



DCYF Caregiver Survey Report

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2023

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Title: 2023 Caregiver Survey Report

Abstract: Between September 2022 and August 2023, DSHS surveyed 1,342 caregivers (495 foster and 854 kinship) who had a child in care within six months of the sampling date (August and November, 2022; February and May, 2023). These caregivers were asked about their satisfaction with support, staff, access and process, information, licensing, and training provided by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and private agencies contracted by the Department. They were also asked to offer recommendations for change.

Satisfaction with support, staff, access and process, information, training, and licensing remained high in 2023, with a majority of caregivers giving positive responses to all structured items. Kinship providers were more positive than foster caregivers on most items. There were also significant changes since 2022: more kinship providers said they were treated like part of the team; more foster caregivers said they found licensing staff knowledgeable; and fewer foster caregivers said they felt personally supported, listened to, included in meetings, and informed.

In the written comments, caregivers expressed appreciation for the support from caseworkers; staff access and consistency of contact; available resources; overall quality and helpfulness of DCYF staff and related agencies; and the helpfulness of the training. Caregiver comments also identify some areas that need work, including policies and processes, service coordination, and access to financial resources. Many caregivers also commented that they thought DCYF needed additional staff.

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2023 Caregiver Report



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Introduction

Listening to the voices of Washington’s foster and kinship caregivers.

“[We became caregivers] to be a safe landing for children who need it. To share our home, family, and resources because it is our moral duty to do so. To love children and their families because we understand and have been personally impacted by the opioid crisis. To provide a permanent home to a child should reunification no longer be an option.”

– Foster Caregiver

Every year, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) partners with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Research and Data Analysis (RDA) Division to survey kinship and foster caregivers in the State of Washington. This is an opportunity for caregivers to share their perspectives and experiences, offer suggestions for improvement, and help DCYF achieve its mission to protect children and strengthen families so they flourish.

Caregivers who participated in the 2023 survey report positive experiences working with DCYF and partner agencies. Most caregivers feel included, supported, informed, and listened to. Though most caregivers gave positive responses to the structured questions, some caregivers expressed concerns. They identified a need for smoother processes, better communication with caseworkers, and clearer expectations.

The 2023 Caregiver Survey Report¹ is divided into three sections:

1. **Caregiver Support** highlights where caregivers feel supported by DCYF and partner agencies and where they would like to see improvements. It includes the results from the structured questions, shows trends over time, and shares the voices of caregivers.
2. **Caregiver Training** presents caregiver feedback on the required training. This section also includes the results from the structured questions, shows trends over time, and shares the voices of caregivers.
3. **Results at a Glance** presents summaries of the survey responses for both the structured and open-ended questions, as well as the demographic characteristics of the survey participants.



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¹ In addition to this main report, a supplemental report that presents detailed survey results, summary of caregiver comments, and a comprehensive discussion of research methodology is available at <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/rda>. Search for “2023 Caregiver Survey Report.”

Highlights

About the Survey



Data collected
Sept 2022 to
Aug 2023



Conducted by
phone (53%) and
online (47%)

495
Foster
Caregivers

854
Kinship
Caregivers

92%
Cooperation
Rate

Main Results

Most caregivers are satisfied with support from DCYF. For example,



67% feel personally supported by DCYF staff



72% are treated like part of the team



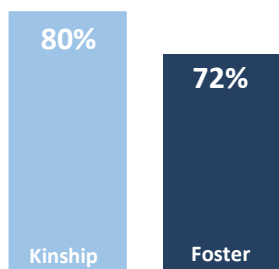
73% were offered resources and support



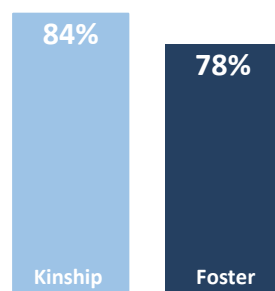
74% can get help when they need it

Kinship providers are more positive than foster providers on most items. For example:

Do the caseworkers listen?

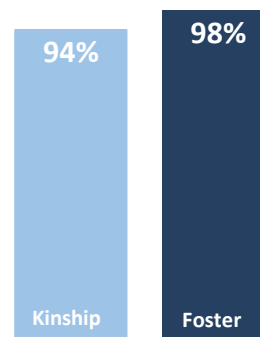


Are you included in meetings?



One question, though positive for all, was slightly less positive for kinship caregivers. This may reflect uncertainty around the new kinship licenses.

Were licensing staff knowledgeable about the process?



Changes Between 2022 and 2023



4 items lower in 2023 for foster caregivers

Feel supported

Caseworkers listen

Included in meetings

Get adequate information



1 item higher in 2023 for foster caregivers

Licensing staff are knowledgeable



1 item higher in 2023 for kinship caregivers

Treated like part of the team

Caregiver Support

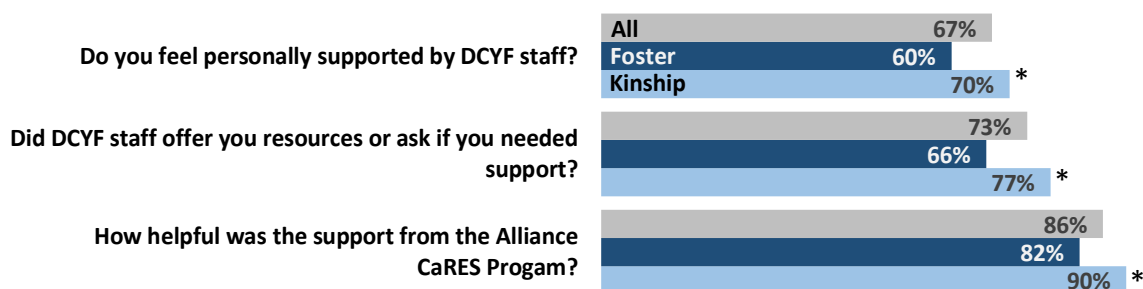
Overall Support and Helpfulness

"I want to say thank you very much for everything you guys did for us."

- Kinship Caregiver

Most caregivers are satisfied with the support provided by DCYF, with 67% responding that they feel personally supported by DCYF staff and 73% responding that staff offer resources or ask if they need support.¹ In addition, 86% of the caregivers who receive support from the Alliance CaRES Program² reported that it is helpful. On all three questions, a higher percentage of kinship caregivers than foster caregivers gave positive responses. Seventy percent (70%) of kinship caregivers reported that they feel personally supported by DCYF staff, compared to 60% of foster caregivers. Similarly, 77% of kinship caregivers responded that staff offer resources or ask if they need support, compared to 66% of foster caregivers. Kinship providers were also more positive about their support from Alliance CaRES.

Caregivers are satisfied with the support provided by DCYF and Alliance CaRES.



*Difference between foster and kinship families is significant at $p < .05$.

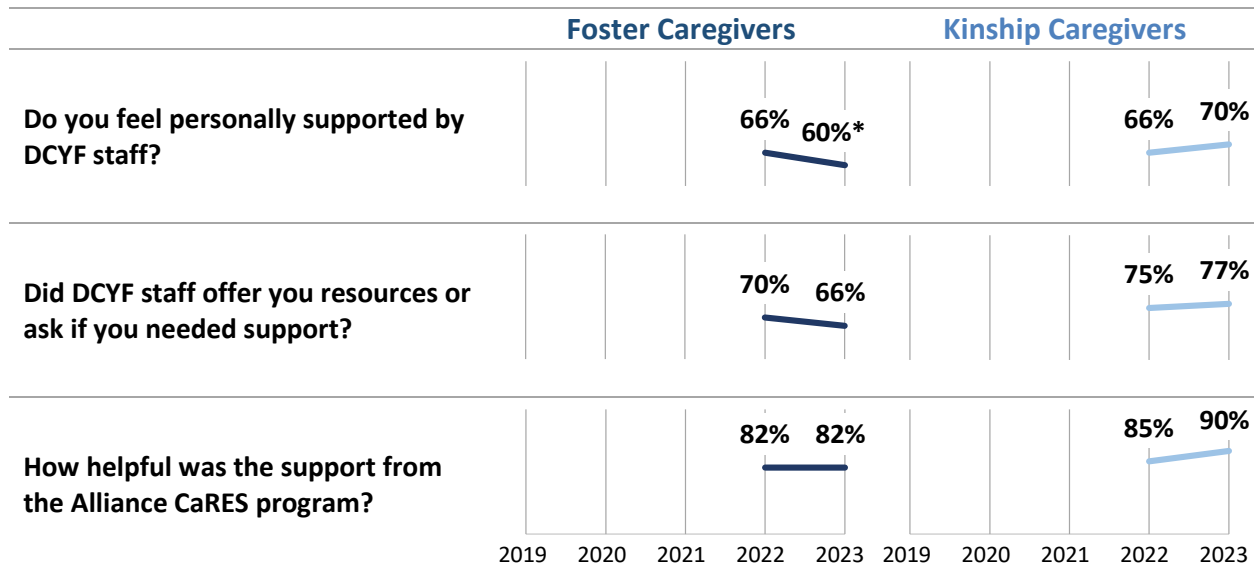
Trends over Time

The three questions asking about overall support were first included in the survey in 2022. On all three of these questions, more kinship caregivers gave positive responses in 2023 than in 2022, though the changes are not statistically significant. The proportion of kinship caregivers who feel supported by DCYF staff increased from 66% in 2022 to 70% in 2023. Similarly, the proportion who say that DCYF offered resources and support increased 2 percentage points to 77% in 2023, and the proportion who find the Alliance CaRES program helpful increased 5 percentage points to 90%.

