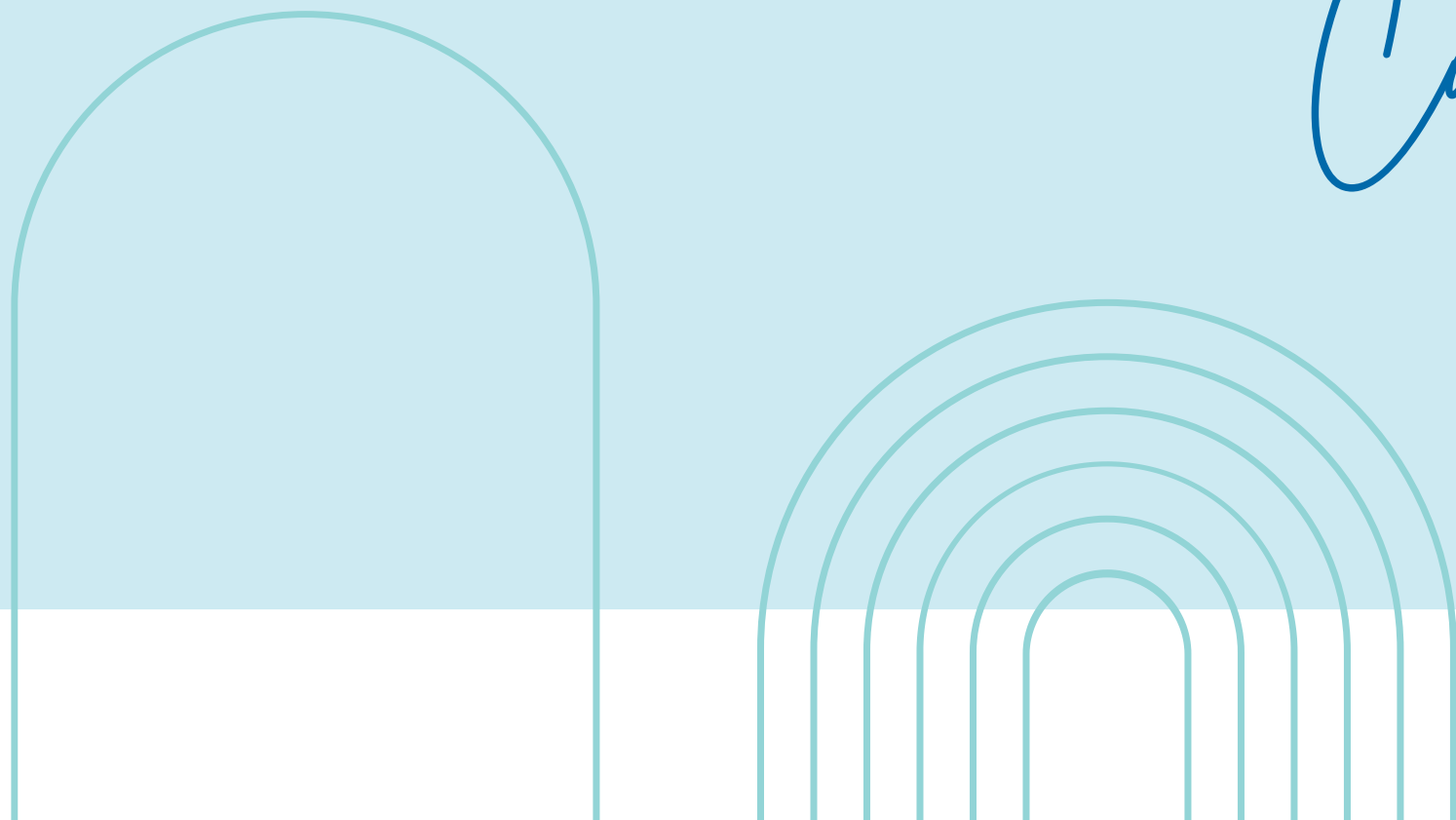


Annual Report
2022-2023

ALLIANCE CARES

Caring for the Caregiver



LETTER FROM CARES

When Alliance CaRES was established two years ago, we set out to wrap support around caregivers so they felt embraced by a community that really "gets it." That's why we built our team out of current and former foster parents with years of experience. Partnering with a family in crisis, inside of a complicated and chaotic system, while caring for children who have experienced trauma can be overwhelming on the best days. But that's what foster and kin caregivers do! So we are here to care for the caregivers. We want CaRES to feel like a rest-stop where caregivers can recharge, find nourishment, connect with others, and leave ready to continue their journeys. It's our honor to provide the empathy, resources, training, and support to help caregivers keep going.

With respect,

The Alliance CaRES team

Jean Brownell, Director of Caregiver Support

Luanne Marshall, Kinship and Licensing Coordinator

Shana Burres, Lead Mentor Coordinator

Christa Murray, Community Engagement Coordinator for Western Washington

Kati Brown, Community Engagement Coordinator for Eastern Washington

Robin Blomster: Director of Strategy and Communications, Alliance

Mandy Gillis: Social Media and Communications Specialist, Alliance

The CaRES Mentors: Christina Urtusan, April Burres, Mary Robinson, Collette Bise, Rae Cook, Stephanie Reid, Lisa Konick, Deshanna Brown, Sarah Strode, Nathan LaChine, Amanda Merriman, Nancy Schrader, and Racheal Turner

The CaRES Specialists: Emmanuel Camarillo, Francisco Contreras Alvarez, Sylvia Cardenas, Trey Rabun, and Matthew Sam-Thornhill

The CaRES Connectors: Lindsay Welch, Ashley Benavides, Audrey Coffman, Barbara Johnson, Cece Smith, Rachael Hill, Brittany Clapp, Mindijo Terrill





**OVER
6,340**

Individual supportive
contacts with
Washington State caregivers

CARES PROGRAM YEAR 2 HIGHLIGHTS

505 Support groups,
community groups,
and special events

2,070

Participants who
attended support
groups, community
groups, and special
events

Vision Statement

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

ABOUT CARES

The Alliance 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 Alliance CaRES program has made a dramatic impact on caregivers by building their sense of community and giving them individual support when they face challenges.

