as well as ICPC, our Quality Assurance Team, our Operations Team, our Adolescent Services Team and our Revenue Enhancement Team. It will be important to sustain this engagement as new and shiny initiatives come along and there is risk that DR work will be pushed to the back burner.

FSD has a preexisting relationship with the Child Welfare Training Partnership (CWTP) which is housed at the University of Vermont. This vital partnership supports division-wide training and orientation of new employees and provides on going practice

coaching to the field. Additionally, the CWTP supports the division's caregiver training program. Representatives from the CWTP participated in the development of this DR plan as Advisory Team members

## **VI. Key Partners and Stakeholders**

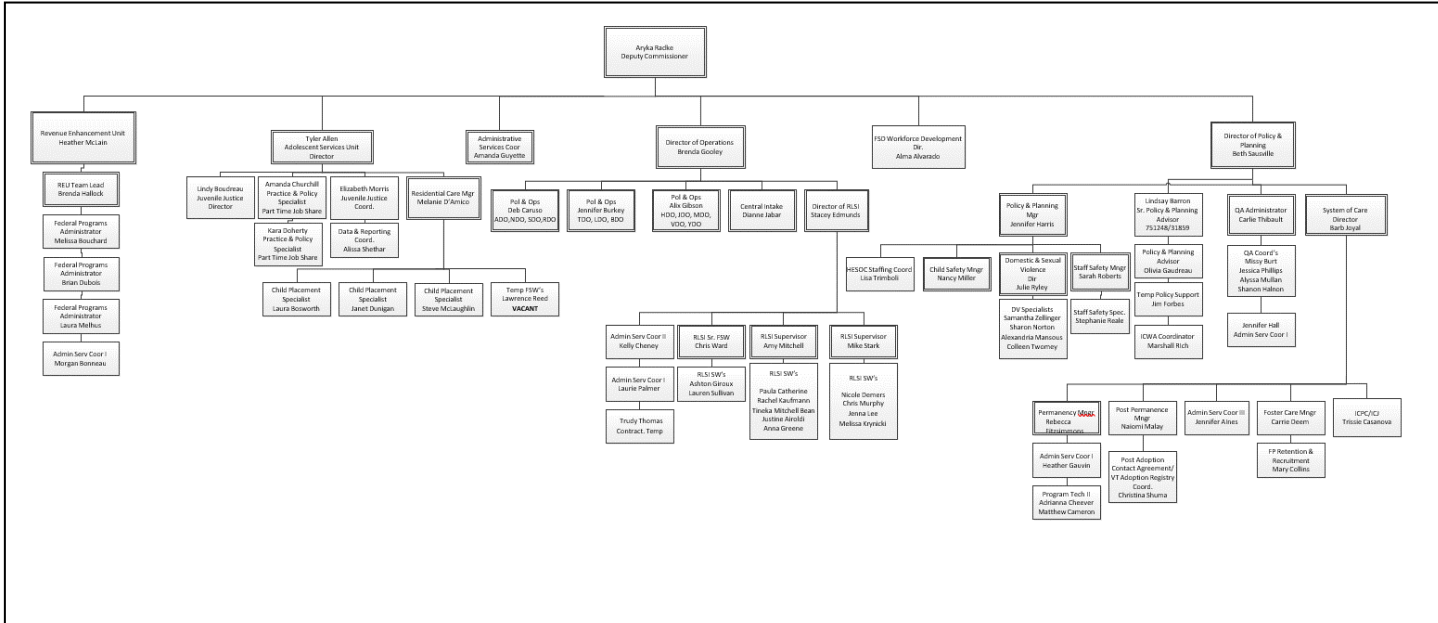
As various DR Plan activities are undertaken additional stakeholders will need to be engaged to complete various components of the Plan. When the Action Plan determines an activity should be initiated, consideration of which Partners or Stakeholders should be engaged will be incorporated into the DR Action Plan as an activity.

For detail regarding Key Partners and Stakeholders please see Appendices D and E.

