



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

2026

Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan 2026

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Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan for 2025

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Introduction

LSSI's Annual Implementation Plan outlines how the agency upholds the Foster Parent Law, including foster parent rights and responsibilities. The plan details each right and responsibility with specific examples in narratives describing how LSSI ensures they are protected and supported. A draft version is first shared with staff and foster parents across LSSI's 11 sites to gather feedback. The input is used to refine the plan before foster parents review the final draft, suggest revisions, and give approval for dissemination.

Rights & Responsibilities

RIGHTS

Respect and Dignity

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

LSSI recognizes that foster parents play a vital role in children's lives and are essential partners in the child welfare team. The organization prioritizes treating foster families with dignity and respect by nurturing meaningful, supportive relationships. This begins with initial contact with prospective caregivers and with relative and fictive kin caregivers. All foster parents are encouraged to understand their role as a member of the team, and to ask question if uncertain. Staff also have the responsibility of assessing if a caregiver understands their role fully as some may need additional encouragement.

Some key practices:

- Partnership & Respect
 - Foster parents are valued as professional members of the child welfare team.
 - Staff (case managers, licensing/resource workers, supervisors, etc.) are trained to treat families with dignity and respect. This occurs during Foundation training, LSSI's Bootcamp training, which has a designated section regarding Foster Parent Rights and Responsibilities, and via on-going supervision. Inherent in this is the need to give any information provided by caregivers, no matter its content, full consideration. Supervisors reinforce during both group team meetings and during one-on-one supervision.

- New staff receive on-boarding training and ongoing supervision to reinforce this expectation.
- LSSI also encourages peer mentoring between experienced and new foster parents.
- **Communication & Trust**
 - Foster parents are encouraged to have a voice and to be heard. They first learn the importance of communication during PRIDE training, and this is reinforced by case managers and licensing/resource staff. Foster parents are encouraged to seek advice, express any concerns and/or praise, often. They are provided opportunities in formal and informal settings (ACR, CFTM or home visits, phone calls, etc.) to have their voices heard.
 - Staff commit to listening, sharing information, and keeping families informed at every step. Case managers are held accountable during supervision for ensuring this Right is upheld.
 - Calls, emails, and other correspondence are answered within 48 business hours (or sooner when possible). Supervisors are encouraged to be available when direct contact with a case manager may be delayed.
 - If a meeting is canceled, caregivers are promptly notified; if not, they are encouraged to contact a supervisor. LSSI's leadership has reiterated this during supervisory meetings and monthly meetings with all program directors.
 - LSSI caregivers are provided with information regarding how to contact the DCFS Advocacy office; while we hope that is not needed, LSSI recognizes caregivers may need to voice their concerns independent of the support provided by the Team.
 - DCFS Advocacy Office: 800-524-2090
- **Involvement in Youth's Care**
 - Foster parents are invited to attend staffings, court hearings, educational meetings, case reviews, and other planning sessions. Additionally, it is important for caregivers to understand their role and input is necessary in decision-making regarding youth in the home. This is reinforced through trainings, home visits, etc.
 - Families are trained on the purposes of different meetings and encouraged to share input for service delivery. Caregivers are initially educated regarding this during PRIDE training, but it is important for this to be reinforced throughout the life of a case and/or a caregiver's fostering journey. Relative/fictive kin caregivers who choose to not participate in the licensing process, and therefore do not benefit from PRIDE training, receive education on this subject from their case manager and/or licensing/resource worker and continue to be updated during professional meetings.
 - Child and Family Team Meetings are scheduled quarterly or whenever a significant/critical decision is being made regarding a case. Foster parents are invited in advance to participate and are encouraged to do so.
- **Support and Accessibility**
 - Licensing/resource staff provide consistent support, including advanced scheduling of visits if an unannounced visit is not required.

- Caregivers are given direct phone numbers, email addresses, and on-call information. This is provided in a Welcome Packet, and at time of placement of a youth in the home. Staff rotate on-call responsibilities to ensure 24/7 coverage.
- **Recognition and Appreciation**
 - LSSI hosts trainings, support groups, and appreciation events throughout the year.
 - Foster parents are recognized for their contributions and care via LSSI's website and social media platforms.
- **Cultural Sensitivity**
 - Staff are trained to act with cultural awareness and respect.
 - Caregivers are addressed by their preferred titles, and staff make efforts to learn and honor family traditions.
- **Continuous Improvement**
 - Annual surveys are collected and feedback received is used to guide and improve services and caregiver satisfaction.

LSSI recognized the need for additional support for both staff and caregivers and, in response, established a Program Support Team, led by an Associate Executive Director and includes managers responsible for departments that provide direct assistance to case managers and foster parents, such as training and therapeutic services. The creation of this team has enhanced opportunities for consultation regarding caregiver and staff needs and has strengthened the overall sense of support across the agency.

Training

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.

LSSI's licensing/resource staff ensure any new caregivers are registered for the updated PRIDE training. Additionally, relative, and/or fictive kin caregivers are encouraged to participate in the licensing process, and those who choose to do so, are also assisted in registering. LSSI licensing/resource staff have assisted many prospective and relative/fictive kin caregivers with registering for and understanding the DCFS training platform (LDC – Learning & Development Center). PRIDE is offered in a few formats now, including in-person, virtually, and self-paced. Trainer notes are still completed and are part of the overall assessment process for new families.

Relative/fictive kin caregivers are also encouraged to participate in trainings specific to their assessed needs. Assessment of these needs occurs through routine home visits and during other team meetings. Training effectiveness is also discussed and ways in which to utilize newly learned skills to various situations.

Licensed caregivers are instructed regarding Rule 402, and the required pre-service and in-service training hours for renewal (16 hours for renewal period). Additional training requirements, including those for caregivers with specialized YIC in their home are also discussed throughout the life of a case or one's fostering journey. Caregivers are encouraged to

assess their needs and to work with their assigned case manager and/or licensing/resource worker to identify trainings that will increase their knowledge and assist in caring for youth in their home or for any who may be in their home in the future. Caregivers are instructed to complete trainings throughout the year and to not wait for their renewal period. This includes Educational Advocacy, which is important to complete within the first year of licensure to better understand the role a caregiver plays in a youth's education and educational needs.

- Training needs/assessment is based upon the following:
 - Type of care provided - traditional, specialized, treatment.
 - Age and needs of the youth in care in the home or preferred age and/or developmental age.
 - Caregiver requests or needs.
 - Required training to maintain licensure.

During this review period, LSSI launched its Foster Parent Training Portal, which provides additional training opportunities for caregivers. All LSSI caregivers, licensed and relative/fictive kin, received a postcard with information detailing the contents and purpose of the Portal. Additionally, any new families receive the post card in their Welcome Packet and instructions from their licensing/resource worker. The following trainings and resources are now available via LSSI's Foster Parent Training Portal:

Training

- Trauma
- De-escalation
- Foster Parent Self-Care
- Guide to Your First Placement
- Guide to Caring for Youth in Care
 - Foster Care Timeline
- LGBTQIA+ training/webinar links

Resources

- The Autism Program of IL
- DCFS LDC Guide
- Find a Local Child Advocacy Center
- Find a Local Family Advocacy Center
- HRC/ACAF Terminology
- SOGIE Glossary
- Supporting Your LGBTQIA+ Youth – A Guide for Foster Parents
- IL Car Seat Guidelines
- Car Seat Law Information
- Parent's Guide to CPS
- Tips for Fitting Child in Car Seats
- Keep Calm Plan
- Dysregulation Chart

- 2 Tools to Relax for Youth
- Trauma and the Brain
- Childhood Trauma and Your Response
- 7 Brief Responses

LSSI encourages all foster parents, licensed or not, to complete trauma-informed training. Research shows trauma-informed families are better equipped to support youth with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), leading to greater stability and healthier relationships.

LSSI also offers Trust Based Relational Intervention training each year. This is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. The focus is on helping caregivers connect with children, understand and meet their needs, and minimize fear-based behaviors. Case managers and licensing/resource staff highly encourage caregivers to take advantage of this training opportunity, whether it be offered by LSSI's certified TBRI practitioner, or offered by another organization. Efforts are made to ensure caregivers are aware of any/all training opportunities.

Clinical staff provide support and training opportunities are shared from other agencies. Experienced foster parents are encouraged to co-train with staff, assist with recruitment, and participate in informational meetings. LSSI values their insight, especially in trainings on collaborating with natural parents, and finds caregivers engage more when facilitators share lived experiences. Licensing/resource staff and case managers recommend foster parents with proven capacity to co-train and facilitate support groups. When caregivers agree to co-train, LSSI licensing/resource staff or clinicians provide guidance on using training material and provide talking points to practice.

If a case shifts from reunification to an alternative permanency goal such as adoption or subsidized guardianship, foster parents must complete the DCFS Adoption/Guardianship Readiness training, with case managers or the licensing/resource staff assisting with enrollment to ensure completion. This is encouraged to occur as soon as the permanency goal is changed in court, resulting in fewer delays in permanency.

When specific training needs arise that are not currently available, LSSI case management and licensing teams collaborate with the training department and clinical staff to develop or locate the necessary training. LSSI training staff and clinical staff are available to assist to ensure the needs of youth in care and foster parents are met, including training needs. LSSI's training department is available to provide one-on-one training for specific needs for caregivers or will help to locate an appropriate training resource. Clinical staff are available to provide on-one-one guidance and training specific to a youth's and the caregiver's needs.

Specific Program Info:

Specialized Foster Care

LSSI's contract with DCFS requires caregivers who are licensed specifically to care for specialized (behavioral, medical, and/or developmental), youth in care participate in additional training annually to meet the needs of these youth. The licensing/resource staff work closely with families providing specialized foster care to ensure compliance with DCFS Rule 402/licensing standards.

