

**Charles D. Baker**  
Governor

**Karyn Polito**  
Lieutenant Governor



**Marylou Sudders**  
Secretary

**Linda S. Spears**  
Commissioner

# **Legislative Report on the Department's Foster Care Recruitment Campaign**

**December 2021**



## **DCF Mission**

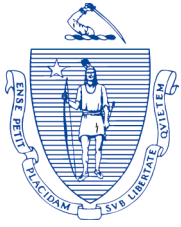
*Strive to protect children from abuse and neglect and, in partnership with families and communities, ensure children are able to grow and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment.*

## **DCF Vision**

*All children have the right to grow up in a nurturing home, free from abuse and neglect, with access to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and education.*

## **DCF Goals**

*Work toward establishing the safety, permanency and well-being of the Commonwealth's children by: stabilizing and preserving families; providing quality temporary alternative care when necessary; safely reunifying families; and, when necessary and appropriate, creating new families through kinship, guardianship, or adoption.*



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Governor

KARYN E. POLITO  
Lieutenant Governor

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Department of Children and Families  
600 Washington Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02111*

*Tel.: 617-748-2000 Fax: 617-261-7435  
www.mass.gov/dcf*

MARYLOU SUDDERS  
Secretary

LINDA S. SPEARS  
Commissioner

**LEGISLATIVE REPORT ON THE DEPARTMENT'S  
FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN**

In accordance with language in line item 4800-0058 of section 2 of Chapter 227 of the Acts of 2020, the Department of Children & Families (DCF) submits the following report:

... to the house and senate committees on ways and means and the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities detailing, but not limited to, the: (i) number of new foster care parents as a result of the foster care campaign; and (ii) methods in which the department is recruiting foster care parents.

**Introduction to DCF Foster Care**

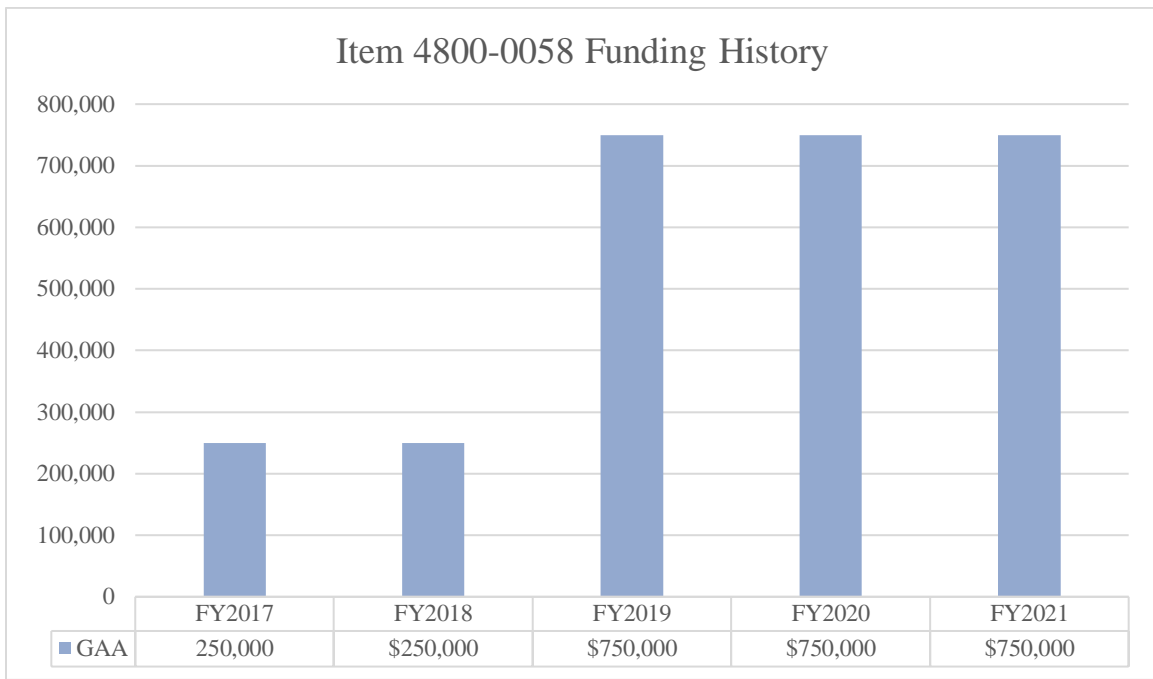
The Massachusetts Department of Children & Families (DCF) is committed to recruiting foster and adoptive parents that reflect the culture, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and language of the children in state care.

