

Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System

This synthesis summarizes the work and findings of a cluster of demonstration projects funded through the Children's Bureau discretionary grant program. The purpose of this grant cluster was to develop replicable models of systemic change and evidence-based models for placing children and youth with families who could provide permanent family connections. These grants funded multifaceted diligent recruitment (DR) programs for a range of resource families for children in public foster care systems. Resource families were defined as kinship, foster, concurrent¹, and adoptive families. Grantees conducted evaluations of their processes and outcomes and reported on their findings. This synthesis summarizes their lessons learned, successful strategies, and evaluation processes and results.

This synthesis was a collaborative effort by Child Welfare Information Gateway and James Bell Associates. It is organized into the following sections:

- Funding Opportunity Announcement
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Funding Opportunity Announcement

In 2010, the Children's Bureau published a funding opportunity announcement (FOA) titled "Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System." This FOA identified a need for the development and implementation of national adoption and foster care strategies, data systems, interventions, and training and technical assistance to address the fact that, according to the results of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs), 22 States had a need for more culturally diverse homes (e.g., Native American, Black, Hispanic).² In addition, the FOA noted that findings related to the systemic factors in the CFSRs revealed that 30 States had no formal process for analyzing the data on children in foster care to formulate a DR plan with strategies based on the children's demographics in a particular community. This supports the need to develop more effective programs to help place children with families who can provide permanent family connections.

¹ Concurrent families are those families fostering children who have concurrent permanency goals and whose secondary goal is adoption by the resource family.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2010). *Diligent recruitment of families for children in the foster care system* [HHS-2010-ACF-ACYF-CO-0012]. Retrieved from https://ami.grantsolutions.gov/files/HHS-2010-ACF-ACYF-CO-0012_0.pdf

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The FOA also noted the following characteristics of effective DR models:

- Recruit kinship, foster, and adoptive families successfully to improve permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care
- Are multifaceted and recognize that permanency efforts should begin when a child first enters care
- Provide options and solutions for permanency that include the search for kin—including family members on both sides of the birth family, as well as the foster and adoptive families—who are able to care and provide for the child and are willing to be involved in concurrent planning³
- Include a comprehensive search of a youth's current and past relationships to identify caring individuals willing and able to be adoptive parents or be open to a mutually beneficial and permanent relationship

In addition, DR efforts should provide information to potential resource families—including natural relationships, such as teachers, mentors, coaches, parents of friends, and others—about the characteristics and needs of the available children; the processes for kinship care, foster care, and adoption; and the supports available to resource families.

As stated in the FOA, the following were the purposes of the funded projects:

- Implement comprehensive, multifaceted DR programs for resource families, including kinship, foster, concurrent, and adoptive families for children and youth served by public child welfare agencies, as a means of improving permanency outcomes

- Integrate the DR program with other agency programs, including foster care case planning and permanency planning processes, to facilitate active concurrent planning activities
- Evaluate the implementation of comprehensive DR programs to document processes and potential linkages between DR and improved outcomes
- Develop identifiable sites that other States and localities seeking to implement improved DR methods can look to for guidance, insight, and possible replication

Funding criteria included whether the prospective projects proposed to develop strategies and implementation plans that were innovative, unique, and distinctive in nature; included practices that were relevant, effective, evidence based, and promising; and included components that could be replicated in other settings. Eligible applicants included State, county, and special district governments. The Children's Bureau is expected to award grants to seven grantees for a total of \$2.8 million.

³ Concurrent planning is an approach that seeks to eliminate delays in attaining permanent families for children in the foster care system. It involves considering all reasonable options for permanency at the earliest possible point following a child's entry into foster care and concurrently pursuing those options that will best serve the child's needs. Typically, the primary plan is reunification with the child's family of origin. In concurrent planning, an alternative permanency goal (e.g., adoption) is pursued at the same time rather than being pursued sequentially after reunification has been ruled out. For more information, refer to *Concurrent Planning: What the Evidence Shows* at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/concurrent-evidence/>.

Grantees

The following provides details about the DR grantees, including partners, target population, and key activities. (Note: Throughout this report, projects will be identified by the postal abbreviation of the State in which they are located. For example, the Collaborative Strategies for Diligent Recruitment project in California will be referred to as CA.)

Project title: Collaborative Strategies for Diligent Recruitment (CSDR) project

State: California (CA)

Lead agency: Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Collaborating partners: Five Acres—Boys' and Girls' Aid Society of Los Angeles County (Five Acres); Kidsave International, Inc. (Kidsave); Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC Foundation); University of California, Los Angeles, TIES for Families, Loss Intervention for Families in Transition (LIFT) program; Anne E. Nicoll, Ph.D.; Sycamore Park Foursquare Church; and Permanency Partners Program (P3)

Award number: 90CO1051

Target population: Youth in foster care in Los Angeles County

Key grant activities:

- Contracted with Five Acres to increase the number of resource parents for deaf children and for children of deaf parents⁴
- Contracted with Kidsave to increase the number of adoptive families and permanent adult connections for older Black and Hispanic youth in the foster care and probation systems⁵

⁴ Five Acres hired a linguistically and culturally competent recruiter/social worker who collaborated with the deaf community and recruited, trained, approved, and supported families who became placement resources for deaf children or children of deaf parents.

⁵ Kidsave hired culturally competent recruiters who worked within the African-American, Hispanic, and LGBTQ communities and who recruited families who became permanent connections and/or placement resources for older youth.

- Provided training through a contract with the HRC Foundation to increase cultural competency of child welfare and probation staff regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals
- Contracted with the LIFT program to provide individual and group therapy to resource parents who were grieving the loss of a child who had been placed in their home but either returned home or moved to a more appropriate placement in order to achieve the child's permanency goal.
- Contracted with Sycamore Park Foursquare Church to recruit foster and adoptive parents from the faith-based community
- Employed retired and part-time social workers for P3 to conduct family-finding and family engagement activities

For additional information:

- Final project report (<https://go.usa.gov/xNKEw>)

Project title: Illinois Recruitment and Kin Connection Project (RKCP)

State: Illinois (IL)

Lead agency: Illinois DCFS

Collaborating partners: Adoptions Unlimited, Inc. (known as the Illinois Center for Adoption & Permanency since October 1, 2015)

Award number: 90CO1053

Target population: Children 6–13 years of age entering foster care in Cook, Will, Grundy, and Kankakee counties

Key grant activities:

- Implemented family-finding and outreach activities by providing specialized staff support immediately upon temporary custody being granted to the child welfare agency
- Established the position of kin connection specialist (KCS), who serves as a member of the family's professional team and attempts to locate family members who could participate in service planning and potentially be resources for placement, alternative placement, hosting sibling visits, hosting parent visits, or family mentoring

- Provided training to the KCS, including family-finding and family engagement training and the *Cultural Humility Put to Practice* training
- Collaborated with public defenders, guardians ad litem, and court personnel to engage parents in providing information about family members and fictive kin
- Developed and provided training on concurrent planning
- Developed individualized recruitment plans for children with special needs and older youth that were based on a thorough exploration of each youth's family, social, and education connections

For additional information:

- Final project report (<https://go.usa.gov/xNKwP>)

**Project title: Inter-Agency Community Adoption/
Foster Family Recruitment Exchange (I-CARE 365)
Project**

State: Michigan (MI)

Lead agency: Oakland County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

Collaborating partners: Wayne County DHHS, Macomb County DHHS, and Spaulding for Children

Award number: 90CO1049

Target population: Adolescents; youth with behavioral, psychological, and criminal histories; large sibling groups; children with disabilities or other physical needs; and Black youth in foster care (all in Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb counties)

Key grant activities:

- Developed a database that captured all the elements of a recruitment event, from planning to event completion
- Partnered with faith-based organizations to develop a faith-based recruitment model in the tricounty project area
- Developed joint marketing brochures with local businesses that contained information about foster care and adoption and information about the business partners
- Created and distributed a 3-minute DVD titled *Become a Southeastern Michigan Superhero* that highlights the need for foster and adoptive homes for sibling groups, Black children, and teenagers
- Conducted targeted recruitment within organizations and agencies that serve or come in contact with youth in foster care, including offering free training sessions to their employees and disseminating information regarding the need for resource families
- Developed the Planning a Transition With Hope Home (PATHH) model, a comprehensive guide and project to transition youth from congregate care to family settings

For additional information:

- Final project report (<https://go.usa.gov/xNKfs>)

Project title: Mississippi Guided Resource Initiatives Targeting Special Kids

State: Mississippi (MS)

Lead agency: Mississippi Department of Human Services

Collaborating partners: N/A

Award number: 90CO1052

Target population: Children in foster care in the State who were 13 years of age or older; are victims of sexual abuse; had sexualized behavior due to past abuse; had physical, emotional, behavioral, or cognitive challenges; and/or were part of large sibling groups

Key grant activities:

- Conducted market segmentation research to identify families and individuals to target for recruitment activities
- Developed and implemented a customer service training protocol for resource and licensing specialists to ensure that families inquiring about becoming resource parents were engaged throughout the recruitment, training, and licensure processes
- Provided training, guidance, and tools for existing resource parents to recruit new resource parents as well as trained resource parents on how to use that information
- Developed a brochure and made presentations that provided realistic information about being a resource parent and about the children in need of families
- Utilized various types of media, including yard signs, marquees, and posters, to draw attention to the need for resource parents

For additional information:

- Final project report (<https://go.usa.gov/xRwsv>)

Project title: Step Up!

State: New Mexico (NM)

Lead agency: New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD)

Collaborating partners: The Adoption Exchange and Shaening and Associates, Inc.

