

# FFTA



## A Systemic View of Partnering for Change

### Introduction

The Foster Family-based Treatment Association (FFTA), Nebraska Chapter, would like to propose a strengthened partnership between Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Division of Child and Family Services (CFS) and FFTA member agencies in order to establish and maintain quality services throughout the state of Nebraska. It is the position of the FFTA and its members that a strengthened partnership will assist CFS in meeting and/or exceeding the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) standards of safety, permanency and well being for children and families.

In 2006 alone, FFTA member agencies provided foster care services to 2,338 of the 3,175 youth in relative and non-relative foster homes across Nebraska. During that time, FFTA member agencies had significantly fewer disruptions with only 11% of the children we served moving one or more times. In addition, 99.7% of FFTA member agency foster homes had an absence of maltreatment recurrence.

Since the CFSR review was completed in 2002, the Division of Children and Family Services has been making strides to improve the outcomes for abused and neglected children across the state. Program improvement plans have been developed and are being implemented state wide. With this implementation, indicators of positive change have been recognized, however several areas of concern continue to present themselves. It is the position of the FFTA that through coordination, collaboration and partnering an increase in positive outcomes for children and families across the state can be more efficiently and effectively achieved.

### National Overview

Currently there are more than 500,000 children in foster care nationwide, an increase of 52% from data collected in 1982. The primary goal of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is to have positive outcomes for children and their families. Historically this has been done by implementing policies, establishing goals, and setting standards regarding performance. It was not until DHHS standardized outcomes that individual states were held accountable for their actions. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) looks for positive components falling under the domains of safety, permanency, and well being. Data is compiled through self-assessments completed by the

state, interviews with major stakeholders, file reviews of randomly selected cases, and reviewing data from the National Child Abuse Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and AFCARS. Conformity to the CFSR is dictated by seven systemic factors:

1. Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
2. Children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate.
3. Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
4. The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.
5. Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
6. Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
7. Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

States must meet national standards on all statewide data indicators, ensure that all of the systemic factors are fully operational, and ensure 95% of cases reviewed have a substantially achieved rating for each outcome reviewed.

## Position for Change

FFTA recognizes the State of Nebraska has several areas in which change is necessary as established by the CFSR results. It is the position of the FFTA that its member agencies can assist the State of Nebraska in meeting these standards. Outlined below are the practices currently in place by FFTA member agencies. These practices not only fulfill the requirements of the CFSR, but provide quality services to children and families with the goal of seeking and supporting permanency.

### *Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.*

- FFTA member agencies actively screen potential providers of services to children including staff, foster parents and respite providers. While complete background checks are required by both member agencies and DHHS, the timeframes in which background checks can be obtained is greatly reduced with agency supported foster homes as a result of staffing and efficient practices, thus decreasing the time that qualified, safe foster placements are available to the children of Nebraska.
- FFTA member agencies recruit and train foster parents for their own agencies. In addition to the required curriculum, agencies are able to tailor their ongoing training to target the specialized needs of the children and families being served.
- Several methods of networking among agencies have been put in place to assist with ongoing assessment, recruitment and training of qualified foster parents. This networking has proven to reduce the utilization of homes that are less appropriate and increase the likelihood of maintaining quality foster parents who may need additional support or training to adequately meet the needs of children and families.
- FFTA member agencies have rigorous expectations regarding staff contact with children and foster parents. These practices reduce the risk of harm to children and prevent placement disruption by allowing qualified staff to intervene during the child/foster family's most vulnerable moments.

### *Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.*

- FFTA member agencies have established a cohesive matching process allowing agencies to fully assess child and family needs prior to placement. Additional time and effort put forth prior to placement increases placement stability and reduces the risk of disruption. Furthermore, the matching process may expedite permanency by matching children in need of permanent placements to foster parents interested in providing permanency.
- FFTA member agencies are currently providing a continuum of foster care services which allows children to enter a home at an identified level, maintain their placement, and receive services appropriate for their behavioral and emotional needs.

***The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.***

- FFTA member agencies have services in place to establish, encourage and promote regular contact between children in out of home care and their biological families.
- Placement of children with siblings is identified as a priority within member agencies. When siblings cannot be placed within the same foster home, agencies have the ability to place siblings in different foster homes within the same agency to facilitate ongoing contact through visitations and respite stays. When children are placed in separate agencies, networking among agencies is utilized to promote ongoing contact and visitation.
- Service plan development for children includes identification and implementation of discharge and after care plans. Often with ongoing contact and communication with the foster parents, children and biological families, agencies become aware of family members and/or absentee parents who may be potential future placement options and/or long term permanency options. When these individuals are identified, member agencies have the ability to include these individuals, when appropriate and approved, into the service planning for the child, thus increasing the likelihood of an eventual transition to a biological family placement.

***Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.***

- FFTA member agencies facilitate family involvement in all aspects of the child's life. Guiding principles establish the parents' active role in the decision making process and encourage and support regular contact between biological families and their children and biological families and the service teams.
- Contact and service provisions are available to the biological families throughout the child's transition back into the home. As agencies are responsible for the well being of the children placed in their care they are available to work with the families during visitations or extended stays to help ensure the safety, security and inclusion of the entire family during the transition process.
- FFTA member agencies operate within their own policies and procedures to ensure children are being seen, not only per contract guidelines but also in additional times of need. Best practice dictates agencies not only meet with children at the contracted rate (minimum) but go above and beyond when deemed necessary and appropriate.

***Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.***

- FFTA member agencies recognize that often a child's educational needs are not met as a result of the guidelines and regulations governing school districts. However, agencies have consistently demonstrated an ability to form relationships and team with both individual schools and districts, resulting in an increased ability to meet the educational needs of children.
- FFTA member agencies consistently advocate for children's educational needs. This has resulted in teaming with schools, biological families and other service providers to attend and actively participate in IEP meetings, SAT meetings, and parent teacher conferences. FFTA member agencies are also able to identify and secure additional services, such as tutoring and day programming, for children in need of additional educational assistance or for those who have been suspended or expelled from traditional educational environments.
- Foster care staff often team with parents to assist, teach and educate them on how to best advocate for their child's educational needs.
- As part of supportive services available to children and families, member agencies have the ability to intervene and support children during times of crisis throughout the school day. It is the responsibility of member agencies to respond to these crises and to assist in implementing a plan to address the related issues.

***Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.***

- FFTA member agencies have the ability to assess and address the needs of children and families in a thorough and complete manner because of their ongoing exposure to children placed in their foster homes. Most agencies have a continuum of services which can be utilized to initiate and maintain appropriate mental health services

in a timely manner. If these services are not available within the agency, networking takes place throughout the community which facilitates referrals to outside providers when necessary.

- Securing and maintaining routine and emergency medical treatment to address a child's medical needs is expected of agencies providing foster care services to children.

## Conclusion

FFTA member agencies have the staffing, expertise and ability to adequately assess the behavioral, emotional, educational and therapeutic needs of children and families entering the foster care system. Foster care staff has access to the children, families, and foster parents twenty four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week, thus allowing for thorough data collection through historical information, observation, and communication. This data collection and assessment can be used to identify and implement services to children and families in a more timely, efficient and cost effective manner. Smaller caseloads (average of 12 children) afford staff the opportunity to work closely with children and families and learn first hand what they need to be successful. FFTA member agencies have the ability to provide continuity of care across family systems. As the Division of Children and Family Services explores new and innovative ways to better serve children and families, we welcome the opportunity to provide input and expertise.

It is the position of the FFTA that through partnering, clear role identification, mutual cooperation, and continuous communication children and families in the State of Nebraska will receive quality, individualized services in a timely manner. FFTA member agencies have in place the mechanisms necessary to achieve the results set forth in the CFSR standards. In addition, we have the ability to assess, implement, adjust and monitor both availability of services and actual service provision in a timely, well planned, and cohesive manner. We welcome the opportunity to partner with the Division of Children and Family Services. It is our sincere desire that through this partnership, children and families can be more effectively served.

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The FFTA's membership of approximately 400 Treatment Foster Care agencies nationwide represents a variety of programs diverse in scope and size. FFTA member agencies share certain values and principles that lie at the heart of Treatment Foster Care and shape its development and evolution. Member agencies believe:

- In normalization as a treatment principle and in the power of family living as a normalizing influence.
- In the important role that kinship plays in the formation of identity and self-worth and in relationships which impart a sense of family belonging to children and youth.
- That all children and youth need and have a right to a permanent family. To that end, family reunification, adoption, kinship care or other long-term stable family living arrangements are crucial.
- In the value of cultural diversity and in the importance of developing competence in dealing with issues of diversity.
- In doing "whatever it takes" to maximize a young person's opportunity to live successfully in a family and community.
- In the fundamental importance of documentation and the systematic evaluation of services and their effects.