

STATEWIDE FY2025-FY2026
PLAN FOR THE RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION OF FOSTER FAMILIES



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Statewide FY2024-2025 Recruitment and Retention Plan Assessment

The Department of Children, Youth & Families is committed to the goal that all children and youth should be cared for in a safe, supportive family setting. To support this goal, DCYF is focused on partnering with the community, its leaders and organizations who can “Be an Anchor” for children and families involved in Rhode Island’s child and family well-being system.

“Be An Anchor” is focused on four core pillars: Our Children, Our Families, Our Communities and Our Commitment.

DCYF recognizes all resource families as anchors to children in care. Resource families include families caring for a child known to them, also known as kinship caregivers; traditional (DCYF) foster families; therapeutic (private foster care agency) foster families; and pre-adoptive families. DCYF and its partners work collaboratively to recruit individuals who can “Be an Anchor” and ensure they are well prepared and supported to care for children.

The 2024-2025 Recruitment and Retention Plan included a series of activities to build a stronger foundation for recruitment and retention. These activities, within DCYF’s overarching strategic plan, have developed into the ongoing guiding principles and strategies below:

Guiding Principles

1. When the natural family is unable to care for a child/youth, it is our responsibility, in as timely a manner as possible, to ensure the child/youth is provided permanency in their life in a safe, stable and nurturing environment.
2. Family, community and government share responsibility for the safety, protection and well-being of children.

Strategic Priorities and Actions

1. Final contracts with private foster care agencies for therapeutic foster care services were issued March 1, 2025. Six contracts were awarded to include six agencies. Boys Town New England Inc., Communities for People Inc., Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health, The Groden Center Inc., Family Service of Rhode Island Inc. and NAFI Connecticut Inc., in partnership with Child and Family of Newport County Inc. and Children’s Friend and Service.
2. Using remaining federal grant funds, DCYF maintained two peer-to-peer mentoring programs (Kinship Connections and Supporting Our Anchors), support groups, the Rhode Island Foster Parent Advisory Council (under the overarching Child Welfare Advisory Committee) and the expansion of Foster Parent College ongoing training opportunities.
3. DCYF’s Division of Resource Families, in partnership with the Division of Contracts and the Data Performance Improvement Team, holds Agency Partnership Meetings with our six private foster care agencies and monthly Active Contract Management Meetings. The goal of these strategic meetings is to:

- a) Support the six private foster care agencies in their efforts to recruit and retain families who can support children with higher levels of need.
 - b) Match open-for-placement families through monthly youth presentations by our Division of Family Services and Foster Care Placement Unit. Of primary importance is to match children and youth in need of foster care placement and to ensure the clinical and case management service delivery standards are consistent and targeted toward children with higher levels of need.
 - c) Collaborate across private foster care agencies to align efforts and resources, discuss process improvements and strategies, and problem-solve challenges.
4. Ongoing facilitation of the Call-to-Action Step Down initiative to step-down youth from residential interventions and psychiatric hospital programming to a family-based setting. This includes a bi-weekly meeting facilitated by our Deputy Director, which includes our community-based partners and private agency foster care programs to ensure full wraparound services for step-down placements.
 5. Provide education on the philosophical best practices of foster care for new and existing Division of Resource Families' staff, other staff, and agency and community partners.

Statewide FY2024-2025 Recruitment and Retention Plan Performance Measures

To support positive outcomes for the health, safety, well-being and permanency of children and youth in foster care, DCYF set the following goals to be accomplished by June 30, 2025. The special populations listed below were selected based on DCYF research demonstrating that recruiting and licensing families who are open to placements for these special populations face more challenges than other populations: e.g., children 11 years and younger without medical, physical and/or behavioral health needs, single children or small sibling groups.

