Vermont will recruit and develop foster, kin, and adoptive families to have the capacity and desire to meet the needs of children who require substitute care and or permanency.

The Family Services Division Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Program, also known as the Diligent Recruitment and Retention Program (DRR) is designed to coordinate and improve the efforts of district and state level staff to improve recruitment and retention activities intentionally and systematically.

Evidence informed strategies will guide practice change and will support the implementation of the DRR plan. These strategies, include, robust family engagement, building skill in making placements that work, recognizing that all caregiving families require training and both formal and informal supports, ensuring improved safety, permanency, wellbeing and law abidance outcomes for children.

Best practice approaches to general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment will shape our work.

A community's most valuable asset and most vulnerable population is its children. Communities will be engaged to increase their understanding about the needs of children in care and the families who support them and how they might be able to help.

We are a learning organization that purposes to continuously learn from our combined efforts to improve our practice and impact our performance.

Responsive Model of Engagement and Support

Recruitment and retention of caregivers is a responsibility that is shared by all FSD employees.

Foster caregivers are volunteers who meet critical safety, permanency and wellbeing needs for children who are not able to remain at home. Our system cannot function efficiently without these valuable team members.

Research tells us that the best way to recruit new foster parents is to ensure current foster parents are well supported and have a positive experience. Our responsive model of engagement works to improve communication and increase the level of support experienced by all foster parents.

The Division will ensure that all foster and kin families have access to a consistent, thorough and timely home study process.

Staff will support foster and kin families by being aware of available resources and will assist them with access to those resources.

Staff will respond to caregivers promptly and will address concerns that arise.   We strive to address little problems before they become big problems that impact placement stability.

This model of engagement is a demonstration of our values and is practiced not only at the local level, but throughout the division and by our contracted partners.

Caregivers are routinely asked about their needs. FSD staff proactively address those needs so that caregivers can meet the needs of the children in their care.

Training and Development

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

Access to adequate and timely training and support correlates with improved placement stability

Caregivers will have access to timely relevant training prior to initial placement and to meet licensing requirements.

Trainings will be offered in various modalities to support caregiver learning styles and needs.

Caregivers will be engaged in the development of their advanced training program.

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

Aligned Policy and Procedures

The 2020-2024 DR plan was developed to meet our federal requirements and it will guide our statewide efforts as they relate to the recruitment and retention of caregivers.

Underpinning this work is the examination of our district practice to ensure that we are functioning in accordance with policy and through the lens of best practice.

Statewide DR plan implementation will be coordinated with, aligned with other initiatives unified across the state. (Strategic plan, Practice model)

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

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

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

Develop productive community relationships

- **Make it a win-win**. What can be offered to others in exchange for help with recruitment and retention. A business' name and logo on all PR materials? A local mission activity for churches? Community service hours for local high school students?
- **Find one person who will champion your cause**. Just one person in an organization getting excited about helping children in foster care, can help build relationship over time. Is it the preacher's wife or the church secretary who knows how to get things done? Consider setting up a meeting with the reporter or editor responsible for covering community events? Is there someone in a civic group who has personal experience with foster care?
- **Develop and use community education and public awareness materials** for initial outreach to community groups. Be prepared to tell each group specifically how then can help. Remember, think beyond "foster parents." Then make sure that someone—foster or kin parent, staff member, or volunteer—will follow up and take the relationship to the next step.
- **Schedule time in your calendar** for building and maintaining community relationships. Someone needs to have regularly scheduled time to make sure relationships bear fruit and continue year after year. It is not enough to send flyers to all the churches or schools in your county. It is the personal follow-up that makes the difference.

Foundation Steps for Collaboration:
- **Identify potential partners**.
- **Develop a shared vision**. Be familiar with your provider partners' organizational mission statements and understand what they can realistically bring to the collaboration. Understanding this up front will help you develop a shared vision and minimize conflict later. A provider's mission should include commitment to child welfare needs in order to effectively collaborate with child welfare agencies. The more congruence between the provider's and agency's mission statements, the better chance there is for a sustainable collaboration.
- **Develop shared goals.** Be aware that specific objectives might differ between agencies and providers. Parties to a partnership most likely have a specific objective or contractual mandates that will guide their input on the collaboration's goals. Trust is built when the collaborative group can factor specific objectives into a common goal.

Data Driven Recruitment and Retention

Using data effectively is a key component of the Diligent Recruitment work.

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

Collecting, tracking, and analyzing data can be challenging for child welfare systems. And so, we may only be able to track a few new pieces of data on foster and adoptive families.

Prioritized key data elements will help inform efforts to recruit and maintain a pool of families and will help assess the effectiveness of strategies and efforts. These elements are outlined on the Inquiry Tracking Spreadsheet.

Key Data elements, will help to determine:
- If our current families are being fully utilized?
- How is our process working for getting families licensed/approved?

- What is our current actual capacity? Is that capacity sufficient to meet the need for appropriate placements for children currently in need of a placement and for our anticipated placement needs?
- Are our recruitment strategies effective in finding appropriate families for our children and keeping those families engaged both before and after children are placed with them?

Developing a more data-driven approach to recruitment is an ongoing process for our system and aligns well with our efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. Using our data well will support decision making about use of resources and the development of strategies.