Award number: 90CO1050

Target population: Children in foster care, with a specific focus on children from populations overrepresented and/or underserved in the foster care system (Hispanic, off-reservation American Indian, and Black) in NM, particularly in five counties

Key grant activities:

- Developed individualized family retention plans to keep families engaged in the foster care licensing and approval processes
- Contracted with family resource coordinators to provide support to prospective resource parents during the application, home study, training, and placement processes
- Developed and implemented strategies, including creating models and curricula, to improve customer service methods and strengthen concurrent planning practices
- Worked with CYFD staff to create county-specific, data-driven targeted recruitment plans
- Developed and provided training sessions and monthly support group services to assist CYFD foster parents in recognizing and addressing grief and loss engendered by the fostering experience
- Created a process to study their work around concurrent planning and, based on that study, developed a new concurrent planning model
- Developed the Ice Breaker program to bring caregivers and biological families together in order to improve placement stability and increase the likelihood of reunification and the timely achievement of permanency for the children

For additional information:

- Final project report (<https://go.usa.gov/xNKpM>)

Project title: Permanent Families and Lasting Connections Recruitment Project

State: Nevada (NV)

Lead agency: Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS)

Collaborating partners: Child Trends (evaluator)

Award number: 90CO1054

Target population: Children in foster care in Clark County, specifically sibling groups of three or more children, children with special needs, and teenagers

Key grant activities:

- Developed the Child-Specific Adoption Recruitment (CSAR) protocol that allows DFS to match children's special characteristics and needs with a family who can best meet those needs
- Identified the characteristics of quality caregivers and where those caregivers live and, through market segmentation, determined locations for billboards and community recruiting events
- Determined how to effectively engage these prospective caregivers through social media
- Partnered with a marketing firm to create an advertising campaign to recruit foster and adoptive parents
- Revamped and implemented the Foster Parent Champion program, in which the "champions" serve as mentors to new and experienced caregivers

For additional information:

- Final project report (<https://go.usa.gov/xRwAS>)

Project Title: Texas Permanency and Family Resource Development Model

State: Texas (TX)

Lead agency: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)

Collaborating partners: Texas Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) and Child Trends (Evaluator)

Award number: 90CO1048

Target population: Children in foster care in three DFPS regions, with priority given to sibling groups, children of color, older youth, and children with special physical or behavioral health needs

Key grant activities:

- Developed new foster and adoption recruitment materials
- Updated the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) website, updated TARE training tools, and increased the number of profiles on the AdoptUsKids website
- Expanded the recruitment activities of CASA programs to include recruiting for foster and adoptive families, particularly Black and Hispanic families, while recruiting new CASA volunteers
- Enhanced the responsibilities of CASA volunteers to include case-record mining, family-finding, and family engagement activities

For additional information:

- Final project report (<https://go.usa.gov/xRwH3>)

Key Program Interventions, Strategies, and Activities

To improve permanency outcomes and facilitate systemic change, grantees were asked to plan and implement a comprehensive, multifaceted DR program, including general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment activities, for prospective and existing resource families for children and youth served by public child welfare agencies. In addition, through partnerships with various public and private entities (including adoption networks, national organizations, local businesses, faith-based organizations, and community-based and grassroots organizations), grantees sought to implement progressive and effective interventions to positively affect permanency outcomes for children and youth in care. All grantees established or expanded relationships and partnerships in their communities, which benefited and supported the projects in various grant tasks and activities.

The models and interventions implemented by the projects were collaborative in nature, with the lead agency for each project located in a specific division or office within the State or local child welfare agency. The following are examples of interventions implemented by some of the projects:

- CA's CSDR project was a multipronged effort to build cultural capacity and understanding among child welfare staff regarding LGBTQ youth and families, recruit and retain more resource parents who can meet the needs of children in foster care, and increase the number of children in the county—particularly Black, deaf, LGBTQ, and Hispanic children as well as youth on probation—who achieve permanency.
- IL developed an intensive, comprehensive front-end family-finding program designed to establish lifelong family permanency opportunities for youth in foster care. This model located family members and fictive kin who could be resources to support the provision of services and concurrent planning.

- NV implemented a multifaceted DR and retention plan that included child-specific recruitment for adoptive placements, market segmentation for foster parent recruitment, and a foster parent mentoring program to support new and current foster parents.
- TX DFPS and TX CASA combined resources to implement a model that included data mining and diligent searches for all maternal and paternal relatives and other persons with significant relationships with children in the target population. CASA volunteers expanded their responsibilities to also conducting case-mining activities, and DFPS staff conducted diligent searches.

Grantees realized that long-term improvements in resource family recruitment, development, and supports—and, ultimately, better permanency outcomes for children—would require implementation of wide-reaching and permanent organizational and system changes. These included changes in policies and procedures for recruitment, training, and licensing and in caseworker practices throughout the continuum of services and supports for resource families (e.g., application, training, home study, licensure, postpermanency services). Regular assessment and improvement of these processes was essential to increasing worker responsiveness and follow up with current and prospective resource families, to ensuring support for and engagement with families throughout the licensing process, and to improving family satisfaction with the recruitment and training system. Grantees reviewed existing systems and implemented improvements in order to address inefficiencies, limitations, inconsistencies, perceptions, and overall effectiveness.

While the long-term benefits of these systemic changes are difficult to measure during a 5-year project period and may not have always been observed in the grantee's outcome evaluation findings, improved systems, procedures, and processes are likely to support improved practices and outcomes for as long as these changes are sustained.

General Recruitment

General recruitment activities were a means to provide information to potential resource families throughout the communities about the characteristics and needs of the available children; the nature of kinship care, foster care, and adoption processes; and the supports available to kinship, foster, and adoptive families. As part of the general recruitment efforts, grantees conducted the following activities:

- Developed public service announcements, television spots, radio advertisements, flyers, posters, and newspaper articles
- Made presentations in churches and other venues
- Staffed information booths at community events
- Planned and hosted special meetings, parties, and trainings

Through partnerships with local businesses and churches, grantees were also able to plan large-scale recruitment events to distribute information, build awareness, and have one-on-one conversations with community leaders and members. Additionally, many grantees were assisted by people with existing connections and relationships in target communities, such as community liaisons, resource parents, and youth in foster care. Grantees also created photo listings, Heart Galleries⁶, and child-specific videos to build connections between children and prospective resource parents. The following are examples of general recruitment activities:

- MI: The project worked with Biggby Coffee to disseminate joint direct mailers to 2,000 residential customers and 400 businesses in a targeted market area in western Wayne County. The mailer included information about becoming a foster parent as well as a discount coupon for coffee. The project also met with local businesses and developed a brochure that contained information about foster care and adoption and the business partners (e.g., menus, addresses, coupons). The project developed brochures targeted to each county's needs. For example, if a county

was in need of families to foster sibling groups, the project would place a picture of a sibling group on the front panel of the brochure and include information regarding placement of siblings in its content. The project disseminated over 20,700 joint recruitment brochures. Additionally, DHS and Screen Visions Media, an advertising agency, collaborated to run a 30-second foster care advertisement at one movie theater in each of the three counties participating in the project.

- MS: The project held events to honor current resource parents and increase community awareness about the need for additional resource parents. Project staff also developed a brochure that offered realistic information about being a resource parent and provided information about children currently in need of a family. In addition, the project held "fosterware parties," which were community gatherings with a foster parenting theme.
- NV: The project conducted market segmentation research to support the development of a recruitment plan for quality foster families. Using grant funds, DFS entered into a partnership with the Nielsen Company, a marketing firm. The Nielsen Company used the zip codes of the 700 quality foster families identified by DFS to determine their lifestyle preferences, profile characteristics, and the neighborhoods in which they lived. The company identified the key characteristics of prospective resource families, which helped the project refine its recruitment efforts.⁷ For example, DFS conducted recruitment activities at a local food festival because the Nielsen Company identified dining out as an interest of the prospective foster family population. DFS then contracted with another marketing firm, R&R Partners, to develop and place advertising materials based on findings from the market segmentation research.

⁶ Heart Galleries are photographic exhibits created to find forever families for children in foster care. Additional information is available at <https://www.heartgalleryofamerica.org/>.

⁷ Detailed information about the findings are available in the NV final report, which is available at <https://go.usa.gov/xRWAS>.

Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruitment strategies included recruitment activities targeted specifically at Black and Hispanic populations. They also included activities to recruit families and establish connections for older youth, LGBTQ youth, youth with mental health and behavioral issues, youth with criminal histories and/or currently on probation, children with disabilities, and sibling groups. The project used existing resource parents and professionals to target potential resource parents in neighborhoods with high rates of out-of-home placements. In addition, some grantees revised their recruitment and training processes and procedures to ensure they promoted cultural awareness and sensitivity to the needs of different communities and populations. The following are examples of grantees' targeted recruitment efforts:

- CA: DCFS contracted with Kidsave to increase the number of adoptive families and permanent adult connections for older African-American and Hispanic youth in the foster care and probation systems. Kidsave hired culturally competent recruiters, including Black and Hispanic recruiters, and conducted outreach in the Black, Hispanic, and LGBTQ communities to recruit families to become permanent connections and possible placement resources for older youth. Additionally, DCFS contracted with Five Acres to increase the number of resource parents for deaf children. Five Acres hired a linguistically and culturally competent recruiter/social worker who reached out to the deaf community and recruited, trained, approved, and supported families who became placement resources for deaf children or children of deaf parents.
- NV: The project's targeted recruitment workgroup focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues and also researched practices about recruiting foster and adoptive parents from the LGBT community and supporting LGBT youth in foster care. Based on recommendations from this research review, recruiters began distributing marketing materials to potential foster and adoptive parents at a local LGBT parade and festival.
- TX: While recruiting for Black and Hispanic CASA volunteers, CASA programs also recruited for Black and Hispanic foster and adoptive families within the communities the CASA volunteers served and the communities from which the children were removed. The CASA volunteers explained the need for resource families in the local communities and raised awareness about children who are in foster care.
- MI: The project used the PATHH model to improve permanency outcomes for youth in residential treatment settings. The model was designed to assist in building cross-system partnerships for the transition-planning process. PATHH, which includes the implementation of child-specific recruitment activities, assisted in improving coordination by service providers in providing supports to youth or families and in the development of transition plans.⁸ Additionally, MI conducted targeted recruitment within organizations throughout the tricounty project area that served or came into contact with youth in foster care. This included offering free training sessions to specific professionals (e.g., residential staff, child care providers, educators, nurses) to recruit them as potential foster parents for the grant's target populations. The premise behind this process was that by focusing on these professional groups using a combined training and recruitment message, the project would target individuals who already have the skills and interests needed in resource families; raise the awareness of the needs of children and youth in foster care; increase the accuracy of information available to professionals about the issues affecting children in foster care; increase professionals' skill levels; and enlist professionals in additional recruitment efforts for the project's target population.

⁸ Due to various systemic issues, the PATHH model was not fully implemented. However, the project continued to study PATHH by completing interviews with caregivers, staff, and youth for five cases that transitioned from residential care.

