

Child and Family Services Division Program Improvement Plan Pilot Program

Championing a Home for Every Child in Montana

JUNE 9, 2026



DEPARTMENT OF
**PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

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Introduction

Montana formally opted into the **A Home for Every Child (AH4EC)** initiative on March 30, 2026. Prior to this decision, CFSD leadership and field staff engaged in extensive internal discussions, as well as collaborative conversations with DPHHS leadership and child welfare partners through the State Advisory Council. These collective efforts informed Montana's decision to join the AH4EC pilot. The state looks forward to continuing its strong partnership with the Children's Bureau throughout the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) process.

Montana plans to build on the agency's existing strengths, many of which were highlighted in the CFSR Round 4 Final Report, while addressing persistent challenges through coordinated, data-informed, and community-engaged strategies. To that end, Montana will more cohesively monitor current efforts to directly influence the home-to-child ratio, while also developing new strategies to increase the number of relative homes and licensed foster homes available for placement and to safely reduce the overall number of children in foster care. Montana's approach is organized around three primary drivers of that ratio:

- Prevention Efforts to Safely Reduce Foster Care Entries
- Kinship and Foster Home Recruitment and Retention
- Accelerated Safe Permanency

The primary goal of Montana's PIP is to narrow the gap between the number of available foster and kinship homes and the number of children in foster care. The following pages outline Montana's priorities and planned actions over the next twenty-four months to move toward achieving this objective.

Proposed Strategies

1. PREVENTION EFFORTS TO SAFELY REDUCE FOSTER CARE ENTRIES

CFSD will implement the following strategies and lead measures to strengthen prevention efforts and safely reduce the number of children entering or remaining in foster care.

Prevention Strategy 1: Increase the Accuracy of Initial Risk and Safety Assessment

Current Practice Assessment:

The Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) has conducted fidelity reviews intermittently for several years as part of its continuous quality improvement efforts related to investigations of alleged child abuse and neglect. Although the structure of these reviews has evolved over time, the process was revitalized in 2022 by the Safety Committee, which convened management and field-level subject-matter experts to evaluate CFSD's existing practices. As part of this work, the committee refined the fidelity review process to ensure reviews are conducted regularly across the regions, with the overarching goal of strengthening the investigative components of practice.

Building on this work, CFSD has identified an opportunity to leverage existing internal controls within the fidelity review process to evaluate staff understanding and application of the safety model. Strengthening this area is critical for ensuring thorough initial assessments of families and for prioritizing the most appropriate and least intrusive interventions. Fidelity reviews that focus specifically on the immediate danger assessment, the protection plan, and the family function assessment will help identify needs for additional training, support more effective use of prevention plans to safely prevent removals when possible, and highlight opportunities for targeted coaching and mentoring

Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Safety Outcome 2: Item 1

Focus: Statewide

Ratio Impacted: Denominator - The count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. Regional Leadership will conduct three (3) fidelity reviews per month in each region, focused on assessing staff understanding and application of the safety model. These reviews will specifically evaluate the quality and accuracy of the immediate danger assessment, the protection plan, and the family function assessment to ensure that the most appropriate and least intrusive interventions are considered first.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Recent Maltreatment History: Percent of children harmed after the child welfare agency has already confirmed abuse or neglect.

