



## **Resource Parent Experiences with the Child Welfare Licensing Process**

This report summarizes results from a survey of active and prospective resource parents participating in a statewide survey as part of a Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) study funded by the Administration for Children and Families. The brief addresses resource parent experiences with the initial contact and licensure process. Web-based surveys were distributed to 670 households with an active email address in DCYF databases as licensed or license-pending to provide foster or adoptive care. This was supplemented with an additional 136 households who had attended a resource parenting information session in the past year by Adoption Rhode Island (ARI). A total of 270 households (34%) completed at least a portion of the online survey. Participants included those who were licensed (or seeking a license) through DCYF or through the 11 private child-placing agencies (PCAs) operating within the State (approximately 82% of participating resource parents were affiliated with DCYF).

Questions summarized in this brief address resource parent experiences with their initial system contact to discuss resource parenting and the licensure process, training to become a licensed resource parent, the background check and home study process, and contact with DCYF or PCA licensing staff. Limited research has examined factors influencing foster parent recruitment and retention, or their experiences with the training and licensure process<sup>1-2</sup>. Studies in this area focus on dimensions of foster parent satisfaction with the overall experience (e.g. providing foster or adoptive care); however, few studies link these factors with intent or actual continued provision of care<sup>3-4</sup>. Further, very little empirical research focuses on resource parent experiences with the licensing process, despite the fact that these experiences may affect long-term satisfaction and retention of resource parents. Thus, investigating resource parents' perceptions and experiences of the licensing process may assist in identifying specific factors that relate to the decision to continue care, thus improving retention rates.

For the current survey, participants ranged in age from 23 to 76 years old (mean age: 46 years). Approximately 90% were women, approximately 9% were male and 1% identified as transgender. Resource parents identified primarily as Caucasian (84%); an additional 7% identified as Hispanic, and 2% or fewer identified as being African American, Native American, Asian, bi- or multi-racial, or from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Types of care provided are as follows (note: respondents may be providing more than one type of care): relative/kinship care (33%), non-relative foster care (38%), treatment or private agency foster care (12%), adoptive care (17%), pre-adoptive care (24%), and guardianship (7%). In addition, 9% of those surveyed were not yet licensed to provide care and 13% were not currently providing care. On average, resource parents had been providing foster or adoptive care for 3.7 years, though this varied by the type of care provided – adoptive care providers reported the longest periods of providing care (6.5 years, 4.3 as an adoptive placement), followed by guardianship (5.7 years, 1.2 as a guardian placement), and foster care (4.7 years).

### **First Contact**

Resource parents were asked to rate their experiences during the initial contact with staff to discuss the prospect of becoming a resource parent. Approximately 62% had this initial contact with staff from DCYF, approximately 15% with staff from a PCA, approximately 15% from either ARI or Foster Forward, and approximately 6% with staff from another agency. Responses are summarized in Table 1, below.

**Table 1. Experiences with Agency First Contact**

	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>
Called me back within 24 hours	48.3	37.4	10.9	3.3
Was very respectful	57.1	40.2	1.6	1.2
Clearly explained what I needed to do next	50.6	40.7	6.8	1.9
Was knowledgeable about foster care or adoption	51.3	43.8	3.4	1.5
Answered all of my questions	46.6	42.4	8.8	2.3
Left me feeling satisfied with the conversation	48.3	40.2	8.4	3.1
Made me feel like they wanted me to apply	54.2	36.2	8.5	1.2

Overall, resource parents reported being very satisfied with the initial contact experience. More than 95% of survey participants indicated the initial contact was respectful, and more than 90% felt that the staff member was knowledgeable about foster care or adoption and clearly explained the application process. The only item that received negative ratings in the 14-15% range was whether participants had received a timely response if they had left a message; other items were negatively rated by approximately 10% of resource parents.

A 'First Contact Score' was created by averaging responses to the items in Table 1, with higher scores indicating more favorable ratings of the experience. Scores were compared based on which agency had been the point of initial contact (i.e., DCYF, PCA, ARI/Foster Forward, or another agency). Resource parents whose first contact was with a PCA provider rated the experience more favorably than those whose first contact was with DCYF (3.71 vs. 3.36 out of 4;  $p < 0.01$ ), as did those whose first contact was with ARI or Foster Forward (3.58;  $p < 0.05$ ).

### Training Experiences

A majority of survey participants had completed all required trainings to become a resource parent (88.6%), and an additional 3% of participants had begun the training process. More than three-quarters (82%) were licensed or pursuing licensure through DCYF and 24% through a PCA provider. Resource parents were asked to rate their training experiences with respect to content, format, and convenience. Their responses are summarized in Table 2, below.

