Introduction:
The Building Family Partnerships (BFP) work was established in partnership with parents and caregivers in Washington, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCFY), Casey Family Programs (CFP), the Children’s Trust Fund Alliance and the Youth Law Center/Quality Parenting Initiative. The BFP was established to gain insight into the ways true partnership and co-leadership can occur amongst parents, kinship caregivers, and foster parents on behalf of youth and children. The BFP work has centered hearing and valuing people who have experienced the child welfare system and has been co-designed with families from the inception.

The BFP wanted to hear from a range of stakeholders in order to:
• Learn from individuals with lived experience in order to share learnings with cross-systems stakeholders;
• Identify relationship-building strategies and recommendations from parents and caregivers in order to improve outcomes for children and youth in out of home care; and
• Identify common themes and barriers families are currently experiencing in order to develop recommendations for systemic improvements.

Background:
This report represents a summary of recommendations collected from a series of listening sessions from a variety of stakeholder affinity groups. The recommendations are intended to be discussed with key stakeholders in order to advance practice and normalize building partnerships between parents and caregivers. We hope these recommendations will be used to inform DCYF’s leadership and forthcoming plans to improve agency practice to support partnerships and to help community providers improve their practices as well. We believe implementation of these recommendations will help increase timely

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reunification, ensure safety upon return home and increase permanency for those children who cannot reunify.

**BFP Town Hall:**
A Town Hall meeting was held in December 2020 with over 100 birth, foster and adoptive parents, child welfare advocates and other community and local government stakeholders in attendance to learn why children benefit when their parents and caregivers work together. In March of 2021, a summary of the themes gathered were sent out to over 200 stakeholders, including those who attended the Town Hall. The summary can be accessed in the appendix.

**BFP Listening Sessions:**
The BFP coordinated a series of stakeholder “Listening Sessions” held during June 2021 – September 2021 with birth, foster, relative/kin, youth and DCFY front-line staff from various offices. The Listening Sessions with these “affinity groups” were a follow-up to the Town Hall meetings, where we heard from a variety of stakeholders on supporting partnership between parents and caregivers. Each Listening Session except for the DCYF staff session were co-sponsored by a community constituent-led organization, who helped to recruit and register participants for each session. The DCYF Core Team member recruited the DYF staff for their listening session. Additionally, each session was co-led by a constituent and a national BFP work-group partner. The sessions were intentionally kept small with 6-12 attendees, which enabled us to have a deeper exchange in a safe setting. Participation in each session was voluntary and we maintained the confidentiality of participates by ensuring comments reflected in this report are not linked to any individual person.

**BFP Listening Session Overarching Themes:**
- The importance of intentionally and thoughtfully building relationships between parents and caregivers for children and youth in foster care is paramount.
- The importance and value of effective partnerships should be addressed at a system level.
- Focusing on building relationships at the beginning of a case is essential.
- Ensuring the engagement of children and youth in this process, including in new policy and practice development is key.
- Extending compassion and empathy to all parties involved is a core value that must be demonstrated when embarking on relationship building.

**BFP Convening:**
A statewide convening is planned to be held in December 2021. The convening is an opportunity to unveil and explore the overarching themes and recommendations that emerged from the statewide listening sessions regarding building and supporting partnerships between parents and caregivers. **We invite you to consider your role in advancing practices to accommodate these recommendations and ultimately better meet the needs of families** through building and sustaining such practices that improve coordination and relationships between parents and caregivers on behalf of the children and youth involved.

**Summary of BFP Listening Session – Recommendations:**
While each stakeholder group had unique perspectives related to partnership, there were challenges and recommendations for change that were consistently raised across multiple participant groups. These challenges and recommendations shared across stakeholder groups include:

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1. Working towards a culture in DCYF that values parent partnership at all levels of leadership and is consistent across social workers, supervisors/managers and regions.

2. Ensuring DCYF and court/legal staff work with foster parents and relative caregivers as respected valued partners and agency ensure practices provide support, include families in decision making processes, allow proper care of the child (including partnership work), and support retention. Practices that stress and overwhelm a very limited pool of foster parents and relative caregivers make partnership (and retention) difficult or impossible. Practices such as failure to consider appropriate match of child with the home, placing too many children in homes, and lack of social worker support interfere with the foster parent’s capacity to build relationships. Ensuring existing foster parents and relative caregivers are retained and well supported, and the agency is committed to recruitment of additional families that will be willing and supported in partnership efforts is critical.

