

South Carolina Department of Social Services

Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan

2020-2024

Who are our Children?

After review of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) data the agency has determined that the agency is currently working with 4,713 children within the foster care system statewide. Of this total number of children 52% of them are male (2,468), 48% are female (2240) and 0% are unknown (5). The majority of these children are Caucasian with African American being the next highest percentage. All other races are less than 10% of our populations. Many of our youth are between the ages of 7 to 17 years old. Also, after reviewing the data many of these children are members of a sibling group where many are not placed together or within the home county. As with national trends, SC is seeing a larger number of children who are victims of sex trafficking and currently specialized placement for them is lacking. With this knowledge in hand the agency has developed a recruitment plan that will target its critical need areas.

Who are our Foster and Adoptive Families?

Foster Homes:

Currently there is 2,796 foster homes within the state (this number includes those licensed and case managed by SCDSS, therapeutic foster agencies, and regular foster homes licensed by private agencies). Of these homes, the breakdown of the racial mix is 382 African American regular foster homes and 778 therapeutic foster homes, 73 multi-racial regular foster homes and 35 therapeutic foster homes, 2 American Indian/Alaskan Native regular foster home and 4 therapeutic foster homes, 1 Asian regular foster home and 0 therapeutic foster home, 1 unknown regular foster home and 7 therapeutic foster homes, 3 regular foster homes who declined to state race and 0 therapeutic foster homes, and 1256 Caucasian regular foster homes and 253 therapeutic foster homes. When reviewing where these homes are situated they are spread throughout the state in unequal numbers.

Adoptive Homes:

Current data that SCDSS has on its adoptive homes is not as detailed as the foster home data. Efforts are underway to clean up the information in the system in regards to adoptive home status that will allow SCDSS to be able to gather data in a timely and accurate way. Currently the agency has 1,553 Adoptive families in the system. Of these families there are a total of 663 approved and roughly over 400 are not child specific applications. Many of the families desire to adopt a legally free child within the age of 0-5. SCDSS does not have many children that meet these guidelines and desires of the adoptive applicants. Furthermore, there is no data to provide on the racial or household composition of the adoptive homes at this time.

Kinship:

SCDSS has recently started emphasizing kinship foster home licensing, however, due to statutory and regulation guidelines waivers are not allowed to be used when licensing blood

relatives. It is the agency's goal to have these barriers addressed and changed over the next five years. According to the data many relatives choose to take guardianship of their kin due to the length of time and all the regulations that are required in order to become a foster and/or adoptive home with SCDSS.

What are our current practices?

Currently the Regional Adoption Offices are in the process of going through a business redesign plan. This redesign of the adoption process will enhance and improve the applicants' process of the adoption application process. This new process will allow the families to obtain approval or denial at faster rate while still complying with federal and state statutes. When this redesign process begins it will affect the Regional Foster Licensing Units as well. The redesign will have the Licensing Unit and the Adoption Units complying with the same standards across the state. This will be done so that current foster parents who wish to become adoptive resources to be able to obtain adoptive approval in less than 45 days.

The business redesign plan has incorporated the National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards and state statutes. In this process the homes will be held to the required standards and will help to ensure that the children are receiving quality and stable services from the families.

SCDSS is also currently moving towards providing training to our foster, adoptive, and kinship homes that are evidence based trauma informed. The agency is working towards the full implementation of these trainings within the next five years.

Recruitment Initiatives:

When it comes to recruitment, it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel. Many of the things that will be discussed in this report have been or are being used to address the problem of children languishing in foster care, or exiting the system without an identified family. Initiative begun during the past several years, that have proven to be successful, continue to be refined. The refining is particularly true of the contracts that are being utilized under the Adoption Incentive Payments funding, which will continue during the FFYs 2020-2024.

These contracts include the following providers:

- The Seneca Family of Agencies: The SCDSS contracted with the Seneca Family of Agencies to support the requirements of the Family Finding initiative. The Seneca Family of Agencies conducted manual searches of public records in an effort to find and identify possible relatives of children in foster care. Search requests are submitted through a secure link on the Seneca Family of Agencies' website. Upon receipt of requests for family searches, the Seneca Family of Agencies assigned an experienced search agent to conduct a manual search, and provide a report back to the SCDSS staff that includes: addresses and listed phone numbers for the subject, as well as possible relatives and associates of the subject with their addresses, and listed phone numbers, and any neighbors with listed phone numbers of the subjects most recent address. Seneca Searches have been successfully utilized to identify extended family members who are willing to provide support, and permanency options, including adoption, for children in the foster care system.

- The Foster Care Review Board (FCRB)/The Heart Gallery: The Heart Gallery (SCHG) is a national program that uses the power of photography to help find homes for children who are legally free and lingering in foster care. Through community exhibits and internet photo display, this recruitment tool increased public awareness of the need for adoptive families. Heart Gallery photographers volunteer their time and talents to create unique portraits showcasing these children. The portraits are displayed at various locations around the state all during the year. The agency had and continues to have a contract with the FCRB for the SC Heart Gallery to be administered and supported by the Children's Foster Care Review Board. The SCHG program works with SCDSS Regional Adoption staff to arrange photography sessions as needed, plan community exhibits, track and respond to any inquiries from interested families, and provided targeted, child-specific recruitment and family engagement. Furthermore, the staff at SCDSS also assist in completing adoptive home studies as requested by the agency.
- The SC Foster Parent Association Heartfelt Calling: Heartfelt Calling developed by the SC Foster Parent Association (SCFPA) provided expedited responses to inquiries about fostering and adoption. Heartfelt Calling developed a website (www.heartfeltcalling.org) and implemented a separate and specific toll-free number for recruitment purposes. This has allowed for one consistent entry point into the SCDSS system for all potential resource families, and has allowed consistency and follow-up from first contact through pre-service training. A tremendous benefit from this centralized system is that inquiring families were given consistent messages about fostering and adoption, and a centralization database tracking ensures follow-up and provides information on service gaps.

