



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

**Foster Parent Law [20 ILCS 520]  
Implementation Plan  
Bill of Rights and Responsibilities**

**2025**

**Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan for 2025**  
**Lutheran Social Services of Illinois**  
**1001 E Touhy Ave., Suite 187**  
**Des Plaines, IL 60018**  
**Child Welfare License: #013005**

## **Introduction**

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is a nonprofit social service organization of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). LSSI is the largest provider of social services in Illinois, delivering a multitude of services, including mental health assessment and treatment, prevention services, youth and family services, community outreach, senior housing, prisoner and family ministries, addiction treatment, adoption preservation, and intellectual and developmental disability programs.

LSSI provides supportive Foster Care and Adoption services for families and youth in care through three programs: foster care, therapeutic foster care, and the Families Together foster care pilot program. Inherent in all foster care programs is support from clinical staff as well as other available resources. The Families Together program allows for smaller caseloads and additional professional and para-professional staff assigned to each case. LSSI foster care services are provided statewide, with services in four geographical regions: Metropolitan Chicago; Northern, located in Rockford, Aurora and Nachusa; Central, located in Champaign/Savoy, Moline, Danville, Peoria, Canton, and Galesburg; and Southern, which provides foster care services in Vienna and Marion. Therapeutic foster care is offered in Chicago, Rockford and Aurora, and the Families Together pilot is based in Chicago. Both employ consultants with extensive knowledge and experience, which enhances each program's service delivery. LSSI strives to provide quality services to children and families in each of its four regions, including the 2,647 youths who received foster care services in fiscal year 2024.

LSSI is dedicated to ensuring the safety, well-being, and permanency of youth in care in its Foster Care and Adoption Programs. Foster parents, including kinship caregivers, are essential to achieving these goals, serving as vital members of the child welfare team. LSSI believes that respect and support between staff and foster families is critical to achieve successful outcomes for both youth and families. This includes ensuring foster parents fully understand their Rights and Responsibilities and the significant impact they have on children's lives. When foster parents recognize their worth and the difference they make, they are better equipped to serve alongside staff. This collaborative partnership is key to creating positive results, and LSSI is passionately committed to nurturing this relationship with all foster parents.

## **Rights:**

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

LSSI understands the importance and impact foster parents have on children's lives. The organization's mission cannot be achieved without including foster parents as members of the professional child welfare team; of utmost importance is treating foster families with dignity and respect. LSSI accomplishes this by striving for positive and meaningful relationships between staff and foster parents, including case managers, licensing/resource workers, supervisors, etc. Allowing and encouraging foster parents to have a voice and to know they are heard is a keystone to trust-building and positive working relationships.

Positive relationships are forged through mutual trust. This trust is enhanced by case managers and other staff committing to listening to foster parents and giving them with the information necessary to provide for the safety and well-being of youth in care. One case manager stated, "It is important to keep them [foster parents] informed of every step, so that they do not feel lost in the process, forgotten about or confused." Foster parents are instructed on the strict rules of confidentiality regarding the youth for whom they care, and also are assured their information is kept confidential as well. Foster parents are kept apprised of any program and staff changes as quickly as possible.

Foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend staffing, court hearings, educational meetings, Administrative Case Reviews, and any other planning sessions relative to youth in their care. LSSI ensures foster families and staff are trained or receive training regarding the various types of meetings and their purposes. They are encouraged to provide information regarding youth in care when given the opportunity and to assist in the development of service and treatment planning. LSSI's previous Covid-19 policies have been archived, but if more convenient for a foster family, meetings may be conducted virtually. Staff have been tasked with finding assistance for families who may be unfamiliar with virtual technology. Foster parents are given information on date, time and location of meetings well in advance. Also, if any meeting dates, times or locations are changed or canceled, foster parents are informed immediately. If an assigned worker is not working or is unavailable, the assigned supervisor is responsible for all notifications. Case management and licensing/resource teams are responsible for being respectful of foster parent schedules and time, and they provide advance notice if a home visit date or time needs to be changed.

LSSI's policy is for any calls, emails or other correspondence be addressed within 48 business hours, but sooner if possible. Case management staff report that responding promptly avoids confusion and miscommunication. LSSI specifically addresses the need to be respectful during onboarding training with new staff, and during individual supervision. LSSI child welfare staff are also encouraged to communicate with foster families even if they do not have an answer, and inform them they will provide an answer or response as quickly as possible. Child welfare staff are encouraged by their supervisors to build trust with foster families by actively listening, taking

time when completing home visits, and having in-depth conversations, which allow staff to understand the challenges and successes the family is experiencing.

Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) are scheduled quarterly, or every 90 days, and efforts are made to accommodate foster parent schedules as well as those of natural parents. LSSI recognizes that many foster families engage in various activities, which require staff to be mindful and attentive to their availability. If necessary, foster parents may attend via Zoom or Microsoft TEAMS sent by the case manager. Foster parent input is also utilized when scheduling parent/child and sibling visits, and if possible, these visits are scheduled to accommodate the family's other activities. Foster parents are trained on their responsibility to make youth in care available for visits. By exchanging ideas during CFTMs and home visits, case managers can build a positive relationship with foster parents that is based on trust, respect, and an acknowledgment of the importance of foster parent involvement. Information shared by foster parents is utilized in case planning, referral for services for youth in care, school placement, and in many other manners.

Licensing/resource staff make all attempts to schedule visits well in advance if an unannounced visit is not required (per DCFS rule). Licensing/resource staff serve as a source of support, and oftentimes are able to provide requested information to foster families when an assigned worker is otherwise unavailable.

Foster parents are provided with the phone numbers and email addresses of assigned staff, and the after-hours emergency on-call phone number. LSSI staff rotate on-call responsibilities with a case manager and supervisor on a weekly basis, with the licensing/resource staff on stand-by for support. LSSI provides an on-call phone to be used, thereby having one consistent after-hours phone number. LSSI case managers, supervisors and licensing/resource staff also provide their business cards to foster families.

Another way that LSSI demonstrates its commitment to treating foster families with dignity and respect is by providing opportunities for training, support groups and various appreciation events throughout the year. LSSI hosts foster parent appreciation dinners and awards banquets, parent cafes, holiday parties, and back-to-school supply giveaways. These events have been successful with large participation from foster families. During 2024, LSSI held its first "Foster Fair" where each site invited all foster families and youth in their home to attend and participate in various activities with the youth in their home, including bounce houses, animal petting, food trucks, splash tanks, games, and more.

LSSI also recognizes outstanding foster parents on its public webpage and via its social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram. LSSI's Communication department has completed feature stories about foster families and has used them to promote positive attention for foster care. Most recently, a foster parent who is part of LSSI's Therapeutic Foster Care Program was honored at LSSI's True Friend Celebration.

LSSI staff are provided training regarding the importance of and requirement to treat all team members, including foster parents, with dignity and respect. This includes embracing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). LSSI has made significant advancements towards becoming the state leader by promoting a more equitable, diverse and inclusive work environment and service delivery, which includes foster families. LSSI has a dedicated EDI department, an EDI Steering Committee, and a new Employee Resource Group featuring a Disability Inclusion group. LSSI remains committed to providing all staff with anti-racism training to enhance their ability to deliver enhanced services not influenced by internal biases.

LSSI continues to survey clients and foster parents annually. In 2024, LSSI's Quality, Compliance and Data (QCD) department sent a survey to all foster families that focused on the quality of LSSI services, how foster families felt they were treated, and the overall quality of their lives. Feedback was shared with each program site for analysis and follow-up as needed. Anyone unable to complete the survey via MS Form was provided with a paper copy, a self-addressed-stamped-envelope, and a seal to ensure confidentiality.

LSSI staff demonstrate their respect for families by engaging in thoughtful, culturally sensitive actions. These include addressing individuals as Mr. or Miss, asking permission to wear shoes inside their homes, and discussing meeting expectations in advance. They also make efforts to understand each family's culture and traditions, often recognizing a special occasion. One staff member shared she always begins by asking, "What do you need from me?" to ensure that she is addressing the family's needs and preferences in her support approach. LSSI uses staff mentoring for newer members of the child welfare team to teach how to engage families, including the importance of respect and treating foster families with dignity.

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

All non-related prospective foster parents are required to participate in the DCFS Pride pre-service training (Pride Redesign - recently updated), which is available either online or instructor led. Additional supplemental training regarding Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standards is also required. In-person instructor-led trainings are offered at various locations throughout the state. Many previously required supplemental trainings are now incorporated in the Pride modules. The new HMR nine-hour training, available in person or online, has replaced the HMR/HFK training, including the DVDs. Online training requires access to the DCFS Learning and Development Center (LDC), which has proven to be difficult for some relative caregivers. In these situations, licensing/resource staff have assisted by either hosting a group training and tutorial or providing individual assistance in the home of the relative caregiver. Anyone who does not have Wi-Fi access is invited to an LSSI office to complete online training. Relative caregivers are also required to complete the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard supplemental training. Trainer notes continue to be a valuable part of the overall assessment of homes for licensure and future training needs.

The licensing/resource team collaborates closely with foster parents to mutually assess training needs and develop a training plan; one that includes DCFS and LSSI requirements but also focuses on specific foster parent needs to enhance their skills and abilities. Additional training requirements based on the Council on Accreditation (COA) recommendations, such as CPR and First Aid, are also discussed with families and provided by the agency. Case managers assess training needs with foster families when discussing youth in their home.

Licensing/resource staff assess training needs at each foster home visit and more often if required and/or requested. Licensing/resource staff have become familiar with the LDC format and are able to assist foster parents, licensed or unlicensed, in locating training modules, webinars and other resources such as seminars to enhance their overall experience. Each LSSI site produces a monthly newsletter to foster families, which contains a section regarding upcoming training opportunities. The LSSI training department hosts numerous trainings throughout the year at all sites, facilitated in-person and virtually, to accommodate families.

All LSSI foster parents, including those who choose to not participate in the licensing process, are encouraged to participate in trauma based informational training. Research supports that families who are trauma informed are better equipped to work with the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) many youths in care experience. LSSI strongly believes that with the right training, youths in care will experience more stability and positive future relationships.

LSSI's training staff has partnered with licensing/resource staff, case managers and the LSSI Communication department to create a training and resource portal for foster families. In the trial stages with assistance from the LSSI Information Systems department, clinical staff and Associate Executive Director of Program Support, this portal will house a resource library, calendar of events and various training modules including, but not limited to:

- ACR/First Aid
- Car Seat Training
- De-escalation Training
- LGBTQIA+ Training and Webinars
- Trauma Training
- Foster Care Case Timeline
- Guide to Caring for Youth in Care
- Foster Parent Self-Care
- Child and Adolescent Development
- Guide to First Placement
- Lifebook for Foster Parents
- Secondary Trauma
- Saying Goodbye to a Foster Parent
- Compassion Fatigue

Experienced foster parents are encouraged to co-train with staff when possible. Additionally, experienced foster parents are enlisted to assist in foster parent recruitment activities and

during informational meetings. LSSI partners with foster parents for trainings, specifically those related to collaborating with natural parents. LSSI has discovered foster parents have greater interest in support groups and training experiences if they feel the facilitator understands their experience. Licensing/resource staff as well as case managers recommend foster parents based on their experience and their proven capacity to translate life experiences into meaningful information for others. The development of foster parents to co-train and/or facilitate support groups remains a priority for LSSI.

LSSI's contract continues to include provisions for specialized youth in care. To mutually assess training needs and develop specific programs, LSSI licensing/resource staff work closely with families caring for youths identified as requiring specialized care due to medical, developmental or behavioral concerns. In cases where a family does not currently have a youth in care in their home, staff use knowledge of youth in care and the type of training beneficial to meet their medical, developmental and behavioral needs. Licensed foster parents are required to complete an additional 12 hours of training per year for their license to remain in compliance. Foster parents may utilize the foster parent meetings and training sessions held by resource staff, or foster parent and staff development specialists, as well as community-based training that is approved by DCFS for these additional training hours. Education by medical providers specific to a youth in care with special medical needs may also be used towards additional training credit hour requirements. LSSI licensing/resource teams also ensure foster parents are aware of the numerous trainings offered via the LDC and strongly encourage participation in the Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma training. LSSI, as a COA accredited agency, also requires CPR/First Aid, LGBTQIA+, and de-escalation training.

