

FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT DILIGENT RECRUITMENT PLAN

2026

Table of Contents

Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan 1

Targeted Recruitment Efforts 1

Children with Special Medical and Behavioral Needs 1

Siblings 2

Foster Families Race 3

Statewide Recruitment Efforts 3

Percentage of Children in Custody Statewide by Age Group 3

Gender of Children in Custody Statewide 3

Race of Children in Custody Statewide 3

Stronger Families Together 5

Stronger Families Together Recruitment Strategies 5

Learn More About Foster Parenting 11

Foster Parent and Staff Training 12

Adoption Recruitment 13

Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan

Child Protection Services (CPS) and the Office of Licensing and Accreditation (OLA) continue to share the responsibility of the recruitment and retention of foster families in South Dakota.

As of May 31, 2025, DSS had a total of 788 basic foster homes licensed. CPS and OLA continue to utilize the Family and Children Information System (FACIS) to inform the development of the division's recruitment plan for foster and adoptive parents. FACIS provides real time data such as age, gender, race, and tribal affiliation of children and youth in custody. The data is available by office, region, and statewide, allowing staff to have the data at their fingertips to analyze trends. Most of the information gathered was available through FACIS, although additional information about specific child needs and families available for placement was gathered by OLA and CPS staff. A needs assessment was conducted prior to the implementation of the targeted recruitment initiative. Data is reviewed on an annual basis to determine recruitment needs for South Dakota's statewide recruitment plan. A set of data elements related to children in care and available foster and adoptive families was gathered and analyzed across the state.

Key considerations in recruiting families continue to be age and race, as of May 31, 2025, there are 71.4% (1,176) of the children in custody between the ages of 0-11 and 70.9% (1,169) of the children and youth in custody being Native American. According to the 2020 United States Census, Native Americans make up 9% of the population in South Dakota, therefore creating a significant challenge to recruit an adequate pool of Native American resource families. As of May 31, 2025, DSS had a total of 90 Native American foster homes.

Recruiting families for teenagers remains a challenge. Youth ages 12-18 are 22.4% (369) of the youth in custody; 68.6% (338) of these youth are placed in family settings. CPS and OLA continue to see a trend of youth placed in CPS custody due to developmental disability, mental health, and behavioral needs their families cannot meet. It remains especially challenging to locate placement resources for youth discharging from group care or residential treatment. Families are needed with special skills in caring for children with significant developmental delays, significant behavioral needs, genetic disorders, prenatal drug and alcohol effects, drug-addicted newborns, and rare/complex medical diagnoses.

Targeted Recruitment Efforts

Children with Special Medical and Behavioral Needs

CPS and OLA have made efforts to increase the capacity of foster families to meet the needs of children requiring specialized care due to medical, mental health, behavioral, and developmental needs. Behavior challenges are the most common reasons foster or pre-adoptive parents request to have a child removed from their home. Caring for children with medical needs can also be challenging for foster and pre-adoptive parents if they have not had prior experience caring for the child's specific condition, making it difficult to find and maintain a stable foster family placement. When foster or pre-adoptive parents are caring for children with challenging behavioral or medical needs, the family is provided additional training and supports to equip them in providing a safe, consistent, and predictable home for the child until permanency is achieved. The Department continues to advocate for placement stability through team meetings to identify specific supports for children with higher needs. Child placement agencies provide treatment foster care services, including case management and additional in-home support for the foster parents.

CPS and OLA continue to collaborate with child placement agencies, private adoption agencies, foster families, South Dakota Kids Belong (SDKB), tribal child welfare programs, and faith-based organizations to facilitate recruitment and retention activities across the state. This collaboration is particularly focused on three regions with the greatest need for more foster families. More details can be found below on page six under the Stronger Families Together section.

Recruitment information was disseminated by members of local recruitment collaboratives at several community events in SFY 25. Refer to Appendix A, Attachment A2 for a list of Recruitment and Retention events that were held in SFY2025.

