

**2025 – 2029 SCDSS Foster and Adoptive
Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan**

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Introduction

Pursuant to Section 422(b)(7) of the Act the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) works diligently to recruit foster and adoptive families that reflect the diversity of children in South Carolina for whom homes are needed. SCDSS works closely with contracted providers and agency partners, current resource families, and other community entities to recruit, retain, and support foster and adoptive providers that meet the needs of children placed in SCDSS's care.

The 2025 – 2029 Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan addresses the following topics:

- A description of the characteristics of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed;
- Specific strategies to reach out to all parts of the community;
- Diverse methods of disseminating both general information about being a foster/adoptive parent and child-specific information;
- Strategies for assuring all prospective foster/adoptive parents have access to agencies that license/approve foster/adoptive parents;
- Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities;
- Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;
- Non-discriminatory fee structures; and
- Procedures for timely search for prospective parents for a child needing adoptive placement

Characteristics of Children Needing Homes

SCDSS Accountability, Data, and Research team (ADR) maintains an internal foster care dashboard that provides a daily update of the number of children in foster care and their demographic and level of care information. As of 5/21/2024, there were 3,413 children in foster care in South Carolina. The below provides a breakdown of demographic characteristics for these children. This data is aggregated to the state level, however the internal foster care dashboard where this data originates includes regional and county breakdowns by demographic characteristic. This allows for analysis of specific demographic characteristics at local, regional, and state levels.

By age, the largest group of children in care is between 0 and 6 years of age (39%), followed by children ages 13-17 years (33%). Although there are less children in care in the teenage age group, this age group is typically the most challenging age group to place.

By race, the largest group of children in care are white (49%), followed by black or African American children (36%), and 11% being multi-racial. A small percentage is represented by other races, including Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. From this extract, 3% of children are listed with their race as unable to determined. This may be due to variety of factors and is most frequently seen when a child first enters foster care and this information has not yet been obtained and recorded in the CAPSS system¹.

Demographic Characteristics of Children in Foster Care as of 5/21/24

¹ SCDSS SACWIS system

Sex	Male	52%
	Female	48%
Age Group (years)	0-6 yrs.	39%
	7-12 yrs.	28%
	13-17 yrs.	33%
Race	White	49%
	Black or African American	36%
	Multi-racial	11%
	Asian	0.20%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.20%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.10%
	Unable to determine	3%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	7%
	Non-Hispanic	85%
	Unknown or declined	7%

The majority of children in foster care are placed in a foster family home (56%), followed by kinship placements (26%), group homes (11%), pre-adoptive or adoptive placement (5%), and 2% in other. Other may include placement in a hospital, correctional facility, or other facility type.

Placement Type for children in foster care as of 5/20/2024	
Pre-adoptive or adoptive home	5%
Other	2%
Kinship	26%
Foster Home	56%
Group Home	11%

The ADR team produces a similar report of characteristics of children legally free for adoption, identifying at county and regional levels the numbers of legally free children, their race, ethnicity, age group, and current placement type.

As of 5/22/2024 the largest population of legally free children were youth ages 13 – 17 years (43%), followed by children ages 7 – 12 (30%), and children ages 0 – 6 representing the smallest proportion of legally free children (27%). Although ages 0 – 6 represent the highest population by age of children in foster care, younger children are often the easiest to locate an adoptive resource for and as a result represent the smallest population by age of legally free children.

Demographic Characteristics of Children Legally Free for Adoption as of 5/22/24		
Age Group (years)	0-6 yrs.	27%
	7-12 yrs.	30%
	13-17 yrs.	43%
Race	White	58%
	Black or African American	30%

	Multi-racial	6%
	Other	6%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	7%
	Non-Hispanic	90%
	Unknown or declined	3%

Strategies to reach out to all parts of the community

In collaboration with agency partners, SCDSS is focusing on the below targets for foster parent recruitment and retention:

- Increase the number of licensed kinship placements
- Focus on child-specific recruitment efforts based on current needs
 - Non-kinship foster homes
 - Therapeutic foster homes
 - Foster homes for sibling groups
 - Foster homes for teenagers
 - Foster homes for medically complex children
- Increase retention by improving relationships with current foster families

Contractual Recruitment Efforts

Each contracted CPA has specific recruitment activities that are closely monitored by the SCDSS contract monitoring team and the Office of Permanency Management to help support the above targets. Each CPA is required to submit an annual recruitment plan to SCDSS in August that outlines their specific recruitment strategies. These recruitment activities are monitored ongoing through contract monitoring efforts.

