



South Carolina Department of Social Services
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South Carolina Department of Social Services

Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan 2015 - 2019

Who are our Children?

A paradigm shift within the Adoption Division of the SCDSS has refocused efforts, during the past several years, from “working with families who want to adopt” to “finding families for the children in the SCDSS who need families”. It was found that our approach had been to cast a net out into the waters and capture any families interested in adopting. Sadly, too many times, these families did not understand or want the children who were in the SCDSS system. For example, as many as 50% of approved waiting families only wanted a child 0-5 years old. The child factors that families were willing to accept also meant that many families would never find a desired match with a child involved in foster care. It became imperative that a clear message be delivered to the community as to the types of children who were in the SCDSS care, who needed forever families.

Through the contract with the SCFPA-Heartfelt Calling, a centralized 1-800 number and website has allowed for consistent messages and consistent education to those making initial inquiries. This has allowed a stage one “screening process” to occur to gauge with families what they are looking for, and if indeed SCDSS is the best path for them to explore adoption. For example, those who inquire only about an infant or a child under age 3 are discouraged from starting the application process at that point, but are added to the waiting list for contact at a later date. We already have hundreds of families approved and waiting for those rare cases. Secondly, it also “triages” families, directing those who wish to adopt and those to wish to foster to appropriate next steps in the process. The impact on finding resources appropriate for our children has been tremendous. Targeted adoption for the children in the Department’s care also maximized the use of time of the adoptions staff members, in order to provide focus on finding families for the children who were waiting.

Other important changes in practice within the Adoption Division occurred during agency re-organization as Adoption Services was combined with a regionalized mental health services Division called Intensive Foster Care and Clinical Services, under a centralized leadership. Some immediate service delivery changes implemented during CY 2011-2013 included:

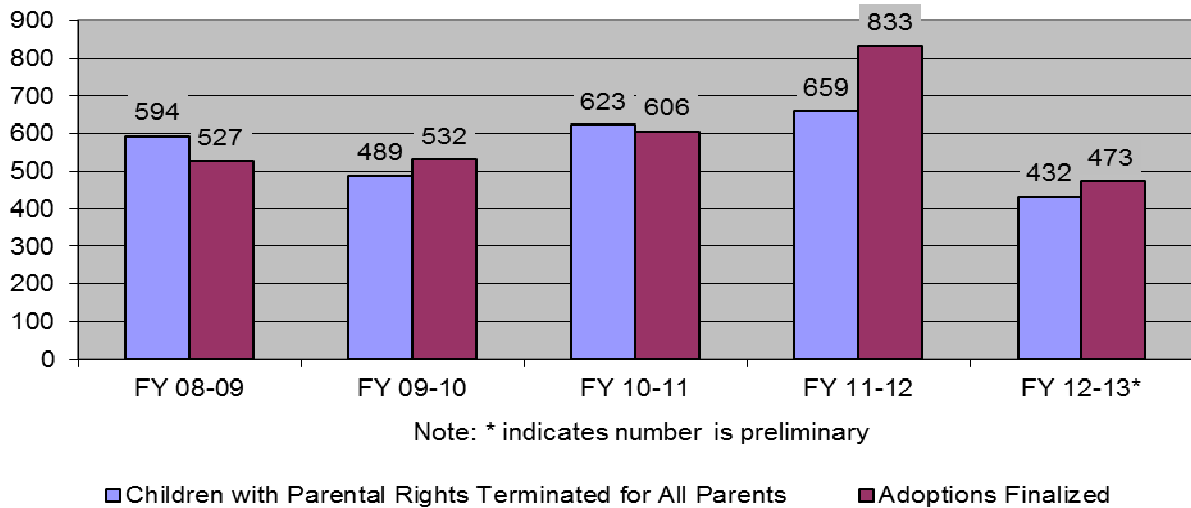
- The practice of “referring” youth from county case management to Adoption Services, and subsequently “transferring” case management from a county foster care worker to an adoption case manager was discontinued, effective September 1, 2013. Rather, adoption or other specialty services were teamed with the county foster care worker who maintained primary case management, and worked concurrently with an adoption worker on permanency plans.
- Referral and assessment for appropriateness, before accepting a youth for adoption recruitment activities, was discontinued by the first quarter of the FFY 2014. At that point, all youth entering care were immediately assessed by concurrent planning adoption specialists in order to identify potential kinship or naturally occurring community of familiarity resources. This process allowed adoptions workers to work simultaneously with the child toward a high legal risk foster to adopt placement, to assure timeliness in the achievement of a permanent plan.
- Monthly staffing was held to review legal case management system data and identify the youth whose parents’ rights were in the preparation process for termination, in order to alert staff to begin adoption recruitment and placement activities. This ensured that all legally free children received recruitment activities, if a pre-existing adoptive resource has not been identified prior to the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). Implementation of this data-driven Legal Case Management System has allowed for greater accountability and tracking of children waiting for final TPR. The length of time to achieve permanency through adoption has historically been greatly influenced by inequities in the legal processing of the TPR actions. As this system became fully implemented, the length of time in foster care to TPR was reduced. Also the implementation of concurrent case planning at the time of entry into foster care prepared a child’s case for movement into adoption upon completion of TPR, versus just beginning the adoption matching process at that time.
- Beginning mid-2012, the regionalized Intensive Foster Care and Clinical Services (IFCCS) Division began offering voluntary intensive case management services to families during the pre-adopt placement period, upon adoption finalization, or to families requesting post-legal support services. A full array of therapeutic support services may be made available based on an assessment of child and family needs. This could include paying for out of home residential treatment services for an adopted child if properly authorized, as well as in-home and community

interventions. Provisions of these services have been a necessary component to ensuring that families have the support needed to meet the challenges and special needs of older youth. At the present time, families who have most readily utilized post-adopt services have used them to help families connect to community mental health services and support resources. Involved families have stated that this intervention and support early on has prevented them from reaching a point of adoption dissolution.

