



# Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

## Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan for 2010

### Introduction

This Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan sets forth Lutheran Social Services of Illinois' vision for calendar year 2010 regarding a continued partnership between the agency and foster parents. Foster parents are understood by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) as integral to providing quality services to the children and families in LSSI's care.

The Foster Parent Law delineates the foster parent rights and responsibilities that form the underpinning of this partnership. This document represents a deliberate planning process that guides LSSI's full implementation of these rights and responsibilities so that, together with LSSI's foster parents, the agency will continue to fulfill its mission to bring "healing, justice and wholeness" to children and families in Illinois.

### Plan Development

LSSI reviewed and revised its plan from 2009 and then submitted the revised plan to four regional workgroups (Cook County, Northern Region, Central Region and Southern Region) for their review and input. Each workgroup was led by a licensing supervisor and included staff and foster parents. Each workgroup was asked to review the revised plan and make any comments. Each workgroup was also asked to review and endorse the final plan. Administrative staff also reviewed and endorsed the final Plan.

### Foster Parents' Rights

According to the Foster Parent Code (DCFS Rule 340, Appendix B) a foster parent's rights include, but are not limited to:

- 1) **The right to be treated with dignity, respect, and consideration as a professional member of the child welfare team.**

LSSI believes that foster parents are essential to LSSI fulfilling its mission of bringing "healing, justice, and wholeness" to families and communities. Each foster parent is recognized as a significant member of the child welfare team. Staff members are expected to treat foster parents with respect and dignity. The LSSI program directors and supervisors of the agency must ensure that the needs and viewpoints of foster parents are included as essential members of the team.

All LSSI staff members are expected to treat foster parents with respect, dignity and professionalism at all times. All new staff persons at LSSI receive training on the important role foster parents play on the child welfare team. Foster parents play a role in all aspects of the

child's care and are active participants in home visits, family visitation, phone calls, Child and Family Team Meetings, Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs), court hearings, school meetings and staffings. LSSI program directors and supervisors must ensure that LSSI caseworkers invite foster parents to all of these events, inform foster parents of changes to planned activities and meetings, and ensure that phone calls from foster parents are returned within twenty-four hours.

All LSSI staff will do their best to answer all questions and concerns from foster parents within the bounds of confidentiality. "Being heard" is a meaningful way for a foster parent to feel respected. Across the state, foster parents provide input on issues to LSSI staff on a variety of issues. LSSI will continue to include foster parents in programming decisions and will continue to try creative ways of obtaining foster parent's input and involvement. Barriers to foster parent involvement will be removed whenever possible and new methods of communication may help in soliciting foster parents' input. These methods will include e-mail, website postings, fax alerts, etc. The input of foster parents demonstrates their commitment to the child welfare program. LSSI staff listening to foster parents is an important way LSSI shows its appreciation for the time, energy, commitment, and expertise of foster parents.

LSSI continues to focus on the following ways of demonstrating respect for foster parents as members of the professional child welfare team:

- Foster parents are kept informed of program and staff changes (such as when their child welfare specialist changes).
- Foster parents are given direct numbers/extensions for staff members to make it easier for them to reach the right person.
- Home and family visits are scheduled with foster parents as far in advance as possible and with consideration for the foster parent's schedule. Foster parents are made aware that unannounced home visits may be conducted when needed to assess licensing compliance and/or safety issues in accordance with DCFS Rule and Procedure.
- Foster parents are contacted as soon as possible when the child welfare specialist needs to cancel or change appointments or when they will be late for an appointment.
- Child welfare specialists address foster parents by "Mr., Mrs., Ms." unless they are given permission to do otherwise.
- Foster parent's accomplishments with their birth children, their lives, and work experience are recognized, valued, and utilized.
- All LSSI staff members are expected to respond to foster parent requests, questions and needs as they arise.
- Supervisors will develop performance goals for annual evaluations for their staff on issues related to treating foster parents with dignity and respect.
- LSSI ensures that mailing lists are updated to ensure that foster parent materials from the agency reach all foster parents in a timely manner.
- LSSI requests to have foster parents' email addresses so that program information may be sent to them electronically, if they so desire.

LSSI program directors and licensing supervisors at each site are expected to conduct in-service training for LSSI staff on treating foster parents with dignity and respect. Training is used to remind all staff of the importance of respectful communication during interactions with foster parents. The training provides examples of how respect is demonstrated and uses foster parents' input on respectful interaction through the use of foster parent co-trainers, foster parent "panels," or written material developed by the program's Foster Parent Advisory Council on respectful staff-foster parent interaction.

LSSI's appreciation for its foster parents and families is shown in the many foster parent appreciation events held throughout the state during the year. LSSI hosts health/educational expos, summer picnics and/or holiday parties for foster parents and their foster children. These events provide a time for the LSSI staff to give back to the foster parents and thank them for their considerable contribution to LSSI's foster care programs. Sites also have additional foster parent appreciation dinners and awards ceremonies during the month of May in celebration of National Foster Care Month. Many programs have started "Foster Parent of the Month" and "Foster Parent of the Year" programs. Foster parents are nominated for this honor by child welfare specialists and honored at the appreciation dinner. The selected foster parents are also honored in their program's newsletter and/or at other program events.

**2) The right to be given standardized pre-service training and appropriate ongoing training to meet mutually-assessed needs and improve the foster parents' skills.**

LSSI requires that all new non-related foster families complete the nine Foster Pride pre-service training sessions. Foster families may also utilize the DCFS Foster Pride modules for ongoing training. LSSI encourages relative families to attend the full Foster Pride training, but only requires that relative families attend Foster Pride sessions one and two or watch the videos of the first two sessions and complete the written homework for those sessions. During the initiative currently underway to license all (at least 80%) relative caregivers, many LSSI offices have hosted licensing expos and special training events to help relatives complete the requirements. Many of these events have been in conjunction with DCFS and other private agencies. LSSI encourages relatives to attend PRIDE classes in-person because the relatives get so much more out of the experience and also meet other relative caregivers – often leading to an enhanced support system.

LSSI has some staff members who are qualified Pride trainers, as well as foster parents who are Pride-qualified who may act as co-trainers at agency-sponsored Pride sessions. The co-training model enhances the training experience by not only giving prospective foster parents information from both a staff person and a foster parent, but also by modeling the staff and foster parent teamwork that is used in good child welfare practice.

In addition, all programs through LSSI are expected to host trainings for foster parents and staff as part of on-going professional development. Topics for training may be selected by each program to respond to the needs and interests of foster parents and staff. The training includes the LSSI procedures on the grievance policy. Foster parents are also encouraged to engage in other training opportunities available in their communities.

Prospective and current foster parents are also referred to specific in-service Pride modules to address their needs, as well as other agency-sponsored training events. In some instances one-on-one training may be recommended. For example, a foster parent caring for a medically complex child may receive one-on-one training from an LSSI nurse. In addition, if foster parents have been identified to receive a medically complex child into their home, they may receive training from an LSSI nurse or from hospital staff caring for the child. This training typically occurs in the hospital or other medical setting prior to discharge.

LSSI's specialized foster care program provides additional trainings to help foster parents gain the knowledge and skills to care for children with more complex needs. Sites that provide specialized foster care have developed training procedures and are required to inform foster parents interested in the specialized program about the increased training requirements. These sites are also expected to create a tracking system for specialized training - keeping all foster parents informed of completed training hours and their progress.

Staff members are expected to be resourceful in helping foster parents meet all training requirements - both for specialized care and for renewal of license. Each site is expected to know about on-line training and other trainings that DCFS provides. Foster parents are required to attend a minimum of 4 hours of training per year to maintain their foster home license. Newsletters, training calendars and fliers are mailed to foster parents by each program site regarding upcoming training events held by both DCFS and LSSI. Program sites are expected to hold trainings in buildings that are handicapped accessible to ensure participation by all interested foster parents.

