

Virginia Department of Social Services

Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan

2019-2024

2022 update

Introduction

Virginia's social services system is state supervised and locally administered, with the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) providing direction, oversight, and support to the 120 local departments of social services (LDSS) which serve the children and families of Virginia. VDSS partners with the LDSS, and faith-based and non-profit organizations, to support the continuum of placement services and provide resources to temporarily meet the needs of children while their parents work to address the issues which brought the children into care. LDSS and Licensed Child Placing Agencies (LCPA) are responsible for approving foster and adoptive families based on specific Code requirements and regulatory standards. Virginia's resource families are dually approved to foster and when appropriate, adopt, and the approval process is a mutual endeavor between the LDSS or LCPA and the family requesting approval.

The Virginia Children's Services Practice Model

The Virginia Children's Services System Practice Model sets forth a vision for the services that are delivered by all child serving agencies across the Commonwealth, especially the Departments of Social Services, Juvenile Justice, Education, Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Office of Children's Services. The practice model is central to all decision-making, present in all meetings, and in every interaction that takes place with a child or family.

- We believe that all children and communities deserve to be safe.
- We believe in family, child, and youth-driven practice.
- We believe that children do best when raised in families.
- We believe that all children and youth need and deserve a permanent family.
- We believe in partnering with others to support child and family success in a system that is family focused, child-centered, and community-based.
- We believe that how we do our work is as important as the work we do.

Virginia's practice model aligns with VDSS' commitment to improve foster care practices in Virginia and its mission to protect children and promote healthy families. By strengthening partnerships with public and private child welfare agencies and key stakeholders VDSS will promote a kin first culture that prioritizes placement of children in family based settings.

Alignment

As part of VDSS' goal to strengthen Virginia's Child Welfare system there have been ongoing, statewide efforts to provide local departments with supports and tools needed to increase the pool of available foster homes. The Child and Family Services Review conducted in 2017, the subsequent Program Improvement Plan and most recently the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee completed in 2019, have provided clear direction for Virginia to implement a Diligent Recruitment Strategic Plan.

CFSR/PIP

Conducted between April 1, 2017 and June 1 2017 the third round of the Virginia's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), indicated that although progress was made towards improving Virginia's child welfare system, there remain significant areas in need of improvement. VDSS's CFSR Program Improvement Plan (PIP) identified areas of concern to include:

- Foster families who can provide for the identified needs of the child;
- Placing children with relatives while in Foster Care;
- Moving children from Foster Care to permanency; and,
- Achieving permanency in a timely manner.

Review of placement data for the cohort of children who entered and exited care from July 2011 through March 2017, showed 40% of children with one placement, 21% of children with two placements, and 20% of children with three or more placements. The data further showed that the number of placements went up as the child's length of time in care increased; although this aggregate number would also include cases where placement changes were related to the goal.

A significant need, as identified by LDSS staff, are foster home placements for teenagers (approximately 38% of the foster care population) with foster parents who are trained and have supports necessary to meet the needs of older children (e.g., intensive case management, specialized services for children, etc.). LDSS supervisors and workers participated in Town Halls across the state and also reported that they struggle to find appropriate foster home placements for sibling groups, African American children and youth (approximately 30% of the foster care population). It was further reported that treatment foster care homes are no better equipped to

support children who exhibit difficult behaviors than are locally approved foster homes resulting in many children being placed in congregate care facilities.

The lack of data related to the number of locally approved homes and treatment foster care homes along with the lack of information related to the age and needs of children in foster care is a significant barrier to ensuring that all children who enter foster care in Virginia live in a family. Virginia also does not have aggregated racial or ethnic demographic data for resource families. As a result, the state is unable to ensure that the pool of resource families reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the children needing foster and adoptive homes.

Strategy 3.2 in the PIP specifically addresses these issues through a comprehensive Diligent Recruitment Strategic Plan developed by a workgroup made up of state/regional staff, LDSS staff, stakeholders and foster parents. This plan is intended to address data collection to allow Virginia to determine the number and types of foster and adoptive homes needed as it relates to the foster care population.

Adoption Call to Action

The Division of Families Services Practice Program areas: Foster Care, Adoption and the Resource Family programs aligned division outcomes and resources along with Virginia's five year Child and Family Services Strategic Plan, Child and Family Services Review (Program Improvement Plan), and Virginia's Diligent Recruitment Strategic Plan to develop Virginia's plan for the Adoption Call to Action Initiative (ACTA).

