

Alliance
CaRES

ANNUAL REPORT
2021-2022



BACKGROUND

In early 2021, DCYF selected the Alliance to hold the statewide caregiver retention contract. The Caregiver Retention, Education and Support (CaRES) Program is a statewide program focused on supporting Washington's foster and kin caregivers with innovative, data-driven and responsive programming. The program launched on March 15, 2021, and in its first year has made a dramatic impact on caregivers by building their sense of community, and giving them individual support when they face challenges so they can do their important work in supporting children and families.

The CaRES team is intentionally made up of current and former foster and kin caregivers and former foster youth who bring their knowledge and empathy to supporting caregivers. Our Mentors and Specialists each have many years of experience and deep connections to their communities as well as specific areas of expertise including kinship care, LGBTQIA+ youth and caregivers, Spanish speaking communities, caring for Native children, maintaining cultural connections, caring for medically complex children and youth, and more.

The team walks alongside caregivers at all points of their journey, from inquiring about licensure to achieving it, from the first time a child is placed in their home, until the point of reunification or adoption. CaRES offers a variety of individual and group supports as well as connections to the high-quality, skill-building training for which the Alliance is known. The response from caregivers has been incredibly positive, grateful and relieved, with requests for more!

This report is our chance to share the scope and impact of the first year of the CaRES program.

MORE ABOUT CARES

The CaRES team is made up of full time staff, Mentors and Specialists across the state. But we consider our team to include all the stakeholders, supporters, and partners with whom we work in our efforts to support Washington's caregivers. The team is made up of people who believe wholeheartedly that the work caregivers do every day to care for children and support families matters.

4

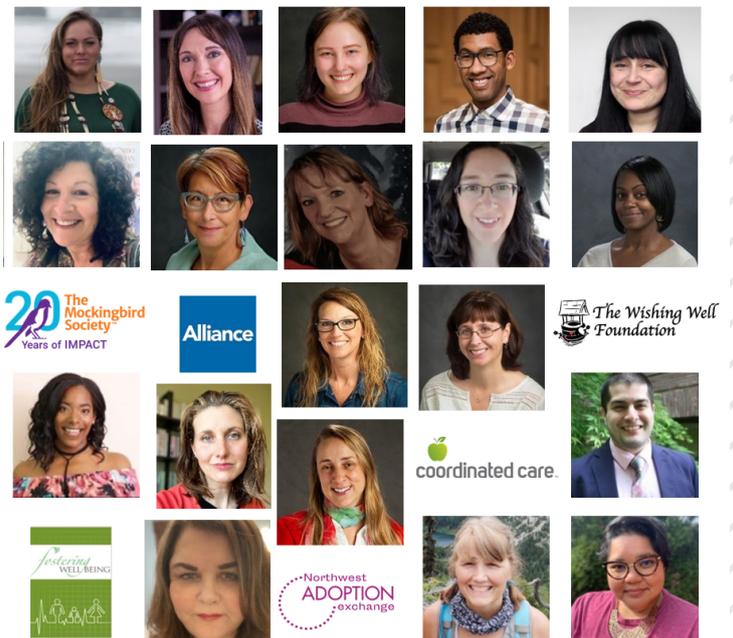
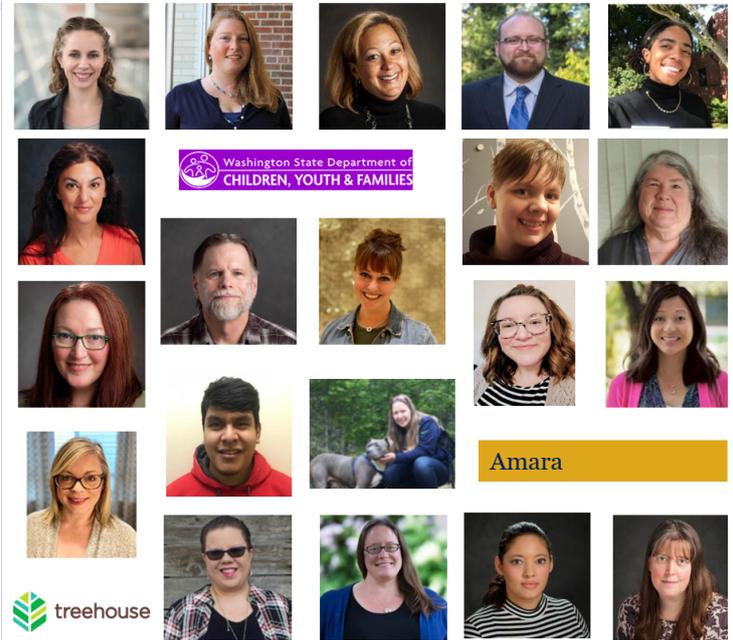
FULL TIME STAFF

