

The background image shows a vibrant city scene. In the foreground, several young children are running and playing in a large, active water fountain. The water is splashing high, creating a dynamic and joyful atmosphere. The children are wearing summer clothes like tank tops and shorts. In the background, there are tall, ornate city buildings with many windows, suggesting an urban setting. The overall image is slightly faded to make the white text stand out.

!⋮ BLOOM WORKS

# “Sticky Families” Recruitment

Findings Summary  
June 29, 2023

# Our team



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# Where we are



**Sprint 1: "Sticky Family"  
Recruitment**

**Sprint 2: Placements  
for Teens**

**Sprint 3: Placement  
Preferences**

# Agenda

1. “Sticky family” characteristics
2. Recruiting and developing stickiness
3. “Sticky family” experiences from recruitment to care
4. Key challenges and recommendations

**Child welfare agencies struggle to recruit “sticky families” – resource families who provide stable placements for those who have had multiple prior disruptions.**

## Our goals

1. Understand which families provide stable placements — their characteristics and experiences
2. Identify a term for these families more popular than “sticky families”
3. Develop strategies to identify and recruit them

## A core assumption

"Sticky families" are out there, and child welfare agencies simply need to better understand them to know where and how to recruit them

***"Gold standard families"***

***"Go-to families"***

***"Rockstar families"***

***"Unicorns"***

## What we did

- Literature review on recruitment methods and stability
- Spoke with 4 SMEs with expertise on:
  - Child welfare policy
  - Youth empowerment
  - Recruitment methods and data
- Spoke with 9 CW agency staff in DC, MI, NM, OK, RI, VA
- Spoke with 11 “sticky families” in MD, NC, NM, OR, RI, SC, VA



## **“Sticky families” criteria**

- Must have provided placements to 2+ children or youth with 2+ prior disruptions
- Must have had at least 1 placement reach permanency
- Ideally licensed for 1+ years
- Ideally had placement in last 1 year
- Ideally cared for teens, sibling groups, or those with developmental or behavioral needs

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# What we found

**By demographic measures,  
“sticky families” are diverse**

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## Who we spoke to

**11** Women



Marital status

Married

Formerly

Never

Parenting

Parented

Never

Ages

**28 – 74 years old**

Household income

**\$35,000 – \$175,000+**

Years licensed

**2 – 19 years**

## We found some clusters



Beth



Jenna



Deborah



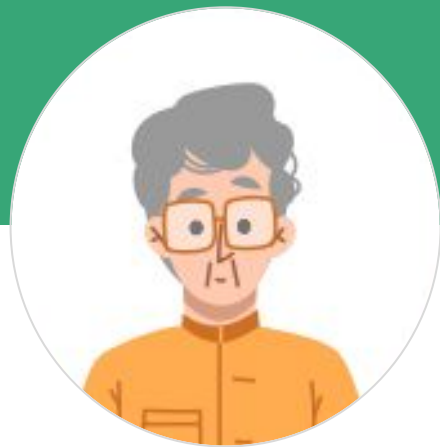
Yolanda



Sophia



Cassidy



## Carer by Calling

***"I am religious and believe in Providence. It was time."***

### Beth

- 60s
- Married
- Retired
- 3 grown biological children
- Caregiver to mother

**Motivations:** Called through faith to have an impact

**Community:** Church, hosts large extended family and has a busy house around the holidays, keeps home open to past foster youth - especially for laundry

**Parenting style:** Provides youth a chance to be mentors, focuses on the positives, uses clothes shopping to develop their self-confidence

**Agency reliance:** Relies on youth peer mentoring programs, in-service behavioral trainings and behavioral health referrals



## Queer Ally

***"We don't need these kids to be ours... we're passionate about keeping the kids safe as long as they need us."***

### Jenna

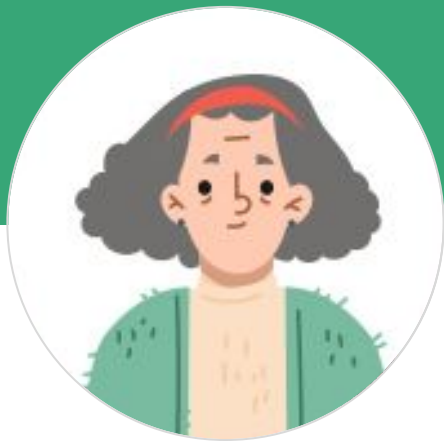
- 30s
- Married
- Stay at home
- Partner is queer full-time earner
- 1 stepchild

**Motivations:** To support queer youth, to create a long-term hub and home for youth, without needing to be the parent

**Community:** A big chosen (ie. non-relative) family, healthy boundaries with relatives who have been toxic in the past

**Parenting style:** Attuned to youth's emotions and communication styles, supports youth inclusion in permanency planning, familiar with gender and sexuality exploration

**Agency reliance:** Uses respite as a source of stability, seeks out behavioral and mental health resources on their own



## Unconditional Giver

*"Kids all need a place and loving, they're not throwaways.  
We all have problems, you work through them."*

### Deborah

- 50s
- Divorced
- Works full-time
- 2 grown biological children
- Adopted foster children

**Motivations:** Always wanted to adopt, learned that financial support could reduce work day from 16 to 8 hours

**Community:** Lives with extended family in large household, too busy for hobbies but makes time to visit with adopted child's half-siblings

**Parenting style:** Guides youth through several psychiatrists, resists labels of high acuity and any need for specialty facilities

**Agency reliance:** Makes use of ombuds office, some community with cohort from pre-service training





## Mobility Coach

***"I don't think I would have been successful [with my girls] if we been a traditional family."***

### Yolanda

- 50s
- Single
- Career-oriented
- No biological children
- Adopted foster children

**Motivations:** To give back, started fostering through non-relative kin connection

**Community:** Regularly cooks large amounts of food for Sunday meals without knowing who will come, mobilizes neighbors and career networks to benefit children

**Parenting style:** Coaches teens, especially to complete school and focus on future, aware of trauma and triggers

**Agency reliance:** Seeks mentoring opportunities like internships to provide educational advancement



## Non-profit Advocate

***"It happened because of my work, I saw the need out there... the people doing it desperately needed help."***

### Sophia

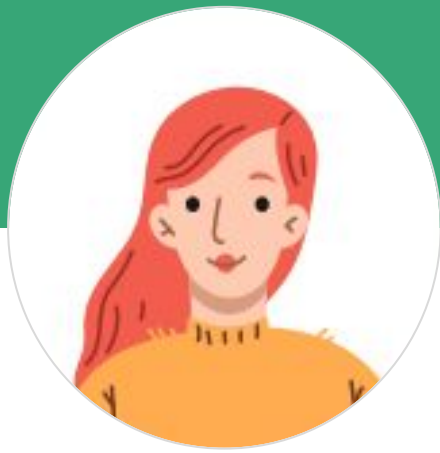
- 40s
- Married
- Non-profit founder
- 2 biological children
- Adopted foster