Among foster caregivers, positive responses declined between 2022 and 2023 on the two questions asking about support from DCYF staff. In 2023, 60% of foster caregivers felt personally supported by DCYF staff, a significant decline from 66% in 2022. Similarly, 66% of foster caregivers in 2023 reported that DCYF staff offer resources or ask if they needed support, compared to 70% in 2022; this change was not statistically significant. The proportion of foster caregivers who find the Alliance CaRES program helpful was steady at 82%.

¹ Positive responses include caregivers who responded "Always or almost always" or "Usually."

² The Alliance CaRES question was answered by 302 foster and 263 kinship caregivers who received support from that program; percentage refers to those who responded "Very helpful" or "Somewhat helpful."



*Percentage change between 2022 and 2023 is significant at p < .05.

Caregivers Speak

About one-third of caregivers (31%) who commented on support said something about the overall quality and helpfulness of the support they receive from DCYF and other child welfare partners. Most of these comments (57%) were positive, and fewer (38%) were suggestions for improvement.

31% of support comments were about quality and helpfulness (n=387).



▶ 221 (57%) of these comments were positive.



▶ 15 comments (4%) were mixed.



▶ 146 comments (38%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

An additional 5 comments (1%) were neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Positive comments reflected overall satisfaction with the support they received.

“I’ve had a great experience. They have helped me every time I need help with anything.”

“There is always support when I need it.”

“I have a great social worker. She is a joy to work with because she is always there for me and the kids.”

Foster caregivers were especially positive about the support they received from private agencies.

“The child placement agency has been instrumental in providing support for our family and placement. They advocate on behalf of the child and on behalf of stability for the placement to ultimately prioritize the child's wellbeing.”

“My private agency is exceptional. They have gotten us a lot of support. The state social workers have done as much as they can.”

“The private agency provides amazing support in all areas and are great advocates. The DCYF social workers try to provide support and communicate but they are so busy and overwhelmed they are unable to effectively do their job.”

Additional comments reflect a common concern that DCYF staff are overworked and, as a result, are not able to provide adequate support. This concern is expressed by both kinship and foster caregivers.

“DCYF is extremely overworked and understaffed. Myself and the children have suffered. This has been ongoing for years.”

“The quality of the services is not adequate. Not enough employees to respond timely. I guess that they need more staff and resources to keep up with the needs that we ask for and to provide in a timely manner.”



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Caseworkers and Other Staff

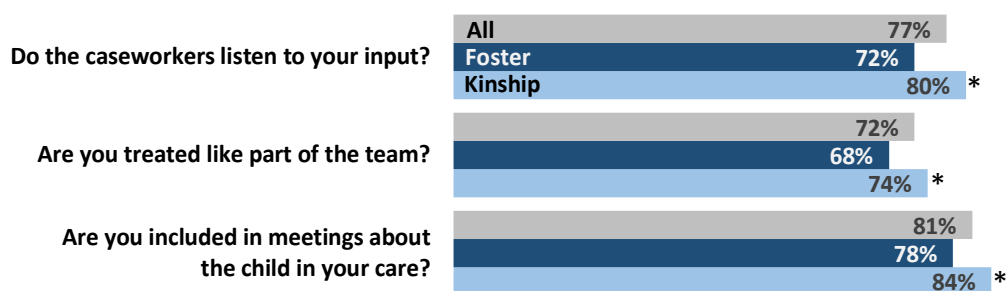
“They always ask what they can do and listen to our input. They do their best to find resources for the kids in our care.”

- Foster Caregiver

Caregivers, especially kinship caregivers, feel listened to and included by caseworkers and other staff. Overall, almost 8 of 10 caregivers (77%) said that caseworkers almost always or usually listen to their input, 7 of 10 (72%) feel they are almost always or usually treated like part of the team, and 8 of 10 (81%) reported that they were almost always or usually included in meetings about the children in their care.

On all three questions, kinship caregivers were significantly more satisfied than foster caregivers. Kinship caregivers were more likely than foster caregivers to feel listened to (80% vs. 72%), to be treated like part of the team (74% vs. 68%), and to be included in meetings (84% vs. 78%).

Caregivers feel listened to and included.



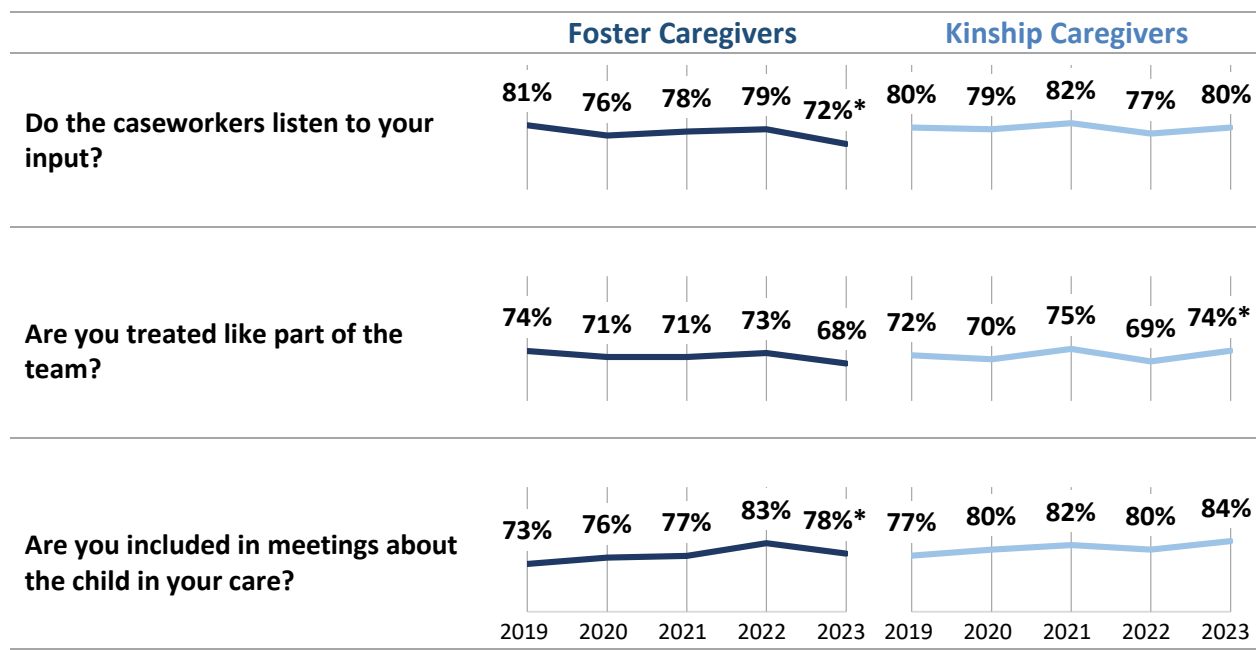
*Difference between foster and kinship families is significant at $p < .05$.

Trends over Time

Responses from kinship caregivers about their interactions with caseworkers have remained steady or become more positive since 2019. In that same period, foster caregivers have become less positive on two questions and more positive on one.

In 2023, 80% of kinship caregivers said that caseworkers always or almost always listen to their input; this has been steady since 2019 and is a slight increase from 2022. Positive responses to being treated like part of the team increased significantly from 69% in 2022 to 74% in 2023. More kinship caregivers also report that they are included in meetings about the child in their care: 84% in 2023, compared to 77% in 2019 and 80% in 2022.