3. Ensuring DCYF implements practices that support partnership such as facilitating early meetings between families, providing guidance and clear expectations for building relationships, supporting parents participating together in the child’s life including appointments and activities, clarifying reporting requirements so foster parents do not feel like they are being forced to monitor/report inappropriately, and offering support if/when challenges in the relationship arise.

4. Ensuring support for DCYF staff so they have the clarity, time, capacity, information, training and techniques to support partnership. Agency social workers who are overextended and stressed struggle to provide the support and troubleshooting needed for partnership. Given current capacity, there may be value in exploring additional supports such as courtesy social workers, assigned liaisons or outside contractors.

5. Ensuring birth parents have access to timely, effective, and culturally relevant services so they are able to receive the treatment, support, and concrete assistance necessary to heal and stabilize to effectively form and maintain relationships with both the foster parent/relative caregiver and their child. Particular gaps identified include bicultural and bilingual services and services and dual substance abuse and mental health treatment.

6. Providing increased supports and assistance for relative caregivers that address basic needs such as housing, food, and clothing as well as practical supports to enable participation in partnership, and navigate and heal historical and current relational dynamics between families. Support in navigating the healing is necessary for this specific affinity group.

7. Ensuring defense attorneys understand the value of partnership to their clients and to promote practices that support building relationships between birth and foster parents/relative caregivers. When defense attorneys exclude foster parents from team meetings advise birth parents not to communicate with the foster parent, limit information sharing with foster parents or pressure relatives to supervise visits without support this interferes with potential partnership between families. Roundtable discussions about partnership with local defense attorneys and caregivers invested in partnership may help address concerns so partnership will be seen as protecting, rather than limiting the rights of clients.

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8. Ensuring practices that support child focused information sharing between birth and foster families to allow adequate care for a child and minimize the trauma and challenges children experience.

9. Ensuring that children with a case plan of reunification will not be placed in the home of families who are primarily interested in adoption.

10. Prioritizing addressing the special urgent partnership considerations and implications for Native American children, and children who are placed in homes where they are separated from their culture and identity.

11. Addressing bias and misunderstanding about birth parents from social workers and foster parents/relative caregivers through training, sharing of success stories, peer mentoring, and surveys/supervision. Need for training for DCYF staff, foster parents/relative caregivers, attorneys and court stakeholders that includes families and youth sharing their experience of partnership and its impact.

12. Ensuring older children and youth are consulted and listened to, and are able to be a partner in decision making relating to establishing partnership between families to ensure they feel safe and supported.

**BFP Listening Sessions – Feedback by Affinity Group**
The following represent a summary of challenges raised by each affinity group, as well as highlights of practices that are currently supporting birth and foster partnerships in Washington. Stakeholders raise creative, practical ideas for how we can ensure that every child is able to experience all the adults in their lives working together for their well-being.

**Former Foster Youth Perspectives:**
*What do you see as the value of having foster parents and your birth family working together? What concerns do you have?*

- When birth and foster parents work together, they are able to come together to focus on the youth.
- When youth don’t have a relationship with their birth family, they may run away or otherwise put themselves in harm’s way to find their parent and feel connected.
- Youth may feel safer when visiting with birth families if their foster parents are involved and available.
- Parents deserve the reassurance of knowing who their children are placed with and where they are.
- System needs to really listen to youth’s fears, concerns and desires about the relationship with their birth families and follow their lead. Youth have experience and insight with their families that others do not have.

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What practices and policies interfere with relationships and partnerships between birth and foster parents?

DCYF Perspectives:

- Need for supports for relative caregivers and other caregivers with pre-existing relationship with birth family to address challenging family dynamics and allow healing and restoration. Relative caregivers have the unique experience of having a pre-existing relationship with parents, and may have reluctance around navigating partnership work without additional supports.
- Inadequate support for birth families, particularly bilingual and bicultural families, results in inequities in family readiness or ability to participate in partnership. Birth families need supports in addressing fears, anger or expectations around working with foster parents and relative caregivers.
- For parents requiring supervised visitation, a shortage of visit supervisors and service providers results in delays and limitations in visitation, and additional demands on foster parents and relative caregivers that cause conflict when they are unable to fulfill.
- Placement practices such as placing children out of the area, and utilization of congregate care also cause barriers to partnership. Distance makes partnership challenging, and congregate care facilities see their role as isolated to working with children, rather than working with the child’s family and preparing for return.

