

STATE OF IOWA DEPARTMENT OF  
**Health** AND **Human**  
SERVICES

*FFY 2020-2024 Child and Family Services  
Plan  
Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent  
Recruitment Plan*

June 2023

# FFY 2023-2027 Child and Family Services Plan

## Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan

STATE OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DIVISION OF FAMILY WELL-BEING AND PROTECTION

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## BACKGROUND

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has five geographic service delivery areas. In 2017, HHS awarded a contract for the Recruitment, Retention, Training and Support for Resource Families (RRTS) to one agency in each service area. The awarded contracts were as follows:

- Western Service Area – Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI)
- Northern Service Area – Four Oaks Family Services
- Eastern Service Area – Four Oaks Family Services
- Cedar Rapids Service Area – Four Oaks Family Services
- Des Moines Service Area – Four Oaks Family Services

While Four Oaks received contracts in four service areas, they are responsible for independently meeting the requirements of the contract and achieving service area specific performance measures.

The contracted providers are responsible for the following activities:

- Developing service area specific plans that include strategies and numerical goals for each service area based on the needs of the service area for the following criteria:
  - Families that reflect the race and ethnicity of the children in care in the service area;
  - Families who can take sibling groups of two or more;
  - Families who can parent older children, especially teens;
  - Families who are geographically located to allow children to remain in their neighborhoods and schools;
  - Families who have the skills to care for children who exhibit difficult behaviors or have significant mental health, behavioral, developmental, or medical needs;
  - Families who can provide a continuum of care including respite, short term placements, transitioning children to permanency and adoption;
  - Families who will mentor and work collaboratively with birth parents; and
  - Families who understand the importance of maintaining a child's connections to their family, school, community, and culture and will help maintain those connections.
- Conducting licensing activities for foster families and approval activities for adoptive families including:
  - Providing orientation sessions for interested families;
  - Providing pre-service National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC);
  - Completing all background checks according to state and federal law;
  - Completing an initial home study and all other required paperwork; and
  - Completing renewal activities and updating home studies.
- Providing service area specific matching services for children in need of foster home placement. Matching criteria is established based on the needs of each child but may include:
  - Keeping siblings together;
  - Keeping children in their home school and neighborhood;
  - The family's ability to parent older children;
  - The family's ability to meet the child's cultural needs;
  - The family's ability to meet the child's emotional and behavioral needs; or
  - The child's permanency goal.
- Providing support services to foster families and pre-adoptive families. The contract requires providers' staff to:
  - Assign one caseworker to a foster family in the beginning of the licensing process who will remain with the family until the family no longer provides care. The caseworker:
    - Is the family's primary contact for questions and when a need or concern arises.
    - Conducts licensing renewal activities.

- Is actively involved in the matching process.
  - Monitors compliance with rules and corrective action plans to come into compliance when needed.
  - Monitors training completion.
- Visit a family within 5 days of the first time a child is placed in their home;
- Contact each family within 3 days of the arrival of a new child;
- Visit each foster family who has a child in their home at least every other month with one visit unrelated to licensing renewal or adoption approval activities, and have a meaningful phone contact in any month a visit was not required;
  - Foster families who do not have a child placed in their home have monthly phone contact.
- Provide support services based on the foster/pre-adoptive family's needs that may include:
  - Providing crisis interventions;
  - Assisting families with the transition of teens to adulthood;
  - Assisting families with the transition of children to permanency through reunification;
  - Partnering, coordinating, and collaborating with other service providers;
  - Providing services in a culturally competent manner;
  - Coordinating and collaborating with service providers to assist families in the transition from foster care to adoption;
  - Assisting families in understanding the difference between foster care and adoption.
- Providing in-service trainings to foster families that are timely, relevant, and intentional to increase a family's skills and abilities to parent children in care.
- Providing post-adoption support to all adoptive families who adopted children that receive or are eligible to receive adoption subsidy. Support services are voluntary, and families can self-refer or have HHS staff refer them. Services are free of charge to the family and may be provided in the family's home. Service providers tailor the support services to meet the needs of the family, which may include:
  - Crisis intervention;
  - Providing assistance in developing behavior management plans;
  - Assisting and supporting the family's relationship with the birth family;
  - Advocating for the family with school, HHS, or other service providers; and
  - Assisting families in securing community resources.
- Assisting HHS in finding adoptive families for waiting children by:
  - Registering children on the national exchange through AdoptUSKids;
  - Providing adoptive families with AdoptUSKids registration information;
  - Facilitating information sharing between adoptive families and HHS adoption workers;
  - Managing the state Heart Gallery; and
  - Collaborating on or coordinating adoption month events.
- Providing support to existing enhanced foster families. These specially identified foster families have the skills, ability, capacity, and willingness to care for children coming from a congregate care setting who have behaviors and needs that make it difficult to find a foster family home.
  - Enhanced foster families will receive additional training beyond the required 6 hours a year.
  - Enhanced foster families will receive a higher maintenance payment rate of \$50.00 per day.
  - Enhanced foster homes will stay within their licensed capacity and limit of only two children at the enhanced level. The Department will consider the skill set of the home and if all enhanced referrals are exhausted, the contractor can contact an enhanced home for other referrals of a child aged 13 or older. Non-enhanced children placed in the home must be verbal, able to self-protect and the child's needs would not make them prone to be at risk.

The RRTS contract is a performance-based contract. Performance measures are the same for each of the five contracts, but baselines and targets are specific to each service area. The performance measures are:

### Performance Measure I – Stability

Children placed into a licensed foster family home from their removal home or shelter within the quarterly reporting period will experience stability in placement. A child's first placement should be the child's only placement. The contract payment for performance will be based on the percent of a cohort of children who remain in the same licensed foster home 180 days after placement or:

- will have exited the licensed foster home to a trial home visit working towards reunification; or
- will have exited to a relative home; or
- will have exited to a fictive kin home; or
- will have exited to a pre-adoptive placement working toward permanency; or
- will have attained permanency through adoption or guardianship or;
- will have exited the emergency foster care placement within 48 hours of placement.

Adding the emergency foster care placement as an option allows the RRTS contractor to still achieve this performance measure as it is more appropriate for a child to go to a temporary foster care placement as they are working on an appropriate long-term match rather than going into a shelter placement.

Contract payment will be made using the following standards (note: the Gold and Silver Standards are mutually exclusive by quarter, and both cannot be earned for the same quarter):

- Gold Standard (payment of 2.5% of quarterly eligible contract value) – Greater than or equal to 85% (previously 93%) of children in family foster care will be stable in their first placement for six (6) months.
- Silver Standard (payment of 1.5% of quarterly eligible contract value) – Greater than or equal to 75% (previously 88%) of children in family foster care will be stable in their placement for six (6) months.

The table below shows the achievement for the past 5 quarters:

Service Area	FY22 Q1 Percentage	FY22 Q2 Percentage	FY22 Q3 Percentage	FY22 Q4 Percentage	FY23 Q1 Percentage
<b>Western</b>	75	82.7	90	75	79.1
<b>Northern</b>	65	47.8	73.7	70.8	61.1
<b>Eastern</b>	60	84.6	71.4	61.1	35.7
<b>Cedar Rapids</b>	54.3	75	70	70.6	36.8
<b>Des Moines</b>	79.1	50	71.4	76.5	67.5

Data Source: HHS CWIS

## Measure 2 – Recruitment and Retention (Overall Net Increase in Families)

The Contractor shall increase the net number of licensed Foster Families Available for Matching, relative or Fictive Kin identified for a specific Child or Children on an annual basis. The Contractor’s net increase in number of licensed Foster Families will be based on the number of licensed Foster Families Available for Matching, relative or Fictive Kin identified for a specific Child or Children on July 1st at the beginning of each Contract year and the number of licensed Foster Families Available for Matching, relative or Fictive Kin identified for a specific Child or Children on June 30th at the end of that same Contract year.