Trends are slightly different for foster caregivers. Between 2019 and 2023, the percentage of foster caregivers who feel that caseworkers listen to their input declined to 72%, a 9-percentage point drop from 2019 and a significant 7-percentage point drop from 2022. Similarly, fewer foster caregivers in 2023 say that they are treated like part of the team; 68% gave a positive response to this item in 2023, compared to 74% in 2019 and 73% in 2022. Since 2019, the percentage of foster caregivers who say they are included in meetings about the child in their care increased 5 percentage points to 78%; but this was a significant decline from the 5-year high of 83% in 2022.



*Percentage change between 2022 and 2023 is significant at p < .05.

Caregivers Speak

Over 8 of 10 caregivers who commented mentioned caseworkers and other staff. These comments varied in their sentiment: slightly more than 4 of 10 comments are positive (42%); just under 4 of 10 are suggestions for improvement (36%); and about 2 of 10 comments expressed both positive and negative sentiment (22%).

81% of support comments were about caseworkers and other staff (n=1,007).



▶ **418** (42%) of these comments were positive.



▶ **225** comments (22%) were mixed.



▶ **364** comments (36%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

No comments were neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Comments about general staff support were mostly positive.

“Agency staff and caseworkers regularly ask if there are any problems or issues, and remind us all the time if we need their help with anything.”

“They are great at giving resources for services. Always ask if there is anything needed for the children.”

“They offered help when we needed it. It was a great experience despite the terrible circumstances that put us there to begin with.”

Suggestions for improvement were more common in comments related to specific staff behaviors, such as courtesy, listening, communication, and responsiveness.

“If they would just listen and be genuine and respectful that would make a big difference. We take on some of the most difficult to place kids and often get treated poorly by the social workers.”

“Listen. Provide the basic needs for the child. We are not respected. Our opinions mean nothing. Nor are we ever appreciated.”

“They could show empathy. They could listen to me and base their comments and guidance upon my parenting ideals instead of trying to tell me how they parent their children. They could recognize what I do and suggest resources that support me. They could give me insight into the child's past and how that affects the child now. That information would help me understand how to parent that child. In general, they could treat me as their peer and discuss the children in my care in a manner that makes me feel like I am part of the team, instead of feeling like I am constantly being investigated and evaluated.”

Overall, caregiver comments about caseworkers and other staff are varied, depending on caregivers' specific experiences with the staff they interact with.



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Access, Process, and Coordination

“I often feel that we have too many people on our team because they are not all on the same page. I often ask questions or make a statement that I heard from one person that is news to the other. I feel like if we want what is best for the child, we all need to be on the same page.”
- Kinship Caregiver

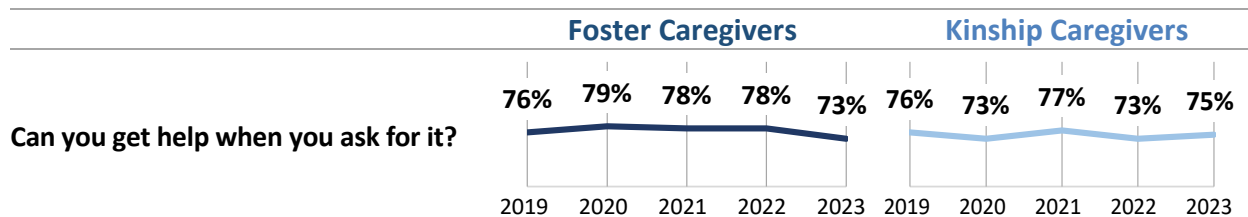
About 3 of 4 caregivers (74%) say that they almost always or usually have access to help when they ask for it: 73% of foster caregivers and 75% of kinship caregivers.

Caregivers have access to help when they ask for it.

Can you get help when you ask for it?	All	74%
	Foster	73%
	Kinship	75%

Trends over Time

For foster caregivers, the proportion saying they get help when they ask for it is the lowest it has been since 2019, though the change is small and the 5-point decline from 78% in 2022 to 73% in 2023 is not statistically significant. For kinship caregivers, the proportion giving positive responses has been fairly steady since 2019 at around three of four caregivers.



Note: Percentage change between 2022 and 2023 is not significant.

Caregivers Speak

About half of caregivers (53%) who commented about support mentioned access, process, or coordination. Most of these comments (54%) were suggestions for improvement.

Many of these negative comments described challenges accessing staff over phone, text, or email.

“They never answer my phone calls or texts. I always have to go into the office to get help.”

“Follow up in a timely manner with answers to questions. Call me back when I leave messages. Follow through on open issues they are assigned to do.”

Some caregivers understood that caseworkers are overworked, but the lack of access was still difficult.

“I guess be more available. Easier to get ahold of. When you call, not have to wait so long to hear back. It is frustrating to keep calling and emailing. I know caseloads are hard, and they are overwhelmed. Not sure what a solution would be.”

53% of support comments were about access, process, and coordination (n=661).



▶ **218** (33%) of these comments were positive.



▶ **82** comments (12%) were mixed.



▶ **359** comments (54%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

An additional 2 comments (<1%) were neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Caregivers also suggested ways to improve processes, especially for new kinship caregivers.

“In the beginning, it would have been helpful to have someone to orient us to the overall process and what it all meant. [It is] hard to navigate a system you have no experience with or know nothing about.”

“In the beginning, it was very overwhelming and time-consuming to try to figure out everything we needed to apply for and set up. It was not a very clear process. It would have helped to have someone walk us through the process, or maybe a system/database that would streamline applying for the appropriate programs applicable to our family’s needs.”

Caregivers would also like to see better coordination between team members and offices.

“When working between counties there needs to be better support for the families and children, at times it feels like you're forgotten if the child(ren) is doing well.”

“I feel like there could be better communication between case workers especially if there's a courtesy worker. It's hard to make it a community with all of us working together.”

“Tribal and state agencies working together and communicating with each other. There seems to be a lot of miscommunication, which causes confusion for us foster parents.”

Though many caregivers identified ways to improve access, processes, and coordination, about one-third of caregivers (33%) expressed positive sentiment in these areas.

“They answer my call or return my call right away. They are very prompt and professional to answer any and all of my questions.”

“The caseworker is wonderful. She responds to my phone calls and emails in a timely manner. She has provided me with the necessary things that are needed.”

“They let me know when the next court dates are and what the next step is in the process of adopting. They respond to my phone calls, emails, texts in a timely manner.”

Information

“I’ve had good experiences with workers explaining how things work and what comes next.”
 - Foster Caregiver

Overall, about 3 of 4 caregivers (76%) said that they get more than adequate or somewhat adequate information about the needs of the children in their care. However, there is a large difference between foster and kinship caregivers on this item: only 65% of foster caregivers gave a positive response, compared to 83% of kinship caregivers. Though this is the largest difference in the survey, it is not unexpected, as many kinship caregivers know the child placed in their home.

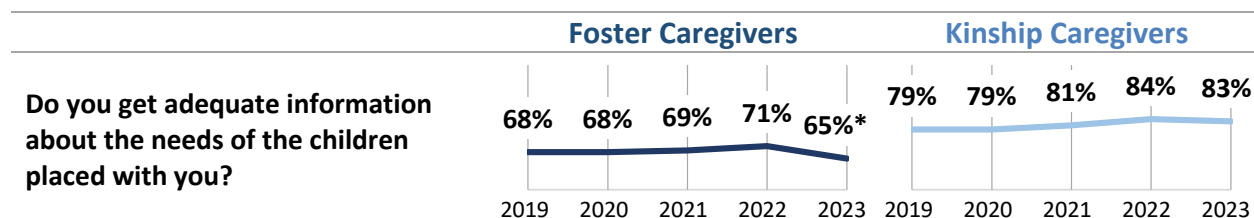
Kinship caregivers are more likely to say they have adequate information.



*Difference between foster and kinship families is significant at $p < .05$.

Trends over Time

Trend data show that the gap between foster and kinship caregivers in access to information has widened since 2019. In the past five years, there has been a decline in positive responses among foster caregivers – from a 5-year high of 71% in 2022 to 5-year low of 65% in 2023. Among kinship caregivers, there has been a slight increase in positive responses on this question over the past five years, from 79% in 2019 to 83% in 2023.



*Percentage change between 2022 and 2023 is significant at $p < .05$.


Caregivers Speak

Four of 10 caregivers who commented about support said something about information. Just over half of these comments (52%) are negative, about one-third (34%) are positive, and 14 percent are a mix of both.

41% of support comments were about information (n=509).

 ▶ **173** (34%) of these comments were positive.

 ▶ **70** comments (14%) were mixed.

 ▶ **265** comments (52%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

One additional comment (<1%) was neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Most suggestions for improvement are about receiving information in a consistent and timely way.