Diligent recruitment efforts will continue to encompass all three of the major recruitment strategies, (general, targeted, and child-specific). The past years South Carolina has concentrated on obtaining 1 bed per foster child as its targeted population statewide while the Regional Adoption Offices utilized child-specific (one-on-one individualized plan for a child based on a the child's specific needs) recruitment strategies which engaged both youth and families together, and allowing both the opportunity to take an active role in the selection process.

- All Pro Dad: The SCDSS is in its' second year under contract with All Pro Dad, a group started by Coach Tony Dungy, NFL Hall of Famer and foster and adoptive parent. Our contract consists of internet advertising, radio spots, professional video vignettes of our foster and adoptive parents to use as promotional material, one college turf event and five No More Orphan faith centered recruitment events.
- Faith Based Recruitment: The foster care recruitment coordinator will reach out to the leaders of the South Carolina faith community to talk to them about the need for foster/adoptive families as well as ways their congregations could support current foster families in their area. Ask them to share this with their congregations through bulletin inserts or by using our short video vignettes before church service. SCDSS will host five No More Orphan Experience events in some of the state's highest need areas this year.
- Community Awareness and Involvement: The SCDSS will create and share a calendar of all events pertaining to foster care and adoption on its' website and share on social media. All CPA's and non-profit organization statewide will be invited to contribute and share the calendar to invite prospective parent's to an event near them to learn more about becoming a foster or adoptive parent. The SCDSS will update our website and

social media platforms to reflect our new recruitment strategies and message on the types of parents we need. The Office of Communication and External Affairs will continue to reach out to media to obtain spots on the need for foster and adoptive parents. There are currently two series in two of our major television markets running monthly on a child that is available for adoption. We will update our brochures to bring them in line with new standards and align with the children we have in care to better represent the parents we are looking for. We will use data driven information to pinpoint the communities where we need to target our recruitment efforts. SCDSS will engage our CPA's on their recruitment efforts so we do not duplicate effort. We will better engage our foster and adoptive parents in assisting us in our recruitment efforts. A list of all of the private providers will be made available to the public to show all of the agencies in our state that they have the option to foster or adopt through.

- Retention: SCDSS has formed foster parent and kinship care advisory groups. We will engage the faith community to offer wrap around support to their local foster families. Make caseworker contact information and child's information more accessible to improve response time to the needs of the foster families. Have a better presence by SCDSS staff to support the county foster parent associations in their efforts to train current parents and assist them with their recruitment activities. SCDSS will have an Ombudsman for foster families. This individual will be able to listen to and resolve or settle issues that foster families may have. Work with the South Carolina Foster Parent Association in structuring a model for how a county association should operate. SCDSS will work with CPA's and the South Carolina Foster Parent Association to allow all foster parent's to be available communicate more freely to support and inform each other.

Needs and Recommendations:

South Carolina, like all states nationwide, is obligated to prove diligent recruitment efforts to have foster and adoptive families for waiting children and youth. These efforts need to include all races, ethnicities, and cultures which will best meet the needs of each child. Families must be recruited from communities that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of waiting children and youth.

- Develop training on cultural diversity awareness to ensure the staff incorporates sensitivity into their work with all communities.
- Develop methods to assess the effectiveness of recruitment efforts. Benchmarks and tracking data must be used to ensure recruitment efforts can be measured in each region. The difference between effective and ineffective recruitment is measurement.
- SCDSS will work with our CPA's to better communicate the makeup of our children in care to better assist them in knowing what types of families are needed and where they are needed. Our greatest need for regular foster families are African American or Hispanic or Spanish speaking families who are willing to take sibling groups of two or more children or youth. SCDSS will work with our therapeutic providers to increase the number of Caucasian homes in the locations the children are coming into care. They will also be engaged to help recruit therapeutic foster parents who are specially trained to handle our growing number of youth coming into care due to human (sex) trafficking.
- Regional plans will be developed and tracked at the state level and will include the activities of the CPA's and therapeutic agencies as well. SCDSS will also involve the CPA's in our recruitment efforts. This would allow potential foster or adoptive parents to

have the ability to talk to all of the available agencies they could foster or adopt through together so they can make a more informed decision.

- SCDSS will better engage and inform the non-profit foster care and adoption agencies across the state to enlist their assistance in obtaining quality foster and adoptive homes.
- We will work with the county foster parent associations to mobilize them in recruitment activities within their communities to increase our numbers of quality foster and adoptive parents as well as reaching out to the faith community to explain ways they could assist our current foster parents which would aid in retention.

Conclusion:

The reasons that people foster and/or adopt are complex and each answer varies with the family involved. What SCDSS has to do is continue to recruit families who are capable of unconditional commitment.

Recruitment efforts must incorporate cultural considerations and our programs must work in collaboration with each other. Retention of quality foster families is a part of recruitment. Good “parent” service and effective training are the keys to getting and keeping good foster and adoptive families. Supporting families who foster and adopt creates an atmosphere of public trust that encourages and supports other families who are considering becoming involved in working with the child welfare population.