Contract payment will be made using the following standards (note: the Gold and Silver Standards are mutually exclusive annually and both cannot be earned for the same year) and at the amounts stated below:

Gold Standard: The Agency will make a one-time payment of 2.5% of the yearly eligible Contract value if the Agency determines the Contractor has achieved a greater than or equal to an 8.5 % increase in Foster Families at the end of the Contract year.

Silver Standard: The Agency will make a one-time payment of 1.5% of yearly eligible Contract value if the Agency determines the Contractor has achieved a greater than or equal to 6 % increase in Foster Families at the end of the Contract year.

- Available for matching means a family that is not providing respite only, or is licensed for a specific child, or has accepted a child within the previous 12 months. Baseline numbers were provided for each service area in September 2017. The contract payment for performance is based on the following increases in net number of families during each year per Service Area.

The chart below shows achievement towards the targets:

Service Area	Baseline	Standard	SFY 2022 Target Net Increase	SFY 2022 Achieved
<b>1 (Western)</b>	391	Gold	424	376 Not met
		Silver	414	
<b>2 (Northern)</b>	280	Gold	304	263 Not met
		Silver	297	
<b>3 (Eastern)</b>	175	Gold	190	163 Not met
		Silver	185	
<b>4 (Cedar Rapids)</b>	375	Gold	407	338 Not met
		Silver	398	
<b>5 (Des Moines)</b>	410	Gold	445	400 Not met
		Silver	435	

Data Source: HHS CWIS and Care Match

Four Oaks Family Connections intends to address Resource Family attrition rates and improve Resource Family retention by ensuring each Resource Family is connected to the larger Foster Care and Adoption community through implementation of mentoring program which will pair newer Resource Families with more experienced Resource Families in a voluntary relationship. Additionally, Four Oaks

Family Connections will ensure each Resource Family has access to a readily available peer support group and a Family Connections Caseworker who is deeply knowledgeable about local resources, supports, and services.

### Performance Measure 3 – Recruitment and Retention (Increase in Non-White Families)

The Contractor shall increase the net number of licensed non-white Foster Families Available for Matching, relative or Fictive Kin identified for a specific Child or Children on an annual basis. The Contractor’s net increase in number of licensed non-white Foster Families will be based on the number of licensed non-white Foster Families Available for Matching, relative or Fictive Kin identified for a specific Child or Children on July 1st at the beginning of each Contract year and the number of licensed non-white Foster Families Available for Matching, relative or Fictive Kin identified for a specific Child or Children on June 30th at the end of that same Contract year. The Contract payment for performance is based on the increases in net number of non-white families during each year per Service Area.

The chart below shows achievement towards the targets:

Table 3: RRTS Performance Measure 3				
Service Area	Baseline	Standard	SFY 2022 Target Net Increase	SFY 2022 Achieved
1 (Western)	41	Gold	51	36 Not met
		Silver	48	
2 (Northern)	19	Gold	30	20 Not met
		Silver	27	
3 (Eastern)	16	Gold	24	16 Not met
		Silver	22	
4 (Cedar Rapids)	43	Gold	51	53 Met Gold
		Silver	49	
5 (Des Moines)	54	Gold	72	69 Met Silver
		Silver	68	

Data Source: HHS CWIS and Care Match

## Performance Measure 4 – Enhanced Foster Family Homes

The Enhanced Foster Family Home Performance Measure was eliminated in an amendment with RRTS contractors on July 1, 2022. Reflected in the data below, this was a program that service areas were not able to recruit the foster homes necessary to maintain the enhanced status.

Service Area	July 2022		April 2023	
	Enhanced Homes	Children Placed	Enhanced Homes	Children Placed
<b>1 (Western)</b>	2	2	2	3
<b>2 (Northern)</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>3 (Eastern)</b>	1	1	1	0
<b>4 (Cedar Rapids)</b>	1	0	1	0
<b>5 (Des Moines)</b>	0	0	0	0

Data Source: HHS CWIS and Care Match

HHS continues to collaborate with Iowa Medicaid Enterprises (IME), Mental Health and Disability Services (MHDS) and Targeted Case Management (TCM) on a Therapeutic Foster Home Pilot Project funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The project is intended to enhance the child welfare foster care service array, including providing highly skilled support in family settings for children placed in foster care under Chapter 232 and who have needs exceeding what can safely and properly be addressed in a traditional family foster home setting. A Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) model program for Iowa plans to be implemented by Iowa HHS as a pilot TFC program in July of 2023 in the Cedar Rapids Service Area.

TFC would create opportunities to draw new licensed foster families and financially incentivize existing foster families to accept additional training and services, essentially, becoming professional foster parents. There should be a highly selective process to recruit or promote TFC foster parents—potentially with experience and education backgrounds. They would receive foster parent training and be licensed, but they would also need additional, specialized training. Additional funding is necessary to get the best qualified foster parent and to free them up to spend adequate time with the youth they serve. TFC foster parents would commit to participation in staffing, hearings, school related meetings, Behavioral Health Intervention Services (BHIS), medication management, etc. regarding the care of the children in their home.

TFC will enhance and strengthen Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) under the Medicaid program by building out a process that combines the use of Title IV-E funds for daily living expenses (care and supervision) with an array of HCBS services (care coordination, respite, and family support) for children with severe emotional disturbances to provide children in care with an effective array of services that promote placement stability in family settings and reunification.

The one caseworker model was chosen to strengthen retention efforts. RRTS caseworkers receive assignment of licensed foster families from the time of initial licensure until license expiration. Contract requirements expect that caseworkers have face-to-face visits every other month and phone call support in months when a face-to-face visit did not occur. During the height of COVID and currently as requested, virtual methods continue to be approved.

Iowa also uses the one caseworker model to match children who need foster family care. Care Match is a tool the RRTS contractors use to match a child with the family who can best meet the child’s needs



based on the family's strengths, skills, geographic location, age, and gender of the child. Care Match identifies the families, but the caseworkers are the contact to the family. This model provides families with the assurance of support, and the caseworkers know what supports their families need.

The premise of the one caseworker model was that better matching would enhance stability for children in care. Stability is a paid performance measure and the rate of success varied significantly between service areas and quarters. Table I above shows the rate of stability over the last five quarters.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing issues became more and more challenging in every service area, particularly as variants rapidly became widespread throughout the state. This required juggling of caseloads, prioritizing of tasks, and the staff who were not ill carrying heavier loads for multiple weeks at a time to cover for absent team members. Some service areas continue currently to struggle with getting back to full staffing levels.

Across the 69 counties currently served by Four Oaks Family Connections during this past year, there has been an estimated total of approximately 12 placement "matches" which were delayed, postponed, or cancelled due to either the child in question testing positive or the placement environment having a COVID positive individual. We are unable to estimate the number of "matches" which were declined completely for reasons related to COVID, as there have been a number of foster families who elected to utilize extreme caution in allowing additional children/individuals into their home environment, particularly if a loved one has a compromised immune system or is otherwise at greater risk of significant health complications if exposed to COVID. Close communication and partnership with the Agency, as well as the now routine implementation of virtual communication technologies have significantly eased but not completely mitigated any ongoing impacts from the COVID-19 virus.