Birth Parent Perspectives:

- DCYF failing to provide information about or facilitate involvement with the family caring for the child causes major challenges. Birth parents reported they were not involved in the placement of the child, were not provided any information about where their child was living or how to contact them, were not notified when their child was moved, and contact with the foster parent was actively discouraged.
- Placement of child in a home committed to adoption rather than reunification discouraged partnership and created animosity between birth and foster parent.
- When siblings are placed separately, this creates partnership challenges including stress on parent with managing visitation at different times, and inconsistent visitation.
- Relative caregivers need specific supports to ensure they can partner with boundaries and not enable behaviors that may delay reunification, and that they understand the trauma the child has experienced.
- Inconsistency in social worker interpretation of policies and procedures.
- Foster parent and social worker bias against birth parents, including hurtful comments by both that parent does not deserve their child.
- Lack of support from social workers on birth parent progress towards goals.
- Unnecessary requirements for supervised visitation limit opportunities for partnership and contact outside the agency. Supervised visitation does not allow quality time with child, but is a stressful experience.
- Culture of believing that foster parents/relative caregivers who are helping parents are not protecting children.
**Foster Parent Perspectives:**

- Defense attorneys exclude foster parents from participation in FTDMs and may believe information cannot be shared with birth parents due to confidentiality. Communication between parents about the child could be streamlined without the attorney/social worker as a middleman.
- Foster parents do not feel like a valued and equal partner in the case planning.
- Social workers interpret confidentiality policy to prevent them from sharing information about family with foster parent without consent from bio parents.
- Social workers are unwilling to support building relationships with birth and foster parents, so foster parents are forced to meet with parents without the benefits of a social worker to facilitate an introduction.
- Without a facilitated introduction or support for navigating the relationship, joint participation in medical appointments or other activities can be extremely uncomfortable. Need training for foster parents on how to work together during first medical appointments.
- Need clarification on how ICWA applies to partnership and tribal versus state responsibilities for partnership.
- Lack of support for navigating expectations and boundaries in relationship with birth parents
- Foster parents are not included in transition plans, which is a missed opportunity to support child-focused relationships.

**Kinship Caregiver Perspectives:**

The rules need more flexibility to support partnership. For example, relative caregivers are told they can’t send photos without permission and can’t have contact if they run into birth parents at the store because it’s not a designated supervised visit.

- Challenges navigating the ongoing rights of the birth parent with the immediate needs of the child.
- Lack of support for kinship caregivers is a barrier to partnership, as the caregiver feels stressed and resentful and may not even have a social worker to support. Partnership activities including transportation, visitation and monitoring are additional expectations without support.
- Resentment interferes with establishing relationships between kinship caregivers and birth parents.
- No specific supports available for relative caregivers in overcoming past family challenges, building a relationship with birth parent, or navigating current conflicts (including working with parents struggling with substance abuse or mental health challenges).
- Lack of support for children who are impacted by dynamics between parents or their parents’ challenges.
- Lack of upfront information from social worker, that might have helped build a connection with a parent.

**What current practices or policies support relationships between partnerships between birth and foster parents?**

**DCYF Perspectives:**

- Having the whole team, including foster parents/relative caregivers, present during shared planning meetings and Family Team Decision Makings (FTDM).

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• When foster parents are treated as full partners.
• Ensuring foster parents receive important information timely, and supporting their participation in decision making processes such as court participation (and ensuring court hearings are at accessible dates/times).
• Providing care notebooks that families can pass back and forth during visits to share info and updates about the child.
• Families attending child’s medical and school appointments together- either organically or through social worker coordination (including social workers sharing the importance of joint participation and tips for participation together).
• Facilitated icebreaker meetings in the “Children First” Region 2 pilot that allows parents to meet and greet share information about their families and the child (referrals currently limited and reliant on defense attorneys).
• Providing caregivers with tips to maintain their privacy as they get to know the birth parent, such as use of technology (for example, use of Google voice phone numbers).
• Social workers presenting the positive benefits of partnership and the other family and supporting the foster and birth parent.
• Allowing foster parents to express fears honestly.
• Providing foster parents information about the birth parents in a timely manner to relieve their anxiety.
• Social workers encouraging foster parents to love the child (rather than seeing nurturing as a threat to reunification). Supporting caregivers with grief when a child transitions out of their home and ensuring relationships can continue post-reunification.
• Social workers supporting the foster parents and relative caregivers with including birth families in the child’s activities and sports.
• Supporting clear and ongoing communication between social workers, foster and birth parents.
• Supporting caregivers in developing a personalized plan to support openness to building relationships. Understanding that onboarding foster parents takes time, as there is a lot to remember/know when a caregiver is new. Taking the time to educate new caregivers, and being available for ongoing communication.