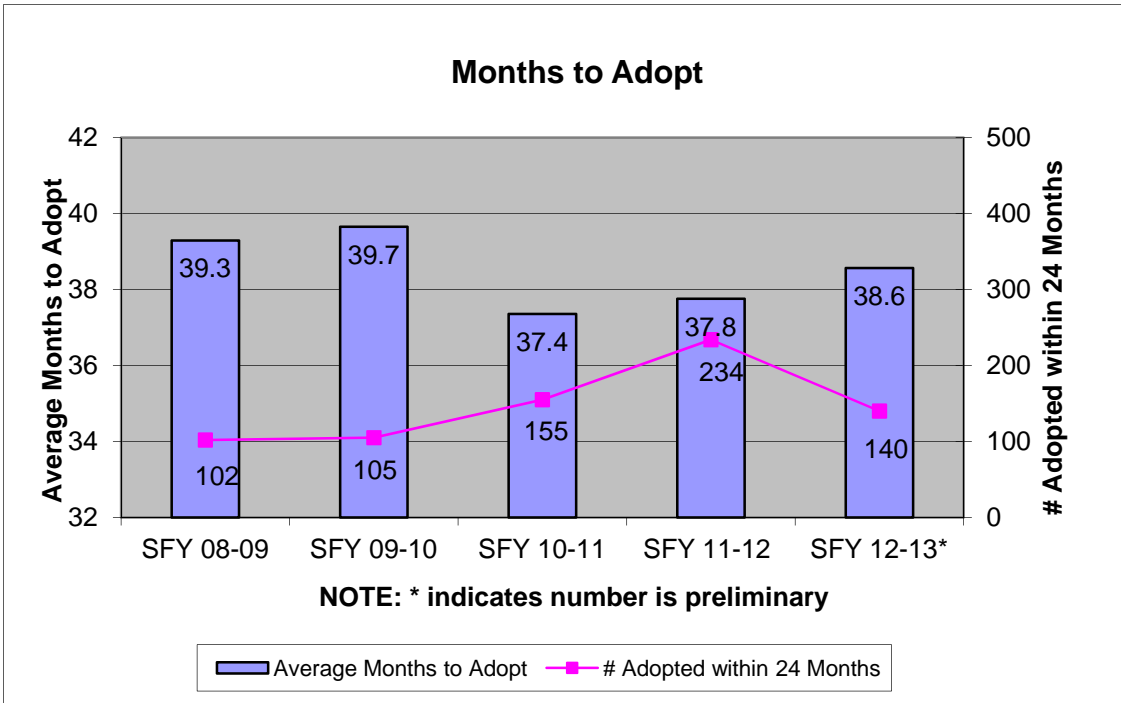
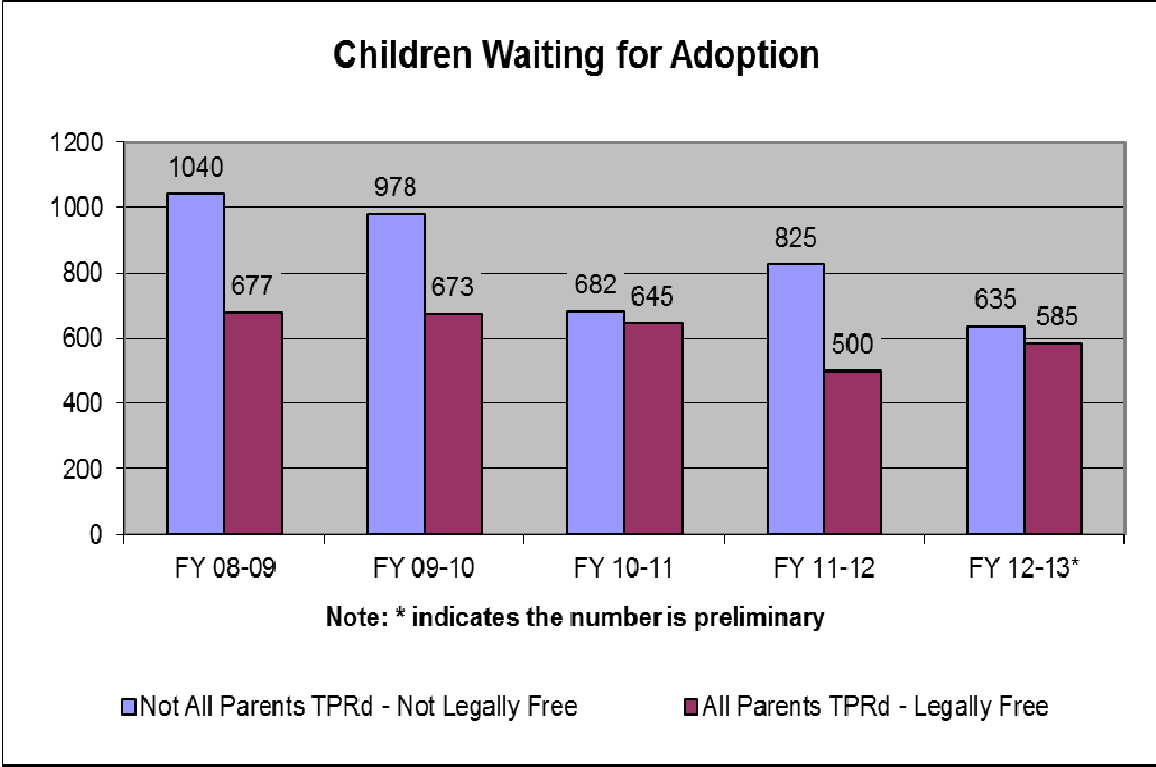
DATA TRENDS

Building upon these paradigm shifts and practice changes, there is now the need to analyze trends of the past five years in order to assist in refining the questions of who, what, when, and where of effective recruitment strategies moving forward.