LSSI also offers intensive services to youth age six through 14 years via its Treatment Foster Care (TFC) program, which is modeled after the Treatment Foster Care of Oregon program. LSSI contracts with specialists from the Treatment Foster Care of Oregon program and a local consultant to assist in ongoing program development and training. TFC focuses on youth in care who have experienced high trauma and multiple placement disruptions. Teams provide a consistent and reinforcing environment with mentoring and encouragement, daily structure with clear expectations and specific consequences, an elevated level of supervision, limited access to problem peers, and an increase in access to prosocial peers as well as create an environment that supports daily school and homework completion. TFC foster parents are required to complete the same PRIDE pre-service and ongoing in-service training as non-relative caregivers along with specific TFC training prior to accepting youth in their home. TFC training is ongoing and specific to the youth placed in the home. TFC foster families have frequent contact with LSSI staff and many opportunities to increase knowledge and skills to ensure the best outcomes for youth placed in their homes.

LSSI is currently in year two of the evidence-based pilot program, Families Together. The goal of the program is to decrease the length of time children spend in foster care and strengthen opportunities to help children and their families thrive. LSSI's Chicago/Augustana office with three teams servicing approximately 120 families, is the current site of this pilot program. The goal is to observe, refine and expand to six teams and 240 families by pilot's end. Foster families in the Families Together Program receive additional specific training, including support and skill enhancement education, concentrated on parenting practices and behavior

management skills. This training, named KEEP, consists of 16 weekly 90-minutes sessions. Five sessions have been offered since November 2023.

If a case moves in an alternative direction than reunification, the foster parent is required to participate in the Adoption/Guardianship Readiness training. Case managers and licensing/resource workers assist families in enrolling in this class.

Additionally, if a training need is identified but a course is not available, LSSI case management or licensing/resource staff will work with the training department and/or the clinical unit to meet this need.

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

Foster parents are informed during the licensing process or at time of placement for unlicensed homes how they can contact staff to receive information and assistance. This includes the agency general phone number, assigned worker direct line, licensing/resource staff phone number, and the supervisor and program director phone numbers. Foster parents have access to LSSI staff 24/7. Each program site has an after-hours message that gives foster parents specific instructions on how to reach an LSSI on-call staff person during non-business hours. The on-call staff person is expected to call the foster parent back within the hour. Each site manages their on-call assignments, but most often a case manager is on-call with a supervisor as back-up. Licensing/resource staff are also available to assist with placement needs. Should it be necessary, the site program director or regional Associate Executive Director may also be contacted for support.

Foster parents are trained on steps to take should a youth in care experience a medical emergency. This includes calling 9-1-1 and alerting the assigned case manager as soon as possible. Foster parents are provided information regarding the need for Guardian consent should an emergency medical procedure be required. Additionally, for planned medical procedures requiring DCFS Guardian consent, foster parents receive training during PRIDE and again by agency staff. LSSI case managers and licensing/resource staff reinforce this during meetings.

LSSI provides clear instructions for action steps should a youth in care's behavior indicate they are a risk to themselves or others or are having a mental health crisis. The Illinois Crisis and Referral Entry Service (CARES) phone numbers (800-345-9049, 800-322-3722 or TTY: 773-523-4504) are provided to all foster parents, and again when a youth in care may need Screening, Assessment and Support Services (SASS). Foster parents are advised to contact the youth in care's assigned case manager, or the on-call worker if after hours, as soon as possible when this type of intervention is needed. Should a youth in care's behavior need immediate attention, foster parents are instructed to call 9-1-1.

LSSI uses a "crisis plan" with foster families who care for specialized youth in care. The crisis plan outlines action steps and provides options for foster parents to utilize when a disruption



may occur. Foster parents are offered placement stabilization services to diffuse disruptive behaviors. Staff are trained to recognize when additional support may be needed and instructed to review crisis plan steps with families in order to ensure the foster family and youth in care have a clear understanding of available resources.

The Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) and Families Together Pilot (F2G) programs use additional measures, including Parent Daily Reports (PDR). The TFC program uses the PDR system every work day, and F2G utilizes the PDR three times per week. This tool measures how a foster parent is managing youth in care behaviors, and specifically their stress level. Staff receive data related to any increase in concerns reported that may need immediate attention, in which case the program supervisor attempts to contact the foster parent that day. Other indicators are assessed to determine if additional support is needed.

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

LSSI has systems in place to ensure board reimbursement payments are processed and either mailed or directly deposited into bank accounts on the third Friday of each month following the end of the previous service month. LSSI staff encourage foster parents (related and unrelated) to use direct deposit as it is deemed more dependable. During 2024, the Associate Executive Director of Program Support and the Statewide Foster Parent Licensing and Recruitment Manager developed and facilitated training regarding timely submission of placement documentation, special service fees, etc. Imbedded in this training is the requirement to submit placement documentation to the LSSI billing department within 48 business hours. This training is mandatory for all case management staff including supervisors, program directors and others; licensing/resource staff; and any other staff who require knowledge of this process. To ensure no documentation is missed, specific email addresses for each billing site were introduced.

LSSI has a plan in place to resolve payment disputes, which is fluid and can be updated if needed. This plan is also imbedded in the training mentioned above. The licensing/resource staff are knowledgeable and assist whenever possible if there is a payment dispute or other type of financial question. The expectation is whenever a foster parent does not receive his or her board reimbursement payment, staff should immediately be notified, which triggers specific steps to ensure accuracy (i.e., address, ss#, etc.) and determine what may have caused the delay. The LSSI business department and billing partners work closely together to complete an addendum report, which identifies any payment issues and ensures the foster parent is made aware of the situation and it is rectified as soon as possible. LSSI previously generated one billing addendum per month, but now runs this report twice. This has improved the expediency in which any payment problems are resolved.

The specific process when there is a “payment” dispute includes the foster parent first contacting his or her case manager or licensing/resource representative who will then contact the accounts payable/business/billing person at the local office. If a satisfactory resolution is not

reached, the foster parent should contact the child welfare supervisor, program director or the foster parent licensing and recruitment manager to resolve the issue. The child welfare worker and/or licensing/resource worker must ensure supervisors are aware of any reimbursement concerns. Only if resolution is not reached will executive level staff intervene. Reimbursement concerns rarely reach this level due to the aforementioned processes. LSSI's agency grievance procedure document is provided to foster parents at time of placement with relative caregivers and at time of licensure for non-related licensed caregivers. This procedure clearly outlines the grievance process, which includes concerns regarding reimbursement, along with who to contact and when.

There is a two-tiered approach to reviewing foster parent monthly board reimbursement accuracy, including a review of monthly moves, new case entries and case closures. First, monthly reports are generated and shared with supervisors and program directors who are instructed to review for accuracy (i.e., is the child reflected in the current home, has the child been reunified, is the correct foster parent listed, etc.). Site supervisors and program directors review the reports and submit any inaccuracies to the billing department or supply placement paperwork if it is discovered it had previously not been processed. The second tier is a comprehensive report generated with information provided from feedback on the above-mentioned reports. Between the two, most issues are noted and rectified before board reimbursement payments are generated. Mandatory training also includes a tutorial on how to review each report.

Foster parents are educated regarding when board payments are made and understand they are made the month following placement. Annually, foster parents are given the dates of when board reimbursement payments are either directly deposited or sent via USPS. Current state issued rates, which includes the rate for licensed versus unlicensed homes, are also provided at this time. Board payments are made to foster parents in accordance with DCFS Rule 359 and LSSI's contracts.

See below for payments made in calendar year 2024, and those scheduled through December 2025.

For January 2024 services – February 16, 2024  
For February 2024 services – March 15, 2024  
For March 2024 services – April 19, 2024  
For April 2024 services – May 17, 2024  
For May 2024 services – June 21, 2024  
For June 2024 services – July 19, 2024  
For July 2024 services – August 16, 2024  
For August 2024 services – September 20, 2024  
For September 2024 – October 18, 2024  
For October 2024 services - November 15, 2024  
For November 2024 services – December 20, 2024  
For December 2024 services – January 17, 2025

For January 2025 services – February 21, 2025  
For February 2025 services – March 21, 2025  
For March 2025 services – April 18, 2025  
For April 2025 services – May 16, 2025  
For May 2025 services – June 20, 2025  
For June 2025 services – July 18, 2025  
For July 2025 services – August 15, 2025  
For August 2025 services – September 19, 2025  
For September 2025 services – October 17, 2025  
For October 2025 services – November 21, 2025  
For November 2025 services – December 19, 2025  
For December 2025 services – January 16, 2026

Foster parents are paid commensurate to the care needs of each youth in their home. This includes a higher rate for youth who have been assessed as requiring a higher level of care. Assessment occurs through the Clinical Intervention to Placement Preservation (CIPP) process and includes input from all team members, including the foster parent. Staff are trained on the CIPP process and how to ensure the billing and licensing/resource departments are immediately notified when a youth in care is approved for specialized care (medical, developmental or behavioral). This cooperation between teams ensures foster parents receive the additional funds needed for a youth in care with extraordinary needs without delay.

In addition to receiving a board payment schedule, which includes all dates of board payments listed above, foster parents are given information regarding rates of reimbursement based on licensure status and the level of care they provide. Program staff are familiar with the specialized foster care rate, which is determined by levels of care for children who have special needs. Licensing/resource workers provide information to families regarding the daily rate breakdown of their foster parent board reimbursement, if requested. In addition, staff are responsible for being knowledgeable about special service fee protocols to ensure foster parents are receiving appropriate reimbursement for the level of care and any special services they provide. Unlicensed relative or fictive kin caring for youth in care who have been assessed through the CIPP (Clinical Intervention to Placement Preservation) process as requiring a higher level of care may also receive a higher rate of reimbursement. This is considered a Difficulty of Care rate and requires the foster parent to actively participate in the licensing process to receive. Once an unlicensed relative or fictive kin caregiver completes the licensure process, he or she will receive the full specialized rate. Again, the collaboration between the case management and licensing/resource teams is imperative to ensure there are no delays in the increased board reimbursement to foster families. The statewide foster parent licensing and recruitment manager assists in reviewing the DCFS cycis CM 18 screen to determine if the approval is entered and shares this information immediately to the billing team.

The Families Together program delivers *Targeted Support Funding* and uses the above-mentioned calendar schedule as well. Families Together provides targeted support for youths and foster parents in the program by assessing needs in real time and responding to those

needs without stepping a youth up to specialized foster care. The case coordinator (child welfare worker) assesses the needs monthly in conversation with the foster parent during required home visits or via a phone call. Funding for the anticipated needs for the following month is included in that month's board payment. Requests for targeted support funding must be submitted to LSSI's billing department by the 20th of each month to ensure payment. Foster parents in the Families Together Program also receive additional money following completion of KEEP training.

Families Together targeted support funding is divided into the following categories:

- A. *Other Extraordinary Care Needs* (encopresis, enuresis, allergies, etc.), which can be used for diapers, rubber sheets, increased laundry needs, specific foods, sensory support, or other goods necessary to care for the youth's specific needs.
- B. Specific Activities for Child (tutoring lessons, sports fees, etc.).
- C. Extraordinary Transportation for transportation outside of usual daily life. Examples include frequent medical appointments, psychiatric care, visits to the child while in the hospital/psychiatric unit, therapy appointments, etc.
- D. Respite.

Foster parents and staff are trained regarding policies and procedures for reimbursement for bed holds and non-recurring expenses such as camp, music lessons, graduation costs, etc. The latter are paid out of the agency's allotted specific assistance funds. Certain criteria must be met for the foster parent to be eligible for reimbursement due to a bed hold (for example, the child must be in a medical or psychiatric hospital, the foster parent must remain involved with the child, and the child must return to the foster parent upon discharge). Reimbursement for respite services is allocated in specialized contracts, and a small amount of funding for respite is earmarked in downstate and Cook County performance-based contracts 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 programs with a large number of specialized youth in care, individualized respite training is provided to respite providers. Foster parents may identify their own respite provider for the agency to screen and train, or the agency will help identify a respite provider who has already completed these steps. Respite providers must deliver care that is consistent with the child's service and treatment plans. For situations not addressed in contracts/program plans, staff seek out community resources and facilitate collaboration among foster parents to address respite needs.