**Birth Parent Perspectives:**

• Allowing birth parent time to see value of developing a relationship with foster parent, even when initial feelings are negative.
• Situation where foster parent and DCYF supported out of area father without housing to live in foster parent’s home with child until dependency was dismissed.
• A region currently supporting birth parents in participating in child’s appointments with foster parents.
• Family Connections training in one county on fostering relationships between parents, foster parents and relatives.
• When foster parents support parent to visit child in their home.
• Legislation allowing parents who have experienced the system to foster and/or help parents as peers.
• Keeping siblings together in placement.
• Foster parents communicating at the time of introduction that they are not interested in adoption, but there to support the birth parent in reunifying.
Foster Parent Perspectives:

• Foster parents who keep the parents alive in the hearts and minds of children by including birth parents in their daily life (examples of particular tips: pictures in the home, prayer for parents even if they have not meet).
• Working with clinicians to support attachments with parents.
• Mentoring by experienced foster parents to prepare to meet birth families before an appointment.
• When social workers facilitate introductions and provide relationship expectations and support.
• Written documents for foster and birth parents with clear information and plans about the relationship and expectations.
• Use of video chat and technology support to encourage shared parenting at the beginning of the relationship.

Kinship Caregiver Perspectives:

• Liberal, more frequent visitation has been beneficial to build connection and relationship.
• Reimbursement for mileage and meal costs for transporting children to visits.
• Financial support for supervising visits.
• State providing location for visits to occur when there is strain in relationship.
• Clear policy where a parent receives a list of what they need to do and timeline to regain custody, and caregiver is aware.

What new practices or policies do you think Washington DCYF, the courts or others should put in place to support building of relationships and partnership parenting?

DCYF Perspectives:

• Create an assigned liaison between the agency and new foster parents. Currently, very simple procedural questions get overlooked because social workers don’t have time to answer causing frustration and stress.
• Develop creative placement options such as “whole family foster care” when the whole family is placed in foster care.
• Focus on buy in from defense attorneys. FTDM facilitators could attend court improvement meetings to help educate attorneys on each person’s role at an FTDM and discuss need to trust each other to work towards permanency.
• Scale any new practices for consistency across regions.
• Ensure buy in from all levels of agency management.
• Implement an orientation for relative caregivers to understand dependency and their role in the process.
• Address support and retention of good workers. Time and workload is a major issue. Agency should anticipate turnover and be proactive in hiring new staff.
• Provide support for social workers in doing the work needed to help build and maintain relationships.
• Designate concrete funding to help parents fund costs for activities, gifts, and expenses such as entry fees for sports events to incentivize parents showing up for their kids and their activities without shame.

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Birth Parent Perspectives:

- Facilitate a positive initial meeting between birth and foster parent to reduce trauma on child and parent. When possible, facilitate birth and foster parent meeting at parent home prior to removal, and when not, conduct an icebreaker meeting before the shelter care hearing.
- Provide parents with a summary (biography) of who the foster parent is and why they are fostering.
- Ensure accountability for implementation of HB1194 supporting visits within 72 hours
- Use technology to make initial introduction between parents and foster parents if in-home meeting will be too emotional.
- Make FTDMs strength based and parent led.
- Survey staff regularly about their attitudes towards parents and collect feedback from parents about how they are viewed/how social workers show up.
- Develop a method to ensure policies and procedures are adhered to and consistent from social worker to social worker, from office to office.
- Create a forum for parents to share with foster parents, staff and others about who they are, their mistakes, what they are doing to change and how foster parents and staff can support their growth.
- Provide trainings for both new and existing foster parents and social workers to humanize birth parents and share the vision of partnership. Ensure foster parents and social workers understand addiction.