Statewide FY2024-2025 Licensing Goals

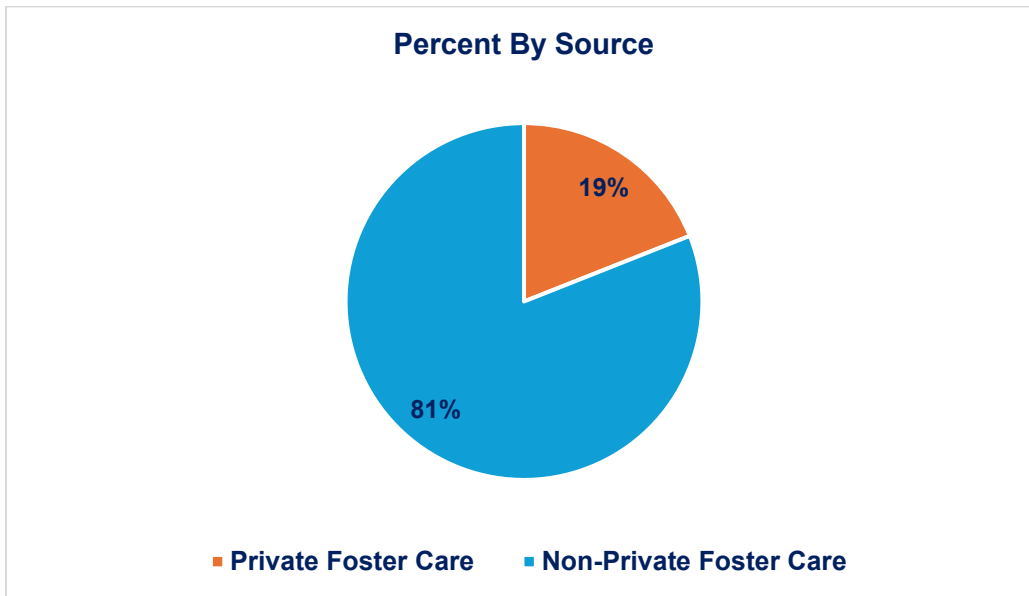
The contracts for therapeutic foster care slots provide a total of 267 placements. The combined goal was to license 85 new non-relative foster families by June 30, 2025. It was projected based on past performance and status that DCYF would license 30 new families and agency partners would license 55, for a total of 85.

TOTAL NEWLY LICENSED NON-KINSHIP FOSTER HOMES ACROSS STATE

Number of new families recruited and licensed for at least 1 day July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025	72
Among number of new families recruited and licensed for at least 1 day July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025, the number retained on July 1, 2025	65

Data Source: RICHIST Report 809, July 1, 2025; RICHIST Report 430, July 1, 2025.

TOTAL LICENSED FOSTER CARE FAMILIES, JUNE 1, 2025



Total: 674 licensed foster care families, includes kinship and child-placing-agency, child-specific families. Private foster care=125; non-private foster care=549. Source: RICHIST Report 430.

Statewide FY2024-2025 Retention and Utilization Goals

1. Our retention goal was among foster homes newly licensed between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, 94% will be retained as of June 30, 2025. The actual percentage was 92%. (See table below.)

2. Utilization of open slots among DCYF-licensed non-relative families will be 70%. According to utilization data, this data point fell short at 50%.

RETENTION OF FOSTER HOMES NEWLY LICENSED, JULY 1, 2024-JUNE 30,2025

Number of families on July 1, 2024	389
Number of families on June 30, 2025	358

Building On Our State FY2024-2025 Plan

Reflecting on the state FY2024-2025 Recruitment and Retention Plan, data indicates recruitment is meeting short-term goals. However, retention of experienced foster families continues to be a significant challenge. Despite the positive recruitment numbers, the total number of licensed non-kinship homes decreased. The data highlights the need for enhanced retention strategies such as increased support, ongoing training, continued peer mentoring and additional opportunities for recognition efforts.

In state FY2024-2025, the demonstrated success in recruiting new non-kinship foster families remains consistent with strong short-term retention among those newly licensed. However, the decline in the total number of active families underscores the urgency of strengthening retention strategies for both new and experienced foster parents. Sustained attention to both recruitment and retention will be necessary to ensure Rhode Island can continue to provide stable, nurturing homes for children in need and expand availability of family-based placements.

“Recruitment is meeting short-term goals. However, retention of experienced foster families continues to be a significant challenge.”

The state FY2024-2025 annual recruitment and retention data demonstrates developing outcomes in the recruitment of new families and highlights positive short-term retention. The challenges in retention of existing licensed homes emphasizes the critical need to increase resource caregivers' sustainability. While DCYF made progress in partnership with the private agencies, the net decline in active homes highlights the urgency of strengthening retention supports and closing the recruitment gap. By sustaining momentum in outreach and community awareness activities, while increasing efforts to support and retain existing families, Rhode Island can continue to build a more resilient and responsive foster care system that meets the needs of all children in care.