Siblings

As of April 1st, 2025, there are 146 sibling groups of brothers and sisters statewide who have at least one sibling who is separated and placed in a different placement. The most common reasons that a sibling group may be split include:

- At least one sibling requires a higher level of care
- At least one sibling is placed with their biological parent who is not caring for the entire sibling group.
- At least one sibling is placed in a kinship care placement who is not caring for the entire sibling group.
- At least one sibling is placed in a preferred ICWA placement who is not caring for the entire sibling group.
- There is not a resource available to take a large sibling group (4 or more children)
- Siblings need to be separated as one sibling is a danger to the other

Monthly assessments identifying opportunities to place brothers and sisters together are required in policy. CPS offers additional supports, including financial support, to assist families willing to keep brothers and sisters together. The FACIS data elements have not yet been implemented to track when brothers and sisters are placed together or separately; however, this information continues to be tracked by the seven CPS Regional Managers. Percentage of Split Brothers and Sisters:

Region	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025
1/2	45%	37%	31%	41%	43%
3	55%	41%	43%	35%	41%
4	52%	43%	46%	42%	39%
5	33%	27%	52%	28%	45%
6	22%	31%	32%	33%	37%
7	46%	36%	24%	32%	41%

Foster Families Race

As of May 31, 2025, of the 788 foster families the two highest races' making up foster families in South Dakota are Native American 11.4% (90) and White 84.9% (669). The remainder of the breakdown of race: Black 2.3 % (18), Asian 1.3% (10) and Hawaiian/Pacific .01% (1).

Percentage of Foster Families by Race for SFY2024 and SFY 2025.

SFY	Black	Native American	White	Asian	Hawaiian/Pacific
2024	2.8%	10.9%	85%	.98%	.25%
2025	2.3%	11.4%	84.9%	1.3%	0.01%

Ethnicity of Foster Families

Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
9.4% (74 of 790)	90.6% (716 of 790)

*Data was captured in August 2024 for State Fiscal Year 2025. All foster families have a race recorded in addition to their ethnicity.

Statewide Recruitment Efforts

Data from FACIS as of May 31, 2025, utilized to inform recruitment efforts follows:

Percentage of Children in Custody Statewide by Age Group

Age Group	0-4	5-11	12-15	16-18	19-21
Percentage in Custody	33.8% (558)	37.5% (618)	17.2% (285)	11.2% (184)	0.0% (3)
***Percentage in Family Setting**	99.8% (590)	90.1% (591)	75.8% (229)	57% (109)	33.3% (1)

*This number does not include children and youth in trial reunification.

Gender of Children in Custody Statewide

Male	Female
52.1% (858)	47.9% (790)

Race of Children in Custody Statewide

Black	Native American	White	Asian	Hawaiian/Pacific	Hispanic
5.4% (89)	70.9% (1,169)	23.2% (382)	.3% (6)	.1% (2)	7.5% (123)

Ethnicity of Children in Custody Statewide

Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
7.5% (123)	92.5% (1,525)

*All children represented in this chart have race recorded in addition to their ethnicity.

Tribal Affiliation

Tribal Affiliation: Number of Children in Basic Foster Home Placement

Sisseton Wahpeton	Standing Rock	Crow Creek	Cheyenne River	Lower Brule	Oglala Nation	Rosebud	Flandreau Santee	Yankton
45	56	32	56	19	118	152	2	24

Tribal Affiliation: Number of Children in Basic Foster Home Placement by Region

Region	Sisseton Wahpeton	Standing Rock	Crow Creek	Cheyenne River	Lower Brule	Oglala Nation	Rosebud	Flandreau Santee	Yankton
Black Hills	2	2	5	16	6	97	25	0	1
3	0	14	0	24	0	0	1	0	0
4	3	0	11	0	2	1	60	0	0
5	10	0	1	7	0	0	12	0	0
6	23	8	14	9	11	15	52	2	9
7	4	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	14

A total of 40 children affiliated with South Dakota Tribes are placed in licensed kinship care across the state.

South Dakota is comprised of a diverse population of families from many races and cultures. Native American children and families constitute the highest percentage by race receiving services from Child Protection Services.

Five of the nine Native American tribes in South Dakota have Tribal-State agreements to license foster homes on their tribal land and services area. They are the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, and Crow Creek Sioux Tribe.

While each community in South Dakota has their own unique recruitment needs, there are similarities in placement needs statewide. South Dakota recruitment efforts target the following:

1. Native American families to care for Native American children.
2. Families to care for brothers and sisters
3. Families to care for older children and youth (10-18)
4. Families who can care for children who require specialized care due to behavioral, mental health or medical needs.