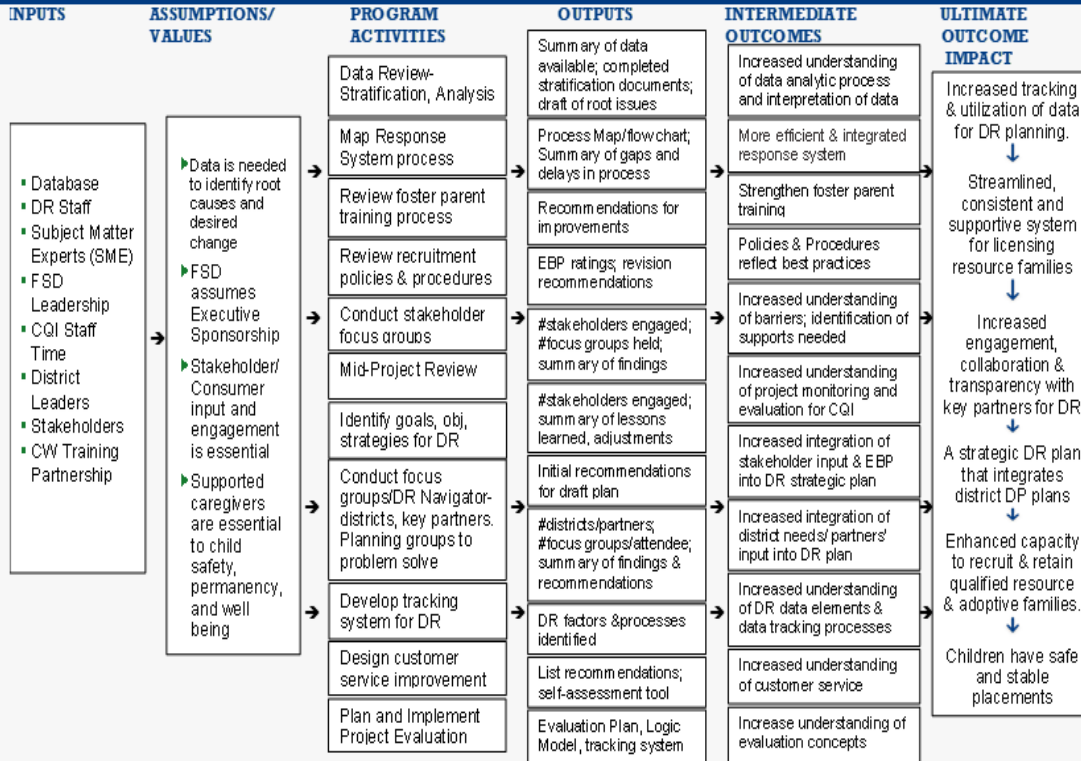


# APPENDIX A:

## FSD Organizational Chart



# Diligent Recruitment Logic Model



## APPENDIX C:

# STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS GRID

- Identify stakeholders that are crucial to the success of the implementation.
- Understand stakeholder interests, expectations, and potential conflicts.
- Develop a strategic approach to managing stakeholder interaction.
- Inform on communications and sustainability planning.

Stakeholder	Description	Influence	Interest	Interests and Expectations
Children		Low	High	- Orientation about potential placement - Process for Decision Making - Voice
Advocacy Groups	represent the interests of a particular constituency group in communities and at the legislature	Unknown	High	- Informed about constituency group - Focused on child's best interest
GALS	appointed by the court to look out for the best interests of children in the court process	High	High	- Focused on child's best interest - Services - Changes to placement
Parents Bar	represents parents in court	High	High	- System organization and status - "Macro view of system"
Parents		High	High	- What is happening in the Foster Home - Process for decision making - Transparency of placement process - Safety of children
State Attorney's	represents state in court	High	High	- System organization and status - "Macro view of system"
Assistant Attorney General	represents division in court	High	High	- System organization and status - "Macro view of system"
Children's Attorney	represent child in court	High	High	- System organization and status - "Macro view of system" - Focused on child's best interest
Foster Parent Association	advocacy, supports communication between division and caregivers	High	High	- Clear and consistent communication - Policy and procedure information - Individual case information - DR plans and progress towards meeting goals - Transparency around safety
AHS Leadership - DHS - DAHL	Funding and overall decisionmaking. Access to supports and services	High	High	- Data - DR Goals & Outcomes - Collaboration
Parent/Child Centers	Provide support services	Low	Low	- General information
Contracted Providers	contractors provide essential services that support CW mission	low	high	- promote placement stability - support overall practice of the division - Collaboration
Law Enforcement	partner with child welfare related to child safety and law abidance practices	Low	Low	- Role in trauma informed practice - Overall safety of child - Collaboration
Medical Community	partner with child welfare related to child safety practices	mod	high	- Macro view of system - safety of Children - Consultation
Media	can influence public perception either positively or negatively	high	mod	- Could support changing public perception