



children's home & aid

FOSTER PARENT LAW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Children's Home & Aid has provided foster care services since its inception in 1883. Traditional Foster Care, Relative Foster Care, and Specialized Foster Care are provided in the three regions of Children's Home & Aid: Metropolitan Chicago, Northern, and Southern. Additional programs provided in the Metropolitan Chicago Region and Northern Region include: Sibling Foster Care

While the program's focus is on the safety, well-being and permanency of the children in foster care, foster parents are a critical component in achieving successful outcomes for the children. The agency continues to recognize the importance of engaging and involving foster parents in development of the Implementation Plan.

In 2017, the agency added a new Foster Parent Support coordinator and a foster parent mentoring program. Children's Home & Aid recognizes the value of experienced foster parents and is utilizing that level of expertise and positivity to support new foster parents, both traditional and relative. In 2018, two foster parent support specialists were also added to support foster parents. In 2020, one more foster parent support specialist was added.

In 2020, the introduction of a digital training room for caregivers was created to provide a centralized location for monthly trainings and support groups. The new training schedule is available for all caregivers whether foster or biological. The information regarding this new training schedule can be found at: www.childrenshomeandaid.org

A. Foster Parent Involvement

Children's Home & Aid's foster care services are provided statewide, with services managed in three geographical regions. The regions are: Metropolitan Chicago, located in the Chicago and greater Metropolitan area; Northern, located in Rockford, IL; and Southern, which provides foster care in the Belleville, IL and E St. Louis, IL areas, with the regional office located in Granite City, IL.

Due to the agency's organizational structure, involvement by foster parents in the development of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan (FPLIP) varies from region to region. Foster parents from all three regions participated in the review of the 2020 FPLIP. Various opportunities were provided for foster parents to give input on the 2020 FPLIP. Group and individual interactions were used to seek input from foster parents. Licensing representatives from across the state used the monitoring and compliance visits to foster homes to review the 2020 plan and seek input.

An online survey was created to increase the amount of feedback received. 16 foster parents from all 3 regions provided feedback regarding the implementation plan and grievance procedure. Due to Covid-19 amount of participation has decreased from past years. However, in Northern 103 calls were made to families, and 262 emails were sent to encourage participation. In Southern 98 emails were sent and 21 phone calls made and in the Metro region 142 phone calls were made and 210 emails were sent. Beginning in 2021 the digital survey link will be provided to families when they originally receive the new plan. This will allow for participation to occur throughout the year.

All written and verbal feedback is provided to the statewide FPLIP task force, which is responsible for using feedback to create the FPLIP for the following year.

The information gathered was used to create the 2021 FPLIP draft. Foster parents from all regions were consulted in groups or individually for the approval of the 2021 FPLIP. While this process is more cumbersome than working with a single foster parent group, given the regional structure of our statewide agency, it has proven to be the most effective way to involve foster parents in the process. Additionally, an online survey was created to allow for all foster parents to be given the opportunity to review and approve the plan. A representative sample of signature sheets provide evidence of foster parents' approval of the 2021 FPLIP. In total 14 foster parents approved of the draft and 6 staff across the state. Due to Covid-19 participation was also lower than past years, participation was requested to over 450 foster parents throughout the state via email and phone calls.

A statewide task force consisting of licensing staff from each region of the agency, a foster care case manager and supervisor from Southern Region, program

managers for Northern and Metro, the statewide foster parent support coordinator, and all foster parent support specialists, convene via phone conference on an as needed basis to discuss survey responses, changes to the plan, and processes to ensure foster parent involvement.

I. Direct Service Staff Involvement

The fact that Children's Home & Aid is a statewide agency presents a challenge in ensuring that direct service staff have an equal opportunity to be involved in the review and development of the plan. Direct service staff are introduced to the plan and input is sought at individual team meetings in the various regions of the state. In an effort to continually reinforce the importance of the FPLIP and the very important role of foster parents, the task force works with the agency wide Foster Care Network. The network is comprised of one Regional Vice President, foster care and licensing directors, managers and supervisors, and the quality improvement manager, who meet via video conference on a quarterly basis. During each network meeting, foster care staff are reminded of the FPLIP and the importance of staff using the document in their day to day work.