DCF places children and youth who come under its care in suitable and appropriate foster homes, within their own communities whenever possible. Foster parent recruitment campaigns can never be considered "done." It is the responsibility of DCF to continue to focus on efforts to raise awareness about foster parenting to maintain a deep and diverse reserve of foster and adoptive parents who can meet the specific needs of children in care. It is the Department's goal to have a visible and meaningful presence in all 351 of the Commonwealth's cities and towns. With the assistance of a public relations agency, DCF branded its foster parent recruitment campaign and called it FosterMA. Because it is not possible to predict what the needs of children coming into emergency care will be, continuous recruitment and support of foster parents is necessary, so the Department can make the best matches possible for children.

The Department formally launched its recruitment campaign in July 2017 after a dedicated stream of funding was included in Line Item 4800-0058 of the FY2017 state budget for DCF to develop a

focused and coordinated campaign. The state had gone many years without the resources required to conduct a proper recruitment campaign, and the continuous funding through Fiscal Years 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 (Figure 1)—has allowed DCF to continue to promote its foster care and adoption programs. These funds have had a positive impact on all sides of DCF’s work around foster care, from the recruitment of foster parents to support after their homes are licensed.

Figure 1. Item 4800-0058 funding history from FY2017 to FY2021.



For a summary of the spending from line item 4800-0058, please find Appendix A at the conclusion of this report.

## **Highlights and Achievements**

The following are highlights and achievements of the FosterMA since the recruitment campaign began in July 2017:

- In January 2017, the Department added 15 social workers dedicated to foster parent recruitment statewide and has gradually increased the number to 29, which allows for one full-time recruiter for each area office.
- Overhauled web presence to create a more user-friendly website with up-to-date information on the application process and training, along with FAQs. In 2018, the Department launched an online foster and adoptive parent application as an alternative to mailed-in applications and to streamline the application process.
- Contracted with Solomon McCown & Cence (SM&C), an established Boston-based communications agency, to design and manage a digital media campaign to reach online audiences and rebrand collateral materials.
- Developed brochures and materials targeted to recruitment for specific populations, including teens, siblings, and children with complex medical conditions.
- Expanded social media presence on Facebook and Twitter for FosterMA recruitment campaign. The FosterMA - Massachusetts DCF page on Facebook is currently followed by over 6,000 people.
- Translated written recruitment materials into Spanish and Portuguese and made materials in other languages available as well.
- Purchased and implemented the customer relationship management (CMR) platform Salesforce, which has enabled recruiters to track and follow all inquiries and campaign events since September 2020.

### **I. Number of new foster care parents as a result of the foster care campaign**

From the start of the recruitment campaign at the beginning of 2017 to December 31, 2020, DCF successfully approved 2,020 non-kinship/unrestricted foster homes statewide. This represents a net gain of over 202 unrestricted foster homes for our children as of December 31, 2020. On December 31, 2020, the Department had 1,697 unrestricted foster homes. These counts represent approved/licensed non-kinship/unrestricted foster homes only and does not include kinship/child specific or pre-adoptive homes. Often when foster parents adopt the children in their care, they

decide to stop fostering other children in order to devote themselves to their newly adopted children, creating a continuous need for recruitment and on-boarding of new foster families.

Prospective foster families are initially connected with a recruiter who guides them and assists with answering questions, completing the application process (including background records checks), and enrolling the adult caregivers in the Commonwealth's Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) foster parent training. The family is then assigned a family resource social worker in the office closest to where they reside. This social worker then conducts a comprehensive home study.

To provide safe homes for children with significant trauma history, DCF has a rigorous and thorough process to approve foster parents, which includes a licensing study, 30 hours of mandatory training, at least three interviews with prospective foster families, assessment of health and safety standards of the home, and obtaining references (medical, school, employer and personal). Before a foster home can be licensed, the Department conducts criminal background, sex offender registry, and child welfare history checks on the prospective foster parent and all household members 15 years and older.