Hiring qualified Social Workers has always been a challenge, especially in rural locations. Service Area I has been on a corrective action plan (CAP) for the past reporting period due to caseworker shortages and current caseworkers having caseloads over the contract requirement. Competitive salaries, along with general workforce shortages and limited qualified applicants have greatly impacted the work force and ability to maintain or hire qualified staff.

## **FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLAN**

**A description of the characteristics of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.**

HHS provides data to the contractor to determine recruitment and retention goals and targets. Each service area has a recruitment plan based on the needs of their service area, including data specific to that service area. Recruitment and retention targets for specific populations of children may include:

- Teens
- Sibling groups including those with very young children
- Non-white children
- Children with difficult behaviors (physically aggressive, sexual acting out, impulsivity, etc.)
- Children with significant needs (mental health concerns, developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, medically fragile, etc.)

The data on capacity shows the state has a sufficient number of homes in relation to the number of children in care. However, some children wait in shelter, residential care, or other settings while the

search for a foster home is in process. Having the right foster homes in the right areas at the right time is a challenge. This is especially true for sibling groups of three or more, even if the children are very young. The emphasis of recruiting and retaining families for older children and discouraging families who want to “foster to adopt” very young children resulted in an unintended consequence of not having a sufficient number of foster families for children ages 0 to 5. The data clearly shows just over half of the children in foster care are between 0 and 5 years of age. Iowa needs foster families for young children in sibling groups who respect and participate in reunification efforts.

An ongoing challenge continues to be developing foster families who have the skills, ability, and willingness to care for older youth coming out of congregate care who have difficult behavioral or mental health needs. As stated earlier in this report, in an amendment to the RRTS contract effective July 1, 2022, Enhanced Foster Homes was removed from the contract. The EFH program has struggled since the inception of the RRTS contract, and even with revisions to protocols, has never been able to increase the pool of homes.

RRTS contractors continue to work to raise public awareness of the need for foster/adoptive homes by utilizing strategic community outreach to establish mutually beneficial relationships with local civic and/or child and family serving organizations as well as influential community members. They place a particular emphasis on working with communities of color that have historically been underrepresented as resource families by building trusting and accountable relationships with influential community members as well as the culturally important institutions within that community, such as faith communities or advocacy organizations.

<b>Licensed Foster Families by Service Area</b>	<b>June 2021 Count</b>	<b>June 2022 Count</b>	<b>March 2023 Count</b>
<b>Western</b>	519	478	460
<b>Northern</b>	359	341	299
<b>Eastern</b>	476	210	210
<b>Cedar Rapids</b>	243	445	410
<b>Des Moines</b>	552	542	541
<b>Total</b>	<b>1630</b>	<b>1538</b>	<b>1920</b>

Data Source: Care Match as of 4/1/2023

A primary Recruitment and Retention goal has been to increase the number of Resource Families (including kinship and fictive kin caregivers) available to accept children coming into care with specific and complex needs. To meet this goal, it has been a primary objective to create community awareness emphasizing the valuable and critical role that Resource Families play as a resource to help the child and their family. While educating the communities, we also focused on creating a deeper understanding of the impact of trauma and the loss that children experience due to separation from a child’s family and community. Emphasis to ensure that siblings are placed together and family connections is reinforced. The importance of keeping children in their home schools and communities is continually promoted.

RRTS contractors recognize and reinforce the important work of Iowa’s Adoption Call to Action and promotes permanency and stability for youth who need forever homes. RRTS staff have resumed in-person interviews of youth in group home and shelter settings to better understand the needs of the youth. RRTS staff have identified and engaged resource families who have positively parented teens, sibling groups, and youth with complex needs, to share their passion for foster parenting and their

stories of success. Stories continue to be shared through newspaper as well as through social media on the Contractors Foster Care and Adoption Facebook page to emphasize the ongoing need for families to provide loving and stable homes for youth.

RRTS continues to use outreach and one-on-one communications with currently licensed Resource Families, to promote a better understanding of children who have traditionally been difficult to place. In a bi-monthly newsletter, LSI RRTS continues to include de-identified information about children awaiting placement (sibling groups, teens, and children with complex medical or behavioral needs). RRTS staff reinforces the strengths that the child possesses to help overcome the challenges that they face due to their trauma history. RRTS staff meets individually with children in shelter to get a better understanding of the child's personality and to provide them "a voice" in what they need in a foster care placement.

LSI has established partnerships to build relationships with community organizations, schools, and churches to promote the need for Resource Families, including kin and fictive kin to address trauma needs of children and the contributing factors of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). LSI joined with other community organizations in the Storm Lake area to implement an educational event to address needs of the community in relation to trauma and ACEs, drawing attention to the needs of youth in foster care and the need for resource families who can meet the needs for safety and placement stability with a loving home when reunification cannot occur.

A unique approach to faith-based recruitment opportunities has been strengthened by utilizing established connections with identified faith leaders. The use of use of a monthly newsletter in SAI to Identified Faith leaders asking them to pray for general needs relating to children, families, resource families and caseworkers has been implemented. This creates sensitivity and awareness among Faith Leaders relating to the real struggles and needs that exist in our communities for children and families.

The Family First Preservation Services Act (Family First) continues to significantly impact family foster care. Foster families will be needed to keep children from entering residential care, and to care for children leaving residential care. Foster families who will partner with and mentor a child's family to fully support reunification will also be an increased focus of recruitment and retention.

A Statewide Foster and Adoptive Council was established this reporting period. HHS and RRTS collaborated beginning in August 2022. The importance of hearing foster/adoptive family voice as Iowa's child welfare system continues to evolve in its efforts to improve policy (legislation and rules), practice (how legislation and rules are implemented), and the lived experiences of birth families, children, resource families, and child welfare professionals is the reason why this council was developed. The council is representative of resource families across the State of Iowa and with consideration for race, ethnicity, urban versus rural, sexual orientation, foster/relative/adopt homes, and new/experienced homes. The council meets monthly, has established a leadership board, rules of participation, and terms of service. The council has already reviewed policy at the request of HHS as well as provided feedback to a community group regarding legislation that would impact foster/adoptive parents.

HHS strongly supports keeping children within their families and will continue to encourage more relative caregivers in becoming licensed foster parents. Licensure brings increased financial assistance, concrete supports, and training that unlicensed caregiver do not receive. HHS only waives non-safety standards for relatives to promote licensing.

The Kinship Caregiver Program began on July 1, 2021. All relative/fictive kin placements are eligible for the Kinship Caregiver Program once a relative or fictive kin child has been legally placed in their home. The kinship caregiver will receive a payment of up to \$310/month (\$10/day) for a period of up to six

months. During these six months, HHS will work in collaboration with RRTS contractors, to expedite the licensing process for the kinship caregiver while maintaining consistency in licensing standards for all foster families.

The Kinship Navigator Program also rolled out statewide on July 1, 2021. This program supports kinship caregiver families through HHS's Family Centered Services (FCS) Contract. Kinship Caregivers are eligible for this program for up to four months. The kinship specialist will assist the caregiver with emotional and concrete supports. They will also assist the family with connecting to agencies for financial and childcare assistance.

Best case scenario would be for the HHS SWCM to refer the kinship caregiver to the Kinship Navigator Program once placement occurs. The kinship specialist will assist the caregiver with any supports or needs to stabilize the placement and begin the conversation about the Kinship Caregiver Payment that will start on month three of the placement and the benefits of becoming a licensed foster parent for increased supports. HHS SWCM's will then refer family to the RRTS contractor for them to schedule an informational meeting to give the family an overview of the foster care licensing process.