5. Families who can care for children and support their parents to achieve reunification.

Stronger Families Together

In May 2021, the Stronger Families Together initiative was launched to recruit and support foster parents in South Dakota. The initiative includes a focus on recruiting foster parents who can support family connections and reunification efforts. It is the fifth year of the Stronger Families Together initiative and the following principles continue to be the focus.

- All children deserve to grow up in a family where they are loved and protected.
- Foster families are needed to care for children and support their families when they are experiencing challenges that cause the children to be unsafe.
- Encouragement, support, and services are needed for parent, kinship families, foster families, and adoptive families to provide the best care possible for children.
- Families are needed to provide children a safe, stable, and permanent forever family if they cannot return home.

The following entities across South Dakota continue to work together for Stronger Families Together: Governor's Office, DSS, CPS, OLA, South Dakota Kids Belong (SDKB), Tribal child welfare programs, foster and adoptive parents, foster care alumni, business leaders, faith-based organizations, private adoption agencies, and child placement agencies.

Stronger Families Together Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment strategies for SFY 2026 include the following:

1. **Annual Recruitment Plan**: The Stronger Families Together Program Specialist is working on a collaborative recruitment plan including community stakeholders, the office of Licensing and Accreditation (OLA), and CPS. This recruitment plan will include collaborative data from the community stakeholders, OLA, and CPS.

2. **Statewide Messaging Coordination**: The Department of Social Services Communications team coordinates the statewide messaging of the vision and call to action through news stories, testimonials, websites, social media, and emails.

3. **Regional Recruitment Workgroups**: Workgroups were formed in the three regions with the greatest need for foster homes:

    - **Black Hills Region**: Rapid City
    - **Region 3**: Pierre, Mobridge, and Eagle Butte
    - **Region 4**: Chamberlain, Winner, and Mission

    In the past fiscal year, Region 1 and 2 consolidated and is now referred to as the Black Hills (BH) Region. This realignment is reflected in all referenced data. These teams comprise members from CPS and OLA state offices, local CPS and OLA offices, regional foster parents, South Dakota Kids Belong (private non-profit), Child Placement Agencies, community participants, and tribal representatives. The recruitment teams meet monthly or as needed. Although Sioux Falls is not an area identified as a need for more foster

homes, a recruitment team is being implemented. Sioux Falls has the highest numbers of foster families in the state and has the potential for many more.

4. **Community Collaborations**: Tribal, faith-based, business, and nonprofit organizations collaborate with Stronger Families Together to provide outreach and engagement opportunities about foster parenting needs through their existing community relationships.

The Stronger Families Together initiative incorporates the following efforts:

- Stronger Families Together Website: The website content is reviewed and updated on a regular basis to ensure that all information presented is accurate and current.
    - Initiative Overview**:** Features comprehensive information about the Stronger Families Together initiative, including actionable steps for getting involved.
    - Business Engagement: Offers a tab for business leaders to support their communities and foster families by becoming partners in aiding foster families and children in foster care.
    - Faith Community Involvement: Provides opportunities for faith communities to recruit, retain, and maintain relationships with current and prospective foster and adoptive families.
    - Wrap Around Services Recruitment: Encourages those who may not be ready to become foster parents to support current foster families through services such as providing car repairs, temporary childcare, mentorship, or lawn care.
    - Activation Postcard: The activation postcard reads “To learn more about foster parenting.”. This continues to be the most utilized method for individuals interested in foster and/or adoptive care to reach out and request more information.
    - Lived Experience Videos: Highlights videos of individuals with lived experiences, supporting the four principles of the initiative. Through collaboration with SDKB and their I Belong Project, new videos have been added to share experiences of foster families in caring for sibling groups, children with high needs, caring for older youth, and working with parents towards reunification. In addition, new videos have been added to support the Stronger Families Together values.
    - Contact Information: Contact details for tribes and child placement agencies who license foster homes are available through the navigation tabs.
    - Adoption Resources: Includes a link to the South Dakota Kids Belong website, showcasing children and youth eligible for adoption who lack identified placements.
    - Monthly Updates: The website is updated monthly to feature upcoming foster and adoptive parent classes, along with other necessary updates.
    - Governor’s Message: Features a message from former Governor Noem expressing her support for the initiative and a call to action for more foster and adoptive families in South Dakota.
    - Other non-profit programs, such as Light of Mine Ranch, provide a link to the Stronger Families Together website.
- Executive Proclamations
    - Executive Proclamations by Governor Larry Rhoden are made for “Adoption Appreciation” month, and “Foster Parent Appreciation” month.
- Social Media