Lutheran Services Carolinas:

- Establish a statewide family recruitment and licensing team to identify and educate potential foster families on how to care for youth with wide-ranging needs.
- Provide attendance incentives to foster parents.
- Hire a recruitment supervisor, 2 family developers, and a centralized intake coordinator.
- Partner with a marketing firm to develop a targeted recruitment plan.
- Develop marketing and outreach materials to improve foster parent recruitment.
- Contract with a consulting firm to improve staff's ability to enhance interpersonal and marketing skills.
- Document team recruitment procedures, goals, and data collection/analysis tools.
- Incorporate foster family feedback through surveys.
- Ensure that of families recruited, screened, and transitioned to family developers, at least 50% will become licensed foster homes.
- Increase the number of their licensed beds by 35% with an emphasis on youth with complex and specialized needs.

New Foundations:

- Develop and implement engagement strategies to recruit foster parents to serve as placement resources for teens, LGBTQIA+ youth, and the Latinx community.
- Develop and implement marketed materials and items to support foster parent recruitment for the specialized population above.

- Actively engage communities and provide quarterly informational events designed for foster parent recruitment in partnership with local businesses in the upstate counties.

PalmettoPlace:

- Collaborate with community partners and stakeholders to ensure a network of support is available and extends beyond the program to promote long-term stability.
- Leverage social media platforms to reach families and caregivers and share information about programs, events, and resources.

Landmark:

- Support the implementation of infrastructure to support building capacity to provide rehabilitative behavioral health services with a focus on child and youth involved or at risk of contact with SCDSS.

Pinnacle:

- Create two 30-second radio ads specifically addressing the urgent need for foster families, particularly targeting teenagers, youth with enhanced needs, including those from the LGBTQIA+ community, and medically fragile groups. Ads will run on platforms such as Pandora, iHeartRadio, TuneIn, Entravision, and Soundcloud.
- Utilize the “Everyday Heroes” ad campaign and produce video ads to be aired on platforms including HGTV, Samsung TV, Peacock, among others.
- Design and print targeted materials such as banners and flyers, tailored to the needs of teens and youth with enhanced care requirements. These materials will also promote the benefits of therapeutic foster care Fostering Solutions training and trauma-informed care, with the aim of distributing them at community events and informational sessions.
- Implement a robust data tracking system to effectively monitor and analyze various demographic aspects related to the recruitment and licensing of foster homes.
- Train foster parents and staff in Foster Solutions model for delivering therapeutic foster care and track outcomes related to the model.

Growing Homes Southeast:

- Utilize data and anecdotes to create a plan for recruitment and retention of foster parents and meet at least quarterly to reevaluate plans and evaluate progress in plans.
- Use radio, social media, and community newspapers to raise awareness about the need for foster parents, targeting communities that reflect the specialized needs of children in care.
- Partner with the National Network for Youth to determine specific strategies for recruitment of youth who identify as LGBTQ+. The National Network for Youth offers specific guidance to support the needs of vulnerable young adults.
- Utilize resources available through Fostering Great Ideas to facilitate a youth specific forum to determine the needs, desires, and challenges associated with young people in foster care.
- Partner with area churches and other faith-based organizations to relay the need for foster parents.

- Establish a foster parent support group to ensure current and future parents have a forum for expressing their concerns, challenges, and needs. The expertise and knowledge of parents will be leveraged to ensure successful recruitment of new families.
- Expand training and proficiency in the evidence based Together Facing the Challenge model to ensure current and future parents are prepared to face the needs of youth in care.
- Utilize the evidence-based Wendy's Wonderful Kids adoption model to identify permanent options for youth.