**Motivations:** Confronted with the need, previous experience in orphanages, but wanted to support children close to home

**Community:** Non-profit leader, has a faith community and strong foster parent community

**Parenting style:** Advocates for trauma-informed approaches, leverages own knowledge to get necessary support

**Agency reliance:** Sought supplementary in-service resources on behavioral challenges, emotional preparation for fostering, and sexual exploitation



## High Needs Specialist

***"I studied behavior management and had experience with nonverbal kids so I knew how to keep her safe."***

### Cassidy

- 30s
- Divorced
- Special needs teacher
- Co-parents biological child with autism

**Motivations:** Felt drawn to use experience and expertise to help others with behavioral needs

**Community:** Extended family supports, included biological child in decision to become resource family

**Parenting style:** Understands the needs and communication styles of children with developmental differences

**Agency reliance:** An available worker to field emergent issues and late night calls, craves strong documentation of prior placements for continuity of care



Beth



Jenna



Deborah



Yolanda



Sophia



Cassidy

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Clusters are likely not exhaustive

**We can only reflect the profiles of those already recruited.**

**We cannot speculate on more distant scenarios.**



## Who might be similar?

- Non-Christian religious members with the same commitment to service and community
- Those who have experienced marginalization and can identify with social, medical, behavioral challenges
- Single men who can especially support male children and youth



**Leslie**

- 40s,
- Pediatric nurse
- Divorced
- No biological kids



**Will**

- 30s
- Single
- High school teacher
- Peer mentor in Men Against Violence group

**Still, the families we spoke to had some commonalities.**

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## **There were some commonalities**

- They are fierce advocates for those in their care
- They have a simple set of rules, and give time before enforcing them
- They try to maintain relationships with youth formerly in their care
- They are strengths-oriented, committed to the potential of those in their care, not just on difficulties



**Their commonalities are  
attitudes and skills that can be  
developed in trainings.**

**Unicorns don't exist.**

—

## What “sticky families” should be called

- Given there are many diverse families who can provide stability, calling them all by one term may be misleading
- It may also reinforce a belief that they are unique and exist “out there,” ready-made and identifiable by shared demographics

**develop**

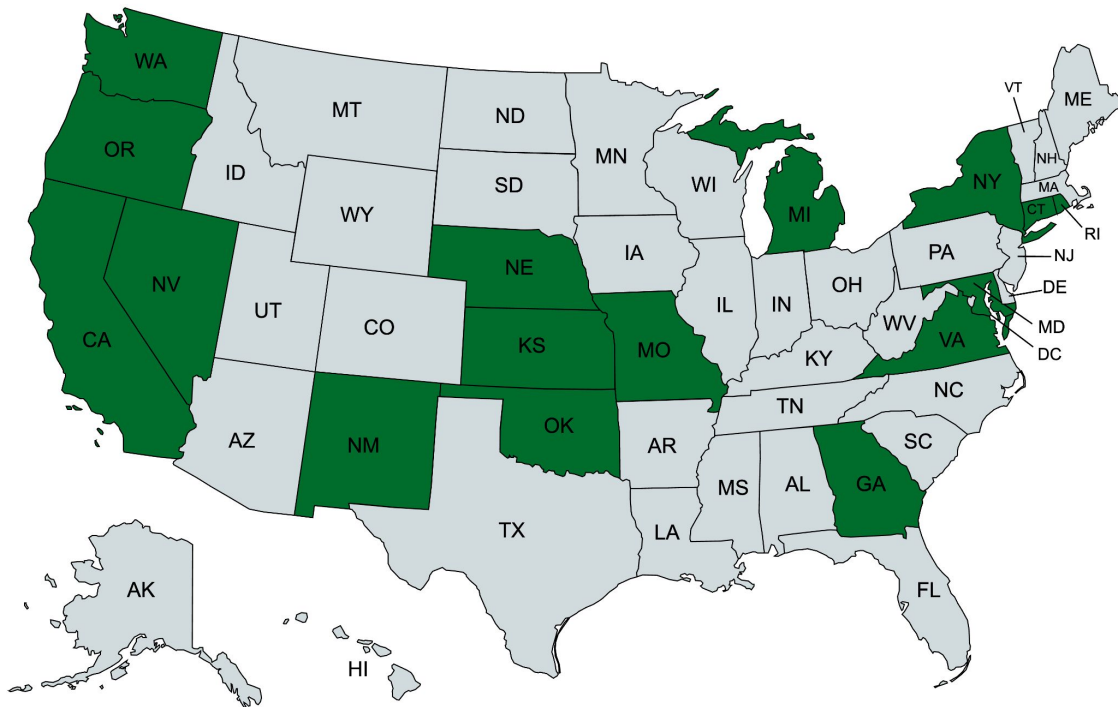
**Child welfare agencies struggle to ~~recruit~~  
resource families to provide stable  
placements for those who have had multiple  
prior disruptions.**

## **Our** <sup>revised</sup> **goals**

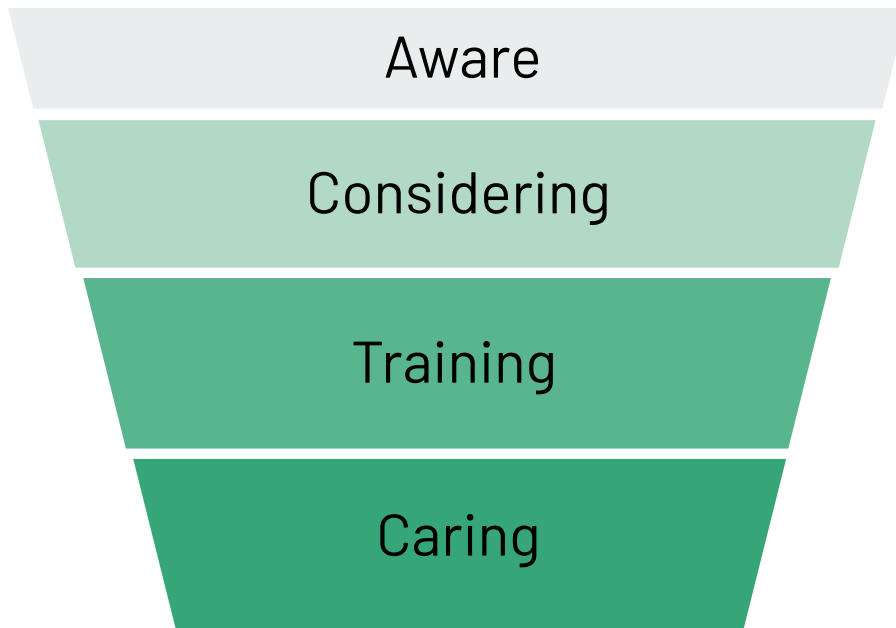
1. Understand how recruitment is structured and optimized
2. Develop strategies to limit attrition throughout recruitment process
3. Find ways to develop the attitudes and skills necessary to provide stable placements

