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April 9, 2019

Leveraging Community Partners to Recruit and Retain Resource Families for Children in Foster Care

The last several years have marked a transformational time in Los Angeles County’s child welfare system. Los Angeles County, through its unwavering commitment to the mission of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), is reducing its reliance on congregate care for children in the foster care system. No child should spend their childhood in a group home setting. That is why Los Angeles County is committed to ensuring that all children live with a nurturing and permanent family that prepares them for a successful transition into adulthood. Recruitment, retention, and support of resource families is critical to accomplishing that goal.

As of February 2019, 16,176 foster children lived in a family setting in Los Angeles County. This translates to 89% percentage of children in the Los Angeles County foster care system. Los Angeles County’s obligation, however, continues until all children have a family and a home to call their own. This means efforts must focus on recruiting resource families to provide loving homes for the 11% of children who are not living with a resource family and, instead, are living in other placement settings (such as a group home or Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program). The recruitment of resource families remains a top priority to that end.

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The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) engages in innovative strategies to recruit, retain, and support resource families. The State Foster Parent Recruitment Retention and Support (FPRRS) funding has been key to these strategies. Los Angeles County hosted “Fostering Home” recruitment events, where prospective resource families completed multiple elements of the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process in one location. Prospective resource families attended an orientation session, completed a health screening, and received assistance from social workers with completing required paperwork. Community partners that provide ongoing support, such as child care agencies, participated.

Los Angeles County collaborates with private, nonprofit organizations that understand what it takes to successfully recruit resource families and build loving homes in Los Angeles County. Two such organizations are RaiseAChild and FosterAll. RaiseAChild recruits, educates, and nurtures supportive relationships with prospective resource families while partnering with DCFS and Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) to improve the process of advancing foster children to safe and loving homes. RaiseAChild outperforms the national standard by advancing 23% of prospective resources families from inquiry to approval. RaiseAChild’s vision is to be a nationwide leader in the recruitment and support of all prospective resource families, including from the LGBTQ+ community, interested in building their family through foster care.

FosterAll recruits prospective resource families from faith communities and provides ongoing support to resource families so that they can provide safe and loving homes for children who have been abused and neglected. FosterAll is a leader in the recruitment and support of resource families, operating over 100 foster care programs in faith communities, with 46% of families assigned to FFAs being ultimately approved as resource families.

In addition to focusing recruitment efforts for the 11% of children who are not in home-based family care, Los Angeles County must dedicate FPRRS funding to provide resource families with tangible supports they need to be successful. Provision of tangible supports is integral to successful retention of resource families. To further offer resources, every prospective resource family will receive the RFA Guide, developed by

the Step Up Coalition, to assist with understanding and completing the RFA process. DCFS has also increased the rate for respite care and committed its funding to other tangible supports, like diapers, cribs, strollers, bedding, extracurricular activities, and transportation to support retention efforts.

Los Angeles County has leveraged FPRRS funding to recruit and retain resource families countywide. The remainder of FPRRS funding must be expended by June 30, 2019. Therefore, there is an urgent need for Los Angeles County to partner with agencies specializing in recruitment of resource families to increase the number of loving homes for all children in foster care.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors

1. Authorize and instruct the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services to enter into a funding agreement with RaiseAChild to increase the pool of resource families, particularly for children in congregate care, in Los Angeles County at a total cost of no more than \$400,000 of the Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, and Support (FPRRS) award.
2. Authorize and instruct the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services to enter into a funding agreement with FosterAll to increase the pool of resource families, particularly for children in congregate care, in Los Angeles County at a total cost of no more than \$400,000 of the Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, and Support (FPRRS) award.

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