## **II. Methods in which the department is recruiting foster care parents**

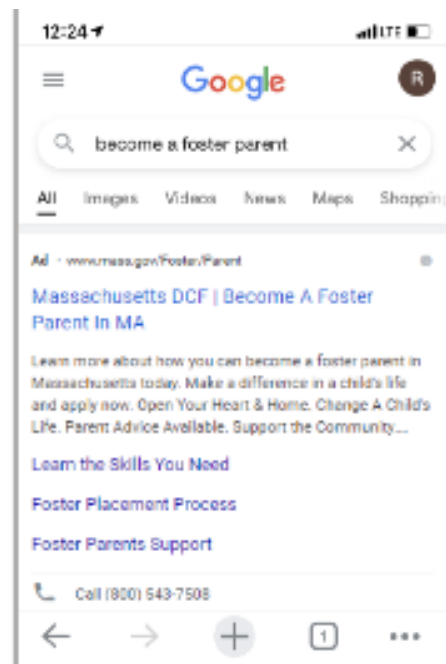
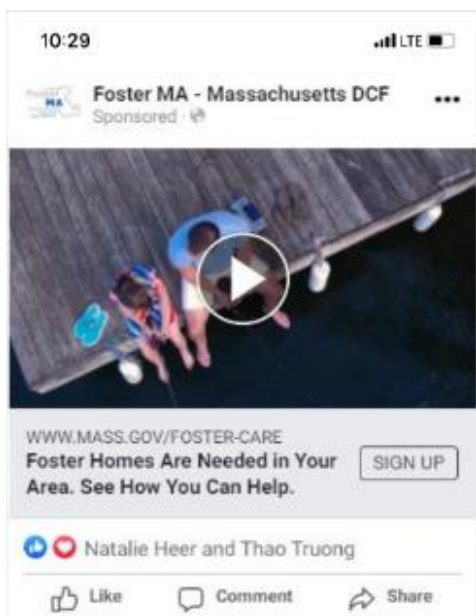
DCF's marketing campaign supports efforts to build a larger, more diverse community of foster parents, allowing DCF to better respond to the various needs of children based on their age, race/ethnicity/culture, gender identity and sexual orientation, and medical and behavioral health needs. In order to bolster recruitment efforts, the Department seeks to raise awareness about foster parenting, with the goal of strategically improving statewide recruitment numbers while producing a more diverse pool of applicants. Based on national research and departmental data, campaigns of this nature are effective in reaching previously identified target audiences and increase the impact of the recruitment staff, broadening their reach to those who show interest but have not had the opportunity to speak to recruiters in the community. DCF's campaign has targeted recruitment in the Commonwealth's faith-based, Hispanic/Spanish-speaking, and LGBTQ communities with emphasis on growing the number of homes for teenagers and sibling groups.

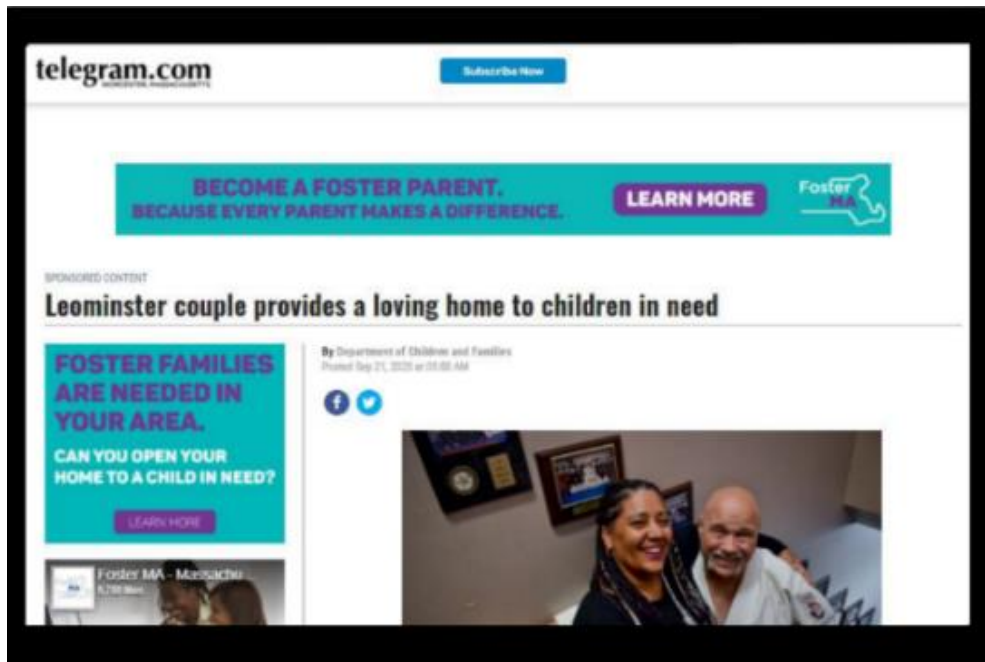
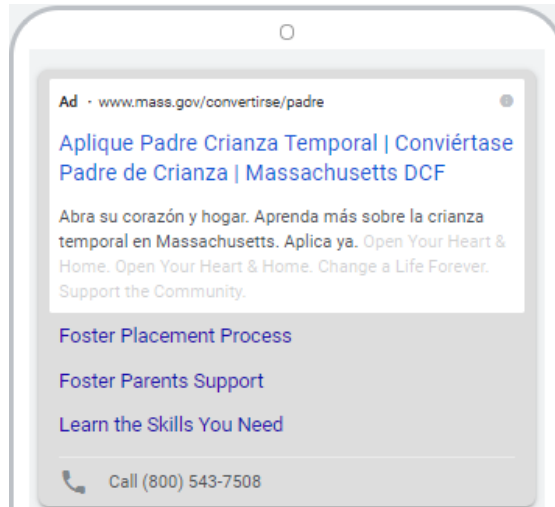
## Recruitment Strategy and Methods