## What we did

- Analyzed 16 state diligent recruitment plans
- Attended 3 resource parent information sessions



# The recruitment process is a funnel



**Aware**

Considering

Training

Caring

Aware

  
Call to action

**Considering**

  
Decision

Training

Caring



Aware

Considering



Inquiry

**Training**



Licensure

Caring

Aware

Considering

Training



Placement

**Caring**



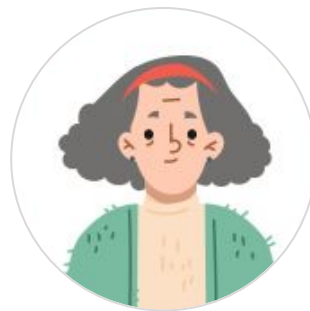
Permanency



Beth



Jenna



Deborah



Yolanda



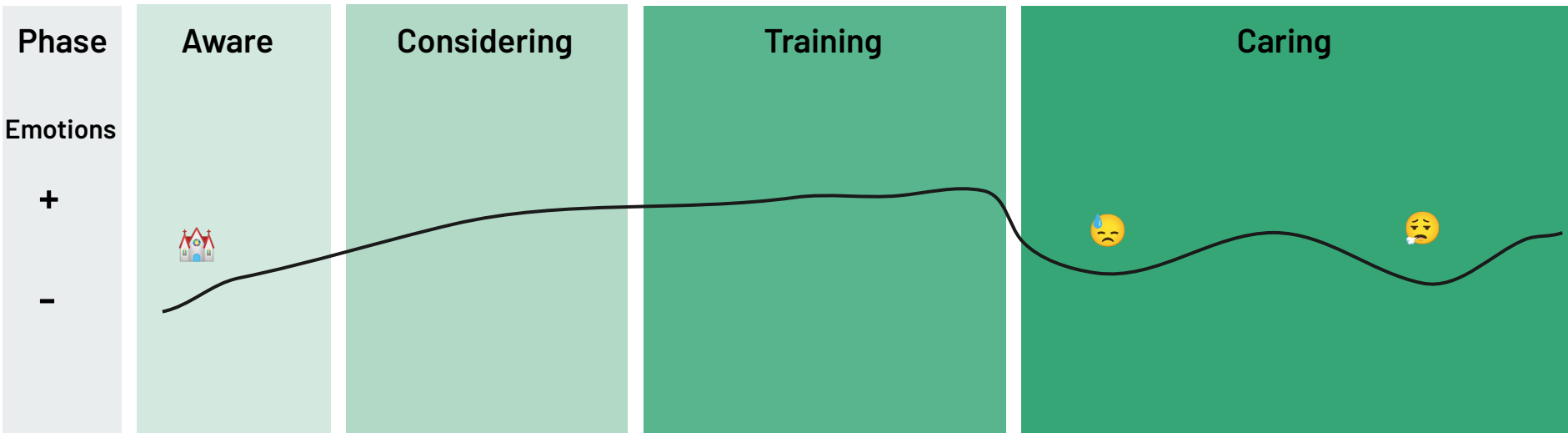
Sophia



Cassidy



## Beth, Carer by Calling



*"With the agency, more respite was provided. With the county, there's not as many (foster) parents."*



## Jenna, Queer Ally

Phase

Aware

Considering

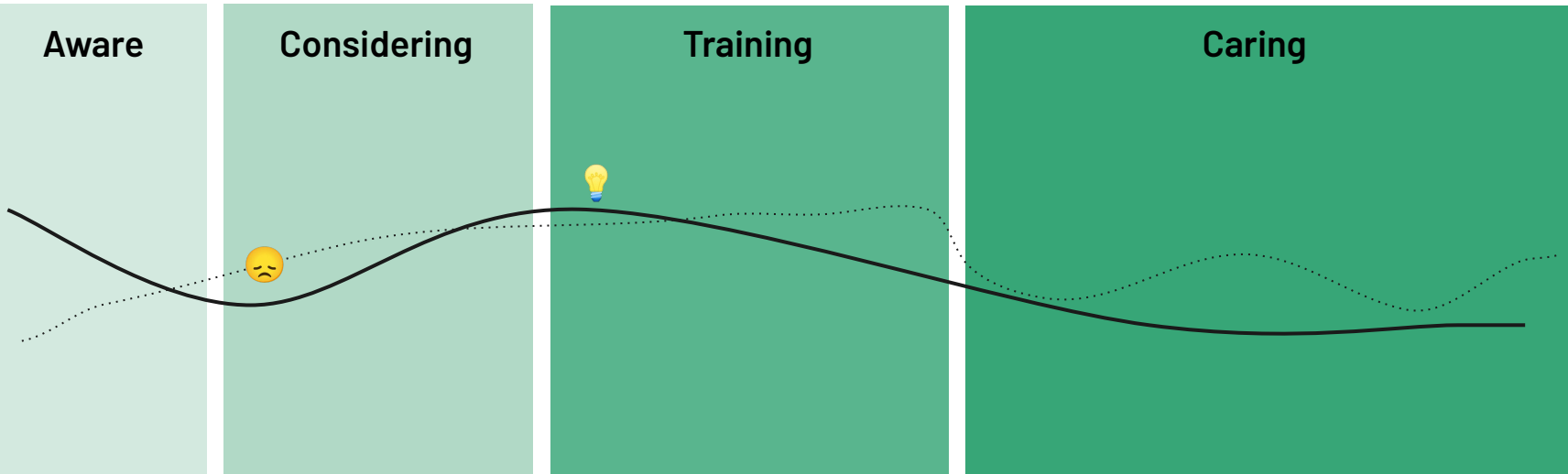
Training

Caring

Emotions

+

-



*"The foster care community is very religious based. We're an LGBT family. So we don't fit in with that group."*