SAFY:

- Develop a multifaceted marketing campaign highlighting the unique rewards associated with fostering teenagers.
- Collaborate with local partners to raise awareness about fostering teenagers.
- Utilize social media platforms to share testimonials from foster caregivers who have cared for teenagers.
- Use researched-based messaging to overcome assumptions commonly placed on older youth.
- Conduct informational sessions emphasizing the importance of keeping siblings together.
- Partner with local media outlets to feature stories of families who have successfully fostered large sibling groups.
- Provide additional support, resources, and training for foster caregivers willing to foster sibling groups.
- Collaborate with LGBTQIA+ organizations to create a welcoming environment for potential foster caregivers.
- Ensure staff are trained and knowledgeable about issues facing LGBTQIA+ youth, provide specialized training on the unique needs of this population, and create a network of supportive foster families.
- Implement engagement strategies to include participation in community events and advertising in LGBTQIA+ publications and websites.
- Establish partnerships with healthcare providers, pediatricians, and medical networks to reach potential foster caregivers with experience and interest in working with medically fragile youth.
- Develop targeted campaigns emphasizing the availability of specialized medical support and training for foster caregivers.
- Ensure that through developed partnerships, healthcare providers will speak at information sessions to answer questions pertaining to caring for youth with medical needs.
- Launch targeted campaigns highlighting the specialized support and resources available for those interested in fostering youth with total care needs.
- Partner with disability advocacy organizations to increase awareness and outreach.
- Develop and implement a mentorship program connecting potential foster caregivers with experienced caregivers who have fostered youth with total care needs.
- Identifying and training respite providers to provide emergency overnight respite care, and a placement stability specialist to assist caregivers with managing behaviors to maintain youth in respite homes until long-term placement is secured.

SCYAP:

- Focus on targeted recruitment efforts for foster homes willing to take youth with complex behavioral health needs, youth with special needs, children with complex medical conditions, teenagers, LGBTQIA+ youth, and sibling groups.
- Develop and use customized recruitment materials and media sources to target the need for foster parents for the specialized populations listed above.
- Engage in extensive community outreach to intentionally target organizations, providers, and communities for the specific populations which foster homes are being sought which may include travel and in-person engagement.
- Develop a pool of “spokes families” made up of foster families who have experience parenting the specialized populations.
- Work to emphasize their array of services available to support children and youth placed with one of their licensed foster homes.
- Ensure that all staff and foster parents receive relevant training to support the placement of the specialized populations.
- Hire 4 FTE specialized population recruiters, 3.5 FTE licensing coordinators, 1 FTE recruitment/licensing supervisor, and 1 FTE administrative assistant to assist with bringing about the conditions of the contract.
- Track, measure, and identify outcomes related to the scope of effort.

Bair Foundation:

- Expand its marketing efforts to reach families who will take teens, sibling groups, LGBTQIA+, total care clients, and medically fragile children.
- Target ads to individuals who are most likely to foster the specialized populations above.
- Streaming of recruitment videos to target the populations described above. This advertising will involve creating compelling visual content, such as videos and infographics, to share inspiring stories of success, resiliency, and placement stability of difficult to place foster children.
- Utilize popular social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook which help reach a broad audience, while utilizing specific hashtags related to medical foster care and other specialized populations to increase visibility and engagement.
- Market a referral incentive for prospective and current foster families, who are willing to serve the specialized populations.
- Implement a placement stability stipend for foster parents who successfully maintain placement of LGBTQIA, total care, teens, medically needy and large sibling groups for 120 days or more.
- Create, market, and distribute sensory kits to foster parents who accept placement of children with total care or special needs.
- Create, market and distribute teen placement kits to foster parents who accept placement of a teenager.
- Provide sitter services for clients who do not qualify for other childcare assistance or are still awaiting approval.
- Hire 1 FTE for a Director of Recruitment, 3 FTE Therapists, a FP Liaison, and a Family Support Advocate to bring about the conditions associated with the scope of effort.

