



**Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan
Progress and Accomplishments**

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On April 1, 2022, MDCPS launched two new targeted recruitment initiatives, Foster Parent Recruitment and Wendy's Wonderful Kids.

Foster Parent Recruitment:

This unit develops, schedules and hosts events specifically designed to recruit foster parents. Foster Parent Recruiters have been identified state-wide to assist with recruiting foster homes for children placed in care to receive the safety and stability they need to heal and thrive. Foster Parent Recruitment works in conjunction with the Licensure Unit to plan, organize, and document recruitment efforts to secure foster homes. The MDCPS Communications Director has utilized various social media platforms to explore and explain the role of foster families in the Shared Parenting relationship with the parents of foster children in their care. MDCPS's educational and public relations efforts are focused on how foster parents are needed statewide to both care for children and to serve as supports and role models/mentors for those children's parents and family. The photographic and video materials have been integrated into the agency's ongoing foster parent recruitment efforts and are being used as part of MDCPS's ongoing efforts to recruit foster parents for key populations of foster youth, which include children ages 10 and older, sibling groups, children with special needs, and children at risk of aging out of foster care without permanent family connections.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids:

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, a national nonprofit public charity, is partnering with MDCPS to implement an expansion of its signature program, Wendy's Wonderful Kids®, to find adoptive homes for children in Mississippi's foster care system. This unique public-private partnership will serve children and youth at risk of aging out of foster care without a family, including teenagers, children with special needs, and siblings. The Foundation provides grants to local public or private foster care adoption agencies to hire an adoption professional to serve a small caseload of the most difficult to place children. This recruiter implements an intensive, child-focused recruitment model (Wendy's Wonderful Kids) that requires a thorough review of the case file, a face-to-face relationship with the child, collaboration with all adults in the child's network, assurance of adoption preparation, an aggressive recruitment plan, and diligent search for all potential adoptive parents. Effective, aggressive, and accountable recruitment strategies are critical to the success of the Child-Focused Recruitment Model. Rather than casting the broad net of general awareness and recruitment campaigns or defaulting to internet photo listings, media profiles of children or public photography displays, child-focused recruiters are expected to be agents of change in the lives of the children for whom they are recruiting by employing an intensive and exhaustive recruitment strategy. To date, since implementation in April 2022, WWK Recruiters have successfully matched 24 youth with 3 adoptions and 2 durable legal custody rulings. WWK Recruiters are currently serving well over 100 youth by utilizing the Child Focused Recruitment Model!

MDCPS has developed and continues to implement our Shared Parenting Plan across the state. This plan is designed to encourage Front Line/Licensure/Adoption staff, as well as birth/foster parents, to embrace the vision of our agency to keep children with their family

whenever we can safely do so. MDCPS's message is documented on our website and in our brochures/posters for fostering. The judges are mentioning Shared Parenting in court hearings and our Support Group leaders/Foster Parent Liaison reference this concept in town halls/support group meetings. MDCPS staff have been educated on Shared Parenting and its benefits for children and families.

MDCPS has also pushed out Trauma Informed Care training to newly licensed foster parents and existing foster parents, so they understand what our children go through and are given some tools to assist them better in managing those behaviors. It is the hope that this will help decrease the number of disruptions with some behaviors that are encountered.. While MDCPS does not know a concrete reason why the response rate was low, it could be similar to the reason that the peer-to-peer support group attendance decreased, possibly including issues with a lack of confidence in the confidentiality, a poor use of their limited time, or Specialists were not seeing sufficient changes in their areas of concerns quickly. The agency has been recruiting heavily for families who will take sibling groups as well as teens, as this seems to be the population where there is the largest challenge finding placement. Data is shared with the team daily to inform needs to the public while out in the community. In addition a weekly log is kept of any recruitment activities that the Licensure team is doing to track the efforts that are being made. All these processes are engrained in the Orientation/PATH curriculum, as well as all Recruitment materials that are on the MDCPS website and in-person interactions with interested applicants.

MDCPS was in a rebuilding period from 10/1/21-1/31/23. A requirement was set to license 486 non-relative homes during that 16-month period. During this time period 477 homes were licensed. Work continues toward achieving the goals for licensing non-relative goals.

In April 2022, MDCPS launched the Foster Parent Recruitment Unit.

Currently, the unit consists of three (3) Recruitment Supervisors and fourteen (14) Recruitment Specialists positions with three (3) vacancies. The unit's primary focus is recruitment throughout the state to help identify new potential foster families so that we can increase the number of licensed homes available for children in care. In addition to recruitment, the MDCPS Foster Parent Recruitment Unit is responsible for providing Foster Parent Orientation to all applicants. Contractors are still being utilized to assist with completing Non-Relative Home Studies to help aid in licensing new homes. The units will also continue to recognize Foster Parent Appreciation Month as well as other opportunities to show support/appreciation for the commitment foster parents have made to the children and families served by MDCPS. From July 2022 through May 2023, we licensed 306 non-relative homes:

- July 2022: 21 homes
- August 2022: 37 homes
- September 2022: 37 homes
- October 2022: 33 homes
- November 2022: 33 homes
- December 2022: 18 homes
- January 2023: 38 homes

- February 2023: 16 homes
- March 2023: 24 homes
- April 2023: 25 homes
- May 2023: 24 homes
- June 2023: June numbers will not be available until approximately July 7, 2023.

Homes are recruited based on the Children in MDCPS Custody Map. At present, demographic, and regional data is captured internally through MACWIS. This information is not intentional for recruitment and retention purposes. Currently, disproportionalities/disparities data is not studied.

Barriers to achieving goals:

MDCPS Licensure Unit has the following barriers to achieving the goals we have set:

- MDCPS has made efforts to improve the Criminal Background process. A new unit was developed to remove the criminal background responsibilities from the Licensure Unit. The Fingerprint Unit will be responsible for obtaining the Local, State, and Federal background checks along with the Child Abuse Central Registry checks for anyone residing in the respective homes who are fourteen (14) years of age; and older and others that are entrusted with the protection and care of the children for the State of Mississippi. The goal of this implementation is to ensure that the agency is in compliance with federal requirements as it relates to Criminal Background clearances for all applicants requested for the State of Mississippi. However, a delay has been encountered in receiving the required local and Child Abuse Central Registry checks from other states.
- MDCPS partnered with Grant Me Hope to assist with child specific recruitment for older youth in care. As of April 5, 2022, 14 children had been taped and videos were being aired on several news stations across the state. The videos were also featured on the MDCPS Heart Gallery Facebook page, Grant Me Hope Website, and YouTube. The MOU between Grant Me Hope and MDCPS ended April 5, 2022, and was not renewed.