



# *Bethany*

*for Children & Families*

## **Annual Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan**

**2023**

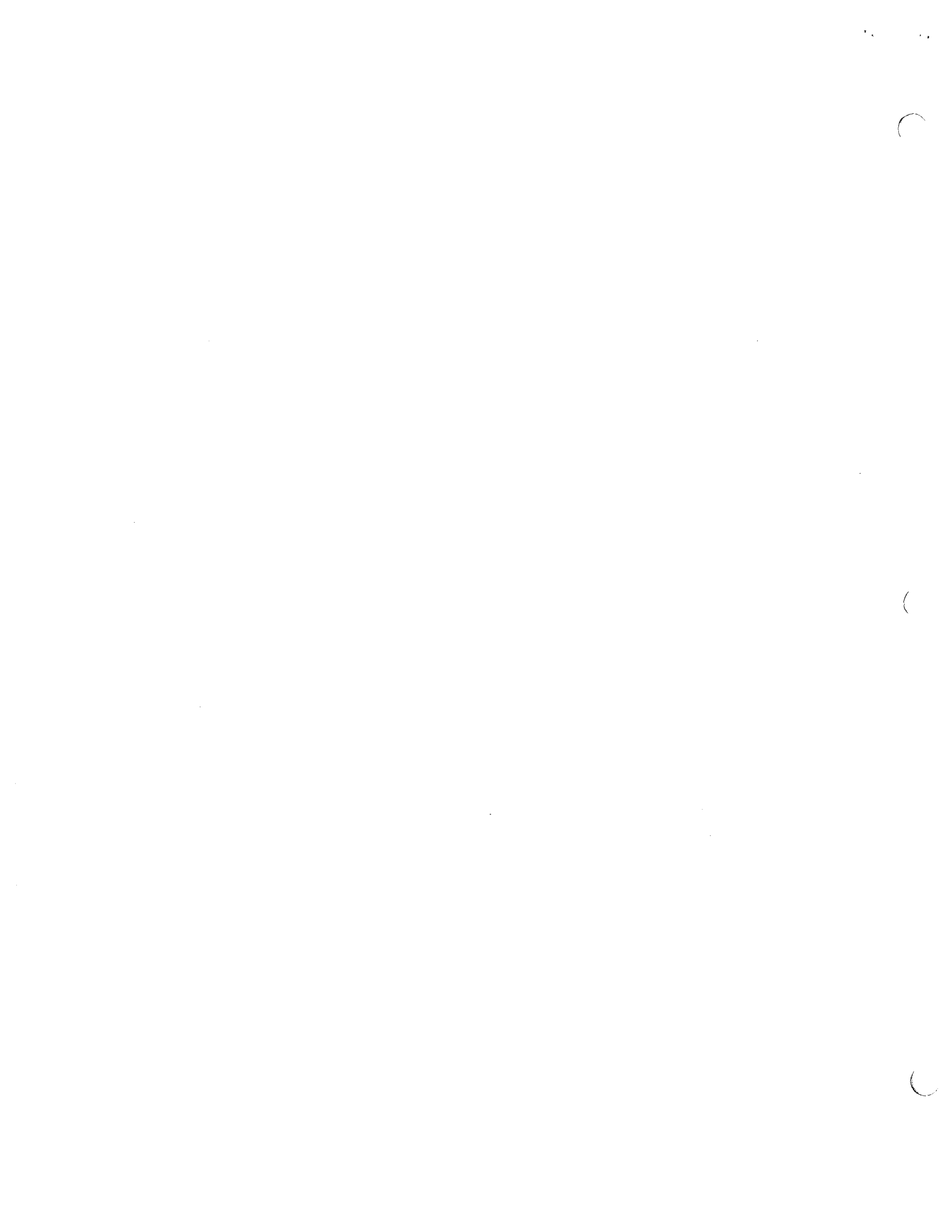


Bethany for Children & Families

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## Foster Parent Law

Bethany for Children & Families provides supervision and guidance to applicant foster parents and/or adoptive parents in Illinois for foster home and/or adoptive home licensing. Foster parent applicants are required to complete 29 hours of pre-service training, 15 hours of supplemental training complete the fingerprinting process in order for the agency to obtain the most recent Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) background results, provide references, medical clearances, and other supportive documentation outlined by the Department of Children & Family Services. Once licensed, Bethany continuously works with the foster parents to ensure they are aware of the services being provided to the children in their care. Bethany for Children & Families endorses the rights and responsibilities of foster parents unconditionally as defined in The Foster Parent Law (Public Act 89.19). The agency views this as an ongoing process that involves the invaluable feedback of foster parents, foster home licensing staff, and direct line foster care staff. Bethany submits the following implementation plan as documentation of its conformity with this law.

## Foster Parent Rights

The Foster Parent Law ensures that foster parents are included in a majority of case management activities and seen as a professional member of the Case Management Team. The following is Bethany's Implementation Plan for making sure that the foster parent's rights are followed.

### Dignity and Respect

1. "The right to be treated with dignity, respect, and consideration as a professional member of the child welfare team."

Caseworkers are continuously trained to respect the rights and dignity of clients, foster parents, and family members. All child welfare staff members of the agency are instructed that anything less than the demonstration of full respect for foster parents is not tolerated. This issue is addressed during the new employee orientation of foster care staff, as well as during weekly supervision, monthly unit meetings, and in-service trainings. Bethany also affirms foster parent rights in its document "Agreement between Foster Parents and Bethany for Children & Families," which is signed at initial licensure and yearly with the development of the implementation plan.

Caseworkers meet a minimum of once a month with agency foster parents (if a foster child is residing in the home) to discuss the medical, behavioral, emotional, and educational needs of the child. **The caseworker also discusses the permanency, safety, and well-being needs of the child.** The caseworker also discusses the progress or lack of progress of the child, program changes, and to seek foster parent response and input into case issues. After a child is initially placed in a home and any subsequent placement changes, the caseworker meets with the family within 72 hours in the foster home to assess how the child and foster parents are doing. If the child is in