Children Legally Freed and Adopted



The data for SFY 2011-2012 is of particular interest as it reflects a leap in the number of adoptions achieved due to changes in practice approaches, as well as paradigm shifts in mindsets. Correspondingly, the number of months in foster care until adoption for SFY 2011-2012 was exceedingly high, as a large number of children and youth whose TPR cases were brought to finalization, and also there was a focus on adoption of older teens who had been in care longer.



The data reinforces that a continued focus on concurrent planning encompassing adoption as an immediate permanency option upon entry into foster care, expeditious movement of TPR cases, and not allowing age or special needs to be a barrier to finding an appropriate permanent home for foster youth, was essential in moving forward with

recruitment strategies. In addition potential families were asked if their interest was in fostering, adopting or both. There can be challenges for families wanting to adopt, getting attached to children who will not become legally free and impeding the reunification process. Training was also provided to families interested in adoption with regard to high-risk, legal placements, as some families were willing to accept children for placement under those circumstances. These were cases in which circumstances appeared that TPR was probable, but had not been finalized.

ALL WITH PLAN OF ADOPTION AND OPEN ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE DESIGNATED FFY- AND LEGALLY FREE BY AGE GROUP

FFY	Total Open	0-2 yrs	%	3-5 yrs	%	6-9 yrs	%	10-13 yrs	%	14 yrs+	%
9	1041	127	12%	158	15%	178	17%	227	22%	351	34
10	1074	127	12%	170	16%	202	19%	235	22%	340	32
11	1060	117	11%	152	14%	212	20%	239	23%	340	32
12	1001	113	11%	147	15%	169	17%	242	24%	330	33
13	762	54	7%	88	12%	110	14%	176	23%	334	44
14**	799	75	9%	82	10%	103	13%	155	19%	384	48
	5737	613	11%	797	14%	974	17%	1274	22%	2079	36

SCDSS - Accountability, Data, and Research (data from CAPSS on June 2, 2014)

**FFY14 is effective through May 2014.

ADOPTION FINALIZATIONS BY AGE GROUP FFYs 2009-2014

FFY	finalizations	0-2 yrs	%	3-5 yrs	%	6-9 yrs	%	10-13 yrs	%	14 yrs+	%
9	533	141	26%	169	32%	122	23%	71	13%	30	6%
10	535	142	27%	162	30%	127	24%	70	13%	35	7%
11	589	156	26%	187	32%	127	22%	85	14%	34	6%
12	782	201	26%	222	28%	181	23%	118	15%	60	8%
13	510	134	26%	115	23%	134	26%	69	14%	58	11%
14**	253	68	27%	48	19%	41	16%	47	19%	49	19%

** 2014 Partial year reflects data entered in CAPSS through March 2014

As adoption of older youth in South Carolina has increased in the past few years, the SCDSS is learning valuable lessons from the youth themselves about what works in finding families for them. The "Unpacking the No" toolkit provides useful strategies for exploring youth resistance. Answers to the tough questions like "will I ever be able to still see my biological family" must be openly discussed. Peer-to-Peer discussion groups or one-on-one discussions between former foster youth who were adopted and youth considering adoption assist in removing barriers.

Youth must be empowered to aid in the search for their forever family in meaningful ways. Families were encouraged to provide "family video graphs" to introduce themselves to prospective youth. Anecdotal evidence indicated that four very successful events for older youth were held regionally during CY 2013, where youth and prospective adoptive families came together for a day of fun, games, fellowship and food. This allowed informal interactions in a fun, relaxed, no pressure situation, and each event had successful matches that occurred based on "getting to know each other". These were often times between families and youth who might have never been "matched" on paper.

Mentoring programs were another important strategy for older youth, as it builds a positive, supportive adult relationship for youth with “no strings attached” for either party in regard to adoption. Mentors from the faith-based community, and also from the pool of approved prospective adoptive parents have proven especially successful. Such relationships allowed trust to develop and provide the youth with exposure to what being part of family might mean for them. Anecdotal evidence indicated that Permanency Pacts and Adoptions have resulted from these mentoring programs; however there is no data to indicate the number.

ADOPTION FINALIZATIONS BY GENDER AND RACE

FFY	Finalizations	males	%	females	%	non-white*	%
9	533	282	53%	251	47%	232	44%
10	535	277	52%	258	48%	237	44%
11	589	308	52%	281	48%	275	47%
12	782	409	52%	373	48%	367	47%
13	510	285	51%	252	49%	247	48%
14**	253	129	51%	124	49%	109	43%

*Race other than white/Caucasian includes Black/AA, Asian, American Indian, multi-racial, other minority

** 2014 Partial year reflects data entered in CAPPS through March 2014

The demographics of the total foster care population and the percentage of adoptees by gender have been very consistent, during the past five year period, and it is anticipated that this trend will continue with an average of 52% of the population being male and an average of 48% being female. Adoption finalizations during this period have mirrored the same percentages as the total foster care population.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF FOSTER CARE POPULATION 2009-2013										
	SFY13		SFY12		SFY11		SFY10		SFY09	
Gender	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Female	2,990	47.9%	3,435	47.9%	3,906	48.3%	4,358	49.1%	4,561	48.8%
Male	3,252	52.1%	3,726	52.0%	4,172	51.6%	4,514	50.8%	4,785	51.2%
Unkn		0.0%	3	0.0%	9	0.1%	7	0.1%	2	0.0%

The following charts depict the racial make-up of the foster care population in South Carolina over the past five year period. First, it is important to note that the total foster care population has decreased significantly during this five year period from 9,438 in 2009 to 6242 in 2013, a nearly 33% decrease in total number in care. Second, the racial demographics of the foster care population have shown an increase in the percentage of youth in foster care who are white (47% in 2009 vs. 52% in 2013), and that the percentage of black/AA population has decreased (46% in 2009 vs. 39% in 2013). The proportion of foster care population of those classified multi-racial or other minorities has shown a 1% increase in each of these combined sub-categories. This statistically significant change in demographics is of interest and a trend that the agency will need to continue to analyze for child welfare practice implications, inclusive of adoption recruitment activities.

