

Decreasing Residential Care and Building Strong Family and Community Supports

What We Are Learning in Suffolk County



Family First Readiness Strategy Sessions

Wednesday, December 4, 2019

Albany Capital Center

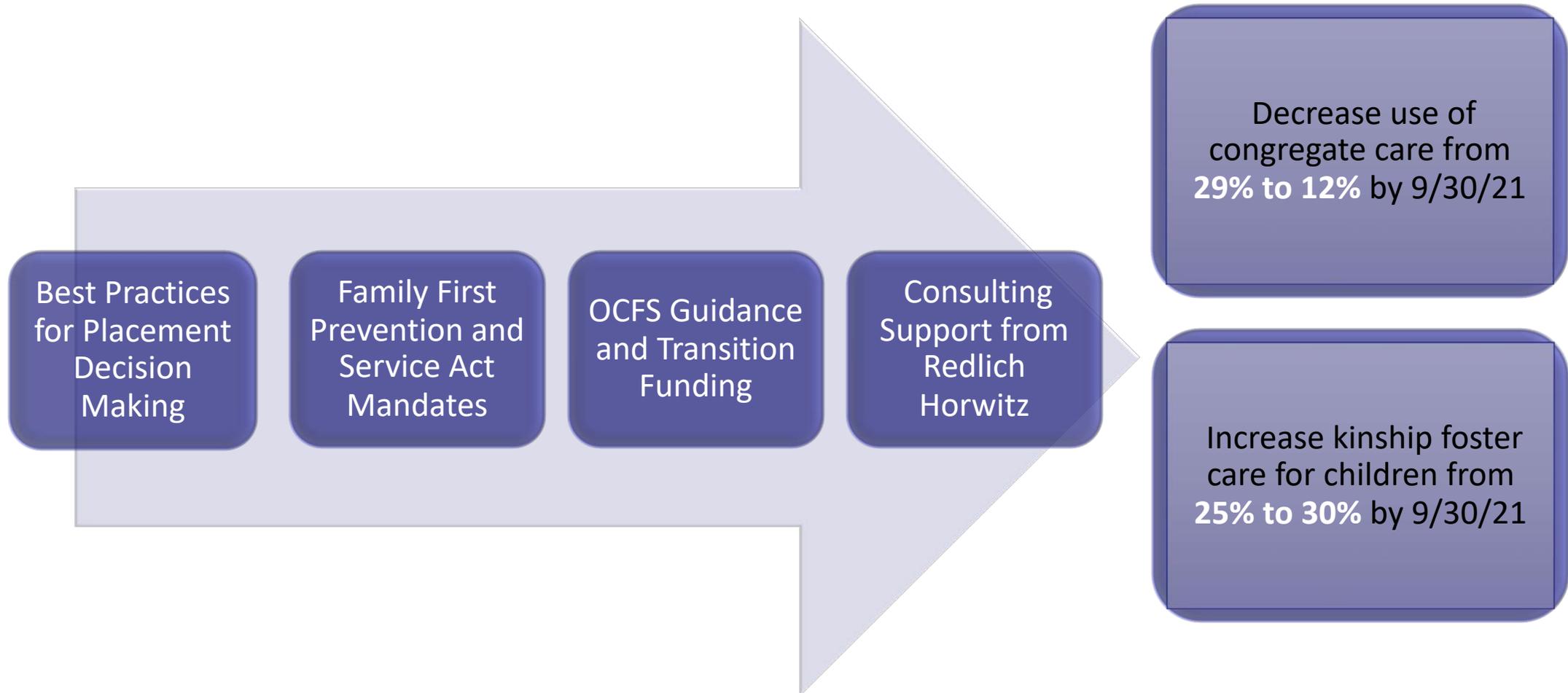




Do the best you can until you know better. When you know better, do better. -Maya Angelou

Working to Improve Child and Family Outcomes

Suffolk County is exploring new strategies to decrease group care significantly and expand strong family and community supports:

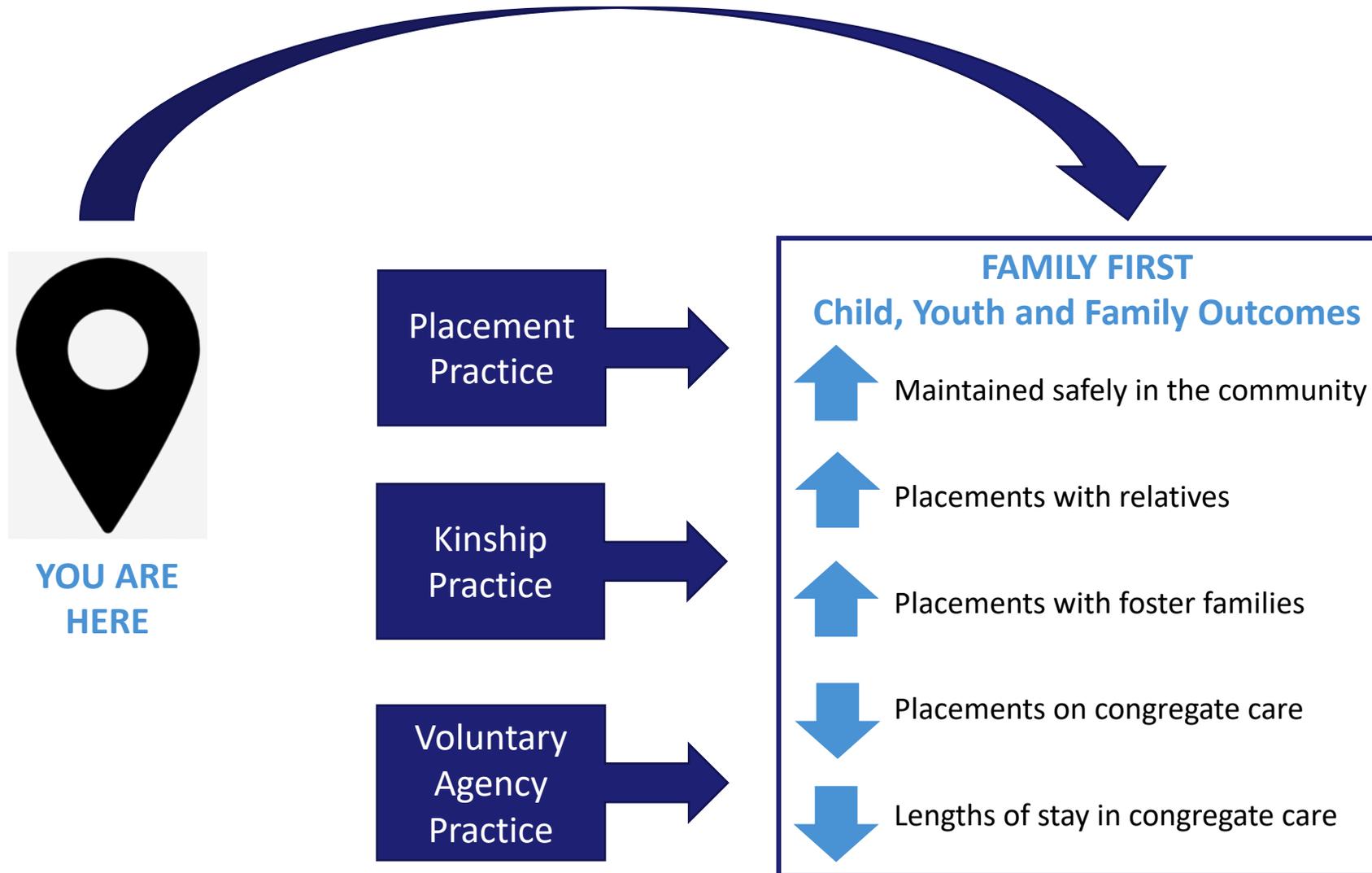


Guiding Philosophy: The WHY behind the HOW

- Research and our clinical experience show that **children do best in families**. Children deserve to grow up in caring families and communities.
- When families first come to our attention, Suffolk County DSS will continue to do everything possible to **connect parents with appropriate prevention and support services to allow children to remain safely in their own homes**.
- When a temporary foster care placement is needed, **children should be placed with families, preferably with approved kin or, if kin are not available, other qualified foster family homes**.