Many foster parents have voiced the need for childcare in order to attend trainings. Program sites are encouraged to develop a plan to meet this need. Specialized program sites may be able to use respite care providers. Foster parents are encouraged to link with other foster parents willing to provide care for each other. The program sites may also use staff and/or screened volunteers to provide childcare.

**3) The right to be informed as to how to contact the appropriate child placement agency in order to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for children in the foster parent's care.**

There is a 24-hour on-call system in place at each program site so foster parents can receive assistance in the event of an emergency or need for additional support. Each program site has an answering service or voice mail system that gives foster parents specific instructions on how to reach an LSSI on-call staff person. The on-call staff person is expected to call the foster parent back within the hour.

At the time of placement, foster parents are provided with the names and phone numbers of the child's caseworker and supervisor. The foster parents are notified of any changes in the assigned worker within two working days of the change. Ideally the previous worker introduces the new worker to the foster parents. When this is not possible, programs must supply the foster parents with the names and numbers of the new worker and/or supervisor responsible for the case.

Foster parents are also given the name and phone number of the program's administrator in the event that the transition does not go smoothly.

Foster parents are instructed by the child's caseworker as to the proper procedures for accessing resources. Both on-call and regularly assigned casework staff are knowledgeable of the procedures for emergency medical consents, the CARES hotline, Screening, Assessment, and Support Services (SASS), Systems of Care (SOC), Child and Youth Investment Teams (CAYIT), and other support services for children and foster parents. The child's caseworker will discuss resources such as CARES, SASS, CAYIT, and other resources with the foster parent to make sure foster parents are knowledgeable about these resources as well.

**4) The right to receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with the care needs of the child as specified in the service plan.**

Board payments are made to foster parents in accordance with DCFS Rule 359 and LSSI's contracts. Foster parents are paid on the fourth Friday following the end of the service month. Payment dates for 2010 are as follows:

- For December 2009 services--January 22, 2010
- For January 2010 services--February 26, 2010
- For February services--March 26, 2010
- For March services--April 23, 2010
- For April services--May 28, 2010
- For May services--June 25, 2010
- For June services--July 23, 2010
- For July services--August 27, 2010
- For August services--September 24, 2010
- For September services--October 22, 2010
- For October services--November 26, 2010 (most likely earlier due to holiday)
- For November services--December 24, 2010 (most likely earlier due to holiday)
- For December 2010 services--January 28, 2011

LSSI has a history of passing on rate increases received by the agency to foster parents. Foster parents are provided information regarding payment schedules and rates of reimbursement based on licensure status and the level of care they provide. Programs are familiar with the Child and Youth Investment Teams (CAYIT), specialized foster care gatekeepers and special service fee protocols to ensure foster parents are receiving appropriate reimbursement for the level of care provided and any special services provided.

LSSI offers foster parents the option to have their monthly reimbursement checks deposited directly into their accounts. Direct deposits are made on the fourth Friday of the month, which allows access to the deposit several days before they would normally receive a check in the mail. The process is optional. Foster parents who prefer to receive a check in the mail may do so.

Foster parents and staff are trained regarding policies and procedures for reimbursement for bed holds, and non-recurring expenses; e.g., camp, music lessons, etc. There are specific criteria that must be met for the foster parent to be eligible for a bed hold. (For example, the child must be in a medical hospitalization, detention for less than 14 days or alcohol or substance abuse programs. The foster parent must remain involved with the child and the child must return to the foster parent upon discharge). Respite services are reimbursed in some specialized contracts and in the downstate traditional contract, as described in the program plans. A statewide policy is in place with clear expectations regarding these services and the rates of reimbursement for respite provided under each level of care/contract. For other levels of care, programs seek out community resources and facilitate collaboration among foster parents to address respite needs.

Programs use donations to provide supplemental assistance in the form of goods, supplies, and clothing to foster parents. These may include food, equipment, or clothing for the foster parents when children are placed in their homes to help cover needs until the first board payment is received. Gift certificates to major stores are available to assist in emergency situations. Children who are initially coming into foster care are eligible for clothing vouchers and equipment for children under the age of three years (if needed). Staff members are knowledgeable on the procedures to access these options..

LSSI has a history of paying foster parents on time and timely resolution of payment problems. Prompt submission of the Placement Payment form (CFS 906) is crucial to ensuring timely payments to foster parents. Caseworkers are expected to complete the 906 form immediately when there is a new placement or change in a child's status. 906 forms are to be processed by the agency's billing staff within 24 hours of any changes. In addition, supervisors and program directors review and sign off on the agency's monthly billing prior to submission to DCFS to affirm its accuracy. Timely assessments of the level of care through the CAYIT process are also expected to ensure foster parents are receiving payment commensurate with the type of care provided.

Foster parents are directed to call their program's billing person and/or their child welfare specialist with any payment questions or problems. Problems that cannot be resolved at this level are referred through the chain of command, including the program's child welfare supervisor, business manager, and/or program director. If resolution is still not achieved, executive level staff provide resolution; however payment problems rarely reach this level as program staff members are almost always able to address problems that arise. The agency's grievance procedure is also available to foster parents who have payment problems. As noted, however, problems rarely reach this level.

- 5) **The right to be provided a clear, written understanding of a placement agency's plan concerning the placement of a child in the foster parent's home. Inherent in this right is the foster parent's responsibility to support activities that will promote the child's right to relationships with his or her own family and cultural heritage.**

Foster parents receive and sign a Foster Care Placement Agreement within twenty-four hours of the placement of the child/children.

Within ten working days of the child/children's placement, the child welfare specialist will create, with input from the birth family, foster family, and child/children, a visiting plan. LSSI believes that one of the best ways for foster parents to support the child/children's rights to relationships with their birth families and cultural heritage is for the foster family and birth family to get to know one another. Foster parents are encouraged to attend Child and Family Team Meetings and get involved in family visits whenever possible. LSSI respects the foster parent's wishes and desires regarding their level of involvement with birth families, but does encourage foster parents to be involved. Foster parents are able to host, supervise, and/or provide assistance with sibling or birth parent visits. This kind of involvement helps the child feel more comfortable being in the foster home and maintains their relationship with their birth parents. By observing their child/children with the foster parents, birth parents are given the opportunity to learn positive parenting techniques. Open interaction between the foster parents and birth parents help to create additional opportunities to honor the child's familial and cultural ties. Reimbursement is available through DCFS for foster parents who are involved in birth family visitation. Caseworkers are expected to be knowledgeable of this and the process for seeking foster parent payment for involvement with birth family visits.

Council on Accreditation (COA) Standards and DCFS Rule and Procedure require a 14-day notice from the agency to the foster parent and from the foster parent to the agency prior to placement changes. Whenever possible both parties are encouraged to give more notice. More notice may give the child welfare specialist and foster parent an opportunity to prevent the placement disruption by addressing concerns or putting additional services in place. Efforts at reconciliation should be exhausted before disrupting a child's placement. Even if the disruption is not prevented, more notice allows for more careful preparation of the child for the new placement. In cases of immediate risk to the child/children, prior notice is waived.

Child welfare specialists and foster parents work together to develop the service plan for the ACR. Foster parents can help identify and develop goals for the child/children and then help design the plan to meet those goals. Foster parent's involvement in the Integrated Assessment process also steers the development of the initial service plan and is crucial to a solid plan. Foster parents can provide input on the child/children's needs, behaviors, and progress in other services and therapies. Foster parents' input on the visitation plan is crucial to ensure that the plan is considerate of the foster parent's schedules, the child/children's schedules, and the foster parents' roles in facilitating and/or supporting family visits. Foster parents receive timely notice of ACRs and are advised of scheduling changes. Foster parents who attend the ACR are given an opportunity to hear the pertinent sections of the plans and give input and feedback directly to the case reviewer.