Armed with the knowledge of the benefits of a public informational campaign, DCF pursued a contract with a public relations firm to supply the industry strategy and tactics needed to accomplish the goals of the Department. DCF released a Request for Response (RFR) for the campaign’s marketing, advertising, and event supports at the end of Fiscal Year 2017. The agency selected to perform this work was Solomon McCown & Cence (SM&C), formerly known as Solomon McCown. The first two years of the FosterMA campaign were dedicated to building a recruitment infrastructure from the ground up and included a rebranding effort.



The FosterMA brand is deployed in statewide advertising, on platforms including social media, television, digital and print ad including billboards, buses, and city kiosks, along with printed materials. SM&C produces original video ads in English and Spanish, which have been primarily viewed on Facebook, YouTube and by television and television streaming audiences. Augmenting the video ads, the campaign includes social media ads, display ads, and ads in local print publications. Examples are pictured below.





DCF shares recruitment data with SM&C to target larger communities and populations with the greatest need for foster homes. DCF and SM&C set goals and base strategy on this qualitative and quantitative information. The SM&C campaign allows DCF to target those who have indicated an interest in adoption or foster care, and direct advertising efforts to those who are likely to seek more information. Once someone has shown initial interest either through in-person interactions with a recruiter at an event or through digital interactions with advertisements, SM&C is able to continuously show advertisements to that person. National research indicates that multiple



interactions with advertisements are needed before an individual is ready to move forward with completing an application.

From 2017-2020, the FosterMA digital campaign registered over 47 million impressions on the campaign’s digital advertisements and web videos. Impressions represent the number of times an ad or video loads on a webpage where a viewer can see it. In 2018, SM&C received the “Best Digital Marketing Campaign” award for FosterMA from PR News, the industry-leading trade publication for public relations and digital communications.

### *2020 Campaign Impressions*

#### Data from SM&C



SM&C works with DCF to continuously assess its recruitment strategy to reach target audiences in the evolving media landscape. Through strategic targeting on websites, social media and streaming

platforms DCF is able to make multiple touch points, or contacts, with those who have previously shown interest in foster care or adoption. This draws views to the DCF website and also reaches potential new foster parents who may not have been accessible to DCF recruitment staff at events in the community. In the last year, the FosterMA campaign has found success in new outreach on Pinterest and on television streaming platforms, where FosterMA video ads are streamed during programming that appeals to the demographics of prospective foster parents.

SM&C also has the ability to advertise during major television sporting events where the demographics of the event's viewers have been identified as a target audience based on their market research. As an example, FosterMA television ads were translated into Spanish and broadcast locally on Telemundo throughout the 2018 Men's FIFA World Cup soccer tournament. This program was specifically selected in order to reach Spanish-speaking homes seeking to work with DCF to better serve the Department's children in foster care whose primary language is Spanish.

Other efforts include partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to advertise FosterMA on billboards and partnering with regional public transit to display ads on ferries, and buses.