- **Residential care is a placement of last resort** and should *only* be used when a child has clinical or therapeutic needs that cannot be addressed in family-like setting with strong wraparound supports.
- We are committed to building and supporting a **robust network of strong community-based mental health services and other family supports** to prevent the need for residential care and expedite residential care step-downs.
- These guiding principles are not just administrative or policy priorities; they reflect our agency's fundamental commitment to **support our community's children and families just as we support our own**.



Federal Policy Change: Getting Ready for Family First

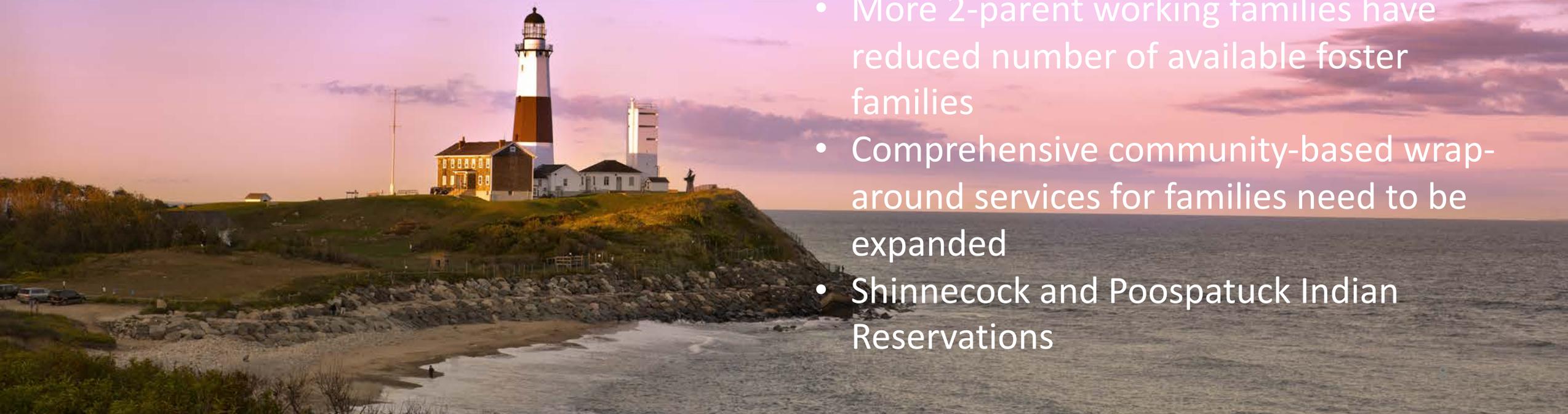


Family First is a
“jumping off” point
to help us do better
and be better across
the entire child
welfare service
continuum