- 6) **The right to be provided a fair, timely, and impartial investigation of complaints concerning the foster parent's licensure, to be provided the opportunity to have a person of the foster parent's choosing present during the investigation, and to be provided due process during the investigation; the right to be provided the opportunity to request and receive mediation or an administrative review of decisions that affect licensing parameters, or both mediation and an administrative review; and the right to**

**have decisions concerning a licensing corrective action plan specifically explained and tied to the licensing standards violated.**

Licensing investigations are required by both DCFS and LSSI policy when a violation of the licensing standards (DCFS Rule 402) is alleged. DCFS recently revised Rule 383 which governs licensing enforcement. All licensing staff attended training sponsored by DCFS to learn the new rule and procedures. The revised rule includes an extensive set of required letters and notifications to ensure that foster parents' rights are understood and respected. The new documentation also ensures that the agency has completed the required steps in conducting monitoring visits, licensing investigations, corrective action plans, supervisory and informal reviews and enforcement actions. LSSI is committed to implementing the new procedures.

LSSI is diligent at ensuring licensing investigations are completed within the required 30 days; if the investigation needs to be extended, LSSI provides the foster parents with written notice as required. Foster parents are informed in writing of the right to have an advocate present during the investigation process. In addition, foster parents are able to bring an advocate to any follow-up meetings, reviews, or hearings. Foster parents are informed in writing of the outcome of the investigation. If violations are substantiated, the written notice includes information on how to request a supervisory review. Placement holds accompany a licensing investigation; foster parents receive written notice of the placement hold as well.

As a way to promote accurate and consistent procedures during investigations, staff members are trained on the rights and responsibilities of foster parents during licensing investigations. Licensure training for both foster parents and staff at LSSI is an ongoing process that is constantly being developed by the entire child welfare team. Training focuses specifically on enhancing the communication between LSSI and foster parents regarding complaint investigations, foster parent's rights and responsibilities during the investigation phase and appropriate and meaningful corrective action plans relating to violations of Rule 402. It is the responsibility of the licensing supervisors to make sure that the licensing policies and procedures are followed.

**7) The right, at any time during which a child is placed with the foster parent, to receive additional or necessary information that is relative to the care of the child.**

LSSI commits to sharing all information with foster parents pertinent to the care of the children as the child welfare specialists receive the information. LSSI's new staff training specifically addresses the need for foster parents to receive adequate information about the children in their care and specifies the types of information that should be shared. The child welfare specialist is accountable to provide the information known at the time of the placement and to update the information as part of regular contacts with the foster family. Supervisory consultation is appropriate when information is being shared with foster parents to ensure that all appropriate information is in fact shared. Failure to provide appropriate information would result in additional training for the staff person. Blatant or purposeful withholding of needed information would be handled as a performance/disciplinary issue.

- 8) **P.A. 94-1010 amended the Children and Family Services Act, the Child Care Act and the Foster Parent Law regarding the information that must be given to a caregiver when a child is placed, prescribes the timeframes for the provision of relevant information about the child, requires the caseworker to document that the caregiver was given the information and to provide the same information to the child's guardian ad litem.**

Foster parents are provided with all known information regarding the children and the children's families pertinent to the care and needs of the children. Staff is trained to share the necessary information during new staff training. The following information should be provided to the caregiver if known and applicable:

- The medical history of the child including known medical problems or communicable diseases, information concerning the immunization status of the child, and insurance and medical card information.
- The educational history of the child, including special educational needs and details of the child's individualized educational plan (IEP), Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP), when the child is receiving special education services or 504 Educational Special Needs Plan, if applicable.
- A copy of the child's portion of the client service plan including any visitation arrangements and all amendments or revisions, case history of the child, including how the child came into care, the child's legal status, the permanency goal for the child, a history of the child's previous placements, and reasons for placement changes, excluding information that identifies or reveals the location of any previous foster or relative home caregiver.
- Other relevant background information of the child, including any prior criminal history; information about any behavior problems including fire setting, perpetration of sexual abuse, destructive behavior and substance abuse habits; and likes and dislikes, etc.

If foster parents request further information, LSSI makes every attempt to seek out and provide the information. The disclosure is documented in the case record and shared with the child's guardian ad litem.

Foster parents are given a clear explanation on the limits of disclosure to essential information for the purpose of understanding the children's needs. The responsibility to protect the confidentiality rights of the children's families in the course of such disclosure is also explained. This responsibility extends to the foster families in maintaining confidentiality of information. LSSI encourages foster parents and birth parents to work together in the care of the child. When foster parents and birth parents communicate openly and regularly, foster parents learn more information about the child's needs directly from the birth parents. This foster parent-birth parent alliance enhances the foster parent's knowledge regarding the child's needs.

In addition, the Integrated Assessment process and social history also include foster parents in many of the initial interviews regarding the child and is intended to get more initial information about the child's needs so that appropriate interventions are designed from the outset of the case.

The results of this assessment, or social history, are shared with the foster parents to the fullest extent possible.

As noted, the child welfare specialist is accountable to provide information about the child known at the time of the placement and to update the information as part of regular contacts with the foster family. Staff should use their supervisor for consultation if unsure about what information should be disclosed. Failure to disclose appropriate information would be dealt with in supervision, as would disclosure of information to which the foster parent is not entitled. If the disclosure error was due to lack of knowledge, the staff person would be asked to complete additional training (one-on-one or group) on this topic. If the failure to disclose (or over-disclosure) was blatant or purposeful, the matter would be dealt with through the staff evaluation process and/or the disciplinary procedures of the agency.

- 9) **The right to be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings concerning the foster child in order to actively participate in the case planning and the decision-making process regarding the child, including individual service planning meetings, administrative case reviews, interdisciplinary staffings, and individual educational planning meetings; the right to be informed of decisions made by the courts or the child welfare agency concerning the children; the right to provide input concerning the plan of services for the child and to have that input be given full consideration in the same manner as information presented by any other professional on the team; and the right to communicate with other professionals who work with the foster child within the context of the team, including therapists, physicians, and teachers.**

Foster parents are an integral part of the team and workers have been instructed to notify foster parents of all scheduled events pertaining to the child in placement. For ACRs, caseworkers follow up with foster parents to make sure that they have received notification from the Department and encourage foster parents' attendance at ACRs.

Foster parents are notified of court hearings concerning any children placed in their homes at least 30 days prior to the hearing, or when the caseworkers are notified, in the event that there is less than 30 days notice. Foster parents are permitted (and encouraged) to attend court hearings for the children in their care. Foster parents are notified at least within five working days and usually sooner of the outcomes of court hearings, unless the outcome requires immediate (no more than one business day) notification, such as an order for increased family visitation or return home.

Foster parents are notified of staffings and Child and Family Team Meetings held on behalf of children in their care and are encouraged to attend. Staff persons in leadership roles are expected to create a climate at meetings that encourages full participation by foster parents. In addition, foster parents are encouraged to communicate with all team members (therapists, workers, supervisors, other service providers) on an ongoing basis.

Foster parents are notified in advance of visits for children in their care. Whenever feasible, they should also be involved in planning the visit times. Foster parents are encouraged to be

involved in planning, transporting, hosting, and/or supervising visits. They are notified of changes in the visiting schedule within 24 hours whenever possible; sometimes less notice may be unavoidable (such as a birth parent cancelling a visit). Every attempt is made to schedule visitation at times that are convenient for the foster parents, taking into account the needs of the children, the birth parents, as well as DCFS and court requirements.

Foster parents are considered a part of the professional team and their input is encouraged and given full consideration regarding service planning and decision making in regards to the child in placement. Barriers to foster parent involvement should be addressed by the child welfare team, which may include the time or location of the meetings.