In staff meetings in each region the plan was discussed prior to changes and approved after changes were made. Case management staff were encouraged by the committee members and their supervisors to read through the plan and give feedback and suggestions.

II. Changes to the 2020 FPLIP

The entire 2020 Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan was reviewed and revised as necessary. In addition, a more thorough review of certain rights and responsibilities was done based on the suggestions for improvement and general comments from the 2020 plan.

This year's feedback from foster parents resulted in clarifications to specific rights and responsibilities.

Changes made based on feedback from foster parents:

-Clarification to Right 4-timely financial reimbursement, to include the changes to payments resulting in all caregivers being paid from Children's Home & Aid and relative caregivers not receiving pay from DCFS

-Clarification to Responsibility 8-strategies to prevent placement disruption, to further explain the reason for at least a 14-day notice being given. This allows for time to find the most appropriate placement for the youth.

Overall feedback from foster parents was positive; however, a theme of concerns with communication from case managers was present. As a part of the agency recruitment/retention plan all agency staff will be taking part of customer service training to ensure continued respectful treatment of all birth parents, youth, and foster parents.

Since some foster parent feedback does not directly relate to the FPLIP it can't be acted upon by the statewide task force, it was disseminated to the appropriate department within the agency to be taken into consideration for implementation.

The comments from the 2020 FPLIP indicated that the Children's Home & Aid plan is strong overall; therefore, there were few suggestions for improvement. Since Children's Home & Aid is a statewide agency, with four separate regions, and the specifics of things such as trainings vary from region to region, the language in the plan must be general enough to cover all contingencies.

Changes made based on suggestions for improvement and general comments from the 2020 plan include:

- Due to new organizational charts changes made to include the chain of command changes. Case manager, supervisor, then manager and/or director
- Edited information regarding accessibility to foster parent newsletter, clarification that the newsletter is being sent out via email and will not be mailed unless specifically discussed with foster family.
- In right 2-Training, more robust information regarding the new digital training room, and the addition of the new training programs including self-care support, core teen, twice monthly support/training group, and new caregiver orientation.
- In responsibility 9- acknowledge/minimize stress. Clarification regarding the utilization of foster parent support specialists and crisis plans
- In responsibility 10-promotion of foster parenting, to include clarification regarding the customer service training for staff. Also, the addition of DCFS recommended training regarding promotion of foster parenting for staff and caregivers wishing to assist with recruitment.

IV. Foster Parent Law Grievance Procedure

The Children's Home & Aid Foster Parent Law Grievance Procedure for Violations of the Foster Parent Law was revised on 7/25/2013. The current Foster Parent Law Grievance Procedure for Violations of the Foster Parent Law was provided to

foster parents for review and comment along with the 2020 FPLIP. Foster parents did not indicate the need for any revisions to the grievance procedure this year.

The Children's Home & Aid Foster Parent Grievance Procedure for Violations of the Foster Parent Law is provided to foster parents at the time of licensure, on a regular basis and as requested. During monitoring visits, licensing representatives remind foster parents that there is a grievance procedure available and inquire about their need of a copy. The Grievance Procedure for Violations of the Foster Parent Law is also posted on the Children's Home & Aid website at www.childrenshomeandaid.org.

There were no reported grievances during the 2020 implementation plan period.

DCFS has sent a draft outline for a new grievance procedure. A committee of foster parents and staff will be established and work on updating the grievance procedure in the first quarter of 2021.

V. Rights Narratives Revised

- ❖ #1 Dignity and Respect
- ❖ #2 Training
- ❖ #4 Timely Financial Reimbursement
- ❖ #11 Child Movement-Replacement

VI. Responsibilities Narratives Revised

- ❖ #8 Strategies to Prevent Placement Disruption
- ❖ #9 Acknowledge/Minimize Stress
- ❖ #10 Promotion of Foster Parenting