Ongoing recruitment and retention efforts are most successful when challenges are acknowledged within the system, and opportunities to strengthen successes are recognized.

Youth and family voice must be central to inform system change and improve retention efforts. It is the responsibility of all DCYF staff and private foster care agency partners to retain foster families through the process of authentic engagement and responsiveness to needs. It is crucial all partners recognize the vital role of our foster families, respect their contributions and work collaboratively to support and value them, because their stability is fundamental to the well-being of the children we serve.

Efforts must be ongoing to ensure our resource families represent the demographics, personal beliefs, communication preferences, geographies and experiences of the children, youth and families we serve, with the priority of identifying kinship caregivers first.

Open and ongoing dialogue with families should begin at the start of the recruitment process to build a clear understanding of their expectations, needs and abilities. At the same time,

transparency about the needs of the children, youth and families within our system is essential to ensure successful outcomes for both children and resource families.

“Building and retaining a strong network of resource families with varying experience levels is shown to be effective when supported by foster-parent peer mentors.”

Building and retaining a strong network of resource families with varying experience levels is shown to be effective when supported by foster-parent peer mentors—individuals with lived experience who provide authentic understanding, guidance and encouragement. Their insight is invaluable in helping new and experienced caregivers navigate challenges, feel supported, and remain committed, ultimately strengthening placement stability and retention across the system.

Targeted recruitment for special populations requires a private and public approach with innovative, data-driven strategies. Further, critical team members with varied experience must focus on accomplishing goals to achieve successful outcomes for children and youth.

Conclusion

The State FY2024-2025 Recruitment and Retention Plan demonstrates the work of foster care recruitment and retention is a collaborative process. DCYF is committed to the goals highlighted in the plan by using data to inform processes and working collaboratively with our stakeholders. DCYF will continue our commitment to the philosophical approach of “Be an Anchor” through:

Voice: Empowering the voices of children and families. Resource families and the children and youth we serve are active members of the team and are empowered to use their voices to improve system practice.

Matching: The presenting needs of children and youth must drive our recruitment focus and align with best practice in support and stabilization efforts, understanding resource families have autonomy to their home and are encouraged to maintain an environment that aligns with their family vision and goals. Children and youth will be cared for by families who can best support their needs, with a lens to demographics.

Engagement: Authentic family engagement is important to build relationships, assess parental capacity, enhance the caregiver experience and strengthen retention. Further, we must create opportunities for impactful investments in re-engagement of experienced resource families and ensure access to meaningful supports.

Our children. Our families. Our communities. Our commitment.

State FY2025-2026 Recruitment and Retention Plan

Goals and Performance Measures

Achieving the performance measures set forward in the State FY2025-2026 Recruitment and Retention Plan is an ongoing process that requires the diligent effort of all the recruitment partners. For children to feel safe and successful, we must ensure we have a holistically prepared child and family well-being system equipped with best practice resources, therapeutic foster home capacity and strong public and private partnerships to meet the needs of all children in care.

The goals below were developed through collaboration between our private foster care agency providers and DCYF staff, through comprehensive review of qualitative and quantitative data. Goals and data will be reviewed quarterly to analyze gaps and successes allowing for modification of goals as appropriate for system needs.

2025/2026 Continuing Licensing Goals

1. License 85 new non-relative foster families by June 30, 2026.
2. Increase the number of foster families who support targeted populations, including:
 - a) Youth 12 and older
 - b) Siblings
3. Increase the number non-relative foster families who will be open to match with children and youth who have mental health or physical disability to 98% of total licensed non-relative foster homes. Mental health and physical disability are inclusive of:
 - a) Learning/school issues
 - b) Medical (mild)
 - c) Oppositional/defiant behavior

State FY2025-2026 Retention Goals

1. Among the total newly licensed families from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, 94% of homes will be retained as of June 30, 2026.
2. Utilization of open slots among DCYF-licensed non-relative families will be 70%.

Strategic Priorities and Actions

To achieve desired outcomes, our system must remain focused on the needs and perspectives of the families and children we serve. This includes using a versatile approach to developing strategies.

Planning and Operations

1. Collaborate with community stakeholders on the State FY2025-2026 Recruitment and Retention Plan Revision and its implementation.