16

STATEWIDE MENTORS & SPECIALISTS

MANY

PARTNERS ACROSS THE STATE



THE BIG PICTURE

IN OUR FIRST YEAR, THE CARES TEAM HAD:

OVER
6,076

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTIVE CONTACTS WITH WASHINGTON'S CAREGIVERS

410

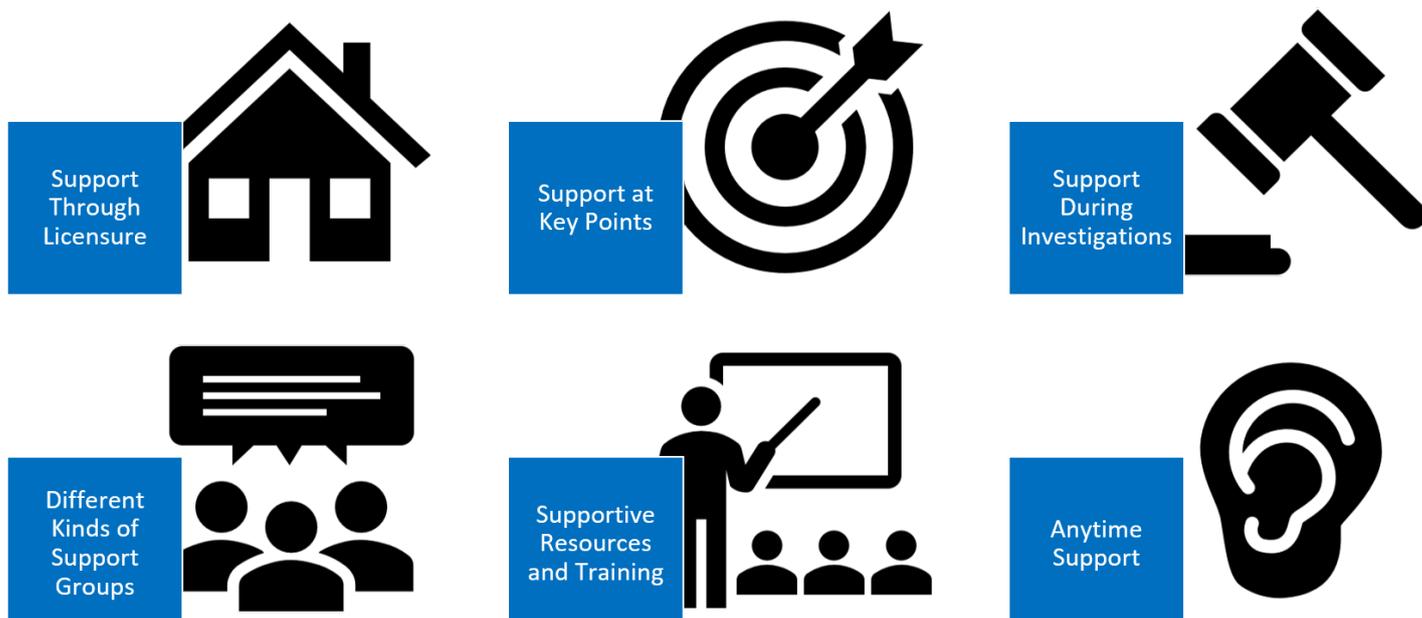
SUPPORT GROUPS, COMMUNITY GROUPS & SPECIAL EVENTS

1,749

PARTICIPANTS WHO ATTENDED SUPPORT GROUPS, COMMUNITY GROUPS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

PROGRAM SCOPE

The CaRES Program is made up of 6 elements and robust data tracking to ensure success can be measured:



1) Support through the licensure process: Prospective caregivers can find the licensure process confusing and intimidating. CaRES staff call all prospective kinship caregivers for individual support. We also call all those who inquire about foster care who live within the top 25 highest removal ZIP codes across the state. Workers refer prospective caregivers who are struggling with licensure for additional help. We also offer weekly virtual lunchtime sessions to answer frequent questions about paperwork and the licensing process, as well as "While You Wait" support groups for those who are preparing to welcome their first placed child.

2) Support at key points: CaRES Mentors reach out to all caregivers to engage them at those moments when we know support is most needed, including at the time of licensure, at the time of first placement of a child into a home, and six months after licensure. These calls provide community resources, advice, and emotional support to build an ongoing connection so that caregivers have someone to call in their next moment of need.

PROGRAM SCOPE

3) Support during investigations: Through the FIRST program, CaRES offers neutral, confidential support for caregivers with an allegation or licensing violation. We offer information about what to expect during the investigation process, and a listening ear during a challenging time.

4) Different kinds of support groups: The CaRES team has created 20 different online topic-based support groups for facilitated discussion, problem-solving with other caregivers, and training credit. Community-based mentorship groups offer the opportunity for local supportive connections with other caregivers. These vary from park playdates to ongoing in-person meet-ups. Drop-In groups are online informal ongoing groups that give caregivers the chance to connect around specific topics like foster parenting as a single parent. We also offer special events, which vary; often they are partnerships with community organizations.

5) Supportive resources and training: We offer a wealth of resources through Facebook, Instagram, and the CaRES website. We also connect caregivers to free and extensive training and coaching opportunities through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence.

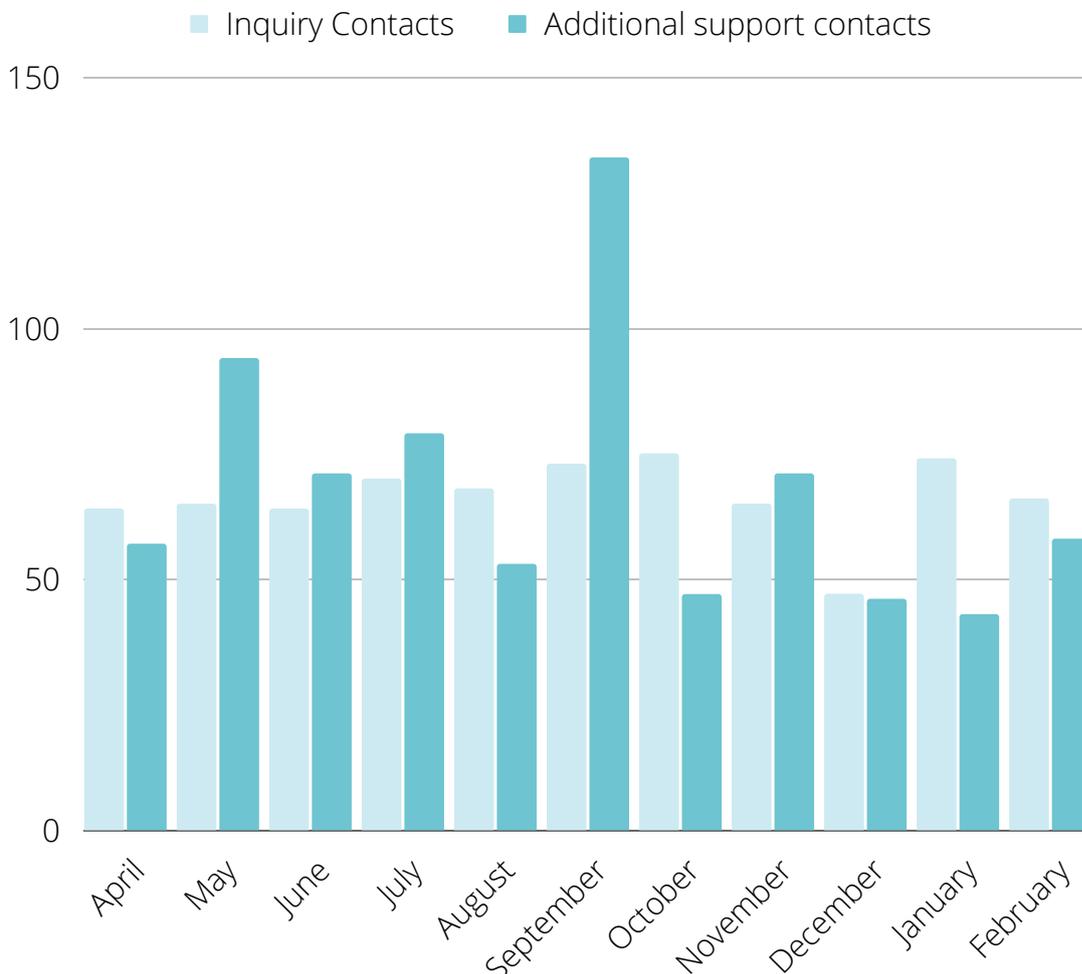
6) Anytime support: While caregivers are doing the important work of supporting children and families, we are here to support the caregivers. CaRES is working to build even more availability to provide empathetic, experienced support. We measure this success in the calls that come from caregivers reaching out directly to Mentors for ongoing support, to get additional questions answered, and for advice.