Foster parents not licensed by LSSI (i.e., licensed by DCFS, etc.), or unlicensed relatives or home of fictive kin caregivers, also receive reimbursement from LSSI based on the schedule listed above.

Caseworkers and licensing/resource staff provide detailed guidelines to foster parents regarding reimbursable expenses (i.e., supervising sibling visits, supervising parent/child visits, mileage for extraordinary transportation, etc.). Foster parents also receive specific instructions on how to

complete the Excel spreadsheet, what information is required, and the preferred date to submit reimbursement documentation monthly. Supervisors review foster parent expenses and submit them to Program Directors for final approval. Once approved, the program director submits the expense report to either LSSI's central billing department or the LSSI business department.

During 2024, DCFS enacted a new process for providing immediate assistance to foster families when a youth enters into the foster care system. The previous procedure, which entailed vouchers or reimbursement, is no longer employed. Child Protective Service workers now give foster families gift cards to use for the initial needs of youth in care. Programs may distribute donations such as food, equipment or clothing to foster parents before the first board payment arrives as well. Gift certificates to major stores are available to assist in emergency situations for youth in care who are not new to the foster care system or for other reasons such as growth spurts, damage to clothing, etc. LSSI has an Amazon business account that can be used for quick purchasing of necessities and expedited shipping. The LSSI Amazon business account also is used to purchase beds for youth in care. Children already placed in foster care whose cases transfer to LSSI from another private agency or DCFS foster home are not eligible for clothing or equipment vouchers; however, program directors may approve assistance for this type of need on a case-by-case basis. Program supervisors are responsible for ensuring staff members are knowledgeable on the procedures to access these options. LSSI recognizes that foster families may at times struggle financially due to unforeseen circumstances. In these instances, LSSI can offer additional aid in the form of groceries, gift cards, and assistance with transportation, rent and other expenses. LSSI's Advancement team is always seeking ways to raise additional funds for youth in care, which benefits foster parents as well.

**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.**

During Pride pre-service training and at time of placement in the case of relative/fictive kin, or soon thereafter, foster parents are educated regarding their right to be provided with LSSI's placement plan. LSSI staff are responsible for ensuring foster families understand their role in service plan development, and the need to provide comprehensive and factual information. LSSI staff also review the importance of foster parent participation in the initial integrated assessment process and during ongoing case planning occurring at home visits, CFTMs, educational staffings, etc.

Foster parents and children 12 years and older receive a clearly written summary of the foster parents' goals, the child's goals, and the child's summary of the service plan. This written plan is given to the foster parents within 45 days of a child's initial placement in the foster home, at regular six-month intervals when service plans are updated for ACR, and within five days of any subsequent re-placement. The child welfare specialist is responsible for providing a printed copy of the above-mentioned information or may send it electronically if approved encryption is used, which protects confidential information.

Foster parents are expected to participate in the assessment of the child's needs, the development of the child's goals, the creation of a service plan, and the evaluation of progress toward those goals. They often have a unique perspective regarding the child's strengths and needs, which is valuable in the plan's content. The service plan is comprehensive, addressing the child's functioning and developmental needs as well as those relating to the child's right to have a relationship with his or her own family and ongoing access to cultural heritage. Foster parents have the opportunity to provide input into their youth in care's visitation and communication plan with the youth's biological family. From initial training through ongoing discussions, foster parents are reminded about the importance of family connections, including ways in which they can support natural parents. LSSI licensing/resource workers reinforce this right and encourage foster families to be assertive if they feel they are not being heard or have not received required documents.

LSSI has clearly defined bootcamp training for new staff, which has a dedicated session regarding staff responsibility to keep foster parents informed of all meetings and ways in which to encourage participation. Case managers and licensing/resource staff are provided additional training on how to engage foster families with natural families and how to support loving and supportive relationships between the youth in care and their natural families.

Foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend all court hearings pertaining to the child in their care. During permanency hearings, which occur every six months, they may learn about goal changes for example. If a foster parent is unable to attend court, information regarding the outcome of the hearing, including goal changes, is shared by the child welfare specialist within 48 hours. This information is conveyed through a phone call, email or the foster parents' preferred method of communication. LSSI staff have various ways to keep foster parents informed of upcoming court hearings and other case related meetings including providing monthly calendar updates, text and/or call reminders the week of the meetings, etc.

Any information made available after placement about the child regarding his or her health, safety and emotional well-being must be shared with the foster parents. They have the right to request additional information be provided whenever it is essential to meet the child's needs. It is the foster care supervisors' responsibility to ensure child welfare specialists are aware the information is appropriate to share with foster parents. No information is to be shared without signed consent. Foster parents learn about confidentiality and sharing information during pre-service training and are reminded about it during ongoing licensing/resource monitoring visits and by their assigned case manager. During bootcamp training and in supervision, staff are instructed to ensure foster families receive necessary information as well as the CFS 600-4.

Foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend all CFTMs that occur every 90 days. Efforts are made to schedule meetings at times when the foster family and natural parents are available. The child welfare specialist invites foster parents, biological parents, and other child welfare team members. CFTMs are opportunities for foster parents to address changes they feel need to occur and offer input on the child's service and visitation plan. Foster parents are

encouraged to voice their concerns and opinions regarding the visitation plan as they are often involved in assisting with transportation and coordination of youths attending visits with their birth families. During CFTMs, the child welfare specialist also provides notification or updates of upcoming court hearings, ACRs, school meetings, and counseling appointments. Licensing/resource staff attempt to attend CFTMs as often as possible and will provide reminders to foster parents of dates and times.

Child welfare specialists are required to complete a case note documenting any information or discussion shared with the foster parents. These case notes become part of the child's case file. Most LSSI sites have a weekly mandatory in-office note day, designed to assist in the completion of notes in a timely manner. If for any reason a worker is unable to be present, supervisors encourage "protected time" during the same week to catch up on notes. Child welfare specialists also are required to provide documents specific to the safety, health and well-being of the child in the foster home. Additionally, child welfare specialists and supervisors schedule monthly supervision to discuss relevant issues regarding the case, including the foster home. Supervisors stay connected with the foster parents to ensure they are treated fairly and document discussions in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Case supervisors have developed a supervision tool to support child welfare specialists and ensure they follow requirements for monitoring youth in care and the foster placement.

**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 and 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.**

LSSI's licensing/resource team is trained regarding foster parent and child rights, and how to conduct a licensing investigation following a licensing complaint. In 2024, the Statewide Foster Parent Licensing and Recruitment Manager and licensing/resource supervisors developed an updated training for staff, which included a full review of DCFS 383 Rule and Procedure. Imbedded in this training was a module focused on the importance of educating foster parents on procedures that must occur once an allegation regarding abuse or neglect, or a violation of licensing standards is made. LSSI believes it is important that any individual or family engaged in the licensing process or already an established foster parent has the right to know that an investigation could occur if violations are observed or reported. To further ensure foster families are aware of their rights during a complaint or stand-alone investigation, an FAQ was developed and is part of the foster parent initial informational packet. Licensing/resource staff have begun distributing this document to established foster parents during monitoring or other required visits while also reviewing several 402 licensing standards and providing information regarding investigations. In many cases, if a foster parent has not been involved in a complaint or stand-

alone investigation, the conversation can be alarming; therefore, they are informed the information is shared for their knowledge and not due to any current concerns. Foster parents are encouraged to contact their assigned licensing/resource worker to ask any additional questions.

The licensing/resource team assumes the responsibility of explaining the investigations of complaints concerning the foster parent according to the timeframes as required by 89 Ill. Adm. Code 383. Licensing/resource and case work staff inform foster parents about DCFS Division of Child Protection (DCP) investigations and what to expect in terms of allegations made against them. If an allegation of abuse or neglect is made to the hotline, the assigned licensing/resource worker immediately contacts the DCFS DCP unit. A request is made to work concurrently and the DCP worker will take the lead in interviews.

When a licensing complaint is received, the licensing/resource specialist has two business days to begin the licensing investigation. The licensing/resource specialist will conduct an unannounced visit to the home to initiate the compliant investigation (if a concurrent investigation with DCP is not warranted). At that time, the CFS 596-29/Right to Have an Advocate is shared with the foster parent. If an advocate is requested, that requested advocate has four hours to arrive at the home. LSSI licensing/resource staff honor the request of any foster parent to request an advocate. The resource specialist must also interview other persons relevant to the investigation, including case work staff, and document these interviews. If extenuating circumstances prevent the resource worker from completing the complaint investigation and making a final finding within 30 days, the foster parent(s) will be informed and a 30-day extension requested and approved by the resource supervisor. The usual cause of complaint investigations not being finalized in 30 days is if the complaint is concurrent with child protective services. If the complaint investigation is concurrent with a DCP investigation, the final licensing compliant decision will not be made until the DCP investigation has been finalized. Foster parents are made aware of this by their assigned licensing/resource worker. Once the final recommendation regarding the investigation is submitted to the licensing/resource supervisor, the supervisor has seven business days to approve or request corrections. The DCFS Agencies and Institutions licensing staff person assigned to monitor LSSI must also approve the licensing complaint investigation. Within five calendar days of the investigation's approval, the foster parent must be informed in writing of the outcome of the investigation and corrective action plan, if applicable. If violations are substantiated, the written notice includes information on how to request a supervisory review. The foster parent must request the supervisory review within 10 calendar days, and it must be held within 14 calendar days of the request. The results of the supervisory review must be given to the foster parent in writing and include information on how to request an informal review. The informal review is held with the DCFS Regional Licensing Administrator and can determine: 1) the corrective action has or has not been completed; 2) initial or further corrective action should be offered; or 3) enforcement action is needed. If enforcement action is taken, such as revocation or refusal to renew the license, the foster parent has a right to request an administrative hearing. The foster parent would then receive information on the administrative hearing process. All above information is included in the updated 383 training but if there are questions, licensing/resource



workers or supervisors consult with the statewide manager. If needed, the statewide manager will consult with the A & I supervisor or with the DCFS Licensing Enforcement Unit Manager. Due to the complexities of DCP and licensing investigations, LSSI believes keeping foster parents informed is imperative.

During a compliant investigation, if a home is placed on hold, the assigned licensing/resource worker completes the CFS 2011/Placement Hold Request and the Statewide Foster Parent Licensing and Recruitment Manager reviews and authorizes. The CFS 2011 is submitted to the DCFS Placement Clearance Desk, who forward to the DCFS Licensing Enforcement Unit Manager for review and data entry. The licensing/resource worker is likewise responsible for requesting the hold be removed once appropriate.

If at any time during the licensing complaint investigation a licensing standard is found to be in violation that poses imminent danger to the child, the child will be removed from the home by the case worker. The foster parent will be provided with a CFS 151 - Notice of Decision as well as the IL DCFS service appeal brochure.

Licensing training for child welfare staff begins during new employee bootcamp. Also, seasoned staff have been trained on the rights and responsibilities of foster parents at team meetings. It is the responsibility of the resource supervisors to make sure the licensing policies and procedures are followed. In addition, LSSI's DCFS licensing representative is required to read all investigations and provide detailed feedback to help ensure consistency with this process across the state. Licensing/resource staff are instructed to follow up with DCFS A & I if feedback and required signatures are not received according to stated required timeframes.

**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 has instituted additional measures, including updated training, on how to provide clear and accurate information to potential foster parents when seeking placement for a youth in care. New staff are instructed on what information should be provided and how to use the CFS 600-4/*Sharing Information with the Caregiver* in compliance with The Children and Family Services Act. Additionally, LSSI will assign new staff to shadow seasoned staff for learning purposes. Seasoned staff have been instructed on the use of the CFS 600-4 during team meetings and in individual supervision. This document clearly outlines that information is to be given within 10 days of placement and should include case information and history, health and medical information, educational information and history, placement history, and behavioral/social Information. Information not to be disclosed, such as previous placement address, etc., is also outlined. The foster parent and the child welfare specialist should sign the form to ensure information was shared appropriately. Also, this form should be included in the case file and the discussion should be documented in SACWIS. Supervisors then review this information in SACWIS and recommend changes when needed.

LSSI placement staff and licensing/resource staff ensure that prior to placement of a youth in a home, foster parents are provided with pertinent information to determine best fit. This includes the child's behaviors, positive and adverse; health; education; concrete supports; visitation schedule; and more.