Thornwell:

- Develop and implement targeted recruitment strategies to recruit new foster parents interested in fostering teens and siblings.
- Coach foster families develop individualized recruitment plans with families, cover costs for event supplies, and create/distribute curated content for social media posts by foster families.
- Develop marketing materials to include yard signs, recruitment collateral, and other printed materials.

Crosswell:

- Hire a foster care manager to manage additional homes in Sumter and surrounding counties.
- Implement targeted recruitment strategies aimed at finding and licensing new foster families willing to accept teenagers, sibling groups, and other “difficult to place” youth.
- Recruitment activities are not limited to but include stand-alone recruitment events (in-person and virtual), posting flyers in church bulletins, hosting booths at community events, creating yard signs, and other promotional material and activities (e.g. social media).

Epworth:

- Recruit and license a total of 100 foster homes statewide, 30 of which to serve youth between 13-21 over the 12-month project period.
- Ensure that efforts include video, voice overs, interviews, digital marketing, printing, and radio and digital placement.

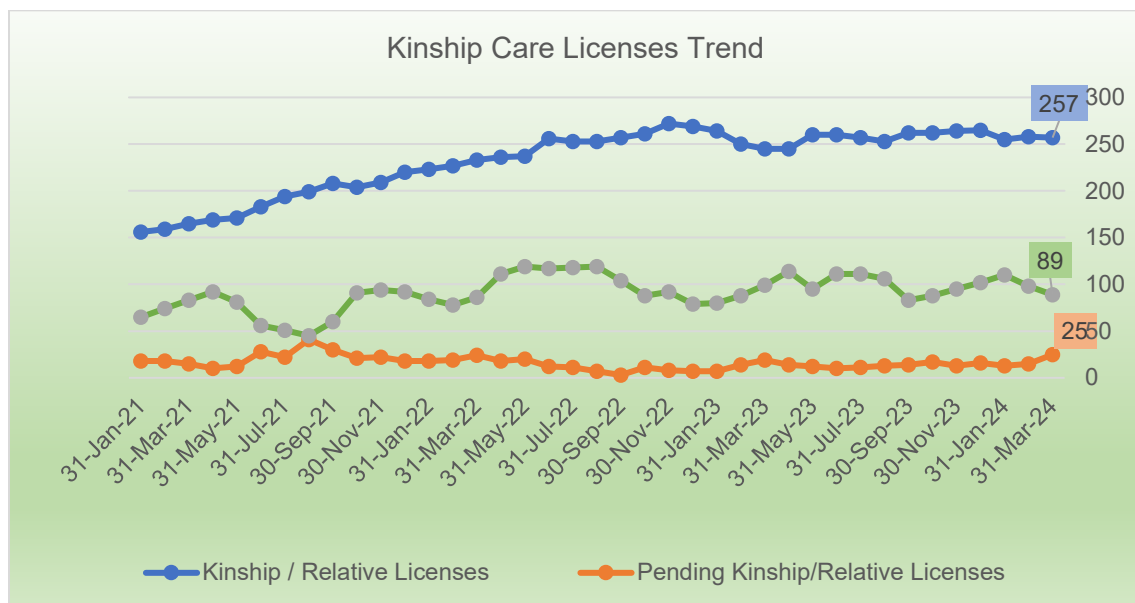
SC Foster Parent Association/Heartfelt Calling:

- Heartfelt Calling serves as the central intake for anyone interested in foster care and/or adoption. They have a website (<https://heartfeltcalling.org/>) and social media presence, in addition to holding foster and adoptive recruitment events across the state

Increasing the number of licensed kinship placements

SCDSS believes kinship placements not only assist in preserving a child’s connections, but also correlate to higher placement stability. The Department has focused on increasing kin placements with good results. Over the past several years SCDSS has focused efforts to increase kin and fictive kin placements by providing ongoing training and supports focused on the importance of kinship placements. In 2020, SCDSS focused efforts to increase kinship placements by providing ongoing training regarding the importance of kinship placements, instituted provisional foster home licenses and waivers for non-safety requirements for kinship providers, developed a kinship care policy and tip sheet for staff, funding to kinship providers through the kinship navigator grant, and shifted the responsibility of licensing all non-kin foster homes to child placing agencies contracted by SCDSS. Although SCDSS continues to encourage licensure, the Department continues to support unlicensed kinship caregivers with needed supports and services. In 2024 the Family Resource Connection and Preservation Services (FRCPS) contract was issued, which helps support kin by providing in-home services to both licensed and unlicensed caregivers. SCDSS continues to focus on placing children in kinship homes by the continuation of the above-mentioned practices.