Child-Specific Recruitment

Child-specific recruitment involved exploring specific families and relationships and working closely with youth to identify existing biological and fictive kin who could be contacted to establish and nurture long-term permanent connections and, hopefully, eventual adoptive or guardianship placements. Strategies included developing child-specific recruitment videos, creating specialized staff positions for recruitment, and providing supports to resource parents and children while permanency options are explored. Specific examples of child-specific recruitment activities included the following:

- IL: To support family-finding and outreach activities, the project provided specialized staff support through a KCS immediately upon temporary custody being granted to the child welfare agency. The assigned KCS⁹ began by interviewing family members present at court to gather information about them and other significant persons in the child's life who may be possible placement resources or provide additional supports to the child and family. The KCS then conducted additional searches for relatives, fictive kin, and others and requested that those who were willing to serve as resources consent to various background checks. When appropriate, the KCS interviewed the child and completed a child-centered ecomap using the child's words. Throughout the life of the case, the KCS reassessed the family members and fictive kin to assist with case planning and to determine the types of supports they can provide (e.g., placement, respite care, transportation, supervised visits).
- NV: The project used the CSAR protocol to identify recruitment activities for a specific child, such as "mining" a child's case file to search for connections who might be potential placement resources for the child or conducting visits with the child to help determine what type of family would be best for him or her (as opposed to recruiting families from the general pool of foster or adoptive homes). The protocol outlined suggested timeframes for each step in the process of locating a permanent home for a child. The

⁹ See the Specialized Staff Positions section of this report for additional information about the KCS positions.

CSAR protocol included guidelines for case-file mining, visits with the child, and posting the child's profile on adoption websites.

- TX: CASA volunteers conducted child-specific recruitment of potential relative and nonrelative adoptive families in a child's community. In addition, the volunteers used CASA websites, newsletters, speaking engagements, and fundraising events to promote children available for adoption.

Training

All seven grantees included various types of training activities as key components of their DR projects. Training content included effective customer service strategies, information sharing, recruitment and licensing processes, and overcoming barriers to recruitment and retention. In general, grantees developed separate training programs for resource families and child welfare staff. The following are examples of training activities:

- Training for resource families and potential resource families covered topics such as child welfare processes and services, the licensing application and approval process, recruitment within social and professional networks, legal issues, trauma-informed care, awareness of issues affecting children in care, children with disabilities and special needs, and managing child behaviors. Training for this population also gave service providers the opportunity to learn about the needs and recommendations of potential foster and adoptive parents and to solicit their input on the development of training materials and in-service training sessions. Specific examples included the following:
 - MI: As part of its targeted recruitment efforts, the project provided various trainings, including *Childhood Trauma, Foster Care/Adoption 101*, and *Everyday Creativity*, to targeted professional groups.¹⁰

¹⁰ See the Targeted Recruitment section for additional information about the targeted professional groups.

- NM: The project developed and presented the *Concurrent Planning: Partnering for Permanency* training to foster parents in the five counties served by the grant. Additionally, it incorporated key concurrent planning concepts into the *Relative, Adoptive, and Foster Training* for foster parents to ensure that new resource parents are aware of concurrent planning, the benefits for children in foster care, and foster parents' role in the process. The project developed digital stories—videos about real-life concurrent planning experiences—to share with foster parents and CYFD staff, incorporated them into the concurrent planning curriculum, and presented them in other venues, such as foster parent appreciation events. NM also developed and provided training sessions and monthly support group services in each of the five counties to assist foster parents in recognizing and addressing feelings of grief and loss engendered by the fostering experience.
- NV: The project revised its curriculum for kinship preservice training in order to bring it into alignment with the *Partnering for Safety and Permanence Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting* curriculum provided to prospective nonrelative foster and adoptive parents. The revisions added information on addressing common child behaviors and working with the agency and birth parents. NV also launched the Nevada Quality Parenting Initiative's Just in Time training website. The online videos on that site provided training to licensed resource families on various topics, including working with biological families, trauma-informed care, managing difficult child behaviors, and independent living skills. DFS also posted webinars, a calendar of events, and revised regulations to the website.
- The projects provided training for child welfare staff and service providers to improve rapport with potential resource families, expand the use of positive customer service techniques, ensure culturally appropriate interactions with families, build or improve family-finding and case-mining skills, and improve resource families' perceptions of child welfare services. The following are examples of grantee activities in this area:
 - CA: The project contracted with the HRC Foundation to provide training to DCFS and probation staff to increase their cultural competency in working with LGBTQ youth and adults and to increase the ability of social workers and probation officers to help foster youth feel comfortable in self-identifying as LGBTQ.
 - IL: The project provided the *Cultural Humility Put to Practice* training to KCSs. (See the Specialized Staff Positions section of this report for more information about the KCS positions.) This training included self-awareness exercises and emphasized the importance of practicing cultural humility to foster successful engagement with families.
 - NM: The grant developed and presented the *Concurrent Planning: Partnering for Permanency* training to CYFD staff in participating counties. Additionally, the project developed a three-part customer service training for all CYFD staff. The goal of this training was to increase CYFD employee knowledge about the State's customer service standards and to implement these standards when working with prospective and current resource families.
 - MS: The project developed and implemented a customer service training protocol, which was provided to all resource and licensing specialists, to ensure that families inquiring about becoming a resource parent were engaged in the process until licensure.

Enhanced Family-Finding Strategies

Grantees engaged in a range of enhanced family-finding strategies to promote child-specific recruitment:

- Providing training to child welfare and other human service professionals on family-finding strategies and processes
- Identifying, developing, or rebuilding family and kin relationships that had been disrupted
- Developing positions and hiring family engagement staff with specialized training in searching for and engaging birth and kinship families

- Collaborating with child support enforcement agencies to identify biological fathers
- Engaging parents' attorneys, guardians ad litem, CASAs, and court personnel in assisting with gathering information from parents and other family members

Foster Parent Retention Efforts

The projects developed and implemented various strategies to support and retain new and current foster parents. These strategies included training child welfare staff on improved customer service for foster parents as well as improving training, resources, and services for foster parents. The following describe several examples:

- CA: The grant contracted with the LIFT program to increase the retention of resource parents involved with a concurrent plan and whose placement was disrupted because the child was reunified with a biological parent or placed with relatives. The LIFT program provided therapeutic interventions to grieving resource parents through individual and group therapy.
- NV: The project developed and implemented the Foster Parent Champion program that provided information, support, and encouragement to foster caregivers. The following are examples of key program activities:
 - Contacting foster families within 5 to 7 days of a new placement (relative caregivers will be contacted within 24 hours of a child being placed with them)
 - Calling foster families again within 30 days after a child is placed
 - Helping foster families and relative caregivers access community services and resources
 - Providing crisis management, support, and encouragement
 - Working to prevent placement disruptions or to ease transitions to a new home

- NM: The project conducted listening tours with foster parents and CYFD staff in five counties to develop an in-depth understanding of customer service needs, challenges, strengths, and opportunities that needed to be addressed and considered. Based on the findings from these meetings, CYFD developed and implemented customer service standards and competencies and trained its staff accordingly.
- TX: The grant provided training to foster parents, child-placing agency staff, DFPS staff, CASA volunteers, and other stakeholders on grief, loss, and trauma. The trainings also provided an overview of best practices in trauma-informed care to assist youth in resolving their past losses and preparing them for permanency while seeking, engaging, and developing caring adult connections. The trainings also provided tools and activities to help professionals assist youth in resolving past grief, loss, and trauma and developing healthy emotional connections.

Specialized Staff Positions

As part of their DR projects, some grantees established or contracted for specialized staff positions to support the recruitment and retention of prospective foster, adoptive, and resource families. The following are two examples:

- IL: The grant established the KCS staff position, which served as a member of the family's professional team. The KCS attempted to locate family members who could participate in service planning and potentially be resources for placement, alternative placement, hosting sibling visits, and hosting parent visits, as well as be mentors for the family. The KCS began outreach efforts the day temporary custody was granted to the child welfare agency.
- NM: The project contracted with five family resource coordinators to develop grassroots DR initiatives in their assigned counties to increase the number of foster and adoptive families available for children in that community. In later years of the grant, the coordinators provided support to prospective resource parents throughout the inquiry-to-licensure process.

Advisory Boards and Multidisciplinary Groups

Grantees established advisory boards and multidisciplinary groups to help develop and guide the completion of project goals and objectives. The following describes several examples of these groups:

- IL: At the beginning of the grant period, the project established the steering committee for RKCP, which was composed of key representatives from the child welfare system, including training and information systems, as well as representatives from the courts. The committee quickly embraced the vision of the project and assisted with coordinating dissemination meetings between RKCP and Cook County judges, public defenders, public guardians, States' attorneys, DCFS legal staff, mediation staff, and members of the Cook County Clerk's Office. Steering committee members were all in positions to have a significant effect on policy changes that would affect how the system supports permanency. Although membership fluctuated throughout the grant period, core membership remained intact and provided the direction and leadership necessary for sustainability.
- MI: The project formed its Recruitment Events Subcommittee to develop and implement a tricounty comprehensive and coordinated adoptive and foster parent recruitment and retention plan. The committee developed recruitment strategies that addressed iCARE 365 project goals, including involving youth in their own placement resource recruitment efforts, increasing the number of foster homes in the counties or zip codes in which targeted children live, and increasing capacity to place siblings together or in proximity to one another. Additionally, the subcommittee worked closely with the Community Outreach and Marketing Subcommittee to develop tools for recruitment.
- NM: The grant developed and convened a concurrent planning workgroup to collaborate with the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections and provide guidance, feedback, and input on the design and implementation of a concurrent planning model, including reviewing data and developing and adapting effective strategies. The workgroup was composed of CYFD staff, including regional recruiters, placement caseworkers, permanency planning caseworkers, central office staff, and the court improvement project manager, as well as foster parents and Step Up! project staff.

Sustainability Efforts

Mindful of the eventual end of their Federal discretionary grant funding, grantees prepared to scale down, modify, or continue project activities in some form. All grantees instituted sustainability efforts, particularly in the final year of their projects, and were successful in maintaining a range of strategies to impact permanency outcomes. Several grantees sought to integrate the tenets and philosophy underlying DR into routine child welfare system policies, practices, and procedures to further bolster sustainability efforts. For example, IL reported a State law was passed that expanded the definition of "relatives" to include fictive kin, which allowed for the integration of family-finding protocols into DCFS policy. This included adding a new section about documenting family-finding efforts to the Illinois Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Other grantees identified certain grant initiatives, such as hiring community liaisons, child-specific recruiters, and the expansion and/or continuation of contracts and agreements with local agencies that would allow them to continue their DR efforts. For example, the five local CASA programs in Texas planned to continue many of the enhanced case-specific recruitment activities, such as case mining, family engagement, and family finding, to locate and promote positive adult connections and permanent placement options.