Training Requirement:

- Foster parents caring for specialized youth or who have been issued a specialized foster care license, must complete 12 additional hours of training per year.
- Training requirements can be met through:
 - Foster parent meetings and support sessions with a training component.
 - Community-based trainings approved by DCFS.
 - Trainings led by medical or clinical specialists.
 - Education by medical providers
 - Caregivers should discuss opportunities with their assigned licensing/resource worker to ensure they receive training credit.

Monitoring & Training Plans

- Annual and semi-annual licensing/resource home visits include discussions on trainings completed and training effectiveness and needs.
- Staff update training plans with caregivers and recommend additional training as needed.

Additional Training Resources

- DCFS LDC (Learning and Development Center)
- LSSI Foster Parent Training Portal (web-based)
- Local community agency training opportunities
- Strong encouragement to complete Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

LSSI Additional Training Requirements

- CPR & First Aid
- LGBTQIA+ Awareness
- De-escalation

TFC – Treatment Foster Care

LSSI continues to offer intensive services for youth ages 6-14 through its Treatment Foster Care (TFC) program, modeled after Treatment Foster Care of Oregon. Program development and training are supported by specialists from Treatment Foster Care Oregon. TFC is designed for youth who have experienced high levels of trauma and multiple placement disruptions and delivers a structured, closely supervised environment that emphasizes mentoring and specialized foster parenting.

Key Program Elements:

- Target population: youth ages 6-14 with significant trauma histories and repeated placement disruptions.
- Intervention model: Treatment Foster Care of Oregon model, adapted and implemented locally.

- Support and training: Consultation from Oregon specialists; on-going youth-specific training; weekly mandatory meetings for foster families.
- Training Activity: TFCO training facilitated in November 2024 and March 2025 with 17 participants.
- Expansion: 10 new TFC homes licensed.
- Team Structure: Each TFC team is comprised of a Team Leader, Case Manager, Resource Specialist, Family Therapist, Child Therapist, Skills Coach; all overseen by the Senior TFC Program Director.

Outcome:

- FY '25 – 26.3 months in treatment placement reduced to 12.2 month.

Next Steps/continuing priorities:

- Continue to recruit and license new homes; continue targeted training to support placement stability and shortened treatment projections.

F2G – Families Together

Families Together (F2G), the largest of the three programs – is an evidence-based program with the goal of reducing the length of time spent in foster care; increase the use of positive, predictable, and supportive parenting skills; improve the level of functioning of YIC; and improved placement stability. F2G blends expert case coordination, interventions, and advocacy with real-time support for foster and biological parents, and children. Families Together brings multiple elements of wrap-around services together, including a foster parent specialist who works closely with the families and the team. Currently, LSSI's Chicago-Augustana has three F2G teams serving approximately 120 families.

Foster Parent Training

- Focus – parenting practices and behavior management.
- Format – 16 weekly sessions, 90 minutes each; facilitated by certified KEEP training staff within the LSSI organization.
- Since November 2024, five sessions have been offered.

Program Support

- Case Coordinator
- Case Supervisor
- Parent Specialist
- Foster Parent Specialist
- Child Therapist
- Family Therapist
- Resource Specialist

Agency Support and Contact Info

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 provided with clear guidance on how to reach agency staff and what steps to take in emergencies. This information is provided at time of licensure and at time of placement for unlicensed caregivers. Information is provided verbally and is part of LSSI's caregiver Welcome Packet. Case managers reinforce this information during regular home visits and in CFTMs; licensing/resource staff also ensure this information is understood during semi- and annual monitoring visits.

How to Reach Staff:

- Caregivers are provided with case manager, supervisor, and licensing/resource worker's general number, and in some instances, a cell phone number.
- E-mail addresses are also provided for easy communication that does not need an immediate response.
- Information on how to contact site Program Directors and AEDs is also made available, though caregivers are encouraged to contact their assigned case manager, supervisor, or licensing staff first.
- 24/7 access for emergencies: each site has an after-hours message with on-call instructions (numbers listed below)
 - On-call staff must call back within an hours
 - Usually a case manager is on-call, with a supervisor as backup on a weekly rotation.
 - Each licensing/resource team is also available to provide support during emergency situations or when an immediate placement for a youth is needed.

Emergencies:

- For medical emergencies:
 - Call 911 first if there is a medical emergency.
 - Caregivers have a responsibility to inform the assigned case manager of any emergency incidents as soon as possible.
 - Guardian consent may be needed for certain unplanned medical emergencies/procedures – training on this is provided during PRIDE and reinforced during routine meetings.
- For behavioral or mental health crises:
 - Call the youth's case manager (or on-call worker after hours)
 - CARES Crisis-Line: 800-345-9024
 - If there is a risk of immediate danger to self or others: call 911.
- Crisis Support
 - Specialized foster families receive a written crisis plan with step-by-step actions and options to prevent disruptions.
 - Placement stabilization services are available to help manage disruptive behaviors.
 - Staff are trained to "check-in," review the crisis plan steps, and make sure families understand the support available.

On-call/Emergency Contact Information by Site

Auroa – 630-450-5181
Canton – 309-214-7147
Champaign – 217-402-5118
Chicago – 847-919-0756
Danville – 217-402-5118
Galesburg – 309-3514957
Marion – 618-997-9196
Moline – 309-430-3712
Nachusa – 815-535-7262
Peoria – 309-251-7532
Rockford – 815-742-7132

The TFC, F2G, and EFH programs use an additional tool to support caregivers, which is the Parent Daily Report (PDR). The PDR is an assessment tool used to measure what behaviors are present, the number of behaviors, and the caregivers overall stress level related to the behavior. If a PDR shows serious or urgent concerns, the supervisor or Program Director calls the foster parent right away. Other PDR results are reviewed to see if more support or services are needed for the youth or caregiver.

How PDRs are used:

- TFC program: foster parents are called each workday by a team member.
- F2G program: foster parents are called 3x/week by a team member.
- EFH program: foster parents receive a text request PDR 3x/week by the Statewide Foster Parent Licensing & Recruitment Manager.

Foster parents, as part of the professional team, are encouraged to request support at any time for the youth in their home or for themselves. LSSI makes referrals based on the youth needs, both internally and to external contracted providers. Caregivers are made aware of how to contact any service providers, including names, phone numbers, etc. If at any time, a caregiver does not have this information, or feels more information is needed, they are encouraged to speak directly to the case manager.

Timely Financial Reimbursement

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

- LSSI has a clear system in place to make sure board reimbursement payment go out on time. Reimbursement is processed after the end of each service month and are sent on the third Friday of the following month by either USPS or direct deposit.
 - example, August 2025 paid – September 19, 2025
 - example, September 2025 paid– October 17, 2025
- LSSI began paying non-licensed relative and fictive kin caregivers the updated rate in accordance with the KindAct, effective 7/1/25.

Details:

- Available by check or direct deposit.
- Direct deposit is encouraged since it is more reliable.
- Is inclusive of licensed and non-licensed caregivers.

To ensure accuracy and respect in the reimbursement process, LSSI requires annual training for all staff involved (case managers, licensing staff, supervisors, billing managers, etc.), which include easy to follow tutorials for completing paperwork. This training reviews DCFS rules and reinforces the importance of timely, fair payment to caregivers.

Any reimbursement or payment disputes should be brought to the attention of the case manager or licensing/resource worker and supervisors immediately. These concerns are then immediately investigated. The LSSI billing department and billing manager maintain open communication regarding any disputes and makes all attempts to resolve the issue within a few business days. To reduce caregiver hardship, the billing team now create addendums twice a month so errors can be corrected in the same month.

LSSI uses a two-step review process to make sure foster parent board reimbursements are accurate. This includes checking for things like new placements, hospitalization, reunification, and case closures before payments are made.

Step 1: Monthly Report Review

- Reports are generated and shared with supervisors and program directors.
- They confirm accuracy or any mistakes to be corrected. If errors are discovered, the supervisor has 48 hours to provide the necessary information for correction, which may be missing placement paperwork.

Step 2: Comprehensive Report

- A second, detailed report is created using feedback from Step one.
- This helps catch and correct most issues before reimbursements are processed.

Caregivers are provided with the fiscal year board amount that is commensurate with the care needs of the youth in their home. LSSI has provided additional information for FY '26 that outlines the increase due to the KindAct. LSSI ensured unlicensed caregivers received the new reimbursement rate effective July 1, 2025. This information is provided to all new caregivers as part of their Welcome Packet and updated annually.

Information below is for non-specialized YIC.

FY26 Licensed/Certified

<u>Child's Age</u>	<u>Board</u>	<u>Transportation</u>	<u>Clothing</u>	<u>Allowance</u>	<u>Total</u>
0 - 11 months	\$ 486.00	\$ 117.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 19.00	\$ 672.00
1 through 4 years	\$ 480.00	\$ 117.00	\$ 55.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 672.00
5 through 8 years	\$ 534.00	\$ 123.00	\$ 68.00	\$ 21.00	\$ 746.00
9 through 11 years	\$ 551.00	\$ 126.00	\$ 84.00	\$ 35.00	\$ 796.00
12 and over	\$ 515.00	\$ 160.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 62.00	\$ 827.00

FY26 Unlicensed/Non-Certified

<u>Child's Age</u>	<u>Board</u>	<u>Transportation</u>	<u>Clothing</u>	<u>Allowance</u>	<u>Total</u>
0 - 11 months	\$ 437.60	\$ 105.30	\$ 45.00	\$ 17.10	\$ 605.00
1 through 4 years	\$ 432.20	\$ 105.30	\$ 49.50	\$ 18.00	\$ 605.00
5 through 8 years	\$ 481.20	\$ 110.70	\$ 61.20	\$ 18.90	\$ 672.00
9 through 11 years	\$ 496.50	\$ 113.40	\$ 75.60	\$ 31.50	\$ 717.00
12 and over	\$ 464.20	\$ 144.00	\$ 81.00	\$ 55.80	\$ 745.00

Foster parents providing care for youth in care who have been approved for specialized foster care services, receive reimbursement at a higher rate:

- Medical - \$51.71/day
- Behavioral - \$53.70/day

Foster parents are paid according to the care needs of each youth in their home, with higher rates provided for youth who require more intensive support. The assessment for this need takes place through the Clinical Intervention to Placement Prevention (CIPP) process, which includes input from the entire team, including the foster caregiver. When a youth is approved for specialized care, staff immediately notify the LSSI billing and licensing/resource departments to ensure the foster parent receives the appropriate reimbursement. Staff are trained on this process so that payments for extraordinary needs are issued without delay.