    - Department of Social Services maintains a Facebook page and maintains activity several times each month by posting information to support the Stronger Families Together initiative.
    - While Governor Kristi Noem was still in office during SFY2025, she shared posts on her social media platforms, as well as other state and private agencies which increased the reach of the Stronger Families Together messaging. The DSS Communication Team will continue to share information with Governor Rhoden's team for consideration to share on his administration's social media.
    - South Dakota Kids Belong maintains a Facebook page and maintains daily activity with its followers by posting information about fostering and adopting, foster and adoptive family testimonials, and specific recruitment needs in South Dakota.
    - Social media posts guide the interested public to the Stronger Families Together website and a" Learn More about Foster Parenting" link. The link is connected to the foster and adoptive parent inquiry coordinator so that contact with anyone interested in knowing more about foster care can be contacted.
- Collaboration with SD Department of Tribal Relations (DTR)
    - DSS and DTR collaboration to develop strategies of engagement with the nine South Dakota tribes for the recruitment of Native American foster and adoptive families.
    - The team has representation from DSS, OLA, and the DTR. The Oglala Sioux Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Crow Creek Sioux Tribe have representatives who participate in the collaboration.
    - Members of the workgroup make ongoing efforts through phone calls, email, and in-person meetings to engage the tribes to appoint representation to this workgroup with DTR, as well as other foster parent recruitment workgroups.
    - The collaboration between DSS and DTR has focused on developing strategies to raise awareness in tribal communities about the need for more Native American foster families. These efforts include engaging tribal leadership through direct presentations and creating culturally relevant, informative social media content to support recruitment.
    - Social Media Strategies promoting recruitment of Native American foster and adoptive families. Currently DTR is reposting Stronger Families Together posts on their social media which has a Native American following.
    - Informing and educating the SD tribal communities about the need for more Native American foster families. Hosting recruitment events on and off tribal lands at Native American community events.
    - The Oglala Sioux Tribe Child Protection Services maintains its own Facebook page and has been actively creating posts to support the recruitment of Native American foster families. In collaboration, the South Dakota Department of Social Services (DSS) shares and amplifies these posts through its own platforms to support and enhance the Tribe's recruitment efforts.
- Foster Parent Tool Kit
    - A tool kit was developed to equip foster families with the necessary tools and resources to effectively share their experiences, inspire others, and support the recruitment process.
    - The objective is to increase the number of qualified foster families within who share the SFT principals, thus contributing to the growth and sustainability of our foster care community while ensuring the welfare of children in need.
    - A pilot includes nine families (15 foster parents) from Region 1, the Rapid City area. Each foster parent received specialized training by the licensing supervisor.

    - Foster parents are provided a tool kit which includes promotional recruitment material such as t-shirts, scripts, and business cards to assist foster parents in recruitment efforts. Stronger Families Together Newsletter
- Newsletter
    - Quarterly editions of the Stronger Families Together Newsletters are released. Newsletters are shared with the SFT Steering Committee, OLA and CPS staff, tribal programs, private placement agencies, and distributed to all South Dakota foster families.
    - The newsletter shows support and provides information for all foster and adoptive families across the state of SD, including families licensed by private and tribal programs. Each newsletter highlights the national awareness month the release corresponds to, such as November's, National Adoption Awareness month. It can also feature local foster parents, child welfare staff, fostering tips, links to resources such as Native American videos of elders sharing the traditional stories, and upcoming community trainings.
- Faith-Based Presentations
    - *Foster Friendly Churches*: As of May 31, 2025, there are 18 churches promoted as foster friendly. These churches implement best practices for the recruitment and retention of foster families and are listed in the Foster Friendly App. Foster families can use the app to find these supportive churches in their community.
    - In follow-up to *The Sound of Hope, the Story of Possum Trot,* the Black Hills Regional Recruitment and Retention team developed Foster Friendly Church Coalition, a sub-workgroup that meets monthly, inviting churches from the Black Hills Community to come together to discuss recruitment of foster/adoptive care and retention of foster families.
- Wrap-Around Services
    - South Dakota Kids Belong is working closely with the faith community and businesses in Sturgis, Deadwood, Hot Springs, Custer, Rapid City, Aberdeen, Pierre, Freeman, Spearfish, Belle Fourche, Dell Rapids, Yankton, Vermillion, and Sioux Falls areas to provide wrap around services to existing families. South Dakota Kids Belong plans to continue to expand wrap around services to all communities across the state.
    - Continued recruitment of wrap-around volunteers occurs at churches across the state as described above. Congregations are called to step forward and provide wrap-around services such as, babysitting, meal preparation, yardwork, and other acts of service for foster families.
    - The state Wrap Coordinator through South Dakota Kids Belong, who is also a South Dakota foster parent, leads in these efforts to build wrap teams across South Dakota.
    - As of May 31, 2025, there are 38 wrap leaders supporting foster and adoptive parents.
    - The wrap experience provides an introduction to foster care; therefore, wrap-around volunteers are often recruited to become licensed foster parents.
- Foster Friendly Business
    - Businesses and non-profits are provided an opportunity to support children in foster care, foster families, and adoptive families in their community in the following ways.
    - Helping current foster parents who are employees and educate employees to become foster parents.
    - Create an internship for youth who has or is experiencing the foster care system