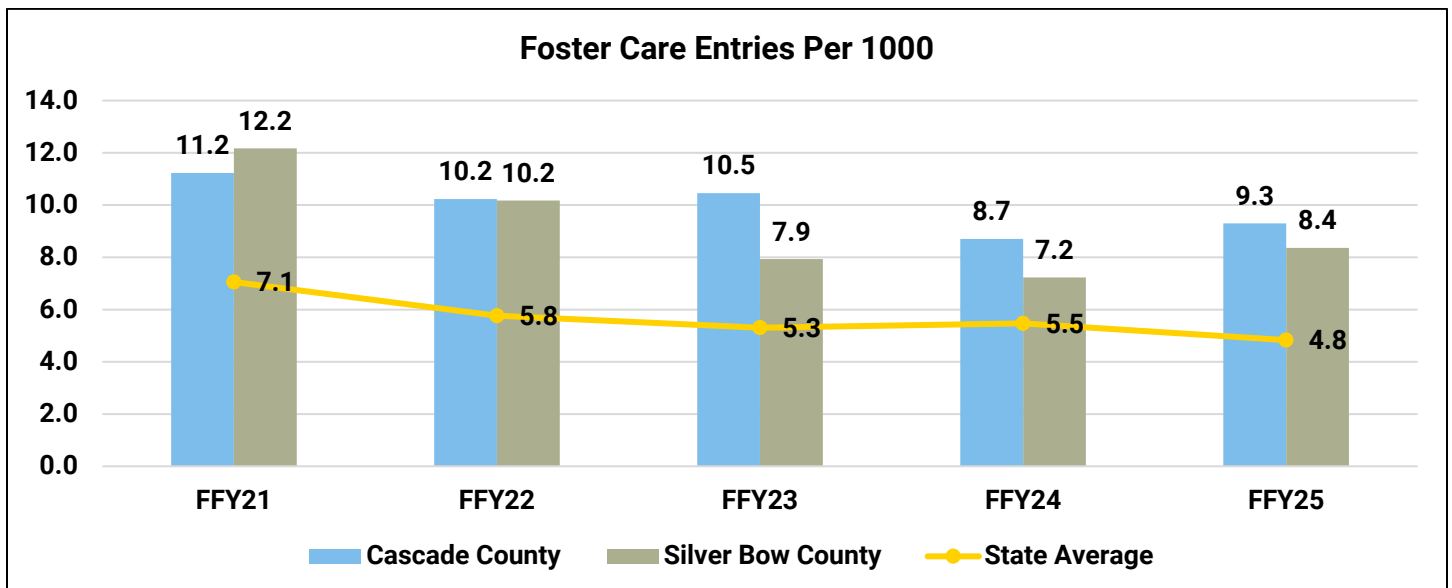
Prevention Strategy 2: Increase the Use of the Community Response Program

Current Practice Assessment:

In 2023, CFSD partnered with the Montana Children's Trust Fund, housed within the DPHHS Early Childhood and Family Support Division, to pilot a Community Response Program (CRP) in four targeted communities for a two-year period. The CRP is a voluntary, short-term program (8–16 weeks) that provides families with individualized, wrap-around services aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect. The program's primary goals are to expand access to comprehensive, community-based support and to reduce both initial and additional reports to CFSD by reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors within families.

The CRP pilot demonstrated several positive outcomes, including a 72 % referral acceptance rate among families identified as at risk. Many participating families also engaged in additional preventative services offered by CRP agencies, which helped reduce or eliminate their involvement with CFSD during the two-year pilot period.

Although federal funding concluded in 2025, Montana recognized the early impact of the CRP in supporting families within the pilot communities. To continue this progress, the Montana Children's Trust Fund, CFSD, and the Human and Community Services Division—administrator of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program—secured funding to extend the CRP pilot through December 2027. The expanded pilot includes two new sites in CFSD Regions 4 and 2, which have the second- and fourth-highest foster care entry rates in the state, *as reflected in the table below*. By implementing the CRP in these regions, CFSD aims to reduce the number of CPS reports requiring intervention and to decrease recidivism for children re-entering foster care



Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Safety Outcome 2: Item 2; Systemic Factors 29 and 30

Focus: Region 2 and Region 4

Ratio Impacted: Denominator - The count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. CFSD Centralized Intake Specialists will increase the percentage of families referred to the Community Response Programs in Regions 2 and 4 when screening determines that the report does not meet the safety or risk thresholds for a field investigation
2. In Regions 2 and 4, CFSD staff will refer families to the Community Response Program when closing an investigative report that does not meet the safety or risk thresholds for a Prevention Plan or Legal Intervention.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Recent Maltreatment History: Percent of children harmed after the child welfare agency has already confirmed abuse or neglect.

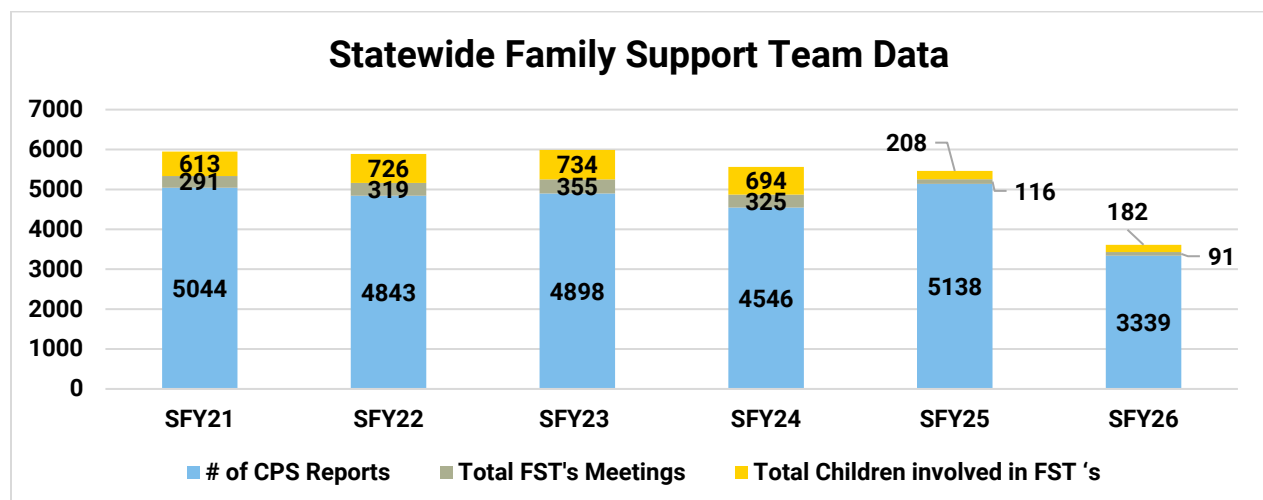
Prevention Strategy 3: Implement and/or Increase the Use of Family Support Teams

