## Program Purpose

To ensure qualified foster families are available in the community to meet the physical, emotional, and behavioral needs of children in foster care.

- The program recruits, trains and retains families to foster and adopt children.
- Prospective foster families are recruited from the Arlington community and surrounding Northern Virginia areas. Foster families must be over age 21, and may be single or married.
- Child-specific and kinship placements are used whenever possible to maintain a child’s connections with their family or other natural supports. A specialized training and certification process is available for kinship foster families.
- Information sessions provide education to the community and recruit prospective foster families.
- All prospective foster families participate in an information session, 30 hours of training, background checks and a comprehensive home study before certification to foster and adopt.
- The program has increased recruitment efforts through social media, targeted outreach, and relationship-building with community institutions.
- Certified foster families obtain 15 hours of continuing education annually.
- Children are placed with contracted therapeutic foster care (TFC) agency families when Arlington trained foster families are not available to accept a child in need of a placement. In June 2017, 34 children were served by Arlington certified foster families versus 26 in TFC placements.

### PM1: How much did we do?

#### Staff

- Total 3.5 FTEs:
  - 0.50 FTE Supervisor
  - 1 FTE Resource Family Coordinator
  - 1 FTE Resource Recruiter
  - 1 FTE Family Development Specialist
  - 0.50 Home Study Contractors and Human Services Clinicians

#### Customers and Service Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 2015</th>
<th>FY 2016</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Sessions / Families Attending</td>
<td>8 / 154</td>
<td>7 / 96</td>
<td>8/101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Service Training Sessions / Families Trained</td>
<td>4 / 47</td>
<td>3 /49</td>
<td>5/63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Foster Families Certified</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Certified Foster Families (as of last day of fiscal year)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Served by Program (average per month)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PM2: How well did we do it?

- 2.1 Timeliness of home study completion
- 2.2 Retention of certified foster families

### PM3: Is anyone better off?

- 3.1 Continuity of children’s connections
- 3.2 Placement stability
Foster Families

Measure 2.1 Timeliness of home study completion

Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days Elapsed</th>
<th>Percent of Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-60 days</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-90 days</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91+ days</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg: Days</th>
<th>Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 2015</td>
<td>66 days</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2016</td>
<td>77 days</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2017</td>
<td>74 days</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2018 (proj)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Summary

- Arlington County targets the completion of home studies within 90 days after training.
- In FY 2017, the percentage of home studies completed within 90 days increased to 93% from 68% in FY 2016. The average time to home study completion remained under 90 days.
- Home study completion dates are tracked in a spreadsheet. Families who have home studies completed in more than 365 days due to personal situations are excluded. In FY 2017, one unmarried couple received separate home studies.

What is the story behind the data?

- Foster families must be certified prior to child placement, and rapid certification ensures families are available to meet the needs of children in foster care.
- Families sometimes complete training but delay submitting paperwork indicating a lack of readiness to move forward with the home study process.
- Certification requires completion of a home study. Family availability for home study interviews and unexpected changes in family status can impact completion of this final step.
- In FY 2017, the pre-service training featured a new curriculum which included a web-based component and supported pre-assessments for readiness to begin the home study process.

Recommendations

- Begin the home study during foster parent training after pre-assessments determine readiness.
- Continue to use experienced contractors to support the timely completion of home studies.
Due to the complexity of one case, the home study required 118 days to complete assess the kinship family’s ability to provide care.

In FY 2017, there were 4 emergency approvals. This requires the home study to be completed within 60 days.

Two families from the Fall 2016 training and six from the Spring 2017 training had their home studies delayed due to the lack availability of 2 of 3 home study contractors. A contract addendum had to be created to increase the number of allowable home studies completed by the available contractor prior to assigning any additional.

Contractors continue to require extensive guidance to complete studies.

**Forecast**

- In FY 2018, it is projected that 85% of families will certify within 90 days.
Foster Families

Measure | 2.2 | Retention of certified foster families

Data Summary
- Families who were active (certified and available to foster children) at the end of FY 2016 are retained if they remain active through the end of FY 2017.
- In FY 2017, 81% of families who were active in FY 2016 were retained.

What is the story behind the data?
- According to a 2005 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study, 40-50% of foster families are retained for at least one year. Due to Arlington’s high retention rate the number of foster parents continues to increase, enabling more children to be placed with Arlington certified foster families rather than therapeutic foster family placements.
- Monthly newsletters, support groups, training, and appreciation activities are provided to support retention of foster families.
- A new foster family support protocol was implemented in FY 2017 to increase individualized retention activities such as weekly contact during the first month of a new placement.
- According to National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, foster parents most often cite lack of support, and stresses related to working within the child welfare system as reasons for discontinuing fostering.

Recommendations
- Implement the PRIDE Model of Practice which encourages support from all members of the child welfare team.
- Complete a Foster Parent Support Administrative Issuance to standardize agency practice and procedures around supporting foster parents.
- Institute conversations with kinship families who demonstrate capacity and express interest in fostering and meeting the needs of children not related to them.
- Continue the foster parent exit survey when children leave a foster family. Although the survey was implemented in FY 2017, there is not enough data yet to provide trends.
• Foster parents may also discontinue fostering after adopting a child, due to changes in health or family dynamics, or due lack of space. In FY 2017, 13 families were closed. Of the 13 families, 5 were kinship families whose cases closed due to adoption or custody. One family that fostered for over 10 years retired. Three families had changing family dynamics such as moving out of state and medical emergency. The remaining four families closed due to an inability to meet the needs of children.