SUPPORT THROUGH LICENSURE

3,726
WELCOME
EMAILS

1,484
INDIVIDUAL
CONTACTS

We have sent over 3,726 welcome emails this year, ensuring that everyone who inquires about foster parenting gets information and resources. In addition, we made individual calls to all prospective foster parents who identified themselves as kin or who came from the top 25 highest removal ZIP codes in the state (see Inquiry Contacts on the chart below). We also connected with all prospective caregivers who reached out to us directly or were referred to our program (see Additional support contacts on the chart below). In total, we had 1,484 individual contacts with prospective foster parents this year to help them achieve licensure.



SUPPORT AT KEY POINTS AND BEYOND

2,742
ENGAGEMENT
CONTACTS

1,850
ADDITIONAL
SUPPORTIVE
CONTACTS

Our Mentors offer individual outreach calls to every caregiver at the time of licensure, as well as at the time of a kinship placement or a first placement as part of our engagement strategy (see chart below for monthly numbers). Beyond that, we connect with caregivers who seek additional support at any time. We measure our success as a program especially in the number of additional supportive contacts we offer, because they show that caregivers are returning for more help. We added a call at the six month point as an additional support beginning in January.



WHAT DO SUPPORTIVE CONTACTS LOOK LIKE?

The following are pulled from Mentors' notes describing supportive contacts:

- "Spoke with J. on the telephone, she is a foster adopt parent and this little boy was placed with her a week ago. He tested positive for drugs at birth and the mother has had other children that do not live with her. J. is thrilled to have this placement, but in looking over the Newly Licensed call, I remember that she had concerns about attachment and how she would handle that if the child went back home or to another placement. We talked about grief and loss issues for foster parents and she seems to have good insight but knows that it will not be easy especially if this baby is with her for a long time. She said she will be calling back for support."
- As a result of a relationship built during a call related to a first placement, one Mentor was able to engage in ongoing support of brand new foster parents during a crisis with a suicidal teenager in their home. Over the course of several days as the youth was stabilized and services were put in place, the Mentor spoke frequently to the caregivers about their trauma, anxiety, and feelings of being unprepared. The Mentor continually went above and beyond including offering to meet the caregivers at the hospital where they were with the youth. As a result, the home will remain open despite the initial impulse of the caregivers to close their home because of feelings of being overwhelmed.