Current Practice Assessment:

Family Support Teams (FSTs) were first implemented in Region 2 in 2021 as a collaborative approach to engage families, community partners, and natural supports early in a case. The purpose of FSTs is to support timely decision-making that helps keep children safely in their homes whenever possible or facilitates prompt reunification when removal has occurred.

In July 2024, CFSD committed in the Child and Family Services Plan to expanding FSTs to additional regions to establish a baseline for comparing outcomes between families who participated in an FST meeting and those who did not when entering a Protection Plan. The CQI Bureau conducted quarterly check-ins in the regions implementing FSTs and collected data to assess the model's effectiveness. Early results showed positive outcomes, particularly in the teams' ability to quickly connect families with the supports they needed to address the concerns that led to CFSD involvement.

Throughout 2025, the CQI Bureau continued quarterly check-ins on FST implementation; however, participation declined, partly due to facilitator vacancies in several regions. When data were reviewed in early 2026, they showed a significant decrease in the number of FSTs held statewide compared to previous years, *as reflected in the table below*. By reengaging regions in the FST process, CFSD aims to reduce foster care entries and increase the number of families who can safely engage in a Prevention Plan rather than enter Legal Intervention.



Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Safety Outcome 2: Item 2; Well-Being Outcome 1: Items 12 and 13; and Systemic Factors 29 and 30

Focus: Statewide

Ratio Impacted: Denominator - The count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. For regions that **do not yet** have a Family Support Team (FST) process in place:
 - a. FST Facilitator will identify and engage community partners and provide training to CFSD staff on the purpose, benefits, and use of FSTs to support successful statewide implementation.
2. For regions that **currently have** a Family Support Team (FST) process in place:
 - a. CFSD will increase the percentage of FST meetings held within 72 hours of initiating a Protection Plan to identify family strengths, natural supports, and specific services needed to address safety and well-being concerns.
 - b. The FST Facilitator will engage Tribal Social Services and Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) representatives within their communities and invite them to participate consistently as members of the FST.

Chaser Measures(s):

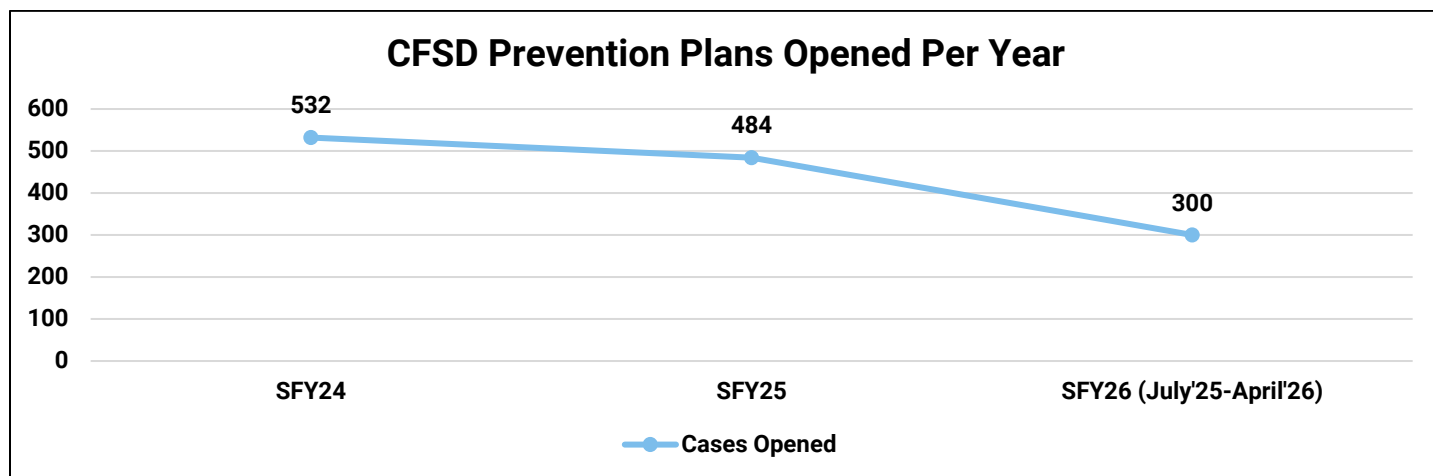
1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Recent Maltreatment History: Percent of children harmed after the child welfare agency has already confirmed abuse or neglect.