Child welfare specialists are required to document any discussions with the foster parent in SACWIS within 48 hours. These case notes become part of the child's case file. Supervisors review these notes monthly to confirm proper documentation is completed in a timely manner and foster parents receive the information they need. If it is found that a foster parent did not receive information regarding the youth in their care, supervisors are required to hold the child welfare specialist accountable in providing that information in a timely manner. This may require additional training or more frequent supervision. Also, child welfare specialists and supervisors are required to discuss any issues in the foster home and document them in SACWIS monthly. Supervisors are required to stay connected with foster parents to ensure they are being treated with dignity and respect and as a member of the child welfare team. LSSI has designated days for child welfare staff to use "protected time" in order to properly complete required case note documentation.

At any time, foster parents have the right to request additional information about a child in their care. To protect the birth parents' rights and confidentiality, the requested information will be shared only if it is essential to the safety, permanency and well-being of the child. Both foster parents and staff receive training on confidentiality and what information is appropriate to share. Moreover, these topics are included in the new employee training/bootcamp offered by the foster parent and staff development specialists. Ultimately, the foster care supervisor is responsible for making sure that the child welfare specialists are aware of what information is suitable to share with foster parents.

Foster parents, biological parents and members of the child welfare team meet quarterly to discuss the child's progress and permanency goal. Foster parent engagement in these CFTMs is imperative and allows for all team members, including foster parents, to discuss the well-being of the youth in care. During these meetings, child welfare specialists are required to inform the foster parents about upcoming court hearings, ACRs, school meetings, and any other meetings that concern the child in their care. Foster parents are encouraged to attend these meetings as a means to provide input and be kept informed of case updates. If the foster parent is unable to attend, the child welfare specialist will discuss any pertinent information concerning the child and provide feedback to the foster parent during the next home visit or via a phone conversation. LSSI child welfare supervisors are responsible for ensuring CFTMs occur quarterly. Further, quarterly case reviews are completed on ten percent of the agency's cases, in which facilitation of CFTMs is monitored for compliance and program directors are informed of the results.

Foster parents are emboldened to be a part of the therapeutic process for any youth in care placed in their home. Providing information on child behaviors, patterns, etc. helps therapists develop and implement proper treatment plans. Foster parents are encouraged to ask questions

about the therapeutic process but to understand and give grace when all information cannot be shared due to confidentiality restraints.

**8) The right to be given information concerning a child from the Department as required under Section 5 of the Children and Family Services Act and from a child welfare agency as required under Section 7.4 (c-5) of the Child Care Act of 1969.**

LSSI ensures new and seasoned child welfare specialists and supervisors follow the requirements for providing information, including placement in foster home or an adoption-only home, according to the Child and Family Services Act and Child Care Act. New staff are trained during onboarding/bootcamp regarding the use of the CFS 600-4/*Sharing Information with the Caregiver*. At the time of placement, the child welfare specialist will complete a CFS 600-4 form, discuss the information with the foster parent, and sign the form together. This is compliant with HIPAA regulations and DCFS policy Section 340.40. Child welfare staff are instructed to review DCFS Rule and Procedure 301.120 for further clarification on information sharing. The child welfare supervisor is responsible for ensuring child welfare staff are aware of the Rules and Procedures relevant to sharing information. Foster parents are given a packet (folder or accordion folder) that includes detailed medical information (immunization history, hospitalizations, etc.), educational history (grade, IEP, etc.), placement history (reason for moves), a copy of the youth's portion of the service plan and visitation agreements, and any known social or behavioral information (criminal background, destructive behavior, victim, or perpetrator of sexual abuse, etc.) along with other pertinent information. If documentation is not available regarding all information above, the child welfare specialist may provide a written document containing as much information as possible until records are received.

Foster parents are integral in the development of the service plan and are instructed on procedures regarding meeting with an Integrated Assessment Specialist, providing information to establish service needs and interventions, and input regarding visitation with parents, siblings and extended family when appropriate. The child welfare specialist shares as much social history with the foster family without violating the biological family's right to confidentiality. Additionally, during CFTMs, child welfare workers and supervisors are able to offer additional information, discuss important changes, and address new or missed information from previous meetings.

In the case of an emergency placement, the "current known" information is verbally provided to the foster parent but all pertinent information must be shared with the foster parent within 10 business days. The CFS 600-4 form is reviewed and signed during an emergency placement as well and placed in the youth in care's record. The assigned supervisor also reviews the CFS 600-4 to determine what additional information should be relayed to the foster parent.

LSSI's policy is to provide additional information learned to foster parents as quickly as possible. Foster parents are asked to do the same. The child welfare specialist and foster parent must work together to communicate relevant information and services in which the youth is involved.

LSSI takes a firm stance on staff knowledge regarding the importance of maintaining confidentiality. They are trained on appropriate information sharing as are foster parents. Information regarding natural parents, including what is necessary to provide care and support to the youth in care, is shared on a limited basis.

LSSI requires licensed foster parents to sign an acknowledgment of receipt of the Child Care Act once the ACT is provided and reviewed. This acknowledgment becomes part of the foster parent file.

**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.**

LSSI is committed to providing meaningful and impactful training for new and seasoned staff to enhance knowledge of the importance of foster parent input and recognition. During 2024, LSSI leadership developed an updated training curriculum for new staff. Supervisors were tasked with identifying seasoned staff who they believed would also benefit from the training. This training “plan” includes frequent knowledge testing for the first 18 months of employment. LSSI believes this approach to training and development improves staff competencies and results in better relationships with foster families. A portion of the training curriculum serves as a refresher or companion to information learned during Foundation and Fundamental training about the importance of foster parent involvement in case and educational planning, and their right to not only be asked for information but also for that information to be given full consideration and used in all aspects of case planning. New child welfare specialists are paired with seasoned child welfare staff to learn how to engage families and to utilize information provided by foster families to plan for needed services and to advocate for youth in care. This practice is beneficial, especially after participating in the above-mentioned training/bootcamp.

During initial placement and the licensing process, foster families are informed of their role as a member of the child welfare team in their “welcome” packets. They receive coaching during Pride pre-service training, as well. This information is reiterated throughout the life of the case with foster families.

LSSI child welfare staff, including licensing/resource workers, encourage foster parents to attend and actively participate in all meetings regarding any youth in care in their home, including quarterly CFTMs, routine educational meetings, IEP and/or 504 educational meetings, medical appointments, ACR/case reviews, and court hearings. Additionally, if a youth in care

has extraordinary medical diagnoses, significant developmental delays or displays behaviors that require intense intervention, foster parents are encouraged and expected to actively participate in any staffing/meeting regarding the level of care needed. Whenever possible, meetings are scheduled at a time convenient for the foster parent or conducive to their ability to attend. Alternative means of participation, including phone, virtual, etc., are offered to increase foster parent participation.

Foster parents receive written notice of scheduled ACRs from DCFS. The assigned child welfare specialist is responsible for ensuring the department has accurate information needed to send the notice (CRMR). Foster parents are encouraged to participate fully and instructed that they will not be privy to information specific to the natural parents. If a foster parent is not able to attend an ACR, the child welfare specialist is responsible for gathering information to present during the review and providing feedback to the foster parent following the completion of the review. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, ACRs have been held virtually, which allows foster parents who otherwise might not have been available to attend to participate.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend all court hearings pertaining to the youth in their home. They are cautioned that the Judge will not allow them to be present during information sharing or testimony given by the natural parents. The child welfare specialist is responsible for communicating to the foster parent the date, time and location of court proceedings as well as the GAL and presiding Judge. Court orders are given to foster families with natural parent information redacted for confidentiality. Information obtained from foster parents during required monthly home visits and other meetings (medical, educational, therapeutic, etc.) is incorporated in court reports written by child welfare staff and authorized by the child welfare supervisor. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring child welfare staff routinely gather information from foster parents to be used for service referrals and added to required court reports. If foster parents are not able to attend a scheduled court hearing, they are encouraged to meet with and provide information to the GAL to be presented on their behalf. Many types of court hearings continue to be facilitated via Zoom, which assists foster parents who otherwise may not have been able to attend. Child welfare staff can also assist with transportation if a foster parent needs a ride to attend a court hearing.

Foster parents are educated regarding their role as a youth in care's surrogate parent for educational purposes. LSSI understands how important it is that a youth in care's educational needs are met and that it is not possible without information provided by the foster parent. Child welfare specialists, including LSSI Educational Liaisons, support foster parents in their role by encouraging participation in all school meetings, advocating for youth in care with the foster parent, and providing support for any recommended services. Child welfare specialists are responsible for contacting schools and visiting two times per year. Child welfare supervisors are required to ensure staff contact schools to obtain information regarding youth in care and to support the foster parent if needed.

LSSI child welfare staff provided examples of how they ensure foster parents are included as members of the child welfare team.

- Encouraging participation in meetings.
- Listening to foster parent concerns and addressing them as quickly as possible. This includes not rushing through home visits, returning phone calls promptly, and following through on agreements made.
- Recognition that foster parents usually have the most pertinent information regarding the youth in their care and acknowledging the importance of this information.
- Providing learning opportunities regarding Educational Advocacy.
- Providing a monthly calendar of scheduled meetings, visits, etc. Additional measures include texting and/or calling as reminders of visits and other meetings.
- Considering a foster parents schedule when preparing visitation plans.
- Arriving on time for scheduled meetings or giving advanced notice of any change in scheduled appointments.
- Asking and answering questions; providing additional information and feedback.
- Using information received during home visits, CFTMs, etc. to request services for the youth in care.
- Informing foster parents of hearing results, the same day or the next business day, if they were unable to attend.
- Encouraging foster parents to research and offer suggestions for services.
- Allowing foster parents to suggest service providers.
- Providing information (name, phone number, email) for all members of the professional child welfare team (therapist, physicians, teachers, supervisors, etc.); encouraging the foster parent to reach out to any member.

LSSI places a strong emphasis on partnering with foster parents, recognizing their firsthand insight into the well-being of the youth in their care. This collaborative approach, especially in case planning and addressing issues or changes, is key so that foster parents' valuable perspectives are considered when making decisions.

**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 that 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 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.**

LSSI abides by the DCFS policy regarding information sharing and assists foster parents in knowing their right to information. Child welfare staff are trained during Foundation and Fundamental modules, as well as during LSSI's updated and improved onboarding/bootcamp training, regarding information to be given to foster families. This is further reinforced during group and one-on-one supervision sessions.

Whether an initial or a subsequent foster home placement is being sought, child welfare staff including case managers and licensing/resource staff work together to identify a placement

resource that will best meet the needs of the youth in care. During this process, the child welfare specialist and licensing/resource specialist will advise the foster parents of all relevant information regarding the child consistent with the rules of confidentiality. The DCFS CFS 600-4/Sharing Information with the Caregiver policy is reviewed and becomes part of the youth's record. LSSI child welfare staff also provide information that is pertinent to the case and the youth's well-being. Information is shared immediately, and if additional information is received at a later date, it is shared as soon as possible. The LSSI child welfare specialist will communicate additional information gained verbally over the phone or in person during the next home visit. It is also shared with other members of the child welfare team. If needed, a verbal summary is provided within 10 days of placement of the youth in care in a foster home or when the information was received. Foster parents are instructed to maintain documentation and other information in a confidential manner and be prepared to review during home visits.

LSSI emphasizes timely communication and information sharing, keeping foster parents in the loop as new details arise. The practice of keeping and updating electronic records (SACWIS) and consulting supervisors for guidance on what should be shared has reinforced LSSI's commitment to transparency and collaboration within the child welfare team. This method of information sharing assists foster parents in decision making to better care for youth in their care.

Information shared includes health, educational, behavioral concerns, pertinent family history needed to care for the youth, visitation plan, exposure to domestic violence, placement history and reason for moves, and any other details that will help the foster parent care for the youth. Foster parents are educated and encouraged to ask questions in order to make an informed decision regarding their ability to care for the youth in their care. They are not given specifics pertaining to biological/natural parents, including any treatment requirements, service plan tasks, etc., but can be given information that could impact the care of the youth in their care. Child welfare staff are trained on the importance of providing service plan information to foster parents.