Foster Parent Perspectives:

- Utilize courtesy social workers to free up social worker time to allow support for partnership. Implement creative & flexible scheduling for agency staff to facilitate meetings between parents at evening and weekend sports events, children’s activities, etc.
- Invite caregivers to present at Dependency 101 to introduce benefits of partnership to birth parents.
- Provide forums for stakeholders to learn the importance of building relationships between parents and how it impacts children’s well-being.
- Include foster and birth parents in honest conversations about timelines and how parents are advancing towards reunification.
- Revise social worker job description to include expectations on relationship building
- Include experienced foster parents who can share their experiences working with birth families in trainings of new foster parents.

Kinship Caregiver Perspectives:

- Provide an individual caseworker to support each kinship family and a liaison to assist with advocacy and resources.
- Provide kinship caregivers (licensed or not) financial and concrete support for their basic needs to allow them to continue to care for children: housing, clothing and food as well as supports for the child.
- Offer intensive partnership support from a social worker: recognize many relatives have had a long history with the birth parents, and have made enormous sacrifices with little or no support to care for children.

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• Ensure birth parents receive effective, timely services and treatment (substance abuse and mental health) that will allow them to safely engage with their children and the relative caregiver.
• Provide inspiration for parents to stay motivated to reunify through letters, pictures of children, etc.

**Former Foster Youth Perspectives:**

• Social workers should facilitate the relationships between parents. For teenagers, triangulation or splitting can happen between youth, foster and birth parents, so a neutral party is necessary.
• Provide birth families coaching on how to navigate relationships.
• Provide youth peer mentors to support youth through this process.
• Ensure sharing information about the child’s needs is a priority. When foster parents don’t have a relationship with birth parents, foster parents lack information on what the youth needs, what they like, their health, and other basic information or tips that can prevent trauma and stress for the child. For teens who may have moved multiple times, this information is particularly important.
• DCYF must ensure youth have meaningful input in decision making.
• Create a mechanism to elevate concerns about the quality of foster parents so that abusive and uncaring parents have some accountability and don’t continue to harm children.
• DCYF should prioritize partnership to keep children connected to their culture, race and ethnicity to allow the child a complete sense of self.
• Set clear expectations in recruitment, orientation and placement that foster parents will be required to work with birth parents and offer all foster parents more training to help them successfully build and maintain relationships. Include examples of families working together with the youth during orientation and training so foster parents have real examples of how partnership can work and why it is important.
• Include teachers in team meetings and as a stakeholder in partnership- in many cases the youth feels they are the most trusted adult who spends the most time with them.

**Conclusion:**
Again, we invite you to consider your role in advancing practices to accommodate these recommendations and ultimately better meet the needs of families through building and sustaining such practices that improve coordination and relationships between parents and caregivers on behalf of the children and youth involved.

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Appendix

BFP Listening Session Quotes by Affinity Group:

**Former Foster Youth**

“I think these relationships benefit both the child and the families involved.” –Former Foster Youth

“Birth and foster parents working together hopefully means the youth will be able to return to a healthy living environment where the caregivers are all working to ensure they thrive. But, it is important to always consider the youth’s wants/needs for contact with their birth families.” –Former Foster Youth

“Sometimes it’s wonderful to have birth and foster parents working together, because it’s not always the parents’ fault that the child is in foster care. It allows ease of mind for parents knowing that their children are in placements that are safe and they know where their child is.” –Former Foster Youth

“Having foster parents present during visits with birth families helps maintain relationships and safety; this is an important value to me.” –Former Foster Youth

“It’s really important for foster parents to have a relationship with birth parents because foster parents won’t know what the child needs and what we like. Birth family can provide helpful tips to prevent further trauma.” –Former Foster Youth

“Without these connections between birth and foster parents, foster parents can inflict additional trauma and unnecessary stress.” –Former Foster Youth

“Email or text can be the first steps to relationships – it doesn’t have to be a visit and everyone getting along from the beginning.” –Former Foster Youth

“If the foster parents are a different race than the birth parents and the birth parent(s) want to be involved they should let them or they are keeping the child away from their roots.” –Former Foster Youth

**DCYF Staff:**

“Some relatives and suitable caregivers put distance in the relationship due to feeling the responsibility of reporting to DCYF on information they have on the birth parents. They don’t want to be put in that position so I have seen some step back from that relationship with bio parents.” -DCYF Staff

“Clear and ongoing communication with foster parents would help a lot.” -DCYF Staff

