

2024

Family Reunification Month Planning Toolkit

Table of Contents

<u>Intro to Family Reunification Day</u>	2
<u>Planning Timeline</u>	3
<u>Planning Committee</u>	5
<u>Location & Time</u>	6
<u>Donations & Funding</u>	7
<u>Partners & Booths</u>	8
<u>Celebration Activities</u>	9
<u>Media & Outreach tips</u>	10
<u>Sample Documents</u>	12

Intro to Family Reunification Day

What is Family Reunification Day?

June is Family Reunification Month! Family Reunification Day events celebrate the important accomplishments of parents and the many professionals that support them in getting their children home safely. These celebrations serve as an opportunity to instill hope and remind us all why we do this work. Please consider organizing a Family Reunification Celebration in your county and using this toolkit to help guide you through the process!

There's no one right way to celebrate family reunification or host a Family Reunification Day event. Some events are as friendly as a reception with cake and punch, invitations to families and workers who support families, and a few remarks from a judge or child welfare official. Others are larger gatherings with local leaders and media, lots of families and activities, food and gifts donated by local businesses, and so on. Most events fall somewhere in between.

All celebrations are valuable contributions to supporting families who have worked or are working hard through the dependency process, to thanking the court and child welfare workers who invest themselves in this process, and to changing the community narrative about parents and families who need help.

What if we're a small court or new to celebrating Reunification Day?

Reunification Celebrations do not have to be big, elaborate parties. The purpose is to recognize and celebrate families, so find a way that works for your specific community. Don't be afraid to think outside the box or to start simple!

Some ideas from smaller courts and beginners:

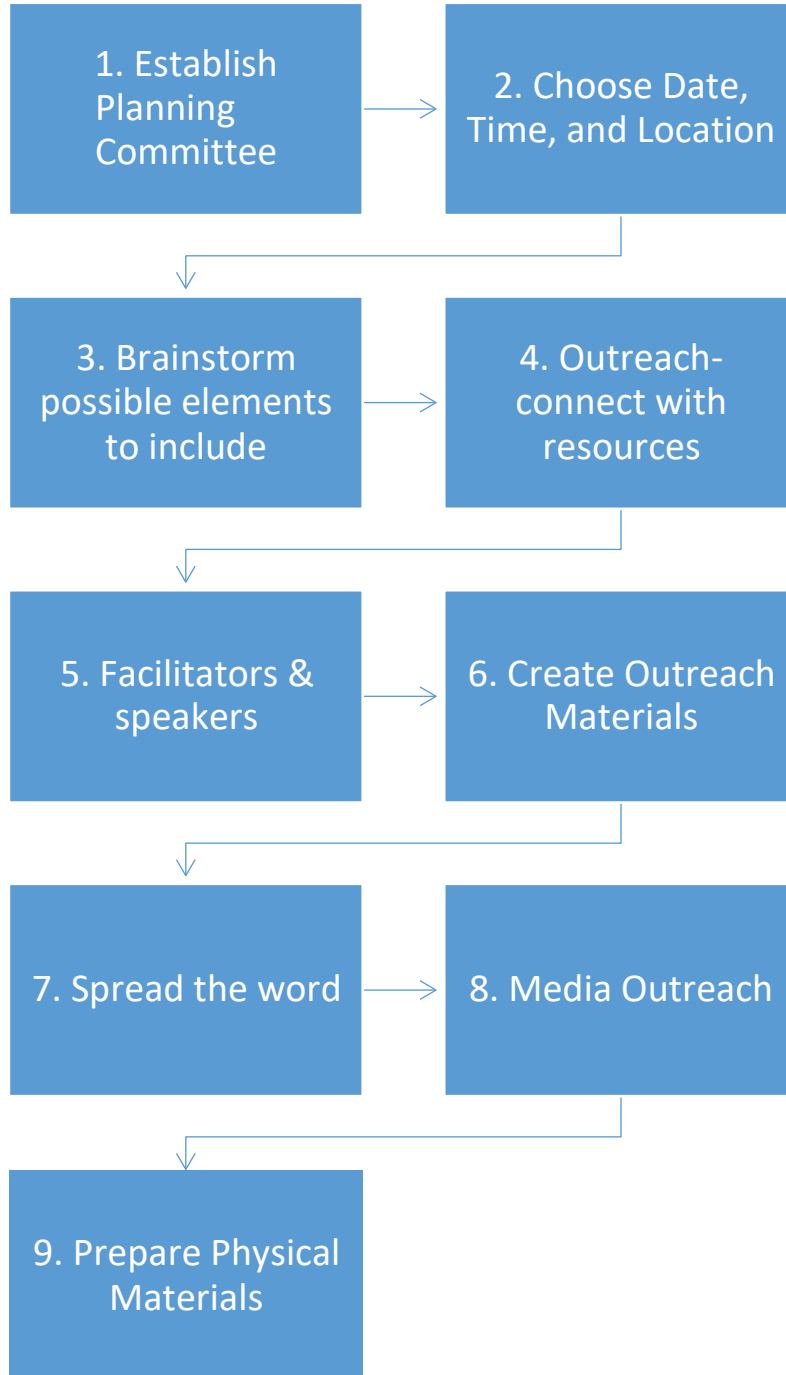
- Drive-Thru or Drop-In celebrations
- Mailing or personally delivering certificates
- Small park or courthouse gatherings