RRTS contractors have worked collaboratively with the FCS contractors providing the Kinship Navigator programs. The two contractors meet routinely to address kinship caregiver licensing process, program needs, and potential barriers to becoming licensed. HHS licensing staff are also invited to participate in these meetings to help keep the process moving for the kinship caregivers.

The RRTS contractors receive age, race and ethnicity data for every child who exited or entered a foster home each week. The RRTS contractors also use a database called Care Match that records demographic information on foster and adoptive families and on children placed in foster or adoptive homes. They use this data when developing service area specific recruitment plans.

The most recent data regarding race and ethnicity for the children in family foster care are in Table 6 below:

**Table 6: Children in Licensed Family Foster Care as of 4/6/23 by Service Area, Race and Ethnicity**

Licensed Foster Families (Clients) as of 4-6-23 by Service Area, County Size, Race and Ethnicity		# of Counties	American Indian and Alaska Native	African American	Two or more Races	White	Asian	Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander	Other	Hispanic
		Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
Western	Metro	6	25	18	9	83	0	3	3	31
	Urban	18	10	8	4	106	0	3	1	23
	Rural	6	0	0	0	10	0	4	0	0
	Total	30	35	26	13	199	0	10	4	54
Northern	Metro	3	0	13	0	36	1	0	0	2
	Urban	19	4	18	11	119	1	0	1	13
	Rural	5	0	3	1	15	0	0	1	1
	Total	27	4	34	12	170	2	0	2	16
Eastern	Metro	2	0	21	3	52	0	0	2	8
	Urban	7	0	22	8	65	0	2	0	9
	Rural	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
	Total	10	0	43	11	118	0	2	3	17
Cedar Rapids	Metro	5	3	56	18	123	0	2	0	12
	Urban	9	2	2	5	65	1	0	4	12
	Rural	3	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0
	Total	17	5	58	23	195	1	2	4	24
Des Moines	Metro	5	3	81	27	196	4	2	11	36
	Urban	5	0	3	1	37	0	0	4	3
	Rural	5	0	0	1	28	0	0	0	0
	Total	15	3	84	29	261	4	2	15	39
Total	Metro	21	31	189	57	490	5	7	16	89
	Urban	58	16	53	29	392	2	5	10	60
	Rural	20	0	3	2	61	0	4	2	1
	Total	99	47	245	88	943	7	16	28	150

Data source: FACS system data current as of 4/6/23

The population of all children in foster care in Iowa reflects the following statewide demographics.

The most recent data regarding the age for the children in family foster care by Service Area are in Table 7 below:

**Table 7: Children in Licensed foster Family Care by age and gender**

Licensed Foster Families (Clients) as of 4-6-23 by Service Area, County Size, Age and Gender		# of Counties Count	0 to 5			6 to 12			Age 13 +			Total Count
			Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
			Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	
Western	Metro	6	32	30	62	24	19	43	21	15	36	141
	Urban	18	25	14	39	26	18	44	22	27	49	132
	Rural	6	4	1	5	2	2	4	1	4	5	14
	Total	30	61	45	106	52	39	91	44	46	90	287
Northern	Metro	3	14	9	23	4	8	12	10	5	15	50
	Urban	19	32	32	64	23	24	47	19	24	43	154
	Rural	5	6	5	11	0	3	3	4	2	6	20
	Total	27	52	46	98	27	35	62	33	31	64	224
Eastern	Metro	2	19	23	42	13	15	28	3	5	8	78
	Urban	7	25	26	51	14	14	28	10	8	18	97
	Rural	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2
	Total	10	44	49	93	27	29	56	14	14	28	177
Cedar Rapids	Metro	5	46	55	101	38	24	62	17	22	39	202
	Urban	9	19	12	31	15	14	29	10	9	19	79
	Rural	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	5	1	6	7
	Total	17	66	67	133	53	38	91	32	32	64	288
Des Moines	Metro	5	74	64	138	53	47	100	34	52	86	324
	Urban	5	5	6	11	6	7	13	10	11	21	45
	Rural	5	4	5	9	6	3	9	3	8	11	29
	Total	15	83	75	158	65	57	122	47	71	118	398
Statewide	Metro	21	185	181	366	132	113	245	85	99	184	795
	Urban	58	106	90	196	84	77	161	71	79	150	507
	Rural	20	15	11	26	8	8	16	14	16	30	72
	Total	99	306	282	588	224	198	422	170	194	364	1374

Data source: FACS system data current as of 4/6/23

## Specific strategies to reach out to all parts of the community.

Service area recruitment plans cover the entire area; however, prioritized areas are identified based on the demographics and geographic location of children coming into care. Service areas analyze data to determine which geographic locations children are removed from and prioritize those areas to have a sufficient number of foster/adoptive families, while also recruiting throughout the area.

Research and experience show the best form of recruitment is family to family. RRTS staff consistently engages current foster and adoptive parents to act as ambassadors for foster care in their home communities. Ambassadors use their personal and professional networks to raise awareness of the need for foster families in their communities.

Strategies common to all service areas include:

- Engaging faith-based organizations and houses of worship in all communities, especially non-white communities;
- Partnering with local media outlets, especially non-white;
- Partnering with local businesses and civic organizations;
- Reaching out to schools, child care providers, and other agencies that serve families;
- Family to family resources such as “tool kits” with recruitment information, and educating current foster families on the needs in their own communities to assist in outreach;
- Partnering with schools to provide information on foster and adoptive parenting in children’s Virtual Backpacks;
- Use of social media such as Facebook to provide information both publicly and through designated groups;
- Collaborating with community partners to host National Adoption Month and National Foster Care Month activities; and
- Partnering with Pridefest organizers to raise awareness of the need for foster families for LGBTQI+ children in care as well as to recruit prospective foster and adoptive parents from the LGBTQI+ community.

RRTS contractors also identified service area specific partners to assist in planning retention activities as well as provide donations of funds and goods. Examples of these activities include:

- Western Service Area – In Western Iowa, the partnership between LSI and the Urban Native Center has continued to reinforce the importance of maintaining Native American Culture and Traditions for Native American youth in foster care or adoptive homes. The Urban Native Center provides cultural opportunities including after school activities and events for children and families of all ages. LSI has also continued to take an active role in the March to Honor Lost Children Event, which occurs every year in November to honor children who have been lost through the foster care system, the goal of maintaining Native American Youth in Native American families. LSI participates in CINCF (Community Initiative for Native Children and Families) in Sioux City to promote wellness and quality for the Native American population in the Siouxland. Cultural connections have also expanded to promote enhanced minority connections for resource families with LSI developing partnerships with LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) out of the Denison, IA location. Partnerships with recruitment events and media involvement in promoting the need for resource families who can maintain a child’s culture and traditions.

During the past year, LSI has provided Retention events throughout Western Iowa in collaboration with other community agencies and organizations. Involvement in the Community Coalition meetings in several counties including Audubon, Buena Vista, Carroll, Crawford, Ida, Plymouth, and

Sac counties has allowed for collaborations to promote the needs of resource families. Numerous agencies and organizations recognize the valuable role that resource parents play in the life of children and families and have taken additional steps to support resource families in Western Iowa. The Junior League and Iowa School of Beauty teamed together to provide Hair Cut vouchers for children in out-of-home care in Sioux City and surrounding communities and partnered with LSI RRTS caseworkers to have these distributed.