Overarching Themes

This section outlines examples of challenges, successful strategies, and lessons learned reported by the grants.

Challenges

- **Negative perceptions:** Some grantees faced historical distrust in their communities regarding foster care and child welfare services in general. This distrust had a negative impact on targeted recruitment activities and developing community partnerships and demonstrated the need to improve relationships among agency staff, resource parents, and community members.
- **Staff turnover:** Changes in child welfare agency leadership affected the management and implementation of several grants, and repeated losses of project staff impeded efforts to maintain continuity, develop and implement new strategies, and sustain worker morale in the face of heavy workloads.
- **Customer service:** Foster and adoptive parents have sometimes experienced inconsistent and inefficient customer service. Becoming a resource parent is a difficult and emotional experience that requires that licensing workers have excellent customer service skills and a sense of compassion for families going through the process. Grantees found that issues with poor customer service and poor relationships with current resource families had an ongoing negative effect on efforts to recruit and retain families.
- **Collaboration with private agencies:** Some grantees experienced challenges with obtaining full cooperation from private foster care agencies that recruit and support resources families. Some of these challenges were due to competing priorities and differences in philosophies.
- **Commitment to the grant process:** During the 5-year grant period, the commitment to the grant process by some grant recipients changed due to various issues, many beyond recipients' control, including changes in agency administration, staff turnover, resource availability, competing priorities with

other agency initiatives, and grant project staff not receiving the support needed to champion systemic change. In addition, some of the grant recipients used subcontractors to manage the actual project, which did not provide the same level of exposure, advocacy, or access to elements that typically drive system change that are available in larger system, including training, policies, and continuous quality improvement.

Successful Strategies

Despite many challenges, the DR grantees reported success with numerous undertakings:

- **Building partnerships and collaborations:** Collaborative partnerships with agencies and businesses proved to be essential to implementing general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment activities and in retaining current foster parents. Effective partnerships helped support project components such as referrals, recruitment assistance, material support (e.g., providing space for project events), information dissemination (both via print media and word of mouth), and staff training. Some of the grantees' most effective collaborative efforts occurred through partnerships with faith-based organizations, especially when targeting specific ethnic or cultural populations. Leaders within these organizations, who are trusted by their communities, served as important recruitment conduits. Faith-based organizations also provided in-kind support by hosting recruitment events, such as informational meetings for prospective resource parents.
- **Enlisting resource parents and foster youth:** Several grantees reported positive outcomes from engaging foster parents and current and former foster youth in DR activities, especially in the geographic or cultural communities to which they belong. Resource parents offer real-world experience in fostering and adopting children involved in the child welfare system, and foster youth are able to share compelling stories of how seeking and finding a permanent home has impacted their lives.

- **Training:** Grantees provided various trainings to child welfare staff, current and potential resource families, and community and project partners to support project goals. These trainings enhanced participants' understanding of many aspects of foster care, including the needs of children and youth in foster care, concurrent planning, and the recruitment and retention of resource families.

Lessons Learned

Grantees shared several lessons learned for enhancing the DR efforts of their own or other child welfare agencies moving forward:

- **Limit the number of interventions and the size of implementation locations:** Grantees often found that it was preferable to focus on a more limited number of well-defined activities rather than attempt to implement a broader range of initiatives. A narrower focus allowed grantees to see more easily where changes needed to be made, where resources needed to be allocated, and where new actions needed to be taken. Implementing fewer interventions in the beginning allowed grantees to refine, adapt, and expand the scope of their service array more purposefully during later stages of their grants. Additionally, implementing the project in a smaller geographic region was preferable to attempting implementation statewide or in multiple regions of the State.
- **Engage agency leadership and frontline staff:** Engaging managers and other high-level staff within grantee organizations often proved critical to the success of the interventions. Including key organizational leaders on planning committees, advisory boards, and other decision-making groups ensured that the necessary resources and enforcement authority would be available to support the implementation of project activities. On the other hand, some projects found that not having the input of frontline staff responsible for program implementation created problems. The effective implementation of some projects was impeded by staff not understanding workers' roles and responsibilities and how new and additional tasks affected their workloads.
- **Nurture relationships with resource families:** The quality of the relationships between current resource families and agency workers varied across projects. As projects began general and targeted recruitment, they realized the importance of strong and positive relationships with current caregivers. By nurturing these relationships through supportive services and resources, resource parents were willing to assist agencies in formal and informal recruitment efforts. Additionally, project staff began to realize that nurturing relationships with resource parents begins at initial recruitment. Families entering the training and approval process need guidance, empathy, transparency about the system and the children they will serve, and assistance with administrative tasks, such as completing paperwork. Providing this support keeps prospective families engaged in the process.
- **Build relationships with community partners:** For projects that depend on community engagement and participation for positive outcomes, strong relationships with community partners and stakeholders are a necessity. Developing a positive image and building relationships within the community can be difficult for the child welfare system, which is often viewed negatively by the communities it serves. Grantees realized that they needed to focus more time on building relationships with community partners and stakeholders before trying to engage them in recruitment activities.
- **Consider sustainability from the beginning:** Although all grantees considered how to sustain aspects of their projects (particularly during the final year of their grants), some projects realized in hindsight that it would have been beneficial to begin sustainability planning at the very beginning of the grant period.

Evaluation Highlights

Most 2010 DR grantees conducted multiple activities, including general recruitment activities to increase the overall pool of available resource families, recruitment of identified types of families to care for distinct child populations, and child-specific recruitment activities meant to increase connections and placement resources for individual children. Therefore, grantee evaluations tracked multiple efforts and a broad array of intended outcomes.

To assist in the assessment of these activities, evaluation activities helped expand and improve agency data collection systems, particularly regarding recruitment efforts. For example, by collecting information from families about recruitment activities they attended, grantees were able to determine which activities were successful in motivating families to make contact with the child welfare agency. By tracking family progress through licensure (e.g., attendance at trainings, completing the home study), grantees were able to determine where families dropped out of the process and develop strategies to improve the resource family recruitment and licensure processes. In addition to supporting the evaluation of grant activities, these data will be valuable for agencies as they assess their ongoing efforts related to recruitment and retention.

Several grantees attempted to recruit resource families that matched the demographics of the children in foster care and/or families willing to care for children who are traditionally more difficult to place. Grantee evaluations showed mixed results related to these efforts. The deaf community was successfully engaged by one project. Data reported by one project showed significant barriers to families of color progressing through licensure, but there were no data available related to what created racial disparities in resource family licensure.

Projects that conducted and evaluated child-specific recruitment activities showed success in identifying child connections and increasing a child's placement options. However, even when grantees practiced evidence-based

family-finding efforts with fidelity and consistency, they were not able to show strong evidence of improved lasting child placements or better permanency outcomes. Combining child-specific recruitment strategies with credible interventions to support families during placement may be necessary to impact longer-term outcomes for children.

Projects working toward increasing the availability of resource families and retaining current resource families showed mixed or inconclusive results about their impact on long-term child permanency and placement outcomes. However, many grantees made sustainable changes to their foster care recruitment and retention systems, including the development of new recruitment practices and resource family supports. These may eventually translate into better outcomes both in terms of the availability and representativeness of resource families.

Evaluation Designs

The grantees' evaluations used multiple data sources and incorporated both qualitative and quantitative research methods. All projects used available administrative data from child welfare agencies to assess child outcomes. Two grantees tracked the licensure process of families (MI and CA). Only one grantee (IL) utilized validated measurement instruments as part of its evaluation. The grantees examined project impact through a variety of methods, including natural randomization processes (IL), comparison group designs (CA, MI, and NM), and matched-case designs using propensity score matching (TX). Grantee evaluation designs are summarized in exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Overview of Evaluation Designs

Grantee	Process Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Evaluation Design
CA	<p>Process Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family referral sources ▪ Resource family recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of families who inquired ○ Demographics of families who inquired ○ Number of families who attended orientation ○ Number of families who completed training ○ Number of families who were licensed ▪ Staff knowledge of cultural competency <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Database to track recruitment, training, and licensing activities ▪ Annual surveys with DCFS staff and partnering agencies ▪ Focus groups with staff from DCFS and partnering agencies ▪ Document review ▪ Pre- and posttests to assess training 	<p>Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family retention (concurrent planning family support component only) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of families willing to accept future placements ○ Number of families with another child placed ▪ Child outcomes (child-specific recruitment and deaf youth program components only) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of children who achieved permanency <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCFS administrative data (SACWIS) 	<p>Nonexperimental: The child-specific recruitment component utilized a comparison group to assess permanency outcomes.</p>
IL	<p>Process Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child welfare agency practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quality of concurrent planning ○ Engagement of caseworkers with RKCP ▪ Child-specific recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Placement options identified <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Case file reviews ▪ DCFS administrative data (IL SACWIS) 	<p>Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child placement outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Placement stability and type ▪ Child well-being outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Child behavioral/mental health indicators ○ Family connectedness ○ Self-concept/optimism <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCFS administrative data (IL SACWIS) ▪ Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment: Youth Self-Report ▪ Youth interviews 	<p>Quasi-experimental: Natural randomization was determined by family courtroom assignment. Children assigned to the experimental group received intensive RKCP family-finding services, and those assigned to the control group received traditional family-finding services.</p>

Grantee	Process Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Evaluation Design
MI	<p>Process Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Return calls to resource family inquiries ▪ Resource family referral sources ▪ Resource family recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of families who inquired ○ Number of families who completed training ○ Number of families licensed ▪ Resource family support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family satisfaction with services ○ Improved parenting skills <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DR tracking database ▪ Annual focus groups and interviews with resource families ▪ Retrospective posttest training evaluation 	<p>Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Families’ match with racial/ethnic distribution of child population ○ Families willing to care for children with behavioral and physical needs, adolescents, and large sibling groups ▪ Child outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Relative placement ○ Length of stay ○ Discharge to adoption <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SACWIS administrative data 	<p>Quasi-experimental comparison group design: Outcomes in targeted counties were compared with outcomes in matched counties with similar demographic and case characteristics.</p>
MS	<p>Process Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of families who inquired ○ Inquiries prompted by recruitment activity ○ Demographics of families who inquired ○ Families’ willingness to care for children in target population ○ Reasons for withdrawal from the licensure process <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviews and focus groups with agency and project staff ▪ Data collection and tracking forms ▪ MS SACWIS administrative data 	<p>Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family pool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased pool of resource families ○ Newly licensed resource families willing to parent difficult-to-place children <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MS SACWIS administrative data 	<p>Nonexperimental longitudinal design: The evaluation tracked changes in key outcomes at baseline and at annual follow-up time points.</p>

