

Helping find forever homes

SUCCESS STORY CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES



At a glance

Community

- Child and Family Services

Organization

- Arrow Child & Family Ministries

Location

- Texas and Maryland

Challenges

- Reduce number of children in congregate care
- Increased need for treatment foster care
- Streamline onboarding process for therapeutic foster care parents

Solution

- myEvolv®

Results

- In less than two years, recruited and trained more than 70 foster parents and served over 108 children in treatment foster care
- Developed highly effective evidenced-based and trauma-informed treatment foster care program, which resulted in more than 70% transitioning to permanency placement

Arrow Child & Family Ministries enhances foster care services through heightened recruitment and treatment foster care

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), a division of the United States Health and Human Services (HHS), indicates that at least 10% of the more than 400,000 children in the foster care system currently reside in congregate care. In many cases, this results from a lack of family-based options prepared to offer treatment for kids with complex trauma. Although there is an appropriate role for congregate care placements in the continuum of foster care settings, there is a consensus that the majority of children and youth excel in a family environment. Providers should base the length of stay for congregate care on the child's behavioral health needs and promote stabilization. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, research shows children in congregate care settings are almost three times as likely to have a DSM diagnosis compared to children in other settings and six times more likely than children in different environments to have "child behavior problem" as a reason for removal from home.

Unnecessarily, far too many children find treatment in congregate care settings across the United States. In Texas, more than 800 kids under the age of 10 received treatment in congregate care. Many there, not because it was clinically necessary, but instead because it was the only treatment option.

Arrow Child & Family Ministries takes action

Arrow Child & Family Ministries, a well-respected foster care provider in Maryland and Texas, understood the urgent need for more intensive foster care services. This urgent need includes the necessity to recruit and train foster parents to provide care to youth with histories of trauma and require specialized services, including behavioral

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Arrow Child & Family Ministries COO

health services, special education and life skills training. Arrow developed a 3-part approach to professionalize the role of the foster parent:

- Find recruitment staff with backgrounds in marketing and sales
- Develop foster parent training that prepares foster parents to be active members of the treatment team
- Provide ongoing, wraparound support that ensures holistic care

Arrow heavily invested in the targeted recruitment of families and the implementation of evidence-based, trauma-informed practices.

“We knew the effectiveness of treatment foster care, so we needed to shift to develop more capacity for these kids,” Arrow Child & Family Ministries COO, Jay Pruett said. “It’s about finding and supporting people who are willing and able to participate in treatment foster care, to move these kids out of congregate care, and into a family setting.”

Starting with recruitment strategies

As a faith-based organization, Arrow initially relied on engagement with local churches to find foster parents. To expand their reach, they needed to think differently about recruiting and engaging potential foster parents. While Arrow has successfully developed foster homes for thousands of children over the past 25 years, they needed to pivot their approach to address children’s needs in congregate care who have experienced traumatic events and require behavioral health services.

“We needed to find homes for not just infants and toddlers, but teenagers and young adults who display different kinds of behaviors due to difficult backgrounds,” Pruett said. “To find more foster families, we needed to broaden our search beyond just going to speak at local churches.”

The first step was creating an enhanced recruitment strategy. Arrow hired recruitment staff specifically with a marketing and sales background. They ran a variety of ads and leveraged social media outlets to connect to a broader audience. The idea was simple: get people interested and asking more questions about the program. Once an individual expresses interest in becoming a foster parent, Arrow hosts several

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informational meetings, Arrow.org/meeting, to help families understand the program and the children in need of placement to make an informed decision.

“Our recruitment staff’s goal is to get people in the door,” Pruett said. “It’s a division of duty between the staff, with the first goal of getting more people through the door initially.”

Enhancing training and requirements

In addition to a designated recruitment team, Arrow also adjusted the requirements and training necessary for foster parents to complete the new program. To become a foster parent with Arrow, they not only need the 30-hour training required by the state but an additional 16 hours of trust-based relational intervention (TBRI) training. Arrow also invested in the Together Facing the Challenge program, an evidence-based practice curriculum that helps structure support groups for individuals before and after they become foster parents.

The impact is clear

It didn’t take long for Arrow to see the impact of the treatment foster care program. After just two years of developing the program, Arrow has recruited and trained more than 70 foster parents and served over 108 children in treatment foster care. They have seen more than 50 discharges, with 76% of them deemed successful, meaning the child or young adult transitioned to a lower level of care. In slightly more than 70% of cases, children have been able to transition to permanency.

“When you look at the population needing services, these kids were having a lot of trouble even getting out of a congregate care setting,” Pruett said. “They were languishing in hospitals and group homes. Now they are getting the help they need and moving toward a permanent home.”

Leveraging technology

In addition to Arrow staff’s hard work and people’s willingness to become trained foster parents, having the right support mechanisms in place, especially technology, is critical. Through an integrated electronic health record (EHR), Arrow staff can create a complete record for each child, including developing specific treatment plans tied to the child’s service plans.

Pruett said a real benefit of the myEvolv EHR comes from the ability to collect data for foster parents. Arrow staff can efficiently gather information from initialization with a foster parent’s application through recruitment and training. The myEvolv EHR has helped Arrow reduce the average time it takes to certify a foster parent from nine months down to four and a half months.

“Now we can collect enough data to see where we are getting stuck and where we need to streamline,” Pruett said. “The ability to collect data and extract it helps us make better, more informed decisions regarding foster parents.”

“We rolled out the new myEvolv user experience a year ago, and the number of efficiencies that created for our staff was significant,” Pruett said. “This included documentation abilities offsite, capturing signatures, touchscreen hardware, and the ability to provide community services, along with regulatory and compliance perspective, was huge. Now, we can review reports in a matter of seconds.”

Moving forward

Through both traditional foster care and now the treatment foster care program, Arrow will have onboarded a total of 250 foster parents in 2020. Moving forward, Arrow still maintains the goal of developing even more foster homes.

“There is still much more work remaining,” Pruett said. “We look forward to continuing to see the positive impact our staff and foster parents are making on these kids’ lives. While the need is still growing, we are so proud of the work so far. Challenges in these children’s lives move us to be creative and innovative. We are making good progress for children to win.”

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About Netsmart

Netsmart designs, builds and delivers electronic health records (EHRs), solutions and services that are powerful, intuitive and easy-to-use.

Our platform provides accurate, up-to-date information that is easily accessible to care team members in behavioral health, home care, senior living and social services. We make the complex simple and personalized so our clients can concentrate on what they do best: provide services and treatment that support whole-person care.

By leveraging the powerful Netsmart network, care providers can seamlessly and securely integrate information across communities, collaborate on the most effective treatments and improve outcomes for those in their care. Our streamlined systems and personalized workflows put relevant information at the fingertips of users when and where they need it.

For more than 50 years, Netsmart has been committed to providing a common platform to integrate care.