SUPPORTIVE CONTACT EXAMPLES, CONTINUED

- "Based on a call back in November, D contacted me. She and her husband are struggling with behaviors of their 14-year-old niece with extensive trauma history, who has been placed with them for one month. They are trying to understand why the first month went so well and now these behaviors are surfacing. We talked about how a honeymoon phase followed by rejection is common with kids who have been through trauma. I shared a number of other ideas that have worked for me, reflective listening, how to reduce power struggles, etc. I also recommended that she talk to the SW about wraparound and respite care, because she said the impacts on her other kids (she has five other kids at home) have been profound. In addition, because her niece made the comment this weekend "I hope I don't wake up," I made a plan with her that she will call the intake line and email the social worker and her licensor today. At the end of our phone call, she broke down in tears and expressed that she felt very relieved that these behaviors are not uncommon and that she's not doing anything wrong. She also expressed that "it's so good to have someone to talk to, and just rant to when I get to that point." We agreed that she would call me back again anytime she needs to, and if I don't hear from her I will check back via text in a week or so."
- "Spoke to M. Family is needing additional help getting McKenney Vento transportation set up for school transportation. M and her husband have drastically altered their work schedules to drive kiddo to and from school but cannot continue to provide transportation. They also requested help finding out the contact info for the ongoing social worker to replace her previous worker who is out on maternity leave. M is working on setting up non-needy TANF and looking for childcare options that will work for her family. Sent email to DCYF Social Worker Supervisor requesting contact info for ongoing social worker and additional help with school transportation. Received information the following day to share with M."

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUPPORT GROUPS

Rather than the traditional support group model based solely around location, we decided to base the CaRES groups around topics so that caregivers across the state could come together around topics like grief and loss, parenting teens, adoption from foster care, and many more. We also built book clubs around relevant topics. Our Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups (SFDGs) are based on the "Communities of Practice" Model, in which groups of people who share a focus, concern, or passion for something they do, come together to learn from one another about how to do it better. We recognize the expertise of the participants and use guided questions from a facilitator to ensure that everyone can learn from one another and participate in skill-building and problem-solving. Our offerings have been expanding monthly and have been very well received by caregivers.

1,295

WE HAD 1,295 SUPPORTIVE FACILITATED DISCUSSION GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- March 0 groups | 0 engagements
- April 5 groups | 51 engagements
- May 13 groups | 137 engagements
- June 27 groups | 152 engagements
- July 31 groups | 110 engagements
- August 27 groups | 147 engagements
- September 30 groups | 150 engagements
- October 35 groups | 117 engagements
- November 29 groups | 106 engagements
- December 20 groups | 53 engagements
- January 31 groups | 113 engagements
- February 38 groups | 159 engagements

20

20 SFDG TRAINING OPTIONS WERE DEVELOPED & OFFERED

WHAT ARE CAREGIVERS SAYING ABOUT SFDGs?

The response from attendees has been extremely positive. All support group attendees who completed the survey shared positive experiences, sharing comments including:

- "Facilitator made it easy to feel comfortable sharing and was engaging without being demanding or pushy. Had the perfect combination of activities, videos, and facilitated discussions to keep the training interesting and fun. I will definitely look for more trainings...because I enjoyed [their] approach so much. It also means a lot to me to have LGBTQ+ representation which [facilitator] was able to speak to."
- "Like zoom because it works well with schedule and can meet others in other areas."
- "It was actually very good, better than I expected a remote meeting to be, and folks were very engaged."
- "This is a great way to learn new info, digest it, and incorporate it into skills."
- "Great info in a relaxed environment with accountability to attend and participate."
- "A grief and loss group might not sound uplifting, but in fact I felt so much relief just to sit with other foster parents and know that I am not alone. Grief and loss can be so isolating, but during our two evenings together I felt like we were really able to lighten one another's loads. The facilitator did an amazing job of being our guide on that journey."
- "I appreciated the relaxed structure with specific goals and questions but enough time for the group to thoroughly discuss how it relates to everyone's personal situation and brainstorm helpful ideas."