**10) The right to be given, in a timely and consistent manner, any information a caseworker has regarding the child and the child's family which is pertinent to the care and needs of the child and to the making of a permanency plan for the child. Disclosure of information concerning the child's family shall be limited to that information essential for understanding the needs of and providing care to the child in order to protect the rights of the child's family. When a positive relationship exists between the foster parent and the child's family, the child's family may consent to disclosure of additional information.**

The agency acknowledges the sharing of pertinent information with the foster parents is an ongoing process throughout the life of the case. The agency's intake protocol specifies the process for sharing with the foster parents the needs of a child in need of placement. The agency's intake process is twofold. When DCFS staff has taken "protective custody" of a child in need of placement, the case is referred to a centralized assignment unit, the Case Assignment Placement Unit (CAPU). The Foster Home Availability Database (FHAD) is used by CAPU to locate an available foster home within the child's community. The CAPU then contacts LSSI's intake staff. The foster home identified by CAPU is contacted to see if they are willing to accept the placement of the child/children. There is a one hour time period in which the agency must respond to CAPU regarding the placement and whether the foster parent will accept the child. The identified foster home is given any known information regarding the circumstances that led to protective custody being taken. The known medical, emotional and developmental information about the child is also shared with the identified foster parents. Prior to the initial placement, the child is examined by a medical provider for any injuries or obvious medical conditions. That information is also shared with the foster parents. The agency's child welfare specialist completes a Caregiver Matching Tool (CFS 2017) which identifies the needs of the child/children and this information is shared with the foster parents to ensure the foster parents will be able to meet the child/children's identified needs. It should be noted that the information may be limited due to the circumstances at the point of intake.

The second method of intake is when the case has been served through another foster care agency or is a child in the specialized (medical or behavioral) programs. In these situations the case is transferred to LSSI or, in the case of new specialized cases, assigned to LSSI through a gatekeeper at DCFS. The agency's intake protocol has a referral sheet which asks the referring agency or gatekeeper for information concerning the child/children's needs, medications and

other medical information, current services, and past and present behaviors. Information from the current care provider is also gathered. This information is shared with the foster parents.

As the case develops, more information becomes known. An Integrated Assessment is completed. Through that process additional medical, emotional and developmental information about the child is revealed and shared with the foster parents. The child's medical, developmental and educational needs are assessed. Needed services are put in place for the child. If information about the child/children is incomplete (such as medical history), the child welfare specialist will work diligently to obtain past records and information.

The foster parents are a vital part of the assessments and implementation of the service plan for the child. The foster parents are encouraged to participate in the court hearings and the ACR meetings. In addition the foster parent is an important participant in the quarterly Child and Family Team Meetings. In these meetings the permanency goal, the child's progress in services and concerns of the foster parents are discussed.

**11) The right to be given reasonable written notice of any change in a child's case plan, plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster parent, and the reasons for change or termination in placement. The notice will be waived only in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.**

Foster parents are notified in writing of any changes in children's case plans within five business days. The written Notice of Decision or Notice of Change of Placement are used and should contain specific reasons for a service change or termination of placement. Foster parents are notified in writing of the intent to move children from their homes at least 14 days prior to the move, unless there is imminent risk. More notice is given when possible to allow for a smooth transition for the child. Foster parents are given appeal process information at the time of the notice. This includes steps on having the removal reconsidered, including the emergency review process. All parties included in the case should be notified of any placement changes.

Prior notice is waived if the children are determined to be at imminent risk of harm. However, in these situations the appeal process is still available, and foster parents have the right to be treated with respect. Even in these situations, foster parents and children have formed relationships with one another and deserve, whenever possible, opportunities to say good-bye to one another. Foster parents have the right to receive information regarding the agency's actions, appeal information, and timely disposition of the situation. It should be noted that the agency's primary goal is to avoid placement removals and that emphasis is placed on preserving placements, whenever possible and safe.

**12) The right to be notified in a timely and complete manner of all court hearings, including notice of the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the hearings, and the court docket number of the case; and the right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek mandamus under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987.**

All foster parents are notified in writing at least twice a year of the next court date, including the date, time, calendar/courtroom of the hearing and court docket number of the case on their copy of the service plan. Between Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs), which are held every six months, the foster parent is informed by the caseworker verbally of the next court date, either by phone or in person at the next scheduled foster home visit.

The foster parents receive the “Foster Family Handbook” from DCFS during Foster Pride training. In this handbook there is an entire section dedicated to Juvenile Court with specific information regarding court proceedings. This handbook also refers to foster parent rights and responsibilities including their right to file a writ of mandamus (this compels a government agency, a state body, a public official or other such body to perform a mandated act).

All new staff is trained on the need to keep foster parents informed of all important case issues - this includes court hearings. If it becomes clear that a staff person is failing to inform foster parents of court hearings, the supervisor is required to address this issue with the caseworker. The caseworker’s failure to inform the foster parent could result in disciplinary action, which may include written notice of the performance issue and/or a corrective action plan.

**13) The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parent is to be re-entered into foster care, if that placement is consistent with the best interest of the child and other children in the foster parent’s home.**

If children re-enter foster care, previous foster parents are considered as the first option for the children, if the foster parents have adequate space and the re-placement is in the best interests of the children. Referrals are made to LSSI by the DCFS Case Assignment Placement Unit (CAPU) on the basis of the FHAD (Foster Home Availability Database). If a child re-enters care, they may make what is called a “directed referral” to the agency. This may be done in cases of children re-entering care or to place a new child with siblings already in care.

If CAPU makes a directed referral to LSSI of a child re-entering care, LSSI assesses the former foster parent’s current licensing status and capacity for additional children. In addition, other factors such as current family situations, the child(ren)’s current needs, the child(ren)’s best interests, the foster parents’ wishes, and the availability of resources are considered in the decision to replace. The child is re-placed if the caregiver is in agreement, has capacity, it is in the best interests of the child and would not disrupt other children already in placement.

The agency has an opportunity to implement this right for specialized children who may re-enter care as these children are referred to LSSI and LSSI selects the best match for the waiting child, in consultation with the DCFS gatekeeper for specialized care. The child is re-placed if the caregiver is in agreement, has capacity, it is in the best interests of the child and would not disrupt other children already in placement.

**14) The right to have timely access to the child placement agency's existing appeals process and the right to be free from acts of harassment and retaliation by any other party when exercising the right to appeal.**

Foster parents are provided with written appeals procedures for DCFS and LSSI. An acknowledgement of receipt of this information is included in the foster home file.

Foster parents also receive training on the Foster Parent Law. This training also includes instructions on both the DCFS and LSSI appeals processes.

LSSI strives to provide quality services at all times through a process of teamwork and collaboration. When a grievance arises pertaining to decisions made regarding service planning and provisions, foster parents have the right to use LSSI's grievance procedure. It is as follows:

- "LSSI expects that you, your worker and his/her supervisor will work collaboratively to resolve differences that may arise over the course of your work together. LSSI expects that when differences arise, you will bring them to the attention of your worker and his/her supervisor to be resolved. Likewise, the worker and supervisor are expected to bring problems to your attention for discussion and resolution. Problems not resolved at this level may be brought to the attention of the Program Director at the site where you are receiving services. All discussions toward problem resolution are recorded, in writing, to document this process for Agency files. You are entitled to receive copies of this documentation upon request. If, after following this process, you remain dissatisfied, you may request an administrative review regarding LSSI's services by writing to the appropriate Associate Executive Director for your region. This information can be obtained from the supervisor or program director at your location.
- This process is also to be used to report alleged violations of the Foster Parent Law not covered by an already existing grievance or appeal process (it cannot be used to address issues covered by the service appeal process, the appeal process for indicated reports of child abuse or neglect, the process for appealing licensing investigation findings or licensing revocations, etc.).
- An investigation of any written grievance, complaint or violation of the Foster Parent Law is initiated within two business days. All grievances, complaints or alleged violations of the Foster Parent Law are documented in writing by LSSI and the outcome of the investigation is reported in writing to the Executive Director of the Children's Community Services Network of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services within 10 business days of receipt of the grievance or complaint. All grievances or complaints and the outcome of LSSI's investigation are also reported to the LSSI Board of Directors at the next scheduled meeting.
- If, after presenting grievances to the associate executive director/executive director and satisfaction is not obtained, you should write to:

Chief Operating Officer  
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois  
1001 East Touhy Avenue, suite 50  
Des Plaines, Illinois 60018

- Any retaliation against someone making a grievance or complaint is prohibited. Instances of retaliation, should they occur, will be handled through established Agency disciplinary processes.
- Please note that you also have the right to appeal to an advocate outside of LSSI. Your assigned worker will assist you in this process should you need further information regarding who to contact.”