Prevention Strategy 4: Increase the Use of Prevention Plans

Current Practice Assessment:

CFSD has historically used prevention plans as a key strategy to help children remain safely with their families and reduce the need for foster care placements. However, over the past three state fiscal years, the number of prevention plans entered into with families has declined, *as reflected in the table below*.

This decrease is partly due to staff turnover among positions previously designated as dedicated prevention plan workers, whose duties were reassigned to meet broader staffing needs. Recognizing the importance of prevention plans as an effective early-intervention tool, CFSD is renewing its focus on this practice. The division is engaging staff in additional training to reinforce the benefits of using prevention plans early in a case to address safety concerns, provide supportive services, and ensure ongoing monitoring with the goal of keeping children safely with their families whenever possible.



Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Safety Outcome 2: Item 2; Well-Being Outcome 1: Items 12 and 13; and Systemic Factors 29 and 30

Focus: Statewide

Ratio Impacted: Denominator - The count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. Prevention plans will be increased across the state by providing training to all applicable CFSD staff regarding the use of prevention plans, with a particular emphasis on helping staff understand the purpose of prevention plans (e.g., the benefits, safety mitigation and monitoring, timeframes, etc.), ensuring they recognize how these plans keep children safely with their families.
2. Regional supervisors will engage with staff by providing coaching and mentoring around prevention plans through consultation during the investigative phase. This will build staff confidence and consistency across the state, enabling them to effectively identify risks, engage families early, and implement prevention strategies using prevention plans.
3. CFSD leadership will strengthen staff skills in developing quality in-home safety plans by providing focused training, coaching, and practical tools that reinforce the purpose, structure, and application of these plans within prevention work. This strategy includes building a shared understanding of how to identify safety threats, partnering with families to develop realistic in-home actions, and effectively monitoring plans, ensuring staff can confidently and consistently implement safety plans that keep children safely at home.
4. Once a prevention plan is in place, meeting facilitators will consistently invite Tribal representatives to all case-related meetings for Native American children. When Tribal representatives are unable to attend, the facilitator will provide a written meeting summary to the appropriate Tribal representative to support timely communication and collaboration.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Recent Maltreatment History: Percent of children harmed after the child welfare agency has already confirmed abuse or neglect.

2. KINSHIP AND FOSTER HOME RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

CFSD will implement the following strategies and lead measures to strengthen the recruitment of kinship homes, with an emphasis on immediate and ongoing family-finding in each case, as well as targeted recruitment of traditional foster homes supported by strategic, community-specific training.