Foster parents may be reimbursed for additional expenses, through the DCFS special service fee process, when these costs are approved in advance by the agency's supervisor or program director and align with the DCFS childcare payment procedures. These expenses may include things like overnight or weekend sibling visits, camp, or music lessons. Once approved, the agency accounts payable department submits the request to DCFS, which then starts the process for reimbursing the foster parent.

Respite can be paid directly to the provider, or the foster parent can be reimbursed on an as-needed basis to help support placement stability. Caregivers are encouraged to request respite in advance, and homes caring for youth who are approved for specialized foster care are entitled to up to fifteen hours of respite each month.

Any expenses that do not fall under the categories above, should be discussed with the case manager and approved by the supervisor, with final approval from the Program Director or

Associate Executive Director when needed. DCFS sets annual limits for certain reimbursable fees, and LSSI carefully monitors these limits. Even so, the child's needs are prioritized, and every effort is made to approve enrichment activities whenever possible.

Caseworkers and licensing/resource staff give foster parents clear guidelines on what expenses can be reimbursed and provide step-by-step instructions on how to complete and submit the reimbursement form, including submitting receipts. Supervisors also review these details with foster parents during CFTMs when needed. After expenses are submitted, supervisors review and forward to the program directors for final approval. Once approved, the expense report is submitted to LSSI's accounts payable team so that reimbursement can be processed quickly.

Families Together

The Families Together program continues to use Targeted Support Funds, following the above established monthly schedule. This funding helps meet the needs of youth and foster parent in real time, allowing the program to provide extra support without moving a youth into specialized foster care. Each month, the case coordinator discusses the youth's needs with the foster parent during home visits, and funding for anticipated needs is added to that month's board reimbursement. Requests for targeted support funds must be submitted to LSSI's billing department by the 20th of each month to ensure timely payment. In addition, foster parents in the F2G program, receive extra compensation (\$100/month/child) after completing 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.

Emergency Foster Care

Foster parents who provide emergency care for 30 to 60 days received an additional \$1100 monthly stipend. This additional amount is paid separately from that of the monthly reimbursement and is usually delivered or deposited the second week of each month. These funds are meant to supplement any additional needs and to provide a cushion for caregivers who often incur additional expenses during these 30 to 60 days.

In 2025, LSSI continues using the DCFS process introduced last year to provide immediate support when a youth enters foster care. Foster families may receive a gift card from Child

Protective Services or the caseworker for essential items such as food, clothing, sleeping equipment, or other urgent needs. Gift cards to major retailers are available for emergencies.

LSSI also uses its Amazon Business account to quickly order necessities, including bedding and beds, with supervisor approval. While children transferring to LSSI from another agency are not automatically eligible for clothing or equipment vouchers, program directors may approve assistance on a case-by-case basis. Supervisors ensure staff are trained on how to access these resources.

Recognizing that foster families may face unexpected financial challenges, LSSI can also provide groceries, gift cards, and help with transportation, rent or other expenses. LSSI's Advancement team continues fundraising efforts to cover gaps in resources for foster families and youth in care.

Placement Plan Info

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- or at the time of placement for relative or fictive kin caregivers, or shortly thereafter, foster parents are informed of their right to receive LSSI's placement plan. LSSI staff ensure that foster families understand their role in the development of the service plan and the importance of providing accurate and thorough information. Staff also emphasize the value of foster parent participation in the initial integrated assessment process, as well as in the ongoing case planning through home visits, CFTMs, and educational staffings. Timelines are also reviewed and caregivers become well versed in when reports, meetings, etc. are required.

Foster parents and children 12 and older receive a clearly written summary outlining the foster parent's goals, the child's goals, and the child's and their portion of the service plan. This written summary is provided to foster parents within 35 days of the child's initial placement (service plan info is made available after the initial Integrated Assessment has been completed), prior to each ACR, and within five days of any subsequent placement change. The child welfare specialist is responsible for ensuring delivery of this information, either as a printed copy or electronically using approved encryption methods.

Foster parents are expected to actively participate in assessing the child's needs, developing goals, creating service plans, and evaluating progress. Their unique insights into the child's strengths and challenges provide valuable input for the plan's development.

From initial training through ongoing discussions, foster parents are reminded of the importance of maintaining family connections and supporting natural parents. LSSI licensing/resource staff

reinforce these rights and encourage foster parents to advocate for themselves if they feel unheard or have not received necessary documentation.

Foster parents are encouraged to attend all court hearings related to the child in their care. These hearings, including permanency hearings held every six months, provide important updates such as potential changes in case goals. When a foster parent cannot attend, the child welfare specialist shares the outcome, including any goal changes, within 48 hours (early if possible) through the foster parent's preferred method of communication – phone, email, or otherwise. LSSI staff also ensure foster parents remain informed of upcoming court hearings dates and other case-related updates through calendars, letters, texts, and other communication methods.

Any information available – or that becomes available – after a YIC is placed in a foster home that relates to the child's health, education, emotional well-being, etc., must be shared with the foster parents. Foster parents have the right to request and receive additional information when it is necessary to meet the child's needs. The foster care supervisor is responsible for ensuring information shared is appropriate.

Foster parents receive training on confidentiality during PRIDE pre-service training, which is reinforced by the assigned caseworker and licensing/resource worker during regularly home visits and monitoring visits.

Foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend all CFTMs, which are held every 90 days. These meetings are scheduled to accommodate both foster families and natural parents whenever possible. The child welfare specialist invites all relevant participants, including foster parents, biological parents, other members of the child welfare team, and youth in care who are 12 years or older and able to participate. CFTMs provide an opportunity for foster parents to share their perspectives, suggest necessary changes, and contribute to the development or revision of the child's service plan. Because foster parents often are asked to assist with transportation and coordination of family visits, their input regarding visitation is especially valuable.

If LSSI determines that it is in the best interest of the child or youth to be removed from a foster home, the caregiver receives written notice, from the case manager. The notice outlines the reason, effective date, and instructions for requesting a clinical placement review if the caregiver chooses to appeal. All removal decisions are made through the critical decision process, which includes the case worker, supervisor, program director, clinical staff, and any other involved professionals. The critical decision meeting is intended to ensure the decision is appropriate and well-supported. If it is determined that a child or youth is at immediate risk of harm, removal from the home will occur without delay, though the caregiver is still provided the above-mentioned notice.

Investigation Allegations

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.

Complaint Investigation Procedure:

LSSI's licensing/resource team provide notice to caregivers of any licensing complaints, including those regarding violations of licensing standards. Should the allegations include abuse and/or neglect, DCFS is the agency of notification.

- Depending on the allegation, the foster home/license is placed on hold, which is either initiated by the DCFS CPS worker, or the LSSI licensing/resource worker.
- Licensing Standard Violation only – the LSSI licensing/resource worker will conduct a home visit after receiving supervisory guidance.
- CPS hotline investigation – the DCFS investigator leads this investigation, but inherent in this type of investigation is the violation of a licensing standard, which means a concurrent licensing investigation is also required.

Caregivers are instructed of their rights during a licensing complaint investigation, including the right to have an advocate present (they are presented with the Right to Have an Advocate form and encouraged to have someone to provide support; additional information is verbalized and on the document that the support person must be available within four hours. Supervisors are responsible for reminding the licensing/resource team member to present the form immediately to the caregiver.), and the right to fair, timely, and impartial investigation. For this to occur, the licensing/resource staff must initiate contact within 2-business days and finalize the investigation within 30 days. If the investigation is concurrent with DCP, then the licensing investigation must be finalized within 30 days of the final DCP finding. There are instances when if notification is not received by the agency, an investigation will not be required. This is always closely monitoring by the licensing/resource supervisor. Additionally, finalization by DCP is also monitored by the supervisor to ensure there are no gaps in finalization. Oftentimes, the DCP investigation is prolonged, which then delays the completion of the licensing complaint concurrent investigation. In these instances, extensions are requested, which requires supervisory approval, and if more than two requests are made, additional approval must be requested from the Agencies & Institutions licensing representative.

Appealing a Finding

LSSI foster parents receive clear information on how to appeal findings they disagree with, including the right to request a Supervisory Review. Final findings are sent by certified mail, often accompanied by a phone call to the caregiver. The letter outlines how to request a review

and includes the name, address, etc. for the supervisor. The timeline required for a request to be made is also outlined. During the Supervisory Review, the supervisor meets with the caregiver to explain the findings, explore resolutions, and support corrective measures if needed. If a corrective plan is not completed or if concerns remain after the review, the caregiver receives another certified letter detailing the next steps, which may include enforcement action or further appeal options. Details pertaining to requesting an Informal Review from DCFS is outlined in this letter, again with the contact person's name, address, and specific timeframes.