**Table 2: Experience with Trainings for Resource Parent License**

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
The steps to becoming licensed were clearly explained	51.7	41.7	5.8	0.8
I learned what paperwork I needed to complete	50.6	45.6	3.3	0.4
I was told about things in the process I had to pay for	43.6	39.4	14.2	2.8
The trainer made a good presentation	53.8	39.1	5.5	1.7
Training was available at a convenient time	41.2	48.8	9.2	0.8
Training was available at a convenient location	36.0	47.9	14.4	1.7
Provided me with information to be an effective resource parent	41.5	44.5	13.1	0.8
Informed me about available resources and services	35.6	39.7	20.9	3.8
Helped me to understand my role and responsibilities	42.5	51.2	5.0	1.2
Helped me understand challenging behaviors of special needs children	42.4	41.6	13.9	2.2
Overall, I was satisfied with the trainings I attended	43.0	45.6	9.3	2.1

A majority (75% to 95%) of resource parents reported positive or very positive experiences related to the training process. Nearly all respondents felt that the steps to becoming licensed were clearly explained, they learned what paperwork they needed to complete, and the trainer did a good job presenting training material. Nearly 90% of resource parents indicated positive ratings of overall satisfaction with the trainings they attended.

Though overall ratings were positive, the results also highlight some areas in which there is room for improvement in the training experience. The area with the highest proportion of negative ratings was the degree to which trainings provided information to resource parents about available resource and services. Nearly a quarter of resource parents felt dissatisfied with this aspect of training. Four other items were negatively rated in the 10-15% range: information about aspects of the licensing process for which the resource parent is responsible for paying, information to help resource parents better understand challenging behaviors of special needs children in care, the availability of convenient training locations, and the availability of convenient training times.

Items in this domain were averaged to create a mean score of training experiences, with higher scores indicating more favorable ratings. There was no statistically significant difference in satisfaction with training between resource parents served by DCYF compared to non-DCYF providers (3.31 vs. 3.43 out of 4).

### Background Check Experiences

Resource parents were asked to rate their experience with the background check including general knowledge of the process, timely communication with staff, and clarity of steps to take if their background check was denied.

**Table 3: Experience with Background Check**

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
I understood what happens in a background check	66.3	30.5	2.8	0.4
I was notified when my background check was completed	50.0	28.3	18.9	2.9
The background check process was completed in a timely way	51.7	41.9	5.9	0.4
I was aware of what would happen if I did not pass the background check	49.1	27.4	19.2	4.3
I was told in advance that past felonies might disqualify me	54.7	28.5	14.0	2.8
I was told what steps I could take to appeal if I was disqualified	39.4	19.2	31.0	10.3
If you did not pass the background check: The reason why I did not pass the background check was clearly explained to me	52.6	26.3	18.4	2.6

Overall, more than 90% of resource parents surveyed felt they understood what happens in a background check and that the background check was completed in a timely manner. One item, being told the steps to take to appeal if disqualified, was negatively rated by over 41% of resource parents. Three additional items were negatively rated in the 20-25% range: being notified when the background check was completed, awareness of what would happen if disqualified, and having the reason for disqualification explained. Finally, nearly 17% of resource parents were not aware that past felonies could disqualify them in the background check.

Items in this domain were averaged to create a mean score of background check experience, with higher scores indicating more favorable ratings. Resource parents who were conducting their background check with non-DCYF providers rated their experience more favorably than those working with DCYF providers. Mean satisfaction for non-DCYF providers was 3.75 compared to 3.53 for DCYF ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Home Study Experiences

Resource parents were asked to rate their experience with the home study including general knowledge of the process, timely communication with staff, and overall sensitivity or respect with which the study was conducted.

Overall, more than 90% of resource parents surveyed rated three aspects of the home study process highly: understanding the steps to complete the home study, feeling the home study was conducted in a respectful manner, and feeling they could be truthful in answering questions. The greatest area for improvement was in awareness of steps to take if the home study was denied – approximately half of resources parents expressed a negative view of this domain. In addition, 45% of resources parents felt some questions asked were too personal. Six additional items were negatively rated in the 20-30% range: understanding how licensing decisions are made, being told how to best prepare for the home study, having reasons why a license was denied clearly explained, receiving timely notification of license approval, receiving help needed from their licensing worker to complete the home study, and being notified when the home study was approved.