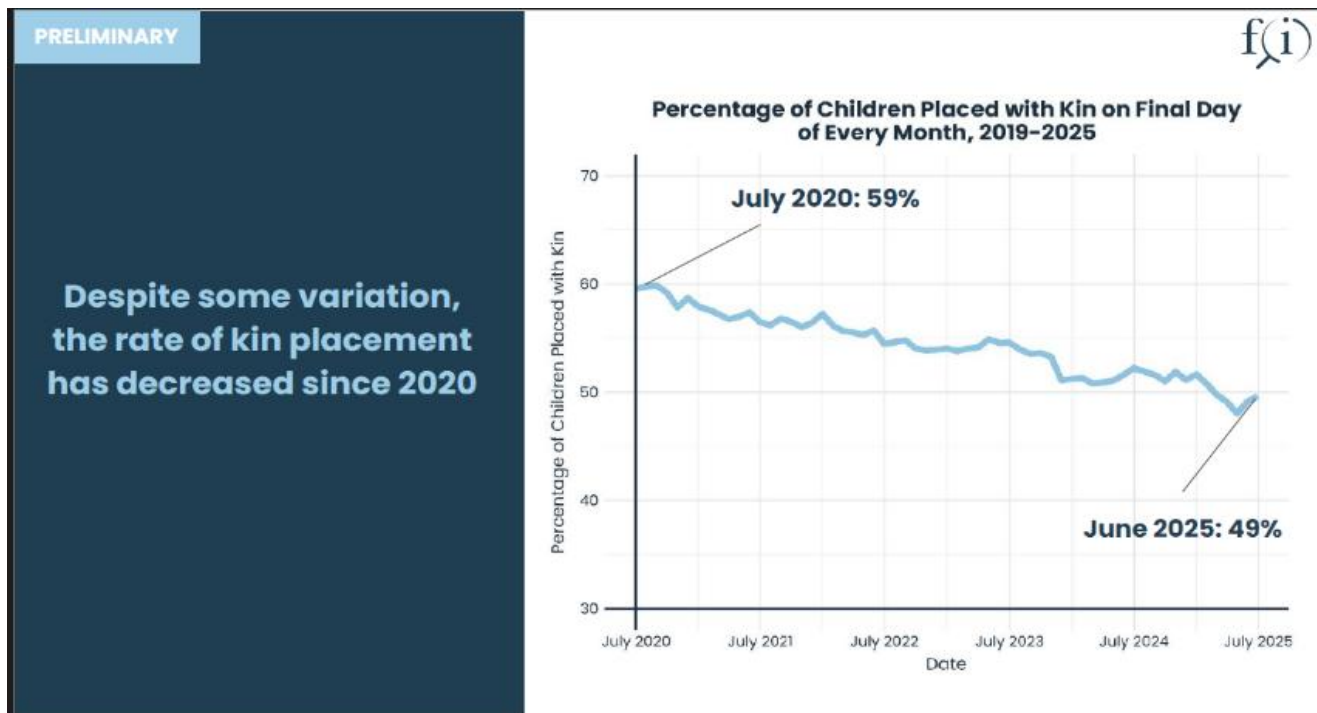
Kinship and Foster Care Recruitment Strategy 1: Increase Diligent Family Finding Efforts

Current Practice Assessment:

Montana has historically embraced a strong kinship-first culture, grounded in the understanding that children thrive when they can remain connected to their families, communities, and cultural identities. Prioritizing kinship care supports stability, preserves relationships, and reduces the trauma children experience when separated from those they know and trust. Despite the long-standing importance of kinship placements in Montana's child welfare practice, data show that they have declined over the past six years, *as shown in the table below*, which was shared as part of CFSD's ongoing work with Foster Insights. Additional Information on the Foster Insights initiative is outlined in Strategy 4 in this section.

It is important to note that Administrative Rule of Montana (ARM 37.49.101) defines "Kinship" as a member of the child's extended family, a member of the child's or family's tribe, the child's godparents, the child's stepparents if the child is placed with the stepparent by CFSD, or a person to whom the child, child's parent, or family ascribes a family relationship and with whom the child has had a significant emotional tie that existed prior to CFSD's involvement with the child or family.

In alignment with the kinship-first commitment, CFSD intends to increase the number and percentage of children placed with kin, ensuring that kinship care is consistently and effectively prioritized across the state.



Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Permanency Outcome 1 (Item 4), Permanency Outcome 2 (Items 9 & 10), Well-Being Outcome 12 (Sub-Section C), and Systemic Factors 27 and 35.

Focus: Statewide

Ratio Impacted:

1. Denominator - The count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month.
2. Numerator – The count of all licensed homes with an active license on the last day of the month, plus all unlicensed homes with a child placed in the home on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. CFSD will implement the statewide use of Family Identification Meetings (FIM) to increase the number of placements with kin.
 - a. Each CFSD Region will designate a Family Identification Meeting (FIM) Coordinator who will receive training in the FIM model and serve as the regional point of contact for implementation.
 - b. The FIM Coordinator will be responsible for training regional staff on the FIM model, supporting staff in understanding the referral process, meeting with parents to gather names of family members, and ensuring consistent implementation of FIMs within the region.
2. The CPS worker, or other assigned staff, in coordination with the FIM Coordinator, will offer and schedule a Family Identification Meeting (FIM) within five (5) business days of a child entering foster care.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Congregate Care: Percent of days children are placed in group homes/settings instead of living with a family.
3. Home Disruptions: Percent of homes where foster placement ends unexpectedly and children must move.

Kinship and Foster Care Recruitment Strategy 2: Develop and Provide Peer Mentorship Opportunities for Kinship and Foster Families

Current Practice Assessment:

As part of the commitment to a kinship-first culture and to increase the number of foster homes available for children, CFSD will continue to leverage support for kin families through the Montana Kinship Navigator Program with the Montana State University Extension Office, a partnership that has been in place for several years.