## Deborah, Unconditional Giver

Phase

Aware

Considering

Training

Caring

Emotions

+

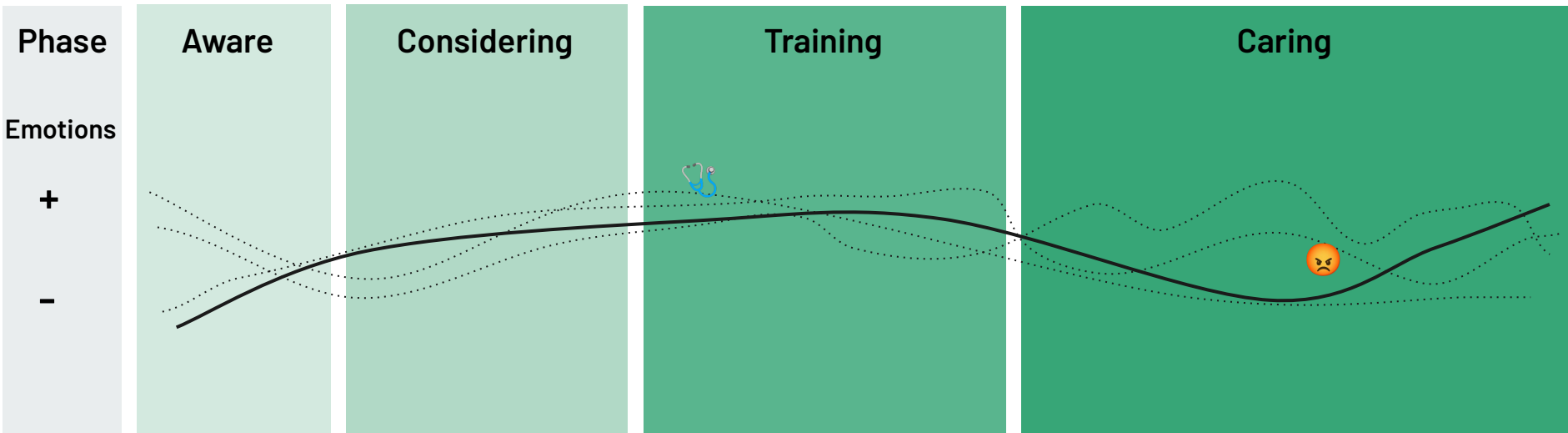
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*"The caseworker left me with a piece of paper that said, 'If he tries to kill himself call here'. I had it stuck to the microwave. It was a crisis hotline."*



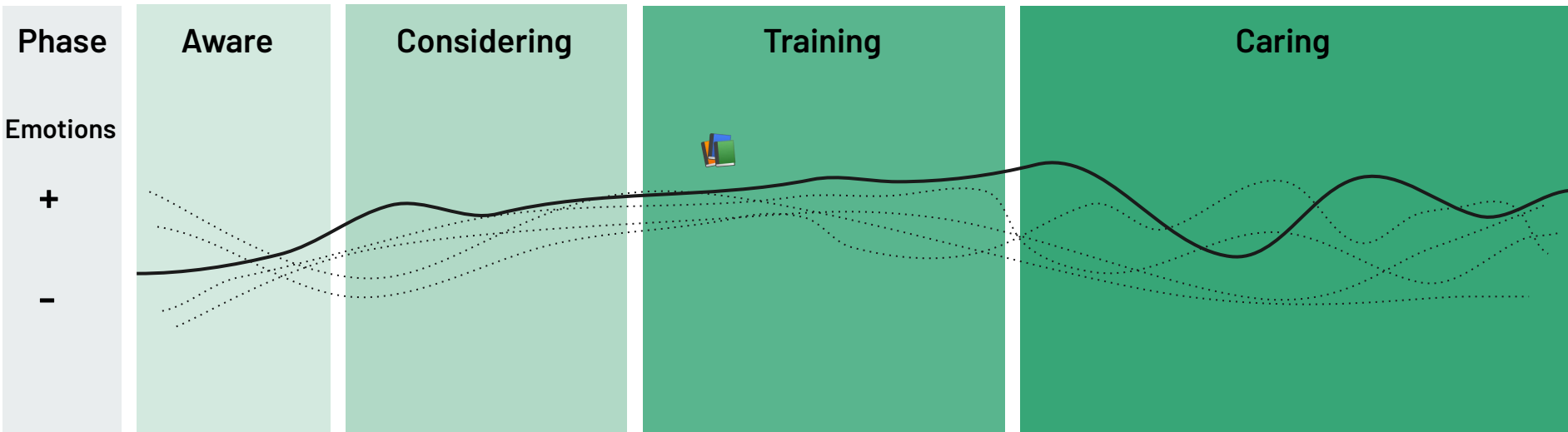
## Yolanda, Mobility Coach



*"All the trainings say to treat them as if they are ours. But then I can't do anything. For the longest time, I couldn't take them to get their driver's license or social security to get them in school."*



## Sophia, Non-profit Advocate

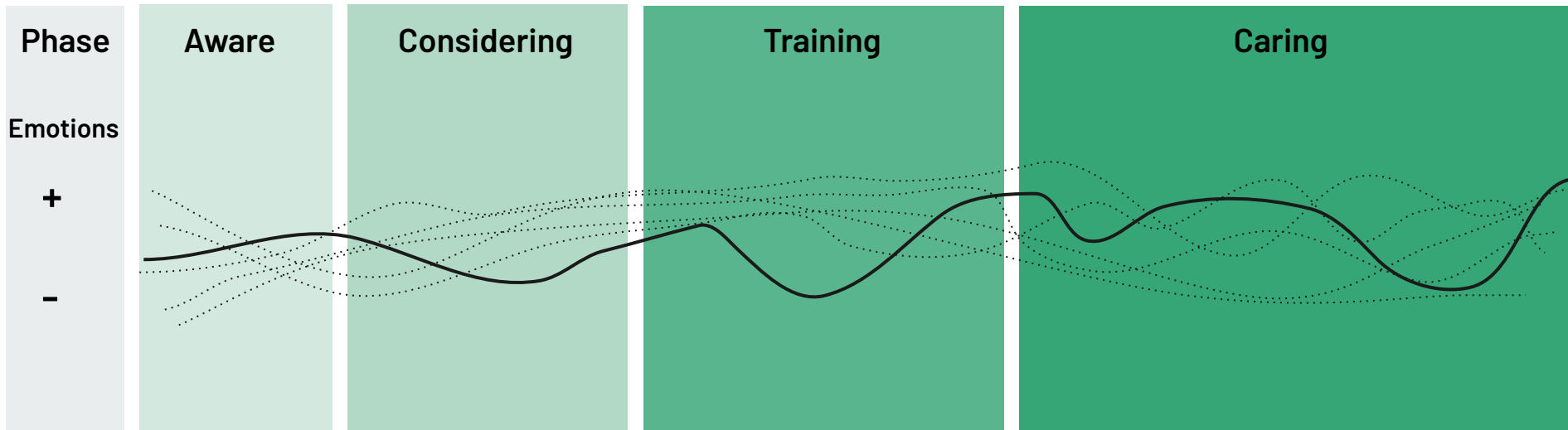


*"Broke my heart because there is nothing really unique about us. What is unique about us is that we have learned through years of trial by fire practice."*