“Be more forthcoming with information that may help the child.”

“Keep me in the loop on all meetings regarding my child, provide adequate information regarding trauma background on my child.”

“Inform me of case process, court dates, meetings, etc.”

Other caregivers had more positive experiences and feel that they have adequate information to care for children.

“Any question I have, they have been very eager to provide answers and assist with any requests that I’ve had. They also have given me adequate information for extra resources that I may need in the care of the child in my placement.”

“They provided information as to the resources available.”

“They check in often, they talk to me about milestones the child should be reaching. They let us know what resources are available to us such as clothing vouchers and activities for the child.”



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Resources

“In every interaction, from the investigator to the social worker to the GAL [Guardian ad Litem], I am always asked if I needed anything.”

- Foster Caregiver

In their comments, over one-third (36%) of caregivers mentioned resources. Six of 10 (59%) of these comments are positive, over 3 of 10 (33%) are suggestions for improvement, and fewer than 1 of 10 (8%) are mixed. These proportions are similar for both kinship and foster caregivers.

Caregivers Speak

36% of support comments were about resources (n=445).



▶ **262** (59%) of these comments were positive.



▶ **37** comments (8%) were mixed.



▶ **145** comments (33%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

One additional comment (<1%) was neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Most general comments (65%) about resources were positive.

“They are great at giving resources for services.”

“I think they do a good job offering resources. If we express a concern, they offer resources to help with that.”

Fewer caregivers expressed a general desire for more resources and more support accessing resources.

“I seldom hear from anyone, and I struggle to get help with resources.”

“More resources and following through getting the resources.”

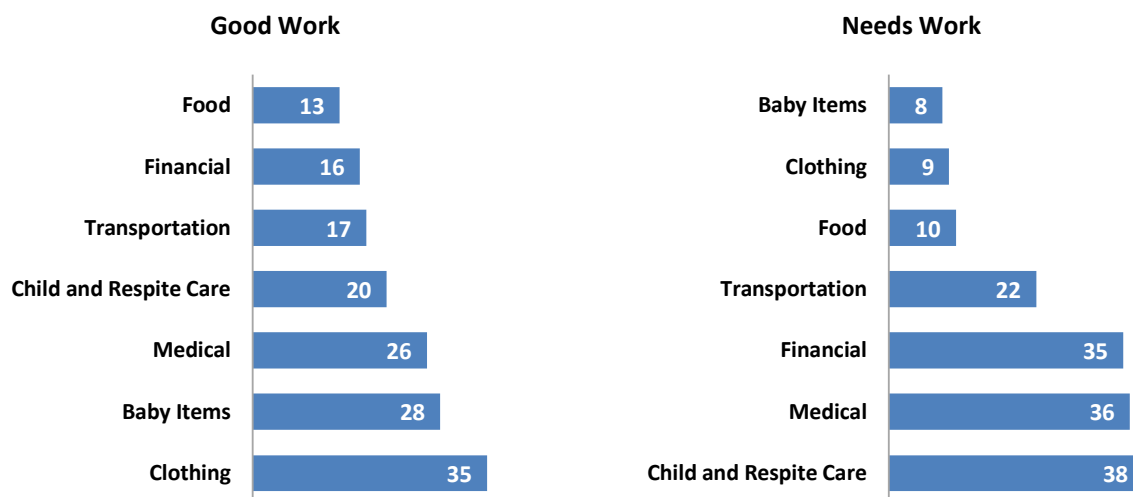
Caregivers often referred to specific resources in their comments. They expressed gratitude for access to material resources like clothing and supplies for baby care.

“Investigator provided vouchers for formula, diapers, and clothes, and social worker personally stopped into Target to buy (with a department card) some baby formula for my kiddo.”

“[They] helped to get clothing vouchers to get kids clothed, helped to get me set up with a bunk bed so that we could add brother to household.”

“Help with the child I am caring for by providing clothing, food vouchers, gas vouchers, school supplies and other things I need as well. And always answer any questions I have when I need the help if I don't understand.”

Caregivers Appreciate the Resources They Receive and Identify Areas Where They'd Like More Support.



Caregivers also frequently mentioned medical resources, especially mental health resources.

“Counseling is a hard thing to get and wish we could get more of. Mental health is hard to come by for the kids.”

“Find therapy services! Every kid in the system deserves counseling or therapy and we haven’t been able to line this up for our foster daughter in the year she’s been with us, despite great effort.”

“One of the hardest parts of our journey supporting the teens in our care was getting access to consistent and long-term mental health supports. The state insurance reimburses so little for behavioral/mental health care that our teens often end up seeing a therapist who is unlicensed or in training. When they finish training, they then leave the agency or become too expensive for Medicaid to cover. This meant the teens in our care were building trust with a therapist who would leave as soon as they were starting to make progress, and they needed to effectively start over with someone new. It was almost impossible for these youth to make mental health progress, unless they were comfortable quickly opening up to a new therapist (rare amongst the teens we worked with). This is an area of the child welfare system that urgently needs addressing.”

Comments about financial resources, including reimbursements, were also common. Some caregivers feel that payments are not adequate for covering the costs of caregiving.

“The payment amount provided by DCYF for caring for children is substantially not in alignment with today’s cost of living.”

“Need more resources for families that are hard up.”

Other comments related to financial resources were requests for more timely reimbursement.

“Pay travel reimbursements on time. They are currently three months behind on travel payments for me, which is more than \$1,000 in reimbursement.”

Caregivers also commented on resources like transportation, child care, and respite care.

“They helped with the child daycare. That was really good.”

“The greatest help has been in facilitating visits. Since visits are supervised, our foster child is picked up from school and transported to the visit and then to our home afterward. This is greatly appreciated.”

The majority of comments about transportation, child care, and respite care are suggestions for improvement.

“They don't always give me the help I need. I don't always have the best experience. They are rude to me. They don't care as much as they should. I remember I asked them if they would help with transportation after I totaled my car, and they just said take the bus.”

“The transporters are also never on the same page with visits, which can be very frustrating. We have gone through probably 50 transporters while the girls have been in care.”

“When it comes to child care, and there are no openings or options, DCYF could do a whole lot better with their in-home reimbursement of \$2.00. I found this absolutely ridiculous. It kept me from being able to work during and after COVID. My household suffered immensely!”

“Offering more respite instead of two days a month. When kids have a lot of behaviors, sometimes they need more breaks in order to prevent burnout and disruption of placement.”

Overall, caregivers were grateful for the resources they received to help care for the children. Increasing access to child care, respite care, timely reimbursements, and material supports would help ensure that caregivers have what they need to provide for children in their care.



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Caregiver Licensing

“The licensing division made it easy to complete the program.”

- Kinship Caregiver

Over 9 of 10 caregivers (96%) reported that licensing staff almost always or usually treat them with respect and that licensing or home study staff were almost always or usually knowledgeable. These are the highest percentages among all the survey questions.

The same proportion of foster and kinship caregivers (96%) said that licensing staff treat them with respect. However, fewer kinship than foster caregivers said that staff were knowledgeable about the licensing process (94% vs. 98%). This may be due to the new licensing options for kinship caregivers that were fully implemented when we started data collection in fall 2022.

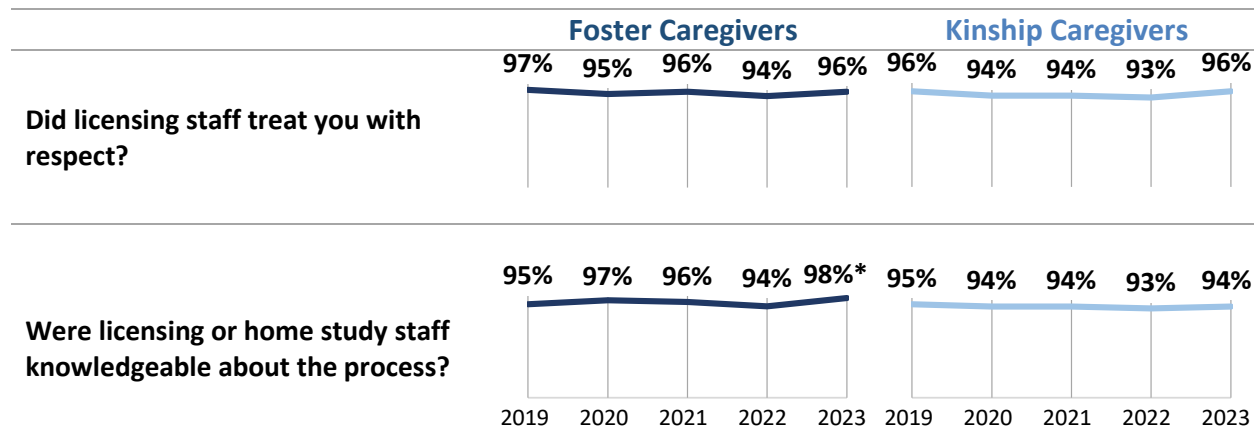
Almost all caregivers report positive experiences with licensing staff.