What is the Reunification Day State Advisory Committee?

The Reunification Day Advisory Committee is co-facilitated by Tonia McClanahan and The Honorable Jeffrey Bassett from Kitsap County. The committee is made up of representatives from OPD, AOC, OCLA, CASA, NICWA, DCYF, and Akin. They meet monthly to discuss Family Reunification Month activities, both state-wide and at the local level.

Planning Timeline

What does the planning process look like?



1. Establish planning committee:
 - a. Planning can start up to 6 months prior to your event. Some start as little as 8 weeks in advance.
 - b. Start with establishing a planning committee with your dependency court cross-system partners.
2. Choose date, time and location:
 - a. This should be done as soon as possible – those details help the other steps fall into place.
3. Brainstorm- Think about possible elements to include:
 - a. Consider which elements to try to include — snacks, photos, craft/activity tables, information/resource booths, local mascots, decorations, etc.
4. Outreach- Connect with Resources:
 - a. Start asking companies, potential donors, resource booth folks, photographers, face painters, local mascots, businesses, etc.
 - b. Starting in January helps increase access to resources and supports as new fiscal years begin for businesses.
5. Facilitators & Speakers:
 - a. Decide whether or not someone will ‘preside’ over the celebration & if any speeches will be made (parents or support persons).
 - b. Request & involve any needed people and get them on board early.
6. Create Outreach Materials:
 - a. Create invitations and flyers for event with necessary information.
7. Spread the word:
 - a. Send invitations to families, court partners, and local community groups and businesses who have been supportive of parents.
 - b. Work with the varied child welfare offices and court partners to help get the word out and to invite families and individuals.
8. Media Outreach:
 - a. Send a press release about two weeks before celebration.
9. Prepare Physical Materials:
 - a. Prepare any needed physical materials

Planning Committee

What does a planning committee do?

Planning committees meet to plan their local Reunification Day Celebration and they work collaboratively to put the event together. They do this by scheduling the event, reaching out to venues, coordinating food and activities, connecting with partners, and spreading the word to families and community supports!

Who should be on a planning committee?

When putting together your planning committee it's important to think about who is and is not a part of the group, and why. Planning committees can look different for every court. Some work better with smaller groups, some work better with larger. Assess your community's needs and the capacity of your partners in order to form a group that can effectively work together on this long-term project.