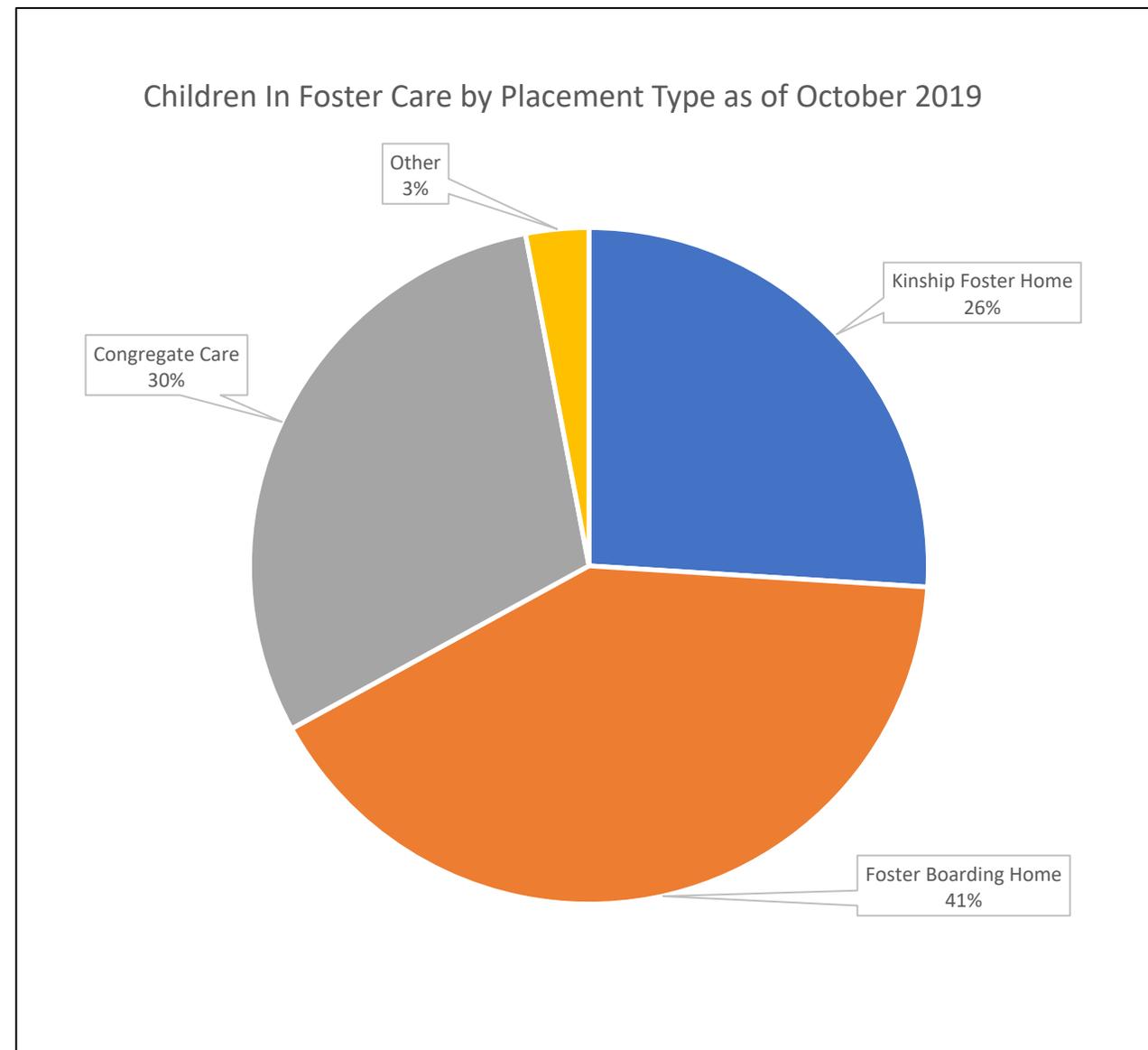


Suffolk County Landscape

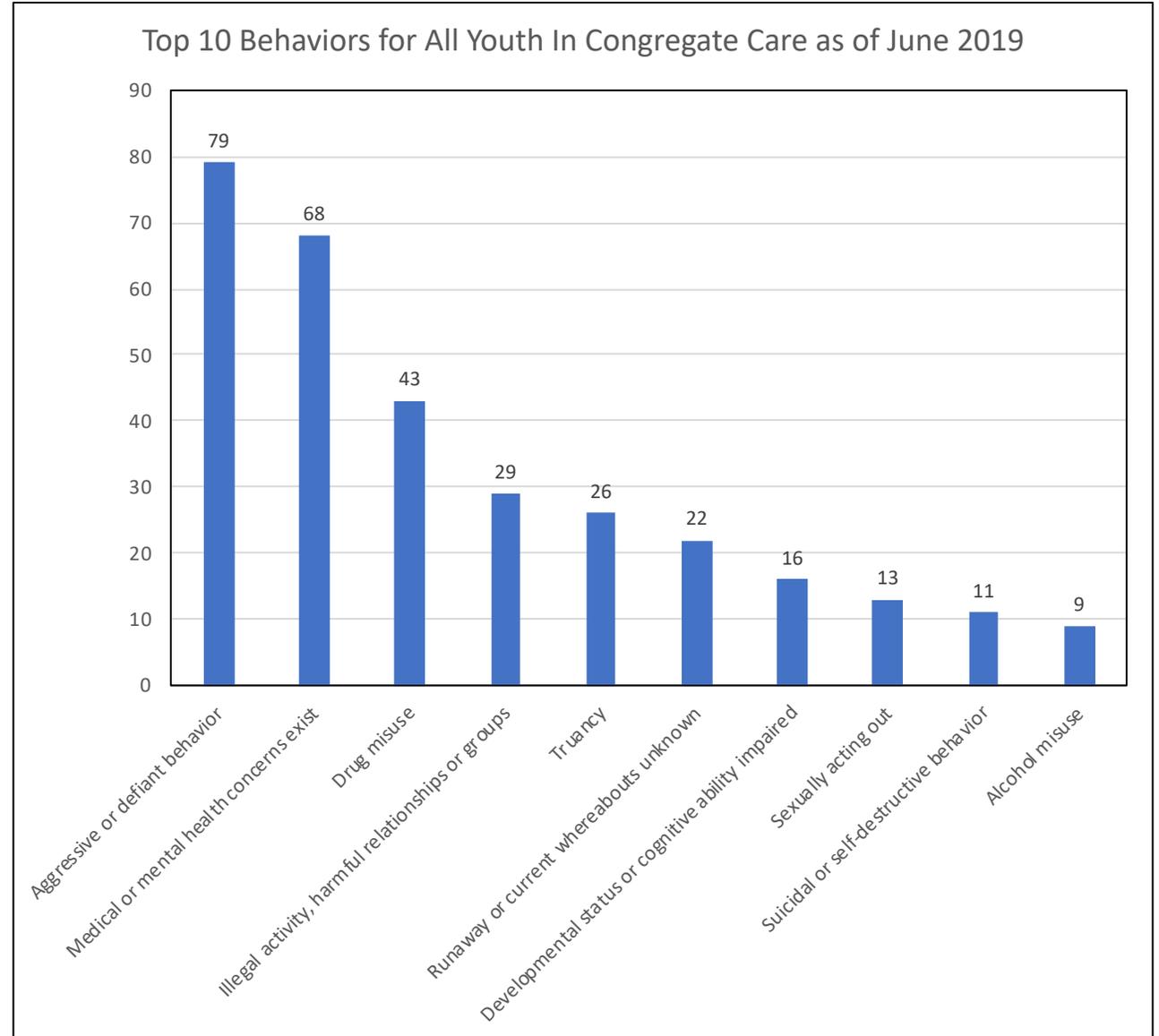
- Demographic shifts; increasing urbanization
- 4th largest county in the State; approximately 1.5 million people
- Large income disparities
- Increasingly complex family issues require practice and policy adjustments
- Children's behavioral issues intensifying
- More 2-parent working families have reduced number of available foster families
- Comprehensive community-based wrap-around services for families need to be expanded
- Shinnecock and Poospatuck Indian Reservations



Approximately 30% of children in the overall foster care caseload are currently in congregate care.



