

Alliance CaRES

**QUARTERLY
REPORT 2021**

Q1

A MESSAGE FROM OUR TEAM

The CaRES Program Team is thrilled to have begun building a program that can make a real difference to caregivers across the state. By offering genuine and robust support opportunities we can impact caregiver satisfaction, retention, and improve outcomes for children in care. We see our first small steps leading to big changes and we are grateful to all the partners, stakeholders, and team members who are helping guide and inform our work. We are building this program to be responsive to the needs of Washington's caregivers and are always ready to adjust our plans and make new ones to better serve our stakeholders. We look forward to our next steps and we hope you do too!

Alliance CaRES Program

Vision Statment

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

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SUMMARY

When the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence was formed nearly a decade ago, providing training and education to caregivers in support of positive outcomes for families was central to our mission. As we have grown, so has our capacity to support the caregiving community, which is why we are so excited to have been selected to lead Caregiver Retention, Education and Support (CaRES) in partnership with DCYF. We launched the program on March 15, 2021.

The CaRES team walks alongside caregivers at all points of their journey, from inquiring about the program, to the first time a child is placed in their home, and beyond. Even a seasoned caregiver needs help with a new situation. The vision for this program is grounded in our values of inclusivity and cooperation. Cultural responsiveness is a priority. We will work to evolve through caregiver feedback, listening to where caregivers report finding challenges either with in-home circumstances or within the system.

This report is our chance to share the very first quarter of the CaRES Program's updates on the scope and impact of the program including successes, challenges, recommendations, and details of our support of caregivers.

The first quarter was spent in building infrastructure including: the Alliance CaRES website, social media, hiring staff, creating communications documents, finalizing contract elements, training staff, researching models for use in the support groups and mentorship elements of the program, and updating the tracking database to meet the needs of the program and our state partner.

Summary Continued

In this first quarter, even as the CaRES Program has been working to design, build, and grow the program, we have also been focused on spreading the word about the program to caregivers and staff across the state. This new contract brings many changes and that has been an adjustment for caregivers and staff. We will continue to focus on this during the second quarter.

Much of the CaRES Program's support is based on the engagement strategy developed with DCYF to provide outreach to caregivers and prospective caregivers at specific points and from targeted locations. During Quarter One, CaRES staff made all contact calls within our required timeframes, and most within two days. In addition, the team expanded our supportive phone calls to reach all inquiring caregivers in High Removal Zip Codes (rather than just the initially agreed upon limited group).

We were able to launch topic based support groups based on the *Communities of Practice* model and offered a wide variety of topics to meet caregivers' needs. During the second quarter we will pilot community based support groups.

We finalized a sub-contract with Amara, which will provide additional focused support for kinship caregivers, LGBTQ+ caregivers, and caregivers caring for LGBTQ+ youth. In Quarter Two we will continue to expand specialized support to diverse communities.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

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. CaRES staff also call all those who inquire about foster care who live within the top 25 highest removal zipcodes. We also offer weekly virtual lunchtime sessions to answer frequent questions around paperwork and the licensing process, as well as "While You Wait" support groups for those who are preparing to welcome their first placed child.

Support at key points:

CaRES Mentors reach out to all caregivers 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. These calls provide community resources, advice, and emotional support to build an ongoing connection.

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.

Program Elements Continued

Two kinds of support groups:

CaRES offers online topic-based support groups for facilitated discussion, problem solving with other caregivers, and training credit. Community based mentorship groups are coming in Quarter Two and will offer the opportunity for local supportive connections with other caregivers.

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.

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 will be piloting a Warm Line in Quarter Two.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Over **800** supportive calls were made this quarter by CaRES Program staff to prospective caregivers, licensed caregivers, and kinship caregivers across the state



185 caregivers have participated in CaRES' new topic based support groups this quarter

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Si desea leer este mensaje en español [haga clic aquí](#).

Hello!

We're so happy to hear you're thinking about joining the community of caregivers across Washington. Foster parents can make all the difference in the lives of children and families in need of support by providing temporary or "for now" parenting. People like you are central to providing stability to the 5,500 children on average who enter care every year until they can safely return home.¹

1,143 welcome emails were sent this quarter by the CaRES team to prospective caregivers providing guidance and offering resources

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

1 program manager, **3** staff, **9** regional Mentors, and **1** sub-contractor have been hired who share passion, empathy, and expertise as caregivers to share as they offer their support

The CaRES team has done **23** FIRST program related calls to support caregivers undergoing an investigation this quarter



FIRST PROGRAM
Foster Intervention and Retention Support Team

The FIRST Program provides neutral advice and support to foster parents statewide.