2. Incurs the cost of fingerprinting, completion of safety and lead inspections and CPR and first aid training, and legal and financial subsidies for adoption and guardianships regardless of family's financial situation.

3. Facilitate ongoing agency partnership meetings with our private agency foster care providers with a focus on sharing recruitment and retention process, strategies, data and strengthening outcomes for children and families.

4. Continue expansion of branded resources for coordinated and efficient communication and targeted recruitment efforts for special populations.

5. Continue implementation of Binti, the web-based portal for foster care recruitment, licensing and matching.

6. Convey all materials and training to meet the linguistic needs of foster families.

7. Coordinate with New England Child Welfare Commissioner's Group of Foster Care Managers to discuss regional challenges and strategies.

Recruitment and Awareness

1. Expand messaging scope of "Be an Anchor" by championing staff to practice the philosophical approach in their daily interactions with all children and families we serve.

2. Support goal awareness through promotion of the 2025-2026 "Rhode to 85 New Foster Homes" campaign.

3. Deliver ongoing virtual informational events every two weeks at family friendly hours and offer flexibility for personal meetings.

4. Partner with organizations that support and represent youth in foster care to highlight youth voice and establish recruitment partnerships.

5. Facilitate pre-in-service meetings and pre-service home visits with all recruited families to clarify intention and matching, further ensuring we identify families committed to supporting the needs of our system.

6. Ongoing scheduling of pre-service TIPS MAPP trainings to ensure consistent classes to support waiting applicants. Cadence: January, April, September and additional as needed.

7. Engage education leaders to strengthen partnerships to recruit foster homes and encourage fictive kinship connections.

8. Reengage kinship families who are closing and in good standing.

9. Identify recruitment and retention champions who can support a recruitment and resource-family-retention task force for targeted recruitment.

Matching and Placement

1. Engage in a variety of forums to informally connect youth and families (community events, training opportunities, family retreats).
2. Complete targeted matching reviews for DCYF and agency families to include youth voice. The use of exchanges and interagency efforts, such as adoption exchanges and collaboration between agencies to broaden the pool of prospective foster providers.
3. Engage in feedback forums with families who have found success with accepting challenging placements in the effort to duplicate factors of success.
4. Continue implementation of call-to-action step-down initiative highlighting the recent stipend increase and the home-based service array.

Support and Retention

1. Build a Retention Framework centered on five supports:
 - a) Peer mentorship
 - b) Ongoing training and education
 - c) Recognition and appreciation
 - d) Crisis and respite care access
 - e) Consistent, responsive communication.
2. Ongoing support of the Child Welfare Advisory Council (CWAC).
3. Ongoing facilitation of peer-to-peer mentoring program, Supporting Our Anchors, for traditional families.
4. Use of enrichment activities and statewide foster care appreciation events to highlight families, create opportunities for family engagement and increase a natural support network.
5. In partnership with DCYF Division of Performance Improvement, facilitate ongoing Resource Family Satisfaction Survey to be distributed two times per year to gather data and inform Department practices.
6. Continue implementation of pre-service training (TIPS-MAPP), in-service trainings (Foster Parent College), shared trainings with child placement agencies and trainings related to general licensing policies and working with the DCYF. The Recruitment, Development and Support team will maintain an online resource library for easy access to information and strategies for addressing challenging situations. The library will include Department documents, articles, resources, videos, etc. The Department will continue to promote and supports all languages.
7. Facilitate 2 open feedback forums aimed at learning from resource families about opportunities for strengthened retention and ongoing recruitment efforts.

Conclusion

This plan reaffirms DCYF’s commitment to ensuring that every child in need of care finds safety, connection, and a sense of belonging within a family. By partnering with private agencies, community organizations, and families, Rhode Island aims to strengthen and make its foster care system more resilient, guided by the “Be An Anchor” philosophy. Private agencies have developed additional recruitment and retention strategies that align with the state’s goals while supporting their own visions and models. They can also provide agency-specific strategies upon request.

2026 Deliverables

- 85 new non-relative foster families licensed.
- 94% retention of newly licensed families.
- 10% reduction in congregate care placements.
- Quarterly public reporting on recruitment, retention, and utilization outcomes.

**“Together, we are the anchors
that hold children steady
and guide them home.”**

