

**Department for Children and Families**  
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**Stabilization Foster Care Homes Initiative**

As many of you are likely aware, the High-End System of Care in our Division has become somewhat unstable. This is due to a number of factors, including staffing shortages because of Covid and more youths coming into custody with increasing levels of acuity. Because of this, the Division has been finding it increasingly more challenging to find beds for these youths when they come under our care.

FSD's High End Stabilization Workgroup researched various program models to address this issue, and based on that research we have devised a plan to develop a cadre of specially trained stabilization foster care homes. This would provide more beds at a local level for our high-end youths to receive assessment and other services. The idea is that after the situation has been stabilized, the child could return home with wrap services if necessary, or, if appropriate, to another suitable placement.

Caregivers in these foster homes will provide short term care—generally 1 to 30 days--through a specialized foster care contract, at an increased daily rate. Ideally, these will be caregivers who can care for one child or youth at a time and who have flexible schedules to support youth who may not be able to attend school. Additional training in crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques will be provided. The aim is to have at least one stabilization foster home in every district and possibly multiple homes in the larger districts.

An important feature to this plan is that we are partnering with agencies with a proven track record in caring for young people in this cohort to provide intensive support and stabilization and wrap services to these families--particularly including a well-coordinated safety plan and 24/7 on call support, as well as a model of care that is clinically focused and trauma informed. We believe these factors are key to creating an environment to encourage the best possible outcomes for all involved--including the youth and their families, as well as the caregivers.

Two of the most exciting things about this initiative is that (1) the program will provide an avenue for youth to stay in state and in their communities for these services, who now might have to go out of state for this care. This ability to maintain family and community ties during stabilization can be such an important factor to a successful reunification or transition. And (2), from a financial perspective, we are still determining the daily rate for our stabilization care givers. But we firmly believe this program will be cost effective, given that the Department has spent 26 million in 2020, to care for the 123 children in our custody that are in residential care, half of whom are currently out of state.

My team has been working very hard to get this program up and running. We are currently reviewing an RFP to provide support and stabilization and wrap services to the caregivers and families. And within the last two weeks we sent out a solicitation to all of our 1,500 licensed care givers about the initiative. Eighteen families have already expressed an interest in participating. We are in the process of assessing the families for suitability, and our residential licensing unit is reviewing their records to make sure there are no concerns from that perspective. In terms of training, an all-day workshop on de-escalation techniques and crisis communication for the stabilization foster parents is scheduled for early June. We are hopeful to have the first group of regional stabilization foster homes come online by mid to late summer.