- Leveraging products or services to support foster parents.
- Partnering with the *I Belong Project* and state-wide initiatives to recruit and retain more than enough safe, loving families in SD.
- The *Foster Friendly* app was created to connect foster parents with businesses who aim to provide support to foster parents by offering goods and services at a free or discounted cost. The app is available for foster parents to download on iTunes and Google Play. A list of participating businesses is also available on the Stronger Families Together website. There are currently 324 businesses participating in this across the state.

- Youth Bureau of Speakers
  - During SFY25, the Department of Social Services (DSS) continued efforts to implement and expand the Youth Bureau of Speakers program which was established under the broader initiative known as Young Voices. This initiative was created to establish, empower, and equip youth alumni with the tools and confidence to effectively share their lived experiences, insights, and success stories from the foster care system. The primary goal of this platform is to inspire, educate, and build awareness among stakeholders, service providers, and the broader community, thereby fostering a more supportive environment for current foster youth and encouraging the recruitment of foster families, especially for teenagers.
  - **Ongoing Planning and Collaboration:**
    - Throughout the year, all Independent Living Services (ILS) events, including youth workshops and workgroup meetings, included discussions with youth and supportive adults about how to use lived experiences in recruitment efforts. Strategies included in-person presentations and social media engagement.
    - Ongoing planning meetings were held between the Stronger Families Program Specialist, Lutheran Social Services (Community Resource staff), and the Independent Living Specialist to develop event ideas and strategies for the Youth Bureau of Speakers.
  - **Youth Engagement Events- SFY25:**
    - June 2024: The ILS Program Specialist and Community Resource Team hosted the annual ILS conference in Pierre, SD, attended by over 100 youth. A former Young Voices member delivered the keynote, sharing her foster care journey, transition to adulthood, and her ongoing advocacy efforts.
    - October 2024: Three young adults presented to providers at the Human Services Psychiatric Center in Yankton. Their message focused on preparing youth in treatment for independent living. The session was impactful enough that they were invited to speak directly with youth in the long-term placement, offering encouragement and practical advice.
    - November 2024: Two young adults attended a showing of *The Sound of Hope* at the Elks Theater in Rapid City, an event aimed at recruiting foster homes. Though they did not present, their presence was recognized privately and appreciated by DSS Cabinet Secretary Matt Althoff.

- January 2025:
    - Two young adults joined the Independent Living Program Specialist at a foster parent quarterly training. While the specialist presented program information, the young adults shared deeply personal experiences. Their stories left a lasting impact—one family in attendance expressed interest in fostering older youth.
- February 2025: Three young adults spoke at the SD Association of Youth Care Providers conference in Pierre. Their presentation focused on:
    - The value of provider participation in Age Meetings
    - Ensuring youth retain educational credits during residential placements
    - Teaching practical life skills to help youth prepare for adulthood
- May 2025:
    - Two young adults presented to CPS Supervisors, Regional Managers, Program Specialists, and Leadership, focusing on the role of caseworkers in building trust, being consistent, and showing up for youth. They reflected on how those relationships shaped their healing and impacted their transition into adulthood.
    - Two foster youth graduates will be featured on social media, celebrating their high school graduations, and highlighting their future planning and aspirations.
- June 2025:
    - Several youths who transitioned from care will serve as keynote speakers at the upcoming ILS conferences in Sioux Falls and Rapid City. In addition to sharing their stories, they will help lead conference activities to encourage peer engagement and comfort among current foster youth.
    - These same young adults will also present at the Homeless Summit in Pierre, SD. Their session will offer provider insights into how to better meet the needs of young adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
    - Two college students who transitioned out of care will share their experiences with post-secondary education and how the Educational Training Voucher (ETV) helped them alleviate financial burdens and supported their academic success.