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 the work. Mentors and Specialists each have many years of experience and deep connections to their communities as well as 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 understanding trauma.

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 second year of CaRES.



01.

SUPPORT THROUGH LICENSURE

We offer information and individual guidance to prospective foster and kin caregivers.

02.

SUPPORT AT KEY POINTS

We reach out to caregivers to provide mentorship at the time of licensure, placement, and beyond.

03.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUPPORT GROUPS

We create a variety of topic-based statewide groups and community-based groups to meet all needs.

04.

SPECIAL EVENTS

We host innovative, statewide events to educate, refresh, appreciate and engage caregivers.

05.

ANYTIME SUPPORT

We share resources and build community through our website, email campaigns and social media presence.

06.

SUPPORT DURING INVESTIGATIONS

We provide a neutral, confidential phone line for caregivers undergoing the stress of an investigation.



CARES PROGRAM SCOPE

See our program elements in Appendix A

Support through licensure

We had 1,047 individual contacts with prospective caregivers

We have sent over 3,085 welcome emails this year, ensuring that everyone who inquires about foster parenting gets information about the licensing process 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. We also connected with all prospective caregivers who reached out to us directly or were referred to our program. In total, we had 1,047 individual contacts with prospective foster parents this year to help them achieve licensure.

The following is an example of the type of support a prelicensure call provides:

"Spoke to W. at length, she is a special education teacher who has worked with medically fragile children, and that is her interest in fostering. She told me about her experience working in schools with medically fragile youth, as well as her lived experience of foster care as a child. She was also a foster parent many years ago. Discussed the need for foster parents in her area. She had received pre-licensure email and was concerned about having to wait until March to get licensed. We discussed CPAs as an option, she would prefer to get licensed with the state but may go CPA route. Emailed info about Region 1 CPAs and encouraged her to reach out with any other questions."