Regional Permanency Practice Consultants conducted a review of the cases of all children placed in congregate care and identified 550 children who were placed in congregate care not due to medical necessity. Of those children Virginia identified 33 children under the age of 12, for who termination of parental rights has been obtained and have the goal of adoption. The 33 children became the focus of the ACTA. Over the course of nine months, the ACTA initiative was managed by the Adoption Policy Specialist. Due to the complexity of the cases and limited time of the initiative, the goal was to have 40% or 13 of the 31 youth placed in prospective adoptive homes by December 2020. The regional Adoption Negotiators worked with their regional peers; permanency practice consultant and resource family consultants along with the LDSS monthly to monitor progress of placing youth safely in prospective adoptive homes. Of the 33 children in the ACTA initiative; 23 (70%) identified an adoptive family or have been placed with an adoptive family. Below is a regional breakdown:

Region	# children identified	# children placed/visiting
Central	8	8
Eastern	3	2
Northern	9	5
Piedmont	8	3
Western	5	5

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC)

In December 2018, JLARC submitted the report [“Improving Virginia’s Foster Care System”](#), which highlighted the need for the state to invest in a resource family program with the goal of ensuring that every child in foster care lives in a family. In particular, the report identified a lack of a strategic plan for recruiting foster families and a lack of a statewide inventory of foster families as failings in the current system. The report made the following recommendations for the General Assembly to consider for foster family recruitment and retention efforts:

RECOMMENDATION 4 The Virginia Board of Social Services should promulgate regulations to require staff of local departments of social services to at least annually conduct a search for relatives of every child who (i) is not placed with relatives and (ii) has no clear permanent placement options. The amended regulation should further require that relative searches be conducted when a child’s placement changes, if such a search has not been conducted in the 90 days prior.

RECOMMENDATION 6 The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should issue clear guidance that presents the options available to local departments of social services to facilitate the approval of relatives to serve as foster parents. Guidance materials should be issued to all local departments and regional VDSS staff.

RECOMMENDATION 7 The General Assembly may wish to consider amending Title 63.2, Chapter 9 of the Code of Virginia to require every local department of social services to provide semiannually to the Virginia Department of Social Services a list of all licensed foster families who reside in their locality. The list should, at a minimum, include foster families’ contact information, preferences regarding the age, number, and needs of children each family would consider fostering, key demographic information for each family, the number and ages of children each family is currently fostering, the total number of other children in each family’s home and their ages, and biological relationships (if any) between each family and the children they are fostering.

RECOMMENDATION 8 The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act directing the Virginia Department of Social Services to develop and maintain a statewide strategic plan for recruiting and retaining foster families.

RECOMMENDATION 9 The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act to establish six positions—five regional staff and one at the central office—at the Virginia Department of Social Services responsible for implementing the statewide strategic plan for recruiting and retaining foster families and supporting local recruitment and retention efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 11 The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act directing the Virginia Department of Social Services to (i) conduct an immediate review of the circumstances of every child in foster care currently in congregate care, to identify children who do not have a clinical need to be in congregate care; (ii) communicate its findings to each local department of social services; (iii) direct the local departments to make concerted efforts to identify appropriate family-based placements for these children; and (iv) direct the local departments to move identified children to an appropriate family-based placement, if feasible.

Virginia's Response to JLARC Recommendations

Based on JLARC's recommendations a Diligent Recruitment Workgroup comprised of supervisors from five local departments along with representatives from the Capacity Building Center for Sates, Newfound Families, and Virginia's Kids Belong, the Governor's Office/VA Fosters, VDSS Regional Practice Consultants and Home Office staff was organized in early 2019. The workgroup was convened to begin developing a data-driven strategic recruitment and retention plan that prioritizes placement of children who enter foster care with relatives whenever possible. Prior to the release of the JLARC report, VDSS had begun data clean-up of its current Online Automated Services Information System (OASIS) to address the lack of accurate Resource Family data. These efforts will continue as VDSS moves toward developing a more reliable data base to track key demographic information of all foster families statewide.

The 2019, General Assembly Budget Appropriation Act allocated funding to hire a Resource Family Program Manager along with five Regional Consultants. Virginia has since filled these positions and now has a Program Manager and a dedicated staff member in each of its five regions to support local recruitment and retention efforts. In March 2020, the Resource Family Policy Specialist position became vacant and went unfilled for the remainder of the calendar year as Virginia implemented a hiring freeze. The

Division of Family Services moved quickly to fill vacant positions when the hiring freeze was lifted and the Policy Specialist position was filled in March 2021.