Faith-based organizations also contribute to retention and training events by providing spaces for the events and appreciation door prizes during National Foster Care Month. Some of these organizations include the Church of Christ and St. John's Lutheran Church in Council Bluffs, St. Mark's, St. Luke's, Sunnybrook in Sioux City, Bethany Lutheran and Faith in Spencer, First Lutheran in Milford, First Reformed in Sanborn, Ransom Church in Rock Rapids and Good News in Okoboji. Numerous individuals and organizations donate to the Back-to-School Events including the faith-based organizations listed as well as other community organizations. In Council Bluffs, the Church of Christ sponsored a Back-to-School Carnival and RRTS staff volunteer time to assist with this event. Stephen's Center for Behavioral Health has developed a family support center providing trainings to resource parents as well as support activities for resource families and ask RRTS providers to help serve on their executive board.

Kings and Queens Organization out of Okoboji specifically provides support events to resource families in their area. In Northwest Iowa, organizations such as the Setting Anchors, Katelyn's Fund, and Kings and Queens, all provide various support opportunities for resource families including establishing training focused support groups. Beauty Amidst the Ashes has developed a positive collaboration with RRTS services and also provides recruitment and retention support, trainings, and donations for resource families as well as bike donations for youth across Iowa. Every year a Holiday Dinner and Activities for foster families and Christmas donations are provided to foster children through the "Share My Smile" organization out of the Pottawattamie and Harrison County areas in Iowa with RRTS staff donating time and resources to assist with the implementation of the events. In Sioux City, Spencer, Storm Lake, Denison, and Council Bluffs, the mayors issued proclamations for National Foster Care Month. There are also many individual connections between RRTS staff and identified anchor agencies in the communities where they reside that promote the need for resource families who can meet the needs of the children coming into care across Western Iowa.

- Northern Service Area – Four Oaks Family Connections recruiter spoke with the DEI group at the Tomy Outlet Store in Dyersville on November 22, 2022. The western part of Dyersville is in the Northern Service Area. We had over 30 people attend to learn about the need for foster and adoptive families in the area. We left flyers, chip clips, and wrist lanyards for the employees. We encouraged them to talk to other about the needs as well.

Efforts to recruit diverse families continued during the third quarter. Recruitment materials reflecting diverse families continue to be utilized throughout the state, including regular posts on social media. A Spanish/English orientation was held in March 2023. A bilingual foster parent ambassador donated her time and skills to translate this orientation. It was advertised in English and Spanish via social media, the family connections newsletter, and caseworkers were encouraged to talk with Spanish-speaking foster families about spreading the word.

The Northern Service Area continues to utilize connections and partnerships with CPPC/DECAT groups during the third quarter. Recruitment materials and information about lunch and learns were



sent out to call CPPC/DECAT groups in the Northern Service Area in March 2023. We sent emails to their distribution lists with flyers to send out to the group. These CPPC/DECAT groups have a focus on addressing the root causes and impacts of disparity/disproportionality of families of color who care child welfare system involved.

Faith-based outreach continued in the fourth quarter. Another faith-based outreach event was scheduled in June. This event was open to the public and was inclusive of all faithers, and faith-based organizations. The purpose of these events is to provide faith-based communities with foster care recruitment and retention suggestions and to allow a time where faith-based communities can share with one another the challenges and successes they see with faith-based foster family recruitment and support. This even was held virtually to allow to anyone to attend.

- Eastern Service Area – Four Oaks Family Connections attended the quarterly meeting for Nonprofits of Clinton County on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022. There were 42 members of other nonprofits in attendance. During the meeting, it was announced that there will be a website in the works that will roll out in the next month that will be available to the public. This website will host a community calendar in which any nonprofits can list the date of their activity and ask for volunteers. Community members can sign up to help with any needs that a nonprofit has. All nonprofits will be able to see what others are doing and possibly team up to make the events even bigger and better, reaching more of the community.

Four Oaks Family Connections was able to present in front of the Clinton County Women’s Golf Association on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022. Approximately 20 women were present to hear about the need for foster and adoptive families. We also discussed the need for more African American and LGBTQ-friendly homes in Clinton County. The presentation addressed ways to encourage and support local families already fostering. Pamphlets were left with attendees, providing information on how they could get involved.

Four Oaks Family Connections partnered with the CPPC group in our southern counties: Des Moines, Lee, Henry, and Louisa. We distributed our flyer to all their contacts via email with a description of the material, “More African American Homes and the LGBTQ Friendly Homes.”

Four Oaks Family Connections was invited to speak at the November 10<sup>th</sup> meeting at the Counsel of Social Agencies. There were 12 other businesses and/or nonprofits present. We distributed flyers to all attendees and discussed the need for more African American and LGBTQ-friendly homes in Clinton County. The audience asked many questions about how we can all work together to better support our foster families and the children already in foster care with our communities.

Four Oaks Family Connections was able to meet with the community outreach department of Mercy Hospital on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. There were 7 employees present. We were able to present information for the needs for more diverse families in the community. Staff also gave information on how local businesses can help recruit more families and support our families already caring for children in the community.

- Cedar Rapids Service Area – Four Oaks Family Connections have partnered with a provider through the Area Substance Abuse Council (ASAC) who provided an excellent in-service training. This provider is passionate about being a positive African American role model and plans to be a guest speaker during pre-service training classes in the upcoming quarter. She plans to promote understanding to cultural issues but also about substance abuse issues in the pre-service stage of training.

To recruit foster and adoptive families who are culturally competent and demonstrate the skills related to cultural humility, several efforts were made in this quarter in terms of engaging with the community, specific service providers, and vendors at cultural events. Events provided the opportunity for outreach and distribution of promotional flyers. Events included the following:

July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022 – Marion Alliance for Racial Equality (MARE) Unity Rally

September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022 – Intercultural event which included cultural fashion show, panel discussion, international food sampling, and kid-friendly activities.

September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022 – Women’s Art Festival providing activities, sharing art, and raising awareness for advocacy for women of all ages.

Family Connections has partnered with AMP to bring the message of need regarding families that will provide care to children over the age of 14. Family Connections also partnered with Families Helping Families to collaborate a back-to-school drive to ensure children in foster care have what they need for school and a Holiday Party was put on in December for foster and adoptive families. Applebee’s and Panda Express provided fundraisers and gave a percentage of the meals purchased back to Four Oaks Family Connections. Another partnering with Family Connections has been with members of the Marion Alliance for Racial Equality (MARE) which included provisions of Four Oaks fliers to be shared with other members to promote diversity among foster parent applicants. Extending Grace provided care packages and supplies to children in care. They also provided meals for the first few days of placement to help foster families acclimate to additional people in the household. Family Connections also partnered with the Oskaloosa Student Council, Centerville Student Council, and Denton Community Student Council regarding donations for foster children.

- Des Moines Service Area – Recruitment was on the Des Moines Service Area Staff meeting agenda this quarter. The recruitment coordinator equipped caseworkers to identify potential foster parent ambassadors and engage them in recruitment. Packets of recruitment materials were distributed to each caseworker that can be given to families. Packets included general flyers, as well as flyers that target specific demographics such as churches, Spanish speakers, LGBTQ families/individuals, and African American families/individuals. These packets also included flyers for businesses, nonprofits, and churches highlighting ways that they can get involved in recruitment and support of foster families. Vinyl stickers, a poster, and the business card were also included.