At the time a child is placed in a foster home, the child welfare specialist will answer any follow-up questions posed by the foster parents to the best of his or her ability. The child welfare specialist will also discuss any current services and provide the schedule for these services to the foster parents. This information may be shared verbally, but then is provided in writing within 10 business days of placement. The child welfare staff makes all attempts to ensure there is no disruption to current services. Foster parents are encouraged to consider whether they can maintain the current service schedule, and if not, an alternative placement may be sought.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend CFTMs and ACRs to share information to the child welfare team and biological parents. As key members of the child and family team, foster parents have significant data on the health and well-being of the child in their care as well as the most up-to-date details on the child's developmental, educational, emotional, mental health, and medical needs.

When the permanency plan for a youth changes, foster parents are immediately informed. If reunification is no longer the goal, LSSI will include the subsidy/adoption worker in home visits to answer any questions the foster parents may have. The 1800-C series is used to assist foster families.

LSSI encourages foster families to openly communicate with biological parents and build a relationship geared towards meeting the needs of the youth. Open communication allows both families to be on the same page regarding the youth's needs and assists when a youth is transitioned home. Providing notebooks or other tools for sharing information is a practical way to foster that connection, especially when face-to-face meetings might not be possible or appropriate. The child welfare specialist also assists in facilitating open communication and introductions.

**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.**

If a decision to move a youth is made, the child welfare specialist informs the foster parents within 48 hours of the decision. Foster parents are given a 14-day notice of any placement change plan unless safety concerns necessitate immediate removal from the home. The child welfare specialist provides the foster parents with a completed CFS 151-B–Notice of Change of Placement form in person and the critical decision, which is authorized by the child welfare supervisor, is noted in SACWIS. The CFS 151-B also informs the foster parents of their right to appeal the decision. To request a DCFS Clinical Placement Review, the foster parents must immediately call 866-225-1431 (312-814-4117 if hearing impaired) or fax their request for an appeal of the decision to 800-733-3308 within three business days of receipt of the notice to change placement. Prior notice is waived if the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm or a judge has issued a court order to move the youth. If a foster parent disagrees with the final Clinical Placement Review decision, they are informed of their right to request a *fair hearing* with a DCFS Administrative Hearing Unit.

Additionally, foster parents are given a copy of the Service Appeal Brochure (CFS 1050-32), which is consistent with the appeal information in the CFS 151 and CFS 151-B, at time of placement or during the licensing process. The child welfare specialist, supervisor or licensing/resource worker reviews the brochure and explains the different options available to the foster parents.

When foster parents give notice to have a child removed from their home, attempts to stabilize the placement are made. If those attempts fail, the foster parents are asked to provide a 14-day notice in order for a thorough and thoughtful search for a new foster family to be made. If the removal of the child is going to be a difficult transition for the foster parents or youth in care, a member of LSSI's clinical team is available to offer brief therapeutic intervention for the foster parents and their immediate family.



**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 hearing, 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.**

LSSI requires the child welfare specialist to provide in writing and/or to verbally notify foster parents of upcoming court hearings at least two weeks prior to the scheduled court date. LSSI staff are trained during onboarding/bootcamp training of the requirements for information sharing and communication with foster families, including information pertaining to court hearings.

Child welfare specialists provide the date, time, name of the judge, hearing purpose, court docket number, and GAL information to foster parents. This is to be documented in a case note and retained in the case record. The child welfare specialist will remind the foster parents of their right to attend court proceedings and of their right to be heard. If the foster parents are unable to attend, the child welfare specialist should provide the foster parents all information pertinent to the child, including any decisions made regarding the court set goal. Following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, certain types of court hearings have continued to be held virtually. Child welfare specialists are responsible for ensuring foster parents are aware of any virtual attendance instructions.

As part of their ongoing in-service training, foster parents are informed of their right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek action from the court for the youth in care in their home under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987. During the child's placement, the child welfare specialist educates the foster parents on the purpose of Shelter Care, Adjudication, Dispositional, and Permanency hearings. Additionally, LSSI encourages and supports foster parents in seeking additional training regarding court procedures. An FAQ has been developed and is provided to foster parents to further their understanding of juvenile court proceedings. Licensing/resource staff are also trained to be knowledgeable about juvenile court proceedings and foster parent rights, thereby allowing them to be another source of information and support.

**13) The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents 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 parents' home.**

Unfortunately, youth in care who have been reunified with their biological or adoptive family may need to return to foster care for a long or abbreviated period of time. LSSI staff are trained on ways in which to search for previous foster families, and to determine if it is in the youth's best interest to return to their previous foster family. Staff are taught this during ongoing training and during supervision with supervisors.

Foster parents who previously had a youth in care in their home are given priority consideration as a placement option if a child who was formerly placed with them re-enters foster care. Placements are tracked in SACWIS and previous placement information is accessed by staff along with information on the reason for the move (reunification, disruption, etc.). This priority consideration is given unless such replacement is not considered consistent with the best interest of the child in question or that of other children in the foster home. Additionally, the foster home must have available capacity for the child to re-enter. Waivers are considered if placement is deemed in the youth's best interest. LSSI staff review available documentation and, if possible, talk to the assigned worker who was assigned to the youth at the time of reunification.

LSSI uses a thoughtful approach when deciding on foster placement for youth who have returned to care. The organization's priority is to provide the youth with the most stable and supportive environment while considering the child's best interest holistically. LSSI child welfare staff are trained to evaluate best interest factors like previous bonds with the foster family, safety, emotional and psychological development, stability in school or daycare, cultural support, and the ability to place siblings together. Additionally, child welfare staff assess whether the previous foster parents are willing and able to support necessary services and maintain a positive relationship with the child's biological family, including visitation. This approach aims to ensure that the youth's physical, emotional and developmental needs are met in a stable, nurturing environment while also considering the foster parents/family and other youths in the home.

Additionally, foster parents are trained to understand their right to be an option for any youth in care previously placed in their home. Foster parents are encouraged to maintain ties to any youth in care who has been reunified, which increases the likelihood of preserving positive attachments and in turn benefits the youth, biological family and the foster family.

**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 a copy of the agency's written Staff/Foster Parent Grievance Procedure and the IL DCFS appeal procedures. Acknowledgement of receipt of this information is included in the foster home file. Foster parents also receive training on the Foster Parent Law, which includes instructions on both the IL DCFS and LSSI appeals processes. LSSI licensing/resource workers provide the information to families during the licensing process and as part of the "welcome" packet. This information is shared with unlicensed relatives or fictive kin at time of placement or within 10 business days of placement.

LSSI staff also receive training regarding foster parent Rights and Responsibilities, the LSSI Staff/Foster Parent Grievance Procedure, and how to comply with both. When foster parents indicate a desire to file a grievance, the child welfare specialist refers them to the Staff/Foster Parent Grievance Procedure and alerts the immediate foster care supervisor. If foster parents

wish to grieve a service decision or change, the child welfare specialist refers them to the DCFS Service Appeals Process. Foster parents will be provided this information and a copy of the service appeals pamphlet/brochure at a formal meeting. LSSI staff respect the rights of foster parents to have a voice in decision making and their right to dispute decisions.

Foster parents are not treated disrespectfully, harassed, or retaliated against by any party when exercising their right to appeal. Any such action by an LSSI staff member will result in disciplinary action, which may include employment termination. Any perceived retaliation or harassment should be reported immediately to LSSI management and the DCFS Advocacy office at 1-800-232-3798. The LSSI Staff/Foster Parent Interaction and Grievance Procedure (provided in supplemental documents) clearly outlines the steps and contacts foster parents should make if they believe any of their rights have been violated.

**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 foster parents are well informed of their rights by giving them information about the Foster Parent Hotline and by making available the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) brochure by displaying it in a public area at each foster care site. LSSI wants foster parents to be aware of all resources available to them so the organization gives them the Foster Parent Handbook, which has a plethora of meaningful information. LSSI cooperates fully when a call or email is received from the OIG and/or the Advocacy office to provide additional information and addresses any concerns immediately. The Foster Parent Hotline number is 1-800-722-9124.

The OIG office was created to reform and strengthen the child welfare system. Its mandate is to investigate misconduct, misfeasance, malfeasance, and violations of rules, procedures or laws by Department of Children and Family Services employees, foster parents, service providers, and contractors with the department (See 20 ILCS 505/35.5, 35.6, and 35.7). The DCFS OIG can be reached at 1-312-433-3000 or 1-800-722-9124.

DCFS has established a statewide toll-free Foster Parent Helpline that provides advice and referral services. It is given to the foster parents at the conclusion of pre-service training, upon licensure with LSSI, or at time of placement in an unlicensed relative or fictive kin home. The Helpline number is 1-866-368-5204.

LSSI does not tolerate any misconduct by employees, service providers or contractors. LSSI offers ongoing training about the Foster Parent Helpline and OIG investigations. When appropriate, child welfare specialists and supervisors will provide support and information to foster parents in the event of reports of misconduct.

**Foster Parents' Responsibilities**

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

Foster parents are required to participate in pre-service and ongoing training. The PRIDE Re-design pre-service training has a dedicated session on the important topic of confidentiality. Child welfare/licensing staff also review confidentiality during the licensing process and throughout foster families' involvement with LSSI.

Foster parents play a vital role in the well-being of children placed in their care. They are instructed to maintain thorough records of the child's physical and medical reports, which include dental, vision and hearing records as well as educational documentation. Training by the licensing/resource worker and child welfare specialist reinforce foster parents' understanding of when to schedule necessary appointments such as well-child visits and counseling sessions, and the requirement to keep these records readily available for review during home visits. The Foster Parent Handbook, which is provided to all foster parents, also contains useful information.

Foster parents are prepared for semiannual case reviews (ACR) and court hearings where they are expected to provide necessary documentation. Their role as part of the professional team is emphasized, along with the importance of addressing any concerns promptly. Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to track and report milestones and growth areas for the youth in their care, contributing valuable insights into the child's development and well-being.

Open communication is crucial for the stabilization of foster care placements. Foster parents are encouraged to discuss the youth in their care during home visits, CFTMs, ACRs, educational meetings, and meetings with the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) or Court Appointed Specialist (CASA) worker. These discussions help to ensure that all aspects of the child's care and development are being addressed and added to the case record.

Foster parents are instructed to maintain copies of youth medical, dental, educational, etc., information and be prepared to share them with the assigned child welfare specialist. This instruction comes via pre-service training and at case-opening or placement in a home. Additionally, licensed foster parents receive reminders of the importance to maintain documentation during required monitoring visits with their licensing/resource worker.

**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.**

There is an emphasis on confidentiality during the pre-service training and it is reviewed during the initial CFTM for unlicensed relative and fictive kin caregivers so foster parents understand the sensitivity of the information they oversee. Confidentiality is also reinforced when youth in care are placed with an unlicensed relative or fictive caregiver through review of the CFS 458 Pre-placement Agreement and the Caregiver's' Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, which

includes information regarding the laws and regulations foster parents are responsible for knowing. Additionally, child welfare specialists and resource staff revisit this topic during regular visits, ensuring foster families respect the confidentiality of the youth in their care as well as their biological families. Encouraging foster parents to ask questions about what information they can share fosters a culture of caution and respect for the privacy of the youth and their families. When foster parents grasp the significance of confidentiality, they are more likely to comply with these expectations, creating safer or more secure environments for the youth in their care.

Foster parents are encouraged to engage in ongoing learning opportunities related to caring for youth in their care, with a focus on their responsibility to maintain case confidentiality. Specific guidelines on what information can be shared are documented in case notes and entered into the SACWIS system by the child welfare staff, becoming part of the permanent record. LSSI also mandates that staff participate in annual training that covers confidentiality, including the proper handling of proprietary information shared with and by foster parents. Furthermore, confidentiality training is integrated into LSSI's onboarding and bootcamp for new staff, reinforcing its importance from the start. This comprehensive approach promises that both foster parents and staff are well equipped to safeguard sensitive information. Periodically, or when needed, refresher training regarding confidentiality occurs during team or site meetings.

When foster parents have concerns regarding confidentiality or questions about what is considered confidential, they are encouraged to seek out the appropriate answers so they maintain compliance. LSSI staff are available at any time to answer these questions as well as provide the support and guidance needed to uphold confidentiality and adherence to the necessary guidelines, laws and regulations for the protection of the youth in their care.

