



Oregon's Strategies to Improve the Foster Home-to-Child Ratio: A Case Study

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The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) initiative, [A Home for Every Child](#), is designed to help achieve at least a one-to-one ratio of foster homes available for children and youth in foster care, where the numerator is the number of foster homes available and the denominator is the number of children in care. This goal may be accomplished by tailoring strategies to recruit prospective foster parents, supporting kinship and nonrelative caregivers, improving timely permanency, and reducing entries into foster care. This case study is part of a series designed to support continuous learning efforts under A Home for Every Child by examining states with some of the highest home-to-child ratios in 2025 (based on available data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and The Imprint's *Who Cares: A National Count of Foster Homes and Families*). The series highlights policies and practices that can make more foster homes available and reduce the number of children in foster care.

KEY POINTS

- The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) employs Resource Family Retention and Recruitment Champions in each of the state's 16 districts to focus solely on recruiting and retaining foster parents.
- ODHS prioritizes kinship placements through its Relative Pathway Program, which broadened the definition of kin and streamlined kinship certification requirements.
- To help children remain safely at home, ODHS has increased caseworkers' contact with families and improved cross-program collaboration. Child welfare staff work with economic support staff to connect families to concrete supports like transportation and address needs before removal becomes necessary.

OREGON'S CHILD WELFARE AND FOSTER CARE CONTEXT

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) is responsible for child welfare services throughout the state. As of 2025, Oregon's home-to-child ratio was 0.66, above the national average of 0.57 (Table 1), as calculated using [AFCARS data](#) on the number of children in care at the end of FY2024 and the number of foster homes in 2025 from The Imprint's *Who Cares* dataset.¹ Oregon's foster care population decreased from 4,589 children in 2023 to 4,526 children in 2025. Between 2023 and 2025, the state's foster care rate also decreased from 5.07 to 5.03 per 1,000 children.² As shown in Table 1, on average, children and youth in Oregon spent 798

days in care before exiting, higher than the national average of 711 days. Over 40 percent of youth in care were placed with kin or relatives, compared to just under 40 percent nationally.

Table 1. Key foster care measures for Oregon compared to national numbers

Measure*	Oregon	United States
Total children and youth in foster care	4,526	331,747
Per 1,000 children in the state	5.03	4.09
Foster care entries	2,391	175,008
Per 1,000 children in the state	2.89	2.31
Foster care exits	2,115	169,927
Ratio of entries to exits	1.13	1.03
Mean time in foster care (days)	798	711
Percent of children and youth placed with kin or relatives	42	39
Home-to-child ratio	0.66	0.57

* Numbers are as of September 30, 2025, and entries and exits are for fiscal year 2025. The ratio includes children in care at the end of 2024 and the number of foster homes in 2025.

Sources: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Dashboard 2026, Radel 2026

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FOSTER HOMES

This section describes the strategies ODHS uses to increase the number of foster homes, including strategies for recruitment, licensing, and foster caregiver support and retention.

Identifying and recruiting prospective foster parents

ODHS uses locally driven recruitment and retention strategies and focuses on expanding kin placements.

- **Using dedicated Resource Family Retention and Recruitment Champions.** In 2020, ODHS created the Resource Family Retention and Recruitment Champions program, which designated a full-time ODHS “champion” in each of the state’s 16 districts to identify, recruit, and engage foster parents. Each champion develops data-informed recruitment goals and tailors community outreach and marketing to local needs. Champions also respond to prospective foster parent inquiries and support them through the application and licensing process.
- **Promoting kinship placements through the Relative Pathway Program.** In 2023, ODHS created the Relative Pathway Program with the goal of increasing kin placements across the state.³ When considering potential placements, the program uses a broad definition of relatives, which includes adults with whom the child or family might have a close relationship.⁴ Although ODHS had not formally evaluated the program, staff reported that they have observed an increase in the number of children placed with relatives related to nonrelative placements since the beginning of the program. ODHS has also recently begun analyzing nonrelative placements to understand why children are not placed with kin and identify barriers to kinship placements.

Interviewee insight

“[Resource Family Retention and Recruitment Champions are] bridging the gap from the foster community to our community.”
- ODHS staff member

Foster parent licensing and approval processes

ODHS has updated, streamlined, and clarified the foster parent licensing and approval process.

- **Streamlining background check requirements.** Through the Relative Pathway Program, ODHS streamlined the certification process for relatives by removing requirements not aligned with national standards to

reduce restrictions on who can become a foster parent.⁵ The agency also reduced recertification requirements so kin caregivers were not required to complete a formal renewal every two years; instead, ODHS caseworkers provide ongoing support to and frequent contact with caregivers. ODHS also updated its background review process for adults living in certified foster homes to align with federal standards.