The Des Moines recruitment coordinator met with a foster parent ambassador who is a member of the Corinthian Baptist Church. Corinthian Baptist is a large, primarily African American church in Des Moines. Many members of the WIN in NAACP group are attendees there. They expressed an interest in advocating for African American children in foster care. This foster parent was given

recruitment materials targeting both African American families as the faith-based community, as well as information on how churches can get involved. She intends to take this information back to her church leadership and anticipates partnering with Four Oaks for recruitment. There is a potential to also use their building as a training location, and a ministry to provide ongoing support to any families that choose to be licensed.

Efforts to recruit diverse families continued during the third quarter. Recruitment materials reflecting diverse families continue to be utilized throughout the state including regular posts on social media. A Spanish/English orientation was held in March 2023. A bilingual foster parent ambassador donated her time and skills to translate this orientation. It was advertised in English and Spanish via social media, the Family Connections newsletter, and caseworkers were encouraged to talk with Spanish-speaking foster families about spreading the word. This event was also advertised to the Coalition of Latino Service Providers, CPPC groups, and on the AI Exito Facebook page – an organization that advocates for educational opportunity for Latino students. Five people registered for this event. While this number is small, it is more than we have seen in the past.

### **Diverse methods of disseminating both general information about being a foster/adoptive parent and child specific information**

Recruitment plans combine general recruitment activities with targeted recruitment activities based on the needs of the service area. Examples of general recruitment activities are:

- Recruitment teams engage local media outlets by providing staff or resource families for interviews;
- Use of print and electronic media for general recruitment such as the use of public service announcements (PSAs), and promotions for upcoming events;
- Providing brochures and conducting presentations to businesses, churches, child care centers, medical facilities or other entities who serve families;
- Providing information in children’s virtual backpacks;
- Conducting presentations at cultural, faith based, service organizations, schools, and other community organizations.

During the COVID pandemic, contractors have continued to focus on alternative options for engaging the community and creating a strong message of the need for resource families who can care for children while working to engage the child’s birth family. Community awareness of the trauma needs of children and an understanding of ACES has promoted a new approach while recruiting resource families. Contractors have used the following options to recruit potential resource families:

- Bi-monthly newsletters to licensed Resource Families with messaging relating to their value in helping children and families.
- Continued organic growth of the LSI Foster Care and Adoption Facebook page, which currently has 1,300-plus followers and 1,300-plus likes, most of whom reside in Service Area I.
- Family to family recruitment and engagement opportunities are used whenever possible (during recruitment, orientation, pre-service, peer support, training etc.). Resource families are provided with recruitment materials to share in their communities.
- LSI spotlights foster and adoption success stories to educate the public through variety of media options.

The most successful recruitment tool has been to continue with our family-to-family approach in recruitment of resource families. To do this, LSI caseworkers provided currently licensed or retiring resource families with packets of brochures, fliers, and contact cards to share with potential foster care applicants.

Child specific recruitment through the recruitment and retention contract for a child in foster care is more difficult due to the time it takes to license a family. The child's team, including the contractor, works together to identify any currently licensed families, relatives, or other people in the child's life who may be placement resources. However, the RRTS contractors provide relative and fictive kin caregivers referred by HHS the information on becoming licensed and the supports that comes with licensure.

RRTS contractors also provide information to HHS on families interested in adoption when a child's current caregivers are not a permanency option. HHS is often not aware of families only approved to adopt. These families provide profile information to the RRTS contractors who then assist HHS in matching a child in need of permanency with a family who can meet the child's needs.

Four Oaks continues to have a contract with Wendy's Wonderful Kids to help in finding adoptive homes for children in need of permanency through two statewide recruiters. Adoption staff can refer a child who needs a permanent family when other options have been exhausted.

### **Strategies for assuring that all prospective foster/ adoptive parents have access to agencies that license/approve foster/adoptive parents, including location and hours of services so that the agencies can be accessed by all members of the community**

Each contractor has a website and toll-free number for any prospective foster or adoptive family to contact to receive information and to enroll in an orientation. Orientations occur in groups and individually to explain the licensing/approval process, begin the record check process, and enroll families in pre-service training. The contract requires pre-service training to be available to interested families within 60 days of completing orientation and within 60 miles of the family's home. Families may choose to attend later trainings due to preference or scheduling, or training in another area if space is available.

HHS has continued to take significant steps to ensure the safety and well-being of those we serve during the COVID-19 pandemic. On January 18, 2022, HHS provided guidance to the RRTS contractors stating that they could decide whether the TIPS-MAPP/NTDC or any other pre-service trainings or other approved foster parent trainings would occur in person or through video conferencing. The preference would be that applicants participate in person, however, the Agency acknowledged that there would be circumstances where virtual trainings would be deemed more appropriate and safer. Upon writing this report, most of the pre-service trainings are being held in-person although the option of virtual pre-service is still an option due to rural transportation issues.

Although, HHS granted foster care licensing waivers during the first year of the pandemic so that home studies would not be delayed, these waivers have not been necessary this reporting period except for some issues with well testing taking longer than expected.

RRTS contractors began using the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) for pre-service training on July 1, 2022. Below is the number of trainings held in each service area from May 2022 through April 2023:

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Number of NTDC Trainings</b>
<b>Western</b>	12
<b>Northern</b>	26
<b>Eastern</b>	24
<b>Cedar Rapids</b>	64
<b>Des Moines</b>	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>
Data Source: RRTS monthly reports	

Pre-service trainings occur in various locations in each service area to meet the contract requirement that prospective families receive training within 60 miles of their home. HHS and contractors continued to have discussions discussing a plan for a mix of virtual and in-person pre-service training options; at this time most trainings are now in-person.

Each service area offers ongoing training several times a month. RRTS contractors allow families from other areas to attend training when there is space available. This allows flexibility for families to find training in another service area that may be closer, more convenient, and specific to a skill or information the family needs. Each contractor’s website lists the trainings with information on how to register. The offering of on-going virtual trainings for foster parents will continue to be offered moving forward in addition to in-person trainings.

Four Oaks Family Connections spent the previous year training, coaching, and providing Quality Improvement for Caseworkers to improve their on-going discussion with Resource Families regarding the importance of in-service training, identifying, and recommending training topics that are relevant to each individual Resource Families experience with caregiving, and documenting those discussions thoroughly. This has resulted in overall improvement in our Caseworker’s constant engagement with Resource Families on the topic of training, better documentation of that engagement, and more diligent tracking of the training Resource Families have obtained.

### **Strategies for training staff to work with diverse communities including cultural, racial, and socio-economic variations**

For additional information on HHS staff training on working with diverse communities, please see *Attachment 8D: Iowa’s FFY 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), Training Plan*.

Contractor staff receives ongoing training provided by experts or specialists in areas of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Examples of these trainings include LGBTQI+ training by an advocacy and educational organization or representatives from refugee communities who discuss the culture specific to their homeland.

Four Oaks Family Connections staff are members of the statewide Cultural Equity Alliance and participate in localized Breakthrough Series Collaborative groups working to address disparity and disproportionality in child welfare. Additionally, Four Oaks Family Connections works closely with the

Iowa State University Child Welfare Training and Research Project to host and conduct Racial Equity Learning Exchanges to community members, Resource Families, child welfare professionals and stakeholders. Each of these efforts provide meaningful and substantive opportunities to not only recruit additional Resource Families, but to participate in activities that promote child stability and Resource Family Retention. Two examples of the benefits of these efforts are: highlighting the disparities in placement stability of children of color versus their white counterparts during Resource Family pre-service training to encourage new Resource Families to use a culturally sensitive lens in responding to children's behavior; and providing training to professionals and Resource Families about caring for and working with LGBTQI+-identified youth.