Demographics of Children in Foster Care During SFY 2009 through SFY 2013

SCDSS - Division of Accountability, Data, and Research (data from CAPSS on April 1, 2014)

Race	Hispanic	SFY13		SFY12		SFY11		SFY10		SFY09	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	Yes	-	0.0%	3	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	0.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No	14	0.2%	10	0.1%	17	0.2%	14	0.2%	22	0.2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	Unkn	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	2	0.0%	2	0.0%
Asian	Yes	7	0.1%	4	0.1%	5	0.1%	1	0.0%	3	0.0%
Asian	No	5	0.1%	6	0.1%	5	0.1%	8	0.1%	11	0.1%
Asian	Unkn	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	0.0%	2	0.0%	-	0.0%
Black or African American	Yes	16	0.3%	19	0.3%	23	0.3%	31	0.3%	33	0.4%
Black or African American	No	2,422	38.8%	2,937	41.0%	3,362	41.6%	3,814	43.0%	4,225	45.2%
Black or African American	Unkn	5	0.1%	18	0.3%	68	0.8%	67	0.8%	35	0.4%
Multi-Racial	Yes	19	0.3%	25	0.3%	22	0.3%	29	0.3%	31	0.3%
Multi-Racial	No	426	6.8%	496	6.9%	528	6.5%	588	6.6%	550	5.9%
Multi-Racial	Unkn	-	0.0%	2	0.0%	8	0.1%	6	0.1%	7	0.1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Yes	1	0.0%	5	0.1%	3	0.0%	6	0.1%	4	0.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	No	4	0.1%	5	0.1%	9	0.1%	4	0.0%	3	0.0%
Unkn - Multi-racial - other race Unkn	Yes	3	0.0%	1	0.0%	1	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	0.0%
Unkn - Multi-racial - other race Unkn	No	3	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%
Unkn/Unable to Determine	Yes	32	0.5%	43	0.6%	32	0.4%	46	0.5%	24	0.3%
Unkn/Unable to Determine	No	34	0.5%	44	0.6%	53	0.7%	40	0.5%	22	0.2%
Unkn/Unable to Determine	Unkn	1	0.0%	4	0.1%	12	0.1%	13	0.1%	5	0.1%
White	Yes	260	4.2%	301	4.2%	322	4.0%	327	3.7%	333	3.6%
White	No	2,985	47.8%	3,217	44.9%	3,524	43.6%	3,802	42.8%	3,986	42.6%
White	Unkn	5	0.1%	24	0.3%	92	1.1%	79	0.9%	50	0.5%
STATE TOTAL		6,242	100.0%	7,164	100.0%	8,087	100.0%	8,879	100.0%	9,348	100.0%
		SFY13		SFY12		SFY11		SFY10		SFY09	
Gender		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Female		2,990	47.9%	3,435	47.9%	3,906	48.3%	4,358	49.1%	4,561	48.8%
Male		3,252	52.1%	3,726	52.0%	4,172	51.6%	4,514	50.8%	4,785	51.2%
Unkn			0.0%	3	0.0%	9	0.1%	7	0.1%	2	0.0%
STATE TOTAL		6,242	100.0%	7,164	100.0%	8,087	100.0%	8,879	100.0%	9,348	100.0%

Demographics of Children in Foster Care During SFY 2009 through SFY 2013 - Hispanic Only

SCDSS - Division of Accountability, Data, and Research (data from CAPSS on April 1, 2014)

Race	Hisp	SFY13		SFY12		SFY11		SFY10		SFY09	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	Yes	-	0.0%	3	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	0.0%
Asian	Yes	7	0.1%	4	0.1%	5	0.1%	1	0.0%	3	0.0%
Black or African American	Yes	16	0.3%	19	0.3%	23	0.3%	31	0.3%	33	0.4%
Multi-Racial	Yes	19	0.3%	25	0.3%	22	0.3%	29	0.3%	31	0.3%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Yes	1	0.0%	5	0.1%	3	0.0%	6	0.1%	4	0.0%
Unkn - Multi-racial - other race Unkn	Yes	3	0.0%	1	0.0%	1	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	0.0%
Unkn/Unable to Determine	Yes	32	0.5%	43	0.6%	32	0.4%	46	0.5%	24	0.3%
White	Yes	260	4.2%	301	4.2%	322	4.0%	327	3.7%	333	3.6%
STATE TOTAL		338	5.4%	401	5.6%	408	5.0%	440	5.0%	430	4.6%

Comparison Between the Race(s) of Children Who Were Adopted And the Race(s) of the Parent(s) Who Adopted Them