LSSI does not tolerate retaliation or harassment against foster parents who raise concerns, questions, or use the DCFS service appeal or LSSI grievance processes. If foster parents feel that they have been subjected to harassment or retaliation, mediation may be requested through the next level of agency administration. Instances of retaliation or harassment by staff, should they occur, will be handled through established disciplinary processes of the agency.

**15) The right to be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline established under Section 35.6 of the Children and Family Services Act and of all of the rights accorded to foster parents concerning reports of misconduct by Department employees, service providers, or contractors, confidential handling of those reports, and investigation by the Inspector General appointed under Section 35.5 of the Children and Family Services Act.**

LSSI ensures that all sites make available the Office of the Inspector General’s (OIG) brochure which includes the specific details regarding the foster parent hotline and its purpose. LSSI places the brochure in public areas where foster parents can reference them. It is important to LSSI that their foster parents are well informed of their rights. LSSI wants foster parents to be aware of all external resources available to them should they have a problem and/or concern that they feel the agency cannot resolve. LSSI cooperates fully when it receives a call from the OIG and/or the Advocacy office to provide additional information and addresses any concerns immediately.

The roles of these offices in ensuring the safety and well being of Illinois’ children as well as the foster parent hotline are emphasized by LSSI staff via foster parent information meetings, compliance visits conducted by the licensing team, foster parent support group meetings and advisory council meetings. All new applicants are provided with the foster parent hotline number and its purpose in the initial stages of the licensing process. Foster parents also receive a copy of the agency’s Implementation Plan and therefore the number is also listed here: Foster Parent Hotline—1-800-722-9124.

**Foster Parents’ Responsibilities**

According to the Foster Parent Code (DCFS Rule 340, Appendix B) a foster parent’s responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

**16(1) The responsibility to openly communicate and share information about the child with other members of the child welfare team.**

Foster parents are expected to notify LSSI by contacting the caseworker or supervisor by phone, in person or through email within 24 hours of any situation that has impacted the physical, mental or emotional well being of the child. Foster parents are asked to document in writing and retain all events that led to any such situation (journal, calendar, folder, etc.).

Foster parents are required to follow licensing standards for record keeping. At the time of placement, programs provide a book or folder containing pertinent information that serves as a tool for record keeping. Medication and behavioral logs shall be completed by the foster parents and submitted to the assigned caseworker at monthly home visits.

Foster parents are required to participate in pre-service and ongoing training. As a part of this training, the importance of open and frequent communication and the expectations for record keeping and notification are reviewed. This responsibility is also covered in the initial foster parent information meeting with prospective applicants.

**17(2) The responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information concerning foster children and their families and act appropriately within applicable confidentiality laws and regulations.**

Foster parents receive pre-service and ongoing training on confidentiality. Training must include the “dos and don’ts” of confidentiality, but also must sensitize foster parents as to why confidentiality is so important for foster children and their birth families. When foster parents understand the importance of confidentiality for children and their families, they are more likely to understand and abide by the expectations. Confidentiality is also covered in the placement agreement. The rules, limits and necessity of confidentiality are also covered by the licensing worker at monitoring visits and documented on the CFS 597-FFH.

Co-training with staff is encouraged around the topic of confidentiality as this is an area where both staff and foster parents need continual refreshers to remain mindful of confidentiality. Deciding what information about the birth family ought to be shared is not always clear-cut. In addition, when foster parents are actively involved in supporting birth family involvement, the rules for confidentiality can become blurred. Both workers and foster parents need help and support in navigating their way through the complex situations that arise when handling confidential information. When necessary during regular monthly home visits with the foster parents, workers will reinforce/remind foster parents of the confidentiality requirements which they are required to follow. Training on this topic includes resource materials on the laws and regulations pertaining to confidentiality and these materials are available to all foster parents.

In addition, staff and foster parents need ongoing training regarding the handling of foster parents’ confidential information and the laws and regulations available to protect foster parents’ privacy. This remains an important training area that must be addressed on an ongoing basis; child welfare specialists need regular training and supervision on the importance of maintaining foster parents’ confidentiality. Foster parents sign a Notice of Disclosure of Identifying Information during the initial licensing process. This explains to them who could receive their name, address, and phone number in regards to service provisions for children placed into their

care. This helps the foster parents understand the limits of confidentiality as well as the circumstances of disclosure.

Many of LSSI's programs provide foster parent support groups. Since sharing information about their experiences as foster parents is the focus of these groups, leaders are expected to provide reminders about confidentiality at the beginning of every support group session. Foster parent trainers are encouraged to include this as a topic on their training calendars.

### **18(3) The responsibility to advocate for children in the foster parent's care.**

Advocacy skills are a very important part of being a successful foster parent. These skills are presented in sessions six and nine of Foster Pride training. Foster parents must attend the training on Educational Advocacy as well. LSSI assists foster parents with registration for this training through DCFS by providing the dates and times of the training to foster parents. LSSI requires all new traditional applicants to complete Educational Advocacy training prior to being licensed. Applicants who are caring for relative children and who desire to become licensed are encouraged to take the Educational Advocacy training, but it is not required prior to licensure.

Sometimes foster parent advocacy involves the use of the DCFS service appeal process. Foster parents are given information regarding the appeal process through DCFS, LSSI and the courts. This information is provided during training as well as upon request after licensure. If foster parents need help drafting an appeal, the child welfare specialist is available to assist them in that process.

Foster parents caring for special needs children receive additional training due to the complex needs of the children. These children usually receive services from numerous providers so foster parents need to advocate to make sure the services are well-coordinated and meeting the needs of the children. Foster parents are essential to this process and receive additional training to help them develop these skills.

Foster parents are encouraged to work closely with all other professionals involved in the care of their child/children. This may include the Guardian Ad Litem, CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), other court personnel, doctors, nurses, schoolteachers, therapists, mentors, etc. Child welfare specialists encourage the active participation of the foster parents with these and other professionals as the foster parent's input is so valuable to the overall success of the child/children's care.

Foster parents are the best advocates for the child with the educational and medical systems. For example, the foster parents attend the IEP (Individual Educational Plan) and parent/teacher conferences plus support the child in after school activities. Foster parents also attend all medical appointments. They advocate with the physician and the child welfare system for the needed care for the child as they have the day-to-day information regarding the child. For example, the medical card will only pay for one pair of glasses for a child in a year. Frequently glasses can be broken or lost. Through their role as advocate, foster parents may be able to ensure that replacement glasses are provided.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend all meetings pertaining to the child in their care. This includes, but is not limited to: ACRs, placement review staffings, Child and Family Team Meetings, case staffings, school conferences, and court hearings which are held for the child/children in their care. Through linking foster parents with other experienced foster parents, modeling, attending meetings with the foster parents and through training – the agency seeks to help foster parents improve their advocacy skills.