Items in this domain were averaged to create a mean score of home study experience, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. Resource parents who conducted their home study with non-DCYF providers rated their experience more favorably than those working with DCYF providers. Mean satisfaction for non-DCYF providers was 3.45 compared to 3.21 for DCYF ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 4: Experience with Home Study**

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
I understood the steps to complete the home study	50.5	43.9	4.2	1.4
I was told how to best prepare for a home study	36.7	33.8	25.2	4.3
The home study was conducted in a respectful manner	55.9	40.4	2.8	0.9
I feel some of the questions asked were too personal	19.7	25.5	43.8	11.1
The home study took up too much of my time	10.1	13.9	58.2	17.8
I was aware of steps I could take if I was denied	19.7	28.7	41.6	10.1
I received the help I needed from my licensing worker to complete the home study	37.4	41.4	17.7	3.4
I felt I could be truthful in answering everything asked of me	53.1	41.8	4.2	0.9
I understand how licensing decisions are made	31.3	37.9	24.2	6.6
I was notified when my home study was approved	40.2	40.2	14.7	4.9
I received timely notification that I was licensed	38.8	38.8	13.9	8.5
Reasons why I was turned down for a license were clearly explained to me	33.3	40.0	13.3	13.3
Overall, I was satisfied with how the home study process went	35.3	52.9	6.4	5.4

**Overall Contacts with Licensing Staff****Table 5: Contact Experiences with Licensing Staff**

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Provided easy to understand information	42.6	51.2	4.5	1.7
Listened actively and patiently	45.6	47.3	6.3	0.8
Encouraged me to become a foster/adoptive parent	47.6	41.3	10.7	0.4
Treated me with respect	54.4	42.3	1.7	1.7
Respected my values and beliefs	53.8	41.9	3.8	0.4
Showed respect for my racial/cultural background	55.7	43.0	0.9	0.5
Gave complete answers to my questions	46.6	41.6	9.7	2.1
Were people with whom I could really talk	42.9	44.1	10.5	2.5
Helped me get through the licensing process	45.2	42.5	8.8	3.5
Kept me informed about where I was in the process	34.6	36.8	21.9	6.6
Explained how long the different steps would take	35.7	36.2	23.4	4.7
Were accessible when I wanted to reach them	39.6	43.4	12.8	4.3
Helped me to complete paperwork	38.1	41.7	17.9	2.3
Overall, I was satisfied with how I was treated by licensing staff during the licensure process	40.3	50.6	5.2	3.9

Resource parents were asked to rate their overall experience of contacts with licensing staff including communication of the process and steps along the way, accessibility and helpfulness, and respectful interactions.

Overall more than 90% of resource parents rated their experience highly on six items including overall satisfaction with licensing staff contacts; being provided easy to understand information; and feeling respected, listened to, and encouraged to become a resource parent. Three additional items – being given complete answers to questions, feeling the licensing staff were people with whom resource parents could talk, and being helped through the licensing process – were positively rated by over 85% of respondents. The greatest areas for improvement were around communication throughout the process, explanation of steps in the process, and help with paperwork. These three items were negatively rated in the 20-30% range. Finally, 17% of resource parents negatively rated the accessibility of licensing staff.

Items in this domain were averaged to create a mean score of overall satisfaction with licensing staff contacts, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. Resource parents who were working with non-DCYF providers rated their experience more favorably than those working with DCYF providers. Mean satisfaction was 3.54 for non-DCYF providers compared to 3.33 for DCYF ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Summary & Recommendations

- A total of 270 current and prospective resource parents comprised of kinship, foster care, pre-adoptive, adoptive, and guardianship providers participated in a statewide survey to share their experiences in the training and licensure process. Participants primarily included DCYF resource parents, as well as a smaller percentage of resource parents registered with private child-placing agencies.
- The majority of resource parents rated their training and licensure process experiences as favorable or very favorable. Comparisons between DCYF- and non-DCYF affiliated resource parents revealed a small but consistent pattern of more favorable ratings among those affiliated with PCA sites.
- Resource parent training needs to incorporate a greater emphasis on available services and supports for resource parents and the children or youth in their care. Training also should provide more focus on content to help resource parents understand the potential range of behavioral issues they may encounter in caring for children with special needs or who are involved in the child welfare system.
- Resource parent training should be offered at a wider array of accessible times and locations. In addition, resource parents should have a clear explanation of likely expenses for which they are responsible.
- For both the background check and home study, there should be more communication of requirements and potential factors that can result in denial, as well as steps to be taken if the individual is denied. In addition, 45% of resource parents felt some of the questions asked in the home study were too personal.
- There is a need for greater accessibility and help from licensing staff on completing paperwork related to the licensing process.
- There needs to be more ongoing communication with resource parents about their status and progress in the licensing process, including notification of home study and license approval.

### References

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