Top 10 Behaviors for All Youth in Congregate Care



Critical Agency Strengths

**Commitment to Involving Families
in Agency Decision making**

**Strong Voluntary
Agencies**

**Support of Family First
Transition Funds**



**Strong & Experienced
Leadership Team**

**Staff-led Planning &
Implementation**

**Partnership with
OCFS Regional Office**

The Challenges Ahead

Barriers to Reducing Residential Care	Potential Mitigation Strategies
Not enough current foster families (especially those willing to take sibling groups, older youth, and children with challenging behaviors)	Targeted efforts to increase recruiting and supportive partnerships with foster families, especially kinship families
DSS and voluntary agency infrastructure has been more inclusive of congregate care options in past decade	Early conversations with voluntary agencies will help the transition to family-based alternatives
More serious behaviors among children has made family placements more difficult	Considering more specialized training, support and rates for families who are taking on children with trauma and behavioral challenges
Need for additional community-based mental health and family supports to wrap around children in family setting	Leveraging partnerships with voluntary agencies, other county agencies (e.g., Department of Health) to expand community-based services

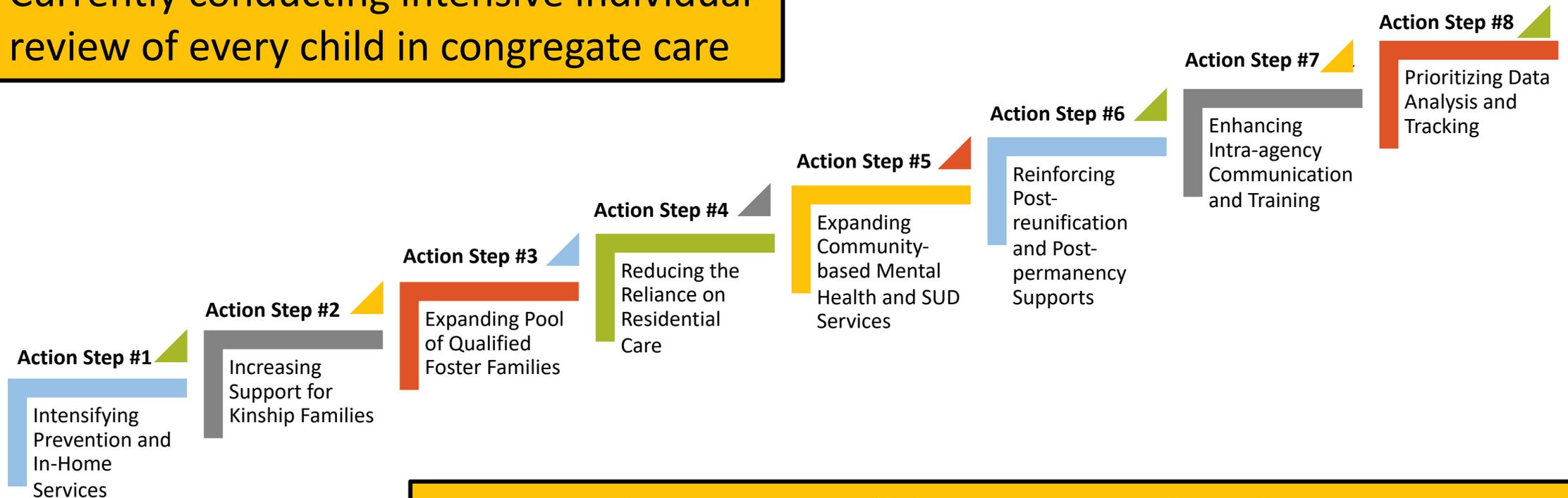
Supporting the Climb: Family First Transition Funds



- Family search and engagement
- Enhancing support for foster families
- Improving recruitment and retention of foster families, including kin

How Will We Get There?