We recommend having a diverse group and encourage you to think about including some of the positions below if you aren't already:

- Lived expert(s)
- DCYF
- OPD
- CASA
- Parents for Parents
- Parent & Child Representation
- FJCIP & Specialty Court Coordinators
- Community Partners & Representatives
- Judicial Officers
- PCAP

Location & Time

How do you pick an appropriate & accessible location?

When choosing the location for your celebration consider a few things:

- Budget
- Nearby Transit options
- Proximity to participants
- Weather
- Safety
- Available Activities

Examples of Family Reunification Day Celebration Locations:

- Parks
- Children's Museums
- Courthouse

What time should our celebration be?

Some courts choose to incorporate Family Reunification Day into their normal court schedule so its convenient for families and court partners. Having your event in place of your regularly scheduled court hearings or right after court can help relieve some burden from participants. Want to engage your specialty court participants in the celebration? Consider setting the celebration following court or let participation in the celebration count as one of their check-ins.

Although most celebrations are during the summer, consider school and work schedules to allow for more people to be present.

Having your celebration directly after work can also make it easier for court partners to attend. It is Important to get court staff and partner representation for motivation & improving court culture.

Donations & Funding

What organizations can I connect with to help support our celebration?

There are many businesses and organizations that are able to give donations or provide assistance with setting up these celebrations. Below are some examples and at the end you will find a [sample donation request letter](#) that you can use to reach out.

We recommend starting this process of reaching out early, funding for donations can be limited and become unavailable.

Organizations to connect with:

- Grocery Stores-
 - Walgreens
 - Costco
 - Fred Meyer/Kroger
- Local Philanthropy-
 - Rotary
 - Lions Club
- Fun Activity/Event Establishments-
 - Movie Theaters
 - Children's Museums
 - Zoos
 - Family Fun Centers/Amusement Parks
 - Wild Waves
- Health Care-
 - SeaMar
 - Molina
- Local Businesses-
 - Auto shops
 - Power Companies
- Key Community Court Partners-
 - DCYF
 - AOC
 - *Note: Check [here](#) to see if the AOC is offering their mini grant*
 - OPD
 - *Note: Contact Tonia.McClanahan@opd.wa.gov to request the OPD Reimbursement*
 - P4P
 - OCLA
 - Akin
 - Coordinated Care

Partners & Booths

Lots of organizations are willing to set up booths and provide resources for your event. Please consider reaching out to some of your local partners to see if they can participate. You can use this list to get an idea of what partners may be able to help, but please remember this list will vary by county.

Who can be a resource at our event?

- Coordinated Care
 - *Note: you can contact Sydney.L.Doherty@coordinatedcarehealth.com for info*
- Health Care Organizations:
 - Molina
 - *SeaMar*
 - Local Opioid Response Group
- Local Peer Organizations (Parents for Parents)
- Service & Treatment Providers
- Akin
- Local Post-Reunification Support
- Family Resource Centers
- South Sound Reading
- 911 Centers
- Local Sports Teams
 - *Note: Some local sports teams can send mascots or prizes to support*
- Local Colleges & Tech Schools
 - *Note: Schools can be great resources and those booths can help parents to continue their education and build their skill sets after reunification*
- Character Businesses/Comic-Cons
 - *Note: Some courts have been able to get super heroes & characters to attend and take pictures with families*
- Law Enforcement
 - *Note: Consider letting law enforcement know about your event, they can help by possibly providing fire trucks and police vehicles that they may be willing to show to children.*
 - *Please also be aware of possible negative experiences that families may have had with law enforcement and maybe let them know ahead of time.*

Celebration Activities

Family Reunification Day is an opportunity for families, court staff and partners, and community organizations to celebrate with one another. Having some interactive activities available can encourage families to attend and provides people with a fun, memorable experience!

What are some fun activities we can include?