“Child safety tends to trump all the above and if we don’t address staffing this makes it all that more difficult to implement and support partnership.” -DCYF Staff

**Birth Parents:**

“The biggest fear as a parent is...where is my kid?” -Birth Parent

“When the foster placement works with the parents, they share pictures of how the kids are doing, when they allow the parents to come to their home and see the kids for an extra visit - this is what’s working.” -Birth Parent

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“Active efforts versus reasonable efforts is what’s needed!” -Birth Parent

“Policies and procedures are in place, but no one is following them.” –Birth Parent

“Some workers are following policies, and some aren’t and that causes partnership barriers.” –Birth Parent

Foster Parents:
“Parent attorneys are becoming an increasing obstacle to birth families and caregivers developing a relationship. I recently had a placement change counties and it was so different. In one county parents were happy to have me at the whole FTDM, but once the case changed counties the attorney advised the parents not to have me there.” –Foster Parent

“One thing we did with preschool age foster kids who really missed their mommy and daddy between visits... we made soft fabric stuffed hearts that the birth parents would put their scent on or kiss at the visit in front of the kid... and they send the heart home with the kiddos. It was a really loved tradition.” –Foster Parent

Relative Caregivers:
“Us taking care of the parent’s children, is us supporting them. That needs to be better understood. We love the parent enough to take care of their children. That is the biggest way we are supporting them and that should be recognized.” –Relative Caregiver

“The court’s policies and practices are very stressful. We need more caseworkers.” –Relative Caregiver
“We need more treatment services that are mandatory for the birth parent. I agree that we need an advocate. It would have helped me a lot to have the state help with housing and food.” –Relative Caregiver

“I tried to collaborate, parent got offended and angry. Due to mental illness, some days you can engage parent, and some days you cannot. Eventually I let the state take over communication between parent and caregiver.” –Relative Caregiver

“We are drowning. We need financial, emotional and caseworker support.” –Relative Caregiver

BFP Structure and Planning Process:
• Organize virtual town halls to hear from individuals with lived experience and to partner with families and allies statewide to learn current practices
• Design, coordinate and facilitate listening sessions to gather the perspective of the constituent groups, which include:
  o Parents
  o Foster Parents
  o Former Foster Youth
  o Kinship Caregivers
  o DCYF Staff
• Communicate with large group to seek feedback on BFP work and decisions
• Organize a statewide convening to report out on overarching themes and recommendations that emerged from the Listening Session series

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• Develop a shareable public report comprised of information learned from Town Halls, listening sessions and statewide convening including recommendations to improve partnerships amongst parents and caregivers
• We also believe that while race equity is a significant problem in child welfare, it is not solely a child welfare problem. It is important to take a collaborative approach to this work and engage non-traditional partners. To best understand the issues and develop meaningful solutions it is particularly important to engage those most impacted by racial inequity—children and families of color. In Washington State that primarily means African American and Indigenous populations. However, inequities are not limited to those two populations. We also know that there are profound inequities that are based on other factors such as gender, gender expression, class, and others. *Because of these dynamics, it was absolutely vital to ensure that these populations were included in the BFP Listening Session groups held, a part of our convening and our work towards building family partnerships.*

**BFP Structure:**
The BFP is co-led by a Birth Parent and Foster Parent, known as the Co-Chairs. The BFP structure is composed of two groups, the Large Group and the Core Team.

**BFP Core Team:**
Members of the core team include the co-chairs, as well as one additional foster parent and one additional birth parent, as well as representatives from DCFY and Casey Family Programs. The core team meets bi-monthly and is guided by a set of core values and working agreements. The core group strives to achieve the highest level of diversity and inclusion in both the core and large team. Each core member participates fully and collaboratively as both subject matter experts and members of the project team, as well as providing support to the co-chairs by taking on parts of the project to help with successful outcomes. Ultimately the core team maintains accountability for timely & quality completion of assigned tasks. **Core Planning Team Members:** Katie Biron (Co-Chair), Shrounda Selivanoff (Co-Chair), Amy Jacobson (Co-Chair), Alise Morrissey (former member and Co-Chair), Ron Murphy, Kikora Dorsey, Nicole Dobbins, Doug Allison, Deanna Morrison (former member), Holly Luna (former member).