Currently conducting intensive individual review of every child in congregate care



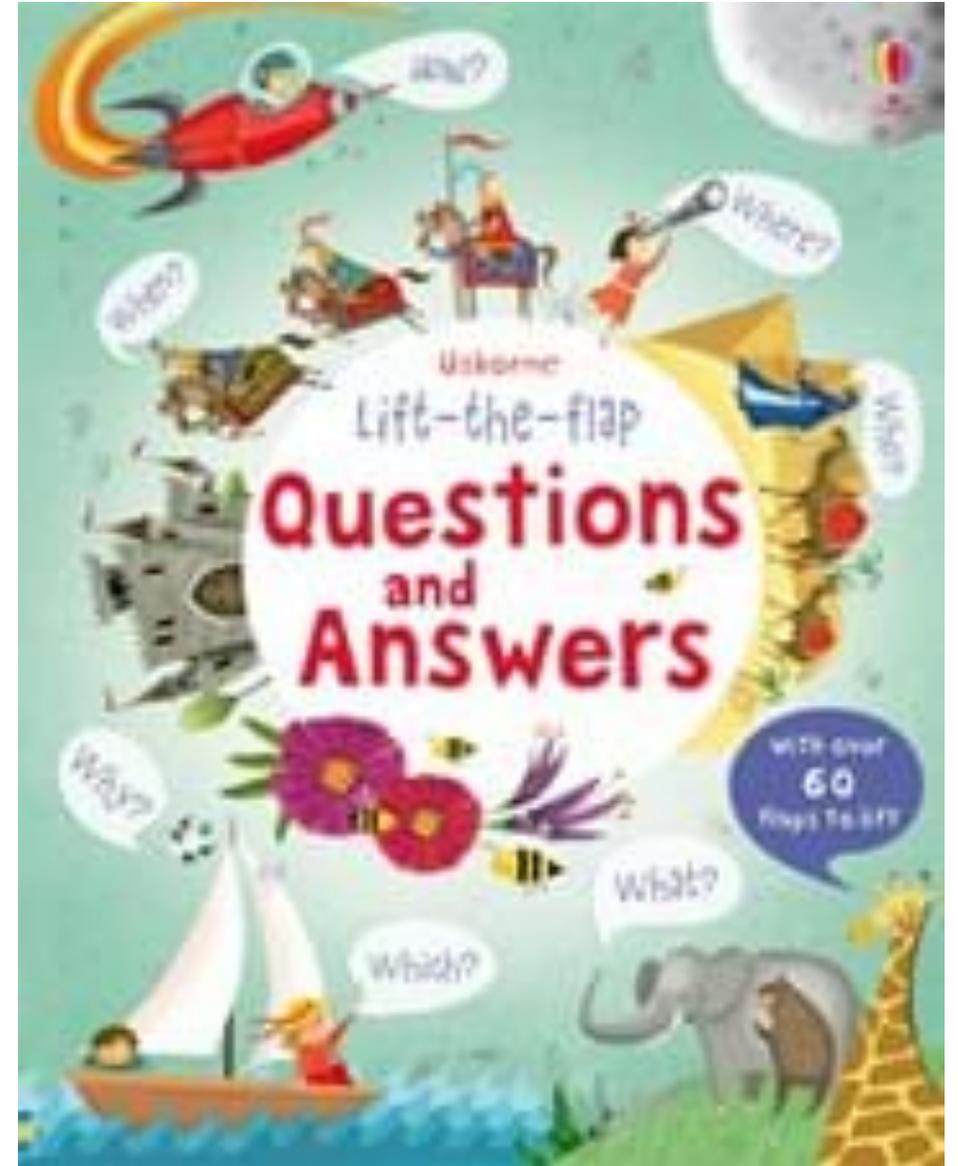
Each action step “planning group” led by relevant staff to ensure practical work plan and effective implementation