The Office of the Governor established the Virginia Fosters initiative with the goal of approving 1000 new foster families. In May 2020 the position of Director became vacant and remains unfilled; however, the employee work profile (EWP) is currently under review and Virginia will move to fill the position within the coming months. Virginia Fosters will partner with LDSS to develop recruitment plans in order to expand the pool of foster families statewide.

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE MULTI-ETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT (MEPA)

Virginia is required to comply with federal laws that promote the best interests of children by ensuring that they have permanent, safe, stable, and loving homes that will meet their individual needs, without regard to the child's or the prospective parent's race, color, or national origin. The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, as amended, prohibits the delay or denial of any adoption or placement in foster care due to race, color, or national origin of the child or the foster or adoptive parents. It also requires States to provide for diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom homes are needed. To meet MEPA's diligent efforts requirements, States must have a comprehensive plan detailed that includes:

1. A description of the characteristics of waiting children;
2. Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community;
3. Diverse methods of disseminating both general and child-specific information;
4. Strategies for assuring that all prospective parents have access to the home study process, including location and hours of services that facilitate access by all members of the community;
5. Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities;
6. Strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;
7. Non-discriminatory fee structures; and
8. Procedures ensuring a timely search for prospective parents awaiting a child, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures ensure that the placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.

Plan Development Process

VDSS' Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP) meetings began in 2018. Initially these meetings consisted of the VDSS Executive State Leadership team. The Executive team reviewed past and current initiatives to ensure that recommendations and requirements outlined in the CFSR/PIP, CFSP, JLARC and Family First Act, would align with the Diligent Recruitment Plan (DR). During the progression of these meetings internal and external stakeholders were invited to join the PIP meetings to gather their input in developing the statewide strategic DR plan. A DR Advisory Committee was convened which included state and local child welfare staff and private providers. Through these collective efforts of state and local child welfare staff, key stakeholders, and private providers, focus groups were convened to assist in the development of a strategic diligent recruitment and retention plan. Additional input and recommendations were gathered from the Youth Advisory Board; which consists of current and former youth in foster care, to gain a better understanding of the types of families needed. The DR Advisory Committee led to the development of a smaller DR workgroup that was charged with developing a DR five (5) year Strategic Plan. This workgroup in collaboration with the Capacity Building Center for States (CFS) continued working on the development and implementation of the DR plan.

By utilizing a root cause analysis, specific barriers to recruitment of foster families were identified and addressed through the development of goals and strategies. A diligent recruitment plan was created that will support a significant increase in kinship placements while also supporting recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families.

Problem Statement and Theory of change

Problem: Children/youth in foster care in VA are not always placed in a family-based setting/placement that is able to meet their needs- resulting in siblings being separated and older youth residing in congregate care settings. Specifically, AA children and youth and children/youth with special needs are not being placed in families that can meet their needs.

Diligent Recruitment Strategic Plan Theory of Change

VDSS/LDSS will systemically utilize a structured diligent recruitment and retention process (policy and guidelines), apply training skills and provide specialized foster parent supports so workers have the ability to assess, train and make appropriate placements

And

Improve state-wide capacity to collect data in order for staff to use data-driven decision-making pertaining to placement

So that

VDSS/LDSS use the skills, tools, process, data to identify kinship and foster families that can meet the needs of sibling groups, minority children, older youth, and children/youth with specific needs and the types of families needed in the geographic areas where they are most needed

So that

Recruitment efforts can be targeted to increase the availability of the right families where they are needed with kinship placement being the first priority

And

Workers will immediately assess and quickly approve kinship and foster families

So that

Children are placed with the right families in the right geographic areas who can meet the child/youth's specific needs

And

Families receive specific supports to meet the needs of the children in their homes.

Goal: All children/youth in foster care in Virginia (especially AA, older youth, and children with special needs) will live in a kinship or foster family that will meet their needs, and children/youth will benefit from their connections to their siblings, families, and communities.

Characteristics of Children in Care

The tables below provide demographic data and characteristics of the children placed in Virginia's foster care system. As of December 31, 2021, there were 5,738 children in foster care, 4,713 children age 18 and younger. See tables below for additional information.