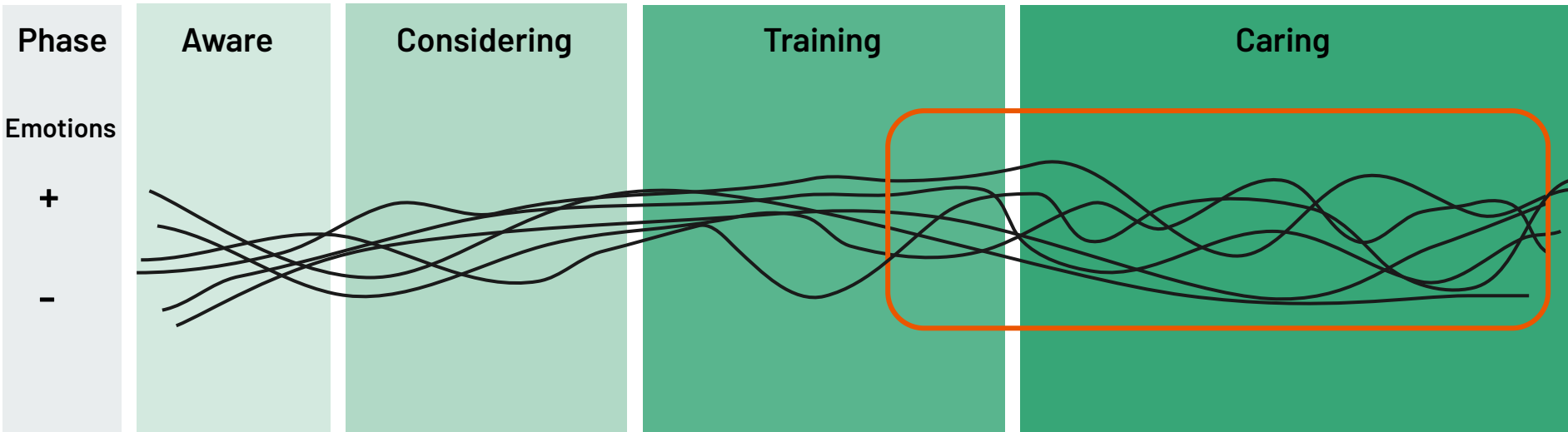




## Cassidy, High Needs Specialist



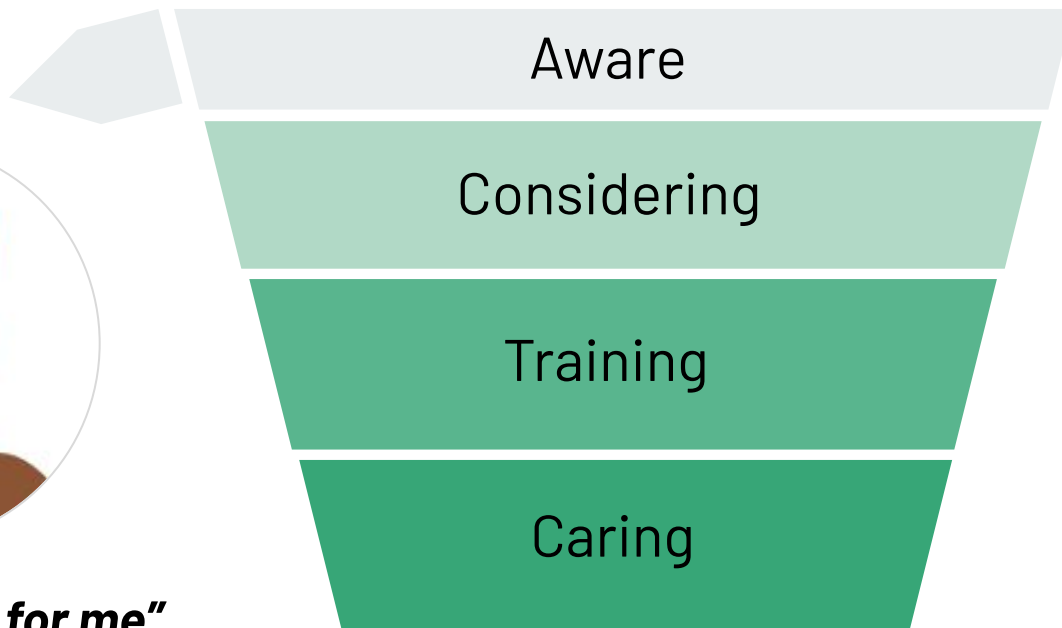
*"Halfway through I was asked if we would be a permanent placement. I did not get in it for adoption so I said no... Then later a new worker said, she is going back home."*