Alliance
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LUNCH WITH LUANNE

DROP-IN LICENSING
HELP

EVERY TUESDAY
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

ZOOM: 985 1150 1228



SUPPORT AT KEY POINTS

Our Mentors offer individual outreach calls to every caregiver at licensure, as well as at the time of a kinship placement or a first placement as part of our engagement strategy. We added a call at the six month point as an additional support beginning in January. 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.

The following are examples of the type of support a mentor call provides:

We made 3,159 individual contacts to support newly licensed caregivers and those with a first placement or new kinship placement

"Had a long conversation with T. She said the timing could not be more perfect. She had lots of questions which included: placement paperwork (which she did not receive until this past Monday), visitation, getting licensed, TANF, etc. I let her know I will be sending her an email today with some further information and she is welcome to contact me anytime."

"Z. is going to be 18 next month, her younger sister, age 15, was moved in to the home that she shares with her grandmother and her own 2 year old. Her grandmother has temporary custody until Z turns 18. Z. asked about be able to get food stamps because they are having a hard time and about help to pay for gas to transport her sister to her school which is a 26 mile RT every day. Z. said she wasn't told anything about being a licensed foster parent. The caseworker told her she could not receive money for gas to take her sister to school that it was just for medical appointments, etc. This family has received no information about what might be available to them to help with the care of this child. Gave her a lot of information today, but will call her back tomorrow and go over those items for her."

We provided 2,134 additional individual supportive contacts with caregivers for a six month check-in or in other moments of need

"Long conversation with T. about his two grandsons that he has had for two years. They are both on the autism spectrum, but have really turned around during the time they have lived with their grandfather. Texting him information about Tree House resources, Camp To Belong, and College Bound Scholarship Program."



CaRES Mentor, Amanda



CaRES Mentor, Rae

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUPPORT GROUPS

2,070 caregivers participated in CaRES Support Groups and Special Events

CaRES support groups are based around topics so that caregivers across the state can connect and learn from each other. 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, 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 participate in skill-building and problem-solving. We offer 26 different topics like grief and loss, parenting teens, fostering across race, ethnicity, and culture, and many more. We also offer 6 different book clubs including an advanced level TBRI option. We continue to revise and expand our topic support groups to meet the diverse needs and requests of the caregiver community.

In addition to our Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups, 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 a variety of in-person gatherings from classic support groups, to caregiver coffees, to walk and talk gatherings, as well as summer park playdates. We also offer digital community groups for caregivers across the state. These drop-in online community groups are a place for single parents, caregivers of children with complex medical needs, kinship caregivers, and caregivers who are interested in TBRI principles to connect and build community.

See our complete list of all events CaRES participated in and created this year in Appendices B, C, and D and our Supportive Facilitated Discussion Group descriptions at alliancecares.org or in Appendix E

Below are samples of the universally positive evaluation responses from caregivers in our Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups:

"[I like] how knowledgeable these two trainers are... When we would touch on a subject they would have a resource and would follow up in an email with those resources."

"I have always felt included and felt that my comments were well received. You do an excellent job in inclusion and equity would love to see more organizations do as well."

"Hearing other people's stories that highlight the fact that I'm not the only one to struggle with parenting. It's easy to fall into the idea that no one else has as hard of a time with things as you do."

"[Facilitator] really honored our cultural differences and intersections, while also reminding us what we had in common as a community."

"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."



A park playdate Community Group in Walla Walla

SPECIAL EVENTS

We hosted and participated in 25 Special Events

In addition to our different types of support groups, we also offer a wide range of Special Events. Examples include our ongoing Storytime, where caregivers and the children in their homes join us for reading and craft activities to build attachment and social-emotional skills, and Wellness Resource Wednesdays, which are offered in partnership with Coordinated Care and doctors from Harborview. These special events train on relevant medical issues and offer supportive conversations around identified medical topics. Similarly, Education Resource Wednesday offers information about academic and educational tools in partnership with OSPI and Treehouse.