- **Streamlining and clarifying the certification process.** In 2008, ODHS revised guidance that previously required prospective foster parents to complete training before beginning a home study. This change was intended to help families connect with child welfare staff and move through the certification process more rapidly. ODHS champions created an accompanying business process guide, which defines staff roles and responsibilities and provides detailed timelines to help staff and families avoid delays during the certification process.

Supporting and retaining caregivers

To retain caregivers, ODHS provides direct support through champions and offers evidence-based foster parent training.

- **Providing additional support to foster parents.** ODHS champions build community and connect foster parents in their districts with support services. Champions host events for current foster parents, such as group dinners, date nights, and advisory groups. Champions also connect newly certified families with experienced foster parents who can serve as informal resources when needed. Some champions also train district staff to build and maintain good relationships with foster parents.
- **Sponsoring peer support groups for foster parents.** Through Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Trained (KEEP), an evidence-based foster parent training and support program, Oregon offers training and opportunities for kin and nonrelative foster parents to connect with other foster parents and discuss their experiences responding to trauma-related behaviors. KEEP connects foster parents who have children with similar backgrounds, such as Native American children or children in the same age group. Foster parents and kin receive financial incentives for participating.

Interviewee insight

"I try to get a panelist of [foster] families that can come to all staff and share their experiences and how they want to be worked with, how they value communication. We just did that last month and it was really impactful to our employees ... a lot of us can be a listening ear to [foster] parents."

- ODHS staff member

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

This section describes the strategies ODHS uses to reduce the number of children in foster care, including preventing entry into foster care and improving permanency for youth in care.

Prevention strategies

To reduce the number of children entering foster care, ODHS emphasizes collaboration across its program offices and resources to help staff make more informed removal decisions.

- **Partnering to help children remain in their homes.** Child welfare and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs in ODHS collaborate to provide family preservation services that help families address safety concerns while children remain at home. Child welfare staff primarily manage family safety

concerns, while self-sufficiency staff connect families to economic supports such as job search assistance. Families can receive these services even if they do not meet TANF eligibility criteria. Caseworkers also meet at least biweekly with families receiving family preservation services. ODHS staff reported that family preservation services have strengthened relationships with families, improved coordinated case management, and helped children remain safely at home.

- **Offering prevention services when hotline calls are screened out.** In two regions, ODHS is evaluating an alternative pathways approach in which families whose referrals to child welfare are screened out at the hotline stage are connected to resource navigation, tailored services, and financial supports. The purpose of the approach is to prevent future referrals for families. After a referral is screened out, it is sent to a community-based organization or ODHS staff person who proactively contacts the family and offers supportive services to prevent further involvement with the child welfare system.

Permanency strategies

ODHS revised its permanency case plan and has increased services to families to help children and youth safely exit foster care.

- **Revising the case plan template.** In 2020, ODHS revised its case plan for families in response to low rates of timely completion, defined as within 60 days of a removal. ODHS updated the platform used to complete the plans and reduced the number of required questions after staff reported that the original process was overly burdensome. ODHS also identified opportunities to involve families in developing their plans. According to ODHS, these changes have increased timely completion rates from about 14 percent to about 90 percent. More timely completion has allowed case workers to spend more time engaging with families and clearly communicating the steps needed for children to return home.
- **Providing transportation and housing supports to promote reunification.** ODHS has an ongoing partnership with a transportation company to help parents attend family visits, medical appointments, and other activities. Staff reported that, according to internal data, this partnership has increased parents' attendance at visits, supporting timely reunification. ODHS also partners with local housing authorities to purchase apartment buildings, including sober housing, to provide stable housing for families working toward reunification.

CONCLUSION

ODHS has worked to expand and sustain foster home capacity throughout Oregon by using champions to provide dedicated recruitment and retention support in every district. Giving champions flexibility to tailor their strategies to local needs has allowed the agency to respond to differences across communities and recruit and support foster parents and kin based on the unique needs of children in the region. Prioritizing relative placements has also helped to expand placement options while reducing trauma for children in care. Finally, partnerships with other state human services programs, community partners, and contracted providers have bolstered these efforts and promoted prevention and permanency services.

A Home for Every Child Case Studies: Methods

Recruiting and selecting states. The study team selected states from those with the highest home-to-child ratios in 2025. The team examined changes in home-to-child ratios between 2020 and 2025 and selected states to ensure variation in key characteristics, including the number of children in care, geographic region, and child welfare administrative structure.

Collecting data. The study team conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from five states. For each state, a two-person study team conducted one to four interviews with key child welfare stakeholders (such as prevention and permanency directors or foster parent recruitment coordinators). The team recorded and transcribed interviews using Microsoft Teams. Following data collection, they cleaned, de-identified, and synthesized notes into a single state-level summary organized by interview topic.

Analysis. The study team analyzed the cross-interview summary to identify key themes and strategies and populate the case study template.

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