



National Association of Public
Child Welfare Administrators

an affiliate of the American Public Human Services Association

How States are Implementing the Fostering Connections Act

The District of Columbia's At-risk Children

In the District of Columbia, between January 1, 2006 and May 31, 2009, the percentage of children in foster care decreased by a notable 15 percent.¹

As of September 30, 2008, the Children and Families Services Agency (CFSA) and contracted private agencies served 2,255 children who were placed in foster care, 18 children placed in third party placements² and 325 children who remained at home as their siblings were served in out-of-home-care. In addition, CFSA (and the private agencies to a lesser degree) provided in-home services to 1,782 children (693 families) found to be victims of child maltreatment but who were able to safely remain in their homes or who were able to safely return to their homes. Overall, a total of 4379 children were placed in out-of-home care or received in-home services from CFSA or private agencies during the month of September 2008. Children served in-home accounted for 41 percent of the population served in September 2008, while children served in foster care accounted for 51 percent of the population served.²

During the Calendar Year 2008, 687 children entered care and 797 exited the system. In that same year, 95 children had their adoptions finalized, 96 exited through guardianship and 364 children and youth were reunified with their families. Moreover, between CY2006 and CY2008 the percentage of children that were reunified increased by 9 percent.³

The District of Columbia's Budget Landscape

The District of Columbia's budget for FY2009 was \$10 billion and \$292 million was allocated for CFSA's program budget. Entering Fiscal Year 2010, the District is facing lower revenue projections which will result in a \$272 million (4.9%) reduction in the local budget. In order to balance the budget, the District has eliminated positions, reduced contract costs, and is maximizing existing revenues. Likewise, the FY2010 CFSA budget also reflects reductions in various types of contracted services and elimination of FTE's. Reductions were also made to administrative, travel and IT budgets. The increased Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) rate in Title IV-E from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 is assisting the CFSA in providing additional assistance to foster and adoptive families. It is projected that the District will claim an additional \$2.5 million per year in stimulus funding.^[i]

P.L. 110-351 State Options

The District plans to implement a federal guardianship assistance program (GAP). In 2003, CFSA began operating a guardianship assistance program using city funds and many (but not all) of the requirements of fostering connections were addressed therein. Although no legislative action was needed to implement a federal GAP, CFSA plans to revise their subsidy policies to align with federal statute, to modify existing Title IV-E eligibility determination practices, and to implement SACWIS modifications that are already underway. The child welfare agency amended their Title IV-E State Plan to implement the federal option and submitted this document to the Administration on Children and Families (ACF) on March 31, 2009. Pending federal approval of the IV-E State Plan Amendment, CFSA will begin claiming these funds retroactively to January 1, 2009. The District conducted a cost benefit analysis to determine the number of children eligible for this program and estimates that 70 children will be eligible for the IV-E GAP program over FY 2009 and 2010, and anticipates IV-E claims in the amount of \$100,000 for FY 2009 and \$400,000 for FY2010.

Although, CFSA will experience a slight fiscal impact from making modification to FACES, the city anticipates a financial gain implementing this federal option.⁴

Regarding the city's efforts to provide federal support to older youth aging out of care, the District allows youth to remain in foster care until age 21 years. A component of the Agency's Office of Youth Development, the Center of Keys for Life

(CKL), administers the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and is designed to prepare youth in their transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. Services are provided to youth age 16 to 21 years currently in foster care or youth 18-21 who have been discharged from foster care prior to their twenty-first birthday. For foster youth who seek post-secondary education and training, CFSA administers the Educational and Training Voucher program (ETV). The ETV program serves former foster care youth (ages 21-23) in all wards of the District of Columbia. In DC, youth may apply for Medicaid coverage if they are emancipated from foster care prior to their 21st birthday. Currently, DC does not extend guardianship and adoption assistance to youth past age 18. The District is determining the potential costs and savings associated with potential new Agency policies, influenced by the Fostering Connections Legislation, on adoption and guardianship subsidies. The intent of the study is to inform subsidy policy development that may further reduce barriers to permanency for children with goals of adoption or guardianship

Federally Recognized Tribes

According to the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, the District of Columbia has no registered American Indian tribes. As a result, CFSA rarely serves children or families of Native American/Native Alaskan heritage. Of 2,221 children in foster care on May 31, 2009, 1 is identified as having American Indian/Alaskan Native heritage.⁵