Grantee	Process Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Evaluation Design
<p>NV</p>	<p>Process Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family licensure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of families who inquired ○ Number of families who attended an information session ○ Number of families who attended the first training ○ Number of families who completed training ▪ Child-specific recruitment activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of recruitment activities conducted for children served <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Web-based data collection system ▪ Interviews and focus groups with staff ▪ Recruitment and licensing data ▪ Family Intake Tracking Tool 	<p>Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family pool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Licensed relative placements ○ Licensed nonrelative placements ▪ Increased child outcomes (including CFSR outcomes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Permanency ○ Placement stability <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SACWIS administrative data 	<p>Nonexperimental, longitudinal design: The evaluation assessed the effect of child-specific recruitment activities using inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests) to identify county-level child outcome changes over time.</p>
<p>NM</p>	<p>Process Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff practice: Customer service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Performance in terms of professionalism, communication, and engagement standards ○ Resource families' perceptions of customer service ▪ Staff practice: Concurrent planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Birth parent participation ▪ Resource family recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reasons for caring for the child ▪ Resource family support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attendance at grief support training and groups ○ Satisfaction with grief support training and groups <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Task-tracking log ▪ Interviews and focus groups ▪ Document review ▪ Resource family survey 	<p>Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of applicants accepted and licensed ○ Number of concurrent planning homes ○ Number of dually licensed foster/adopt families ▪ Resource families recruited who match the child population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number and percentage of homes representative of the child and youth populations ○ Number of homes for older youth ▪ Resource family retention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Services for resource families ○ Retention rates of resource families ▪ Child outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Permanency outcomes for children identified for concurrent planning ○ Children of Hispanic ethnicity placed with Hispanic caregivers <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SACWIS administrative data 	<p>Quasi-experimental: Participating counties were matched with comparable counties. Changes in key measures were tracked from the baseline over time.</p>

Grantee	Process Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Measures and Data Sources	Outcome Evaluation Design
TX	<p>Process Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family inquiries ▪ Resource family licensure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Satisfaction with training ○ Satisfaction with licensure process ○ Reasons for withdrawing ▪ Child welfare agency practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Types of child-specific recruitment activities ▪ Cost of child-specific recruitment <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Program-level data ▪ Licensure data ▪ Resource parent interviews ▪ Web-based database ▪ Site visits ▪ Cost data 	<p>Outcome Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource family pool ▪ Resource family pool’s match with the child population ▪ Child outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Child permanency ○ Placement with relatives ○ Placement of sibling groups <p>Data Sources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ County-level administrative data 	<p>Quasi-experimental with a matched-case comparison design using propensity score matching: Children in participating counties were matched with children in comparison counties on selected matching variables.</p>

Evaluation Challenges

This section describes challenges faced by the grantees as they implemented their project evaluations.

Scope of Project Activities and Resulting Resource Constraints

Grantees' evaluation challenges were often related to a lack of resources available to adequately describe and measure multiple project activities. For example, the CA final report contained seven separate logic models for each programmatic component, with each serving a specific child population and involving collaborations with different organizations. Due to the small numbers of families served in each population, this resulted in analyses that lacked statistical power. It also resulted in the use of less rigorous measures. CA initially planned on using a validated instrument to measure symptoms of distress among resource families receiving supportive services; however, resources were not available to purchase the instrument.

Delays and Inconsistent Implementation of Project Activities

The lack of shared core activities across some grantees' implementation sites made it difficult to assess the relationship between program activities and intended outcomes. For example, implementation sites in MS differed in their staffing models and the types of families they targeted for recruitment. In the MI grant, participating counties developed their own recruitment plans, activities, and goals. Some projects did not reach full implementation until late in their grant periods, which resulted in inadequate enrollment and difficulty measuring impacts. Reasons for implementation delays included contracting and bureaucratic processes (CA), shifting program models (NM), and agency restructuring (NV).

Data Quality and Completeness

All projects incorporated administrative data into their evaluations; however, there were frequent challenges in accessing and using this information. Insufficient data collection on recruitment of resource families led to projects creating separate systems to capture critical information and requests for changes to State data collection systems. Training staff to obtain and enter data, and lengthy processes related to requests of State administrative data collection systems cost evaluation staff time and resources. Delays and quality issues created additional obstacles. For example, CA and MS reported receiving data that was incomplete or that was coded or defined in unanticipated ways.

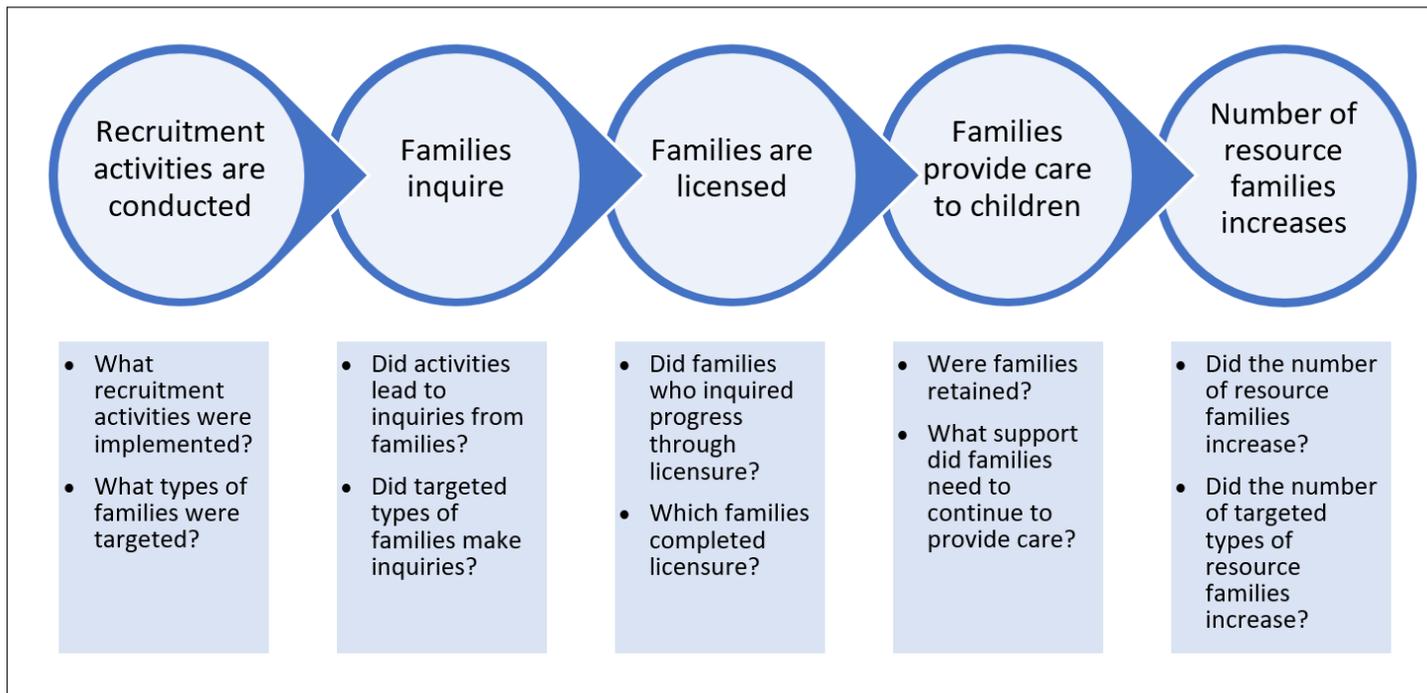
Limited evaluation resources and data meant that grantees had to prioritize collecting and analyzing data on only select outputs and outcomes, which led to gaps in measurement. This resulted in some grantees having less data to assess the implementation of core programmatic components and/or less data that allowed a more thorough investigation of the extent to which project activities led to expected outcomes.

Resource Family Recruitment: Key Findings

Projects conducted recruitment activities to reach families potentially interested in serving as resource families. In general, programs operated under the assumption that increased recruitment activities would lead to more families inquiring about providing care, which would lead to more families becoming licensed¹¹ as foster care providers. If these families were retained and continued to provide care, projects anticipated an increase in the number of resource family placement options for children. This chain of activities and common evaluation questions across the DR projects are illustrated in exhibit 2.

¹¹ The terms "licensed", "certified," or "approved" are terms used by different jurisdictions that refer to families who complete the public child welfare agency process and are authorized to care for children in need of placement.

Exhibit 2: Project Activities Intended to Increase Pool of Resource Families: Common Evaluation Questions



What Recruitment Activities Were Conducted?

As an important first step to increase their resource family placement options for children, grantees developed recruitment activities that would broadly reach families in specific locations and activities that would reach types of families the project was targeting. For instance, MI theorized that professionals who worked with children with physical, developmental, and/or mental health needs would have preexisting skills that would transfer well to providing care to children in foster care. MI designed recruitment activities that offered training on the needs of children involved with child welfare for these professionals and incorporated information about the need for resource families and the process to become licensed. Projects also made efforts to recruit specific types of families, such as those who matched the demographic characteristics of children in their care. For instance, CA hired a recruiter who was linguistically and culturally competent to reach out to the deaf community and to recruit and support families to care for deaf children. See the Grantee and the Key Program Interventions, Strategies, and Activities sections for descriptions of other recruitment activities used by grantees.

Did Activities Lead to Increased Inquiries From Families?

As part of their evaluation efforts, CA, NM, and MI collected data on the number of inquiries about becoming resource families. For a 4-year period, NM reported 3,767 inquiries, MI reported 2,113 inquiries, and CA reported 21,725 inquiries. However, it is unknown whether all inquiries were the result of project activities. CA had updated its foster care program website prior to the grant, and many inquiries came to the project via this portal. Because no baseline data were available for any of these projects, it is difficult to assess the extent to which grant activities increased the overall number of inquiries.

Which Activities Led to More Inquiries?

MI constructed a database that collected data on recruitment events, family inquiries, and licensures that occurred as a result of recruitment activities. The grantee conducted 238 recruitment events that reached a total of 75,700 participants and resulted in 2,113 inquiries.