## Some amount of attrition is expected



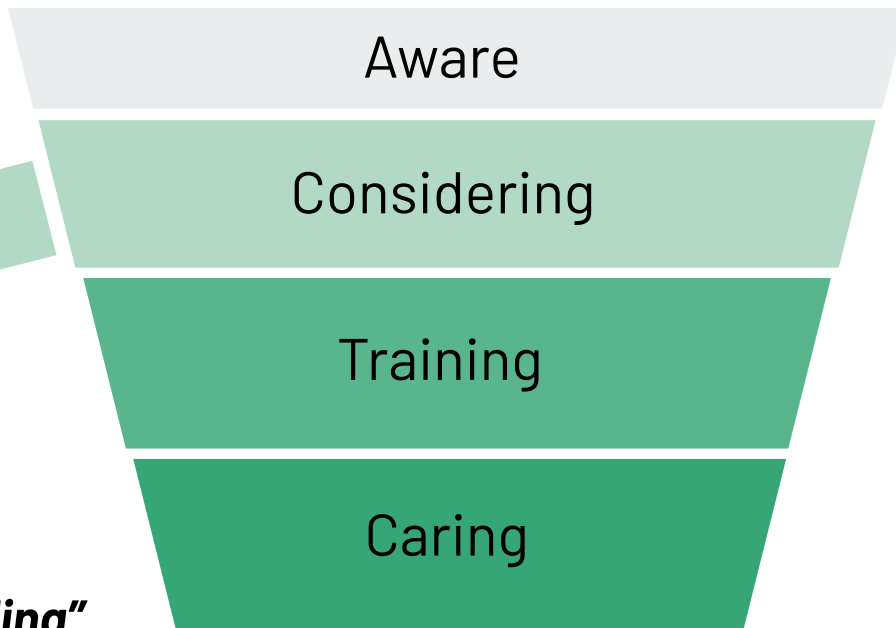
***"That's not for me"***



## Some amount of attrition is expected



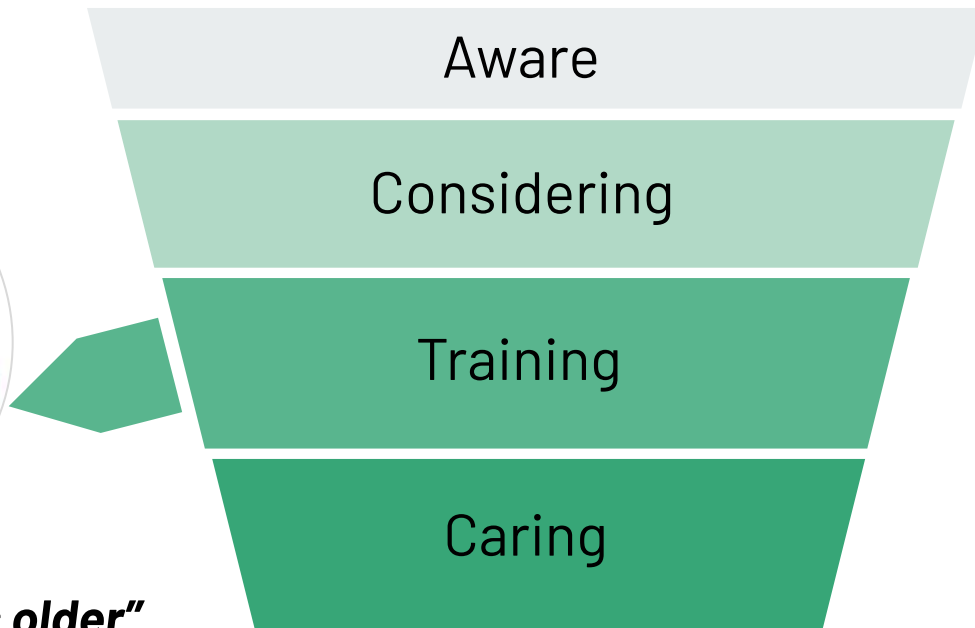
***"My partner is unwilling"***



## Some amount of attrition is expected



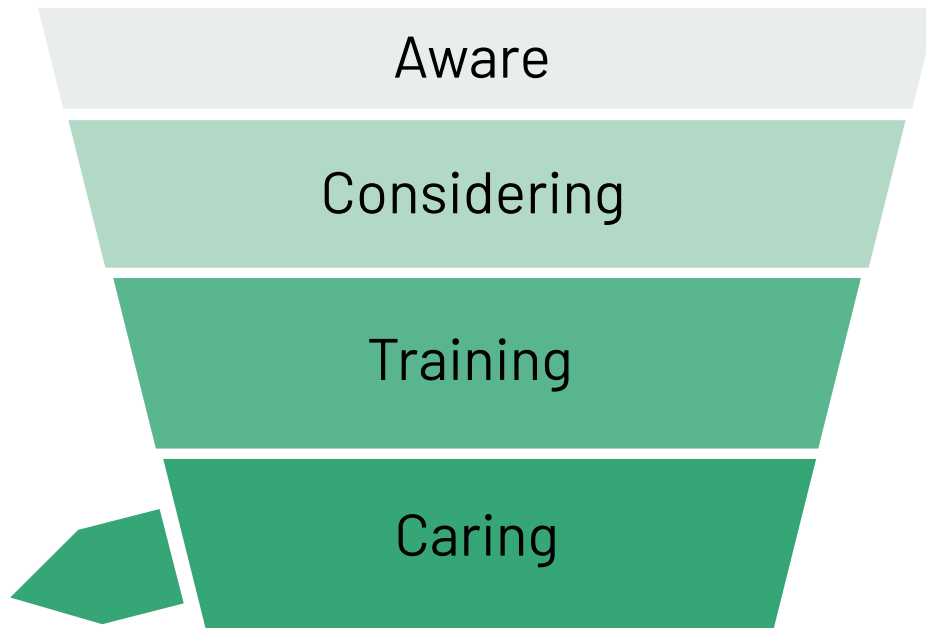
***"Once my kid is older"***



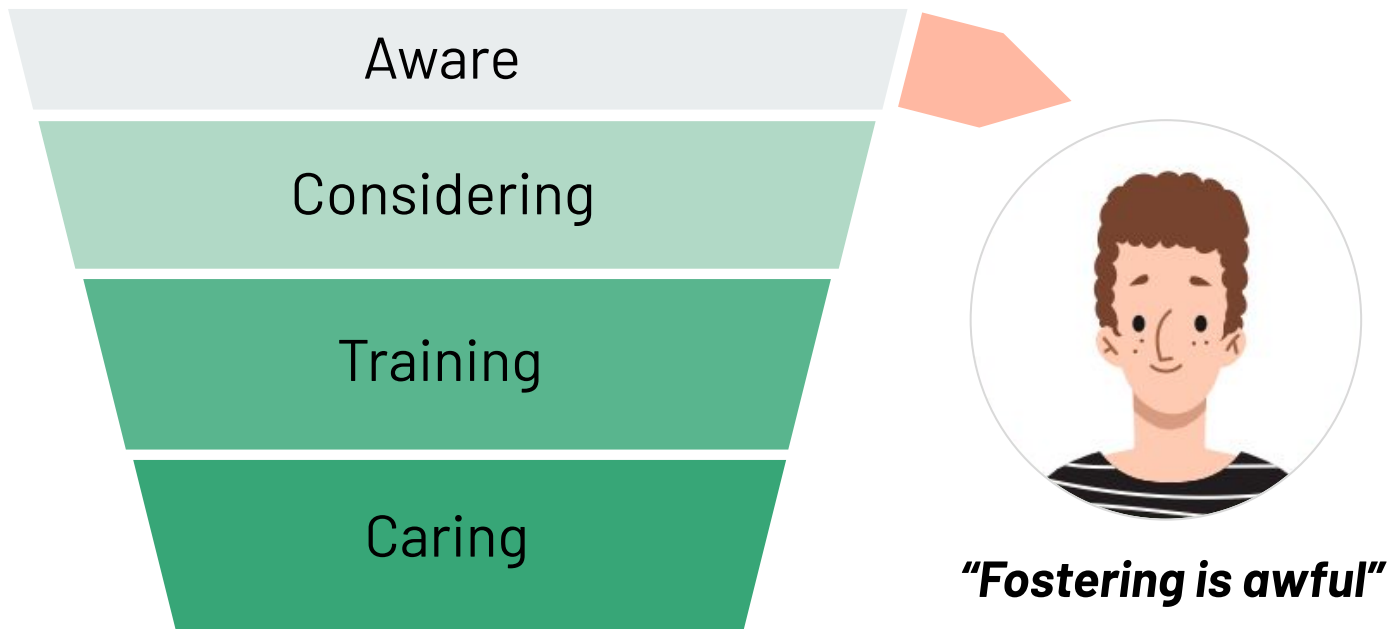
## Some amount of attrition is expected



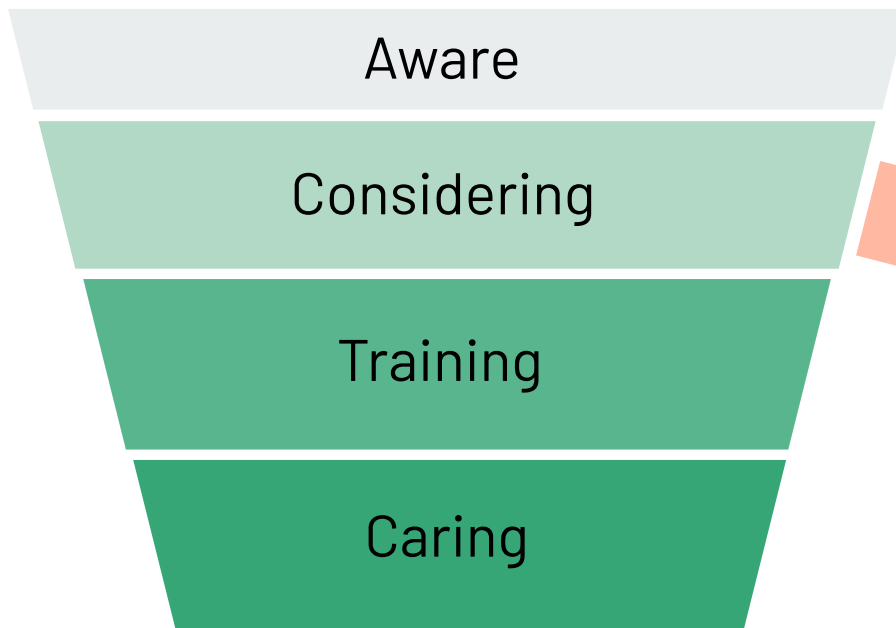
***"I adopted"***



## But off-ramps can signal opportunities



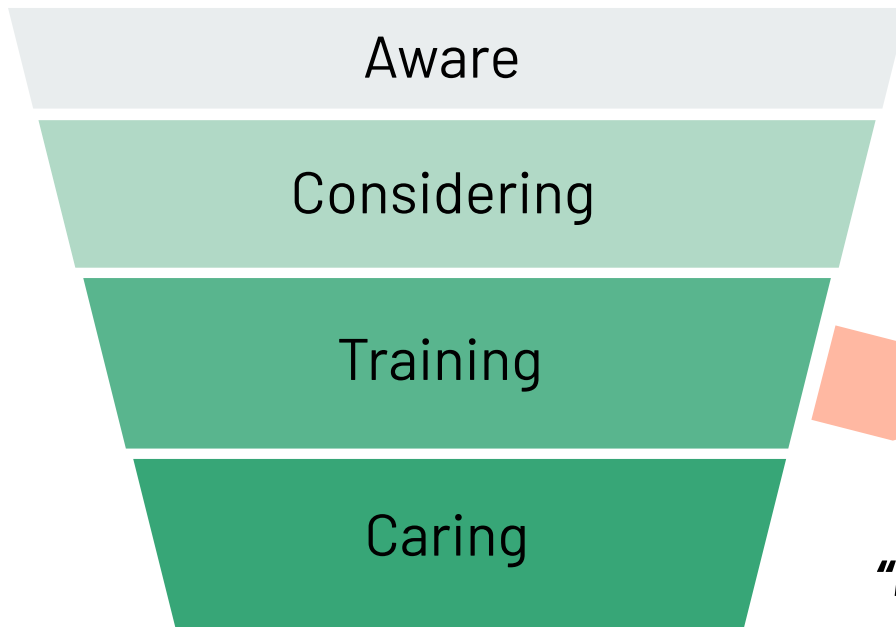
## But off-ramps can signal opportunities



***"But I'm unmarried"***

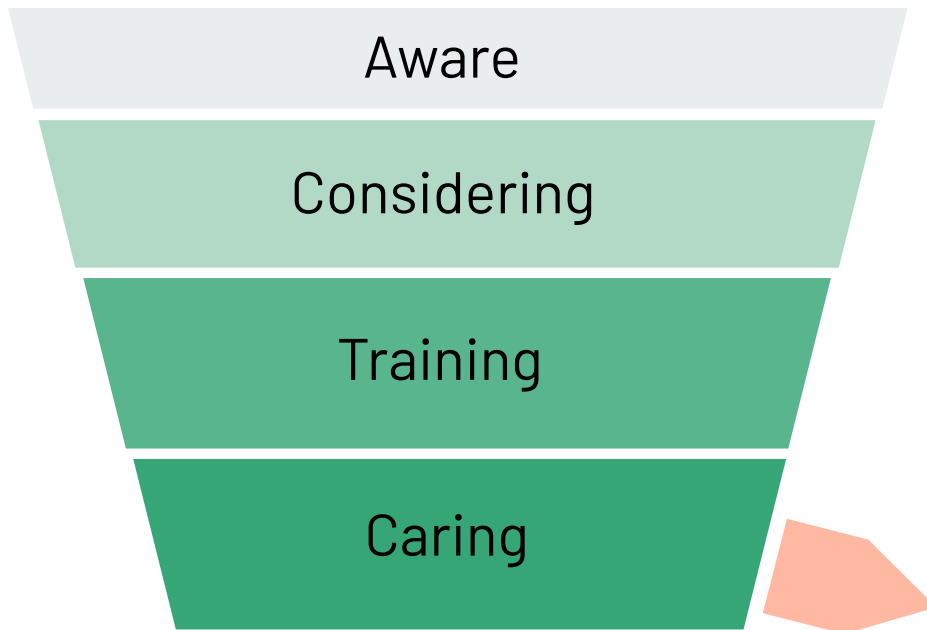


## But off-ramps can signal opportunities



***"I never got a call back"***

## But off-ramps can signal opportunities



***"I can't take this  
lack of support"***

# Key Challenges

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## **Adoption or reunification?!**

- Resource families sometimes come to foster care with the intention of adoption
- Child welfare agencies reframe expectations during training by advocating for the goal of reunification
- But changes to the plan do happen
- Changing permanency plans - from reunification to adoption - can be jarring for resource families

## **Training is not enough.**

- Trainings build expectations of having a team of professionals available to support, that doesn't materialize in practice during placement
- Resources families are not prepared for the emotional realities of caregiving
- Commitment to self-education and ongoing learning is required throughout their experience of caregiving

## **Accessing basic services is very challenging.**

- Accessing medical or behavioral supports can take a long time
- Resource families that provided stable placements didn't wait for the child welfare agency to provide supports, they did the work to seek them out
- Resource families had to push back or question agency decisions when youth weren't getting the support they needed

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# Recommendations

## Core recommendations

- Leave behind thinking that essentializes some as better foster parents than others
- Target recruitment to increase the diversity and pool of resource families
- Develop and build core skills in potential resource families
- Support the placement experience



## How to accomplish this

1. Lead with trauma-informed approaches and center reunification
2. Use culturally-responsive and tailored approaches
3. Take a human-centered mindset to both recruitment and in-placement supports
4. Make community and peer support broader and more accessible
5. Measure and evaluate data at each phase

# 1. Trauma-informed and pro-reunification

Phase	How to do this
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Use strengths-based messages, affirming language and images</li><li>● Emphasize reunification early and often</li></ul>
Considering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Recruit over the long-term, with escalating asks to people supporting populations in care</li></ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Teach advocacy skills to access and navigate supports</li><li>● Educate on shared parenting skills (shared with agency and bio family)</li></ul>
Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Dedicate time to assist in advocacy for services (educational, developmental, behavioral, medical)</li></ul>