The Department has continued to promote the benefits of kinship licensure and encourage kinship caregivers to become licensed. In 2023 SCDSS continues to meet the internal goal of licensing kinship families within 90 days of the referral being received and approving a standard kinship licenses within 90 days of the provisional licenses being issues. The licensure team at SCDSS continues to work on increasing efficiency and timeliness in the initial licensure process. Through these efforts kinship caregiver licensure rates have steadily climbed. SCDSS may issues a provisional license for kinship caregivers. Except in extenuating circumstances, a provisional license should remain in effect for no more than 90 days. Providers are provided a monthly stipend to kinship providers during the provisional licensure period to connect the provider with supports.



In May of 2023 the Kinship Guardianship Program (KinGAP) was signed into South Carolina law via S.380. This law further strengthens the foster care system by increasing stability of kinship placements, allowing SCDSS to draw down federal Title IV-E dollars to fund kinship supports. The KinGAP program is similar to the state’s public adoption program, providing monthly financial supports to kinship caregiver to help meet the need for raising youth exiting foster care until adulthood. This program helps stabilize kinship placements, thus preserving children’s cultural identities and their relationship to their community. The launch of this program provides additional financial assistance to licensed kinship caregivers, many of which are retired or living on a fixed income. In November of 2023 SCDSS issued Capacity Building Grants to 3 providers to implement the Foster Kinship Navigator Model out of Nevada, listed as a promising practice in the IV-E clearinghouse. The Foster Kinship team came to South Carolina in February 2024 to provide training to the selected providers on this model. In July of 2024 the Foster Kinship team will hold onsite visits with each of the 3 providers and full implementation is anticipated for late Summer of 2024. For more information on SCDSS’ kinship care program please visit <https://dss.sc.gov/child-well-being/kinship-care/>

Increasing retention by improving relationships with current foster families

Engaging with placement stakeholders, including the SC Foster Parent Association (SCFPA), CPAs, and congregate care providers, in data-driven discussions has allowed SCDSS to explain its methodology and describe the children most in need of foster homes. SCDSS

regularly meets with these stakeholders to inform of ongoing placement needs. SCDSS gathers additional inputs from placement providers through the annual foster parent survey. This survey is used to better understand the training and ongoing support needs of foster parents.

SCDSS conducts annual foster parent surveys to better understand the training and ongoing support needs of foster parents. Questions from this survey focus on satisfaction with training, what additional supports or training topics are needed, satisfaction with communication, and various other satisfaction and needs related questions. Additionally, quarterly exit surveys are conducted for foster families that voluntarily close their homes. Results of this survey are used to inform needed areas of improvement and retention efforts of foster parents.

Annually, SCDSS hosts a foster parent appreciation event. This event is family-friendly and is intended to bring together foster parents to show the Department's appreciation for their support of foster children and youth. During this event information is shared and specific foster families are honored for their outstanding service.

Dissemination of foster and adoptive information and access to licensing agencies

South Carolina's Code of Regulations define the requirements for licensure. These, along with federal guidelines control the environments in which children in state custody can be placed. SCDSS requires all institutions and foster homes to meet all the requirements to obtain an initial licensure. SCDSS contracts out licensure responsibilities to Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) located across the state. Prospective foster and adoptive parents are able to obtain information about becoming a provider through SCDSS or a CPA in their area.

The SCDSS public facing website provides information on the foster care program, including on how to become a foster parent, requirements to become a foster parent, and the general types of children in foster care. There is an overview of the process of becoming licensed, as well as frequently asked questions and training information. Prospective foster parents are able to begin the application process directly through the website.