From the start, caregivers are informed about the investigative process through an FAQ in their Welcome Packet and reinforced with reminders throughout their fostering journey. They are made aware that investigations may occur, their rights during the process, and the difference between concurrent and stand-alone investigations.

Licensing/resource staff are trained to approach every investigation with respect, fairness, and without preconceived judgments. Training is delivered through supervision, peer mentoring, and annually during scheduled licensing training meetings. Staff are also responsible for explaining the investigative procedures and outcomes to other professional team members, making a strong understanding of Rule 383 and related procedures essential. To ensure accountability, licensing/resource staff are encouraged to seek guidance from supervisors, Agency & Institutions Representative or Supervisor, or the DCFS Enforcement Unit whenever needed.

LSSI foster parents receive information regarding how to appeal a finding if they do not agree with the outcome, including the right to request a Supervisory Review. As stated above, final findings are received via certified mail, but often a call to the caregiver is also made. This letter includes the process by which to request a Supervisory Review. If after the Supervisory Review, or if a Corrective Plan is not completed, the caregivers will receive another certified letter outlining the next steps, which may include enforcement action, and their appeal options.

Support

The licensing/resource worker keeps caregivers informed throughout the investigation, answering questions and offering guidance on the complexities of the child protection investigative process. Caregivers are encouraged to remain cooperative and patient.

Information About Children

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 a strong process in place to ensure foster parents receive accurate and timely information when a YIC is being placed initially and in any subsequent foster/kin homes.

Training & Supervision

- New staff are trained on what information to share and how to use the Sharing Information with Caregivers form.
- New employees shadow experienced staff to learn proper procedures.
- Seasoned staff receive refresher guidance during team meetings and supervision sessions.

Required Information (shared within 10 days of placement)

- Case and placement history
- Health and medical information
- Educational history and current needs
- Behavioral and social background

Confidentiality

- Certain details, such as previous placement addresses, etc. are not disclosed.

Documentation

- Both the foster parent and child welfare specialist sign the Sharing Information with Caregivers form, which is then filed in the family record and a note recorded in SACWIS.
- The case worker is required to document any/all discussions in SACWIS, which are then reviewed by the supervisor monthly.

Accountability

- If a foster parent reports not receiving necessary information, supervisors address it during regular supervision. This is further reinforced during team meetings.
- Supervisors are responsible to reviewing case notes and asking what and how information has been shared.

Prior to Placement: Info Regarding Children

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 that all child welfare specialists and supervisors – both new and experienced – comply with the *Child and Family Services Act* and the *Child Care Act*, including provisions regarding the information provided to foster and/or adoptive caregivers.

Staff Training and Accountability

- New staff receive instruction during LSSI's "bootcamp" training on completing the Sharing Information with Caregivers form.
- Training covers what information must be shared before and at time of placement, as well as procedures for timely notification of court proceedings.
- LSSI training department offers a refresher training. Supervisors advise on who should attend.

Ongoing Supervision

- Supervisors reinforce requirements during team meetings and individual supervision, addressing both case-specific and general issues.
- Supervisors provide reminders regarding IL DCFS policies and procedures.

Information Shared with the Foster Parent

- Foster parents receive a comprehensive packet (folder) that includes:
 - Medical/health history
 - Case information and history
 - Educational history (grades, IEPs, school reports)
 - Behavioral/Social history
 - Placement history and reason for moves.
 - Current service plan and visitation

If any information is unavailable at the time of placement, the child welfare specialist must provide what is available and provide an update once the additional information is obtained. If a YIC is placed in the evenings, during the weekend, or any time when the assigned worker is not present, such as in an emergency move, known information is provided immediately. All remaining information is required to be provided within 10 business days, but earlier if possible.

Meeting Notification

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.

During an initial placement and throughout the licensing process, foster families are informed – both verbally and in their Welcome Packet – of their role as active members of the child welfare team. This message is reinforced during home visits by both the licensing/resource worker and the caseworker. The importance of caregiver engagement is emphasized throughout the life of the case and information shared by caregivers is reviewed during CFTMs to ensure there are no misunderstandings.

Foster parents are encouraged to speak up if they feel their voice is not being heard or reflected in decisions. Ways in which to advocate are reviewed frequently and caregivers should feel supported. Foster parents may address concerns with agency staff, including the YICs assigned worker, supervisor, or the Program Director; licensing/resource staff are also available for additional support and to provide feedback on how best to be heard.

LSSI child welfare staff, including licensing and resource workers, encourage foster parents to attend and actively participate in all meetings related to any youth placed in their home. When a YIC is placed, the worker will have a conversation regarding how information regarding meetings, including CFTM, court, ACR, etc. will be communicated. Caregivers are encouraged to express what will work best for them as not everyone tracks meetings in the same manner. Whenever possible, meetings are scheduled at times that accommodate the foster parent's availability, and alternative participation options – such as phone or virtual meetings – are offered to maximize engagement.

Foster parents receive written notice of ACRs from DCFS, and LSSI child welfare specialists ensure the department has accurate information for notification. Caseworkers also provide reminders during home visits or during follow-up phone calls. Foster parents are encouraged to participate fully while understanding they will not have access to confidential information about the youth's natural parents. If a foster parent is unable to attend an ACR, the child welfare specialist gathers the relevant information in advance to present during the review and provides a summary of the outcome afterward.

Foster parents are also encouraged to attend all court hearings pertaining to youth in their care. However, they are informed that they may be excluded during portions of the hearing when the natural parents' information or testimony is shared. The child welfare specialist is responsible for informing the foster parent of the court date, time, location, court room, presiding judge, and GAL. Redacted copies of court orders are provided to protect confidentiality.

Information gathered from foster parents during monthly home visits and other meetings, including those related to medical or educational issues, is incorporated into court reports and service plans by the child welfare staff, reviewed and authorized by the supervisor. Foster parents are encouraged to share updates regularly so that accurate information can be included in these reports. If a foster parent cannot attend court, they are urged to meet with the GAL beforehand to provide relevant input.

LSSI also educates foster parents on their role as the youth's educational surrogate, recognizing the vital role caregivers play in ensuring that each child's educational needs are met. Child welfare specialist and LSSI educational liaisons support foster parents in this capacity by encouraging participation in all school-related meetings and offering guidance on educational advocacy. LSSI has two educational liaisons who work throughout the state and are available to support foster parents.

To strengthen communication and collaboration, and to ensure caregiver input is given full consideration, LSSI staff use various methods to ensure foster parents are informed and involved, including:

- 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.
- Reinforcing their role as essential partners on the child welfare team.
- 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.

Info Regarding Children and Family

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 adheres to the DCFS policy on information sharing and ensures that foster parents understand the policy and their right to receive information. Child welfare staff receive training on these requirements during initial Foundation and Fundamental training, which is reinforced during LSSI's mandatory onboarding training. This guidance is continually reinforced in group and individual supervision.

When identifying a placement – whether initial or subsequent – child welfare staff, including case managers and licensing/resource staff, collaborate to find the most suitable home to meet the youth's needs. During this process, the child welfare specialist provides foster parents with all relevant information consistent with confidentiality requirements. The Sharing Information with Caregivers policy is reviewed and becomes part of the youth's record. Information is shared immediately, and any new details received later are communicated as soon as possible –

verbally, by phone or in person – and documented in SACWIS. A written summary of verbal information provided is given within ten business days of placement or when new information becomes available.

Foster parents are instructed to maintain all documentation in a confidential manner and to have records ready for review during home visits. LSSI emphasizes transparency and timely communication to support informed caregiver decisions. Shared information includes health, education, behavioral concerns, family background relevant to care, visitation plans, exposure to domestic violence, placement history, and the reasons for any prior moves. Foster parents should ask questions to make well-informed decisions regarding their capacity to meet a youth's needs. While specific details about the biological parents, such as service plan tasks, are not disclosed, any information affecting the child's care is shared.

Child welfare staff also discuss the youth's current services and provide a schedule of those services in writing, ensuring appointments are not missed. Foster parents are encouraged to consider whether they can accommodate the existing service plan; if not, alternative placement may be considered.

Foster parents are invited to participate in CFTMs, ACRs, and other reviews, as their input is vital to service planning and decision-making. Additionally, LSSI staff encourage open communication between foster parents and biological parents to ensure continuity of care and smooth transitions. Foster parents are encouraged to use practical tools – such as notebooks or other communication methods – to exchange updates, especially when in-person meetings are not possible. Introductions and communication are facilitated by the child welfare specialist, with an understanding that a relationship between all parties is the most child-centered approach.

Placement Change Notification

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 is made to move a youth from a foster home, a critical decision must occur first, and the child welfare specialist must provide sufficient reason to move forward with the decision to move the YIC. The child welfare specialist informs the foster parent within 48 hours of the critical decision. Foster parents are provided a 14-day notice of any planned placement change unless safety concerns require immediate removal from the home. Prior notice may be waived if the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm or a court order requires the youth's removal.

The child welfare specialist delivers the completed Notice of Decision regarding placement form to the foster parent(s) in person, only after authorization by the child welfare specialist's supervisor and Program Director, which is then documented in SACWIS. The Notice of Decision form also informs the caregivers of their right to appeal the decision.

To request DCFS review the decision to move a YIC, foster parents must act immediately by calling:

- 866-225-1431

If a foster parent disagrees with the outcome of the Clinical Placement Review, they are informed of their right to request a Fair Hearing, which must occur within 10 days of receiving the decision notice:

- DCFS Administrative Hearing Unit
406 E. Monroe St., Station 15
Springfield, IL 62701
217-728-6655

Foster parents also receive a copy of the DCFS Service Appeal brochure, which aligns with the appeal information on the Notice of Decision form. This information is reviewed with caregivers throughout the life of a case and during the licensing process. The child welfare specialist, supervisor, and/or licensing/resource worker explains the appeal options available to foster parents.

