

ATTACHMENT C

Findings from Co-Neutrals' Interviews with CYFD Resource Home Recruiters

March through August 2025

Overview

In the arbitrator's first Remedial Order (RO#1), the arbitrator determined:

By February 17, 2025, CYFD will dedicate one placement staff worker located in each of the five high-needs counties identified in the CAP (Bernalillo, Dona Ana, Santa Fe, San Juan, and Chavez/Eddy) to focus exclusively on foster placement recruitment in those counties. The individuals dedicated will be identified by name to the Co-Neutrals in writing by February 10, 2025. The individuals designated will maintain their exclusive focus on recruitment in the five high-needs counties for not less than six months from February 17, 2025 so that the Co-Neutrals can assess whether this strategy-agreed to in the CAP- is proving effective. The Placement Staff dedicated to this work must be in a job category approved by the Co-Neutrals (i.e., if the Co-Neutrals require the job to be performed by a Licensing and Support Specialist, then a Navigator may not fill the role). On or before February 10, 2025, CYFD will identify to the Co-Neutrals, the Plaintiffs and the arbitrator the person assigned responsibility for ensuring this directive is carried out.

Between March and August 2025, the Co-Neutral team conducted six rounds of interviews involving 11 CYFD staff tasked by the agency with foster care recruitment and navigation responsibilities in five high-need counties (HNCs): Bernalillo, Dona Ana, Eddy/Chaves, San Juan, and Santa Fe. The main goals of the interviews were to learn about recruitment efforts – what worked well, where there were challenges, and what additional resources might be needed – and determine whether the focused recruitment strategies are proving effective.

The Co-Neutral team used the interviews to learn about the specific stages of the recruitment and navigation processes; the latest recruitment data and how that information is tracked; information about training; as well as other responsibilities that the staff are assigned. In more recent interviews, the Co-Neutral team asked the staff to reflect on strategies they feel have worked well and what strategies they recommend that could potentially increase the number of licensed families. This summary discusses themes from the Co-Neutral staff's interviews.

High-Level Findings

Based on the 30 interviews, the team heard the high-level takeaways summarized below. Some of the findings emerged from sharing recruitment data provided by CYFD with the

staff to validate its accuracy. Other findings were derived from ratings that staff were asked to assign to various key steps in the recruitment process (see Appendix Table A1).

Permanent, dedicated staff capacity for recruitment and navigation in the HNCs was slow to ramp up over the course of the six months

Eddy/Chaves was the only county to have a permanent recruiter position filled since March 2025. Staff in the other counties were hired in May (Bernalillo), June (Dona Ana), and July (San Juan and Santa Fe). The new staff were not able to take on a full workload until completing several weeks of onboarding and NET training. With respect to onboarding, new staff reported mixed experiences relative to the amount of support they received from supervisors as well as staff who were transitioning to other roles. Issues related to training are discussed in a later section.

- Given challenges with managing the various job functions reported in the first three months, the Co-Neutral team began asking staff if they felt they had enough time to do both recruitment and navigation work, as well as retention activities. Responses fluctuated over the course of the last three months of interviews, with staff explaining that balancing event planning and preparation with managing a navigation workload became challenging during periods of increased activity in either or both areas. In general, though, the staff stated that they felt they could handle the workload.

Unclear Unifying Recruitment and Navigation Strategy and Protocols

The staff shared that they were largely unfamiliar with the county-specific recruitment plans, and none were able to identify a specific monthly or annual recruitment target. Beyond that, staff said that while they had seen some guidelines for how to conduct the recruitment and navigation duties, CYFD did not have formal standard operating procedures (SOPs). Some staff shared that SOPs were being developed.