• Foster parents who adopt a child are encouraged to remain with the agency to provide respite even if they stop accepting long-term placements of children, to assist with retention of active foster families.

• The increased approval of kinship families will continue to impact retention as they are typically closing when the foster care case is resolved through adoption or custody.

**Forecast**

• In FY 2018, it is projected that 80% of foster parents active in FY 2017 will be retained.
**Foster Families**

**Measure**

| Measure | 3.1 | Continuity of children’s connections |

**Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 2015</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>26/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2016</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>28/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2017</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>30/35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2018 (Proj.)</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>27/32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Summary**

- In FY 2017, 86% (30 of 35) of placements enabled children in foster care to remain in their original school districts, 90% (26/29) allowed children to continue services with their own providers, and 52% (27/52) allowed children to live with relatives, siblings, or in a child-specific placement.
- Continuity is assessed each time a child is placed with a new foster family.
- Family continuity is defined as placement with kin or placement with a sibling.
- Children with no pre-existing connections to schools or service providers are excluded from the data for those categories. For children who lived with multiple foster families, data for each is included.

**What is the story behind the data?**

- Maintaining family, school and service connections is a core Arlington foster family competency. To lessen disruption to the child, foster families are expected to keep children with their service providers and in their schools of origin whenever possible.
- Maintaining family continuity through promoting kinship care is prioritized. Placing siblings together in the same foster home when appropriate contributes to this goal and is also prioritized.
- An Emergency Certification Administrative Issuance was created to certify kinship and non-relative foster families who can support the continuity of a child’s school, family and/or services.

**Recommendations**

- Continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining continuity with school and service providers during foster family training.
- Continue to recruit foster families who can care for sibling groups and teens.
- Continue consultations with kinship care specialist to strategize around supporting more kinship placements and addressing their unique needs.
• The Kinship Assessment was restructured to support emergency assessments of relatives as potential foster families by highlighting in red the items that are required for urgent placements.
• Two consultations with a kinship care expert were held to focus on the unique needs of kinship care providers and how to better support those needs.
• In June 2017, there were 9 certifications completed for kinship foster families.

Several factors impacted continuity scores:
• Twenty-six children were placed with therapeutic foster care (TFC) agencies because Arlington County foster homes were not available. TFC placements do not typically maintain school and service continuity, as these homes are often outside of the Arlington community.
• Three children entered care who attended D.C. schools. Children entering care who attend school out-of-state cannot continue their school placement once they are in the custody of Arlington County DHS. Two of the 3 children were placed with kin to maintain family connections and changed to the schools near their relative’s home.
• One youth without siblings who was not placed with kin, moved multiple times due to criminal activity within the foster homes.
• Fifteen youth without siblings were not placed with kin.
• Six children with 5 families were part of a sibling group, but not placed with their siblings or in a kinship placement due to foster family availability to accept a large sibling group together, and differing needs including medically fragile and entering care at different times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forecast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is projected in FY 2018 that 85% of foster children will remain in their original schools, 90% will continue services with their original providers, and 65% will maintain family continuity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Foster Families

**Measure** 3.2 Placement stability

#### Data

![Placement Stability by Level of Need](image-url)

The Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT) assessment is completed for every child placed with a foster family. VEMAT assesses a child’s behavioral, emotional, and physical/personal care needs. In FY 2017, 93% (38/41) of placements were stable for children with basic needs, up from 79% in FY 2016. During the same time period, children with complex needs had 90% (35/39) placement stability, up from 80% in FY 2016. Because the VEMAT is completed once a child has been with a foster family for 45 to 60 days, children in short-term placements are excluded.

#### Data Summary

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- In FY 2017, 93% (38/41) of placements were stable for children with basic needs, up from 79% in FY 2016. During the same time period, children with complex needs had 90% (35/39) placement stability, up from 80% in FY 2016.
- Because the VEMAT is completed once a child has been with a foster family for 45 to 60 days, children in short-term placements are excluded.

#### What is the story behind the data?

- Foster families who demonstrate the ability to foster children successfully are asked to consider children with complex needs.
- Families who accept children with complex needs and teens are typically families who have been fostering for 5 years or more and/or those who attend support group regularly demonstrating the benefits of development and support.
- Children with complex needs cannot always be safely maintained in a family setting and may require a higher level of care.

#### Recommendations

- Continue to offer foster families specialized training to meet the specific needs of the children placed in their homes.
- When possible, reserve specific foster families with demonstrated knowledge and skill to only care for children with complex needs.
- Offer foster family “buddy system” when new families...
• In FY 2017 more families were willing and able to accept children with complex needs, sibling groups, and teens.
• Two specialized in-service trainings were offered to foster families in FY 2017 on trauma-informed care and mental health first aid.
• The use of Arlington certified foster families to care for children with complex needs decreases the need for therapeutic foster care agency placements customarily used for children with complex needs.
• In FY 2017, there were seven placement disruptions. Three children required a higher level of care or supervision. Four disruptions were based on provider requests. Of the four disruptions, two were teens with complex needs and the other two were siblings placed together with a provider who was unable to perform as a member of the professional team, which impacted their ability to meet the needs of the children.

Forecast

The placement stability projection for FY 2018 is 90% and 85% for children with basic and complex needs respectively.

• Continue to recruit foster families with specialized skills for parenting children with complex needs.

demonstrate the need for mentoring.