Licensed foster parents may experience an investigation when someone makes an allegation against them. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Licensing Division (LD) has a responsibility to look into these concerns.

Most investigations do not result in a finding of abuse or neglect against a foster parent. However, these investigations can be a stressful time for you or

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WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE!

We're so grateful you're part of the caregiver community!

[Learn more](#)



The CaRES website has had more than **1,600** unique visits this quarter from people learning about the program or finding resources

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Testimonials from Support Group Participants

The response from attendees has been extremely positive. All support group attendees who completed the evaluation survey shared positive experiences with the support group they attended, sharing comments such as:

This group provided the "ability to connect on a personal level and speak freely with other participants and facilitator".

"It was great, very comfortable environment"

"This class was so enjoyable for me that I felt uplifted afterwards. The facilitator was so engaging and easy to talk to as well as the other parents, it was a great class."

"The time to connect with other parents really helped with the feelings of isolation during Covid."

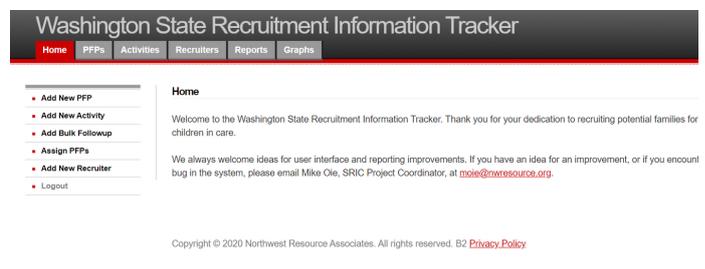
"The connection of knowing that I am not the only one with a very small supportive circle and understand that there are others going through what I am going through."

"There are a vast number of things about what our fostering experience will be like that are unknown, especially as we haven't had a placement yet-and experiences like the support group you offered help make it feel less scary."

NOTEWORTHY CHALLENGES

Limitations in the data available from DCYF have led to challenges in connecting with kinship caregivers at the time of a new placement.

Limitations of the current database create challenges for measuring success and tracking program elements



Across the state, we are seeing low caregiver morale and feelings of distrust for the new contract after the gap in service



CaRES lacks the resource capacity to provide the robust social media engagement opportunities caregivers want without jeopardizing confidentiality requirements

TRENDS

Prospective caregivers have reported high levels of satisfaction and relief in finding that CaRES can offer assistance in navigating the licensing process, which they report is confusing and daunting. The majority of questions for those pursuing licensure are about how to reach a licensor to proceed with the process or how to access or complete online Orientation.

New caregivers are enthusiastic about the challenges and rewards of caregiving and are demonstrating high levels of knowledge and thoughtfulness around maintaining cultural connections for children in care, and an impressive awareness of the impacts of trauma. They are eager to participate in topic-based support groups and have been providing very positive feedback about the new program.

Veteran caregivers are reporting high levels of frustration with DCYF. Their distress and distrust is concerningly high and CaRES staff are having frequent conversations with caregivers who report wanting to quit or are close to quitting. The majority of complaints can be traced back to lack of communication between workers and caregivers. Veteran caregivers are also voicing disappointment at the cancellation of the previous contract and distrust of the new CaRES Program. We are working to gain trust and provide useful support. We are seeing incremental signs that the caregiver community is responding more positively to CaRES as the program increases in visibility and scope.

Kinship caregivers have been the most challenging for CaRES staff to reach. They are less likely to respond to calls and emails. We are working with partner organizations to bridge the gaps.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the second quarter, the CaRES Program will continue to expand and grow. Elements we look forward to introducing in the next quarter include:

- Adding a Spanish page to the CaRES website
- Hiring Specialists around specific topic areas to provide additional support to caregivers
- Increased social media focus
- Launching more new support group topics requested by caregivers
- Piloting a new type of community-based support group
- Launching a partnership with Amara to serve kinship caregivers
- Increasing representation of diverse voices and cultures among the Mentors and Specialists in order to provide more effective support for all caregivers.
- Continuing to publicize the CaRES so that caregivers and DCYF staff are aware of the program