- While staff consistently participated in weekly recruitment and navigation meetings, they did not appear to have a clear plan of action for how to approach recruitment, navigation, and retention activities.
- Even in the most recent round of interviews, staff in two counties had never seen a county recruitment plan.
- Some changes (e.g., shift to focus on retention, changes in event prioritization, etc.) sounded ad hoc at times, and it was not always clear if all staff had received the same information or were implementing common strategies.
- During the July interviews, when asked to share the top two recruitment strategies they had been asked to use, the staff shared varied responses. It did not appear that leadership had prescribed any common strategic priorities across the counties.
- Without a clearly understood strategy with identified benchmarks, it seemed challenging at times for staff to easily gauge how well they and the team were performing in certain areas.
- One specific example that the Co-Neutral team observed relates to timelines for staff to follow up with prospective resource parents after an initial outreach. When

the team asked about specific inquiries in the May and June spreadsheets, staff shared examples of follow-up times that ranged from about a week to two weeks, and some as long as six weeks.

- On a related note, when reviewing the most recent inquiries listed in the prior month's navigation spreadsheet, some staff did not know the status of certain inquiries, suggesting inconsistent approaches to engagement.

Lack of Formalized Training

All of the staff shared that they received very little formal training on how to perform the recruitment and navigation functions, although they all explained that they have felt and continue to feel very supported by their respective supervisors and have received guidance on most critical job functions. This was consistent across all six months.

- The only concrete training examples that were specifically focused on recruitment and navigation were the trainings led by a consultant in June 2025. Those were the first trainings that staff identified as formal offerings, which were reportedly helpful for staff who participated. In subsequent interviews, staff explained that the consultant was no longer providing trainings.
- Staff mentioned receiving one-on-one training support for specific duties, including responding to inquiries, filling in tracking spreadsheets, completing purchase orders, and documentation in Binti. At the same time, staff cited the need for more role-specific training, more documentation of job functions in the recruitment process, and opportunities for shadowing. Staff shared mixed onboarding experiences, including instances where transitioning staff provided hands-on support and guidance as well as instances where new staff received very little hands-on guidance or shadowing opportunities. Additional supports are particularly key for newly hired staff who do not have prior experience and familiarity working at CYFD.

Inquiry and Licensing Application Volume was Relatively Flat

As part of the navigation spreadsheet review exercise with staff, the Co-Neutral team assessed the total inquiries and in-progress applications each month. The inquiry data from the August navigation spreadsheet (the most recent data reviewed by the Co-Neutral team) reflects that from January 1, 2025 to August 31, 2025, the number of inquiries in the five counties remained relatively flat (see Appendix Table A2). Most counties saw a decrease in the number of inquiries from April to May. Table A2 shows that, with the exception of Bernalillo, the average monthly inquiries from May to July was about the same or slightly less than the average from January to April. In July and August, however, all counties saw average monthly numbers that matched or exceeded their monthly averages from January and February. That said, the Co-Neutral team's ability to gauge inquiry inflow is limited in that the team is not able to compare recent numbers to the inquiry totals going further back in time (e.g., from the prior year).

- The Co-Neutral team reviewed inquiry data from May, June, and July with the staff. In three of the counties (Bernalillo, Dona Ana, and Eddy/Chaves), the data showed an increase in new inquiries over those three months. In San Juan and Santa Fe, the

numbers were about the same each month. The average number of inquiries received in each county over the three months were: Bernalillo (35); Dona Ana (7); Eddy/Chaves (7); San Juan (2); and Santa Fe (3).

