

## Implement Data-Driven Recruitment and Retention Practices

CHAMPS, which stands for Children Need Amazing Parents, is a policy campaign focused nationally and in states to promote high quality foster parenting. CHAMPS is based on the understanding that all children need and do best in families. Foster parents, including kinship caregivers, play a primary role in ensuring the safety and well-being of children in foster care. In fact, stable, quality foster parenting is one of the most powerful ways we can help children in foster care to heal and thrive. It is associated with a range of better outcomes for children, such as greater success in school, healthy relationships with family, and improved health and safety.

The CHAMPS policy playbook highlights six priorities for policy change, including implementing data-driven recruitment and retention practices.

### Why is it important to implement data-driven recruitment and retention practices?

At a time when many states are experiencing an increased demand for foster parents, agencies can improve their recruitment and retention efforts through improved use of data-driven decision making. A data collection and analysis system can help agencies have enough trained and available families to meet changing needs, and ensure the best possible match between family and child. Good matches help ensure placement stability, which benefits children's safety, permanency and well-being. Implementing more data-driven approaches to recruitment and retention can help agencies better understand the effectiveness of the full continuum of recruitment and retention activities, including response to inquiries, orientation sessions, pre-service training, licensing and ongoing support. It can also identify reasons for losing foster families.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- States should use data to determine trends and needs for foster parents, and to link those data to targeted recruitment strategies and goals.<sup>1</sup>
- States lack the data needed to improve retention and should collect retention data in order to accurately assess why families choose to discontinue fostering.<sup>2</sup>
- Agencies rarely keep records of successful recruiting efforts or track the family development process from intake through licensing. One of the most helpful tools in recruitment and retention is a data collection system that understands which children are the most in need of homes, the current composition of the foster family pool, and where foster families get stuck or lost in the system.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). Recruiting foster parents. Retrieved from: <https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-07-00-00600.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). Retaining foster parents. Retrieved from: <https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-07-00-00601.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2012). Building successful resource families practice guide: A guide for public agencies. Baltimore, MD: Denise Goodman and Frank Steinfield. Retrieved from: <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-BuildingSuccessfulResourceFamilies-2008.pdf>

## STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Through policy and supportive practice, we can use data-driven recruitment and retention practices. Strategies that work:

- **Conduct an ongoing, periodic foster parent census.** A foster parent census can help agencies assess their overall foster parent capacity and their availability to care for specific populations, such as infants, teens, sibling groups, and children with significant behavioral or mental health needs and/or special health care needs. A census can also identify foster parents who are sensitive to and knowledgeable about children from diverse cultures.
- **Utilize exit surveys.** Foster parents who have decided to stop fostering can provide critical information through exit surveys. They can inform retention efforts by identifying barriers and inefficiencies within the system, as well as supports and services that were helpful.
- **Create foster parent profiles using market segmentation.** Data on current, successful foster families can be analyzed to create statistically accurate profiles. For example, a profile could be created for prospective foster parents interested in mentoring birth parents. Recruitment efforts are then targeted to reach families that fit these profiles.
- **Develop local/regional recruitment and retention plans based on data.** Local recruitment and retention plans can guide targeted strategies based on the specific needs of children, areas from which children are entering foster care, and strengths of each geographic area. Invite key partners from geographic area to participate in developing the plan.

## TAKING ACTION

CHAMPS calls on child welfare leaders, legislators and other decision makers to implement data-driven recruitment and retention strategies. Suggestions for getting started:

- **Agency and program leaders** can determine what data on foster parents is already being collected, and then invite foster parents, kinship caregivers, birth parents, caseworkers, and providers to discuss and help identify what additional data is needed. Be sure to consider collecting data that will help also inform foster parent retention efforts, such as foster parent exit surveys.
- **Legislators** can hold hearings to learn from public and private agency leaders about how foster parent data is currently being used to inform recruitment and retention approaches and to identify gaps and opportunities. In addition to inviting agency leaders, national experts can be invited to share information about trends and best practices.
- **Advocates, families and community leaders** can work with the child welfare agency to convene foster, kin, and birth parents, along with civic, community- and faith-based, philanthropic and business partners to discuss existing foster parent data and to identify specific ways they can contribute to short- and long-term recruitment and retention goals.

## CHAMPS RESOURCES

- **For more information on CHAMPS,** go to [www.fosteringchamps.org](http://www.fosteringchamps.org)
- **For administrative and legislative policy examples** related to implementing data-driven recruitment and retention practices, check out the CHAMPS policy playbook at <https://playbook.fosteringchamps.org>
- **For more guidance on recruitment and retention,** check out the CHAMPS Guide on Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention at <http://fosteringchamps.org/practice-guide/champs-guide-on-foster-parenting-recruitment-and-retention/>
- **Learn more about CHAMPS technical assistance options** at <http://fosteringchamps.org/champs-technical-assistance/>
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