



Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®

Forever Families for Children in Foster Care



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Wendy's Wonderful Kids® Overview

Washington State

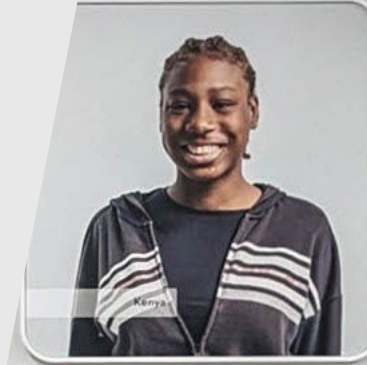
April 2026



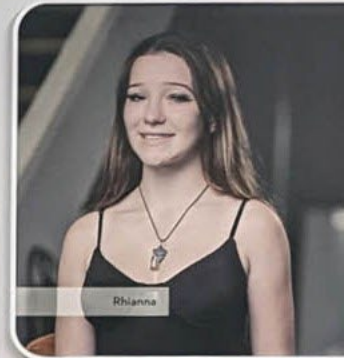
Johnathan



"My recruiter, John
first adult that I
... Johnathan, adopted at 13"



Kenya



Rhianna

... to spend a lot of time with
his family tree and finding us.
... grateful. If it wasn't for her,
... could have gone anywhere."
... Erin, adopted Nathaniel at 13



Erin and Nathaniel



Presenter

Bryonna Hendry, MSW

Specialized Recruitment Supervisor

Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families



In North America ...

390,000+
CHILDREN

are in
foster care

130,000+
CHILDREN

are waiting to
be adopted

20,000+
CHILDREN

age out of care
every year without
a family



Traditional Recruitment Tactics

- **General:** Public — “You should adopt a child from foster care!”
- **Child-Specific:** Public — “Look at these pictures and descriptions of youth available for adoption.”
- **Targeted:** Latino festival attendees — “Look at pictures and a description of Latino youth in foster care.”



Child-Focused Recruitment

- **Emphasizes a child's voice** and focuses on identifying **pre-existing relationships** who may be potential adoptive families
- That network may include relatives, neighbors, teachers, a best friend's parents, previous foster placements or others in the child's life



Core Strategies

- Case record mining
- Family finding
- Relationship mapping
- Youth-centered planning
- Ongoing engagement with relatives and supportive adults





Legal Permanency

Legal permanency can be defined as a child's relationship with a parenting adult recognized by law.

This includes:

- Reunification
- Guardianship
- Adoption (including tribal customary adoption)
- SOUL Family (some states)





WWK Referrals

- Be freed for adoption
- Has goal or concurrent plan for adoption
- Has goal or concurrent plan for APPLA or long-term foster care
- Be part of a sibling group
- Has had previous recruitment efforts
- Has had unsuccessful adoptive placements
- Be in varying stages of adoption preparedness
- Has physical, emotional, developmental and educational needs
- **Does not** have an identified adoptive resource





**I don't want
to be adopted."**

YOUTH SERVED





Initial Child Referral

Introduce recruiter's role to caseworker and learn basics about child



Case Record Review

Take a deep dive into child's case record to find significant people from the past



Relationship With Child

Meet with child monthly to build trust and understand child's needs



Diligent Search

Identify and contact people with whom the child has had a relationship



Child-Focused Recruitment Model



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Wendy's
Wonderful Kids®

Network-Building



Work with all people involved with child

Assessment of Adoption Readiness



Determine if child has needs to address before moving forward with adoption

Adoption Preparation



Assure child is ready for process and family is ready to meet child's needs

Recruitment Plan



Customize comprehensive plan to find adoptive family based on child's needs



Initial Child Referral

Introduce recruiter's role to caseworker and learn basics about child



Initial Child Referral

- **Gather** initial referral information
- **Meet** with the caseworker for further information
- **Reinforce** the model to the custodial agency and/or the child's caseworker
- **Establish** case file review
- **Schedule** initial meeting with the child





Case Record Review

Take a deep dive into child's case record to find significant people from the past



Case Record Review

- An **exhaustive** review of the entire record, both electronic and physical files
- Recruiters are looking for important information about the child's culture and history
- Document key information found in the records, especially names of those who had a connection to the youth
- Relatives, non-relative kin, current and former foster placements, teachers, coaches, mentors, service providers, etc.
- Completed within **30 days** of referral



Potential Adoptive Resources

- When reviewing a file, the recruiters look for anyone who could be a **potential adoptive resource** and others who can help find resources.
 - This can be anyone the youth has known or had a relationship with, currently or in their past.



