



National Association of Public  
Child Welfare Administrators

an affiliate of the American Public Human Services Association

## How States are Implementing the Fostering Connections Act

### New Hampshire's At-risk Children

On average, New Hampshire's Central Intake receives 19,000 calls related to possible child abuse or neglect each year. The state refers about 8,000 of these calls for a complete assessment of the allegations. Between 900 and 1,000 children are found to have been abused or neglected in any given year. There are currently just under 900 children and youth in out of home placement due to abuse or neglect, 80 percent of whom live with foster families and 20 percent in group homes with trained staff.

Each year, approximately 440 children are removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. The number of children exiting care each year has been increasing as children experience shorter lengths of stay in care. This has resulted in an overall decline in the number of children in out of home care from just over 1,000 children in June of 2008 to just under 900 children in June of 2009.

New Hampshire has been very successful with the adoption permanency option. In FFY 2007, the state finalized 143 adoptions from state custody, with 35 percent of these children over the age of seven. In FFY 2008, adoptions increased to 173. From 1998 to 2008, the state has increased adoptions more than 200 percent. Moreover, the state is committed to providing strong post-adoption services for families that adopt from foster care. In 2008, New Hampshire received \$28,000 in Adoption Incentive bonuses, which they used to contract with Casey Family Services to provide post-permanency services and recruit and retain resource families.<sup>1</sup>

### New Hampshire's Budget Landscape

New Hampshire has an estimated budget shortfall of \$12.2 million in SFY 2010.<sup>2</sup> The Governor signed the 2010-2011 budget that required agencies across the board to cut personnel spending by \$25 million over the biennium budget.<sup>3</sup> The \$25 million is on top of other personnel cuts already included in the biennium budget. House Bill 2 requires the Department of Health and Human Services to reduce general fund spending by \$7.6 million for SFY10. Approximately \$5.6 million of this amount is expected to be achieved through downsizing of the organization by 10 to 12%. It is estimated that between 350 and 400 vacancies will be needed to achieve this objective. Additionally, it is proposed, but has not yet been approved that, every state employee is required to take 18 unpaid days off over the next two years, in which workers will lose approximately 5 percent of their income. In exchange, New Hampshire will provide 18 paid days off between 2012 and 2016.<sup>4</sup> The Division for Children, Youth and Families must reduce its budget for services by \$8 million.<sup>5</sup> This includes a reduction in programs funded by Title IV-E, Title XX, and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), mostly affecting residential services. Agencies may see additional cuts this year due to a Superior Court decision not to allow the state to use a Medical fund to balance its budget and the likelihood that the state legislature will come back for a special session.<sup>6</sup>

**P.L. 110-351 State Options.** The state is reviewing the options and how they might benefit the populations that New Hampshire serves. The Executive Team plans to analyze a cost benefit analysis in October 2009.<sup>7</sup> Like other states, New Hampshire will be able to implement the options only if it is financially feasible to do so.

### Guardianship Assistance Option:

As stated above, the state is reviewing the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) option. New Hampshire utilizes relatives as both a permanency option and to keep children from coming into care in the first place. Currently, the state has approximately 169 relative homes caring for children, with 45 of these homes licensed and the other 124 supported through TANF child-only grants, which includes a shelter allowance. Relative caregivers receiving TANF may receive 2 payments per month equal to \$539.00/month. According to TANF rules if there is more than one child in the

relative's home, then the grant increases by \$69/month. This is slightly less than the foster care payment, however a majority of these families opt-out of the licensing process.<sup>8</sup>

As part of its five-year goals, DCYF has a mission to focus on relatives as caregivers with three innovative approaches. These cultural shifts are due in large part to New Hampshire's 2003 Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) and subsequent Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Recently, DCYF has added Permanency Planning Teams (PPT) to each of the Department's 12 district offices in order to break down barriers between the different staff functions and ensure that the child's permanency goals are achieved. Team members include staff from Child Protection, Foster Care, and Independent Living, Adolescent and Adoption workers. A new permanency worker position has been added and he/she facilitates the meetings and carries a reduced caseload in order to be available for consultation.<sup>9 10</sup>

In April 2008, the state hired a Relative Care Specialist to assist relative care providers. During the past year, this worker has developed a database of relative providers as well as a handbook/resource guide with a list of community services available to relative providers.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, DCYF contracted with Easter Seals for a connection specialist embedded in each of the Department's 12 district offices in January 2007. These specialists have case mining expertise and research a child's case file to identify relatives willing to care for foster children.<sup>12 13</sup>

### **Supporting Older Youth:**

Similar to the GAP option, the state is reviewing the supporting older youth option. Currently, New Hampshire supports youth to the age of 18 and up to age 21 if they are still attending high school. There are forty-seven foster youth age 17, twenty-eight young people age 18, twenty-four age 19, eight age 20 in the custody of the state.<sup>14</sup>

DCYF's Adolescent Program was created to assure that youth in foster care and juvenile justice have the preparation and resources they need to transition to adulthood. Adolescent child protective social workers with specialized training in adult living preparation are assigned to each of the district offices to provide this support.<sup>15</sup>

Through Chafee, former foster care youth, ages 18 to 21, who have aged out of foster care in New Hampshire are provided with continued case management, support and financial assistance to meet their needs and help them to find housing, pursue an education, and get a job. Funding is also available, to assist with goods and services such as driver education, vocational training, career exploration, work clothes and items to set up housekeeping.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, New Hampshire provides a limited number of tuition and fee waivers to state colleges and universities.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, in March 2009, DCFY released a resource guide to help their older youth population.

**Tribes:** New Hampshire does not have any federally recognized tribes.

### **P.L. 110-351 Mandatory Provisions**

The state did not request a delay in implementation of any of the mandatory provisions.