**19(4) The responsibility to treat children in the foster parent’s care and the children’s family with dignity, respect, and consideration.**

The importance of treating children and their families with dignity, respect and consideration starts when a family contacts LSSI and attends a foster parent information meeting. In addition, this responsibility is discussed during the initial meeting with a licensing representative. Throughout the pre-service Pride training there is a continued focus on treating foster children and their families with respect, dignity and consideration. New materials developed for Pride use concepts from the “Family to Family” and Reunification models which further emphasize to new foster families the importance of respect and support to the birth family. This expectation is further reinforced in a variety of settings including the licensing representative and caseworker home visits, all supervisor and staff contacts with foster family, ongoing training, staffings and case conferences.

It is part of the DCFS licensing standards that foster parents treat all children in their care with dignity and respect. This standard is reviewed during the licensing representative’s monitoring visit every six months. The caseworker visits at least once every thirty days and is trained to observe how the foster parent treats the child in the home and to be aware of what the foster parent says about the child and their family. Agency staff pays special attention to both foster parents’ words and body language when communicating about the birth family during phone calls, birth family visits and other meetings. If the child appears to be treated in a way that is not consistent with this responsibility the staff member will talk about the concern with the foster parent, licensing representative and assigned supervisor. The foster parent may be asked to attend staffings, additional training and/or family counseling to address concerns.

Ongoing training opportunities are offered through LSSI and DCFS to help the foster parents understand the issues and challenges faced by birth families. These include training classes on reunification, trauma, Child & Family Team Meetings, Ice-breaker meetings (opportunities for foster parents and birth parents to meet when children are initially placed), handling behavior problems, Family Connections, and Pride in-service modules.

As stated elsewhere in this Plan, foster parents are encouraged to meet and become involved with the birth families of their foster children. This is not mandatory, but is strongly encouraged because in almost all cases it assists the foster family, child, and birth family in meeting the child’s service and permanency needs. The opportunity to work together with the birth family also gives the foster family the opportunity to demonstrate their respect and consideration for the child and his/her birth family.

**20(5) The responsibility to recognize the foster parent’s own individual and family strengths and limitations when deciding whether to accept a child into care; and the responsibility to recognize the foster parent’s own support needs and utilize appropriate supports in providing care for foster children.**

Foster Pride Connection notes are used to facilitate communication between prospective foster parents and agency staff regarding the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses. These notes provide an excellent springboard for the foster parent’s ongoing development once they complete Pride and begin fostering. In addition, the Pride Connection notes and the home study process assist licensing staff and applicants in mutual assessment of the capacities of the foster parents to care for children with particular needs.

Staff is expected to help foster parents accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses. By using and reviewing the Foster Parent Preference Check List, both staff and foster parents are able to assess what situations they are open to. LSSI has a responsibility to foster parents to ensure that they are not “set up” for failure because LSSI fails to help them thoroughly assess the type and number of foster children they are best able to foster.

Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of caregivers is part of LSSI’s practice with licensed and unlicensed caregivers in order to ensure the safety and well-being of children in placement. Each unlicensed relative family must be given the same opportunity to engage in a mutual assessment process of all of their strengths and weaknesses related to caring for the children in their homes. This information assists in the licensing process, as well as ongoing placement decisions and individual training plans.

Workers also conduct periodic interviews with foster parents to help assess the foster parents’ strengths and weakness and ongoing training needs. Foster parents are asked to provide input and assess their own proficiencies and areas where growth is needed. In addition, caseworkers provide foster parents with appropriate feedback at many junctures, including regular home visits, telephone calls between visits, and other formal and informal opportunities for discussion of the foster parents’ role in providing the highest quality care to the children in their homes. Training/support is provided to foster parents in identified areas needing improvement, including referral to Pride Core Modules and other agency trainings on specified topics.

**21(6) The responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations in improving the quality of care and service to children and families.**

LSSI encourages foster parents’ participation in support groups and foster parent associations and gives foster parents information on the meeting dates and times of such events. Foster parents and staff throughout the state participate in local community-wide and agency-specific councils and support efforts.

LSSI continues to work on the foster parent support component offered at each of its sites. All of LSSI's primary program sites offer ongoing foster parent support groups and/or link foster parents to community-based support groups. Consistent foster parent attendance is an ongoing struggle given the busy lives of foster parents. However, foster parents continue to voice interest in this concept and appear to want it to be available for assistance at times of difficulty or high stress. All program sites are expected to offer a support group either in-house or through the community. Sites with in-house support groups are expected to have one or more foster parents as co-facilitators for the support groups. Formal and informal networks of foster parent mentors are also encouraged either through shared telephone lists compiled with foster parents' permission or other methods designed by the local sites. Experienced foster parents are also encouraged to mentor new foster parents during support group and advisory council meetings. Licensing representatives work with interested foster parents to ensure that those offering support and mentoring are experienced foster parents who are able to offer appropriate assistance.

LSSI distributes information on state and national foster parent groups and encourages participation. LSSI has had foster parents on the Statewide Foster Advisory Council and also has foster parents who attend the meetings, while not currently members of the Council.

**22(7) The responsibility to assess the foster parents' ongoing individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.**

The intake process for children entering into foster care identifies the various needs of the children through the Integrated Assessment process, the Child/Caregiver Matching Tool (CFS 2017) and the Individualized Assessment of Child for Purposes of Adoption (CFS 485).

The Child/Caregiver Matching Tool identifies the child/children's needs and has a section for the foster parent to identify what they need help in when providing assistance to their foster child. Child welfare specialists meet with foster parents through staffings and home visits and have open dialogs about what needs the foster parents have in providing care to their foster children. Licensing workers are also in the home and can help identify training needs of the foster parents. Once the foster parents have identified what their training needs are the child welfare specialist and the licensing worker help them to develop a training plan. The training plan may include one-on-one child specific training needed for medical or therapeutic issues, workshops and educational modules on topics to improve their skills. Foster parents are notified of trainings through their foster parent meetings, newsletters and training notices sent to them by the foster parent support staff. Licensing workers also help foster parents access the DCFS Lending Library for training resources. Foster parents are kept updated about training materials such as books, internet resources, tapes, and videos that might be helpful to them.

**23(8) The responsibility to develop and assist in implementing strategies to prevent placement disruption, recognizing the traumatic impact of placement disruptions on a foster child and members of the foster family; and the responsibility to provide emotional support for the foster children and members of the foster family if preventive strategies fail and placement disruption occurs.**

It is imperative that foster parents notify LSSI staff as soon as they begin experiencing any difficulties and/or changes in behavior with a child they have in placement. This will allow LSSI to implement supportive services and/or assessments for the child prior to placement disruption. Both foster parents and casework staff are trained to notice early signs of placement disruptions in the home and at school and the traumatic impact of the disruptions if they are to occur. If there is a suspicion of placement disruption, it is the responsibility of the staff and foster parents to seek additional services such as counseling, tutoring, and mentoring to avoid disruptions.

Foster parents shall seek needed support to minimize placement disruptions. LSSI casework staff should support foster parents by providing additional information on services that are available in their community. Information on additional resources is included in regular staff and foster parent training opportunities.

Counseling services continue to be offered to foster children, birth families, and foster families through LSSI. These services are in place to provide counseling and supportive services to foster parents to stabilize placements and address ongoing needs. A referral protocol is in place and known to staff and foster parents.

The Systems of Care (SOC) services and the traumatic impact of placement disruptions are outlined and provided to foster parents through pre-service training, on-going training, Foster Parent Law trainings and through regular reminders published in the programs' newsletters (tailored to reflect regional differences throughout the state).

It is the goal of the agency to prevent placement disruptions. However, when placement disruptions are inevitable, foster parents are to provide written 14-day notice (at least) to allow the agency time to implement new strategies. If another placement is needed, foster parents are encouraged to participate in helping the child transition to a new foster home where appropriate. Foster parents are encouraged to take children back from hospital stays, if appropriate. Foster parents are to be given the support necessary to continue to help make the child safe and secure.