Table 1

Race of children in Foster Care

Year	Black	Percent Black	White	Percent White	Am Indian Alaskan Native	Percent Am Indian Alaskan Native	Asian	Percent Asian	Hawaiian Pacific Islander	Percent Hawaiian Pacific Isl	Multi-race	Percent Multi-race	Hispanic	Percent Hispanic
2019	1642	29.8%	3273	59.3%	2	0.0%	36	0.7%	6	0.1%	473	8.6%	611	11.1%
2020	1487	28.4%	3114	59.4%	3	0.1%	49	0.9%	7	0.1%	491	9.4%	587	11.2%
2021	1376	27.9%	2924	59.3%	11	.2%	42	.9%	7	.1%	474	9.6%	547	11.1%

Table 2

Age of children in Foster Care

Year	Under 1	Percent Under 1	Age 1 thru 5	Percent 1 thru 5	Age 6 thru 9	Percent 6 - 9	Age 10 thru 12	Percent 10 - 12	Age 13 thru 15	Percent 13 - 15	Age 16 thru 18	Percent 16 - 18	Age 19 & Over	Percent 19+
2019	274	5.0%	1279	23.2%	841	15.2%	634	11.5%	843	15.3%	1166	21.1%	480	8.7%
2020	241	4.6%	1239	23.6%	776	14.8%	558	10.6%	791	15.1%	1108	21.1%	530	10.1%
2021	277	4.8%	1102	22.4%	684	13.9%	537	10.9%	774	15.7%	1030	20.9%	565	11.5%

Table 3
Average Time in Care (in months)

Year	Average Time in Care (in Months)	Return Home	Placement with Relatives	Adoption	Permanent FC	Independent Living	Another Planned Perm Living Arrangement	Continued FC	To Be Determined	Guardianship	No Goal Entered
2019	18.73	10.71	16.90	30.58	26.30	18.52	26.73	0.00	6.75	0.00	4.13
2020	20.04	11.74	16.90	31.17	28.48	18.74	23.41	0.00	7.92	0.00	5.98
2021	20.76	11.11	18.76	32.41	29.73	20,80	28.51	0	8.45	0	12.52

Goal 1: Increase the pool of kinship and foster families statewide

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
A. Prioritize data cleanup, collection and utilization	<p>i. Establish data input process and procedures</p> <p>ii. OASIS cleanup of resource family records to accurately reflect the number and location of locally approved homes</p> <p>iii. Use of COMPASS to maintain data that reflects the geographic location and ethnic and cultural information of both locally approved foster families as well</p>	JLARC 7	January 2024 Ongoing	Data dashboard in place with current kids in care and available homes	Statewide Participation	<p>Work collaboratively with COMPASS team to develop protocol for collection of required data</p> <p>Implement a statewide SOP for entering Resource Family data</p>	<p>Virginia will launch a centralized foster parent recruitment portal to be known as “Faster Families Highway” (FFH) that will provide VDSS with the ability to monitor response to foster parent applications, approved families and utilization statewide, regionally and locally. Demographic information related to prospective as well as approved foster parents will be collected. The portal will be initially launched in the Piedmont and Western Regions with implementation to be complete by July 2022. Statewide implementation will conclude by December 2022.</p> <p>VDSS is currently evaluating whether the</p>

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
	as Treatment Foster Care homes approved by LCPAs						information maintained in the Faster Families Highway will allow for more effective management data including the location of Virginia’s locally approved foster families.
B. Increase the frequency of kinship approvals statewide	<p>i. VDSS will establish clear guidance for LDSS to facilitate approval of relatives at time of removal or when identified</p> <p>ii. LDSS will utilize guidance to increase the frequency of</p>	JLARC 6 JLARC 4 PIP 3.2	<p>July 2021 Completed January 2021</p> <p>January 2024 Ongoing</p>	<p>VDSS will revise guidance to provide clear direction related to child specific approval of kin</p> <p>LDSS will develop and utilize a process of approving kinship</p>	<p>100% of PIP agencies will develop a process to initiate child specific approval of kin</p> <p>Statewide Implementation</p>	Resource family unit along with PIP agencies will review and suggest changes to home approval guidance that promote and clarify the process of approval of kin	Regional Practice Consultants have continued to support LDSS to incorporate changes in guidance into their practice. Local Departments have utilized 286 waivers during 2021 in order to place 370 children with relatives. This task is complete. The percentage of children placed with relatives has increased to 10.5% during 2021, up from 8.1% during 2019.