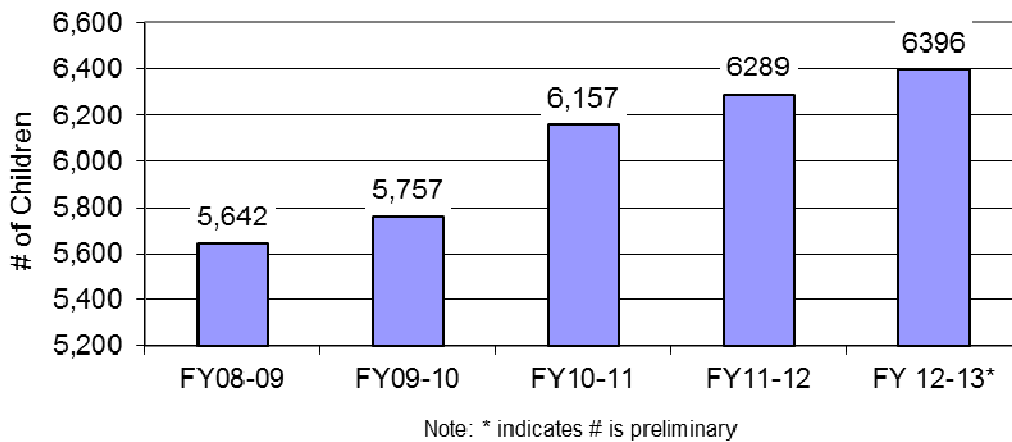
SCDSS - Division of Accountability, Data, and Research (data from CAPSS on April 2, 2014)

SFY the Adoption Finalized	Race of Adoptive Parent(s)	Total Children / Youth Adopted	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian	Black or African American	Multi-racial	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Unknown/Unable to Determine	White
sfy09	Asian	1			1				
sfy09	B/W	4			4				
sfy09	Black	192			153	28			11
sfy09	Native American	1							1
sfy09	Unknown	13			1	5			7
sfy09	White	309			16	26			267
sfy09	White/Other	7	1			2			4
Total SFY 09		527	1	0	175	61	0	0	290
sfy10	Asian	2							2
sfy10	B/W	13			9	2			2
sfy10	Black	164			132	23			9
sfy10	Black/Other	1			1				
sfy10	Other Multi-Racial	1			1				
sfy10	Unknown	7			2				5
sfy10	White	345			31	22			292
Total SFY 10		533	0	0	176	47	0	0	310
sfy11	B/W	7			4	2			1
sfy11	Black	215			175	21		3	16
sfy11	Black/Other	3			2				1
sfy11	Native American	2			1				1
sfy11	Other Multi-Racial	4			2	1			1
sfy11	Unknown	5				1		1	3
sfy11	White	367			33	37		3	294
sfy11	White/Other	3							3
Total SFY 11		606	0	0	217	62	0	7	320
sfy12	Asian	1							1
sfy12	B/W	8			4	1			3
sfy12	Black	296	1		231	36	3		25
sfy12	Black/Other	1			1				
sfy12	Native American	2							2
sfy12	Other Multi-Racial	3			2				1
sfy12	Unknown	1							1
sfy12	White	514			53	52		5	404
sfy12	White/Other	7			1	1			5
Total SFY 12		833	1	0	292	90	3	5	442
sfy13	Asian	1							1
sfy13	B/W	8			6				2
sfy13	Black	160		1	127	18		2	12
sfy13	Black/Other	3			3				
sfy13	Other Multi-Racial	1			1				
sfy13	Unknown	4			1				3
sfy13	White	269			35	25		3	206
Total SFY 13		446	0	1	173	43	0	5	224
sfy14	B/W	6			5	1			
sfy14	Black	129			98	15			16
sfy14	Unknown	1							1
sfy14	White	234			22	17		2	193
sfy14	White/Other	3				1			2
Total SFY 14		373	0	0	125	34	0	2	212

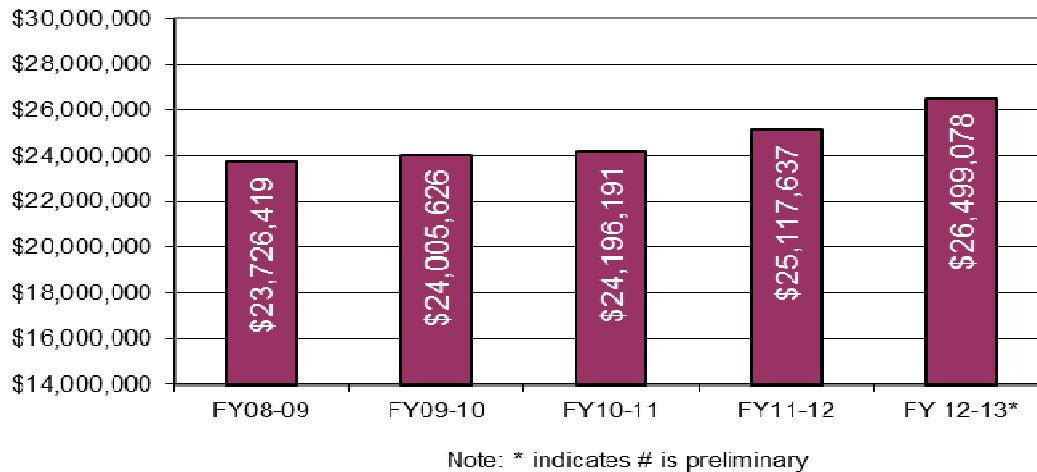
In analyzing the 5-year trend data, it remained fairly consistent that black families, on average during those five years, adopted black children 80% of the time, multi-racial children 12% of the time, and white children 7% of the time. White families likewise adopted white children 82% of the time, multi-racial children 8% of the time and black children 9% of the time. The five year trend also showed consistency, in that approximately 36% of adoptive families were black and 64% were white. As mentioned above, the racial demographics of the foster care population has shown an increase in the percentage of youth in foster care who are white (47% in 2009 vs. 52% in 2013) and that the percentage of black/AA population has decreased (46% in 2009 vs. 39% in 2013).