Special events also include one-time events such as Gentle Yoga for Caregivers, our pride celebration, and a presentation on Coastal Jams by our Native American Specialist. We also participated in a variety of special events in-person in partnership with local organizations such as Coordinated Care, FPAWs, and local DCYF offices including We Are Family Day, conferences, and appreciation events.



CaRES Mentor, Nathan, at an FPAWS conference



One family's finished activity from Storytime

Anytime support, including supportive resources and training


We offer a wealth of resources and supportive services through emails, Facebook, Instagram, and the CaRES website. These include a guide to free and reduced price opportunities throughout the state, a publication on how to proceed after a difficult placement, guidance for understanding the system, and more. We connect caregivers to our many partners across the state and their programs, support groups, and offerings as well as help caregivers navigate the free and extensive training and coaching opportunities through the Alliance. We use targeted marketing through our email campaigns to ensure caregivers are aware of the events available to them. Workers can refer caregivers who need mentorship and caregivers can reach out directly to Mentors for ongoing support, to get additional questions answered, and for advice. We are seeing these calls increase!

The following is an excerpt from a social worker's email after making a referral:

"Thank you so much! I am excited about this program... it can help them navigate all the recent changes and upcoming changes, and the tough spot caregivers are in when they've been in the child's life for so long and don't agree with the Department."

One resource available to caregivers through a CaRES partnership with the Imagination Library

**Alliance
CaRES**



Supporting Youth in Foster Care with the gift of FREE Books!

If you are caring for children between the ages of birth up to five years old, they are eligible to receive a **FREE** book in the mail each month through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library!

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library mails high quality, age appropriate books to children each month, at no cost to the family.

These books are carefully selected and personalized with the child's name when they arrive in the mail.

THANK YOU for being a hero to the children who enter care every year.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Enroll a child by scanning the QR code or registering online.
- In 8-10 weeks, a child will receive their first book in the mail, *The Little Engine That Could*.
- Books arrive in the mail each month until a child's 5th birthday.

EASY TO ENROLL!



Scan this code to enroll a child in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

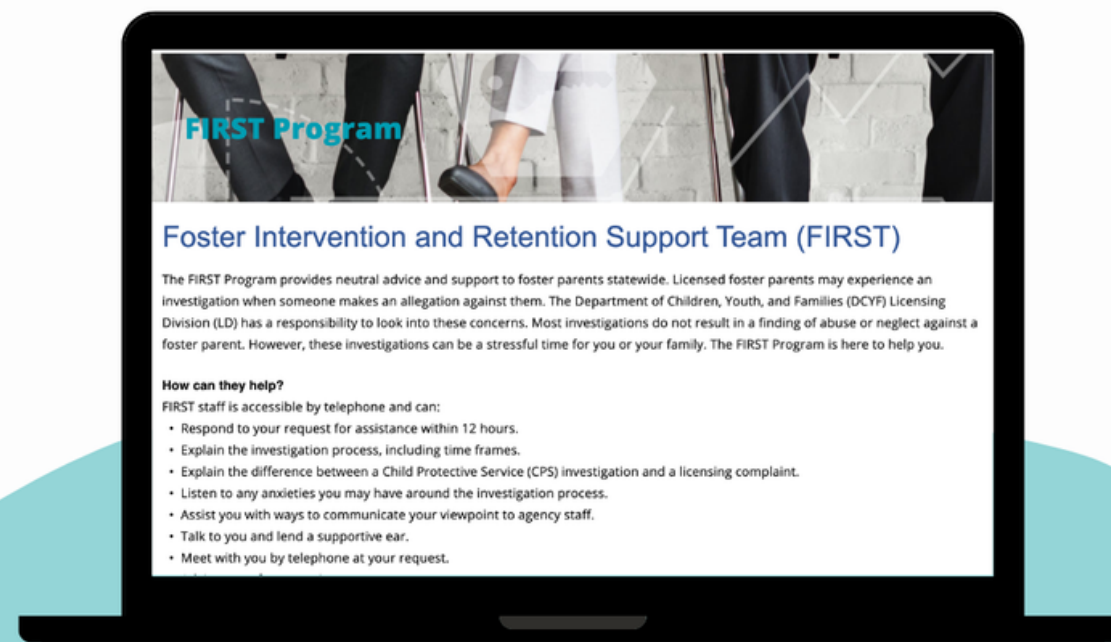
It's easy!