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

LSSI child welfare staff have a responsibility to help strengthen the relationship between foster parents and the youth in their care. LSSI believes that by fostering a stronger attachment, foster parents become more invested in advocating for the youth's needs. During pre-service training and in ongoing meetings, foster parents learn the importance of advocating for the youth in their care and their responsibility to do so. The foster parents' role in advocating across all areas, including medical, social/emotional well-being, education, and development is emphasized as is requesting and attending IEP and 504 meetings (per ISBE, foster parents are the educational rights holders unless a parent retains those rights through a court order). Foster parents may sign consents for educational evaluations and for educational services to be implemented.

Foster parents are encouraged to participate in all relevant meetings such as case staffings, ACRs, placement reviews, CFTMs, and court hearings to provide open and accurate information about the youth in their care. As trusted advocates, foster parents have valuable insights into the youth's service needs and goals, which helps shape the youth's life.

LSSI child welfare staff, licensing/resource workers, and educational liaisons are available to assist foster parents in their advocacy efforts and in determining who to contact for specific

services. LSSI also promotes supportive relationships by encouraging seasoned foster parents to mentor newer ones, further enhancing the advocacy efforts for the youth in their care.

Foster parents are encouraged to collaborate closely with all professionals involved in the care of the youth placed in their homes. They learn the importance and responsibility of advocating for youth in care throughout the life of the case and become more familiar with the process of advocating by developing positive and collaborative relationships with other members of the professional team. These professionals may include the GAL, other court personnel, doctors, nurses, therapists, teachers, and as mentioned above, mentors. Foster parents may request a CASA for additional support in advocating for a youth in their care. LSSI staff are responsible for providing foster parents with information regarding the CASA program, including its website, to determine if the county or court jurisdiction has a CASA program. This collaborative approach ensures that all aspects of the youth's care are addressed comprehensively.

Licensed foster parents are required to receive training on educational advocacy and are encouraged to do so within their first year of licensure. Unlicensed relative foster parents and fictive kin caregivers are also encouraged to participate in the training. Reminders are given during monthly and during biannual home visits with assigned resource staff. This training provides information that allows foster parents to fully participate in and advocate for the child's educational development, progress, etc. DCFS also offers supplemental educational advocacy refresher training that foster parents are encouraged to consider. Child welfare specialists continue to inform foster parents of the benefits of advocating for the educational rights of children through discussions during home visits, and the licensing/resource specialist will discuss the benefits of advocating throughout the licensing process and during biannual monitoring visits. LSSI child welfare staff are responsible for contacting teachers on a quarterly basis, and report doing so via phone calls and emails, and during in-person visits two times per year. LSSI staff encourage teachers to listen to concerns raised by foster parents. LSSI's educational liaisons are also available to assist foster parents in requesting educational services and learning their rights as surrogate parents for educational purposes. Not all LSSI foster care and adoption sites have educational liaisons, but virtual or in-person meetings can occur with the educational liaisons from other sites if needed.

During pre-service training, foster parents learn about working with the court system and the appeal process. Additionally, LSSI child welfare specialists and licensing/resource staff provide training and ongoing updates regarding expectations for court, how and when to provide information, and to whom concerns and positive reports should be provided in order for the judge and court personnel to review in advance of court hearings. Programs serving special needs populations have additional training requirements for foster parents caring for specialized children. Since these children tend to have complex needs and receive services from multiple providers, the training for these foster parents emphasizes advocacy skills.

It is the child welfare specialist's responsibility to follow up with foster parents regarding their concerns or requests. If foster parents feel the child welfare specialist has not taken proper action regarding their request, they are encouraged to contact the child welfare specialist,

supervisor, program director, or associate executive director as outlined in the LSSI Staff/Foster Parent Grievance policy. If a resolution cannot be reached, the foster parents are encouraged to follow the Service Appeal Process which is outlined in a brochure given to the foster parents at the time a child is placed in their home. The Service Appeal process and brochure are provided to foster parents at time of licensure, or during the first CFTM when a youth is placed in an unlicensed relative or fictive kin home.

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

Foster parents receive training on the importance of treating youth in their care, as well as their families, with dignity and respect from the beginning of their fostering journey. This is discussed during the initial inquiry and mutual assessment for licensure, pre-service training, and throughout the licensing process. When they engage in the licensing process, unlicensed relative and fictive kin caregivers also receive education regarding this from their child welfare specialist and licensing/resource specialist. Foster parents are encouraged to treat youth in care equally as they do their own children, using positive reinforcement to build on the youth's strengths, and they sign an acknowledgment prohibiting corporal punishment (CFS 452-3). Unlicensed relative and fictive caregivers are instructed on this pre-placement with an acknowledgment (CFS 458) signed and are advised against making negative comments about the youth, the youth's family or the case in front of the youth in their care. They are also encouraged to communicate with the youth's biological family about important matters. The well-being of the youth and support for their family are key priorities.

Child welfare and licensing/resource specialists are trained in their vital role of monitoring how foster parents and their families treat youth in their care. Child welfare specialists are required to speak privately with the children during home visits. They receive initial training on how to meet and talk to youth in care along with ongoing support through supervision. This time to speak alone gives the youth a safe space to voice any concerns he or she might have. The child welfare specialist can then address these issues directly with the foster parents or discuss them with the licensing/resource worker and supervisor. Foster parents must provide a private space for these conversations. A child welfare specialist may also meet with the youth outside if the living area is not conducive to private conversations. Licensing/resource workers assess the family's ability to support the permanency goal during pre-licensure activities, including assessments, and during biannual monitoring visits. Foster families are urged to be involved in court hearings, case reviews and team meetings to stay engaged in the child's welfare.

All members of the child welfare team encourage foster parents to connect and collaborate with the birth families of the youth in their care. While not mandatory, this collaboration illustrates respect and consideration for the youth and their family, and often helps meet the child's needs more effectively. When a child returns to their biological parents, it is recommended that foster parents stay involved to facilitate a smooth transition. In some cases, they may even maintain contact and offer ongoing support as the families reunify.

LSSI recognizes that, while it is ideal for foster and biological families to maintain a positive relationship, it may not always be feasible or beneficial for all parties involved. In these instances, child welfare specialists, supervisors and licensing/resource staff work diligently to mediate and foster common ground between the families. When mediation fails, LSSI staff ensure that rules of etiquette and respect are upheld during meetings. They stress the importance of not discussing case dynamics in front of youth, aiming to create a respectful and supportive environment for all parties.

**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.**

In order to be successful, foster parents must recognize that they may need support to uphold their responsibility to the youth in their care. LSSI has a thorough approach to assure a good fit for both the youth and the family providing care for the child, offering child welfare specialists and licensing/resource specialists numerous resources such as the Sharing Information with the Caregiver form (CFS 600-4), Child/Caregiver Matching Tool (CFS 2017) and pre-placement questionnaires. When youth in care are placed with relatives or fictive kin, the process is different due to not having an opportunity to assess the relative or fictive kin in advance. The child welfare specialist will use the tools mentioned above as well as the CFS 458–Relative Caregiver Placement Agreement, CFS 454 HMR Placement Safety Checklist and the CFS 458-A–Statement of Relationship. It is important for child welfare staff to ensure relative and fictive kin families understand the commitment being made, and to thoughtfully determine their ability to care for a youth in care. If a relative or fictive kin is unable to provide placement for their relative youth in care, they are encouraged to be a part of the positive support team.

The mutual assessment process begins during pre-service training and continues through interaction with the licensing/resource specialist and the child welfare specialists during regular home visits and biannual monitoring visits. Referrals for added services are a part of ongoing work with foster families and are vital to maintain stable placements for children. Child welfare specialists assess the needs of the foster parents throughout the life of the case. When additional support or training is recommended, foster parents are referred to appropriate workshops, training and counseling; given educational materials; and offered extra assistance by LSSI staff. Moreover, the LSSI training staff aids with support, training and consultation that includes virtual and in-person learning opportunities. LSSI training staff and licensing/resource staff also provide 1:1 training/support if deemed necessary. The approach to training foster families and supporting assessment of their strengths and limitations is comprehensive and tailored to the individual or foster family's unique needs. LSSI encourages foster parents to establish a support network to further utilize their strengths and receive assistance for areas that would benefit from improvement.

During the licensing process, the licensing/resource worker will discuss with the foster family the need to develop a list of questions they would like answered before a child is placed in their



home. Foster families may choose to not provide care for a youth if they are not comfortable with the information provided regarding the youth in care. Foster families work with the licensing/resource worker to identify a capacity and age range that best fits their daily routines and parenting skills. It is the responsibility of the foster parent to listen to staff regarding training needs and to actively participate in the creation of a training plan. The mutual assessment of a foster parents' skills and abilities is continuous throughout the life a foster parent's involvement with LSSI. LSSI licensing/resource staff and child welfare staff update information regarding the foster family's skills and encourage them to participate in training, support events, etc. to enhance those skills, which may lead to a broader range of youth in care accepted into their home. Foster parents are encouraged to seek support from experienced foster parents to gain more insight into questions to ask and what to expect.

If foster parents experience difficulty caring for a child or understanding the child's trauma history or needs, they are encouraged to ask for assistance from LSSI staff so that their needs as well as the child's are met. Resources to assist foster parents include training provided by LSSI and DCFS, books, videos, counseling services, notification of learning opportunities outside of the agency and/or DCFS, and in-home individualized coaching. Moreover, LSSI is responsible for recognizing the foster parents' personal support requirements and helping them find resources and training that is collaborative, effective and innovative. Oftentimes, this is achieved through support groups that share an affinity for providing care for youth in need.

In December 2023, LSSI received the "Solid Foundation Tier of Recognition" from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). This has allowed LSSI to enhance the organization's efforts to establish a record of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) inclusion and build meaningful relationships with LGBTQ+ communities including foster parents or those who desire to be foster parents. The skills learned and used during this certification process have helped LSSI licensing/resource staff assess prospective foster families and made them better able to train and support foster caregivers to ensure an emotionally safe environment for LGBTQ+ youth in care. LSSI aims to ensure LGBTQ+ youth in care are matched to supportive homes, thereby reducing the likelihood of risky behaviors such as running away. LSSI foster parents are assessed in advance of any placement of their willingness to work with a youth who identifies as LGBTQ+, and their response is kept confidential. A foster parent/family who reports they would not be able to support a LGBTQ+ youth would not be considered for placement for someone who identifies as LGBTQ+. Additionally, foster parents who state they are open to accepting an LGBTQ+ youth learn ways to support that individual through required LGBTQ+ training. LSSI offers additional LGBTQ+ training opportunities via webinars hosted by the All Children/All Families (ACAF) organization.

**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 provides ongoing training and facilitates support groups throughout the state wherein foster parents can receive the benefits of networking with other foster parents by sharing ideas

and connecting with likeminded individuals. Some of these include regular foster parent meetings, newsletters, advisory councils, town hall meetings, and training opportunities. LSSI staff relay information about and host support groups to encourage alliances among foster parents. Foster parent groups are an opportunity to share concerns and work towards positive resolutions. Some LSSI sites report they have foster parents who host other foster parents in their home. LSSI child welfare and licensing/resource staff encourage foster parents to participate in support groups at their local site or via other avenues such as online.

Licensing/resource staff share the availability and benefits of support groups within LSSI and through outside affiliations during the licensing process and ongoing home monitoring. They also encourage foster parents to leverage their own strengths by becoming co-trainers and connecting with others facing similar challenges such as behavioral concerns. This initiative is part of the ongoing support foster parents receive to create a collaborative learning environment. LSSI makes these opportunities available to LSSI's unlicensed relative and fictive kin providers, as well, encouraging them to engage in activities that enhance their parenting skills and foster a sense of community support.

LSSI actively encourages foster parent involvement in broader advocacy and support networks by distributing information on state and national foster parent and adoption groups. In 2024, LSSI increased these efforts by tasking licensing/resource teams across the state to nominate foster parents for potential participation in the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council and/or the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council. In recent meetings with staff across the state, child welfare workers, supervisors and others were asked to assess and nominate a foster parent who could positively represent the community on a statewide council. Through these meetings, staff identified several foster parents to participate in the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council. Nine foster parents expressed an interest and one completed the application. The licensing/resource supervisors, in collaboration with child welfare workers, supervisors and licensing/resource workers, will make final recommendations and provide foster parents with the appropriate application.