**24(9) The responsibility to know the impact foster parenting has on individuals and family relationships; and the responsibility to endeavor to minimize, as much as possible, stress that results from foster parenting.**

As part of Module training, foster parents receive training to recognize signs of stress and other related signals that may ultimately lead to disruption of placements or undue stress on the foster parents, foster children, or foster parents' family members.

Additional training is available through classes, DVDs, on-line trainings, and the lending library. Foster parents may contact their caseworker or licensing representative for information concerning further assistance with classes. Foster parents are informed of the availability of support groups, which several programs offer at their sites. If not available at the site, linkage to a community sponsored group is provided.

Family or individual counseling may be utilized to assist in minimizing stress as much as possible. For example, LSSI provides counseling and other supportive services to foster parents to aid in their care of the child. There is no fee to foster parents for this assistance.

Foster parents seek support from LSSI staff and discuss intervention strategies for dealing with stress. Foster parents are encouraged to seek respite as necessary. The methods for obtaining respite and the rates of reimbursement vary depending on level of care of the child. Foster parents should contact their caseworker in the event that respite is needed.

Foster parents who assess that it would be best to forgo additional foster care placements are informed of the opportunity to place themselves on “voluntary placement hold.” All casework, supervisory, licensing, and intake staff are knowledgeable about the placement clearance and “hold” processes and make that information available to foster parents. If the stress is the result of a system disagreement, foster parents should contact LSSI agency supervisors or program directors to obtain resolution.

**25(10) The responsibility to know the rewards and benefits to children, parents, families, and society that come from foster parenting and promote the foster parenting experience in a positive way.**

Foster parents understand the rewards and benefits to children, parents, and families as they are encouraged to provide protection and nurturance to children in their care. They help meet the developmental needs of children and support the permanency goals for children in their care. Foster parents are rewarded by seeing families strengthened and are encouraged to actively assist and mentor families to support them in improving the environment from which the children were removed. They understand that this could assist and aid in a successful reunification for families. This truly demonstrates that supporting relationships are important for the children. If reunification is not possible, foster families see rewards in possibly providing permanency through guardianship, adoption, or independence for the youth in their care. This aids in the children developing lifetime connections. Foster parents also see the reward of being a member of a professional foster care team in working together to meet the needs of a child in their care.

LSSI staff formally acknowledges the positive benefits of fostering through various outlets. As noted, the agency hosts several foster parent appreciation events during the year. LSSI places special emphasis on foster parent appreciation during May, which is National Foster Care Month. While this is an ongoing effort throughout the year, LSSI continues to use National Foster Care Month as an opportunity to raise the profile of fostering within local communities by urging local press contacts, churches, and businesses to honor foster parents in their midst. In planning for these events, we ask foster parents to help us identify community contacts who might be willing to assist in this goal. Involving foster parents in planning the appreciation events during National Foster Care Month, and at other times during the year, continues as a goal.

LSSI has been very involved in the “Foster Kids Are Our Kids” social marketing campaign designed to reduce society’s stigma regarding foster children and foster parents. An agency

administrator is the co-chair of the steering committee for this campaign and this year a former foster care youth who is now an employee at LSSI was featured in the “I’m Doing Good” commercial, poster, website and other materials that are used as part of this campaign. The staff person, who is now a spokesmodel for the campaign, has been a featured speaker at many events around the state, both for LSSI and other agencies. LSSI has made this staff person’s time available to the campaign as needed for the purpose of supporting the campaign’s message.

During the budget impasse, LSSI was very involved in mobilizing foster parents to write to their state officials about the needs of foster children, birth families and foster families. LSSI arranged for some of its foster parents to speak at press conferences around the state and at LSSI’s advocacy day in Springfield. Both events focused on the need to preserve funding for these vital services.

Foster parents are informed of special events by casework staff, monthly newsletters and personal invitations sent directly to their homes. Foster parents are encouraged to speak positively about fostering parenting in their communities, with special emphasis on this during the month of May.

LSSI staff and communications department also takes advantage of opportunities to promote foster parenting through the media, church, and community contacts. LSSI has continued to work closely with the agency’s marketing and communications staff to develop recruitment and marketing plans for fostering. Involvement of foster parents in these efforts continues.

Foster parents are encouraged to participate in recruitment activities and invite friends, family members and neighbors to LSSI’s Foster Family Information meetings. Friends or family members of current foster parents are often the most successful new applicants. Reminders to foster parents about referring others have been provided via program newsletters and other publications that go to foster parents and/or churches. Some sites have used foster parents as recruiters and reimbursed them for their expenses. Other programs send a thank you note and a gift card to show appreciation for referring persons who successfully complete the licensure process.

Foster parent mentors are used formally and informally in the various program sites. A notice about mentoring went out to all foster parents via the statewide newsletter when this effort was initiated. Programs continue to promote via their local newsletters. Positive mentoring relationships among foster parents are highlighted by local programs. Also, as mentioned elsewhere, foster parent support groups and foster parent support telephone lists are used to match experienced foster parents with foster parents who would benefit from a mentoring relationship.

**26(11) The responsibility to know the roles, rights, and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the foster child and the foster child’s own family.**

Foster parents receive pre-service and ongoing training in this area via the Pride training. Through the Pride modules, panel presentations by professionals discuss their various roles and responsibilities within the child welfare system. The importance of the child and the family of origin is discussed. Training on teamwork, respect and communication is part of the ongoing training for the staff and the foster parents.

Guest speakers are often invited to provide training at the program sites. As part of the introduction, the presenter's role within the child welfare system is described. These trainings include both didactic presentations and small group discussions and problem-solving scenarios.

Foster parents are encouraged to be an active and vital part of the services provided to the child and family. The foster parents are strongly encouraged to attend the court hearings and ACRs. If the child is receiving counseling services, the foster parent is consulted regarding any behavioral issues pertaining to the child/children and should be actively involved in the therapeutic process.

At Child and Family Team meetings the foster parents are included in discussions of the issues pertaining to the child and the permanency goal for the child. For other staffings the foster parent is invited to participate. These meetings could include service providers, SOC staff and CASA advocates. If the foster parent wishes to participate, but cannot attend meetings in person, they are able to participate via telephone.

With DCFS' new reunification initiative the foster parent's role is greatly expanded. Foster parents are encouraged to include birth parents in medical and counseling appointments for the child. Foster parents can choose to include the birth parents in traditional family events, birthday parties, etc. The contact between the foster parents and the birth parents can dispel many erroneous ideas they may hold about one another.

**27(12) The responsibility to know and, as necessary, fulfill the foster parent's responsibility to serve as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act; and the responsibility to know the child welfare agency's policy regarding allegations that the foster parents have committed child abuse or neglect and applicable administrative rules and procedures governing investigations of those allegations.**

During pre-service training, foster parents are informed of their legal responsibilities as mandated reporters. The licensing representative also addresses this responsibility at pre-licensure and ongoing home visits. Foster Pride also includes information regarding both mandated reporting requirements and foster parents who are subjects of abuse/neglect reports.

During the licensing process and at renewal, foster parents sign an acknowledgement of their mandated reporter status and the form is reviewed and discussed with them. Foster parents are also trained on their responsibilities to report sexually problematic, abusive or neglectful behaviors.

In an effort to support foster parents, programs provide ongoing training to include information on child abuse and neglect. Foster parents are required to complete a minimum of four credit hours per year for the license renewal. Programs should encourage foster parents to attend trainings related to abuse and neglect to meet those credit hours.

Programs shall provide to foster parents information on rules, policy and procedures regarding allegations and investigations. Programs will provide to foster parents information regarding foster parent rights and responsibilities during the investigation process.

**28(13) The responsibility to know and receive training regarding the purpose of administrative case reviews, client service plans, and court processes, as well as any filing or time requirements associated with those proceedings; and the responsibility to actively participate in the foster parent's designated role in these proceedings.**

Foster parents receive ongoing training in these proceedings. The yearly plan for ongoing foster parent training offered at LSSI includes one or more sessions on ACRs, service planning, and court hearings, and the filing and time requirements for these proceedings. Foster parents are also reminded of the importance of their active participation in these proceedings. Their insight on their foster children's strengths, behaviors, and needs are crucial to making permanency plans that are in the children's best interests.