### **Relative notification**

New Hampshire has always notified known relatives about a child coming into care. The state has recently drafted a new notification letter and form to assisted social workers' outreach. The revised tools/forms specifically identify and notify all adult relatives of children in care. These forms are designed to be completed by the assessment workers, for all cases, even for those not in need of imminent placement.

### **Educational stability**

New Hampshire currently has two educational specialists for all children in foster care.<sup>18</sup> The Education specialists work directly with the agency on cases that have issues regarding education. They consult on any educational issues as well as train the field staff on all laws and policies regarding education and special education on a consistent basis. New Hampshire is currently working on an educational passport for children in care. This project has two intended outcomes. The first is that the child's educational records are up to date, accurate and easily accessible to the student and school no matter where he or she may be living. Second, credits will be transferable and uniform across school districts and private special educational programs when children may be placed in a residential treatment facility.

## **Health oversight and coordination**

New Hampshire's oversight and coordination of health care services for foster children begin when a children first enters care. Each child receives a comprehensive health and developmental assessment within 30 days of placement. Foster Care Health Nurses act as Healthcare Coordinators to ensure that all children have their medical, behavioral, and oral health needs met. This program was recognized as a promising approach by the Administration for Children and Families in February 2008.<sup>19 20</sup>

The Nurses in each district office ensure strict oversight of prescription medications; social workers must have the permission of the DCYF Director or an authorized DCYF Administrator in consultation with a Nurse to obtain narcotic, psychotropic and other prescriptions for children under DCFY guardianship or care, custody and control.<sup>21</sup> The Foster Care Health Program is currently working to develop a standardized report to assist in the tracking of children's medical and dental care.

## **Sibling connections**

The state requires that siblings be placed together whenever possible as a best practice. This was recognized as a strength in the 2003 CFSR.<sup>22</sup> DCYF's ongoing practice is to preserve siblings' existing relationships as indicated in RSA 169-C:19-d and to maintain sibling groups in foster care and adoption unless it is contrary to their safety and well being. If the children are not placed together, DCYF makes reasonable efforts to ensure that the siblings maintain their connections to each other through frequent visitation and ongoing interaction. The placement of siblings practice is in effect when recruiting for foster/adopt families. DCYF is in the process of enhancing its current policy to reflect the practice that is already in place.

## **Transition plans for children**

Adult preparation begins at age 14 for youth in foster care. Teens are encouraged to actively participate in the Adult Living Preparation Process.<sup>23</sup> Each young person receives information about community and transitional resources available to them when they exit care. Youth in care have the opportunity to complete Teen Independent Living documentation including their Needs Assessment, Skills Assessment, Adult Living Plan (ALP) and if they are 17 or older, their Aftercare Plan,. Each of these assessments and the plan are reviewed and updated regularly to help monitor progress and to ensure the youth's needs are met.<sup>24</sup>

## **Family Connections Grants**

New Hampshire applied for two of the four options under the grant, the intensive family finding and group decision making. These programs will be started from scratch. Casey Family Services and Child and Family Services, (private partners) are providing the match. Although not part of the grant, the state has a robust comprehensive substance abuse treatment program. Several years back, New Hampshire had a IV-E waiver that focused on substance abuse services.

## **Opportunities & Challenges**

As a small state, New Hampshire is able to collaborate across agencies and this makes several of the mandatory provisions easier to implement. The challenge of course is the economy and the lack of state resources for the options. It is important to the state that their decisions also follow their Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The state will be going through the next round of the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) in 2010.

## **Conclusion**

The state has a long ongoing challenge with the significant number of children in group homes. There have been many hard conversations of what the future of group and residential facilities may be. The new laws focus on permanency and supporting older youth may help move those conversations forward.

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<sup>1</sup> New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families, 2004-2009 Comprehensive Child and Family Service Plan Annual Progress and Services Report, June 30, 2008

<sup>2</sup> National Conference of State legislatures, The Forum for America's Ideas. State Budget Update July 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with New Hampshire, July 29, 2009 (Catherine Atkins, Post Adoption Program; Myriam Roeder, Adoption Manager; Byry Kennedy, General Counsel; Mary Breen, Recruitment Specialist; Janet Kohlhase, Relative Care Specialist; Steven DeGiso, BTS/Bridges Program; Debra Nelson, Head Start State Collaboration Office; Ann Marie McCarron, Bureau of Quality Improvement; Erica Ungarellii, CFRS Coordinator, Bureau of Child Well-Being; Lorraine Bartlett, Bureau of Child Protection; and Eileen Mullen, Bureau of Community and Family Support.)

<sup>4</sup> The Concord Monitor, July 31, 2009. State Employees Should Take the Deal—Editorial.

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- <sup>5</sup> New Hampshire Public Radio with Laura Knoy. Interview with Maggie Bishop, Director of the Division of Children, Youth and Families, July 21, 2009.
- <sup>6</sup> The Concord Monitor, July 30, 2009. Ruling Sets State Back \$110 Million, Lauren R. Doran.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with New Hampshire, July 29, 2009. See list on note 4.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families, 2004-2009 Comprehensive Child and Family Service Plan Annual Progress and Services Report, June 30, 2008.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with New Hampshire, July 29, 2009. See list on note 4.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Department of Children, Youth and Families website.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with New Hampshire, July 29, 2009. See list on note 4.
- <sup>19</sup> Department of Children, Youth and Families website.
- <sup>20</sup> New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families, 2004-2009 Comprehensive Child and Family Service Plan Annual Progress and Services Report, June 30, 2008.
- <sup>21</sup> Handout from Interview with New Hampshire, July 29, 2009. See list on note 4
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with New Hampshire, July 29, 2009. See list on note 4.
- <sup>23</sup> Department of Children, Youth and Families website.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.