- The August navigation spreadsheet showed that from January 1, 2025 to August 31, 2025, the number of newly licensed community homes in the five counties remained relatively flat (see Appendix Table A3). During that time, there were 38 newly licensed homes, with the majority (22) in Bernalillo. The Co-Neutral team acknowledges that it would take time to detect an increase in newly licensed homes as CYFD aims to complete home studies within 120 days. According to the navigation spreadsheet, the average days to licensure across the five counties was 123 days. That said, the average number of newly licensed families increased only slightly when comparing the monthly average from January to April (4) and from May to August (5). Similar to the inquiry data, the Co-Neutral team's ability to analyze trends and assess performance improvement is limited in the absence of prior year data.
- The Co-Neutral team reviewed with staff newly licensed families in the May, June, and July navigation spreadsheets. During the three months, there were 17 newly licensed community homes across the five counties. Of the 17, 10 were in Bernalillo, three in Santa Fe, two in Eddy/Chaves, one in Dona Ana, and one in San Juan. When reviewing the licensed homes, the Co-Neutral team asked about the days to licensure and factors that may help move the licensing process forward more quickly. In general, staff explained that families who were more motivated and were quick to respond, submit documentation, and schedule trainings, home visits, and other requirements, were more likely to finish licensure quickly.

Staff Did Not Always Know the Current Status of Inquiries or In-Progress Licensing Applications

When the Co-Neutral team reviewed the latest inquiry and application data with the staff, there were instances in which staff did not know the current status of either recent inquiries or in-progress licensing applications. Some of the lack of familiarity likely stems from staff being new and not having been involved with certain inquiries or applications, which may have been submitted months earlier.

- During the June, July, and August interviews, the Co-Neutral team reviewed 81 *recent inquiries* across the five counties and asked for any relevant updates as of the date of the interviews. The 81 inquiries represented about half of all inquiries that were received across the counties in those three months. For less than half (33 or 41%) of the inquiries, the staff reported not having received a response from the prospective parent. The next most common status update category was “moved to licensing” (15%), “in contact (did not yet attend orientation)” (14%), “no updates” (12%), “withdrawing” (7%), “in contact (orientation attendance unclear)” (6%), and “in contact (did attend orientation)” (5%).
- During the June, July, and August interviews, the Co-Neutral team similarly reviewed 57 *in-progress licensing applications* across the counties. (Note: The 57 includes some duplication as in most cases the same application would be “in progress” for multiple months.) For slightly over half (30 or 53%), the staff reported that the

applications were still in progress. The next most common status update category was “staff had no update” (30%), followed by “withdrawing” (7%), “denied” (4%), “approved” (4%), and “no response from applicant” (4%).

- In terms of instances where the staff did not have updates on current in-progress licensing applications, the frequency of those instances did decline over time. During the June interviews, staff did not have updates for 50 percent of the in-progress applications. That percentage dropped to 24 percent in the July interviews and then to 18 percent in the August interviews. Even at the lower percentage, staff not having knowledge of the status of nearly one in five open applications demonstrates a disconnect in communication between the recruiters/navigators and the licensing and support team.

Recruitment Challenges Tend to be Concentrated in the Early Steps of the Process

When staff were asked to rate how each step of the recruitment process was going, “advertising/getting the word out,” “finding recruitment events,” and “getting prospective resource parents to submit inquiries” – all steps at the front end of the process – were rated the lowest.

- At various points in the interviews, staff speculated on how local media coverage may be impacting their ability to recruit – both positively and negatively. Staff more commonly reflected on instances where event participants seemed to avoid engaging with CYFD and/or expressed concern to staff about local media coverage. Staff also reported instances where coverage of the recent directive for removal of all drug-exposed children prompted prospective resource parents to inquire about fostering.
- When asked about what staff consider to be their biggest successes and challenges, two staff cited positive experiences at events and speaking with prospective resource parents and at the same time cited difficulties getting people to engage and to want to start the process. One of those staff shared that additional training and coaching on how to “close the deal” with prospective parents would be helpful.
- Staff often did not have any knowledge of the latter steps after the recruiter/navigator would typically hand off the family to licensing and support. In those instances, staff largely chose not to provide a rating. As stated in the Appendix, the ratings for those latter steps in the process are based on fewer ratings from staff and should be interpreted with some caution.