**BFP Large group:**
In addition to the core team members, the Large Group includes, additional representatives from each of the constituent groups (birth parent, foster parent, relative caregiver, and former foster youth and DCYF staff) and our national partners. The Large Group members meet every other month outside of the core group meetings to review core group developments and vote on core group decision outcomes.

**BFP Sub-Committees:**
To streamline the work-streams necessary to complete the BFP work, 3 sub-committees were formed. Each was chaired by a member of the core group, and had a dedicated role in process development. The Listening Session design team developed and executed the listening sessions, including securing a host organization, scheduling the session and communicating with participants. The Communication team developed all communications that were sent out on behalf of the BFP team. They were also responsible for collecting and compiling the notes, creating the Town Hall summary and developing the final report. The Convening design team was responsible for planning and executing the Convening. All sub committees regularly reported their progress back to the core team and the large group.

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**BFP Listening Session Details:**

All Listening Sessions were held on a virtual platform Zoom. In our initial planning, the Listening Sessions were designed to be held in person, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to pivot to a virtual model. Although there are definite benefits to holding sessions like this in person, we found many benefits that were attributed directly to the virtual meeting model. These benefits included the Listening Sessions being more accessible and inclusive to participants across the state by reducing barriers related to travel, the need to take time off work and securing childcare that many participants require to attend in person meetings.

A set of standard questions were developed for the Listening Sessions, and were kept consistent between all sessions. The questions were asked by the national partner who co-led the group, as that individual was able to guide the conversation from a neutral perspective. The use of a neutral facilitator was important to gain participants’ trust that their responses would be kept confidential, as well as avoiding any power imbalances that may occur when a colleague facilitates a meeting such as this one.

In addition to the constituents and co-leads, each Listening Session was attended by four additional Large Group members. Two of these individuals attended as “Listeners”. Their role was to simply listen to the entirety of the session as someone who did not identify as a member of that particular constituent group. For example, a birth parent was selected as a Listener for the foster parent session, and vice versa. These individuals did not participate in the session other than a brief introduction, and had their cameras and microphones off following the introduction. Two additional Large Group members attended as note takers. Again, these individuals did not participate in the session other than an introduction, and also had their cameras and microphones off. Note takers were asked to complete a standardized template for the structure of their notes. Following the conclusion of each Listening Session, each note-taker submitted their notes to one core group individual to compile.

We maintained the confidentiality of individuals participating in the Listening Sessions by ensuring all comments recorded by the note-takers during the session could not be linked to any identifiable person, even if the participant chose to share their name during the session. We did however, link comments to participants’ general roles such as parent, caregiver, foster parent, DCYS staff, etc. in the notes.

We wish to extend a thank you to the following local and national partners who supported the listening sessions and contributed as facilitators and with recruitment of participants:

- Washington State Parent Ally Committee [https://amarafamily.org/initiatives/parent-allies/](https://amarafamily.org/initiatives/parent-allies/)
- King County Kinship Collaboration [https://ccsww.org/get-help/services-for-seniors-people-with-disabilities/kinship-services/](https://ccsww.org/get-help/services-for-seniors-people-with-disabilities/kinship-services/)
- Children’s Trust Fund Alliance [https://ctfalliance.org/](https://ctfalliance.org/)
- Youth Law Center [https://www.ylc.org/about/](https://www.ylc.org/about/)

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BFP Town Hall Summary:

Building Family Partnerships
December 2020 Town Hall Summary

On December 9th, 2020, representatives from the Washington State Building Family Partnerships (BFP) planning group hosted an informative and interactive town hall event to elevate the voices of families engaged in child welfare. The planning team is comprised of lived experiences voices, including parents and foster and kinship caregiver leaders and also includes support team members of the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) and Casey Family Programs.

The BFP planning team has been meeting regularly since late 2019 and has a vision to create a culture that supports children and families through building family partnerships. Specifically working to:

- Identify relationship-building strategies of parents and caregivers in order to improve outcomes for children and youth;
- Hear from individuals with lived experience in order to share learnings with cross systems stakeholders;
- Identify common themes and barriers families are currently experiencing in order to develop recommendations for systemic change; and
- Utilize learnings to encourage improvements in agency policies, practices, and recruitment messaging strategies that will encourage a culture shift to normalize relationship building between parents and caregivers.

