



Foster Care System and Foster Parent Work Group Update

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Karen Shea, DCF Family Services Deputy Commissioner

Why Foster Care Matters

- ▶ DCF Family Services is responsible for children who come into state custody due to child abuse and neglect or due to behavior challenges (including delinquency)
- ▶ DCF Family Services can not effectively serve children in state custody without the support and availability of foster parents.
- ▶ Foster parents are core to our ability to fulfill our mandate

Our Current System

- ▶ Currently, there are more than 1,252 children in DCF custody.
- ▶ Of those children, 927 are in foster care (607 gen foster care/320 relative foster care).
- ▶ There are approximately 1,283 licensed foster homes in the State of Vermont.
 - ▶ During the last quarter of 2017 (October-December):
 - ▶ 78 new foster homes were licensed; and
 - ▶ 99 foster homes were closed.
- ▶ Approximately 28% of our foster homes continue fostering beyond 3 years.
 - ▶ Some common reasons for closing a foster care license include: becoming licensed to provide kinship care for a relative, only caring for a particular child in custody, adopting children and no longer fostering, and the reality that being a foster parent can be difficult sometimes.

Foster Home Years of Service				
<1 Year	1-2 Years	2-3 Years	3-5 Years	5+ Years
383	307	242	135	216
30%	24%	19%	11%	17%

Background

- ▶ In 2016, S.189 proposed a Foster Parent Bill of Rights
- ▶ After hearing testimony on the proposed bill, the legislature created a working group that was to meet three times and submit a report around several areas identified in the Bill:
 - ▶ Access to DCF on weekends/evenings
 - ▶ Access to DCF records about a particular child or foster family
 - ▶ Scheduling of court-orders visits and appointments with DCF
 - ▶ Fear of reprisal for refusal of a placement or raising concerns about DCF or the foster care system
 - ▶ Regional differences identified in the State's foster care system

Work Group Composition:

- ▶ Lissa Schneckenburger, *Chair*, Foster Parent, and VFAFA Member (VT Foster Adoptive Family Association)
- ▶ Amy Brady, Voices for Vermont's Children
 - *Ridmi Coe, Youth Advocate
 - Hon. Brian Grearson, Chief Superior Judge
 - *Brenda Hamlin, Kin Foster Parent, VFAFA Member
 - Barb Joyal, DCF Family Services System of Care Unit Director
 - *Erinn Rolland-Forkey, Foster Parent and VFAFA Member
 - Karen Shea, DCF Family Services Interim Deputy Commissioner
 - Karen Vastine, Senior Advisor to the DCF Commissioner
- ▶ Additionally: David Kennedy, Guardian ad Litem Coordinator; Jim Forbes, DCF; Leslie Wisdom, DCF; Lindsay Barron, DCF

* Denotes Gubernatorial Appointee

Act 116 Work Group Process

- ▶ The work group met three times as part of its official charge and held additional meetings to continue its work.
- ▶ The group followed the topical headings recommended in Act 116 in its meeting discussions which generated additional ideas.
- ▶ The group primarily arrived at agreements and recommendations using a consensus model.
- ▶ The group submitted a report to the legislature last January: [Foster Parent Working Group Report](#).

Our work together

Inspired by the Act 116 work, an on-going working group comprised of DCF staff, foster parents and other stakeholders was created to focus on the issues identified. They are tasked with reviewing the prior work and creating a workplan going forward.

DCF-FSD Foster Parent Workgroup

- Jointly led by FSD and foster parents
- Membership includes foster parents, central office, district directors, supervisors, social workers, resource coordinators, youth, & community partners
 - Meets every 6-8 weeks
- Oversees the workplan and determines priority areas and next steps
- Serves as a forum for sub-groups to report out and share progress
- Reviews the work happening throughout the division and larger community
 - Provides updates to the legislature as needed