You can also register online by visiting www.imaginationlibrary.com.

Imagination Library of Washington
www.imaginationlibrarywashington.org

Get support through an allegation

**Investigations can be a stressful time.
The FIRST PROGRAM is here to help!**



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SUPPORT DURING INVESTIGATIONS

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 23 calls to the FIRST line from concerned caregivers, which we promptly returned. Most caregivers who call are looking for reassurance about the investigation process or a better understanding of the timeline involved. This resource is under-utilized by caregivers. Caregivers continue to report that they want more direct contact with DCYF, Licensing, and their investigators rather than a neutral and confidential general line staffed by CaRES.

CARES RECOMMENDATIONS

Thoughtful matching for placement:

We continually heard caregivers express challenges related to poor fit placements. Kinship caregivers share that they feel pressed into taking relative placements even when they do not have the means to adequately support the child. Foster parents report frequent placement requests that do not align with their licenses or skill sets. Less experienced foster parents frequently take poor fit placements because of concern about saying no. Both kin and foster caregivers report lack of information disclosed at the time of placement and placement paperwork that does not include significant known behavioral needs. If DCYF can better share the known challenges and better match caregivers with children according to skills and experience, there will be fewer placement disruptions, more stability for children, and improved retention of caregivers.

Support at the time of placement:

As our program supports more and more kin caregivers, we are hearing the same requests and needs come up. At the time of placement, kin often need immediate resources to come with the child. These might include diapers, a car seat, formula, a clothing voucher, and a bed or a crib. Kin also need automatic financial support to be set up for them. Kin are often misinformed by workers that there are not financial supports available to them. They are often afraid to admit the assistance they need, in case children are going to be removed. If DCYF can make supports automatic, at placement, kin will be able to focus on the wellbeing of the child.

Improved communication including regional contact points, and crisis contact points

Much of the discontent experienced by caregivers can be traced back to communication issues. Kin and foster caregivers report an inability to reach someone to answer their questions or respond to their concerns about children in their homes. Between turnover and high caseloads, workers are often unable to respond to caregivers in a timely manner. Caregivers could be helped by having a clear point of contact in each region for questions when they cannot reach the child's worker. Kin, in particular, would like a single point of contact because they feel overwhelmed by the many contact points. We recommend DCYF consider providing all caregivers with a local contact who can direct them to the right person or answer questions. In addition, as placements of children with higher behavioral needs are increasing, caregivers are requesting a crisis response contact to respond to situations where a child has escalated to a dangerous point. Often these moments occur after hours and caregivers cannot reach a DCYF representative.

During the course of the year we have reported back to DCYF the trends and requests we are hearing from our many contacts with caregivers. These are the most frequent and actionable elements we have learned about this year: three ways that DCYF could improve the foster and kin caregiving experience to ensure better outcomes for children and increase retention.

LOOKING FORWARD

We are entering our third year with so many ideas and goals for new ways to support foster and kin caregivers. We will continue to build the program based on the needs we hear from caregivers every day. We plan to continue to expand our reach with more Mentors, Connectors, and Specialists across the state and ever-increasing partnerships with community organizations. We consider our team to include all those who work to support Washington's caregivers.

We thank our staff, partners, helpers, supporters and stakeholders for all we have been able to accomplish together in caring for the caregivers!



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



THE WISHING
WELL FOUNDATION



coordinated care.



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



treehouse



partners
for our children.