## 2. Culturally-responsive and tailored

Phase	How to do this
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Represent the diversity you want, use inclusive and expansive language - and test language with target audiences</li><li>● Focus on the needs of youth, avoiding civic calls to help the state</li></ul>
Considering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Target recruitment in communities that reflect those in care</li><li>● Collaborate with non-Christian or multi-faith groups, LGBTQ+ partners, and ethnic community events</li></ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Offer culturally-appropriate parenting philosophies</li><li>● Prepare caregivers for caring and shared parenting across cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic differences</li></ul>
Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Start affinity peer support early and sustain throughout caring</li><li>● Host frequent focus groups and town halls to listen to BIPOCs</li></ul>

### 3. Human-centered mindset

Phase	How to do this
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Emphasize appreciation of resource families to counter fears of being “glorified babysitter,” while still centering reunification</li></ul>
Considering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Tailor targeted recruitment to users’ preferred media</li><li>● Offer materials that simply communicate the process</li></ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Follow-up promptly, automate where possible, e.g. online sign ups</li><li>● Use personalized portals for tracking and personalized learning</li><li>● Diversify trainers and staff throughout</li></ul>
Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Scaffold first placements, follow a human-centered case management model</li><li>● Set ambitious goals for response times, and hire staff accordingly</li></ul>

## 4. Community and peer support

Phase	How to do this
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Focus on retention to change the narrative of a lack of support</li><li>● Confer with diverse advisory groups for awareness via community</li></ul>
Considering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Build relationships with targeted professional groups</li><li>● Enlist diverse resource parent from community into recruitment</li></ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Use training curricula co-led by resource parent and professional</li><li>● Use peer mentors programs early and throughout</li><li>● Develop training materials with youth alumni and real families</li></ul>
Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Use non-peer volunteers to provide tangible assistance (i.e. transport, meals)</li></ul>

## 5. Measure and evaluate

Phase	How to do this
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Evaluate all recruitment methods with robust surveys and metrics</li><li>● Assess expensive campaigns, or seek cheaper alternatives</li></ul>
Considering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Use (potentially low tech) analysis to assess family gaps and segment recruitment accordingly</li><li>● Evaluate efficacy of targeted events attended</li></ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Implement portals for tracking and goal-setting</li><li>● Use pre- and post-assessments to track preparation and satisfaction</li></ul>
Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Assess progress to human-centered case management goals</li><li>● Use exit surveys when resource families stop fostering</li></ul>

## What's next?



Sprint 1: "Sticky Family"  
Recruitment

Sprint 2: Placements  
for Teens

Sprint 3: Placement  
Preferences

- Understand the youth perspective on best matches and successful placements
- Go deeper on what support and training can develop and prepare resource families to be sticky, especially for teen placements

 **BLOOM WORKS**

The background image is a faded photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, several children are running and playing in a public fountain, with water spraying up around them. In the background, there are tall city buildings, including a prominent classical-style building with many columns and windows. The overall tone is bright and celebratory.

# Thank you!



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# Appendix



# Beth's Journey

Phase

Aware

Considering

Training

Caring

Heard about  
fostering at  
church

Always involved in  
youth activities

Someone at church  
asked them to take  
in a girl

Prayed on it,  
discuss for a year

Called agency

Licensing process was  
full of paperwork,  
lengthy, and complicated

First placements included boys, but soon  
came to specialize in teen girls

Appreciated peer mentoring programs for  
respite and role models

Parented by staying calm, encouraging  
church, taking pride in achievements

Lost respite care when transferred from  
private agency to county

Emotions

+



-



Decision informed  
by prayer and  
providence

Impossible to know the  
impact of behaviors until  
living it

Must switch to county from private agency  
because of firearms in home



# Jenna's Journey

Phase

Aware

Considering

Training

Caring

Had ideas of foster care as a path to adoption

Searched online and joined groups to read about people's experiences

Googled agency  
Licensing worker helped ease concerns and worries about dogs in the home

First placement was with a teen girl that is not a fit, accepts placement despite lack of information

Respite provided necessary breaks to support child in care

Wasn't able to get in touch with caseworker in crisis

Considered leaving to a new agency

Emotions

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Got a negative reaction from friends and family

Changed ideas of how they can support youth without adopting

Christian foster parent community is not welcoming. Agency stopped supporting community building.



# Deborah's Journey

Phase

Aware

Considering

Training

Caring

Always wanted to adopt

Heard adoption was slow and expensive

Heard about fostering from coworker

Divorce from unwilling partner was necessary

Attended training

It was a lot of information, so relieved there was a packet she could refer to

Received placements with very little information

Rejected dismissive providers and advocates for different psychiatrists

Unwilling to accept that child needs to be in a home

Arranged guardianship of one youth, adopts another, then adopts half-sibling baby as well

Emotions

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-



Relief from long shifts was appealing

Wasn't told about ombuds and conflict resolution

At initiation of placement, given a crisis line as only support for youth with mental health history.



# Yolanda's Journey

Phase

Aware

Considering

Training

Caring

Saw a billboard

Current foster parent came into Yolanda's shop

Called agency

Completed application and licensing requirements without much hassle

Attended pre-service training and learned how to react to behavioral challenges

Received a call about a potential placement

Asked for more information before accepting placement to judge fit. Identified with teen girls.

Worked with youth to create structure, boundaries, and respect home space, and to access court-ordered supports.

Adopts daughter out of foster care



Not enough payment for regular care, does therapeutic

Unable to help teens get driver's license and social security, navigates these challenges without agency support

Emotions

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# Sophia's Journey

Phase

**Aware**

Husband's family fostered

**Considering**

Volunteered with orphanages in Latin America

Returned home and searched for vulnerable children here

**Training**

Reached out to professional contact

Supplemented required trainings with own expertise on sexual development and emotional preparation

**Caring**

Deeply humbled by behavioral challenges

Gives youth funds to decorate their space

Used knowledge and network about services and programs to advocate, and speaks for youth when they are being ignored or intimidated



Emotions

+

-

Logical follow on from work

Well prepared and confident

Heartbroken by youth leaving her care for a therapeutic facility because agency had no plan



# Cassidy's Journey

Phase

**Aware**

Close with foster youth as a child

Always planned to foster

**Considering**

Child's autism diagnosis diverted attention away from fostering

Became financially stable and felt ready

**Training**

Felt prepared for logistics, but not the emotional challenges

Ambivalent but simultaneously excited to become foster parent, while confronting reality of removal

**Caring**

Extended family didn't get training and felt mixed about uncertainty of outcomes

Placements started without critical information

Very challenging placement where allegations made risking her job as a teacher

Emotions

+

-



Disappointed to delay process

Excited to make longtime dream a reality

Partway through her first placement, is asked to adopt, until a new social worker recenters reunification goals