- Face Painting
- Photo Booths
- Family Portraits
- Games
 - Cornhole, Jenga, Connect 4,
- Bubbles
- Music
- Scavenger Hunt
- Crafts
 - Sand art, rock painting, coloring, etc.
- Bounce House
- Balloon Artist
- Awards & Speeches
 - *Spokane gives an award to a lived expert and a professional every year!*
- Giveaways & Door Prizes

Tip: Some courts ask partners that set up booths to also bring a game/activity or to donate a gift basket for a giveaway

Media & Outreach Tips

Getting the word out for your Reunification Celebration is important for getting attendees and partners there. The AOC can help with this and there are a number of outreach opportunities below.

How do we use the Reunification Day logo?

You can use the Reunification Day logo on anything you would like, the original designer of the logo just asks that we keep their signature.



How can we get a banner for our event?

If you would like a banner at your event, you can use a place like [U Printing](#), other online services, or get one in your local community.

How can we use Canva to create invites & flyers?

Canva is a great tool that allows people to easily create visual materials at no-cost. There is a lot that you can do with a free canva account. Start by looking at templates for the specific item(s) you are wanting to make (flyers, invitations, etc.). Change the colors, format, and wording to better fit your event, and consider adding some of your own images or logos. You can download anything you make as a PDF, and you can also order prints directly from Canva.

Check out an example flyer [here!](#)

How can we use social media to get the word out?

Social Media can be a powerful outreach tool. If you, Coordinated Care, your court, or a partner have a Facebook page or a Twitter or Instagram page, post your event and your messaging on those. Ask friends to post the event and share it around, or ask local community groups to do so. It helps to share photos from previous celebrations or graduations also. Just putting out a short sentence about celebrating parents who put in the hard work to learn, grow and improve for the sake of their families and children, and thanking community members who support these parents, can be a powerful statement.

Note: Some courts cannot post on social media themselves. Reach out to partners for help.

How can the AOC help us with communications?

Courts can reach out to Lorrie Thompson here at AOC. Lorrie is the Communications here at AOC, and she can put your event information and flyers on our website and share them through various listservs and channels. You can email Lorrie at:

Lorrie.Thompson@courts.wa.gov

Can we take and share pictures from our event?

Yes! You can reach out to Lorrie Thompson to see if an AOC photographer is available to come out and take pictures for your event, or you can also take your own pictures.

If your event is publicly advertised, you do not need to collect photo release forms. However, it's important to let people know that photos will be taken and giving them the option to opt out of having their photos taken and shared.

Some other ideas are to create a sign-in sheet with a disclaimer or permissions checkbox, or you can provide wristbands, nametags, etc. with designated colors for individuals that do not consent to having their photos shared.

Sample Documents

[Proclamation Template](#)

Asking local leaders, such as County Commissioners or City Council or judicial bench members, to adopt a proclamation in support of Family Reunification Day or Month is a great way to inform them of the event and the reasons for having a celebration.

Proclamation language can also serve as a starting place for speaking points because it identifies the main messages behind the celebration, the main reasons for having a public celebration. Speakers can read the Proclamation as part of an event, or use the language to create their own key messages.

Consider reaching out to your Mayor to get a specific one for your city as well.

[Media Release Template](#)

This is a basic template to which you can add your event's details; a quote from someone involved (a judge or commissioner, a local child welfare official, anyone involved in the event); who is sponsoring or involved in the event; and so on. You can put it on your letterhead if you have one, and email or mail it to your local media outlets – newspapers, TV stations, local radio outlets ([email is preferable](#) because many of them will cut and paste it onto their web sites). Send it out about two weeks before the event. Remember, this is your press release – change whatever you see fit.

[Photo Release Form](#)

Photo release forms aren't mandatory, particularly if an event has been advertised as open to the public and media, however if you feel more comfortable getting a release before posting photos on social media or online or in a flyer, here is an easy template to use.

[Donation Request Letter Template & Sample](#)

The donation request template can be altered to your specific event, and the sample letter can be used as a reference when making your own.