Did licensing staff treat you with respect	All	96%
	Foster	96%
	Kinship	96%
Were licensing or home study staff knowledgeable about the process?	All	96%
	Foster	98%*
	Kinship	94%

*Difference between foster and kinship families is significant at $p < .05$.

Trends over Time

Since 2019, the questions asking about licensing staff have consistently been the highest scoring items on the survey, with positive responses of 93% or higher. Between 2022 and 2023, the proportion of foster caregivers saying that licensing staff were always or almost always knowledgeable increased significantly from 94% to 98%.



*Percentage change between 2022 and 2023 is significant at $p < .05$.

Caregivers Speak

Though few caregivers (5%) made comments about licensing and licensors, those who did were overwhelmingly positive.

5% of support comments were about licensing or licensors (n=62).



▶ 48 (77%) of these comments were positive.



▶ 2 comments (3%) were mixed.



▶ 12 comments (19%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

No comments were neutral or had unknown sentiment.

A kinship caregiver said,

“Licensor was awesome, helpful, realistic about timeframe, knowledgeable.”

Foster caregivers made similarly positive comments, such as,

“We were able to get licensed quickly thanks to our private licensor. The training material was helpful and easy to access.”

“Our licensor was easy to work with.”

Suggestions for improvement in this area were most often about specific licensors who caregivers felt could do a better job. For example,

“DCYF licensor doesn’t do anything to help support completing trainings, etc., so it’s easy to forget.”

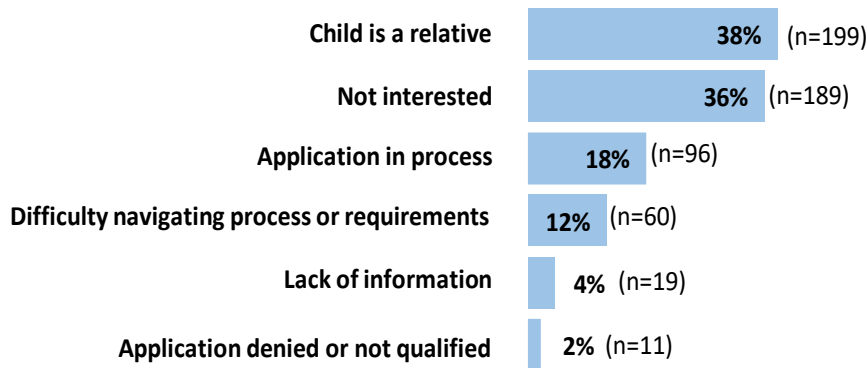
“Our licensor could be more responsive.”

Though a few caregivers expressed concerns about licensing, most were satisfied with their experience.



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Kinship caregivers cite several reasons for not being licensed.



Note: Caregivers could cite more than one reason for not being licensed.

About 3 of 4 kinship caregivers (76%) say that they do not have a license. When asked why, almost 4 of 10 (38%) say this is because they are caring for a relative or see the situation as short-term.

"I only did this for my kin. I don't plan on fostering other children."

"It's a temporary custody of a blood relative."

In addition, 36% of kinship caregivers express a general disinterest in being licensed.

"Not interested in raising children outside of my immediate family's kids."

"It just kind of a family situation, not something that I would do otherwise."

What's clear from these comments is that many kinship caregivers do not think that licensing is relevant to their situation. As kinship licenses continue to be implemented and providers learn more about this option, we may see more kinship providers expressing interest in and pursuing licensing.

Though 95% of foster caregivers report that they are licensed, a small minority of foster caregivers who were interviewed (n=16) report that they are no longer licensed. Ten of these caregivers (63%) chose not to renew their license because of bad experiences or concerns about child welfare policies. They cite lack of support, "too much stress," and burnout.

"We gave up our license after our last two kids were returned home. The foster care system is too difficult on many levels. Kids returned too quickly, bio parents given too many chances, social workers with poor communication skills, bio parent attorneys making disparaging remarks about foster parents in court that were untrue and irrelevant."

Three foster caregivers chose not to renew because they adopted the children in their care. The remaining three foster caregivers who report not being licensed did not provide a reason.

Summary of Key Findings about Support

Support

- On all support questions, a higher proportion of kinship caregivers than foster caregivers gave positive responses. These differences are statistically significant for all but one item (“Can you get help when you ask for it?”).
- Kinship caregivers were most positive on the questions about being included in meetings (84% positive); getting adequate information about the children in their care (83% positive); and feeling listened to (80% positive).
- Foster caregivers were most positive on the questions about being included in meetings (78% positive); getting help when they ask for it (73% positive); and feeling listened to (72%).
- About 45% of caregivers (n=597) report that they get support from Alliance CaRES, and both kinship (90%) and foster (82%) caregivers find that support very or somewhat helpful.
- In the open-ended questions about support, caregivers are especially satisfied with support from caseworkers; staff access and consistency of contact; available resources; and overall quality and helpfulness of DCYF and related agencies. Caregiver comments also identify some areas that need work, including information-sharing, policies and processes, service coordination, and access to financial resources. Many caregivers also commented on the need for additional DCYF staff.

Licensing

- About two-thirds (65%) of caregivers report contact with the Licensing Division in the past 12 months (71% of foster caregivers and 61% of kinship caregivers). Almost all of these caregivers found the staff respectful (96%) and knowledgeable (96%).
- Kinship caregivers were slightly less likely than foster caregivers to find the licensing staff knowledgeable (94% vs. 98%, $p < .05$), perhaps because of the recent policy changes related to kinship licenses.
- Most kinship providers who are not licensed report that this is because they are caring for a relative and are not interested in pursuing a license.

Changes between 2022 and 2023

- On four questions, significantly fewer foster caregivers provided positive responses in 2023 compared to 2022 ($p < .05$):
 - Feeling listened to by staff declined 7 percentage points from 79% to 72%.
 - Feeling personally supported by DCYF staff declined 6 percentage points from 66% to 60%.
 - Getting adequate information about the needs of the children placed with them declined 6 percentage points from 71% to 65%.
 - Being included in meetings declined 5 percentage points from 83% to 78%.
- On one item, significantly more foster caregivers provided positive responses in 2023 compared to 2022: 98% found licensing staff knowledgeable, compared to 94% in 2022 ($p < .05$).
- For kinship caregivers, the proportion saying that they were treated like part of the team increased significantly from 69% in 2022 to 74% in 2023 ($p < .05$).

Overall, the results demonstrate that most caregivers continue to be pleased with the support provided by DCYF and partner agencies. They recognize some of the ongoing challenges related to staffing, financial resources, and bureaucratic processes, yet they also appreciate the many ways that caseworkers and other DCYF staff support them in their caregiver role.

Caregiver Training

“I’ve taken some good classes over the years. It always helps to be more knowledgeable in situations. Trainings help you get ready for what could happen.”

- Foster Caregiver

Most foster caregivers (93%) report that they have participated in training related to their caregiving at least once in the past 3 years. As expected, fewer kinship caregivers (35%) report participating in training, as it is not required for all kinship caregivers.

Among caregivers who did participate in training, over 8 in 10 are satisfied with their experience. Eighty-four percent of foster caregivers and 87% of kinship caregivers who participated indicated that the training was more than adequate or somewhat adequate.

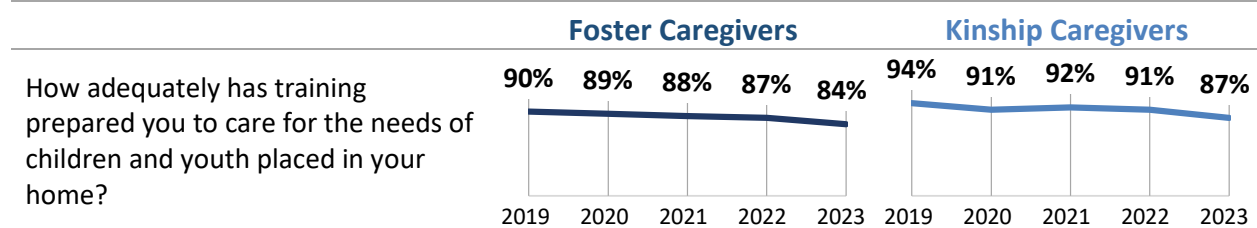
Caregivers are satisfied with training.