- **Ongoing Goals and Action Steps for SFY26:** The Independent Living Program Specialist and Community Resource Team will continue to build on youth engagement and advocacy efforts through the following planned activities in SFY26:
    - Youth Presentations at Statewide Conferences: In August 2025, former foster youth have been invited to speak at the Behavioral Health and Suicide Prevention Conference in Sioux Falls. They will share their lived experiences related to mental health prevention, treatment, and recovery supports.

- Training Videos Featuring Youth Perspectives: Videos featuring former foster youth sharing their experiences in care will continue to be recorded and used as training tools for new staff. These videos are designed to demonstrate the impact that child welfare professionals have on the lives of the youth they serve.
- Statewide In-Person Presentations to DSS Staff: Former foster youth will present during all-staff meetings held for Family Services Specialists across the state. These sessions will focus on the critical role of caseworkers in building trust, maintaining consistency, and fostering meaningful relationships that contribute to healing and a successful transition into adulthood.
- Social Media Advocacy through Stronger Families Together: DSS will continue to produce and share photos and short video clips for the Stronger Families Together social media campaign. These posts will celebrate the achievements of youth formerly in care while raising awareness about the ongoing need for foster homes, particularly for older youth.
- Faith-Based Community Engagement: Former foster youth will present at a faith-based gathering hosted by the Stronger Families Together initiative, helping to educate and engage communities in supporting youth in care.
- Foster Parent Orientations and Trainings: Youth speakers will continue to participate in orientations and training sessions for new or prospective foster parents, sharing their personal stories to highlight the real-life impact of committed, supportive caregivers and highlight the need for more foster homes for older youth.
- Development of Young Voices Framework: Current members of Young Voices are working to establish clear leadership, membership, presentation, and incentive guidelines. These efforts aim to strengthen the structure of the group, support recruitment of future members, and encourage more consistent participation from youth currently in care.

Learn More About Foster Parenting

The State contracts with a private agency, Lutheran Social Services, to carry out foster and adoptive family inquiry processes, foster parent trainings, and to conduct initial home studies. Through the contract, an Inquiry Coordinator responds to families interested in learning more about fostering and adopting as well as completes the inquiry process with families who are ready to start the foster home licensing or adoption approval process. Phone and e-mail contact information for the Inquiry Coordinator is listed on the DSS and Stronger Families Together website. Families can also submit a “Learn More About Foster Parenting” postcard on the Stronger Families Together website or fill out a postcard at a recruitment event to learn more about becoming a foster parent. When the postcard is received, it is forwarded to the Inquiry Coordinator to respond and provide information. Families may also contact the local CPS or OLA offices to be connected to the Inquiry Coordinator.

The number of individuals and families interested in becoming a licensed foster family has steadily increased from 2022 to 2025. In 2022, there were 609 families who expressed interest in becoming licensed and in 2025, 873 families expressed interest.

The FACIS inquiry screen tracks the referral source when families complete an inquiry to begin the foster family licensing or adoption approval process. The inquiry coordinator contacts all individuals who submit a Learn More about Foster Parenting" card to provide additional information and answer questions about their interest in becoming a foster or adoptive family. If an individual or family remains interested in starting the licensing process after the initial contact, the inquiry coordinator completes a more in-depth inquiry process between the agency and the prospective foster and adoptive family to determine next steps. The inquiry process was completed with 375 individuals and/or families in SFY2025 from July 1, 2024- May 31, 2025.

Out of the 375 inquiries below is the breakdown of referral sources:

- DSS Staff: 34.1% (128)
- Foster or Adoptive Parent: 16.8% (63)
- DSS Website: 14.7% (55)
- Friend/Relative: 4.8% (18)
- Other: 29.6% (111)
  (Social Media, Adopt Us Kids, South Dakota Kids Belong, ICPS, Other Child Placement Agency)

Foster Parent Closure

Reasons for foster family closure are also tracked in FACIS to analyze retention patterns. From July 1, 2024, through May 31, 2025, out of all the foster homes licensed, 198 foster families closed their foster care license.