The primary questions discussed in breakout rooms during the town-hall were as follows:

- As parents and caregivers, what are some of the best strategies you’ve used or seen in action, in regards to building relationships between parents and foster parents?
- What gets in the way of achieving true partnership between parents and foster/resource families?
- From your sphere of influence, what is one thing you can commit to doing to improve and/or build partnerships between families?

Common Themes:

- Fear on all sides (the parents, foster parents and child welfare workers) is often what gets in the way of building the partnerships our families need and children desire.
- Relationship building takes intentional work and ongoing nurturing; the benefits are worth the investment.
- Stereotypes about parents and caregivers influence everyone involved and have to be overcome for people to see the real love and caring that can occur when the child is at the center.
- Transparency and honesty is really important as well as not blaming or shaming. Stay strengths-based in communication.
- The more direct the connections between parents and caregivers, the better it is for those relationships.
- Removal is a traumatic experience for children and parents alike; successful strategies center on skilled social workers who build these relationships from the beginning and focus on creating a village to surround children who experience out of home care.

Key Resources:

New Tools with Practical Examples:

  https://ctaffliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bfpp/

New Videos with Lived Experience Voices:

- Family Connections: King’s Story: https://youtu.be/k1HGxROPRGE
- Family Connections: Uvia’s Story: https://youtu.be/bdTyIUD5Vgw

Report Release Date: December 2021
WA BFP Listening Sessions Notes Template:

The note-taker documents in real time the salient points, notes, and follow up questions during the discussion, using the suggested template. Please save and paste chat to the end of this document.

*Listen for and prompt details on systems issues like: recruitment, training, placement, sharing of information, visitation, relationship building, transitions, etc.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session (affinity group):</th>
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<td>Notes Completed by:</td>
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1. From your perspective, what practices or policies get in the way of relationships and partnerships between birth and foster parents?
2. From your perspective, what current practices or policies support relationships between partnerships between birth and foster parents?
3. What new practices or policies do you think Washington DCYF, the courts or others should put in place to support building of relationships and partnership parenting?
4. What else is needed to make this vision a reality here in Washington?

**Listening Sessions - Facilitator Outline:**

**Washington Listening Session Outline/Questions**

1. **Standard Intro/Vision/Context Setting:**
   - Sharing the vision: Here’s the vision for practice in Washington (parents working together to provide the best care for children), and here’s why the vision is critical to children and families.
   - Preparing for engagement: We would like to hear from participants about what’s needed to make this vision a reality, so we can bring your input back to DCYF and decision makers who need to understand FROM YOU how to move towards that goal. This is a great opportunity to be a part of a big change, and we need your expertise to make sure this is done right.
   - Establishing a future focused conversation: This means we want you to focus today on the current and the future (what’s currently working here in Washington to achieve the vision of partnership parenting and what’s currently a barrier to achieving the vision of partnership) and what’s needed in the future.
   - Establishing a systemic focus, not an individual focus: The learning sessions are about discussing system changes for everyone; we won’t be discussing individual issues/cases, but if you want help with a current situation, please talk to us afterwards.

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2. **Confidentiality Verbal Consent & Standard Explanation of Process:**
   Here’s what we will do with the information you give us today, and here’s what the next steps will be. Explain feedback will be aggregate, anonymous, etc.

   - Your feedback will be aggregate, anonymous, etc.
   - We will maintain your confidentiality by ensuring comments made during the session are not linked to any identifiable person, even if you choose to share your name during the session.
   - We will however, link comments to general roles such as parent, caregiver, foster parent, etc.
   - Read verbal consent form.

3. **Grounding Icebreaker:**
   Consider a grounding icebreaker (i.e. everyone close eyes and imagine they are a child in the system- and one word to describe how it would feel to know the adults who are caring for them and who they most care for are working together). This will be a silent icebreaker so it doesn’t take up too much time.

4. **Listening Session Questions:**
   1. From your perspective, what practices or policies get in the way of relationships and partnerships between birth and foster parents?
   2. From your perspective, what current practices or policies support relationships between partnerships between birth and foster parents?
   3. What new practices or policies do you think Washington DCYF, the courts or others should put in place to support building of relationships and partnership parenting?
   4. What else is needed to make this vision a reality here in Washington?

   *Note takers listen for and prompt details on systems issues like: recruitment, training, placement, sharing of information, visitation, relationship building, transitions, etc.*

5. **Closing:**
   End with thanks, clear reminder of next steps and any continued opportunities for engagement/involvement.