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

Foster parents have numerous opportunities to fulfill this responsibility for training tailored to their specific needs. They can initiate requests through their child welfare worker and/or licensing/resource worker, who will help identify trainings offered by LSSI and/or DCFS and provide information on community-sponsored training programs. The process involves a mutual assessment between licensing/resource workers and the foster parent to identify strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring that the foster parent is equipped to meet the essential needs of youth in care. This assessment is documented on the CFS 574-1/Foster Parent Training & Development Log and on the CFS 597-FFH/Foster Family Home Licensing Monitoring record. Child welfare workers are also required to assess training needs and to document them on the DCFS case note form. Licensing/resource staff are available to assist child welfare staff in identifying and locating training opportunities for foster parents.

Foster parents receive ongoing updates about various trainings offered by LSSI, DCFS and other community organizations; support groups; consultations that include virtual and in-person learning opportunities; and online resources such as podcasts and webinars. Once specific training needs are determined, licensing/resource staff are responsible for helping foster parents identify and locate meaningful training opportunities and assisting them in registering, if necessary. LSSI training staff also aid in identifying training opportunities. LSSI has noticed that more seasoned foster parents tend to rebuff the need for additional training. Foster parents are encouraged to seek out training throughout the life of their license, and not wait until their license is due for renewal.

Active support groups play a vital role in the above process, as experienced foster parents can share their insights and encourage others to participate. Licensing/resource workers also foster one-on-one coaching by inviting seasoned foster parents to share their personal experiences, which can occur during meetings, support groups and training sessions. This collaborative approach enhances learning and strengthens the foster parent community.

LSSI has faced challenges in re-engaging foster parents in in-person activities following the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this, efforts are being made to emphasize the importance of community and the benefits of participating in face-to-face meetings. Strategies include highlighting the value of personal connections, sharing success stories from in-person gatherings, and creating a welcoming environment for foster parents to reconnect and engage with one another. Child welfare staff, including case managers and licensing/resource workers, discuss in-person opportunities at home and monitoring visits as well as add them to site newsletters. By reinforcing the sense of support and community, LSSI aims to encourage more foster parent participation in in-person events and strengthen their connections with each other, LSSI and other organizations.

Foster parents are responsible for recognizing their own limitations and proactively seeking guidance and support to minimize any negative impact on the youth in their care. It is essential for them to actively pursue appropriate enrichment opportunities to enhance their caregiving skills. LSSI and DCFS emphasize this through training during pre-service sessions and ongoing education throughout the duration of their license.

**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.**

LSSI recognizes the critical role placement stability plays in the well-being of youth in care. To minimize placement disruptions and assist foster parents with this responsibility, LSSI is committed to educating foster families about their responsibility to maintain stability. This begins with training staff to frequently assess placement stability and continually engage foster parents

in understanding how trauma influences a child's behavior. Licensed foster parents are introduced to their role in reducing the likelihood of disruptions in pre-service training. By providing trauma-informed care strategies, LSSI helps foster families develop approaches to reduce behaviors that might otherwise lead to placement disruptions. This proactive support empowers foster parents to create a more stable and nurturing environment for the youth in their care.

From the moment a decision is made to place a youth in a foster home, LSSI child welfare specialists and licensing/resource workers focus on ensuring the best fit for both the youth and the foster family. This careful matching process considers the foster parents' experiences, skills and capacity. LSSI knows it is essential to listen to foster families and understand their strengths and limitations without assuming they can manage all types of behaviors. This respectful approach helps foster families feel supported and ensures that placements are made with the best possible chance of success for both the youth and the family.

Once a child is placed in a foster home, the child welfare specialist conducts ongoing assessment every 30 days, or more often if needed, to monitor the placement stability and identify signs of potential disruption. The child welfare specialist engages the foster parent in discussions about the child's trauma history and any adverse experiences that may affect the child's behavior, continually updating the new foster parent as new information emerges during the case. They also provide emotional support to the child through private conversations, assuring the child's well-being is prioritized. Child welfare specialists also request quarterly updates from service providers to allow concerns to be addressed, keeping in mind the need for confidentiality.

If a youth shows signs of needing additional support to prevent placement disruption, the child welfare specialist collaborates with the foster parents to identify what steps should be taken. The child welfare specialist may recommend de-escalation, safety and trauma-informed training to equip foster parents with strategies to manage the challenges of caring for a youth who has experienced complex trauma. Additionally, licensing/resource staff assist in identifying supplemental training to add to the annual plan during routine visits and more often if necessary. Foster parents are expected to communicate any previously unidentified issues to the child welfare specialist immediately to ensure that emerging needs are promptly addressed and met.

LSSI understands that both foster parents and youth in care may require services that demand immediate emergency behavioral intervention during and after business hours. As a result, the agency provides foster parents with a 24-hour on-call number, which is staffed by a child welfare specialist and supervisor at each site. Additionally, foster parents are given the CARES hotline, 1-800-345-9049, which provides emergency services to children who are in care, including assessment for hospitalization.

If a youth in care has been identified as needing more supportive services and appears at risk of placement disruption, a CFTM will be convened to develop a plan to enhance support to the foster family to stabilize the placement. LSSI employs therapists who assist foster parents by providing education/instruction regarding specific behaviors and techniques to use to reduce the behaviors and/or minimize the impact of such behaviors. LSSI also provides Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) for staff and foster parents. Additionally, the child welfare specialist can make a referral for Intensive Placement Stabilization (IPS) services. This program is designed to assist families with placement stabilization and prevent escalation into a higher level of care (i.e., specialized foster care, residential placements, psychiatric hospitalization, etc.) through counseling, mentoring and intensive support for high-risk children. Child welfare specialists are asked to advocate for foster parents and make efforts to avoid placement disruption to support permanency for the youth. Foster parents are responsible for not minimizing concerning behaviors and discussing concerns openly and honestly with the child welfare specialist, therapist and/or licensing/resource worker.

The Families Together Pilot program at LSSI's Augustana (Chicago) office provides intensive support and wraparound services to reduce disruptions and shorten the time youth spend in care. The LSSI Emergency Foster Home Initiative (EFHI) program, which launched in April 2024 and is in the pilot phase, aims to minimize placement disruption by placing youth in specially trained foster homes for 30 to 60 days while identifying a long-term placement. Both programs emphasize support through specialized staff, frequent team meetings and additional resources like educational liaisons and therapists. The EFHI program also provides an additional monthly stipend above the DCFS board reimbursement.

When stabilization efforts fail, LSSI collaborates closely with the foster parents and the biological family to identify relative or fictive kin resources for the youth. The Relative Resources and Positive Supports Worksheet/ CFS 458-B is used to explore placement options. If relatives are not available, traditionally licensed foster homes are evaluated for appropriateness. Foster parents are encouraged to provide at least 14 days' notice when requesting removal of a child to ensure a thorough and thoughtful placement and transition process.

**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, any stress that results from foster parenting.**

LSSI staff recognize the challenges foster families face when accepting youth placements and provide thorough support to ensure placement is successful. Licensing/resource staff assess families' capabilities during the licensing process and help them self-evaluate their limitations. Foster families receive pre-service and ongoing training on de-escalation, trauma, Lifebooks, and safety, enabling them to identify stressors that might lead to placement disruptions. LSSI staff also encourage proactive communication and seeking help when necessary to maintain stability for both the youth and the foster family. LSSI staff also receive training during on-boarding/bootcamp and Foundations/Fundamentals on ways to support families and recognize when a "break" may be needed.

LSSI recognizes that foster parents may occasionally need time to rest and refuel and offers respite care across all levels of foster care. LSSI staff are trained on how to assist when the need for respite arises and how to complete the required assessment of an identified respite provider. Supervisor or program director level authorization is required. Respite care helps relieve stress or manage family crises, while child care addresses everyday needs like work. Foster parents are encouraged to reach out to their child welfare specialist for support when respite is needed. Realizing that foster family safety is a concern, LSSI conducts background checks and provides training for respite providers. In 2024, LSSI developed a “non-respite caregiver” policy as a companion to the already established traditional and specialized respite policies.

LSSI offers specialized training to help foster parents manage stress. Topics are developed with input from foster parents, child welfare specialists and licensing/resource workers to address the specific challenges foster parents face. They range from handling attachment issues in children caused by separation from biological parents and siblings to managing their own feelings of loss when a child leaves their care. Training includes self-care strategies to help prevent burnout.

LSSI licensed foster parents can use the DCFS Voluntary Placement Hold process to temporarily pause new placements. To do so, they should contact their licensing/resource worker who in turn requests final authorization by the Statewide Foster Parent Licensing and Recruitment Manager. During the hold, foster families must continue following the Child Care Act and DCFS 402 rules. The voluntary placement hold is meant to be temporary and allow foster parents to adjust as needed. During the hold, licensing/resource staff are available for support.

Foster parents are entitled to access information about service providers for the youth in their care, including contact details and schedules. They are responsible for ensuring the youth attends appointments and are encouraged to communicate with service providers to share relevant information, which can help alleviate stress for both the foster parents and the youth. Their insights about the youth’s behavior at home is invaluable, as they have continuous contact with the individual. LSSI child welfare staff recognize that foster parents will have the most important and recent information regarding youth in their care. If foster parents have concerns about any service a youth is being provided, they can request a CFTM, speak with the child welfare supervisor, or request assistance from their licensing/resource worker.

**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.**

LSSI’s licensing/resource staff emphasize the importance of advocacy and the power of foster families’ voices. Licensing/resource staff encourage foster parents to share their experiences in a meaningful manner with their community.

LSSI provides training to staff and foster parents regarding the importance of being part of the professional team. This teamwork not only supports the youth's well-being, but also enriches the foster families' own experiences.

LSSI staff actively celebrate the rewards and positive impacts of fostering through various initiatives, especially during National Foster Care Month in May. The agency organizes foster parent appreciation events throughout the year highlighting the significant contributions of foster families. For instance, this year's LSSI True Friend event honored a foster parent for her exceptional dedication and care of over 90 youth during her time as a foster parent.

In planning these appreciation events, LSSI collaborates with foster parents to identify community contacts who can help raise awareness about fostering. Foster parents are encouraged to engage local churches, organizations, etc., to increase the visibility of fostering within the community.

To keep foster parents informed about these special events, LSSI utilizes multiple communication channels including emails, monthly newsletters, event calendars, and social medial platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and the newly established Instagram account. Additionally, personal invitations are sent directly to foster parents' homes, ensuring they are aware of opportunities to celebrate their important role and to connect with others in the fostering community.

Foster parents are encouraged to speak positively about foster parenting in their communities. In 2024, foster parents were asked to participate in the first LSSI Foster Fair recruitment event, held by each site in June. During this event, foster parents provided feedback to prospective families and were able to advocate for LSSI and the need for more foster families.

**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.**

LSSI recognizes that foster parents spend more time with youth in care than any other individuals. As a result, foster parents have more intimate knowledge of the needs and wants of youth in care and what may be in their best interest. LSSI staff utilize various methods to empower foster families to participate in meetings, court, ACRs, etc. to share this valuable information. Staff also ensure foster parents are aware of their rights as educational surrogates or the youth in their care. In addition, LSSI encourages foster parents to write letters to the judge if unable to attend a court hearing, or even if they will be present. Encouragement to contact the assigned GAL is also given as this is the preferred method for communication by some of the juvenile court judges. Foster parents are invited to participate in all CFTMs, and if unable to do so, assigned staff solicit information in advance of the meeting. This is also true if a foster parent is not able to attend an ACR. Information from foster families is used in the development of initial and subsequent service plans. Notification for meetings is provided verbally and in writing, oftentimes via email if that is the preferred method for notification by

foster parents. Recently, many foster parents have expressed texting as their preferred method of communication. LSSI ensures all rules of confidentiality are upheld when communicating with foster parents. One of LSSI's sites sends an updated calendar to every foster parent monthly that includes dates, times and locations of court hearings, case reviews, CFTMs, and scheduled parent/child or sibling visits. It is reported that this process has been well-received. Other sites are now considering adopting this process.

Foster parents are provided with information regarding Foster Parent Law and the corresponding Rights and Responsibilities during the licensure process. During pre-service session one, foster parents start learning about their role and staff roles on the child welfare team. LSSI believes it is equally important for non-licensed relative and fictive kin caregivers to receive information regarding their Rights and Responsibilities. All unlicensed relatives and fictive kin are assigned a licensing/resource worker, regardless of their ability or willingness to become licensed. They are encouraged to contact their assigned licensing/resource worker, or any member of the licensing/resource team, for additional support. Licensing/resource representatives strongly recommend foster parents participate in the in-service training, Introduction to Foster Parent Law. Annually in September and October, the FPIP plan from the previous year is reviewed with foster families and feedback is requested. All foster parent questions are answered, and feedback is incorporated into the next year's plan.