When a foster parent gives notice requesting a youth's removal from their home, LSSI first attempts to stabilize the placement. This includes the use of LSSI's new Clinical Placement Disruption process, which provides immediate clinical assistance when needed. If stabilization efforts are unsuccessful, foster parents are asked to provide a 14-day notice (30 days for a specialized YIC), to allow time for a thorough search for a new foster family.

If the removal is expected to be emotionally difficult for either the youth or a member of the foster family, LSSI's clinical team is available to provide therapeutic intervention and transition support.

Notification Regarding Court Hearings

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 ensures ensures caregivers are fully informed and supported regarding all court proceeding related to youth in their care.

- **Communicataion of Court Details**
 - Caregivers receive notice of the date, time, location, court docket number, judge's name, and other relevant court personnel.
 - This Information is provided verbally and in writing, such as through calendars, reminders, or formal letters.

- The child welfare specialist (case manager) is responsible for ensuring this information is delivered promptly and accurately.
- **Timeliness and Accountability**
 - Written notice must be provided as soon as the court date is known and no later than two week prior to the scheduled hearing.
 - Supervisors review compliance with this requirement during monthly meetings, where upon court dates, ACRS, etc. are discussed. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring accountability and documenting as such in supervision notes. Should additional training be required, the supervisor will register the child welfare specialist in LSSI's court proceedings refresher training.
- **Staff Training and Documentation**
 - LSSI staff receive instruction on this process during on-boarding training, with reinforcement and accountability during ongoing supervision and peer mentoring.
- **Foster Parent Rights and Education**
 - Foster parents are informed of their right to attend or request to intervene in court proceeding and to request court action when appropriate.
 - Due to the varying structures in each Illinois county, foster parents are also provided information on what to expect in their specific region. It is widely known that not all court proceedings are the same in each county and it is important that foster parents are aware in advance of what to expect.
 - During the licensure process or during the time a YIC is placed with a relative/fictive kin, the child welfare specialist and/or licensing/resource worker provides education on the purpose of key hearings, including:
 - Shelter Care Hearings
 - Adjudication Hearings
 - Dispositional Hearings
 - Permanency Hearings
 - Termination Hearings
 - Continuances, including why a continuance may be requested and/or granted.
 - LSSI encourages and supports foster parents in pursuing additional training related to court hearings.
 - A court process FAQ is included in each foster parents Welcome Packet.

Placement Consideration for Child Returning to Care

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, some youth in care who have been reunified with their biological family or who have been adopted, may need to return to foster care for a short or extended period. LSSI staff are trained to locate prior foster families to ensure continuity and stability for the youth. This search process includes reviewing electronic records (SACWIS, myEvolv, etc.) and the other available documentation that identifies previous placements. Current relative and fictive kin are also considered as potential placement options.

Staff receive ongoing training and supervision to ensure that placement decisions are made thoughtfully and in the best interest of the youth. Supervisors hold staff accountable for

thoroughly exploring all viable options. When a youth re-enters care, foster parents who have previously cared for that child are given priority consideration for placement, provided it is consistent with the child's best interest and the well-being of other children in the home. Available capacity within the home must also be confirmed. If a home is deemed the best option but lacks open capacity, DCFS waivers may be pursued to allow the placement.

LSSI staff carefully review all available documentation and, when possible, consult with the worker who was assigned to the youth at the time of reunification, adoption, or other permanency outcome. The collaborative, informed approach ensures that each placement decision prioritizes stability, familiarity, and the youth's overall well-being.

When determining whether a return to a previous foster home is appropriate, staff consider several best interest factors, including:

- The strength of the child's previous bond with the foster family
- Safety and emotional security
- Educational and developmental stability
- Cultural and community continuity
- Sibling placement opportunities
- The foster family's willingness and ability to support services and maintain positive relationships with the child's biological family.

This process ensures that youth are placed in stable, nurturing environments that meet their physical, emotional, and developmental needs while supporting healthy family dynamics.

Foster parents are trained to understand their right to be considered as a placement option for any youth previously placed in their home. This topic is discussed during initial licensing, ongoing training, and throughout conversations about foster parent rights and responsibilities. Foster parents are also encouraged to maintain healthy connections with youth who have been reunified with their families, as preserving these positive attachments benefits the youth, the biological family, and the foster family alike.

Access to Appeal System in Timely Manner

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

Foster parents are provided with a copy of the agency's written Staff/Foster Parent Grievance Procedure and the IL DCFS Appeals brochure during licensure and/or at time of placement in a relative or fictive kin home. Acknowledgement of receipt is maintained in the foster home file. Annual review and acknowledgment is required. Staff receive training regarding the LSSI Staff-Foster Parent Grievance procedure and the DCFS Service Appeal process as well. They are also shown the DCFS Grievance Procedure template and instructions for use, including how to present to caregivers. This occurs initially during Bootcamp training and then is on-going during team meetings/huddles and in one-on-one supervision. This then translates to staff being better

able to provide clear instruction to caregivers, which occurs during CFTMS and home visits. LSSI licensing/resource staff include the LSSI Staff/Foster Parent Grievance procedure, the DCFS Grievance template with instructions, and the DCFS Service appeal brochure in the LSSI *Welcome Packets* for traditional and relative/fictive kin caregivers. The Grievance procedure is also reviewed annually. LSSI staff ensure foster parents are aware of the different grievance procedures and how to appeal decisions made by the agency.

Foster parents are protected from disrespect, harassment, or retaliation by any party when exercising their right to file a grievance and/or appeal a decision. Any such behavior by an LSSI staff member is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Any perceived retaliation or harassment should be reported immediately to LSSI management and the DCFS Advocacy Office at 1-800-232-3798.

Foster Parent Hotline

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 provides caregivers with a comprehensive list of statewide and local resources and phone numbers to ensure they have access to needed support and assistance.

The list includes statewide contact for:

- Office of Inspector General (OIG) – 312-433-3000
- Advocacy Office Helpline – 866-368-5204
- Foster Parent Hotline – 800-722-9124
- DCFS Hotline 800- 252-2287
- Medical Consent Unit

Caregivers also receive local contact numbers for their assigned worker, supervisor, Program Director, and licensing/resource worker. Information is provided for the local on-call/after-hours phone number to ensure assistance is always available.

Caregivers receive this information:

- During the licensure process
- At time of placement
- During ACRs
- As part of LSSI's *Welcome Packet* for new families, including traditional, relative, and fictive kin caregivers. The DCFS Caregiver Handbook is also provided to caregivers.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Open Communication with Team

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

LSSI foster parents participate in pre-service and ongoing training to ensure they are fully equipped to meet the needs of youth in care. The PRIDE redesign pre-service curriculum includes a dedicated session on communication and confidentiality, emphasizing the importance of maintaining trust, professionalism, and privacy in all interactions. These topics are reviewed by licensing/resource staff during the licensing process and reinforced throughout each family's involvement with LSSI.

LSSI is committed to maintaining open and respectful communication with foster parents. Honoring and valuing those who serve as caregivers is a cornerstone of the agency's mission and approach to service delivery. Staff receive specialized training on caregiver engagement through multiple learning opportunities, including:

- Foundations Training
- LSSI Bootcamp
- Case scenario reviews
- Peer mentoring
- Team meetings and one-on-one supervision

These trainings prepare staff to ensure caregivers are aware of their responsibility to share information regarding a youth in their home and the various ways in which this can and should occur. Foster parents are provided ongoing guidance to ensure information sharing and record keeping occur. Additionally, caregivers learn during PRIDE the importance of sharing significant events involving a youth within 24 hours. The Foster Parent Handbook, provided to all caregivers, also provides valuable insight into a caregiver's responsibilities.

In preparation for semi-annual case reviews, ACRs, and court hearings, foster parents receive direction on their role as part of the professional child welfare team. They are expected to provide relevant documentation, participate in discussions, and share insights regarding the youth's progress and needs. Foster parents are also encouraged to address concerns promptly and participate actively in all meetings related to a youth's care.

Confidentiality Regarding Case Matters

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.

LSSI places a strong emphasis on confidentiality as a key component of quality foster care. During PRIDE redesign pre-service training, caregivers receive guidance on the importance of maintaining confidentiality and handling sensitive information responsibly. This topic is also

reviewed during the initial CFTM for unlicensed relative and fictive kin caregivers, ensuring they understand the sensitivity of the information they receive.

Confidentiality is reinforced when youth are placed with an unlicensed relative or fictive kin caregiver. All foster parents are required to sign Pre-placement Agreements, which includes information regarding confidentiality. They also receive the Foster Parent Handbook and Rights and Responsibilities, also outlining confidentiality requirements. Child welfare and licensing/resource workers ensure foster parents understand information provided.

LSSI staff complete annual confidentiality training, which covers the proper handling of proprietary and case-related information. This training is also built into onboarding training for new employees, emphasizing confidentiality from the start. Supervisors provide refresher sessions during team meetings or as needed to reinforce expectations.

When foster parents have questions or concerns about confidentiality, they are encouraged to reach out to LSSI staff for guidance. If a child welfare specialist or licensing/resource workers is unsure how to respond, they are required to consult with their supervisor to ensure accurate information and consistent communication.

Advocate for Child in Home

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

LSSI child welfare staff hold a key responsibility to help strengthen the relationship between foster parents and the youth in their care. The agency believes that when foster parent form stronger attachments, they become more invested in advocating for the youth's needs and well-being.

During PRIDE pre-service training and ongoing meetings, foster parents learn the importance of advocacy and their responsibility to support youth in every area of development. LSSI emphasizes that effective advocacy helps ensure youth receive the services and opportunities they need to thrive.