"Today, those numbers as indicated by the SC Context Statistics - *General Child Population from the Census Bureau for 2011* - showed that in SC Black children represented 31.9% of the total number of children under the age of 18. It also stated that the percentage of Black children in foster care in South Carolina was 42% and of that number 41.5% are waiting for adoption. "

Children Receiving Adoption Subsidies



Annual Adoption Subsidy Payments



RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES

When it comes to recruitment, it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel. Many of the things discussed in this report have been or are being used to address the problem of children languishing in foster care, or exiting the system without an identified family. Initiatives begun during the past several years, that have proven successful, continue to be refined. The refining is particularly true of the contracts that are being utilized under the Adoption Incentive Payments funding, which will continue during the FFYs 2015-2019 FY.

These contracts include the following providers:

- **Winthrop University-Concurrent Planning:** In cooperation with Winthrop University, during CY 2013, the SCDSS began co-location of Concurrent Planning Specialists in County Offices across the state. These specialized staff worked in the County Offices but reported to the Regional Adoption Services Offices. The goals for these staff members were to become involved in children's case planning, to offer information to parents on the role of concurrent planning, and to support the County Office staff in making decisions about permanence for the children.
- **Winthrop University-Diligent Recruitment Specialist:** An expansion of the agreement with Winthrop University allowed for a State Diligent Recruitment Specialist with a designated Regional Recruitment Specialist for each Regional Adoption Services Office, to work jointly across the state on recruitment activities. The many recruitment activities, while demonstrating great success, was also exhausting for adoption and county staff who had to dedicate time above and beyond their normal duties. This was often during evenings and weekend hours in order to coordinate the many pieces involved in successful events. Recruitment will remain everyone's job, but having a designated person who will lead coordination of these events across the state will greatly enhance the capacity for expanding recruitment activities in a coordinated and cohesive manner.
- **The Seneca Family of Agencies:** The SCDSS contracted with the Seneca Family of Agencies to support the requirements of the Family Finding initiative. The Seneca Family of Agencies conducted manual searches of public records in an effort to find and identify possible relatives of children in foster care. Search requests were submitted through a secure link on the Seneca Family of Agencies' website. Upon receipt of requests for family finding searches, the Seneca Family of Agencies assigned an experienced search agent to conduct a manual search, and provide a report back to the SCDSS that included: addresses and listed phone numbers for the subject, as well as possible relatives and associates of the subject with their addresses, and listed phone numbers, and any neighbors with listed phone numbers of the subject's most recent address. Seneca Searches have been successfully utilized to identify extended family members who are willing to provide support, and permanency options, including adoption, for children in the foster care system.
- **The Foster Care Review Board/The Heart Gallery:** The Heart Gallery is a national program that uses the power of photography to help find homes for children who are legally free and lingering in foster care. Through community exhibits and Internet photo display, this recruitment tool increased public awareness of the need for adoptive families. Heart Gallery photographers volunteered their time and talents to create unique portraits showcasing these children. The portraits were displayed at various locations around the state all during the year. The agency had and continues to have a contract with the FCRB for the SC Heart Gallery to be administered and supported by the Children's Foster Care Review Board. The SCHG program staffs worked with SCDSS Regional Adoption staff to arrange photography sessions as needed, plan community exhibited, tracked and responded to any resulting inquiries from interested families, and provided targeted, child-specific recruitment and family engagement.
- **The SC Foster Parent Association Heartfelt Calling:** Heartfelt Calling developed by the SC Foster Parent Association (SCFPA) provided expedited responses to inquiries about fostering and adoption. Heartfelt Calling developed a website (www.heartfeltcalling.org) and implemented a separate and specific toll-free number for recruitment purposes. This has allowed for one consistent entry point into the SCDSS system for all potential resource families, and has allowed consistency and follow-up from first contact through pre-service training. A tremendous benefit from this centralized system is that inquiring families were given

consistent messages about fostering and adoption, and a centralized database tracking ensured follow-up and provided information on service gaps.

- The SC Youth Advocate Program: The SC Youth Advocate Program was awarded the recruitment contract for the Upstate Region as an extension of the South Carolina Foster Parent Association's recruitment efforts; three of the most populous counties in the state are in this region. The SCFPA and SCYAP collaborated closely to develop mutually workable and acceptable procedures to ensure that recruitment activities were consistent and that all phone calls and other forms of inquiry about possibly becoming a resource family were handled within the next working day and in the same manner. Any direct inquiries received by SYCAP were forwarded to SCFPA for entry into the centralized recruitment database.

Diligent recruitment efforts will continue to encompass all three of the major recruitment strategies, (general, targeted, and child-specific). The past few years South Carolina has concentrated on older youth as a targeted population (focused on a specific ages and recruited families who could meet those needs) and utilized child-specific (one-on-one individualized plan for a child based on the child's specific needs) recruitment strategies which engaged both youth and families together, and allowing both the opportunity to take an active role in the selection process.

Faith Based Recruitment

There are over 5,000 churches in South Carolina. The following recruitment efforts are being developed:

- conducting meetings with church leaders concerning the need for families for DSS waiting children;
- developing a "Cherishing the Child" Calendar which will feature waiting children paired with pastors and other religious leaders and a signed commitment agreement confirming participation with each church;
- having mobile kiosk display stands in churches on designated dates to answer questions about adoption from DSS, our waiting children, and the adoption process;
- organizing loose-leaf type books with pictures of waiting children to be placed in churches along with related contact information;
- providing churches with inserts for weekly bulletin; and
- maintaining a tracking and monitoring system of referrals of potential families from churches.