Wendy's Wonderful Kids: Case Record Review



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Relationship With Child

Meet with child monthly to
build trust and understand
child's needs



Relationship with the Child

- Meet with the child **in person monthly**
- Develop **trust and openness**
- Facilitate an assessment of child's **adoption readiness**
- Prepare the child for adoption and develop a **recruitment plan**



Youth Involvement and Consent

- Involve youth in the process
- Find out what ongoing contact with the birth family or other connections will look like
- Most states and provinces have requirements around **youth consent**





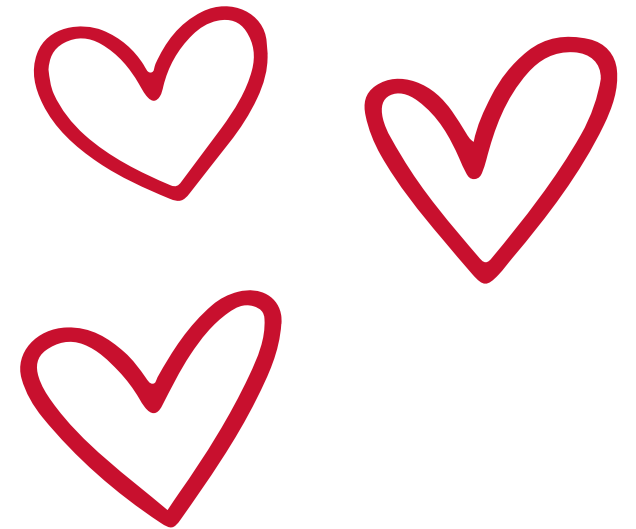
Diligent Search

Identify and contact people with whom the child has had a relationship



Diligent Search

- WWK recruiter identifies and contacts people with whom the youth has a connection
- These connections are discovered through:
 - Case record review
 - Contact with those who know the child well
 - Online search tools
 - Continued conversations with the youth





Perceptions Around Family of Origin

Biological Family's Value

- Terminating the legal relationship between family of origin and the youth **does not** terminate the **emotional relationship**
- Consider preserving **safe and appropriate** relationships for older youth post termination of parental rights



Youth Voices: Importance of Kinship Connections

When we don't support and cultivate family relationships, youth report experiencing the following:

- Lost connections with siblings and no support to maintain sibling relationships
- No assistance to maintain relationships with relatives who could not provide placement
- No support for relationships with relatives who were important to youth because the agency did not think they were a good influence
- Urge to run away and go to their family of origin
- Loss of relationships if youth or siblings were adopted
- Feelings of anger, grief and loss from family separation and struggling to adjust, even in supportive placements





Network Building

Work with all people involved
with child



Jahmie's Story

Network Building

- Meet with people **close to and knowledgeable** about the child
- Establish **regular and ongoing contact** with connections
- Create **positive relationships** with key adults in the youth's life
- **Ensure** not all network members are paid to be in the youth's life
- Have **monthly contact** with the youth's caseworker
- **Document** contacts with the network in the recruitment plan and/or within the WWK case file





Assessment of Adoption Readiness

Determine if child has needs to address before moving forward with adoption





ASSESSING YOUTH



Assessment of Adoption Readiness

- Determine youth's **strengths, challenges, desires** and **preparedness** for adoption
- Summarize the youth's **understanding of and feelings about adoption**
- Must be **developed initially and updated quarterly**
- Complete within **90 days** of accepting the referral onto caseload





ASSESSING FAMILY



Assessing Family

Characteristics of successful families:

- Ability to make a lifetime commitment
- Embracing of values and cultural differences
- Flexible, yet can provide structure for a child
- Willingness to learn



What are some other characteristics you think may help a family to be successful?