How adequately has training prepared you to care for the needs of children and youth placed in your home?

All	85%
Foster	84%
Kinship	87%

Trends over Time

Caregiver satisfaction with training has been on a steady decline since 2019. Though the difference between 2022 and 2023 is not statistically significant for either group of caregivers, the five-year trend shows a consistent decrease in positive responses for both groups since 2019. In 2019, 90% of foster caregivers found the training adequate, compared to 84% in 2023. Similarly, for kinship caregivers, the proportion who finds the training adequate declined from 94% in 2019 to 87% in 2023.



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Training Quality and Helpfulness

"I loved all my trainings and classes. All my instructors were knowledgeable and gave wonderful resources and helped resolve problems."


- Foster Caregiver

Over one-third of caregivers (37%) who commented on training mentioned overall quality and helpfulness. Over 8 of 10 of these comments were positive.

37% of training comments were about training quality and helpfulness (n=236).

 196 (83%) of these comments were positive.

 1 comment (<1%) was mixed.

 37 comments (16%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

An additional 2 comments (1%) were neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Most caregivers found training helpful.

"I thought most of it was helpful. It's just nice to have videos and stories from people who have lived it, instead of just a ton of reading on our own."

"I appreciate some of the things from training and learning that their needs will sometimes be different than our bio children. The caregiver training also helped us understand which kids we are equipped to handle and which kids may need more assistance than we'd be able to give."

The 1 of 6 caregivers who had suggestions for improvement in this area described the training as too general and not applicable to real world caregiving.

"Currently I can't say that it was anything worthwhile. It all seemed like general advice and didn't seem to have anything of actual value. The only reason to take it is to check a box that the required training is complete."

"I don't know if anything was real helpful. It seemed to be common sense."



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Access and Information

“The training courses are easy to follow and insightful. We love how easily accessible they are!”
- Foster Caregiver

About 1 of 4 (23%) of caregivers who commented on training mentioned access and information. Most of these comments (79%) were suggestions for improvement.

23% of training comments were about training access and information (n=143).



26 (18%) of these comments were positive.



3 comments (2%) were mixed.



113 comments (79%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

One additional comment (<1%) was neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Caregivers commented that they'd like to see more flexibility in the training schedule and more offerings on the weekends. They'd also like to see more in-person trainings in their local area.

“Have in-person training on times and days that working families can attend. Provide child care during training.”

“More 'study on your own time' classes. The scheduled times for the class I want to attend have never been convenient.”

“Having more classes evenings and weekends for us working foster parents. When we sign up for classes, sending out reminders to our email or text would help us not to miss a class.”

“I need more on-demand programs about every aspect of the system. I don't want to wait forever to have a class come live again. And they're also too long! Please give me hour-long classes that I can do on my own time. I don't have full weekends to be in training!”

Caregivers would also like the trainings to be easier to access.

“Trying to sign up for the classes is difficult and the instructions are unclear.”

“The system to find the classes you need is not user friendly. Too many long videos.”

“Having someone such as a training coordinator to help find classes.”

“I found the website has much room for improvement. E-learning could be expanded. It was difficult to locate upcoming trainings without having to drill into each class to see if it was being offered anytime soon.”

Caregivers who made positive comments related to access and information were pleased with “flexible schedules” and the number of “options that allow for us to take them as it works for our schedules.”

Trainers and Training Methods

“Lots of knowledge presented in an easy-to-learn format, classes offered in person at reasonable locations, great staff.”

- Kinship Caregiver

Four of 10 caregivers who commented on training mentioned trainers and training methods. About one-third of these comments (34%) were positive, half (51%) were negative, and 15% were mixed.

40% of training comments were about trainers and training methods (n=254).



87 (34%) of these comments were positive.



37 comments (15%) were mixed.



130 comments (51%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

No comments were neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Caregiver comments about trainers were overwhelmingly positive.

“In-person training with a knowledgeable and passionate instructor has been the most helpful.”

“The experienced and caring instructors who are available to answer questions.”

“I think all the trainings I have been through [are helpful], especially if run by actual Social Workers or Foster Parents. It is helpful to hear their experiences with real life kids.”

“The trainers are amazing people. They are very giving, knowledgeable, not only with their educational background, but with their hands-on experience. They continue offering support even after the training is over.”

Comments about training methods were more mixed. Caregivers appreciated trainings that were interactive, relevant, and accessible. Many wanted more trainings to use these kinds of methods.

“The best trainings I attended were smaller group online trainings where the teacher really made the content relevant to individual needs of the attendees and the specific issues they were having.”

“Training that combines knowledge and application is most helpful (ex. TBRI [Trust Based Relational Intervention] training).”

“I think the discussion groups and the opportunity to hear from others who are navigating similar challenges in caring for kids.”

“They talk a lot about what you should do and how you should react, but no guidance on how to do it in the moment. Role playing would be helpful and also talking about what other caregivers have experienced in those situations.”

“More human communication, guidance. Answer questions and have check-ins while completing trainings.”

Training methods include whether the training is offered online or in-person. Most caregivers appreciate the flexibility and convenience of online training, and they would like to see more of it.

“Online so it is convenient, and I don't have to leave my littles.”

“It's helpful to have webinars or online trainings that we can do at our own pace, on our own time.”

“There is a lot on the Alliance CaRES website for courses. My younger one is very defiant. I can go on the website and watch videos for options to try. This is very convenient.”

“The flexibility of the learning is what I appreciate, being able to do it online at our convenience.”

“They have made it pretty easy now. Me and my husband can go on the website and view the trainings after kids are in bed. No longer need to go anywhere and get a babysitter. Very convenient.”

“Offer more e-courses and online courses that allows for flexibility in trainings.”

Other caregivers prefer in-person trainings, as they miss the networking and community-building that the in-person classes offered.

“In the past, when the training was in person, it was so much better. It was about networking at that point. The community was stronger. It is more flexible now being online, but I see a lot of foster parents that do not get it.”

One caregiver also asked for training in languages other than English.

“All my training was with an interpreter, and it would be nice to have a Spanish class.”

Above all, caregivers appreciated having a variety of training options available so that they can choose the format that best meets their needs.



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Training Content and Topics

“It helps to point us in the right direction when making decisions for our kids.”

- Foster Caregiver

Three of 4 caregivers who commented on training mentioned content and topics. Two-thirds of these comments (67%) were positive, 16% were mixed, and 17% were suggestions for improvement.

74% of training comments were about training content and topics (n=466).



311 (67%) of these comments were positive.



73 comments (16%) were mixed.



81 comments (17%) were negative or suggestions for improvement.

One additional comment (<1%) was neutral or had unknown sentiment.

Some caregivers commented that their training was useful for preparing them to care for the children placed with them.

“Very informative and great information when you are new to fostering.”

“The caregiver training during the licensing process was very insightful and helpful to me as far as understanding different behaviors and interpreting them in the children. Also resources available if needed. I truly feel it was a wealth of information that gave me inspiration for the new beginning of helping to provide care for my grandchildren.”

“Overall, there were some good general points that we learned in training. There were good points surrounding WACs, cultural sensitivities and supports, communication, and an idea of general behaviors we might expect.”

“It gave me the tools and some food for thought to handle situations. It has evolved throughout the years. Learned some things that we would not have thought of on how to handle the situations.”

Other caregivers felt the training did not prepare them for the realities of foster or kinship care.

“There is not a lot of ‘what to expect in the process’ information available and most people are reluctant to give you expectations for fear that is not how it will play out.”

“I felt pretty lost regarding the process once I got a kid. I know there's other training I can take to help with that, but it would be nice if that was in the basic training since it's so fundamental once you get a placement.”

“Preparing caregivers for realistic expectations and ways to respond to ways that the state's system shortcomings can affect case trajectory, time-frame, and impact to child welfare. For example, training gave impressions that an 18-month determination period was realistic for TPR [Termination of Parental Rights].”

“Use real life scenarios instead of these candy-coated versions of a functioning system of care.”

In addition, some caregivers would like to see more advanced trainings and trainings focused on the specific needs of the children in their care.

“Trainings are really rudimentary and geared towards people with little or no social service experience. It would be more beneficial to have classes with more in-depth topics and information, especially since they all seem to repeat the same information.”

“I think it could be improved to provide more individualized support or information regarding the specific child or children a family is fostering.”

“The training was just so general that it couldn't fully prepare you for specific situations. And when you realize you need a specific type, it can a long time to find one you need.”