Community Awareness and Involvement

The SCDSS will engage community businesses and organizations to bring awareness about the plight of waiting children in DSS by:

- conducting presentations to community audiences and schools about the need to partner with DSS to recruit families for waiting children;
- distributing newsletters, brochures, flyers, posters, and other information to community centers, local businesses, and schools about the need for adoptive families;
- conducting orientation sessions in community centers, schools, and churches in counties during day-time and evening hours as requested;
- creating and broadcasting public service announcements to encourage people to explore adoption;
- establishing a regional approach to educate the public about the adoption of special needs children;
- coordinating large-scale community awareness events like The Journey Home Project; Walk a Mile in My Shoes; and, Dressed Up and Stepping Out;
- developing a recruitment campaign targeted to men and older couples about the older youth in care, also using the Cherishing the Child calendar featuring adults in various occupations (teachers, medical field, lawyers, etc.);
- developing a mentoring program for older youth with organizations like One Hundred Black Men, etc.; and
- using both foster and adoptive families as facilitators during orientation and/or information sessions in communities.

NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

South Carolina, like all states nationwide, is obligated to prove diligent recruitment efforts for adoptive families for waiting children, when reunification with birth families is not an option. These efforts need to include all races, ethnicities, and cultures which will best meet the needs of each child. Families must be recruited from communities that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of waiting children and youth.

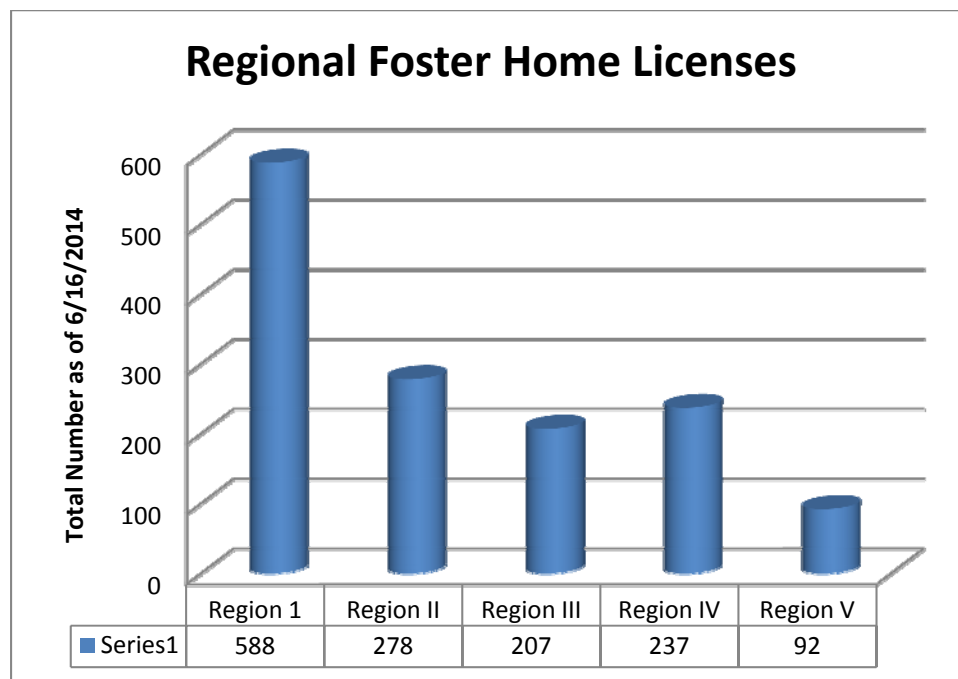
- **Designated adoption recruiter (AR) in each region:** The SCDSS will have a designated AR in each region which will allow for a regional approach to educate the public about the adoption of children/youths with special needs, and expands the potential for them to be adopted. Each region has its own specific demographics, special needs, receptivity factors, and media usage. The Regional AR would be responsible for things like, helping to develop a marketing plan and recruitment strategy for their region, organizing and arranging media and recruitment events, etc.
- **Recruitment Budget:** According to "Treat Them like Gold: A Best Practice Guide to Partnering with Resource Families", it is extremely necessary to have a definite recruitment budget in order to fund a recruitment plan. It is recommended that each region have a recruitment budget will allow for the purchase of materials for recruitment events statewide, printing, supplies, and other needed items.
- **Training Program to tie staff to ongoing cultural diversity awareness training:** Color Consciousness – Not "Color Blindness" will give workers an opportunity to integrate cultural sensitivity into their work with all communities. It will also help increase their understanding of the steps necessary to ensure the professional, equal and culturally-sensitive delivery of services to all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religious origin. It is recommended that this be implemented before the end of the FFY 2015, and that it be mandatory training for all foster care and adoption workers.
- **Develop methods to assess the effectiveness of recruitment efforts** (establish benchmarks and tracking data): The difference between effective and ineffective recruitment is measurement. Forms will be utilized as templates to develop benchmarks and tracking data on recruitment efforts in all regions.
- **Collaboration with foster care to develop innovative recruitment methods:** A promising approach to recruitment is collaborating with foster care to conduct recruitment activities including mining files and family finding activities. Concurrent planning has been implemented and workers are located in the counties and doing concurrent planning. It is written in the contract for Winthrop to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. In regard to the recruitment part of their contract, the SCDSS currently has a recruiter in three of the five regions. They were hired in May 2014 and two more positions for the other regions are planned. They will work in conjunction with the statewide recruiter. There will be two statewide events as part of this contract. One will take place in 2014 and the other will be 2015. These recruiters will focus on targeted and child specific recruitment. There is also a grant with Allen University to assist with recruitment. That is currently still in the planning stages.
- **Regional Licensing Structure:** In recent years, the number of quality resource families statewide has declined, while the number of children coming into care has held steady. Many of these children were members of large sibling groups and often over the age of ten. In order to accommodate the increased number of siblings and older children entering care, more resource families are needed.