Out of the 198 families below is the breakdown of closure reasons:

- Family changes: 40% (80)
- Adopted a child and no longer fostering: 29% (57)
- Difficulty fostering: 9% (17)
- No reason provided: 8% (15)
- Moved out of state: 4% (7)
- Compliance concerns: 7% (13)
- Health Issues 2% (4)
- Retired from fostering: 2% (4)

Foster Parent and Staff Training

DSS contracts with Lutheran Social Services to provide both prelicensure and post-licensure training for foster and adoptive families. The licensure process does not require fees from any individual. Trainings support foster families to take placements of children requiring specialized care. The following themes are including in training: child development, trauma informed care, meeting developmental needs of children surrounding attachment and loss, techniques of managing behaviors, medication management, and culture.

Families are also offered the following trainings: Trust Base Relation Intervention (TBRI), Beyond Consequences, Conscious Discipline, and Adverse Childhood Experience & Trauma Informed.

All post-licensure training is given to the families through their Licensing Specialist. The Licensing Specialist works with the family to determine individual training needs depending on the family's knowledge, skills, and the special needs of the children they are caring for. Trainings are offered across the state in a variety of ways including in person, eLearning, and some blended models.

South Dakota is comprised of a diverse population of families from many races and cultures. Native American children and families constitute the highest percentage by race receiving services from Child Protection Services. CPS staff are required to complete the Foster and Adoptive Parent training as part of their CPS Certification Training. The Foster and Adoptive Parent training curriculum includes information about respecting cultural diversity to meet children's needs and strengthen family connections. Six hours of training in cultural consciousness continues to be required as part of the CPS Certification training for newly hired Family Services Specialists, Licensing Specialists, and Supervisors. The training is facilitated by the Indian Child Welfare Act Program Specialist. The Department of Social Services also continues to provide Cultural Diversity training at the annual New Employee Day training held for all new Department employees.

Cultural trainings currently offered to foster families include the following:

- Cultural Competency Training Services, training is provided by LSS through the WIC Community Innovation and Outreach Project:
    - Part 1- Relating to Norms
    - Part 2- Understanding Values
- Cultural Language Arts Network Classes
    - Intro Dakota – taught by Summer Dumarce
    - Intermediate Dakota- taught by Dawi Huhu Maza
- Positive Indian Parenting Classes
- Indian Child Welfare Act Training presented by CPS Family Services Specialist Supervisor from Watertown, SD.
- Protective Factors Meet Positive Indian Parenting

Propio ONE is an interpreter service utilized by CPS and contract staff when working with a person who speaks another language. Propio ONE allows access to audio and video on-demand interpreting. Propio ONE has 350+ remote interpreting languages. Access to both audio and video for both spoken languages and American Sign Language (ASL) are available. Online foster and adoption training offer closed captioning for the hearing impaired. Lutheran Social Services Community Propio ONE provides trained on-call interpreters in more than 40 languages and has 45 years of experience working with refugee and immigrant families. CPS and OLA also utilize American Sign Language interpreters as needed. CPS utilizes staff fluent in Lakota language, when available, to assist with interpreter services when needed.

Adoption Recruitment

South Dakota continues to implement strategies to recruit and match children available for adoption with permanent adoptive families.

Starting in December 2019, SD began tracking children with the plan of adoption, who have no identified adoptive resource. This information is reported by Regional Managers monthly. Demographic information is part of the tracking form, so data can be used to develop recruitment

strategies matching the children who are available for adoption. There are 100 children without an identified adoptive resource as of June 16, 2025. South Dakota continues to utilize national adoption matching websites such as AdoptUSKids and Raise the Future to identify potential adoptive families who are waiting for children legally cleared for adoption and no identified adoptive resource.