DCF contracted with SM&C to create the FosterMA logo and new marketing materials which had not been redesigned in years. Similar marketing material was also created for adoption recruitment. Rebranding provided a more professional and modern image for the Department that would appeal to the identified target audiences. The recruitment budget also allowed the Department to prioritize the translation of recruitment materials into Spanish and Portuguese, to accommodate the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking populations in the Commonwealth and in the department's care.

### ***FosterMA Social Media***

Facebook has been the primary social media platform that has allowed DCF to build a community of current and potential foster and adoptive parents and promote statewide recruitment events online.<sup>1</sup> Social media accounts highlight foster care/adoption stories and celebrate positive work done by foster parents in their communities. Importantly, the Facebook page provides current and prospective

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<sup>1</sup> The Facebook page can be located at [www.facebook.com/FosterMA.DCF](http://www.facebook.com/FosterMA.DCF)

foster parents with a platform through which they can ask questions of the Department and share information about their experiences.

In July of 2017, the Department redesigned its foster care pages on mass.gov. Digital advertisements drive users to the Department's website,<sup>2</sup> now a comprehensive resource for current and prospective foster parents, including FAQs, information sessions, and MAPP training schedules that are updated regularly.

In July 2019, the Department gained the ability to monitor clicks to mass.gov/foster care. From July 10, 2019, through the end of 2020, the campaign drove 272,000 visitors to the website, led to 2,404 prospective foster parent applications, and prompted 553 phone calls to foster care recruiters. Perhaps most importantly, the Department has transitioned its application process to its mass.gov website. The online application expedites the process for potential foster parents. Previously, all applications were paper-based and had to be filled out and processed by hand. From February 2018 to June 14, 2021, over 5,516 foster parent applications were submitted online.

### ***Recruitment on the Ground***

Since January 2017, DCF has added 29 full-time social workers dedicated to recruiting foster families. Recruiters work together in regional teams, with each recruiter assigned to work with one of the 29 DCF area offices to develop a recruitment plan specific to each office's needs, including, but not limited to, specific age groups or municipalities where a need for foster/ adoptive homes has been identified.

Recruiters manage recruitment events in each region, over 4,000 of which have been held since the launch of the campaign, including information sessions and tables at community events. Recruiters also perform initial screenings of foster care applicants and work with new foster families through the first steps of the onboarding process. Not only do recruiters strengthen the Department's foster parent recruitment efforts, but they also alleviate a portion of the workload traditionally held by family resource social workers, allowing them more time to focus on the licensing and ongoing support of foster families.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.mass.gov/foster-care](http://www.mass.gov/foster-care)

Foster Parent Ambassadors support each area office with recruitment efforts. Each ambassador is a current foster parent who contributes 30 hours a month to assist the Department, including staffing recruitment events. Their role has been expanded to include advising prospective foster parents during the application process.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department pivoted to virtual recruitment efforts. DCF hosted virtual “tables” at conferences, held virtual informational sessions, and submitted recruitment videos that were shown at virtual community events. Virtual information sessions, which had been held exclusively in-person, allowed for recruitment efforts to continue through the height of the pandemic and created the opportunity for more prospective foster parents to participate, as they were no longer limited to information sessions in their immediate areas. In the spring of 2021, the recruiters resumed in-person and outdoor events, but virtual functions will continue.

Three recruitment supervisors based in DCF’s Central Office support all the above efforts and the 29 recruiters. This team also processes the online foster parent applications and responds to email inquiries and calls to the recruitment line, 1-800-kids-508 (1-800-543-7508).

### ***Adoption Recruitment***

DCF’s foster care recruitment efforts also target prospective foster parents who specifically wish to adopt. Using the FosterMA template, SM&C created adoption marketing materials branded AdoptMA.

The Department has also continued its longstanding partnership with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) and with Jordan’s Furniture. Jordan’s Furniture and MARE host adoption parties in each of the five DCF regions across the state. These events have proven to be successful venues in bringing approved pre-adoptive families and children with goals of adoption together.

### **Next Steps for Recruitment**

Moving forward, the Department intends to leverage its recruitment staff and technology to target areas and populations for recruitment purposes. In September 2020, the recruiters started using the database system, Salesforce, to enter all inquiry and campaign event information. As with any new system, implementation was preceded by several months of training.