In addition to the Montana Kinship Navigator Program, CFSD has identified the opportunity to launch a peer mentorship program designed to support both kinship caregivers and licensed foster parents. This initiative aims to strengthen recruitment and retention by connecting new and prospective foster families with experienced caregivers who can offer guidance, encouragement, and practical support. By building a network of peer-to-peer relationships, CFSD intends to enhance caregiver confidence, improve placement stability, and create a more supportive foster care community statewide.

Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Permanency Outcome 1: Item 4; Well-Being Outcome 12 (Sub-Section C); and Systemic Factors 27 and 35.

Focus: Statewide

Ratio Impacted: Numerator – The count of all licensed homes with an active license on the last day of the month, plus all unlicensed homes with a child placed in the home on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. The Foster Care Licensing Bureau will develop the Peer Mentorship Program and train CFSD staff statewide on the importance of the program and the referral process.
2. CFSD staff will refer new kinship and foster placements to a peer mentor or support group within seven (7) days of the initial foster placement.
 - a. CFSD will continue to engage in training opportunities provided by the Montana Kinship Navigator Program and will continue to make referrals as appropriate
 - b. Once the program is launched, staff will refer kinship and foster families to the CFSD Peer Mentorship Program so they can connect with experienced caregivers and strengthen the peer-to-peer support network.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Recent Maltreatment History: Percent of children harmed after the child welfare agency has already confirmed abuse or neglect.
3. Congregate Care: Percent of days children are placed in group homes/settings instead of living with a family.
4. Home Disruptions: Percent of homes where foster placement ends unexpectedly and children must move.

Kinship and Foster Care Recruitment Strategy 3: Develop and Provide Kinship-Specific Foster Parent Training

Current Practice Assessment:

CFSD's Foster Care Licensing Bureau has long recognized an opportunity to offer a kinship-specific curriculum to kinship providers, given their unique needs within the child welfare system. As such, the Licensing Bureau has begun developing kinship-specific curriculum for kin providers who are caring for their young relatives in the foster care system. This curriculum is designed to help kinship providers better understand their rights, the youth's rights, the judicial process, licensing requirements, and key case activities and timelines, such as periodic reviews.

Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Permanency Outcome 1: Item 4; Well-Being Outcome 12 (Sub-Section C); and Systemic Factors 27 and 35.

Focus: Statewide

Ratio Impacted: Numerator – The count of all licensed homes with an active license on the last day of the month, plus all unlicensed homes with a child placed in the home on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. The Foster Care Licensing Bureau will develop and implement the Kinship Foster Parent Training Program and provide Statewide training to CFSD staff on the program components and referral process.
 - a. The Foster Care Licensing Bureau will ensure all regions have access to training materials, guidance, and referral tools needed to support consistent implementation
2. CPS workers, or other assigned staff, will refer newly placed kinship foster families to the Kinship Foster Parent Training within seven (7) days of the child's initial placement.
 - b. CPS or assigned staff will document the referral in the case record to support monitoring of timely referrals and participation.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Congregate Care: Percent of days children are placed in group homes/settings instead of living with a family.
3. Home Disruptions: Percent of homes where foster placement ends unexpectedly and children must move.

Kinship and Foster Care Recruitment Strategy 4: Implement Targeted Community Recruitment

Current Practice Assessment:

In November of 2025, CFSD began to work with Foster Insights (FI) to analyze agency data to understand characteristics and pathways of children in adverse placements to support targeted initiatives for kin finding, foster home recruitment, and other process changes; with the goal of keeping children in care with their family and community whenever possible.

FI used CFSD's administrative data to track adverse placements that tend to happen when there are not enough placements in the child's community. FI defines adverse placements when children in care are not with relatives or other kin and are instead either:

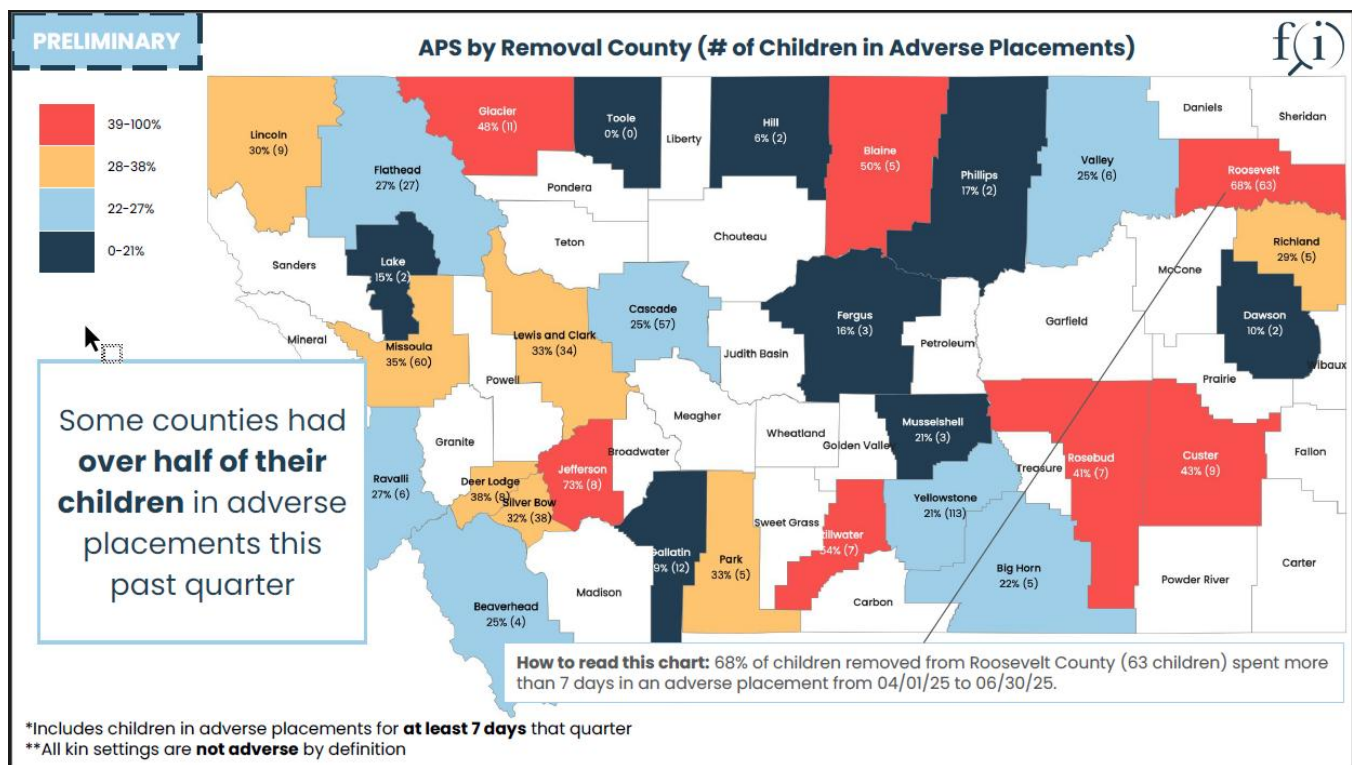
1. Placed in non-family-like settings (e.g. shelters, hospitals, detention),
2. Separated from their siblings, or
3. Placed far from home (e.g. out-of-county or >50 miles away)

Using this definition, FI computed a simple metric, the Adverse Placement Score, which is the percentage of children in care who experience an adverse placement. FI worked with CFSD's Management Team and other leadership who served as a working group of CFSD's child welfare subject matter experts, to break down the metric in a variety of ways so that CFSD can target efforts specifically (e.g. "target recruitment for younger children in Zip Code 123" or "audit the placement process so that we better utilize our homes").

The APS Analysis: Executive Summary provided the following **takeaways**:

1. Kin placement has steadily declined since 2020, increasing reliance on non-kin homes
2. When they were not with kin, over half of the children were in adverse placements
3. MT can reduce APS by continuing to prioritize kin while improving non-kin outcomes

Based on the data and analysis Foster Insights provided, CFSD has identified Roosevelt County in Region 1 with the highest Adverse Placement Score, thereby impacting the largest number of children in any one county who are placed far from home, *as shown in the table below*. CFSD intends to provide targeted support to staff, community partners, including tribal partners, and prospective foster families to ensure children are placed with kin first and, when that is not feasible, with foster families in communities within Roosevelt County.



Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Systemic Factors 27 and 35

Focus: Roosevelt County and Lewis & Clark County

Ratio Impacted: Numerator – The count of all licensed homes with an active license on the last day of the month, plus all unlicensed homes with a child placed in the home on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. CFSD will work to increase the number of kinship and foster homes in Roosevelt County and Lewis & Clark County. The Foster Care Licensing Bureau, Region 1 and Region 4 Leadership will engage community members, staff, and prospective foster families to highlight local placement needs and the impact of placing children far from home due to limited available caregivers. All interested families will be immediately referred to the foster care licensing team for the next steps.
2. CFSD Licensing and Region 1 Leadership will work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and other Tribal partners to license kinship homes used by the Fort Peck Tribe or BIA when those homes are located off-reservation.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Congregate Care: Percent of days children are placed in group homes/settings instead of living with a family.
3. Home Disruptions: Percent of homes where foster placement ends unexpectedly and children must move.