Multiple Shifts in Focus between Recruitment to Retention

During the first three interview rounds, all of the staff cited an increased focus on retention efforts as a method for bolstering recruitment, and staff often framed generating more positive word-of-mouth as being more effective than recruitment events. Staff were positive about the retention events and underscored the importance of acknowledging currently licensed resource parents. During the last three interview rounds (June through August), staff described a shift away from retention and a much greater focus on recruitment and navigation. While the Co-Neutral team did hear examples in earlier

interviews related to resource constraints for retention activities, the staff did not suggest that resources were the reason for shifting focus away from retention.

Scheduling Readiness Trainings

Staff described scheduling the Readiness trainings as one of the biggest challenges in the licensing process. Staff consistently ranked this function among the lowest (see Appendix Table A1), often citing limited options for prospective parents. Staff reported that there was only one training scheduled across the entire state in August and at the time of the August interviews, there were not yet options to schedule Readiness trainings in September. Furthermore, staff explained that the August training options were on weekdays from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m., which was difficult for prospective parents who were working to attend. This speaks to the need for more flexible options for prospective resource parents.

Complex Data Tracking Systems

In addition to their responsibilities for entering certain data in Binti and FACTS, the staff described the series of Excel spreadsheets (including the navigation spreadsheet) that they use for tracking information on events, inquiries, information session attendance, and application progress. The staff shared mixed sentiments about which of these data tracking systems are most accurate at any point in time. The Co-Neutral team has observed that the structure of the navigation spreadsheet and disparate locations for tracking key metrics makes it very difficult to determine how prospective resource parents move from one stage (e.g., inquiry, information session, licensing, etc.) to the next. In addition, at least in earlier interviews, the staff were at times unclear on who was responsible for tracking which information.¹

- The staff also explained that even after prospective resource parents are handed off to licensing and support staff (LSS) during the licensure process, the recruiters were still responsible for tracking updates in the navigation spreadsheet. Some staff indicated that they relied on information in Binti in order to update the spreadsheets, while others solely relied on verbal and/or written updates from LSS staff.
- When asked about the reliability of the recruitment and navigation data being tracked across the core systems (Binti, FACTS, and the spreadsheets), the staff rated the navigation spreadsheet accuracy slightly lower than the other systems. One staff stated, “We go based off what LSS workers are telling us. We could go into Binti ourselves, but it’s a lot with all of those families.” Another staff offered similar sentiments, questioning whether it makes sense for the recruiters/navigators to make updates regarding the licensing process. “The spreadsheet is only as good as

¹ The Co-Neutral team understands that CYFD is using the navigation spreadsheet as an interim tool while it develops its new data management system, IMPACT, which CYFD reports will consolidate data and information currently managed in Binti, FACTS, and the navigation spreadsheet. However, until CYFD can reasonably rely on IMPACT to produce accurate reports on the status of families in the licensing pipeline, it is important that CYFD refine its process to timely update the changing status of families in the navigation spreadsheet, including clarifying responsibilities and creating efficiencies with staff.

what we put in there. If I put information in there and it's not updated, it's not going to be accurate. It's a daily struggle that some licensing team members update it and some don't. Some leave for us to update, but we don't have access to some of the answers until they tell us the answer. I feel that the licensing team should be the ones updating the spreadsheet because they're the ones handling the families. But it's the navigator's job."

Ongoing Procurement Challenges

In the team's initial interviews, the staff were encouraged by additional resources that had been earmarked for both recruitment and retention events. At the same time, staff expressed frustration with the processes for accessing those funds, although the team heard less frustration in the June interviews. During the July and August interviews, staff explained that funds were not yet available in the new fiscal year and so no purchase requests had been submitted. In August, the Co-Neutral team heard about at least one event that the department passed up due to booth fees.