Advocacy Responsibilities

Foster parents are expected to advocate across all areas of a child's life, including:

- Medical – ensuring access to healthcare and follow up care.
- Social, emotional, and behavioral well-being – supporting mental health needs.
- Education and development – attending and participating in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and 504 plan meetings per the IL State Board of Education guidelines.

Foster parents are the educational rights holders unless the court grants that authority to the biological parent or other entity. They may sign consents for educational evaluations and for educational purposes, all of this is learned during the required Educational Advocacy training (see below).

Participation and Collaboration

Foster parents are encouraged to attend all relevant meetings to share accurate and open information about the youth, such as:

- Case staffings
- ACRS
- Placement Reviews
- CFMTs
- Court hearings

By participating in these meetings, foster parents provide valuable insights into the youth's service needs and goals. LSSI child welfare staff, including educational liaisons are available to assist in advocacy efforts to help foster parents identify the appropriate contacts for specific services.

Mentorship and Support

LSSI promotes supportive relationships within its foster care network by encouraging experienced foster parents to mentor newer ones. This peer connection helps strengthen advocacy efforts and improves outcomes for youth in care. Foster parents are reminded to collaborate closely with all professionals involved in a youth's care, developing positive relationships that foster teamwork and understanding throughout the life of each case.

Appeals and Rights Info

All caregivers – licensed foster parents, unlicensed relative caregivers, and fictive kin – receive information about how to appeal decisions:

- This information is provided at time of licensure and when a youth is placed in a home.
- Each caregiver receives an LSSI Welcome Packet that includes:
 - LSSI staff contact info.
 - LSSI Staff/Foster parent grievance procedure
 - DCFS Service Appeals brochure

Case managers and licensing/resource staff are responsible for ensuring caregivers:

- Understand their rights and what can be appealed.
- Know the steps to take to initiate an appeal.
- Receive annual reviews of this information, or more often if needed.
- CFTMs are used to relay information regarding this responsibility.

Training and Ongoing Education

- Licensed foster parents are required to participate in DCFSs Educational Advocacy training and encouraged to do so with in their first year of licensure.

- Unlicensed relative caregivers and fictive kin are also encouraged to participate in the Educational Advocacy training.
- Licensing/resource staff provide reminders during annual and semi-annual home visits.
- LSSI's educational liaisons are also available for group and/or individual educational training.
- During pre-service training, caregivers also learn about the court system and the importance for advocacy. LSSI provides initial and ongoing training regarding the Juvenile court system, including the various types of hearings, etc., as well.

Treating Children and Families with Dignity and Respect

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 from the start of their licensing journey on treating youth and their families with dignity and respect. This principle is introduced during initial inquiry, mutual assessment, PRIDE pre-service training, and reinforced throughout the licensing process. Unlicensed relative and fictive kin caregivers also receive this education from their child welfare and licensing/resource specialists during pre-placement visits, at time of placement, throughout the life of the case.

Foster parents are informed of the expectation that they treat youth in care as they would their own children, using positive reinforcement to build strengths and avoid corporal punishment, which they are required to formally acknowledge. They are encouraged to communicate respectfully with the youth's biological family, as youth well-being and family support are central priorities.

Child welfare and licensing/resource staff receive ongoing training through Foundations and Fundamentals courses, supervision, and mentoring to monitor and reinforce respectful caregiver behavior. During home visits, they assess and discuss how caregivers support youth and their families, offering additional training or guidance when needed. Safe and private spaces are used to conduct conversations with youth in care wherein they can share any concerns, which can then be addressed with the caregiver when appropriate.

Licensing/resource staff assess families' ability to support permanency goals and to engage in respectful relationships with natural families during pre-licensure and during annual and semi-annual visits. The responsibility is further discussed when review of DCFS 402 Licensing Standards occurs during the licensure process and during on-going family assessment. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in meetings, such as court, ACRs, CFTMs, etc., wherein LSSI staff role model ways in which to treat youth and their families during these meetings. Collaboration between foster and birth families – while not mandatory – is strongly encouraged. LSSI staff redirect any negative comments, even those made in private meetings, and provide feedback on how such behavior is detrimental to a youth's emotional well-being. This is an ongoing process, especially with new families, but one that LSSI believes is of vital importance. When positive relationships between families are not possible, LSSI staff work to mediate

differences and ensure interactions remain professional. Supervisors provide ongoing guidance and direction for staff to ensure compliance; this occurs during regularly scheduled supervision, during team meetings, and provided in refresher trainings as needed.

Caregiver Strengths and Weaknesses Recognition

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.

To be successful, foster parents must recognize when they need support to fulfill their responsibilities to youth in care. LSSI provides a comprehensive system to ensure a strong match between each child and their caregiver. Child welfare specialists and licensing/resource staff use various tools and processes to guide and support families.

Key Tools and Processes

- Matching and assessment tools:
 - Sharing Information with Caregivers form and pre-placement questionnaires help determine fit between the child and family.
- Relative and Fictive Kin Placements:
 - Since these caregivers are often identified after a child's removal necessitating immediate placement, specialists use the same tools – along with safety checklists and placement agreements – to assess readiness and clarify responsibilities.
- Ongoing Assessment:
 - The mutual assessment process begins during pre-service training and continues through home visits and annual and semi-annual monitoring.
- Licensing/resource staff are consulted to provide input on families for whom they have assessed.

Continuous Support and Training

Foster parents' needs are assessed throughout the life of a case and during the licensure. When additional support is needed, LSSI provide referrals and hands-on assistance to strengthen family stability and skills.

Available Supports

- Referrals to workshops, training sessions with LSSI training and/or clinical staff, and educational materials.
- Supportive information available via LSSI's Foster Parent Training Portal
- One-on-one training and in-home coaching when needed.
- Access to books, webinars, and learning opportunities through LSSI and DCFS.
- Guidance via LSSI's new Clinical Disruption policy when caregivers face difficulties related to trauma or behavioral needs.

Foster parents are encouraged to build their own support networks and connect with experienced caregivers for advice and mentorship.

Licensing and Training Responsibilities

During the licensing process, the licensing/resource worker discusses expectations and helps foster families identify the capacity and age range that best suits their skills and routines.

Responsibilities and Ongoing Development

- Develop a list of questions before placement to ensure comfort with each youth's background.
- Participate actively in creating and following a personalized training plan.
- Continuously update their skill set through ongoing training and participation in LSSI sponsored events.
- Seek help promptly if challenges arise in understanding or meeting a youth's needs.
- LSSI offers additional opportunities to enhance caregiver knowledge and inclusivity:
 - Specialized sessions for families caring for LGBTQIA+ youth, including materials for All Children/All Families (ACAF).
 - Supplementary webinars and trainings beyond those provided by DCFS.
 - Support groups that encourage collaboration and shared learning among foster parents.
 - Above-mentioned training portal containing additional resources.

If a family feels unable to support certain needs, LSSI provides additional training. However, families who remain unwilling to engage in required learning will not be contacted for future placement of youth with needs they are unable to meet.

Importance of Affiliating with Other Caregivers

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 across the state, giving foster parents opportunities to network, share ideas, and connect with others who share similar experiences. In 2025, participation in these groups reached its highest-level sense the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, in 2025 mandatory training for newly licensed foster caregivers has increased collaboration between new and seasoned foster families.

These gatherings take various forms, including:

- Foster parent meetings
- Town Hall meetings
- Specialized training sessions

LSSI staff promote and host these groups to build strong alliances among foster parents, creating a space to share concerns and work toward positive solutions. Some sites even report foster parents opening their homes to host fellow caregivers for meals and conversation.

Licensing/resource staff regularly discuss the availability and benefits of support groups during the licensing process and during subsequent annual and semi-annual monitoring visits. They also encourage foster parents to use their skills to become co-trainers and connect with others facing similar challenges, such as managing behavioral concerns. This initiative supports a collaborative learning environment that benefits new and experienced foster families.

These opportunities are also extended to unlicensed relative and fictive kin providers. Connections are offered between unlicensed relative and/or fictive kin families and licensed traditional families for information-sharing and advice-giving to occur.

In addition, LSSI promotes broader involvement and advocacy by sharing information about state and national foster parent and adoption organizations. Recently, during statewide meetings, LSSI child welfare staff were challenged to identify and nominate foster families for participation in both internal and external advisory councils.

Assess Training Needs

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

The training needs of caregivers are identified through ongoing collaboration between the caregiver, licensing/resource worker, and case managers. In the Families Together program, foster parent support specialists also participate in this process.

Caregivers have multiple opportunities to evaluate and address their training needs, using both their own growth goals and the specific needs of the youth in their care as guides.

Training Assessment Process

- Training needs are discussed during:
 - Monthly visits with the case manager or 2x/ month for unlicensed caregivers
 - Annual and semi-annual visits with the licensing/resource worker
- Staff and foster families conduct a mutual assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Special focus is given to the types of youth accepted into the home to ensure training aligns with their needs.
- Staff may also encourage caregivers to broaden their skills through additional or advanced training.

Access to Training Opportunities

- Foster parents can request training through their child welfare or licensing/resource worker.
 - Opportunities include:

- Virtual and in-person sessions
 - Online resources (podcasts, webinars)
 - Support groups and consultation.
- LSSI's Foster Parent Training Portal continues to expand in use and accessibility.

Encouraging Engagement and Growth

- LSSI recognizes that some experienced foster parents may feel they no longer need training. Staff work to reframe this mindset by emphasizing that learning is an ongoing process.
- Support groups play a vital role by allowing seasoned foster parents to:
 - Share experiences.
 - Mentor new caregivers.
 - Encourage continued participation in training.
- One-on-One coaching is also encouraged, with experienced foster parents invited to share insights during meetings, groups, and sessions.