Also available on the SCDSS website is a foster home placement needs page, which provides periodic reports that examine the characteristics of children in foster care. These reports factor in current placement, location, age, race, sibling status, level of care, as well as type of placement. The data is compared to the current population of foster homes to determine the specific need for more homes. This information is shared publicly to demonstrate specific placement needs and encourage prospective foster parents to apply.

Adoption information is also included on the SCDSS website and includes an overview of requirements, frequently asked questions, assistance offered, and information on children eligible for adoption. The SCDSS website includes links to the SCDSS public adoption portal, the SC Heart Gallery, and Adopt US Kids which allows anyone accessing the page to view specific children.

In addition to the public website, SCDSS has a social media presence that promotes activities within the agency, including the foster and adoptive programs, providing general information and contact details. The SCDSS foster family and licensing support regional office teams also participate in local events throughout the year, setting up display tables to share information about fostering and promote the program. This includes events at local churches, festivals,

educational events, etc. At the statewide level, the Department attends events to share information and raise awareness about fostering through a number of events such as trunk or treat, local baseball and basketball games, etc.

Procedures for timely search for prospective parents for a child needing adoptive placement

Recognizing that kinship placement settings are statistically more stable, and help preserve connections, SCDSS has focused on increasing kin placements. SCDSS prioritizes placement with kin for children who enter foster care. When this is not possible SCDSS places children with a non-kinship foster family, considering the most appropriate settings available, proximity to their home, and consistent with the best interest and individualized needs of the child. If a child is placed in foster care and is unable to be reunified with their family, with adoption becoming their permanency plan, SCDSS encourages those with connections to the child to consider adoption. This may include relative or non-relative kin, the child's foster family, or anyone else identified as having a connection with that child. Prospective adoptive families are considered on a child-specific basis, ensuring they are able to meet the needs of that specific child.

SCDSS uses several adoptive exchanges for the recruitment and matching of children in care. Referrals to the State Exchange through the SCDSS Adoption webpage are made for all children in the agency's custody without an adoptive resource. Referrals to the national exchange (Adopt-US-Kids) are based on the child's legal status of being legally free without an adoptive resource.

National photo-listing: <https://www.adoptuskids.org/meet-the-children/search-forchildren/search>

Statewide photo-listing: <https://portal.dss.sc.gov/adoptioninquiry/Search.aspx>

In addition, the South Carolina Heart Gallery is contracted by SCDSS to assist in securing adoptive families. SCDSS uses the Heart Gallery to secure adoptive families for children that are legally free and do not have an adoptive resource. Contract monitoring requires quarterly reports from the Heart Gallery to monitor activities. Heart gallery activities include photoshoots, community events, website and other media highlights, and family engagement activities. Heart Gallery is required to report to SCDSS the numbers of these events, as well as intake applications completed, and the number of children matched. The Heart Gallery conducts activities including photo shoots, community events, website and other media communications, and family engagement activities.

SCDSS has continued partnering with Wendy's Wonderful Kids, a program through the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. This program supports the hiring of adoption professionals dedicated to finding placement families for children in foster care who are most often overlooked. This includes teenagers, children with special needs, and sibling groups. Using an evidence-based, child-focused recruitment model to find the right family for every child, Wendy's Wonderful Kids are shown through a 5-year national evaluation that children referred to the program are up to 3 times more likely to be adopted.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Staff diversity training

SCDSS in-service training includes trainings covering information on biases, cultural considerations, engagement strategies, and other topics that prepare child welfare staff for working with diverse children and families. There are numerous ongoing trainings and resources available to new and existing staff on topics of equity, cultural considerations, socio-economic variations, and inclusion. For more information on specific trainings please refer to the 2025 – 2029 SCDSS Child Welfare Services Training Plan.

Strategies for managing linguistic barriers

Individuals in need of interpreter services are provided one free of charge through contracts SCDSS has established with interpreter service providers.

Non-discriminatory fee structures

SCDSS has an established non-discriminatory fee structure. There is not a fee associated with the foster or adoptive home licensure process. Although there may be some costs associated with meeting licensure requirements (smoke detectors and installation, fire extinguishers, etc.), SCDSS can assist in paying for these services.