In the FFY 2013, the SCDSS began a Resource Family Team (RFT) pilot in Region IV for the following twelve counties: Florence, Darlington, Horry, Georgetown, Williamsburg, Clarendon, Marlboro, Lee, Sumter, Dillon, Chesterfield, and Marion. The RFT is tasked with licensing all families in this region who are interested in becoming a resource for South Carolina's foster children. The RFT pilot aims to enhance the recruitment, assessment, licensing and retention of families who are able to be an appropriate resource for children in foster care, in addition to exploring ways to in to increase timeliness of licensing and ensuring quality support for families. The RFT includes Resource Parents, Licensing Consultants, Foster Care Workers, IFCCS Service Coordinators, Adoptions Staff, School Officials, Medical/Mental Health Professionals, GAL's, Birth Families, etc., to ensure children are safe and thriving.

THE RFT pilot places a strong emphasis on keeping sibling groups together and keeping children in the community/school district of origin, unless there is a safety issue while also providing individualized supports and services to Resource Parents to promote placement stability. The RFT has committed to quality vs. quantity, and places the following expectations when recruiting Resource Families:

- license families who really desire to be a *RESOURCE* to children;
- license families who lead children into adulthood;
- provide appropriate independent living skills;
- license families who allow children to participate in activities and recreations that are age appropriate and produce thriving children;
- license families who are invested in the education and the lifelong success of children; and
- families willing to do what it takes to help children achieve positive permanency.

In efforts to meet these expectations, the RFT members completed a thorough assessment of child, family, & caregiver decisions to ascertain the degree that they were child-centered and not process or relationship driven. Decisions need to be based on the child's needs, permanency goals, child and caregiver compatibility, and capacity of caregiver.



(Data from CAPSS on June 16, 2014)

As noted in the chart above, the majority (42%) of the licensed Resource Families on 6/16/2014 were in Region I in the upstate of South Carolina, which also has the largest number of children in care, and has been the recipient of the contract with the SCYAP and the SCFPA recruitment contract. However, the RFT has proven effective in Region IV which is much smaller in child welfare populace than Region I and Region II, but has almost approached the same number of Resource Families for Region II, which is county-based foster care licensing. Given the success of the RFT pilot in Region IV, the SCDSS leadership has determined that the RFT model should be replicated statewide. The SCDSS will use a multi-phase process to convert county-based foster home licensing into a regional-based licensing structure based on the RFT model. It is anticipated that the remaining regions will have completed this transition by January 2016.

CONCLUSION

The reasons that people foster and/or adopt are complex and each answer varies with the family involved. What the SCDSS has to do is continue to recruit families who are capable of unconditional commitment. Families who are willing to support, love, and nurture children and provide them with a permanent committed home to help them develop into safe and secure adults.

In 1997, African American children were disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. In South Carolina, the African American minority population was 30%, yet 64% of the children in the system waiting to be adopted were African American. Additionally, 84% of that 64% were considered to have special needs. Today, those numbers as indicated by the SC Context Statistics - General Child Population from the Census Bureau for 2011 - showed that in SC, Black children represented 31.9% of the total number of children under the age of 18. It also stated that the percentage of Black children in foster care in South Carolina was 42%, and of that number 41.5% were waiting for adoption.

Changes in policy and practice are steps in eliminating barriers to adoption. Research has shown that having insufficient post-adoption support, an ineffective or no recruitment policy, workers with heavy caseloads and inappropriate training, significant youth involvement, etc., are barriers to adoption.

When recruiting families for adoption, the SCDSS does not need families that are all alike, because children are not all alike. The SCDSS also does not need to understand or judge families based on an individualized basis. The Department has to re-examine the way it narrows the definition of 'appropriate family' in methodology and practice. Staff cannot look at a family wanting to recognize similarities to themselves; instead each family must be looked at in a positive way recognizing their differences. What works for one family and/or child, does not necessarily work for another.

Successful adoption recruitment calls for agencies staying abreast of the times and changing with the times. The SCDSS must be about recruiting both foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds of the children in foster care. The Department's general philosophical approach must be on obtaining maximum impact when it comes to recruitment.

Recruitment efforts must incorporate cultural considerations and our programs must work in collaboration with each other. Adopting older youths is not only doable, it is very important. Recruitment efforts for older youth must involve the engagement of youth in their recruitment plans. Additionally, workers who realize the importance of knowing the children/youths on their caseload, and who know their personality, strengths, interests, and challenges, will always be able to advocate for their children in a personal way.

Retention of quality foster families is a part of recruitment. Good customer service and effective training are the keys to getting and keeping good foster and adoptive parents. Supporting families who adopt from the social services system also has a significant impact not only on preserving adoptive families, during times of crisis, but also in creating an atmosphere of public trust that encourages and supports other families who are considering becoming involved in working with the child welfare population.

During the review period of 2010-2014, the Catawba Indian Nation (CIN) and the SCDSS counties have worked collaboratively to provide reasonable efforts to prevent removal of the child from the home. They also worked collaboratively to provide due diligence in the search for a relative caregiver as an alternative to the child being placed in foster care.

When placement with a relative or a foster care placement was necessary, the Catawba Indian Nation worked in conjunction with the SCDSS in recruitment activities, identification of foster homes, and the Heartfelt Calling recruitment initiative. The SCDSS did and will continue to do the background screening for relative placement and

handles the licensing of foster homes. The SCDSS and the tribe have and will continue to work together to conduct home visits.

At the end of the third quarter of the FFY 2014, the tribe has 0 licensed foster parents for the placement of Native American Children. In spite of the assistance of the SCDSS County Offices, the tribe has been able to place 0 foster care children in Native American homes, during this FFY 2014. From March 2013 to March 2014, there were 2 youth in the SCDSS care who were in tribal family placements, both were identified as being Native American, and each was a member of a federally-recognized tribe. When a Native American child is placed into foster care, the tribe has preferred placement in a non-Native American home that is close to the family and the tribe, as opposed to a foster care placement in a Native American home that is farther away. This preference has been and will continue to be respected and accommodated by the SCDSS, in the FFYs 2015-2019.