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
	relative approvals			families as outlined in guidance			
C. Recruit foster families in the right geographical areas that can meet the specific needs of children and youth	<p>i. VDSS will provide data to LDSS to include demographic characteristics of kids in care to include geo-mapping of removal homes</p> <p>ii. LDSS will annually develop data driven recruitment plans that are targeted to the needs of their children and the location of the children's homes.</p>	JLARC 11	<p>January 2021 Completed September 2021</p> <p>January 2023 Ongoing</p> <p>January 2024 Ongoing</p>	LDSS will utilize data specific to the needs of their children and families to implement recruitment plans	<p>25% of agencies will develop data driven recruitment plans that reflect the needs of their children and families</p> <p>75% of agencies will develop data driven recruitment plans that reflect the needs of their children and families</p> <p>Statewide implementation</p>	Resource family practice consultants will assist LDSS in utilizing data to develop annual recruitment plans.	All LDSS now have access to the demographic characteristics of children in foster care. All LDSS are supported by CRAFFT in developing data driven recruitment plans. Additionally, 25% of LDSS have partnered with three organizations to develop data driven recruitment plans in partnership with LDSS. Each engaged in child-focused, targeted, and general kinship, foster and adoptive family recruitment in four VDSS geographic regions, Eastern, Central, Piedmont and Northern under RFP #FAM-20-093. Jewish Family

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
							<p>Services, Connecting Hearts, served the Central region, Extra Special Parents provided recruitment services in the Piedmont region, and Virginia One Church, One Child operated in the Eastern and Northern regions.</p> <p>As noted in Objective A, the FFH will provide LDSS with the ability to utilize data to develop recruitment strategies and messages to reach families that match the racial and ethnic makeup of children in foster care.</p>
	ii. LDSS will develop child specific recruitment plans for children placed in congregate care, children with special		January 2021 Completed December 2020	LDSS will target recruitment of families who can meet the specific needs of children	25% of agencies will develop strategies to identify families for children identified as hard to place.	Resource family practice consultants will assist LDSS in case mining to identify relatives and fictive kin who may be considered for	Recruitment efforts related to RFP #FAM-20-093 resulted in 27 youth residing in congregate care being matched with approved foster families. Targeted recruitment resulted in 118 families being

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
	needs and sibling groups.		<p>January 2023 Ongoing</p> <p>January 2024 Ongoing</p>	identified as hard to place	<p>75% of agencies will develop strategies to identify families for all children who enter foster care.</p> <p>Statewide Implementation</p>	<p>placement. Locally approved families and Treatment Foster Care families will be explored in order to identify families willing to accept placement and work with the local department to meet the specific needs of children.</p>	<p>approved in communities identified as lacking adequate family based placements. Twenty-nine families were matched with youth for whom TPR has been achieved and were residing in congregate care.</p> <p>Virginia’s Kids Belong “I Belong Project” (IBP) in collaboration with Regional Resource Family and Permanency Practice consultants coordinated child specific video and picture events targeting children for whom TPR had been achieved and currently placed in congregate care. The IBP shoots were strategically coordinated every 6 weeks in areas throughout the state in close proximity to congregate care facilities where targeted children were placed. Regional Consultants worked with LDSS to identify the children eligible</p>

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
							for video shoots and supported efforts to coordinate transportation to and from the locations of the shoots. As a result 45 children in need of adoptive families participated resulting in 274 family inquiries during 2021.
	iii. VDSS will provide Virginia's Kids Belong and Virginia Fosters with demographic data of children in foster care.		April 2020 Ongoing due to Virginia Fosters Campaign Manager position vacancy	Virginia's Kids Belong and Virginia Fosters will identify LDSS that it will assist in developing a data driven recruitment plan	Virginia's Kids Belong and Virginia Fosters will develop recruitment strategies to find homes that reflect the needs of the LDSS Currently the Virginia Fosters Director position is vacant. However, the position should be filled in 2022.	Resource Family Program manager will meet at least monthly with Virginia's Kids Belong and Virginia Fosters staff to provide data and assist in the development of recruitment strategies and plans.	Virginia's Kids Belong executive Director access to monthly child demographic reports to review characteristics of children in foster care. Virginia's Kids Belong has hired Campaign Coordinators to serve in the Western and Eastern Regions. While the Virginia Fosters position remains vacant it is expected that this position will be filled during the fall of 2022.
	iv. VDSS will include Licensed Child		April 2021 Completed April 2021	LCPAs will be included in Regional	Increased participation and involvement of	Resource Family unit will include LCPAs in each	Resource Family Program Manager has engaged Virginia