LSSI also recognizes how important it is that staff members understand the Foster Parent Law and corresponding Rights and Responsibilities in order to work effectively with foster families and contribute to their success. As a result, LSSI provides training during the 90-day onboarding process. Additionally, training is conducted on an annual basis to refresh staff on Foster Parent Law. All LSSI foster care and adoption staff are provided with an opportunity to participate in staff meetings to review the FPIP and provide feedback.

To support foster parents' ability to express concerns, voice their joys and ask questions, LSSI has committed to hosting a monthly meeting that will be mandatory for newly licensed foster families and an "open house" style for seasoned foster families. This is an opportunity for staff roles to be presented and Foster Parent Rights and Responsibilities to be reviewed. This forum offers families the opportunity to gain experience from one another as well as ask simple or difficult questions. LSSI licensing/resource staff will facilitate, with guest appearances by other child welfare staff. The Statewide Foster Parent Licensing and Recruitment Manager and the Associate Executive Director of Program Support will attend quarterly. Seasoned foster parents or those with specific areas of expertise will be sought to co-facilitate. This monthly meeting will serve as an opportunity for licensing/resource teams to serve as a bridge between foster families and child welfare workers.

LSSI supervisors and program directors are readily accessible to foster parents for any concerns or needs they may have. Supervisors actively participate in all CFTMs, ensuring foster parents have direct support and representation. When necessary, senior supervisors and program directors are invited to these meetings to provide information, feedback and mediation as required.



LSSI management recognizes the importance of being available to foster parents and encourages open communication so that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed. This approach cultivates a supportive environment where foster parents feel valued and empowered in their roles. Many among LSSI's leadership are familiar with foster families and have long-standing professional relationships due to previous roles.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, LSSI has faced challenges in re-engaging foster families in in-person activities, including co-facilitating training sessions with staff. However, in 2024 LSSI made strides by connecting with several foster parents who have agreed to collaborate in facilitating training on various topics.

Another way in which foster parents have a recognized voice is by providing feedback anonymously via annual foster caregiver surveys. LSSI's Quality Compliance and Data (QCD) department administers the surveys, then aggregates the data for foster care and adoption staff to review. All comments are shared with staff for future performance improvement and to be recognized when praised. When negative or concerning results are presented, LSSI's management team may intervene, often requesting updated training for staff or more immediate and targeted intervention. In addition to the information below, many specific LSSI staff were directly mentioned in the surveys in a positive manner. In 2024, 55 foster parents responded to surveys and overall were satisfied with their interaction with LSSI. LSSI's goal is to always provide excellent "customer service," especially with foster families. The organization will work to improve the 87% and 83% below.

- 87% of families felt they were treated with respect and compassion
- 83% felt LSSI listened to their concerns without judgment
- 100% believed their opinions were heard
- 100% believed LSSI helped them "on a path to becoming the best I can be."

**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.**

To ensure foster parents fully understand their responsibility as mandated reporters, they receive pre-service training regarding DCFS policies. During the licensing process, licensing/resource staff emphasize this responsibility and require foster parents to acknowledge in writing their receipt and understanding of the Mandated Reporting Act, which is then included in their file. Foster parents are also provided with copies of the licensing standards for foster family homes, which details licensure requirements and the investigation process.

Through the above steps, foster parents learn they are required to report any suspected abuse or neglect to the child abuse hotline (1-800-25-ABUSE) when there is reasonable belief that abuse or neglect has occurred. After licensure, LSSI licensing/resource staff continue to provide refresher training on mandated reporting during foster parent meetings, biannual monitoring visits and the licensing renewal process.

In 2024, LSSI licensing/resource staff continued their efforts to educate foster parents on the licensing and Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation processes, highlighting both their similarities and differences. This information was extended to unlicensed relatives and fictive kin, as well. These groups were informed about what to expect in the event of an abuse or neglect allegation, including the potential outcomes of an investigation and the steps to appeal any findings.

LSSI noticed that many foster parents express concerns about false reports or that biological parents may make false accusations against them, which has opened the door for valuable discussions. These conversations provide foster parents with reassurance and clarity on the investigation process, helping to alleviate some of their fears

When a child abuse or neglect investigation involves a licensed foster home, the DCFS investigator is supposed to contact the licensing/resource supervisor to initiate a concurrent investigation. However, LSSI has encountered inconsistencies with this process, as there have been instances where LSSI is informed much later of a CPS investigation on a licensed foster home. When the process is followed correctly, it allows a familiar LSSI licensing/resource worker to be present when the DCFS investigator explains the investigation to the family, offering support and clarification.

During these investigations, the LSSI licensing/resource worker informs the foster parents of their rights, including the right to have an advocate of their choice present. Foster parents are encouraged to reach out to the licensing/resource specialist or supervisor if they have any questions or need further clarification. At this time, they are also informed that there may be information that cannot be shared. Licensed foster parents are required to cooperate fully with DCFS and LSSI during investigations, while DCFS and LSSI have the responsibility to ensure clear communication with the foster parents throughout the 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.**

One of the initial steps in the fostering process for new foster parents is pre-service training, which incorporates a session emphasizing their role as professional team members and their responsibility to participate in meetings concerning the youth in their care. This training includes education on the ACR process, client service plans and court proceedings. Foster parents are

encouraged to actively engage in permanency planning for the child, recognizing the critical role they play.

LSSI child welfare workers provide foster parents with ongoing reminders of the importance of their participation in permanency planning through continued training, CFTMs, biannual monitoring visits with their licensing worker, and regular interactions with the child welfare specialist. LSSI encourages their active involvement because foster parents often know the child best. If LSSI foster parents do not believe their voices are being heard regarding decisions made about the youth in their home, they are strongly encouraged to continue advocating, which may include requesting additional CFTMs, meeting with case supervisors, etc.

LSSI's licensing/resource workers also aim to participate in CFTMs as much as possible, providing additional support to foster parents during these sessions.

LSSI emphasizes the importance of giving foster parents a voice in the lives of the youth placed in their care. To support this, child welfare specialists provide foster parents with on-on-one updates and information before, during or after ACR meetings and court hearings. This helps foster parents understand their roles as advocates and keeps them informed about key developments in the youth's case. If foster parents are unable to attend these meetings, they are encouraged to provide input in advance. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many ACRs and court hearings continue to be held virtually, offering foster parents a more flexible option for participation. The child welfare specialist is responsible for ensuring foster parents have the needed links or login information for any virtual meetings.

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

It is the responsibility of LSSI to inform foster parents of the appeal procedure and they are encouraged to contact their licensing/resource specialist or child welfare specialist with questions if they do not understand the appeal procedure and their rights. LSSI notifies foster parents of their rights and responsibilities during the licensing process as well as when requested. Foster parents receive a copy of Foster Parent Law, which outlines Rights and Responsibilities in writing, and they are strongly encouraged to keep a copy for their files. All foster parents must sign a statement acknowledging receipt and understanding of the information. Any questions or concerns regarding rights and responsibilities are addressed by the licensing/resource team or child welfare specialist. LSSI licensing/resource and child welfare staff offer guidance and assistance to foster parents who wish to appeal a decision. Foster parents can also contact the child welfare supervisor, program director or associate executive director with any specific information pertaining to an appeal decision.

Informational brochures that include both the DCFS process and the internal LSSI Staff/Foster Parent Interaction and Grievance process are distributed to all foster parents and are available upon request. The foster home record contains an acknowledgement demonstrating that the foster parent both received and had the LSSI process explained to them. The brochure includes

the process for reporting violations of the Foster Parent Law not covered by an already existing appeal or grievance procedure. It also delineates time frames for resolution as well as all steps necessary for discussion and a satisfactory conclusion. This brochure also lists the foster parents' right to appeal to an advocate outside of LSSI if necessary. The LSSI Staff/Foster Parent Interaction and Grievance process is reviewed annually during the implementation plan review period and feedback is solicited.

The OIG brochure offers excellent information regarding its role and how it can assist foster parents and staff. All LSSI sites have been given copies of this brochure and 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.**

Foster parents are trained on the importance of maintaining detailed records of significant events, medical incidents and regular/routine medical updates, medication usage, behavior charts, and other key items related to the youth in their care. Accurate recordkeeping is essential for ensuring that children receive the appropriate medical, educational and therapeutic services. Foster parents are informed that these records not only support the youth's current care but may also answer important questions as the child grows older and provide essential information for future providers, child welfare specialists, foster parents, and biological parents.

During pre-service training, LSSI sets clear expectations for recordkeeping with written guidelines. The child welfare specialist reviews these records during regular home visits, while licensing/resource staff check recordkeeping compliance during required monitoring visits as mandated by DCFS. These visits allow licensing/resource staff to offer support such as supplying new folders or other organizational items. LSSI licensing/resource staff have found that some foster parents excel in recordkeeping, and others may need additional assistance.

LSSI encourages foster parents to organize records in folders or similar systems for easy access and review by staff. If additional assistance is needed, LSSI staff are required to aid in any way possible. In addition to the documents above, LSSI staff encourage foster parents to store copies of youth photos in these folders, which can be helpful for the youth's Lifebook and future reference.

**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.**

As part of their role on the professional team, foster parents may be asked to meet with subsequent caregivers and share the youth's records to ensure a smooth transition. LSSI child

welfare and licensing/resource staff assist foster parents in understanding this responsibility by encouraging participation in the transition process. Foster parents receive training regarding youth development, trauma responses, and how to support the youth during transitions during the licensure process. Preparing youth and foster families for these transitions is reviewed by the child welfare specialist and supervisor during home visits or CFTMs. Foster parents are taught that whether a youth is moving to a new foster home or being reunified with a parent, their involvement is crucial as it helps maintain consistency in the child's routine, which is key to minimizing stress during this adjustment period. Foster parents are reminded about the importance of these types of transitions throughout the life of a case, but especially when a move is scheduled to occur or the youth is being reunified with his or her parent(s).

Another educational opportunity for foster parents is how to create and maintain a meaningful Lifebook. Each youth in care is given a Lifebook that remains with them throughout their time in the child welfare system. Foster parents learn during training what information is important to include and how it can be useful for sharing with subsequent caregivers. By creating a Lifebook with the youth in their care, foster parents can document memories and milestones to share with future caregivers or trusted supports in the child's life.

**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 identity 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.**

LSSI is committed to ensuring that the cultural needs and identity of all clients are understood, respected, embraced, and encouraged. Foster parents receive pre-service and ongoing training in cultural awareness and cross-culture sensitivity so they better understand that one youth's cultural beliefs and values may be different than another as well as their own. Today, culture has a broad definition, encompassing many aspects of a youth's life, both large and small. Foster parents are taught that culture can include race, ethnicity, religion, language, traditions, food, clothing, celebrations, and even daily routines. LSSI places a strong emphasis on fostering environments where children feel their culture is celebrated and continually educates foster parents on the importance of family connections and heritage.

Foster parents are encouraged to actively support the birth family through involvement in family visits, phone calls, sharing of pictures, and other events. This collaboration allows both foster and birth families to learn from each other, creating a more supportive environment for the youth. Birth parents can benefit by learning parenting strategies from foster parents, while foster parents can gain insight into the birth family's cultural and racial traditions.

Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to meet the cultural needs of youth in care through various means such as books, ongoing training, external resources, from other foster families, and conversations with the birth family. LSSI staff guide foster parents in maintaining a child's

cultural identity by promoting information sharing through verbal communication or a shared notebook.

Licensing/resource specialists and child welfare specialists work closely together to ensure foster parents know the importance of expressing concerns if they feel uncertain about their ability to care for a youth whose cultural beliefs differ from their own. If necessary, additional education, one-on-one training, or consultation is offered to better equip foster parents to meet the cultural needs of the youth.

Foster parents benefit from recognizing what they may not know, being open to learning, and embracing opportunities to grow in their understanding. This proactive approach helps them better support the youth in their care and strengthens their ability to nurture the youth's cultural identity. LSSI facilitates this approach to further ensure foster families abide by this responsibility.