P.L. 110-351 Mandatory Provisions

Currently, the majority of mandatory provisions in P.L. 110-351 are in DC's statute. The District asked the federal government for a delay on implementing the educational requirements within the act, which is extended until January 1, 2010. Additionally, the city did not require legislative action to make changes in their current policies, except for the educational stability provision.⁶

Regarding relative notification, the city notifies adult relatives as soon as a child enters foster care primarily through the Family Team Meeting (FTM) process. FTMs are held within 72 hours of a child entering foster care and prior to the initial court hearing. FTM Coordinators make every effort to engage family members and support persons in the initial FTM in order to plan for the child and family and to identify possible placement resources. Kin are mostly contacted by telephone and invited to attend the FTM. FTM Coordinators and social workers document contacts in the SACWIS system, also known as FACES. DC attributes their success in locating relatives and offering strong family support to their family team meeting model. FTMs are conducted within three days after a child's removal.⁷ In March 2009, CFSA implemented a new diligent search policy that places strong emphasis on locating relatives within 30 days of a child's removal.

CFSA is diligently working on implementing the educational stability provisions of P.L. 110-351 and revising their policies to comply with federal statute. First, DC is working to ensure that each school-aged child receiving foster care, guardianship and adoption assistance is enrolled in school. CFSA is anticipating further guidance from ACF on the education stability provisions to help meet these requirements. To help improve their current practices, the city has developed a checklist for social workers to use so they can document a child's school attendance and academic performance as well as social adjustment in school. Additionally, when social workers begin to identify appropriate placements for children, school proximity is often a criterion so children can attend school and remain in their home communities. DC is also working with the public school system to help reduce unnecessary school transfers for all children in foster care. CFSA is collaborating with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to develop a plan for these requirements. Once the federal government releases guidance on these mandates, CFSA can determine how many children will need to be transported and formally develop a transportation plan for youth in care.⁸

Improving the health outcomes for youth in care is paramount in DC. CFSA has a unique collaborative within the Agency to coordinate and ensure youth in care receive adequate health care, dental care and mental health services. Health services are tracked, monitored, and reviewed by CFSA's Office of Clinical Practice (OCP). OCP leads a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including a pediatrician and registered nurses, in coordinating comprehensive physical, mental, and behavioral health services for children and youth and providing in-house expertise in domestic violence, substance abuse, education, and family-involved conferencing. CFSA completed the health care coordination plan and submitted it to ACF on June 30, 2009.⁹

The Office of Youth Development offers services for teens ages 15 and up who have a permanency goal of alternative planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). These services are provided through Teen Services Units, the Center of Keys for Life (CKL), and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. Teens with other permanency goals receive case management services through the In-Home and Reunification Administrations. Group homes and Independent Living

programs are licensed by the Office of Facility Licensing (OFL), monitored by the Contract Monitoring and Performance Improvement Administration (CMPIA); and specialized clinical services are offered through the Office of Clinical Practice (for high-risk youth). In the District, transition plans should begin no later than 90 days before a youth exits foster care and when they turn 19 years of age. Additionally, transition plans in the District are youth-led and young people aging out work with independent living coordinators to develop a comprehensive plan that addresses their specific needs. Every six months, youth meet with their social workers and attend a transition planning meeting to modify these plans as their needs can change overtime. As the youth turns 20 years old, these meetings occur more frequently to successfully prepare youth for self-sufficiency. As youth age out of foster care, CFSA independent living coordinators encourage young people to develop a Facebook page so they can stay in contact with the agency and other youth formerly in foster care in the District. This effort is assisting DC to track youth who exit foster care and maintain compliance with the National Youth In Transition Database regulations. Because CFSA currently has these policies in place, they will not make any policy or practices changes to align their statute with Fostering Connections regarding youth aging out.¹⁰ The District is, however, working to revise this process such that transition planning will begin for youth at 17 ½ years of age. The District anticipates implementing this revision later in FY2010.