Adoption Preparation

Assure child is ready for process and family is ready to meet child's needs



Adoption Preparation

- **Child** is emotionally and socially ready to join an adoptive family
- **Family** is emotionally and socially ready to adopt a child
- Documentation of preparation is in the WWK case file

Purpose: Prevent and/or prepare for transition issues and crises





**PREPARING
YOUTH**



Maci

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Most children are worried that **no one will want them**





PREPARING FAMILY



Understanding

The recruiter can help adoptive parents to:

- Develop and communicate “family rules”
- Understand that words matter (i.e., “we” instead of “you”)
- Learn skills to respond to negative behaviors instead of reacting
- Find professional help, when needed





Recruitment Plan

Customize comprehensive plan to find adoptive family based on child's needs



Recruitment Plan

- Complete initial recruitment plan within **90 days**
 - Enhance **quarterly** for **active** cases
- Not a cookie-cutter plan
- Detailed
 - People identified through diligent search
 - Who has been contacted?
 - The outcomes of those contacts
 - **Youth's input**





Matched Cases

Once a youth and/or child is matched, the youth will move from an active case to a matched case

- The 3 yeases
- Recruiters carry matches until case closure
- Active recruitment efforts end, and the specialized recruiters focus on supporting the family to permanency
- Monthly contact with the youth and family continues and in-person contact is required quarterly
- Monthly contact with the primary worker continues
- Quarterly adoption assessments completed





Case Closure

A Wendy's Wonderful Kids case closes once a child and/or youth reaches one of the following legal permanency outcomes:

- Adoption
- Guardianship
- Reunification
- Reinstatement of Parental Rights



HB 1227 – Keeping Families Together Act

- Purpose:
 - Reduce unnecessary foster care placements.
 - Prioritize family and kinship care.
 - Reduce racial disproportionality in child welfare.
- Key Provisions
 - Removal only when there is imminent physical harm.
 - Courts must consider the harm of removal.
 - Requires placement with relatives or suitable others first.
 - Increased financial support for Kinship caregivers.



Alignment: Child-Focused Recruitment & HB 1227

- Child-Focused Recruitment supports HB 1227 by:
 - Identifying family and kinship connections.
 - Engaging relatives and suitable others.
 - Maintaining youth connections to family and community.
 - Supporting permanency outside of traditional foster care.



D.S. v. Washinton State Department of Children, Youth, and Families

- Purpose of the Settlement: To improve outcomes for young people in foster care by:
 - Increasing placement stability
 - Reducing hotel and office stays
 - Reducing multiple placement disruptions
 - Promoting and preserving family connections and permanency
- System improvements required:
 - Kinship engagement
 - Family team decision making
 - Trauma-informed care
 - Youth voice in planning



Alignment: Child-Focused Recruitment & the D.S. Settlement

The child-focused recruitment model supports the D.S. settlement goals by:

- **Reducing instability**
 - Identifying permanent connections early
- **Strengthening family engagement**
 - Family finding and kinship search
- **Promoting youth voice**
 - Youth-centered permanency planning
- **Building lifelong connections**
 - Focus on relational permanency



Side-By-Side Results

BAU	WWK
Number of Connections Identified 2,219	Number of Connections Identified 2,123
Number of Documented Connections Contacted by DCYF Caseworker During Period Under Review 102	Number of Documented Connections Contacted by WWK Recruiter during Period Under Review 3,048
Extended Family Engaged and Supporting Youth 30%	Extended Family Engaged and Supporting Youth 84%
Family Attending Shared Planning Meetings Consistently 2%	Family Attending Shared Planning Meetings Consistently 45%
Active Efforts to Match with Extended Family 31%	Active Efforts to Match with Extended Family 79%
Number of Youth Matched for Permanency 18%	Number of Youth Matched for Permanency 19%



SB 6068 — Washington Child Welfare Legislation

Focus Areas:

- Strengthening permanency outcomes
- Increase relational permanency
- Supporting family, kin and supportive adult engagement and permanency planning.

Policy Goals:

- Reduce long-term foster care
- Increase permanency options
- Improve case planning and youth involvement