Commitment to Ongoing Learning

- Foster parents are responsible for recognizing their own limitations and seeking guidance to prevent negative impacts on youth in care.
- LSSI and DCFS ensure a variety of learning opportunities are available, both virtual and in-person.
- Training participation has increased significantly – higher now than any point since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- LSSI continues to expand its annual training offerings to meet the evolving needs of foster families.
- LSSI now uses a training survey to gauge training needs and effectiveness.

Prevent Placement Disruption by Recognizing Impact

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 that placement stability is vital to the well-being of youth in care. To minimize disruption and to support foster families, LSSI educates caregivers on their responsibility to maintain stability and provides practical tools and training to help them succeed.

Training and Proactive Support

- Staff Training: LSSI trains staff to regularly assess placement stability through trauma-informed care strategies.
- Pre-service Training: Licensed foster parents are introduced early to their role in promoting stability through trauma-informed care strategies.

- Ongoing Education: Foster parents receive continued coaching on de-escalation, safety, and trauma-informed approaches to prevent disruptions.
- Tailored Support: Child welfare specialists and licensing/resource workers identify additional or specialized trainings based on each family's needs.

These proactive measures empower foster parents to create nurturing environments that reduce behavioral challenges and strengthen long-term placements.

Placement Matching and Continuous Assessment

From the initial placement decision, LSSI ensures that the match between the youth and foster family is thoughtful and intentional.

- Matching Factors: Staff consider the foster parents' skills, experience, and capacity while respecting their comfort level.
- Monthly assessment: Child welfare specialists conduct ongoing assessment to ensure the youth's needs are being met.
- Information Sharing: Foster parents are continuously updated about the youth's trauma history and behaviors to support informed caregiving.

Clinical Disruption Plan and Crisis Response

In 2025, LSSI introduced the Clinical Disruption Plan policy, a trauma-informed approach that emphasizes early intervention rather than crisis response. The LSSI Director of Clinical services oversees this initiative and has the support of clinical staff throughout the state.

- Early Intervention: Case managers, licensing/resource workers, and clinical staff coordinate support before challenges escalate.
- Crisis Support: Foster parents have access to:
 - A 24-hour on-call worker (response required within one hour).
 - The CARES line (1-800-345-9049), offering emergency behavioral assessment and hospitalization referral when needed.
- When Disruptions Occur: LSSI convenes a CFTM to develop a new support plan, and clinical staff provide education and clinical assistance to the foster family.

Specialized Support Services

- TBRI (Trust-Based Relational Intervention) Training: Provided to both staff and foster parents to strengthen attachment and trauma-informed care practices.
- Placement Stabilization Services: Referrals are available for counseling, mentoring, and intensive in-home supports to prevent escalation to higher levels of care (e.g., specialized foster care, residential treatment, etc.).
- Respite: Updated training clarifies the difference between respite care and childcare, encouraging caregivers to request help early to prevent burnout.

Programs to Reduce Placement Disruption

- Families Together: Offers intensive wraparound services to stabilize placements and reduce the length of time youth spend in care.

- Emergency Foster Home Initiative Pilot (EFH): Provides short-term, specially trained placements for 30-60 days while a long-term home is identified. This program includes:
 - Weekly caseworker visits
 - Weekly team meetings and clinical support
 - Three times per week assessment of behaviors and caregiver stress level through a specific assessment tool (PDR – parent daily report)
 - Additional stipends beyond DCFS monthly reimbursement

Collaboration and Transition Planning

When stabilization efforts are not successful:

- LSSI collaborates with foster parents and biological families to identify relative or fictive kin placements.
- Foster parents are requested to provide at least 14 days' notice (or 30 days for specialized youth in care or youth in care in the Therapeutic Foster Care program) to allow time for a thoughtful transition.
- LSSI clinical staff debrief with families to evaluate what worked, what can improve, and how to support them moving forward.

Minimize Negative Impact to Family

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 understand the challenges foster families face when accepting placements and provide comprehensive support to promote stability.

Assessment and Training

- Licensing/resource staff assess the family capabilities during the licensing process and help them identify limitations.
- Training covers de-escalation, trauma, safety, and Lifebooks, enabling families to recognize and address stressors early.
- Ongoing staff development ensures workers can identify when families may need additional support or a break.

Clinical and Respite Support

- Clinical team services: Counseling is available to foster families and youth, including biological children, via referral from the case manager or licensing/resource worker.

Respite Care

- Available at all foster care levels to relieve stress or manage crises (distinct from regular childcare).
- Staff are trained to assess respite providers, complete background checks, and secure supervisory authorization.

- LSSI staff also assist caregivers in identifying positive supports and/or respite providers from amongst their trusted support networks.

Stress Management and Self-Care

- Specialized training topics are developed with input from foster parents and staff.
- Training topics:
 - Managing attachment issues from separation.
 - Coping with grief or loss when a child leaves care.
 - Selfcare strategies to prevent burnout.
- Clinical staff can also provide short-term therapeutic support as needed.
- Support groups:
 - Each LSSI foster care and adoption office offers monthly support groups. Foster parents are encouraged to actively participate to network and learn how other caregivers manage stress.

Licensed foster parents may request a DCFS voluntary placement hold to temporarily pause new placements. Requests go through the licensing/resource worker and require approval by the Statewide Foster Parent Licensing and Recruitment Manager. Holds may also be suggested by staff if a family appears to need a break. During an approved hold, the foster family is responsible for maintaining compliance with applicable DCFS rules. Reassessment is required once a hold removal is requested, which includes the licensing/resource worker visiting the home to complete a thorough compliance review and assessment.

Foster parents have the right to contact details for service providers for youth in their care. They are responsible for ensuring attendance at appointments and encouraged to share relevant insights with providers. If concerns arise about services, foster parents can:

- Request a CFTM
- Speak with the supervisor.
- Seek assistance from their licensing/resource worker.

Positively Promote Foster Care

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 strength of foster families' voices. Foster parents are encouraged to share their experiences within their communities to raise awareness and promote foster care. LSSI provides training for both staff and foster parents on how to be active members of the professional team, recognizing that collaboration supports youth well-being and enriches the fostering experience.

With guidance from supervisors, licensing/resource staff, along with case managers, offer informal training to help caregivers promote foster care and communicate effectively with potential foster families. Foster parents learn that their personal stories and word-of-mouth outreach are powerful tools for recruiting and supporting other caregivers. Those who

participate in recruitment or training events receive talking points but are encouraged to speak authentically from their own experiences.

LSSI celebrates the impact of foster parents through appreciation events and recognition initiatives, particularly during National Foster Care Month in May. Throughout the year, LSSI hosts appreciation events – such as themed gift basket deliveries, movie nights, family bowling nights, and community gatherings – to honor the dedication of foster families. The agency partners with foster parents to identify local contacts, churches, and organizations to raise awareness and expand community engagement around fostering. Participation in support groups often helps foster parents gain confidence, feel empowered, and become more active advocates.

To ensure foster parents remain informed about appreciation activities and opportunities to connect, LSSI communicates through multiple channels, including emails, newsletters, event calendars, and social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Invitations are mailed directly to foster parents' homes to ensure they are aware of events that celebrate their invaluable role in supporting youth in care.

Understanding Team Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities

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. Because of this, they possess valuable insight into the needs, wants, and best interests of the youth they support. LSSI staff use various methods to empower foster families to participate fully in important meetings such as court hearings, ACRs, and CFTMs. Staff ensure that foster parents understand their role in these meetings and their rights as educational surrogates for the youth in their care.

When foster parents are unable to attend court hearings, they are encouraged to write letters to the Judge. In addition, some juvenile court judges prefer that foster parents communicate directly with the assigned GAL, and LSSI staff encourage families to do so when appropriate. If a foster parent cannot attend a CFTM, ACR, etc., assigned staff collect their input beforehand to ensure their perspective is included in any decision made. Information provided by foster families contributes to the development of both initial and ongoing service planning.

Foster parents – whether licensed, unlicensed relatives, or fictive kin – are instructed about their rights and responsibilities during the licensing process or at the time of placement. LSSI emphasizes confidentiality in all communication with foster parents. At some sites, LSSI distributes monthly calendars that include upcoming court hearings, case reviews, team meetings, and scheduled visits so that families can stay informed and engaged.

While co-training on these responsibilities is not required, LSSI values the voices of caregivers and actively seeks their input. To ensure understanding and compliance, the Foster Parent Law and related rights and responsibilities are reviewed:

- During initial licensure meetings (included in initial *Welcome Packet*)
- Shortly after a youth is placed with a relative or fictive kin
- Annually thereafter – or more often if needed

Caregivers are encouraged to participate in all service planning meetings, where their lived experiences and perspectives are recognized as vital contributions alongside those of professional team members.

LSSI ensures that staff also receive training on the Foster Parent Law and the corresponding rights and responsibilities. This is included in LSSI's initial 90-day onboarding process, along with an easy-to-use FAQ that summarizes essential information.

To strengthen communication and collaboration, LSSI hosts monthly mandatory training for newly licensed caregivers, and existing caregivers are welcome to attend as well. These sessions provide families opportunities to:

- Revisit foster parent rights and responsibilities
- Share experiences and advice
- Ask questions and voice concerns in an open, supportive setting.

LSSI has found these meetings to be highly beneficial, with seasoned foster parents offering valuable insights to newer families. Supervisors are available for questions or concerns and actively participate in CFTMs to ensure foster parents have direct support and representation. Senior supervisors and Program Directors may also attend when needed.