CPS continues to partner with South Dakota Kids Belong (SDKB), a chapter of America's Kids Belong, to recruit adoptive families for specific children. The "I Belong Project" gives a face and voice to children eligible for adoption and no adoptive family identified. South Dakota Kids Belong has put together a team to create videos of waiting children. The videos capture the child's personality, interests, and the child's input about their adoption plan. This encompasses the use of high-quality videography and photography, to focus on the strengths and needs of youth and show case their individual personalities. In the last year, South Dakota Kids Belong, I Belong Project videos have evolved to include narratives from the child's Family Services Specialist and/or caregiver, offering personalized and strength-based information about each child. The videos can be used in a variety of ways, depending on an individual child and circumstances. The videos can be linked to the child's profile on Adopt Us Kids, featured on the South Dakota Kids Facebook page, shared with specific adoptive families, or other child-specific recruitment strategies. The first videos were created in December 2018. As of June 16, 2025, there have been 250 videos completed on children. The outcomes from videos are captured in the table below. Outcomes from videos are not immediate, therefore percentages from previous years continue to rise.

Year	**Outcomes of Children Placed with Adoptive Families**
2018	40%
2019	60%
2020	82%
2021	65%
2022	85%
2023	58%
2024	50%
2025	13%

In collaboration with South Dakota Kids Belong, a training video was created to guide CPS adoption specialists on using I Belong Project videos to recruit adoptive families for children/youth who are more difficult to place and do not have identified adoptive placements.

Approximately 9-14 children are consistently assigned to the two full-time Wendy's Wonderful Kids adoption recruiters available to CPS. The Wendy's Wonderful Kids is a national program established by the Dave Thomas Foundation; a non-profit organization committed to increasing adoptions of children in foster care waiting to be matched with an adoptive family. Wendy's Wonderful Kids supports the hiring of specialized adoption recruiters who are dedicated to finding permanent families for children in foster care. Target youth are teenagers, children with special needs, and sibling groups. Wendy's Wonderful Kids uses an evidence based, child focused recruitment model to find an adoptive for each child matched with the child's individual needs. The two current Wendy's Wonderful Kids adoption recruiter positions are employed by Children's Home Society with additional funding provided by the Dave Thomas Foundation and the

Department of Social Services. CPS is exploring possibilities for expansion of the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program with the Dave Thomas Foundation.

CPS continues to explore creative and effective strategies to better match children with adoptive families. While a Virtual Adoption Fair was previously attempted, it proved to be resource-intensive and yielded limited success in achieving actual matches. As a result, CPS is shifting its focus to more targeted and innovative approaches. One such effort includes a recent survey distributed to foster parents to assess how many families are highly interested in adoption and to gauge interest in a potential "reverse match" approach. In this model, families would share information about themselves and their adoption preferences, allowing workers to assess potential matches with waiting children. This effort is still in development, and CPS is currently refining a list of families, particularly those in key geographic areas, who have expressed strong interest in adoption, with the goal of piloting this approach in the near future.

South Dakota began implementing Permanency Roundtables (PRTs) as a permanency planning tool in November 2017. PRTs are structured, in-depth case consultations designed to accelerate legal permanency for youth in out-of-home care. The process stimulates professional learning, identifies systemic barriers, and develops aggressive, creative, and realistic Permanency Action Plans for individual children or sibling groups. Unlike standard case staffing's, PRTs provide uninterrupted, focused discussions (lasting at least two hours), include an external consultant to bring a fresh perspective, and ensure direct access to decision-makers who can resolve systemic or policy-related barriers. PRTs are conducted across all seven regions and can be used in a variety of permanency goal situations—including reunification, adoption, and APPLA—particularly when no clear permanency resource is currently established. PRT follow up meetings are held every 30-90 days and continue until permanency is achieved. The composition of the PRT team intentionally excludes youth, families, attorneys, and other stakeholders from the initial meeting to create a safe space for staff to openly examine barriers and explore solutions. However, input from these parties is encouraged before and after the Roundtable to inform planning and support implementation. To support continued implementation and expansion, South Dakota is partnering with Casey Family Programs in SFY26 to provide training and technical assistance related to PRTs. While CPS will have a designated lead for this initiative, Casey Family Programs has been asked to include the four Program Specialists for Permanency and Adoption in meetings with their consultant as planning begins around training, developing policy and procedures, model fidelity, and outcome tracking. Staff development leadership will also be involved early to align this work with broader staff training efforts. CQI will be engaged as the initiative progresses, especially around fidelity reviews, data tracking, and outcome evaluation. Coordination with CQI leadership will determine the appropriate timing for their involvement.

Other means of recruitment will be explored to gather alternative methods of recruitment for adoptive children. Stakeholders from CPS, CPA's, adoption agencies, tribes, etc. (include all involved) are involved in fidelity reviews and workgroups related to permanency practice.