In the Western Service Area, LSI conducts annual contract training in July and an all-staff retreat in September to further address program needs, contract requirements and implementation tools for documentation, and resource family support and development planning. In order to emphasize the program contract requirements monthly all staff meetings are held in western Iowa to reinforce strategies to achieve and ensure contract compliance as well as ensure quality services are provided to families across western Iowa. Quality assurance protocols are put in place with all home studies going through two reviews before being sent to Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.

Native American TIPS-MAPP pre-service training occurs in northwest Iowa to provide more culturally responsive training to prospective Native American foster and adoptive families. Three staff members with Meskwaki Family Services are certified trainers in Native American TIPS-MAPP. Meskwaki Family Services plans to hold three pre-service trainings a year for families on and off the settlement.

RRTS contractors also engaged African American, Latino, and LGBTQI+ foster and adoptive parents to act as Ambassadors. Ambassadors are the face of foster parenting and participate in presentations, outreach, training, and other recruitment and retention activities. RRTS contractors also worked to have employed recruiters of diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.

## **Non-discriminatory fee structures**

Families who apply to become foster parents or adoptive parents through the HHS are not charged any fees for a home study or to attend pre-service training. The recruitment and retention contract includes the cost of record checks and home studies. Families must take CPR and First Aid training prior to initial licensure and must keep their certification current after licensure. Families also may have fees for water testing in rural areas. Families receive a \$100.00 stipend each year to help cover the costs of required ongoing training. However, most of the training offered by the RRTS contractors is free.

## **Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a child needing an adoptive placement, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.**

The RRTS contractors are responsible for child specific recruitment for waiting children. Examples of these recruitment activities include:

- Registering waiting children on the national adoption exchange through AdoptUSKids;

- Displaying the Heart Gallery throughout the state;
- Partnering with a local television station to present a waiting child on a regular segment called “Wednesday’s Child”; and
- Partnering with Wendy’s Wonderful Kids.

HHS is responsible for selecting the adoptive family that will best meet the needs of the child, not the race or ethnicity of the family in relation to the child. Transracial adoptions are common, and children do not wait for a home based on the race or ethnicity.

Children in need of an adoptive home have their photos listed on the Iowa Adoption Exchange on the Lutheran Services in Iowa and the Four Oaks websites, as well as on the AdoptUSKids website. A child must be registered on the Iowa exchange within 60 days of termination of parental rights unless the child meets a deferral reason. Reasons to defer a child are:

- The child is in an adoptive placement.
- The child’s foster parents or another person with a significant relationship is being considered as the adoptive family.
- The child needs diagnostic study or testing to clarify the child’s needs and provide an adequate description of them which is limited to 90 days.
- The child receives medical care or mental health treatment, and the child’s care or treatment provider determined that meeting prospective adoptive parents is not in the child’s best interest and deferral is limited to 120 days.
- The child is 14 years of age or older and will not consent to an adoptive plan, and the consequences of not being adopted have been explained to the child.
- The termination of parental rights is under appeal by the birth parents and foster parents or other persons with a significant relationship continue to be considered as the prospective adoptive family.

RRTS contractors work with HHS staff to arrange photos for registration on AdoptUSKids, for the Heart Gallery, and to photo list children on the respective websites. HHS staff is responsible for referring children for photo listing. RRTS staff list children on the state and nation exchanges and manage the Heart Gallery.

Please see Appendix A: Diligent Recruitment Five Year Plan.

## Appendix A: Strategies and Activities to Develop Diligent Recruitment Plan

<b>Goal:</b> To have sufficient statewide capacity in family foster care in order to improve stability and keep children close to their home communities.			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Benchmarks</b>
FFY 2020 (10/1/19 to 9/30/20)	<p>Propose models of family foster care for children with high needs.</p> <p>Use a needs assessment to identify gaps in services and supports for children and foster families.</p> <p>Develop a process to expedite licensing relative caregivers.</p> <p>Develop consistent messaging to support the role of foster families as service providers to achieve reunification between children and their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a collaborative group between RRTS, family centered service providers, congregate care providers, foster/adoptive parents and DHS develop a work plan.</li> <li>• Use available data to identify reasons for instability.</li> <li>• Explore ways congregate care providers and RRTS contractor can collaborate and support children and caregivers to implement the Family First Preservation Services Act.</li> <li>• Research available models of therapeutic foster family care.</li> <li>• Determine resources needed to implement a therapeutic model.</li> <li>• Review the licensing process to find ways to shorten the process for relatives and kin caregivers.</li> <li>• Identify barriers for family-to-family interactions.</li> <li>• Research models of engagement such as Icebreaker meetings.</li> <li>• Put together talking points on the role of foster parents to mentor a child's parents and support reunification for use by DHS, RRTS, and other stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team members will be identified by 12/1/2019</li> <li>• Goals and strategies will be identified by the team by 3/31/2020</li> <li>• Provide recommendations to DHS leadership on to improve overall stability in family foster care by 9/1/2020.</li> </ul> <p>4/30/20 Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provisional Licensing for relatives is in the initial planning stages in order to provide financial assistance during the foster care licensing process.</li> <li>- Enhanced Foster Homework Group developed to review the criteria of EFH families, referral process, and the challenges that foster homes faced as an EFH.</li> <li>- Foster Parent Advisory Group being explored to ensure their voice is heard in the child welfare system.</li> </ul>



**Goal:** To have sufficient statewide capacity in family foster care in order to improve stability and keep children close to their home communities.

Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- COVID-19 Pandemic has definitely been a barrier for family-to-family interactions</li> <li>- A Family Engagement Work Group was established in 2018-2019 that generated a document defining the Roles of foster parents that would need to be updated due to changes in DHS's delivery of services.</li> </ul> <p><b>4/30/22 Update</b> Ice Breaker meetings are being added to the next RRTS contract to establish a relationship between the foster parent and bio parent/guardian. This meeting will be led by the DHS worker with the RRTS support worker also in attendance.</p> <p><b>4/17/23 UPDATE:</b> Bridge meetings and Comfort calls were piloted in the Western and Cedar Rapids services areas from 12/1/22 – 3/31/23. Evaluation of the pilot is currently occurring, and discussions will begin regarding a statewide implementation.</p>

**Goal:** To have sufficient statewide capacity in family foster care in order to improve stability and keep children close to their home communities.

Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
			<p><b>4/17/23 UPDATE cont.</b></p> <p>The Foster and Adoptive Advisory Council of Iowa was established in 12/22 and started having meetings 1/23. There are three foster/adoptive/kin homes per service area on this council.</p> <p>Enhanced foster homes were removed from the RRTS contract via amendment on 7/1/22.</p> <p>DHS continues to collaborate with Iowa Medicaid Enterprises (IME), Mental Health and Disability Services (MHDS) and Targeted Case Management (TCM) on a Therapeutic Foster Home Pilot Project funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). A TFC pilot will begin on 7/1/23 in Cedar Rapids Services Area.</p>
FFY 2021 (10/1/2020 to 9/30/2021)	Develop a process to expedite licensing relative caregivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-establish a collaborative group between RRTS, family centered service providers, congregate care providers, foster/adoptive parents and DHS develop a work plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team members will be identified by 12/1/20</li> </ul>

**Goal:** To have sufficient statewide capacity in family foster care in order to improve stability and keep children close to their home communities.

Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
	<p>Develop consistent messaging to support the role of foster families as service providers to achieve reunification between children and their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to review the licensing process to find ways to shorten the process for relatives and kin caregivers.</li> <li>• Put together talking points on the role of foster parents to mentor a child’s parents and support reunification for use by DHS, RRTS, and other stakeholders</li> <li>• Establish a RRTS RFP team to discuss non-negotiables and desired outcomes for upcoming RRTS procurement to be released 5/2022.</li> <li>• Utilize various approaches to gather and share information with internal and external partners, consumers, community members, and the public (RFI, survey, town hall meetings, focus groups, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals and strategies will be identified by the team by 3/31/2021</li> <li>• Provide recommendations to DHS leadership on to improve overall stability in family foster care by 9/1/2021.</li> </ul> <p>4/30/21 Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A collaborative group was re-established between RRTS, FCS providers, congregate care providers, and DHS to develop plans for children transitioning from QRTP to a foster care placement that may include an enhanced foster home, and develop supports that will stabilize and maintain the placement.</li> <li>- The Kinship Caregiver Program was developed to financially support relatives/fictive kin and educate them on the benefits and supports of becoming a licensed foster parent. This program will allow relative/fictive kin placements six months of a \$300 stipend while they are working with</li> </ul>

**Goal:** To have sufficient statewide capacity in family foster care in order to improve stability and keep children close to their home communities.

Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
			<p>RRTS in order to become licensed. DHS will waive a majority of the non-safety requirements for licensing to expedite the licensing process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The role of foster parents in mentoring foster children's parents has been a discussion in contractor calls. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus has shifted to supporting foster parents in maintaining the children currently placed in their home as they have been extremely overwhelmed with the increased responsibilities of home schooling, lack of social interaction, lack of daycare and other normal supports.</li> <li>- A planning team was formed consisting of DHS policy and fiscal staff to review the current RRTS contract to develop a plan to gain necessary information in writing the upcoming RRTS</li> </ul>

**Goal:** To have sufficient statewide capacity in family foster care in order to improve stability and keep children close to their home communities.

Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
			<p>procurement. These planning meetings began in 2/2021 and continue on a weekly basis.</p> <p><b>4/30/22 Update</b>            Kinship Caregiver Payment began 7/1/21 statewide for relative/fictive kin caregivers that have a child legally placed in their home. This is a \$10/day, up to \$310/month payment provides financial assistance to bridge the gap until they become a licensed foster parent. The Kinship Navigator Program also rolled out on 7/1/21 statewide which also provides support to relative/fictive kin placements by assisting them with supports/guidance and beginning the discussion regarding becoming a licensed foster parent. These two programs work collaboratively together to ensure that the caregivers are both financially and emotionally supported. Kinship Navigator workers will notify DHS when the family is ready to be referred to RRTS. DHS will waive most of the non-safety requirements to expedite the licensing process</p>

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Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
			<p><b>4/30/22 Updates continued –</b></p> <p>Procurement Teams were developed for the RRTS contracts.</p> <p>There were nine listening sessions to gather stakeholder feedback from 6/21-8/21.</p> <p>Three teams were developed for the RRTS RFP - a Core Drafting Team, a Report out Team and a Larger Group Review Team were developed. These teams have worked together in the drafting, review, revision and ultimately posting of the RRTS RFP. Phase one was 11/21-1/22, Phase two was 2/22-3/22, and Phase three is 3/22-5/22.</p>
<p>FFY 2022 (10/1/2021 to 9/30/2022)</p>	<p>Prioritize recommendations from the workgroup for implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an implementation timeline.</li> <li>• Develop tools, training, and communication to implement recommendations.</li> <li>• Establish baseline data to determine progress</li> <li>• Draft RRTS RFP in 2/2022(Begin with an outline to capture important ideas and</li> </ul>	<p>Documents and training completed according to the implementation timeline</p> <p><b>4/30/22 Update</b></p> <p>DHS is collaborating with Iowa Medicaid Enterprises (IME), Mental Health and Disability Services</p>

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Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
		<p>begin with a well-organized structure for the scope of work)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release RRTS RFP in 5/2022 - Bid Opportunities Open To Public, Procurement Opens</li> </ul>	<p>(MHDS) and Targeted Case Management (TCM) on a Therapeutic Foster Home Pilot Project funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The project is intended to enhance the child welfare foster care service array, including providing highly skilled support in family settings for children placed in foster care under Chapter 232 and who have needs exceeding what can safely and properly be addressed in a traditional family foster home setting. A Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) model program for Iowa plans to be implemented by Iowa DHS as a pilot TFC program in 2023.</p> <p>RRTS RFP has been completed and will be posted to the DHS website for bids in early May 2022.</p> <p><b>4/17/23 UPDATE</b></p> <p>TANF/Kinship Caregiver payment work group established to research TANF funding options for Iowa to move from the current 100% State funding stream.</p>

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Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
			<p>RRTS Contract awarded to Four Oaks Family Connections to begin 7/1/23.</p> <p>Mentoring program for newly licensed foster homes will begin with the new RRTS contract on 7/1/23.</p>
<p>FFY 2023 (10/1/22 to 9/30/23)</p>	<p>Continue to monitor progress toward identified outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise annual recruitment and retention plans as needed to meet goals.</li> <li>• Review data to assess effectiveness of strategies</li> <li>• Make modifications to the plan and strategies based on assessment of progress.</li> <li>• Hold quarterly meetings in each service area to address strengths, needs, and strategies to improve performance.</li> <li>• DHS announces successful bidder for new RRTS contract.</li> </ul>	<p>Increased stability in family foster care from the baseline.</p> <p><b>4/17/23 UPDATE</b> RRTS state-wide contract awarded to Four Oaks Family Connections to start 7/1/23.</p> <p>Quarterly visits occurring in each service area discussing strengths, needs, and strategies to improve performance.</p> <p>Four Oaks implementing interventions to improve the “resource family flow”.</p> <p><b>4/17/23 UPDATE cont.</b></p>



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Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
			<p>For example – the process from inquiry and application through licensure and approval. FO will seek to ensure a thorough but expeditious process in which resource families feel valued and needed.</p> <p>Four Oaks intends to partner closely with HHS to make improvements to the data systems responsibly for tracking and reporting and tracking resource flow information. HHS and RRTS staff are currently working with Five Points on data and programming enhancements.</p>
<p>FFY 2024 (10/1/23 to 9/30/24)</p>	<p>Continue to monitor progress toward identified outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise annual recruitment and retention plans as needed to meet goals.</li> <li>• Review data to assess effectiveness of strategies</li> <li>• Make modifications to the plan and strategies based on assessment of progress.</li> <li>• Hold quarterly meetings in each service area to address strengths, needs, and strategies to improve performance.</li> <li>• New RRTS contract begins 7/1/2023.</li> </ul>	<p>Increased stability in family foster care from the baseline.</p>
<p>FFY 2025</p>	<p>Continue to monitor progress toward identified outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise annual recruitment and retention plans as needed to meet goals.</li> </ul>	<p>Increased stability in family foster care from the baseline</p>

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Year	Strategies	Activities	Benchmarks
(10/1/24 to 9/30/25)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review data to assess effectiveness of strategies</li> <li>• Make modifications to the plan and strategies based on assessment of progress.</li> <li>• Hold quarterly meetings in each service area to address strengths, needs, and strategies to improve performance.</li> </ul>	