To assess the effectiveness of its recruitment activities, CA collected information at the time of inquiry about how families heard about becoming a foster care provider. Results for CA and MI are summarized in exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Where Did Families Hear About Foster Care Opportunities as Reported at the Time of Family Inquiry?*

Referral Sources*	CA (N=21,000)	MI (N=2,113)
Friend/family	22%	10%
Community event**	11%	75%
Internet	26%	5%

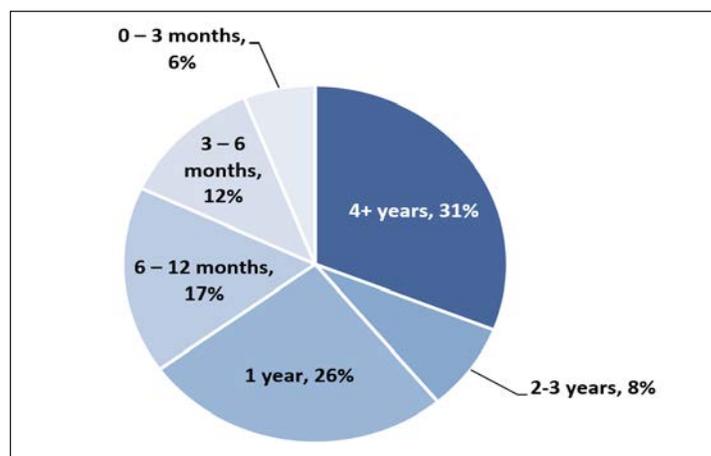
*Only the most common categories reported to both projects are indicated.

The recruitment activities conducted by each project are in line with results described in the table above. For example, the most common referral source in CA was the Internet, which reflects the work done to improve its website just prior to the project. MI’s highest percentage of inquiries were referred through community events, which reflects its activities in the community, including its practice of having sign-up sheets at these events for families interested in further information from the agency. For both projects, the second most common referral source was friends or family.

What Were the Issues With Measuring the Effectiveness of Recruitment Activities?

Assessing the effectiveness of recruitment activities was complicated by the fact that many potential resource families take time to consider the decision to become a foster parent (i.e., the impact of recruitment activities may not be felt immediately). MI staff asked resource families at the time they were licensed how long they had considered becoming a foster parent before coming to a decision (see exhibit 4).

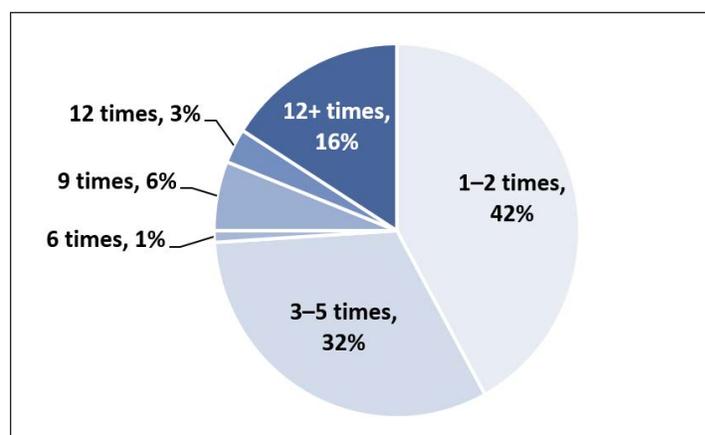
Exhibit 4. MI: Time Families Spent Considering Whether to Become a Foster Parent *



*Categories in graph are as reported by the project

More than one-third (39 percent) of families reported waiting more than 2 years after they first considered becoming a foster parent. This delay makes it difficult to assess the impact of general and targeted recruitment efforts. Another complication in assessing recruitment activities is that families have often been exposed to multiple messages prior to contacting an agency. At the time of inquiry, MI asked families how many times they had been exposed to a message about becoming a resource family (see exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. MI: Number of Times Families Were Exposed to Messages About Fostering *



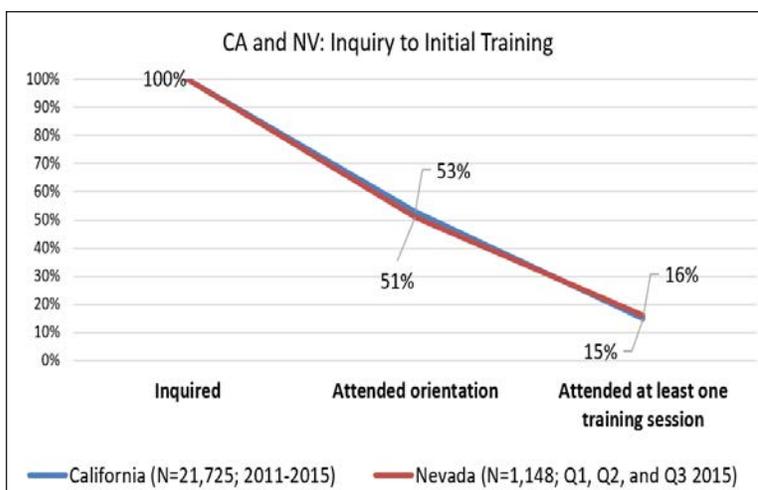
*Categories in graph are as reported by the project

Over half (58 percent) of those making inquiries reported being exposed to at least three messages related to fostering. However, for 42 percent of respondents, receiving one or two messages about fostering led to contact with the agency

Did Families That Inquired Become Licensed?

Several projects tracked the progress of families from inquiry to licensure to determine where in the process families dropped out. NV began collecting this data in the last three quarters of 2015, which was toward the end of its project, and CA tracked licensure data throughout its grant. The percentage of families completing early licensure tasks within these two projects is illustrated in exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6. Early Licensure Process Attrition



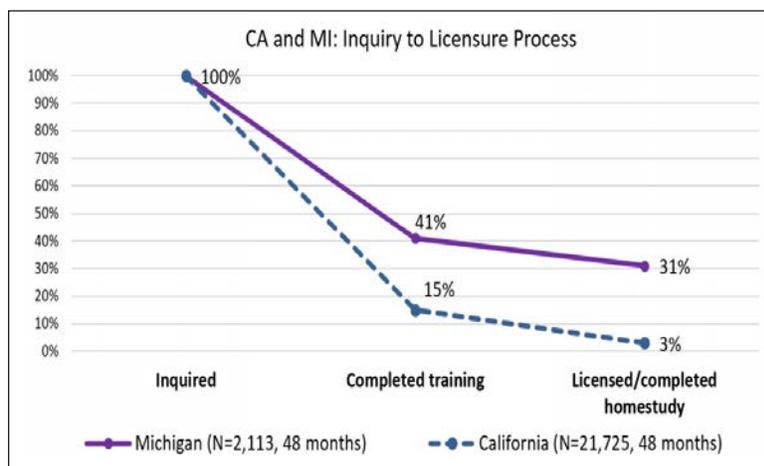
It is interesting that both projects reported very similar rates of attrition from inquiry to attendance at a first training session. NV reported that attrition between orientation and attending training was often due to families not passing background checks, which was estimated to occur for 10 to 12 percent of families. CA developed a self-assessment form for families attending an orientation, which was intended to help families reflect on their readiness to provide care to children in foster care.

Licensure: Attrition and Program Adjustments

Projects used licensure data and other evaluation findings to identify and explain when attrition occurred. Through a review of administrative data, MS found that 18 percent of families who did not complete licensure dropped out because they did not meet licensure requirements (e.g., income and space requirements, unfinalized divorces, having a live-in partner). MS also discovered that families dropped out when they realized that the needs and characteristics of children available for placement did not match their initial expectations. During interviews conducted by TX, resource families reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount and content of paperwork and the length of the licensure process. Resource families in TX, along with staff interviewed in MS, reported logistical barriers, such as the distance and timing of trainings and lack of child care, as factors contributing to attrition.

CA modified its program in response to its licensure attrition findings. These changes included developing a self-assessment tool that was sent to families at inquiry, which allowed them to determine whether they met licensure requirements before attending an orientation. To improve training attendance, the project initiated reminder calls and offered self-help clinics on the first day of training to provide support to families in completing paperwork. The project did not collect data to determine whether these strategies changed attrition patterns.

Exhibit 7. illustrates data provided by CA and MI about attrition from inquiry to licensure.

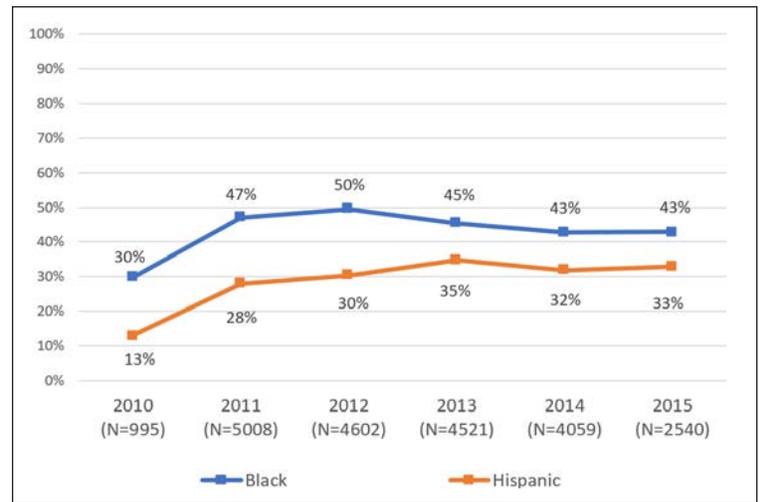


MI's data illustrates a much higher percentage of families licensed relative to the number of inquiries made than was observed for CA. This disparity may have several causes. First, the definition of "inquiry" was different for the two projects. MI's recruitment activities focused on in-person community events, and inquiries were often collected from sign-in sheets. In contrast, inquiries in CA were recorded primarily at the time potential families contacted the child welfare agency for information via phone or website. It is possible that families who attended MI's in-person events were able to obtain information on foster parenting earlier and thereby "screened out" themselves much earlier than CA families who inquired via telephone or the Internet. This earlier self-screening may have contributed to MI's lower rate of attrition. The commitment and investment of resources at the State level in Michigan also may have improved resource family recruitment. Additionally, MI's recruitment model may have been more successful at targeting and engaging families who were more likely to complete the licensure process.

Did Targeted Families Make Inquiries?

Recruitment activities were often intended to reach families who matched the demographics of children needing care and/or families who were willing to care for children who are traditionally more difficult to place, including sibling groups, older youth, children with medical needs, and children with mental health or behavioral needs. MS focused its recruitment efforts on families willing to care for older youth, large sibling groups, and children with medical or behavioral needs. The project did not report an increase over time in the number of parents willing to foster these populations. CA contracted with outside organizations to conduct outreach to the Black, Hispanic, and LGBTQ communities. As shown in exhibit 8, the proportion of inquiries by Black and Hispanic families improved for CA during the early years of the project but then leveled off in later years.