LSSI's leadership encourages open communication and maintains close relationships with many foster families, fostering a sense of trust and collaboration. In addition to these regular opportunities for engagement, foster parents can share feedback anonymously through annual foster care surveys administered by the LSSI Quality Compliance and Data Dept. To ensure ease of use, a QR code for the surveys is sent to all caregivers. Any caregiver who struggles with technology, may request a survey, and envelope to send directly to the QCD team. This process continued successfully in fiscal year 2025, reinforcing LSSI commitment to transparency and responsiveness to family voices.

Survey Results (summary)

In fiscal year 2025, 114 families responded to caregiver surveys:

- 48% of respondents expressed that they "strongly agree" with feeling satisfied with the services and treatment provided by LSSI.
- 47% of respondents expressed that they "agree" with feeling satisfied with the service and treatment provided by LSSI.
- 60% of respondents expressed they "strongly agree" that they are treated with compassion and respect by LSSI, that their opinions and voices are heard, and that LSSI listens without judgment.
- 30% of respondents expressed they "agree" that they are treated with compassion and respect by LSSI, that their opinions and voices are heard, and that LSSI listens without judgment.

Survey results are reviewed by each site and used to strengthen engagement practices.

Mandated Reporter Role

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.

The responsibility of being a mandated reporter is clearly explained to caregivers during the licensing process, through PRIDE pre-service training, and the required DCFS Mandated Reporter Training. Relative and fictive kin caregivers also receive this information to ensure that all individuals caring for youth understand their legal and ethical obligations.

Training includes:

- Responsibility of being a mandated reporter.
- What to expect if allegations are made against a caregiver.
- The rules and regulations that apply when allegations of abuse or neglect occur.
- LSSI also includes an FAQ regarding allegations and investigations in all *Welcome Packets*, and this information is thoroughly explained to all caregivers.
- Hotline number: 1-800-252-2873

Before a youth is placed in a home, each caregiver must have reviewed and signed the Mandated Reporter acknowledgement form, confirming they understand their duties and obligations. The licensing/resource worker is responsible for reviewing these expectations and providing additional or refresher training as needed.

If allegations of abuse or neglect are made against a caregiver, an internal and/or DCFS investigation is initiated. During any investigation, the LSSI licensing/resource worker informs foster parents of their rights, including the right to have an advocate of their choice present during interviews. Foster parents are encouraged to contact their licensing/resource worker or supervisor with any questions or for further clarification about the investigation process.

At the start of the investigation, LSSI staff explain that there may be certain information that cannot be disclosed due to confidentiality rules. This transparency helps set clear expectations and fosters trust throughout the process.

Licensed foster parents are required to cooperate fully with both LSSI and DCFS during any investigation. In turn, both agencies share the responsibility to maintain open and clear communication with foster parents, ensuring they are kept informed and supported at every stage of the investigation.

Case Reviews and Court Hearings Understanding

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 first steps in the fostering process for new foster parents is pre-service training. This training includes a session that highlights the foster parents' role as professional team members and their responsibility to participate in meetings concerning the youth in care. LSSI reinforces this throughout the life of a case and provides additional guidance to relatives and fictive kin caregivers.

Emphasized in pre-service and on-going training is the importance of working as part of the child's professional support team. Active involvement in critical meetings such as ACRs, court proceedings is also encouraged frequently. LSSI child welfare staff continually remind foster parents of the importance of their participation in permanency planning as well. Additionally, LSSI's training, *Guide to Your First Placement*, outlines the importance of foster parent engagement as a professional member of the team and the importance of participating in case reviews and court hearings.

LSSI encourages foster parents to advocate for the youth in their care, recognizing that foster parents often know the child best. If foster parents feel their voice is not being heard, they are encouraged to continue advocating and may request additional CFTMs with case supervisor and other team members. Licensing/resource workers strive to attend CFTMs to provide added support and to ensure foster parents feel represented. Additionally, child welfare specialists provide one-on-one updates and guidance before, during, and after ACR meetings and court hearings to help foster parents understand their role and stay informed about case developments. When a foster parent is unable to attend, they are encouraged to submit their input in advance.

Appeal System(s)

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.

LSSI's Foster Parent/Staff grievance procedures outlines the procedure to file a complaint or grievance. It is the responsibility of LSSI staff to ensure that all foster parents are educated regarding the grievance procedure, relevant appeals systems, and the caregivers right to utilize any of these systems. Foster parents are encouraged to contact their licensing/resource worker and child welfare specialist if they have questions or need clarification.

LSSI staff explain the difference between the types of grievance and appeal processes, including:

- **LSSI Foster Parent/Staff Grievance Procedure** outlined in the LSSI brochure and provided to every family. Acknowledgment of receipt and understanding are part of the licensing and case records.
 - LSSI offers both informal and formal options depending on the situation and the caregivers wishes.

- Informal – involves a first level meeting between the caregiver and the assigned worker and supervisor. Should the foster parent not be satisfied with the outcome, the foster parent is encouraged to use the grievance procedure to request a formal meeting.
- Formal – involves Program Director and if needed the Associate Executive Director. All parties will come together to discuss the issue and work towards an amicable solution.
- **Licensing Grievance Appeal Procedure** outlined in the DCFS Foster Parent Handbook.
- **Service Appeal** for any dispute regarding services or decisions regarding a case. This information is provided to LSSI foster families in the form of the DCFS Service Appeal brochure.
- **OIG brochure** provides detailed information to assist foster parents and staff. Caregivers are provided with this brochure, which includes the Foster Parent Hotline - 1-800-722-9124

Records Management

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 their responsibility to maintain detailed and accurate records of all significant aspects of a youth's care. Caregivers learn that proper documentation and record-keeping ensures continuity of care and supports informed decision-making by everyone involved in the child's life.

Record-keeping Expectations:

- Maintain records of significant events, such as school activities, milestones, or behavioral incidents.
- Maintain all medical information, including:
 - Routine medical updates
 - Medication usage and dosage details
 - Medication logs
 - Medical incidents or emergency room visits
- Track behavioral information by using behavior charts, progress notes, and recording interventions used.
- Keep documentation related to educational and therapeutic services, ensuring that providers have the necessary information to continue care.
- Service plan tasks
- CFS 906 – Placement Authorization
- Medical Card
- Store copies of youth photos for inclusion in Lifebooks and for future reference.

During pre-service training, LSSI sets clear expectations for record keeping and provides written guidelines. Additionally, child welfare specialists review records during required monthly visits. Foster parents are encouraged to have the records ready for review. The licensing/resource team also reviews during required semi- and annual monitoring visits for compliance. Staff also offer organizational support, such as new folders or other systems to help families maintain documentation.

Info Sharing with Subsequent Caregivers

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 members of the professional team, foster parents may be asked to meet with subsequent caregivers and share the youth's records to support a smooth and informed transition. LSSI child welfare and licensing/resource staff help foster parents understand this responsibility by encouraging their active participation in the transition process.

Foster parents are expected to maintain accurate and organized records for each youth in their care and to share relevant information appropriately with subsequent caregivers or parents during CFTMs, home visits, etc. Through training – particularly those addressing childhood trauma and its effects – caregivers learn the importance of maintaining a positive, or at least neutral, relationship with future caregivers to ensure the best possible outcomes for the youth.

Ongoing team support reinforces the importance of confidentiality and prioritizing the youth's best interests. During the licensing process, foster parents receive training and guidance related to youth development, trauma responses, and strategies to support youth during transitions. Foster parents are reminded that their involvement during transitions – whether a youth is moving to another foster home or being reunified with their parents – is essential to maintaining consistency and reducing stress for the child. These reminders are provided throughout the life of the case, especially when a move or reunification is scheduled.

Additionally, foster parent receive education on creating and maintaining a meaningful Lifebook. Each youth in care is provided a Lifebook that stays with them throughout their time in the child welfare system. Foster parents learn what types of information to include and how it supports continuity when shared with future caregivers. By helping youth build their Lifebooks, foster parents document milestones and memories that provide lasting connections and sense of identity for the child.

Culturally Sensitive Care

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 dedicated to ensuring that the cultural needs and identities of all clients are understood, respected, and celebrated. The agency promotes an inclusive environment through ongoing education and support for foster parents.

Training and Education

- Foster parents receive pre-service and ongoing training focused on cultural awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity.
- Training helps foster parents understand that each youth's cultural beliefs, values, and traditions may differ from their own.
- Culture is defined broadly to include:
 - Race, ethnicity, and religion
 - Language and traditions
 - Food, clothing, and celebrations
 - Daily routines and family practices
- LSSI emphasizes the importance of maintaining and celebrating each youth's heritage through Lifebook training, offered via group, one-on-one, or in-home sessions.

Family and Cultural Connections

- Foster parents are encouraged to support birth families through:
 - Family visits, phone calls, photo sharing, and participation in family events.
 - LSSI's Families Together program provides each family with a tablet to allow for virtual visits and daily communication (e.g., saying goodnight, help with homework from parent, etc.).
- This collaboration enables mutual learning:
 - Birth parents can observe and learn effective parenting strategies.
 - Foster parents can gain insight into the child's cultural and racial traditions.

Supporting Cultural Identity

- Foster parents are guided to meet cultural needs through:
 - Books, training opportunities through DCFS and LSSI training, and conversations with birth families.
 - External resources and peer connections with other foster families.
- Staff promote the use of information-sharing tools, such as:
 - Verbal communication or shared notebooks.
 - DCFS mechanisms like "Sharing Information About My Child" form.

Staff Support and Continuous Learning

- Licensing/resource specialists and child welfare specialists collaborate to:
 - Reinforce the importance of cultural sensitivity.
 - Encourage foster parents to express concerns if they feel unprepared to meet cultural needs.
- When needed, additional education, one-on-one guidance, or facilitated sessions are provided.

- Foster parents are encouraged to remain open-minded, acknowledge what they may not yet know, and embrace opportunities to learn and grow.