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
	Placing Agencies (LCPA) in Regional recruitment plans to focus their efforts on identifying families for children with special needs including intense behavioral challenges and children in congregate care.			Recruitment planning	LCPAs in state sponsored meetings	region in developing recruitment plans	Licensed Child Placing Agency Association (VALCPA) in the review of outcomes related to children placed in LCPA homes along with data related to children in need of treatment level foster care. During 2022 VDSS will engage LCPAS in the Central and Piedmont regions in the development of an enhanced treatment foster care pilot program. LCPA will develop treatment foster care families to serve as professional foster parents and provide wrap-around services to provide a level of care within the community to meet the needs of children with challenging physical and psychiatric needs. This task is completed.
D. Increase the frequency at which pre-service training is offered to prospective	i. Consortium for Resource, Adoptive, and Foster Family Training (CRAFFT) will work with		January 2021 Ongoing due to staff vacancy	A calendar outlining an annual pre-service training schedule will be published	Each region will develop a pre-service training schedule that families seeking approval can access	Practice Consultants will work with CRAFFT and PIP agencies to develop training schedules that	While the CRAFFT website has been developed, ongoing updates to the website including calendar updates have been impacted by staffing

Objective	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
foster families	Practice Consultants in each Region to develop a consistent and ongoing preservice training schedule			on the VDSS website		include at least two pre-service trainings annually	vacancies. Providing public access to a statewide pre-service training calendar through VDSS' public site is being explored. Currently pre-service training is offered to prospective foster parents within each region quarterly.
E. A Diligent Recruitment Advisory Committee will be developed to review guidance and policy related to resource families	VDSS will establish a Diligent Recruitment Advisory Committee		August 2020 Completed August 2020	Quarterly meetings will rotate between regions to ensure that LDSS, kinship and foster families in each region have the opportunity to offer input	Advisory Committee meetings will be scheduled in each region	Resource Family practice consultants will identify kinship caregivers along with foster parents in each region who will serve on the Advisory Committee	Regional Resource Family Advisory Committees have continued to meet quarterly within each region. Advisory committees have reviewed and provided input related to tools and resources VDSS has provided LDSS related to engagement of family and assessment of kinship caregivers. This task is complete.

Goal 2: Support, develop and retain foster families who are equipped to meet the needs of Virginia’s children

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
A. Utilize data to understand how to develop support and retention plans	i. Utilize data to identify the number of kinship and resource families statewide and where they are located	JLARC 8	January 2024 Ongoing	State and regional data dashboard in place and utilized to understand where families are located	Statewide Implementation	Resource family unit will utilize regional roundtables to assist LDSS in developing plans of support and retention for foster families in their region.	Work to develop state and regional dashboards remains ongoing. Resource Family consultants in partnership with CRAFFT have conducted quarterly roundtables to support LDSS in developing foster parent retention strategies.
B. Develop the ability of approved families to serve older	i. VDSS will utilize CRAFFT to provide training		July 2020 Projected date of completion	LDSS will utilize data and case reviews at least annually, to identify	Statewide Implementation	Resource family practice consultants will work with PIP agencies and CRAFFT coordinators to develop	Congregate Care case reviews are ongoing. A Levels of Care

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
youth and children with special needs	necessary for kinship families and foster families to meet the needs of children with special needs, and children with significant behavioral challenges		January 2023	children placed in congregate care and understand the barriers to placement in a family		in service training plans specific to the needs of children placed in congregate care	workgroup will be formed and will engage LCPA in developing supportive services for kinship foster parents when they are approved by local departments. LCPA will also be engaged in developing foster families equipped to meet the needs of children with severe physical, mental health and behavioral needs.
	ii. A Tradition of Caring will be utilized during pre-service training of all kinship foster parents		April 2022 Completed January 2022	CRAFFT coordinators will train LDSS staff to implement A Tradition of Caring	Each region will have LDSS staff trained to provide A Tradition of Caring training to kin and	Practice consultants will help LDSS identify staff who may administer A Tradition of Caring when necessary. CRAFFT coordinators will also provide A	LDSS staff within each region have been trained to administer A Tradition of Caring for kin

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
					fictive kin caregivers	Tradition of Caring training upon request from LDSS.	and fictive kin caregivers. Regional CRAFFT coordinators have also continued to administer the curriculum at the request of LDSS approving kin caregivers. This task is complete.
	iii. VDSS and LDSS will partner with Licensed Child Placing Agencies to develop a kinship support model that offers LDSS the opportunity to purchase wrap around services		January 2024 Ongoing	LCPAs will develop wrap around supports for kinship foster parents as needs are identified by LDSS	An LCPA within each region will be identified to provide support services to kinship foster parents	Resource Family unit along with DR Advisory Committee and LCPAs will identify best practice models with focus on support of kin	During 2021 VDSS has engaged VALCPA to explore the development of statewide supportive services for kinship foster parents. Work remains ongoing to develop partnerships between LDSS