- Staff explained that, in general, it takes about two weeks to receive approval on expenses for events, which makes it difficult to purchase marketing items for last-minute opportunities that arise. The team heard about examples of both faster approvals (i.e., within a week) but also examples of longer approval timeframes, especially when change orders were required due to unaccounted shipping costs, price adjustments, etc.
- Staff also explained that they cannot submit for purchases unless they are for a specific event, which limits opportunities for acquiring resources in advance to keep on-hand.
- Staff described a stringent "gifts policy" that prohibits certain purchases for giveaways, door prizes, incentives, etc. as a strategy to help connect with potential family leads.

One staff made the point that some vendors do not want to wait for payment and so there needs to be quicker ways to access and authorize funding.

Access to Resources

The Co-Neutral team also asked staff if they felt they had the resources they needed to effectively implement recruitment strategies. Over time, more of the staff commented that they did feel they had the resources they need. In earlier interviews, staff mostly highlighted lacking promotional materials for events. In July, staff in all five counties indicated that they had the resources they needed. In August, all but one staff felt they had the necessary resources, the exception having to do with not being able to participate in events due to lacking funds for booth fees.

Appendix

Recruitment Step Ratings

Staff were asked to rate how well they thought each of the steps in the recruitment process was going in their county on a scale of one to five, five being “Extremely well” and one being “Not well at all.”

Table A1. Recruitment Step Ratings, April – August 2025

Recruitment Step	April 28	June 3	June 30	July 29	Aug 27	Over all
Advertising/Getting the word out	3.2	3.8	4.5	5@.0	2.8	3.9
Finding recruitment events	3.6	3.0	4.5	4.0	3.6	3.7
Getting prospective resource parents to submit inquiries	2.3	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.3
Responding to inquiries	4.3	4.2	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.4
Scheduling orientations	4.1	4.2	4.5	4.3	4.1	4.2
Reviewing applications*	4.5	4.3	4.4	4.8	4.3	4.4
Scheduling Readiness trainings*	3.3	4.5	4.5	3.7	2.5	3.7
Conducting Readiness trainings*	n/a	n/a	5.0	n/a	3.0	4.0
Conducting home studies*	4.0	4.5	4.0	n/a	n/a	4.2
Conducting background checks*	5.0	4.5	4.0	n/a	n/a	4.5
Application approval*	4.5	3.5	4.5	n/a	3.0	3.9
Average	3.9	4.0	4.4	4.2	3.7	4.0

* In the respective timeframes, at least one county did not provide a rating. As a result, the rating averages do not reflect all counties, nor do they reflect complete ratings across each of the interviews. Note: “n/a” reflects instances where none of the staff provided ratings in a given month. The Co-Neutral team did not collect ratings during the initial interviews in March.

Recruitment Spreadsheet Data

Table A2. Inquiries by Month, January – August 2025

Month	Bernalillo	Eddy/Chaves	Dona Ana	San Juan	Santa Fe	Total
January	28	7	8	5	7	55
February	31	10	11	3	10	65
March	39	6	7	3	1	56
April	24	7	9	4	5	49
May	24	3	5	2	2	36
June	35	8	5	2	4	54
July	47	11	11	3	2	74
August	37	10	10	5	16	78
Total	265	62	66	27	47	467
Avg. (Jan-Aug)	33	8	8	3	6	58
Avg. (Jan-Apr)	31	8	9	4	6	56
Avg. (May-Aug)	36	8	8	3	6	61

Table A3. Newly Licensed Families by Month, January – August 2025

Month	Bernalillo	Eddy/ Chaves	Dona Ana	San Juan	Santa Fe	Total
January	1	2	2	1	0	6
February	1	0	0	0	0	1
March	5	0	0	0	1	6
April	1	1	0	2	0	4
May	4	1	0	0	1	6
June	5	0	0	1	2	8
July	2	1	1	0	0	4
August	3	0	0	0	0	3
Total	22	5	3	4	4	38
Avg. (Jan-Aug)	3	1	0	1	1	5
Avg. (Jan-Apr)	2	1	1	1	0	4
Avg. (May-Aug)	4	1	0	0	1	5