Foster parents are consistently encouraged to attend ACRs and court hearings because their input on the children in their care is so valuable to sound decision-making and planning. Casework staff may provide one-on-one information to foster parents before, during, or after ACR meetings and court dates to help them fulfill their roles as foster parents and advocates and to inform them of what has taken place if they have not been in attendance. If the foster parent is unable to attend, they are encouraged to submit documentation as to their input and recommendations.

**29(14) The responsibility to know the child welfare agency's appeal procedure for foster parents and the rights of foster parents under the procedure.**

Informational brochures are distributed to foster parents regarding the appeals process which includes both the DCFS process and the internal LSSI Interaction and Grievance process. The foster home record contains an acknowledgement that the foster parent both received and had the LSSI process explained to them. This procedure includes a process for reporting any violations of the Foster Parent Law not covered by an already existing appeal or grievance procedure. This process delineates time frames for resolution as well as all steps necessary for discussion and a satisfactory conclusion. This brochure also lists the foster parent's right to appeal to an advocate outside of LSSI if needed. All foster parents have access to the agency's foster parent implementation plan, which also includes all of their rights.

In addition, the Office of Inspector General's brochure offers excellent information regarding the OIG's role and how they can assist foster parents and staff. All LSSI sites have been given

copies of this brochure. Sites are expected to make this brochure available to their foster parents. As noted in the brochure, the Foster Parent Hotline is 1-800-722-9124.

**30(15) The responsibility to know and understand the importance of maintaining accurate and relevant records regarding the children's history and progress; and the responsibility to be aware of and follow the procedures and regulations of the child welfare agency with which the foster parent is licensed or affiliated.**

When a child is placed in foster care, the foster parents are given a record-keeping folder. Foster parents are responsible for tracking significant events, medical reports, dispensing of medication, school reports, and behavioral logs. During pre-service training, LSSI's expectations for record keeping are discussed and written expectations are distributed. The reasons why maintaining accurate records is so important is emphasized. These reasons include:

- The foster parent notes add to the case record which becomes the history of the child/children's life while in foster care.
- The file provides an accurate account of the child's life/needs so there can be adequate medical, educational, and therapeutic services provided.
- The child/children may have questions about their lives in foster care and accurate record-keeping can help answer their questions.
- Subsequent providers and caseworkers may need the information recorded to plan for the child/children in the future.

Records are reviewed regularly by the child welfare specialist. Licensing staff may also review foster parent's record-keeping methods to provide support and assistance with this task. Informal one-on-one training is provided by both licensing staff and child welfare specialists to assist foster parents in effective record keeping and to ensure that all procedures regarding the medication and behavior logs are being fulfilled, as well as ensuring that all significant events/issues are recorded timely and accurately.

Particular policies or procedures for a given program site are thoroughly explained at pre-service and ongoing training events to ensure foster parents are will informed of program requirements. This is particularly true of programs offering specialized foster care. Programs are expected to also provide this material in writing.

**31(16) The responsibility to share information, through child welfare teams, with subsequent caregivers (whether the child's parent or other substitute caregiver) regarding the child's adjustment in the foster parents' home.**

Because LSSI considers foster parents members of the professional team, foster parents may be asked to provide the children's records to subsequent caregivers. Whenever possible, the foster parents meet subsequent caregivers and provide the children's record folders. In addition, foster parents are encouraged to be active participants in the transition process whenever possible and appropriate. This is important, given that children's adjustment to new caregivers is significantly

enhanced when the children's routines are kept as similar as possible and the children observe their past and subsequent caregivers cooperating with one another.

LSSI provides special training opportunities to foster parents such as Family Connections. The Family Connections training sponsored by LSSI, in conjunction with Adoptions Unlimited, educates foster parents on the importance of supporting and promoting connectedness to birth families and other important people in children's lives. LSSI also encourages foster parents to attend DCFS sponsored trainings such as child trauma and reunification, which also emphasize these points.

Foster parents are encouraged to assist children in completing Lifebooks. Some programs have training or support group meetings that include Lifebooks as part of the activity/training topic; Lifebooks are also covered in Pride. Experienced foster parents are an effective source of ideas and inspiration for the completion of Lifebooks and are great co-trainers for this topic. Lifebooks include essential information to help the child understand his/her placement and life history.

LSSI continues with its statewide implementation of its Lifebook Project. Five Lifebook Specialists and a Lifebook Coordinator have been hired this year. Each office has access to a Lifebook Specialist whose job it is to help caseworkers and foster parents complete Lifebooks with the children in their care. Specialists help get Lifebook work started and do "leg work" (like tracking down previous placement information, photos, and caregivers). Lifebook Specialists also each have a caseload of special cases where they do the Lifebook work with the child directly. These may be cases of large sibling groups or situations that require greater expertise. In some instances, the caseworker may be new and unable to do Lifebook work on top of learning their new job so the Lifebook specialist helps until the worker is able to undertake this responsibility.

In addition, the Lifebook Specialists train new staff and all foster parents on the use of Lifebooks with children. The training uses LSSI's training DVD, "Putting the Pieces Together: Lifebook Work with Children." All LSSI children also receive a "Lifebook kit" which contains a Lifebook, three-ring binder, crayons, colored pencils, photo protector pages, extra paper, a glue stick, disposable camera, stickers and other items to help children, caseworkers and foster parents complete Lifebooks. Foster parents have responded very positively to receiving the kits and generously added their own supplies to keep the Lifebook work going. A private foundation has provided funding for this project with the goal of completing a Lifebook with every child in LSSI's care.

LSSI has been very pleased to see the wonderful response to the Lifebook project among its staff, foster parents and children. Lifebook Specialists have contacted former foster parents of many children and these foster parents have willingly and excitedly provided a wealth of information and photos to help complete Lifebooks for children they used to foster. Many foster parents have written beautiful letters to their former foster children, helping them recall the good times in their home, as well as bring closure to the child's move from their home. Children have also responded very positively to the project. Many of them have been able to answer questions

they have also had about why they moved from a home, what happened to a family member or information about where they were born or how many placements they have had. A “Lifebook Update” is included with this plan. It includes some wonderful examples of how children and youth at LSSI have responded to the Lifebook process.

**32(17) The responsibility to provide care and services that are respectful of and responsive to the child’s cultural needs and are supportive of relationships between the child and his or her own family; the responsibility to recognize the increased importance of maintaining a child’s cultural identities when the race or culture of the foster family differs from that of the foster child; and the responsibility to take action to address these issues.**

Foster parents actively seek to understand cultural differences and receive ongoing training on cultural sensitivity. Foster parents are expected to respect and support a child’s ties to his or her birth family and cooperate with the supervising agency and the service plan for the child and family. In some instances when it is in the best interest of the child, birth family connections may be maintained, even if the parental rights have been terminated.

Foster parents are actively encouraged to support the birth family through involvement in family visits and other events. This provides a wonderful opportunity for the foster and birth families to learn from one another and support the child. Birth parents can often learn caregiving ideas from foster parents. In addition, this provides opportunities for exchange around cultural and racial differences. Foster parents whose race, ethnicity and/or culture are different from the birth family may find special benefit in these opportunities to learn about the birth family’s cultural traditions and values. Workers are available to help facilitate these exchanges.

Many foster parents are in need of training in the area of cultural sensitivity, particularly those who are parenting cross-culturally. Licensing workers are responsible for bringing up this issue and assisting foster parents in designing a training plan that addresses cultural and racial sensitivity. All sites with active foster parent support groups are asked to include one or more sessions where foster parents may share their ideas and experiences with cultivating their foster children’s racial, cultural and familial ties.