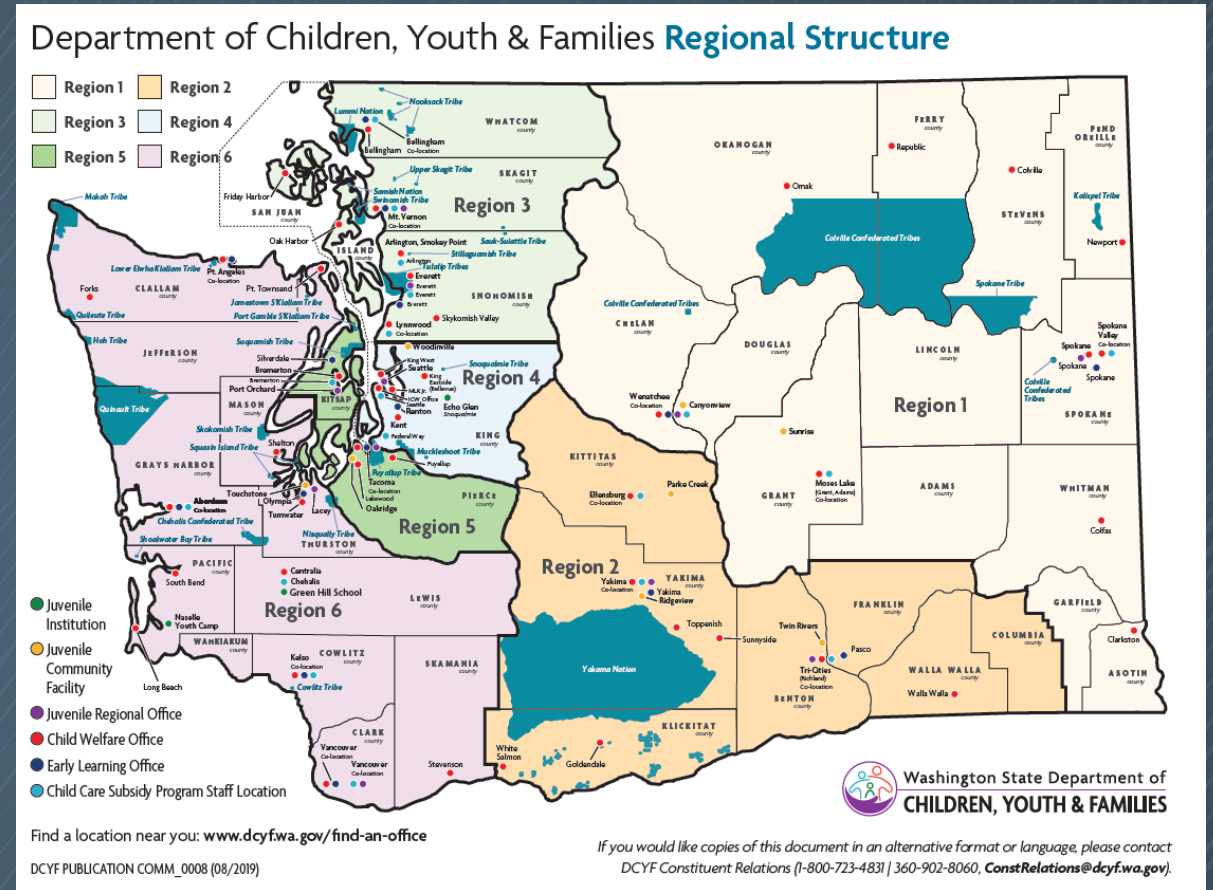
Alignment: Child-Focused Recruitment & SB 6068

- **Strengthens Permanency Planning**
 - Prioritizes early permanency planning for youth who have been waiting in foster care the longest
- **Prioritizes Relational Permanency**
 - Focuses on existing relationships (relatives, teachers, mentors, coaches, former caregivers)
- **Elevates Youth Voice**
 - Youth engage in identifying people who are important to them
- **Improves System Accountability**
 - Structured documentation and case mining help to track efforts and locate family
- **Supports Timely Permanency**
 - Intensive family finding and engagement helps identify relational and legal permanency resources sooner, reducing time young people spend waiting for families



WA Referral Process

- Caseworker creates the referral
 - Note case #, case name and specific child
- Referral is sent to WWK supervisor Bryonna Henry
 - bryonna.henry@dcyf.wa.gov
- WWK supervisor assigns referral based on regions



WWK Specialized Recruiters

Region 1

Allyssa Lyons
(509)818-2097

Allyssa.lyons@dcyf.wa.gov

Region 2

Cori Butterfield
(509)578-8789

cori.butterfield@dcyf.wa.gov

Region 3

Jodie Perez
(425)760-5980

jodie.perez@dcyf.wa.gov

Region 4

Kash Granger
(425)309-2122

kash.granger@dcyf.wa.gov

Region 5

Vacant

Region 6

Kayla McKendrick
(564)999-0985

kayla.mckendrick@dcyf.wa.gov



"Before I was adopted..."



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