Exhibit 8. Percentage of Family Inquiries by Race/Ethnicity for CA*

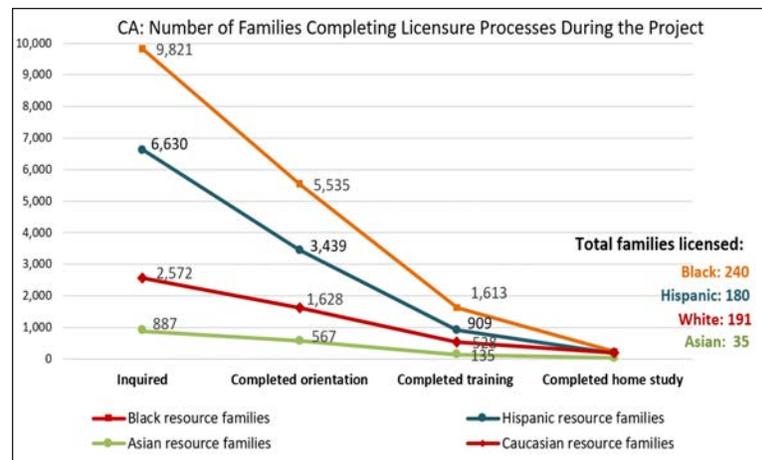


*The project began collecting data in the last 6 months of 2010 and analyzed the first 9 months of data for 2015 for final data reporting.

Did Targeted Families Become Licensed?

Although initial inquiries from Black and Hispanic families increased modestly, CA found that the licensure completion rates for those populations were significantly lower than those for White and Asian families. This is illustrated in exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9. Licensure Process by Race/Ethnicity



Fewer Black families and Hispanic families completed orientation or training than White families. Families of color were significantly less likely to obtain licensure, with a ratio of inquiries to licenses of 41:1 for Black families versus 13:1 for White families. Because these data were analyzed toward the end of the project period, CA reported it was unable to investigate the barriers that caused these disparities, but several interventions were instituted to address drop-out rates. These included having experienced resource parents assist new applicants in the process and creating sessions where background checks could be completed efficiently.

Did the Number of Licensed Resource Families Increase?

MI and NM attempted to increase the number of families that matched the demographics of children in care. MI found no meaningful differences when comparing intervention and comparison counties in terms of the racial/ethnic distribution of approved foster or adoptive homes. NM found no evidence of an increase in the number of families matching the race/ethnicity of children in care, with the exception of one county that had some evidence of increased placements of Hispanic children with Hispanic families. CA reported its efforts to engage the deaf community were successful due the placement of seven deaf children with deaf resource families, although baseline data were not available to compare these to data before the project began.

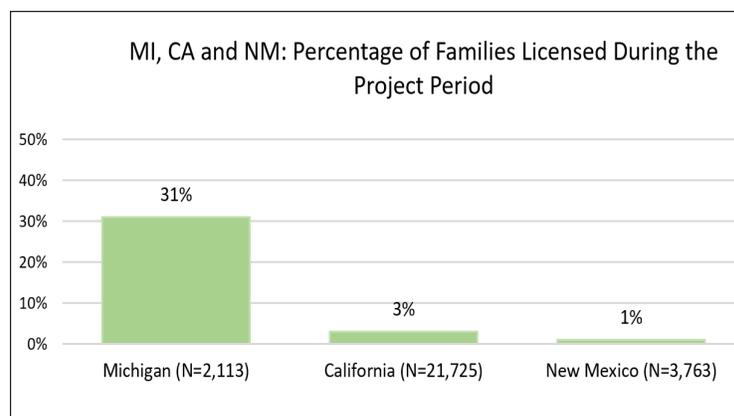
Several projects reported on efforts to increase licensure rates among certain categories of families. MS and MI targeted families willing to care for older youth, larger sibling groups, and/or children who had medical or behavioral needs. Each county had differing successes, but in general, counties had difficulty licensing homes for adolescents. In MS, counties were more successful in licensing homes for sibling groups and children with disabilities, and MI counties generally reported more success finding families willing to care for children with disabilities.

NM’s analysis of licensing data showed no consistent differences between intervention and comparison counties in the number of licensed resource families. MS’s analysis of three program sites showed declines in the number of licensed families over the project period. Each county in MI set goals related to licensing a specific number of families, but only one of the three counties met its target.

Which Families Completed Licensure?

The percentage of families who inquired about becoming resource families and the percentage of families who completed licensure varied across projects reporting these data. Percentages for licensure completion for CA, MI, and NM are shown in exhibit 10.

Exhibit 10. Percentage of Families Who Inquired About and Completed Licensure



Grantees attempted to understand the characteristics of families who completed licensure, improve their recruitment activities, better identify families who would complete licensure, and remove barriers so that more families would complete licensure after inquiring about the process.

Characteristics of Families Who Completed Licensure

NV, MI, and TX obtained information from families who completed the licensure process about their reasons for wanting to serve as resource families. MI surveyed families who obtained their license to determine what made them believe they could be effective resource families. Families often described life experiences that made them familiar with foster parenting and gave them confidence, including parenting children (26 percent), talking with other foster parents (20 percent), having relevant professional experience (17 percent), helping friends with children in foster care (8 percent), and having been a child in foster care (7 percent). These findings lend support to MI's strategy of involving current foster parents and children in foster care at recruitment events and focusing on recruiting professional groups that could have relevant experiences that could be applicable to resource parents.

NV found that two-thirds (67 percent) of families cited altruistic reasons, while 44 percent of MI families reported wanting to make a difference. Some families interviewed in TX reported a religious calling as motivation for fostering.

Recruitment Activity Type: Faith-Based Recruitment

MI and CA reported on recruitment efforts involving faith-based communities. MI developed a recruitment model that resulted in 42 events that reached 4,200 people. Out of the pool of faith-based recruitment participants, 173 families (4 percent) eventually became licensed. This was a higher percentage than non-faith-based activities. MI conducted 652 other recruitment activities, and of the 75,700 participants reached, only 652 (less than 1 percent) became licensed. However, faith-based activities were not consistently reported as successful across grantees. In CA, delays in finalizing State agency contracts caused delays in faith-based recruitment activities, and it also took time to develop relationships with faith-based organizations. CA reported that 66 faith-based organizations hosted presentations over a 2-year period, which resulted in nine families attending or planning to attend a resource family orientation.

Family Retention: What Supports Do Families Need to Provide Care for Children?

The number of retention activities that projects implemented suggests that agencies believed retention of resource families was an important issue to address, yet there was little data reported that linked these activities to improved retention outcomes. In an effort to support and retain concurrent planning families, projects developed supports for resource families who were caring for children in foster care who they wished to adopt but who were reunified with their birth parents. In California, the LIFT program provided individual therapy to 15 participants and group therapy for 54 participants. Nearly half (24) of the 54 families that participated and had a child removed from their care expressed interest in a future child placement, and 12 families accepted another child placement. Whether this is an improvement is difficult to determine due to the lack of comparison data prior to the LIFT program.

NV's Foster Parent Champions program was an intensive effort to support both newly licensed and existing resource families. While anecdotal information suggests that the program was received extremely positively, the project did not systematically collect data to document the program's outcomes.

NM conducted an extensive listening tour of participating counties to identify strategies to improve the retention of resource families. Findings from initial listening tours led to the development of a customer service model to improve agency responsiveness to resource families. Surveys of resource families indicated some improvements in resource family satisfaction over the project period; however, it was not clear whether increased satisfaction was associated with improved family retention.

Resource Family Recruitment: Child Placement and Permanency Outcomes

The overall goal of DR project activities focused on increasing the number and types of resource families to care for children and to provide increased appropriate placement options for children. Increasing potential placement options for children, and retaining resource families, was intended to improve outcomes for children by improving placement stability and child permanency.

It was difficult for most projects to assess the effects of general and targeted recruitment activities on long-term placement and permanency outcomes. Some projects (MS, NM, and TX) reported that challenges achieving short-term recruitment goals using general and targeted recruitment activities made it more difficult to determine if there was a conclusive impact on longer-term child outcomes. TX and NM noted that delayed implementation and wide variation across sites in activities and goals resulted in lower activity and enrollment levels, which may have diluted the impact of their projects on longer-term outcomes. Statewide efforts to improve resource family recruitment may have improved outcomes in comparison counties, thereby affecting the measurement of outcomes for the project. Some projects only were able to track the types of resource families on a limited basis, which meant they were unable to assess whether recruitment activities were attracting families from key target populations and whether these families were progressing toward licensure. This made it difficult to determine whether efforts to diversify the pool of resource families had an impact on child placement stability and permanency outcomes.

Placement Stability and Placement With Relatives

NM examined the percentage of children with three or more placements during their time in care and the length of time they were in care over the course of the project. The trends for these two outcomes in the intervention counties were similar to those across the State, leading the grantee to conclude that these outcomes were not impacted by the project. MI found no consistent trends in the percentage of placements with relatives across intervention and matched comparison counties.