*“Many of the classes have specific titles (Why Kids Lie, Behavior Redirection, etc) but turn out to be generic information about kids who have experienced trauma. In fact, ***every*** training has turned out to be a lecture on how our kids' brains and behaviors are different, and how we need to look for root trauma and causes. I would really appreciate leaving each training with a few **CONCRETE** ideas about the specific topic - a new activity to try, a new item to add to our home, a new rewards system, etc.”*

In addition to these general comments about training content, caregivers also commented on specific training topics. Most of these comments were positive. The training on trauma and behavior was mentioned frequently as being especially helpful. Other topics that were mentioned include anger management, drug and alcohol addiction, African American hair care, CPR, and Washington State policies and guidelines.

Summary of Key Findings about Training

Most caregivers are satisfied with the training they receive for their caregiving role.

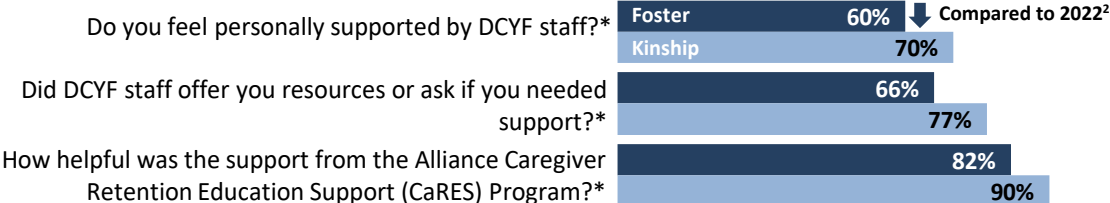
- 93% of foster caregivers and 35% of kinship caregivers report receiving training in the past three years.
- Of those caregivers who received training, 84% of foster caregivers and 87% of kinship caregivers found the training more than adequate or somewhat adequate. This proportion is lower than it has been in the past five years.
- Open-ended comments about training were mostly positive, with caregivers reporting satisfaction with its overall quality and helpfulness and how it helps them care for the children in their care. They find the trainers effective and appreciate having flexible training options, including self-paced online trainings. They also appreciate content focused on trauma-informed care and child development.
- Areas related to training that caregivers would like to see improved include easier access to information about training; having child care available during training; use of more interactive and community-building training methods; and having training available at more convenient times.

Results at a Glance

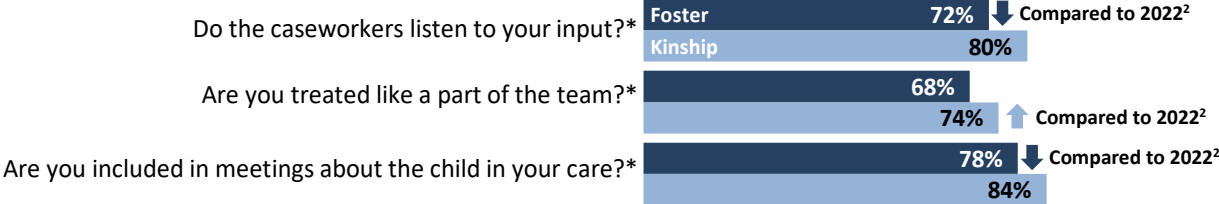
Responses to Structured Questions

Foster and Kinship Caregivers, 2023 Percent Positive¹ and Statistical Significance

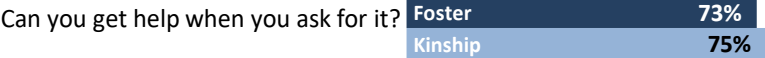
QUALITY AND HELPFULNESS



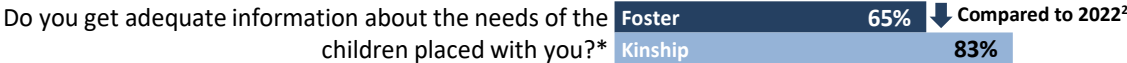
CASEWORKERS AND OTHER STAFF



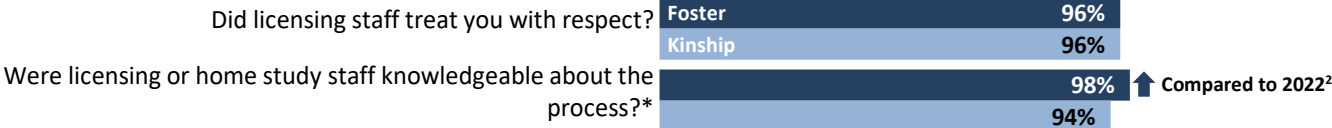
ACCESS AND PROCESS



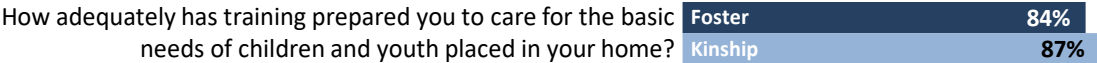
INFORMATION



CAREGIVER LICENSING



ADEQUACY OF TRAINING



¹For the adequacy of training question, percentage shown is the proportion who answered “More than adequate” or “Somewhat adequate.” For the helpfulness of Alliance CaRES, percentage shown is the proportion who answered “Very helpful” or “Somewhat helpful.” For all other core questions, percentage shown is the proportion who answered “Always or Almost Always” or “Usually.”

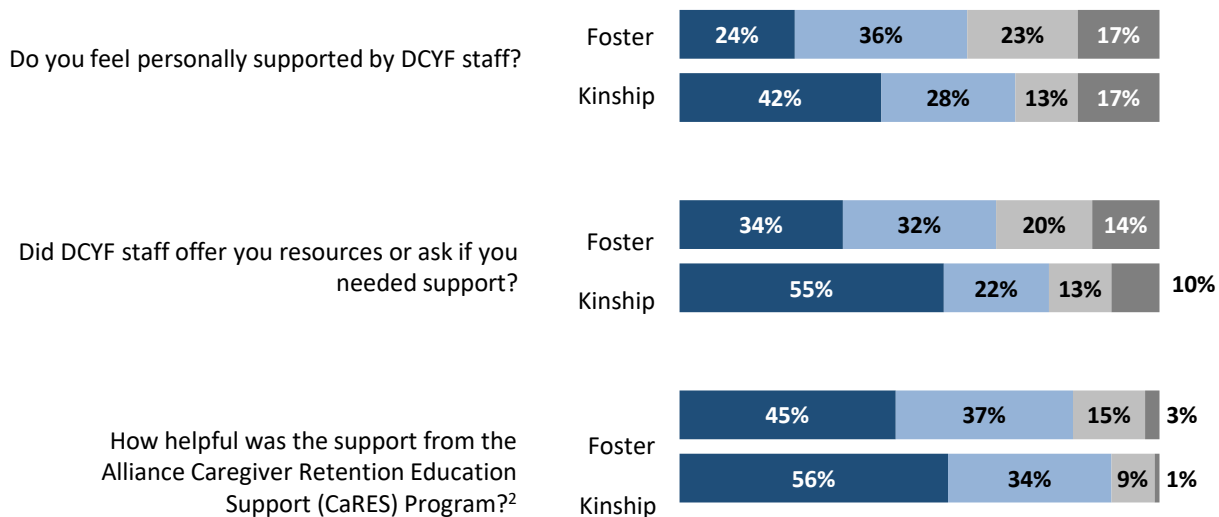
²Arrow indicates difference from 2022 is statistically significant for that group of caregivers (p < .05).

*Difference between foster and kinship caregivers is statistically significant (p < .05).