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
							and LCPA to provide enhanced support to kinship foster parents.
Prioritize retention of foster families using state and regional retention plans	iv. Virginia's Kids Belong in partnership with VDSS will develop regional foster parent support, respite and retention plans		January 2022 Completed January 2022	Virginia's Kids Belong will develop community partnerships within each region focused on providing support to kinship and foster families	Statewide implementation of support and retention plan	Resource Family unit will meet monthly with Virginia's Kids Belong staff to provide necessary data to develop comprehensive plans of support and retention of families	Collaboration between VDSS and Virginia's Kids Belong has continued and expanded during 2021. Regional Coalitions are operating within each region that engage, faith, government and business leaders in public awareness campaigns, kinship and foster parent support projects as well as foster parent recruitment.

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
							This task is complete.
	v. LDSS will utilize the Foster Parent Bill of Rights to establish a standard of practice and a dispute resolution process to reduce foster parent turnover		July 2021 Completed July 2021	Foster care and resource family staff will utilize Foster Parent Bill of Rights to increase the capacity to partner with and respond appropriately to foster parent's concerns in order to reduce foster parent turnover	Statewide Implementation	Resource family consultants will provide practice assistance to LDSS in developing a dispute resolution process that prioritizes retention of foster families	The Foster Parent Bill of rights was developed and the dispute resolution process implemented during 2021. This task is complete.

Goal 3: Invest in a well trained workforce that is knowledgeable and skilled to support kinship and foster family recruitment, use and retention.

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
A. Utilize a data driven decision making model that emphasizes a kin first culture	i. LDSS will continue relative search throughout the foster care case and include both Maternal and Paternal relative searches.	PIP 3.2.2 JLARC 4	October 2022 Ongoing	Guidance will be revised to include relative search and documentation efforts in OASIS/Compass	Statewide Implementation	Resource Family Practice consultants will review OASIS records to ensure ongoing relative search and provide practice assistance as necessary.	Regional Consultants continue to review relative search and engagement screens to monitor relative participation in Family Partnership Meetings.
	ii. LDSS will prioritize approval of relatives anytime a child enters foster care	JLARC 6	July 2021 Completed July 2021 March 2024 Ongoing	Anytime a child is not placed with a relative upon entry into foster care, LDSS will document reasons for decision not to place the child with a relative	100% of PIP agencies will submit Kinship Exception reports whenever a child is not placed with a relative Statewide Implementation	Regional Resource Family Practice Consultants will review Exception Reports and provide practice assistance as needs are identified	Resource Family Consultants have supported the development of internal kin first policies within LDSS statewide. Guidance updates during

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
							2022 will direct LDSS to utilize kin first policies to improve their ability to engage and approve kinship foster parents. PIP agencies began submitting exception reports during the fall of 2021 anytime children enter foster care or experience a placement change and are not placed with relatives.
B. Enhance the understanding of the importance of placing children in families and with relatives whenever possible	i. VDSS will provide LDSS staff with training specific to working with Kinship Caregivers		January 2022 December 2024 Trainings were made available	All LDSS CPS and Foster Care supervisors and staff will complete training to improve understanding of the value of kinship care	Statewide implementation	Resource Family Unit will develop a curriculum designed to facilitate an understanding of the importance of placing children who enter foster	CWS 4080 Kinship Care in Virginia is now available in the Knowledge Center. VDSS will include these trainings in mandated new

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
			during April 2021			care with relatives whenever possible to be available in the Knowledge Center. Resource Family Consultants will monitor completion by LDSS supervisors and staff during 2022.	worker trainings during 2023.
	ii. VDSS will provide LDSS staff with training to focus on finding and engaging relatives		January 2022 Completed April 2021	All LDSS CPS and Foster Care supervisors and staff will complete training to enhance their ability to locate and engage relatives when children enter foster care	Statewide implementation	Resource Family Unit will develop a curriculum designed to enhance the ability of LDSS staff to identify and engage both Maternal and Paternal relatives to be available in the Knowledge Center.	CWS 4060 Family Search and Engagement is available in the Knowledge Center and available to FSS and FSS Supervisors. The curriculum includes scripts to be