Family Reunification Month Proclamation Language (draft)

WHEREAS, the family is the primary source of love, identity, self-esteem and support for children and adults, and provides the foundation of our communities; and

WHEREAS, the bond between child, parents and family members provides the nurturing and security that is critical for personal growth and development; and

WHEREAS, parents can encounter problems that require attention and assistance to ensure the safety and caring support of their children and their family; and

WHEREAS, because of this important bond, reunification with parents and family is the best option and preferred outcome for children removed from their homes and placed in foster care; and

WHEREAS, each year, thousands of parents work hard through the dependency process to improve and grow, and thousands of children are successfully reunified with their parents and families; and

WHEREAS, family reunification also takes investment by extended family members, social workers, foster parents, service providers, attorneys, courts and the community; and

WHEREAS, celebrating Family Reunification Day is an opportunity to recognize and support families who have successfully reunified with their children, those families currently working through the process, and the many support persons who help these families;

NOW, THEREFORE, I [We], _____, proclaim [Month, Year] to be

Family Reunification Month

In the **State of Washington**, and urge all residents to join us in this special observance in support of families.

Signed this _____ day of [Month, Year]

Media Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FROM: [Main Event Contact Person]

DATE [XXX]

Family Reunification Day [YEAR]

[Your] County will celebrate reunified families on [Date]; public welcome

Parents who work hard to overcome significant problems and reunify their families will be recognized at a Family Reunification Day celebration hosted by [XXX] County [Superior Court? Family Court? CASA Office? A partnership of local court and child welfare offices?] on June XX at the [location].

The public is welcome to join in the celebration, which will take place at/from [start time—end time]. The celebration will include [some details -- *a photographer, visits by super heroes, refreshments, crafts and other activities*].

[QUOTE FROM SOMEONE INVOLVED, such as -- *“Often times, members of the public don’t realize how hard these parents work for many months to understand and overcome the complex issues and personal struggles that caused their separation from their children,” said Superior Court Commissioner Michelle Ressa. “They can’t achieve this without a strong determination to succeed, to accept responsibility and bring their families back together. We are very happy to celebrate this important milestone in the journey of a family.”*]

This is the [which time? *Second year? Fourth?*] [XXX] County has celebrated family reunification, which involves the parents working through the dependency process and the support of extended families, they community, court and child welfare workers. The primary goal of dependency — the legal process in which dependent children are taken into the oversight of the state because of deficiencies in adequate care and safety within the home — is reunification of the family whenever possible.

[*Feel free to add local statistics if you like – how many families completed dependency and reunified with their children in your county in the past year, etc. – or other local information, like local sponsors of the event.*]

In 2018, Washington State launched a statewide celebration of Family Reunification Month, set in June, to encourage communities to celebrate the hard work and importance of families healing and coming back together. For more information on the launch of the annual statewide Family Reunification Month celebration, visit www.courts.wa.gov/familyreunification

CONTACT: *Two or three contacts for the local celebration – include both email addresses AND phone numbers.*

Photo Release Form

I, _____ hereby grant and authorize _____ the right to take, edit, exhibit, publish and make use of any and all pictures or video taken of me for any lawful promotional materials including, but not limited to, newsletters, flyers, posters, brochures, advertisements, fundraising letters, annual reports, press kits and submissions to journalists, websites, social networking sites and other print and digital communications, without payment or any other consideration.

This authorization extends to all languages, media, formats and markets now known or later discovered. This authorization shall continue indefinitely, unless I otherwise revoke this authorization in writing.