Child Permanency Outcomes

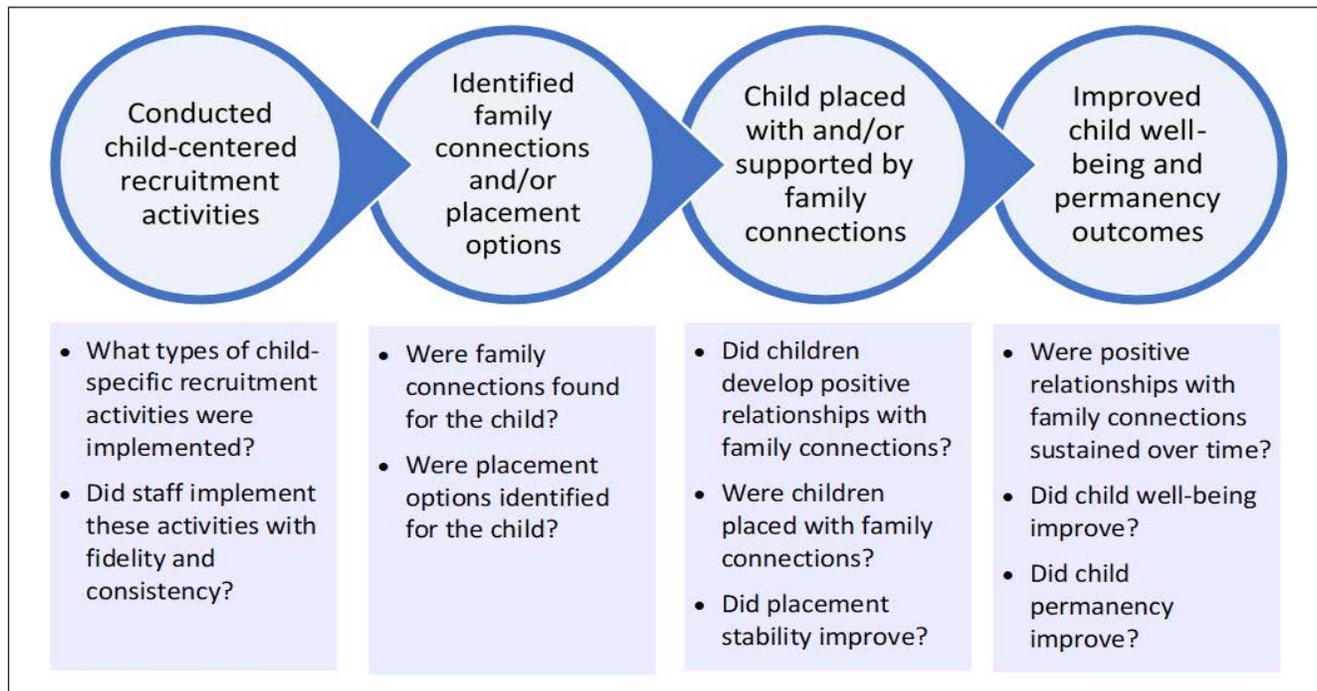
In general, the grantees reported few conclusive associations between project activities and long-term permanency outcomes. NV reported mixed results on CFSR measures related to permanency. For example, the project showed improvement in adoptions occurring in less than 24 months for children exiting foster care, in legally free children being adopted in less than 12 months, and in the median length of stay to adoption. Indicators for which data showed increased negative outcomes included adoptions occurring for children in care for longer than 17 months and older youths' discharge to permanency prior to age 18.

MI reported that two intervention counties reduced the median number of days in care from fiscal year 2012 to fiscal year 2013, though control counties also showed reductions. MI also did not find any differences between intervention and comparison counties in the median length of stay in foster care for children discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption. NM analyzed the length of time children spent in foster care and found no differences in outcomes between intervention and matched counties.

Child-Specific Recruitment: Key Findings

Projects engaged in child-specific recruitment activities to identify kin and other permanent placement options for children in out-of-home care. These activities were expected to improve both placement outcomes and child well-being. The process for child-centered recruitment and common evaluation questions across the projects are illustrated in exhibit 11.

Exhibit 11: Child-Centered Recruitment Activities: Common Evaluation Questions



Staff Fidelity to Child-Centered Recruitment Activities

There were disparate levels of program-model fidelity among the projects that implemented child-specific recruitment activities. IL focused solely on child-centered recruitment by implementing early family-finding activities immediately after a child’s removal and, in general, observed high levels of fidelity and consistent implementation of practices among staff. IL also found that the intervention group had stronger concurrent planning practices than the control group. In contrast, NV and TX reported inconsistent implementation of child-specific recruitment activities. In the middle of its project, the NV model of implementation shifted due to an agency-wide reorganization, which resulted in the reassignment of recruitment activities from recruitment specialists to adoption workers who were unable to complete additional tasks due to workload issues. TX described a lack of clarity and communication regarding the roles and responsibilities of CASA volunteers regarding child-specific recruitment activities, but this problem improved over time.

Were Child Connections Identified?

IL reported that more relatives were identified for children in the intervention group than in the control group, with an average of 19.3 kin and fictive kin identified for intervention group children versus an average of 12.8 kin and fictive kin identified for children in the control group. In TX, an average of 10 connections were found for each child served by the project, with about half of those connections identified for the first time through family-finding efforts.

Were Placement Options Identified?

IL reported that staff were able to identify alternative placement options in case the current placement were to disrupt for almost 70 percent of cases for the intervention group versus 30 percent of cases in the control group. Among workers who were able to identify an alternative placement, more in the intervention group (68 percent) had discussed this possibility directly with the alternative placement for a child than those in the control group (54 percent).

Did Children Make Positive Attachments With Kin and Fictive Kin?

IL discovered that children in the intervention group were more likely to have positive attachments¹² with kin and fictive kin, with 2.8 positive attachments for the intervention group versus 1.2 positive attachments for the control group. Staff were also able to identify barriers to positive connections, such as substance use by or incarceration of possible connections. On average, there were 13 such barriers per child in the intervention group versus 9 barriers per child in the control group. This suggests that identifying more positive connections can also increase the number of potentially negative connections that are also identified.

Child-Centered Recruitment: Child Outcomes

Projects engaged in child-specific recruitment activities to improve child placement and permanency options and to potentially enhance child well-being. Exhibit 12 provides a high-level overview of outcomes related to child-centered recruitment efforts.

Exhibit 12: Overview of Project Measures and Findings: Child-Specific Recruitment*

	Staff Practice/ Fidelity	More Child Connections Found	Desired Child Placement Type	Improved Child Placement Stability	Improved Child Permanency	Improved Child Well-Being
CA	?	?	+	?	+	?
IL	+	+	+/-	-	-	-
NV	+/-	?	?	+/-	+	?
TX	+/-	+	?	-	+	?
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; gap: 10px;"> Positive results Positive results with limited evidence </div> <div style="display: flex; gap: 10px;"> Mixed results No impact Not measured </div> </div>						

¹² Positive attachments were defined as someone who the child has a bond with, does traditional activities with, and/or can confide in.

Some projects engaging in child-specific recruitment efforts also implemented general and/or targeted recruitment activities (CA, NV, and TX). Because project activities were more numerous, evaluation resource constraints meant that grantees had to be selective in the specific outputs and outcomes they chose to measure. In some cases, these constraints limited the rigor of grantees' evaluation designs and the amount of data they could collect to assess linkages between child-specific recruitment activities and expected outcomes.

Child Placement Outcomes

For those grantees that evaluated placement outcomes, there were no observed changes. TX reported that children in the intervention group were no more likely to be placed with siblings than those in the comparison group. Children in the intervention group in IL had more placements on average than children in the control group, although, in one county, more time elapsed before a placement disruption for children in the intervention group than for children in the control group.

Child Permanency Outcomes

IL found no association between its intervention and the length of time in care or the likelihood of reunification.

In NV, 40 percent of children who received child-specific recruitment services had been adopted by the end of the study period, although the lack of a comparison group or baseline data made it difficult to assess the significance of this finding. In TX, children in the intervention group were more likely to be discharged from foster care to permanency (adoption, reunification, or guardianship) than children in the comparison group; however, the total number of children discharged to

permanency in the intervention group was very small (18 children).

Child Well-Being Outcomes

Among the grantees, only IL systematically evaluated changes in child well-being. One of the goals of the project was to connect children to caring adults, even if these connections were not placement resources for the child. The grantee assessed children 12 months into care to determine if a child's relationship to project-identified connections persisted over time. Although early assessments indicated that children receiving services had a higher average number of family connections, no significant differences between the intervention and control groups were observed at the 12-month mark. IL also used the Child Behavior Checklist to measure children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors and constructed a school functioning measure (school behavior, school attendance, and school achievement). It did not find any differences between the intervention and control groups for well-being outcomes.

Recommendations for Evaluations of Future Diligent Recruitment Efforts

Projects provided several recommendations for projects or organizations seeking to evaluate similar efforts. These recommendations are also drawn from challenges reported by evaluations across grantee projects.

Improve Access to and Use of Administrative Data

Ready access to high-quality administrative data was essential to the evaluation efforts of many grantees. For example, access to administrative data allowed TX to construct a matched-case comparison group, which increased the rigor of its evaluation. Challenges to obtaining administrative data access and quality should be identified and addressed during the initial planning or early project implementation stages. This will allow organizations to clarify their needs and form realistic expectations about access to and the quality of administrative data. As part of the initial project-planning process, organizations could run sample data reports and develop strong, detailed letters of commitment to expedite data requests from internal or external departments responsible for child welfare data management and analysis.

Develop Theories of Change and Identify Core Program Activities

The 2010 DR grantees implemented many innovative strategies, including the use of market segmentation research, cultivation of foster parent champions, and faith-based recruitment activities. Many of these unique activities could not be thoroughly investigated due to implementation delays and limited evaluation resources spread thinly over a broad array of activities.

To prioritize evaluation resources, it could be useful for projects to develop theories of change that identify specific populations of focus along with core, cross-site activities that are hypothesized to most directly impact desired changes. Evaluation of a more limited number of activities could promote the rigor of evaluation designs. For example, DR 2010 projects that focused on distinct child populations and/or specific geographic areas were able to use evaluation designs that incorporated propensity score matching, random assignment, and/or validated instruments to strengthen their findings.

Evaluation resources focused on fewer activities could also help projects measure program fidelity and short-term and intermediate outcomes. The availability of CFSR data indicators across most child welfare agencies allowed grantees to incorporate these data elements into their evaluations as long-term outcome measures. But without data to assess the implementation of program activities, outputs, and short-term and intermediate outcomes, it was sometimes difficult to determine which activities were impacting—or not impacting—expected long-term outcomes. This information is critical to determine where in the program implementation process additions or adaptations may be needed for efforts to succeed.

Further Investigate the Licensure Process for Families of Various Races and Ethnicities

A deeper examination of the licensure process may be necessary to determine activities that increase the representation of families that match the demographics of children served by the child welfare system. For example, CA's evaluation found significant variation in the progress of families of different races and ethnicities through the licensure process. Important questions remain as to whether this pattern holds true in other child welfare systems. If so, it is important to determine what factors drive these disparities and how they can be minimized.

Summary

The DR grantees engaged in a broad array of strategies to improve permanency outcomes and facilitate systemic change. Grantees realized that long-term improvements in resource family recruitment, development, and supports—and, ultimately, better permanency outcomes for children—would require implementation of wide-reaching and permanent organizational and system changes. The DR grantees developed and implemented DR programs that included general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment activities for prospective and existing resource families and for children and youth served by public child welfare agencies. Through partnerships with various public and private entities (including adoption networks, national organizations, local businesses, faith-based organizations, and community-based and grassroots organizations), grantees sought to implement progressive and effective interventions to positively affect permanency outcomes for children and youth in care.

Although the grantee evaluations were not always able to fully assess the impact of the broad array of unique strategies they developed, future efforts to recruit and retain resource families will be enhanced by reviewing the experiences and lessons learned by the DR grantees.



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