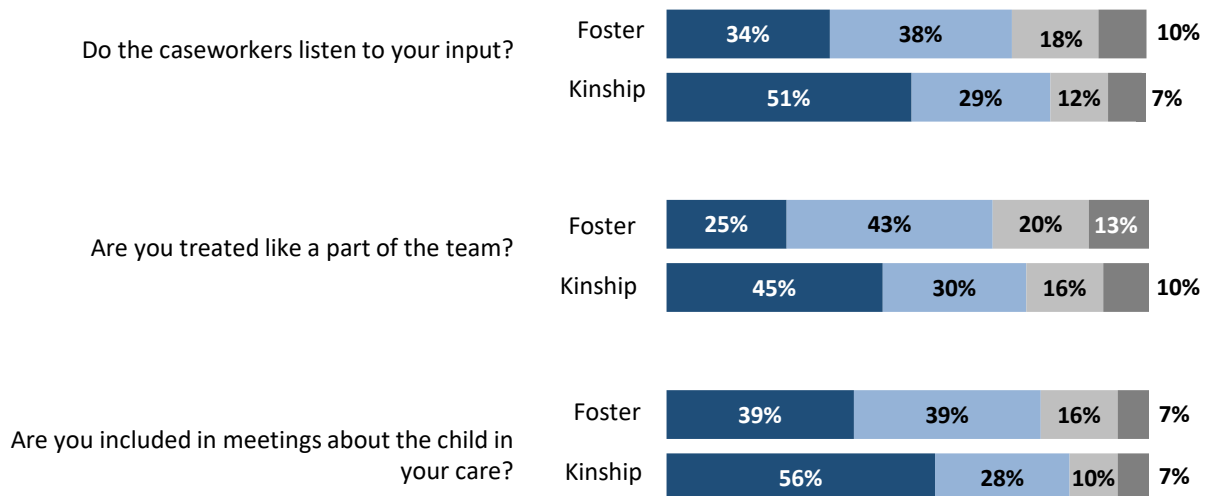
Foster and Kinship Caregivers, 2023 Full Distribution of Responses¹

■ Always or Almost Always
 ■ Usually
 ■ Seldom
 ■ Almost Never or Never

QUALITY AND HELPFULNESS



CASEWORKERS AND OTHER STAFF



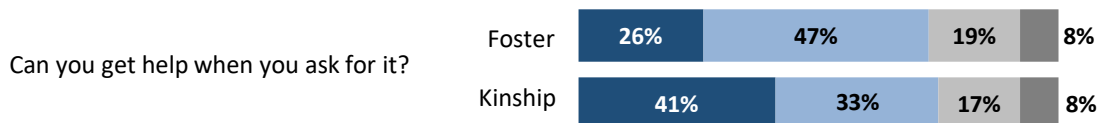
¹ Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

² Response categories are Very Helpful, Somewhat Helpful, Slightly Helpful, Not at All Helpful.

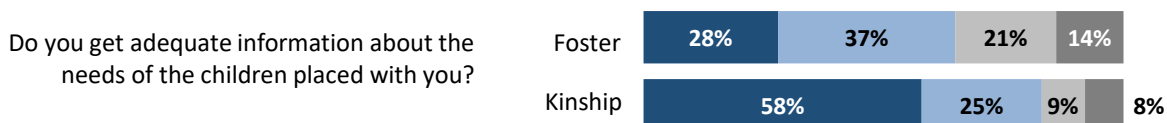
Foster and Kinship Caregivers, 2023 Full Distribution of Responses, continued

■ Always or Almost Always
 ■ Usually
 ■ Seldom
 ■ Almost Never or Never

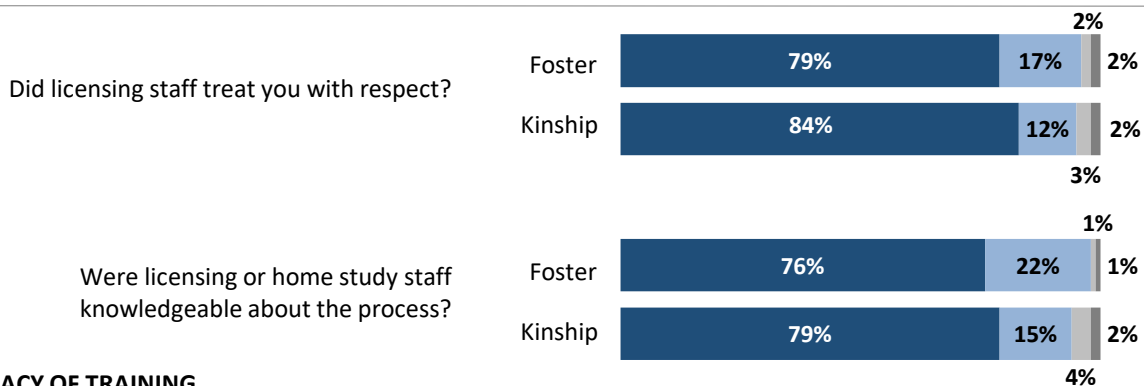
ACCESS AND PROCESS



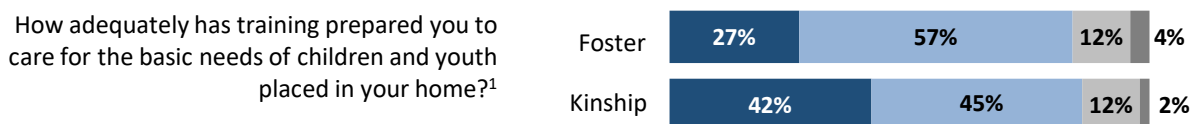
INFORMATION



CAREGIVER LICENSING



ADEQUACY OF TRAINING



¹ Response categories are More than Adequate, Somewhat Adequate, Somewhat Inadequate, Very Inadequate

2023 Caregiver Demographics

		All Caregivers N=1,349		Foster Caregivers N=495		Kinship Caregivers N=854	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Household Income	Under \$10,000	39	2.93	0	0.00	39	4.62
	\$10,000 to \$25,000	108	8.10	9	1.84	99	11.73
	\$25,000 to \$50,000	224	16.80	38	7.77	186	22.04
	\$50,000 to \$75,000	226	16.95	84	17.18	142	16.82
	\$75,000 to \$100,000	247	18.53	113	23.11	134	15.88
	\$100,000 to \$150,000	229	17.18	124	25.36	105	12.44
	More than \$150,000	169	12.68	88	18.00	81	9.60
	Don't know/refused	91	6.83	33	6.75	58	6.87
	Total N for %	1333		489		844	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Primary Caregiver Race or Ethnicity (WSRDAC/M)	American Indian/Alaska Native	37	2.74	3	0.61	34	3.98
	American Indian/Alaska Native, Multiracial	28	2.08	6	1.21	22	2.58
	Asian/Pacific Islander	26	1.93	15	3.03	11	1.29
	Black/African American	100	7.41	24	4.85	76	8.90
	Black/African American, Multiracial	14	1.04	3	0.61	11	1.29
	Hispanic/Latino	135	10.01	32	6.46	103	12.06
	Multiracial, Other	10	0.74	5	1.01	5	0.59
	White	956	70.87	400	80.81	556	65.11
	Unknown Race	43	3.19	7	1.41	36	4.22
Total N for %	1349		495		854		
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Primary Caregiver Age	Age 15-19	5	0.37	0	0.00	5	0.59
	Age 20-29	99	7.34	32	6.46	67	7.85
	Age 30-39	383	28.41	202	40.81	181	21.22
	Age 40-49	415	30.79	182	36.77	233	27.32
	Age 50-59	264	19.58	60	12.12	204	23.92
	Age 60-69	135	10.01	15	3.03	120	14.07
	Age 70-79	44	3.26	4	0.81	40	4.69
	Age 80+	3	0.22	0	0.00	3	0.35
	Total N for %	1348		495		853	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Primary Caregiver Gender	Male	162	12.01	56	11.31	106	12.41
	Female	1182	87.62	438	88.48	744	87.12
	Unknown	5	0.37	1	0.20	4	0.47
	Total N for %	1349		495		854	

		All Caregivers N=1,349		Foster Caregivers N=495		Kinship Caregivers N=854	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Secondary Caregiver Age	Age 15-19	1	0.11	0	0.00	1	0.18
	Age 20-29	59	6.20	23	5.64	36	6.62
	Age 30-39	270	28.36	145	35.54	125	22.98
	Age 40-49	314	32.98	158	38.73	156	28.68
	Age 50-59	180	18.91	62	15.20	118	21.69
	Age 60-69	99	10.40	19	4.66	80	14.71
	Age 70-79	26	2.73	1	0.25	25	4.60
	Age 80+	3	0.32	0	0.00	3	0.55
	Total N for %	952		408		544	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Secondary Caregiver Gender	Male	786	58.27	339	68.48	447	52.34
	Female	164	12.16	68	13.74	96	11.24
	Unknown	399	29.58	88	17.78	311	36.42
	Total N for %	1349		495		854	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
DCYF Region	Region 1	223	16.53	74	14.95	149	17.45
	Region 2	176	13.05	61	12.32	115	13.47
	Region 3	150	11.12	56	11.31	94	11.01
	Region 4	202	14.97	81	16.36	121	14.17
	Region 5	251	18.61	105	21.21	146	17.10
	Region 6	304	22.54	118	23.84	186	21.78
	Statewide/No Region	43	3.19	0	0.00	43	5.04
	Total N for %	1349		495		854	

2023 DCYF Caregiver Survey Report



Prepared for Washington State
Department of Children, Youth, and Families
by Department of Social and Health Services
Research & Data Analysis Division
March 2024