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
						Resource Family Consultants will monitor completion by LDSS supervisors and staff during 2022.	utilized by workers in facilitating conversations with family members to support the process of learning about family structure, relationships and traditions. VDSS will include these trainings in mandated new worker trainings during 2023.
	iii. VDSS will provide LDSS staff with training to focus on supporting kinship families		January 2023 Ongoing	All LDSS CPS and Foster Care supervisors and staff will complete training to improve understanding of how to effectively support relative	Statewide implementation 50% of supervisory staff within LDSS will complete trainings related to family engagement and kinship care.	Resource Family Unit will develop a curriculum designed to improve LDSS staff's understanding of how to meet the needs of relative and fictive kin caregivers to be	VDSS will support LDSS efforts to engage all staff in CWS 4060 along with CWS 4080. A micro-learning video related to using a genogram to support family

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
				and fictive kin caregivers		available in the Knowledge Center. Resource Family Consultants will monitor completion by LDSS supervisors and staff during 2022	finding also available to LDSS staff. VDSS will include these trainings in mandated new worker trainings during 2023.
	iv. VDSS will develop and distribute tools to assist LDSS in developing processes of assessment and approval of kin		January 2022 Completed January 2022	LDSS will utilize tools to improve their ability to assess, approve and support Kinship Families	Statewide implementation	The Resource Family Unit will facilitate quarterly Regional Roundtables to distribute and provide practice assistance related to the utilization of tools	In partnership with regional CRAFFT coordinators have facilitated quarterly Regional Roundtables for LDSS staff to support assessment and approval of kinship caregivers. Family discovery interview questions,

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
							mobility mapping instructions, a permanency assessment tool, questions to engage parents in identifying their natural support networks and guides for scripts for social media outreach to engage family have been made available to all LDSS.
	v. VDSS will develop a Mutual Family Assessment training to be completed by anyone writing a home study		January 2022 Completed April 2021	LDSS and LCPA staff whose responsibilities include writing home studies will complete Mutual Family Assessment training	Statewide Implementation	VDSS will develop a curriculum that provides instruction related to thorough assessment of the competencies of foster families, to be delivered by	CWS 3103 Mutual Family Assessment has been updated and is currently being offered quarterly within each region.

Objectives	Activities	Alignments	Time Frames	Benchmarks	Measures of progress	Implementation supports – staff training needs, technical assistance, evaluation processes, etc.	2021 Update
						CRAFFT within each region	
C. Improve rates of retention of Family Services Specialists by acknowledging their work and supporting them	i. Virginia's Kids Belong in partnership with VDSS will develop Regional partnership designed to acknowledge the work of Family Services Specialists in each region		April 2023	Virginia's Kids Belong will hold quarterly events to celebrate the work of Family Services Specialists within each region	Virginia's Kids Belong will develop partnerships between Business, Non Profit and Faith Based organizations within each region	Resource Family unit will meet monthly with Virginia's Kids Belong staff to develop plans to acknowledge the work of Family Services Specialists in each region	VDSS hopes to fill the vacant Virginia Fosters Position during spring 2022 to collaborate with Virginia's Kids Belong to develop awareness campaigns to acknowledge the work of Family Services Specialists in preserving family connections.

Calendar Year 2021

Virginia has continued to experience an increase in the number of children in foster care who are placed with kinship foster parents. In December 2021, 10.5% of children in foster care were placed with kinship foster parents up from 8.1% in December of 2020. Reviews of children in congregate care have continued and the regional practice consultants have supported LDSS efforts to transition children to family based placements which has resulted in a decrease in the percentage of children placed in congregate setting to 6%. Virginia's Continuous Quality Improvement efforts will remain focused on eliminating the use of congregate care except in cases of acute psychiatric needs and increasing the use of kinship foster families through utilizing data to guide practice within LDSS. During 2022, Virginia will increase its focus on effective utilization of Family Partnership Meetings to ensure that families are consistently engaged in decision making. Virginia will support improved family engagement practices through the development and utilization of assessment tools and effective resources that may be utilized to discover family members and engage them in decision making.

Virginia is in the process of implementing a statewide centralized foster parent recruitment portal that will provide LDSS the ability to maintain targeted recruitment campaigns to reach the families in their communities needed to support the children in foster care. The portal will provide VDSS with the ability to sustain ongoing recruitment campaigns and expedite approval of families who are likely positive matches for children in foster care. VDSS will also develop an enhanced treatment foster care pilot program to develop family based placement for children with significant physical and psychiatric needs to allow them to remain connected to their families and whenever possible home communities. Finally, VDSS will support collaborative partnerships between LDSS to expand their abilities to engage, assess and approve kinship foster parents when children enter foster care.