Currently, the District has positive policies and practices in place that help children maintain strong sibling connections. CFSA strives to place siblings together at the time of removal and placement staff are required to exhaust all resources to enhance these efforts. Although there are a minimal number of foster families willing to accept large sibling groups, the agency has increased their recruitment efforts to expand placement options for sibling groups. Moreover, CFSA's 2009 Resource Development Plan reported that "as of May 31, 2009, 1154 children in foster care were part of a sibling group. Of those, 689 were placed with siblings and 465 were not placed with a sibling. In response to the Agency's priority to maintain sibling groups wherever possible, CFSA is seeking to increase placement capacity by an additional 30 beds specifically for siblings" in FY 2010. The campaign to recruit family-based placements with the capacity to accommodate sibling groups in DC is always a challenge. CFSA, however, is dedicated to achieving this goal.¹¹

Family Connections Grants

On July 6, 2009, the District submitted its application in response to the Family Connection Discretionary Grant (FCDG) request for applications under the Family Finding and Family Group Decision-Making program areas. The Family Finding services will be embedded within the Diligent Search Unit of CFSA's Placement Services Administration. Diligent Search Unit specialists have become experts in identifying resources through broad family networks. To date, the Family Finding services have largely focused on new entries of children into foster care in order to identify family supports and potentially reduce the length of stay in care. The proposed intervention will expand Family Finding techniques to a larger population. Although the District does not operate a Kinship Navigator Program, CFSA administrators believe the FCDG will help expand their existing initiatives that support relatives.¹²

Since 2003, the District has utilized local funding to support the Family Treatment Court (FTC) program for substance abusing mothers/female guardians whose children are the subjects of a child neglect case. The FTC is a comprehensive court-supervised treatment program funded through CFSA and administered through the Department of Health's Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration (APRA). The FTC is targeted to enhance family reunification through the provision of front-end services and complies with the Adoption and Safe Families Act timelines. The first phase of treatment involves up to six months of intensive residential treatment at a facility where the women may bring up to four of their children (0-10 years) for the duration of their stay. Upon completion of the residential treatment program, women must complete six months (minimum) of community-based continuing care. Additionally, CFSA maintains a separate contract with a residential treatment provider that enhances these efforts and expands access to family-centered treatment services for participants who are not eligible for the FTC.¹³

Opportunities & Challenges

The District is awaiting additional guidance on several provisions of P.L. 110-351; however, the District has most of the requirements of the Fostering Connections Act in place. Although CFSA will make modifications to FACES, which will be an added cost to the city, DC believes these changes will positively impact their practice and improve the outcomes for children receiving services through CFSA. Currently, the District is in the final stages of their cost benefit analysis on the optional provisions of the Act to determine the feasibility of accepting both options to support relative guardians and older youth aging out of foster care. Although the educational stability requirement will be challenging to implement, these requirements also encourage the child welfare agency to work more closely with the D.C. Public School System to develop a workable transportation plan to help foster youth remain in their school of origin.¹⁴

Regarding federal finance reform, the District believes that Congress could further support achieving permanency for children and youth in foster care by fully de-linking the 1996 AFDC income eligibility requirements on Title IV-E. DC child welfare administrators believe that while the Fostering Connections to Success Act is one step toward removing these standards, they look forward to legislation on the full de-link as it will improve the outcomes of DC's children in foster and kinship care. Additionally, removing these requirements would increase their Title IV-E penetration rate and enhance their federal revenue to provide additional services for these youth. DC also believes the extension to support older youth aging out is a meaningful improvement to better serve this population, but the city considers the minimum age requirements for youth who exit care to guardianship or adoption past age 16 will affect the agency's ability to move younger children and youth to permanency more expeditiously. The city is also interested in seeing more federal funding directed toward child abuse and neglect prevention programs, which will help states offer a more comprehensive array of preventive services.¹⁵

Conclusion

Since May 2008, the District of Columbia's foster care entries have decreased by 25 percent and this reduction is attributed to an increase in permanent placements with relatives³. Additionally, children's length of stay has slightly decreased by 1 percent and these efforts are attributed to diligent search and family finding efforts by social workers and diligent search unit staff. Reunification numbers in the District have also risen and this increase is due to a targeted effort to connect birth families and children at-risk for removal through family team meetings and enhanced efforts to locate and engage family and extended family members in planning for children and youth who enter foster care.

¹ Interview with Loren Ganoë & Staff. Child and Family Services Agency. July 29, 2009.

² Third Party Placements - all children placed with kin in a non foster care placement, i.e., unpaid placements (e.g., kinship non-foster care non-paid, kinship unlicensed non-paid and non relative unlicensed unpaid). Third Party placements also include children with the legal status of legal custody private/third party placement.

³ It is important to note that this data is point in time. In May 2008 there were 60 initial entries, where as in June 2009 there were 45 entries (yielding a 25% decrease). However, in the months in between the initial entry count fluctuated. For example, in July 2008 there were 76 entries and in October 2008 there were 64 entries.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.