3. ACCELERATED SAFE PERMANENCY

CFSD will implement the following strategies and lead measures to accelerate permanency, including efforts to support safe reunification, preserve children's connections to their families and communities while in foster care, and ensure that targeted communities can meet the unique needs of the children in their care.

Accelerated Safe Permanency Strategy 1: Strengthen Use of the Practice Model and Enhance Consistent Use of the Family Case Plan to Support Improved Permanency Outcomes

Current Practice Assessment:

Timeliness to permanency remains a top priority for CFSD. Ensuring that children achieve safe, stable, and lasting permanency as quickly as possible reduces trauma, strengthens family connections, and supports long-term well-being.

In 2024, CFSD convened an internal Safety Committee, led by members of the Management Team, to identify opportunities to strengthen the Practice Model. The committee determined that the development and use of the family case plan would be a key focus area and serve as a roadmap for the work between the family and CFSD.

Since the implementation of the family case plan two years ago, case workers and supervisors have primarily used it to track their progress in moving the case forward toward permanency. Through internal monitoring and continuous quality improvement, it was identified that additional training, coaching, and mentoring are needed for staff to truly use the family case plan as a collaborative, goal-oriented roadmap that outlines safety concerns, the behavior changes needed, and the services required to ensure a child's safety and achieve timely permanency.

CFSD continues to focus on improving practice, removing barriers, and partnering with families, courts, and community providers to promote timely, sustainable permanency outcomes for every child the agency serves.

Applicable CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors: Safety Outcome 2: Item 3; Permanency Outcome 1: Item 4; Permanency Outcome 2: Item 7, Item 9, Item 10, Item 13; and Systemic Factor 20

Focus: Statewide

Ratio Impacted: Denominator - The count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month.

Lead Measure(s):

1. CFSD will deliver training to all relevant staff on core elements of the Practice Model including:
 - a. collaborative development of family case plans,
 - b. identification of appropriate conditions for return, and
 - c. effective safety planning and monitoring during trial home visits.
2. CPS will ensure initial family case plans are completed within 60 days of a child's removal or the initiation of a prevention plan.
 - a. CPS will complete all required family case plan updates within established timeframes, including 90 days, placement changes, and prior to periodic reviews or hearings.
 - b. Supervisors will conduct monthly case consultations with CPS to review the timely completion and quality of initial family case plans and all required updates.
 - c. When siblings are placed separately, CPS or assigned staff will document a plan within the family case plan to reunify siblings whenever safely possible.
3. CPS will identify and document appropriate Conditions for Return in every case where a child is placed in out-of-home care, ensuring they are behavior-based, measurable, and directly tied to the safety concerns.
 - a. Supervisors will review conditions for return during monthly case consultations to ensure they are clearly defined, updated as needed, and consistently communicated to families.
4. CPS will develop and document a safety plan with details specific to a well-thought-out transition plan for every trial home visit, outlining how safety concerns have been mitigated and what ongoing monitoring will occur during the visit.
 - a. CPS and supervisors will review trial home visit safety plans during monthly consultations to assess the adequacy of monitoring and ensure timely adjustments if new concerns arise.

Chaser Measures(s):

1. Maintaining Family Connections: Percent of children in care at the end of the month who are placed with relatives or kin.
2. Congregate Care: Percent of days children are placed in group homes/settings instead of living with a family.
3. Home Disruptions: Percent of homes where foster placement ends unexpectedly and children must move.

Conclusion

Through participation in the Technical Bulletin #14 PIP Pilot, Montana is aligning its safety, permanency, and placement stability efforts within a coordinated framework focused on measurable, population-level outcomes. By organizing strategies around the primary drivers influencing the home-to-child ratio and pairing these efforts with intentional implementation supports and ongoing monitoring, CFSD aims to ensure that improvement activities lead to meaningful and sustained system-level change.

This approach strengthens CFSD's accountability to ensuring child safety, permanency, and well-being while expanding the effective use of prevention services, increasing foster home capacity, and improving placement stability. CFSD remains committed to continuous quality improvement and data-informed decision-making throughout the pilot period to ensure every child has access to a safe, stable, and permanent home.