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUPPORT GROUPS, CONTINUED

454

WE HAD 454 COMMUNITY GROUP PARTICIPANTS

In addition to our Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups, which confer training credit, we have also built other kinds of support groups. We have provided 454 caregiver participants with support through our various community groups. These have included park playdates in various locations, weekly drop-in groups online on topics from single parenting to a general group called "Fostering Fridays", and special events like our monthly storytime where caregivers and the children in their homes can join us for a story and art activity building attachment and social-emotional skills. We have tried remote and in-person support groups with and without training credit opportunities. We have also developed a special event partnership with Coordinated Care and doctors from Harborview to train on relevant medical issues and offer supportive conversations around identified medical topics.

- March 0 groups | 0 engagements
- April 0 groups | 0 engagements
- May 0 groups | 0 engagements
- June 1 group | 3 engagements
- July 5 groups | 9 engagements
- August 10 groups | 34 engagements
- September 16 groups | 17 engagements
- October 19 groups | 51 engagements
- November 22 groups | 94 engagements
- December 17 groups | 97 engagements
- January 17 groups | 81 engagements
- February 17 groups | 68 engagements

124

WE HAD 124 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES AND TRAINING

Our focus on providing supportive resources and trainings begins with our focus on communication. We built a website that serves as a destination for resources, expanding to meet demand. We have created guides including "After a challenging placement" and "Guide to Free and Discounted Options for Foster Families" as well as a book corner where we showcase books that can be relevant for children of varying ages in care. In response to the consistent questions we heard from caregivers undergoing an investigation, we built a robust page to help clarify the process and what to expect.

We also have Facebook pages and an Instagram account that support caregivers with information, resources, and inspiration. We share events, tips and tricks, and training opportunities.

In addition to social media and our website, we use email marketing to communicate directly with our audience, targeting specific communities and locations for events or groups with known shared interests. Our open rates significantly surpass industry standards.

Finally, to ensure we also reached those caregivers who are less responsive to social media or email, we mailed postcards to 3,350 caregivers across the state introducing ourselves and encouraging them to connect with our program directly.

Because the Alliance offers a wealth of training opportunities for caregivers, we are able to link caregivers to many more resources than our program could offer. We connect any caregiver with whom we have contact with other training opportunities that they may be unaware of.

SUPPORT DURING INVESTIGATIONS

37

WE HAD 37
FIRST CALLS

The CaRES contract includes the administration of the long established "FIRST" phone line, a service for caregivers who are undergoing a licensing investigation or have an allegation against them. We provide neutral, confidential answers to caregivers' questions and provide information about what they can expect during an investigation. This year we had 37 calls to the FIRST line from concerned caregivers, which we promptly returned.

LEARNING FROM OUR FIRST YEAR

The main lessons from our first year are threefold:

1) Flexibility is key: Between Covid changing the landscape repeatedly and the transition between the old retention contract and ours, we learned the valuable lesson that our program must be nimble enough to try new things and adjust our plans based on caregiver responses. We've used this year as a series of pilot tests, trying many versions of community engagement, and different kinds of support groups with different modalities, lengths, topics, and more. In the coming year, we will build on our successes and keep trying new and creative ideas.

2) Partnership is essential: Our program strives to connect with and partner with community organizations to build support with them. These successes ensure that we can support more caregivers across the state despite our limited resources. We are proud of the partnership we have built with DCYF, allowing for trusting and transparent communication even around challenging topics. Our ability to share trends we hear from caregivers with our DCYF partners can lead to practice and policy changes to everyone's benefit.

3) Rely on the experts:

Caregivers are the experts in this work. They want authentic support, which is why our program is made up of those with lived experience and why our offerings are determined in response to caregiver feedback.

LOOKING FORWARD

We can't wait for our second year. We have so many ideas and goals for new ways to support caregivers. We plan to continue to expand our reach with a new full time staff person, more Mentors across the state and ever-increasing partnerships with community organizations. We thank our staff, partners, helpers, supporters, Mentors, Specialists, and stakeholders for all we have been able to accomplish this year!

Alliance CaRES Program

Vision Statement

We believe caregivers thrive when **connected** to each other, practical resources, and the broader community.

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