Group Discussion

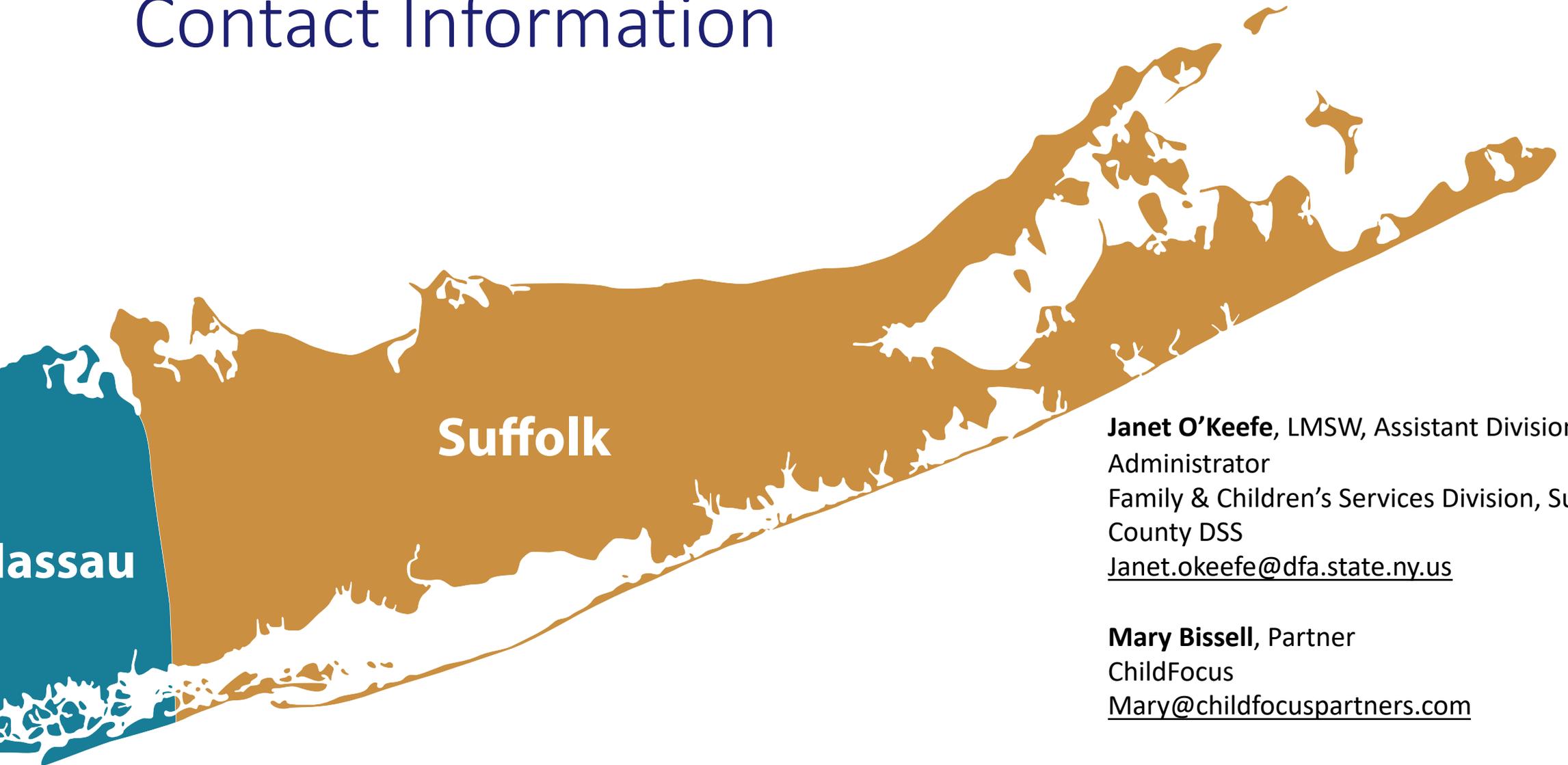


Questions

- What lessons are other counties learning as they reduce their reliance on congregate care?
- What advice do you all have for Suffolk County as we move forward with our strategy?
- What are the biggest challenges you have experienced in reducing residential care and building robust alternative family support services? How are you tackling them?
- What more could OCFS do to help counties meet their residential reduction goals?



Contact Information



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