I waive the right to approve any finished product in which my likeness appears, including written or electronic copy. I hereby hold harmless and release _____ from all liability, petitions, and causes of action which I, my heirs, representative, executors, administrators, or any other persons may make while acting on my behalf or on behalf of my estate.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Donation Request Letter Template

(Your letter head here)

Subject: Support Our Family Reunion Celebration! **Date**

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I hope this letter finds you well. As we prepare for our upcoming Family Reunification Day Celebration, we are reaching out to seek your support. Our community has a rich history of coming together to celebrate families who have overcome an array of challenges to reunify safely and successfully. Each year, parents in our community work hard through the dependency process to improve and grow parenting skills with the help of social workers, the legal system, and community partners to successfully reunite with their children.

Event Details:

- **Date:** [Date]
- **Time:** [Time]
- **Location:** [Venue]

Why Your Support Matters: Our Family Reunification Day Celebration is an opportunity to celebrate families who have reunified and all of those who support them. Our event supports celebrating these families, while providing additional resources and connections for families in our community. However, organizing such an event involves expenses for venue rental, food, decorations, and activities.

How You Can Help: We kindly request your contribution to make this Family Reunification Day Celebration a success. Any support you can give will directly impact the quality of our celebration. Your generosity will allow us to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere for everyone.

Ways to Donate:

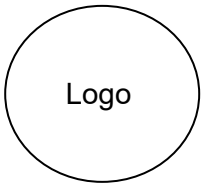
- 1. Monetary through:**
 1. Identify the option: details
- 2. Supplies for the Celebration:**
 1. Identify the supplies you need donated
- 3. Setting up a resource table:**
 1. Details
- 4. Volunteering time:**
 1. details

RSVP: Please let us know if you'll be attending by [RSVP Date].

Thank you for being an essential part of our Family Reunification Day Celebration. Let's create more beautiful memories for the families in our community!

Warm regards,

[Your Name] [Your Contact Information]



SUPERIOR COURT OF ____ COUNTY
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT SERVICES
Court Address

May 25, 2022

Recipient Name
Address

Re: Donation to support Family Reunification Day Celebration.

Dear Recipient,

On behalf of the Juvenile Department, I want to thank you for considering donating to support our Family Reunification Day Celebration on ____ June is National Reunification Month. In ____ County we use Family Reunification Day to celebrate families who have overcome an array of challenges to reunify safely and successfully. To recognize the vital role that community partners, including mental health, substance abuse, and visitation providers, courts and judges, kinship caregivers, foster parents, and others play in helping to reunify, strengthen, and support families. And to inspire other parents, particularly those going through the dependency court process, to have hope that their family's future can be better.

To help make this day special for the families that have reunified in ____ County over the last year we are seeking donations to support creating gift baskets for the families. The gift baskets will be filled with items to support parent child interaction and help continue building and strengthening their relationship. In addition to fun items, community resources will be shared in the baskets to help connect our families with needed resources in our community.

We greatly appreciate consideration for donations of tickets or gift cards for entry into your facility. The items will be used to create the gift baskets for our families who have successfully reunified. We are preparing for 45 families (totally of 80 children). Any support is greatly appreciated.

To acknowledge your donation, you may request a letter to utilize as documentation when itemizing charitable contributions. Please contact your tax advisor should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Signature

"For most children in foster care, reunification with their family is the best option for a permanent and loving home, and each year hundreds of children are successfully reunified with their families."

Family Fun!

Pizza!

Crafts!



People Change – Families Reunite
Come Celebrate Your Success!

FAMILY REUNIFICATION CELEBRATION

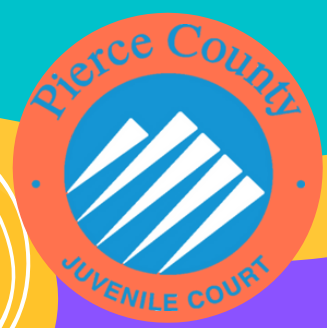
THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 2024

2PM - 4:30PM

WAPATO PARK (Main Picnic Shelter)

6500 S. Sheridan, Tacoma

Enter on 68th & Sheridan | Pierce Transit Bus 48



Games & Prizes!

Gift Baskets!