With Salesforce, DCF will be able to pinpoint the number of foster parents who complete applications. This information then transitions to iFamilyNet where training, homes that become licensed, and recruited foster and adoptive homes that become permanent are tracked. It can also provide a perspective of the behaviors of the applicants which can inform the development of future recruitment plans. For example, Salesforce is able to track data from recruitment events, including how many inquiries the event generated and how many of those inquiries turned into applications. This data will help the Department strategize about the type of events that will likely yield the most applicants. The Salesforce data also provides the recruitment team with additional opportunities to use technology to engage with prospective foster parents, including texting capability.

As DCF continues to evolve as a data-driven agency, technology will be key to maximizing recruitment efforts and the state's financial investment in providing safe, quality foster homes for the Commonwealth's most vulnerable children and adolescents.

## Appendix A. Foster Parent Recruitment Budget

The following charts illustrate the year-by-year breakdown of how the Department spent the funds allocated to the foster parent recruitment campaign in line item 4800-0058. The Key below provides additional detail for each category of spending.

Key	
Category	Items Included
Events	Entrance Fees, Catering, Rental Space
Promotional Items	Printed Giveaways made by Hannaford & Dumas, Printed Material, Flyers, Lanyards, Stickers, etc.
Supplies and Equipment	Tables, Carts, Tents, Folders, Banners, etc.
Advertising	Local Newspapers, Local Buses, Steamship Authority, etc.
Contracted Advertising	Solomon, McCown & Cence, Promotional Advertising Association
Staffing	Salary, Benefits, Temp Workers
Trainer	Training for recruiters on marketing and other focus areas of their work and development of eLearning and videos for the Department's Kinship Orientation curriculum
Translation and Interpreter Services	Forms/Documents, In-Person, Phone, ASL, etc.
Foster Parent Ambassadors	For foster parents to use for event cost reimbursement
Stipends	For Foster Parents who participate in the development of the Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP) foster parent trainings and focus groups
Trauma Coaches for Foster Families	Trauma coaches from UMass Trauma Center are assigned to foster families caring for children with complex trauma-related behaviors to increase placement stability and successful outcomes for children.

Table 1. Funds spent on foster parent recruitment from Line Item 4800-0058: Fiscal Year 2017

<b>Fiscal Year 2017</b>	
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Promotional Materials	\$14,235.45
Supplies and Equipment	\$7,514.96
Contracted Advertising	\$199,915.00
<b>Total Spent: \$221,665.41</b>	

Table 2. Funds spent on foster parent recruitment from Line Item 4800-0058: Fiscal Year 2018

<b>Fiscal Year 2018</b>	
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Promotional Materials	\$51,205.07
Supplies and Equipment	\$6,129.19
Advertising	\$1,876.00
Contracted Advertising	\$145,206.03
<b>Total Spent: \$204,415.29</b>	

Table 3. Funds spent on foster parent recruitment from Line Item 4800-0058: Fiscal Year 2019

<b>Fiscal Year 2019</b>	
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Events	\$13,330.70
Promotional Materials	\$125,603.56
Supplies and Equipment	\$54,992.17
Advertising	\$4,000
Contracted Advertising	\$313,550.00
Staffing	\$96,649.07
Translation and Interpreter Services	\$22,351.50
Foster Parent Ambassadors	\$459.79
Other	\$250
<b>Total Spent: \$605,180.49</b>	

Table 4. Funds spent on foster parent recruitment from Line Item 4800-0058: Fiscal Year 2020

<b>Line Item 4800-0058: Fiscal Year 2020</b>	
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Events	\$13,741.00
Supplies and Equipment	\$12,709.43
Contracted Advertising	\$298,797.55
Translation and Interpreter Services	\$5,410.89
Foster Parent Ambassadors	\$206.17
Focus Group Stipends	\$6,055.00
Trauma Coaches for Foster Families	\$21,096.61
<b>Total Spent: \$358,016.65</b>	

Table 5. Funds spent on foster parent recruitment from Line Item 4800-0058: Fiscal Year 2021

<b>Line Item 4800-0058: Fiscal Year 2021</b>	
<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Events	\$3,944.03
Promotional Items	\$12,773.47
Supplies and Equipment	\$1,741.44
Contracted Advertising	\$300,000.00
Trainer	\$74,750.00
Translation and Interpreter Services	\$3,114.00
Foster Parent Ambassadors	\$101.99
Focus Group Stipends	\$1,080.00
<b>Total Spent: \$397,504.93</b>	