Foster Parent Best Practices Sub-Committee

- Revised the *Placement Checklist*
- Developed the *Foster Parent Authorization Letter*
- Currently developing a supplemental document to the *Placement Checklist* — to be completed by foster parents
- Reviewed normalcy policy and provided feedback
- Future work to occur on the topics of: placement changes and the move process, partnering with children's families, family time best practices, and case planning best practices

Foster Parent Communications & FAQ Sub-Committee

- Two sub-committees of the DCF-FSD Foster Parent Workgroup merged to form this group
- Developed a Foster Parent Social Media Network Guide
- Created a SurveyMonkey to collect Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from foster parents on an ongoing basis.
- Currently drafting responses to FAQs and building a page on the DCF website
- Future work to occur on the topics of: supporting local support groups and placement supports and emergency responses

The Work Ahead

Re-building relationships and trust between DCF staff and Foster Parents (FP)

Issues Identified by Legislative Group

- ▶ Focus on strategies that can be used to exercise sensitivity around the uneven relationship between FPs and DCF staff
- ▶ Create and articulate a process for FPs to share safety concerns.
- ▶ Develop an anonymous method for sharing feedback.

Since 2017

- ▶ Listening sessions with foster parents
- ▶ Work to develop foster parent support groups and mentoring Can we add a slide of the rack card?
- ▶ Supporting peer / mutual support networks through the development of social media guide
- ▶ Development of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) website for FPs – with questions and responses on the topic of sharing feedback and raising concerns.

The Work Ahead

Include FP voice in current policy initiatives and discussions including

Issues Identified by Legislative Group

- ▶ Parent Child Contact Standards – Identified as a need by CHINS Working Group and being discussed in Justice for Children Best Practices Subcommittee
- ▶ Post Adoption Contact Agreements
- ▶ DCF's collaborative work with other stakeholders from the Child Protection System including: the Judiciary, the Office of the Defender General, the Association of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs, Guardian Ad Litem etc.

Since 2017

- ▶ Creation of Post Adoption Contact Agreement focused temporary position to assist foster parents

The Work Ahead

Develop strategies to increase communication between FP and DCF

Issues Identified by Legislative Group

- Determine ways to include foster parents in planning throughout the case;
- Develop checklist for social workers to use with FPs to aid consistent communication
- Develop website content to support info sharing that include Frequently Asked Questions
- Review and revise existing policies to facilitate strong communication and support to foster parents

Since 2017

- Updated placement checklist and authorization letter
- Creation of foster parent notification card and implemented statewide notification process
- Ongoing work on the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) website for FPs
- Work with foster parent on supporting normalcy and implementation of prudent parenting standard



Normalcy & Prudent Parent Standard

Federal Law Requirements

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 requires that:

- ▶ Child welfare agencies promote normalcy and well-being for children and youth in foster care.
- ▶ Child welfare agencies implement a reasonable and prudent parent standard (RPPS) for decisions made by caregivers (foster parents or designated officials for child care institutions, including residential treatment programs or independent living programs).
 - ▶ *This standard allows caregivers to make parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interest of the child and also decisions about the child's participation in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.*

Normalcy Policy and Practice Implementation

- Development of [Normalcy Practice Guidance](#)
- Development of multiple checklists and tip sheets, including:
 - [Normalcy Activities Checklist](#)
 - [Age-Appropriate Activities and Responsibilities Checklist](#)
 - [Tips for Applying the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard \(RPPS\)](#)
- Development and implementation of [Family Services Policy 75](#) (including caregiver guidelines)
- Revisions to the [Placement Checklist](#) and [Foster Parent Authorization Letter](#) specific to supporting normalcy
- Fall 2017 foster parent foundations training included normalcy and the RPPS
- Statewide discussion groups / trainings with child placing agencies and residential treatment programs



Background and Purpose of H.589

- Define Prudent Parent Standard in Statute
- Protect Foster Parents from liability, should a child in their care become injured as the result of a decision of the foster parent that meets the prudent parent standard.
- At least 37 states have now enacted legislation defining the prudent parent standard.
- The language in H.589 is similar to what many other states have adopted.
- Additional support and protection for foster parents is available through policy and our insurance.

Questions?