Specialized Foster Care or an unlicensed relative foster home, then the caseworker meets with the family a minimum of two times per month in the foster home. If foster parents do not have a foster child in their home, they meet with the licensing representative every six months and are provided the opportunity to share current experiences with the placement process. The licensing representative is also responsible for making sure foster parents **are** treated with respect.

Foster parent phone calls to the caseworker are returned in a timely manner, **ideally** within 24 hours. Foster parents may also contact a caseworker/supervisor through an emergency on-call system, if necessary. Foster parents can also use email to contact their caseworker, as well as their licensing staff. The foster parents and caseworker respect confidentiality by not using the child's name in the email. The foster parent and caseworker are to use initials during email correspondence. Many questions can be answered quickly through the ability to text back and forth, with only using the child's initials. This has helped the response time and provided a satisfactory resolution to many immediate concerns.

Bethany uses a team approach in which all foster parents are active participants. The foster care team's input is important in the establishment of court related objectives and service plan goals. The caseworker notifies the foster parents of meetings that pertain to the foster child and attempts to schedule times when the foster parent can attend. However, most meetings are scheduled when birthparents are available. Each foster parent is asked to identify any issues and or special concerns about a child in order for these issues to be addressed **and documented** in the service plan. Any changes made to the service plan pertaining to the child, visitation plan, or permanency goal are communicated to the foster parent within 48 hours or sooner of the change.

In 2017, DCFS instituted the policy Normalcy Parenting. Normalcy Parenting empowers the foster parent to make common sense decisions without seeking prior approval or consent from the caseworker or other foster care staff. This policy, along with the chart of decisions that the foster parent is allowed to make, is distributed yearly to all foster parents and is contained in the foster care binder that foster parents receive when a child is placed in their home. Bethany held a training on the Normalcy policy in October 2021. Normalcy: Reasonable and Prudent Parenting is a 30 minute training on the DCFS training website and is required of all foster parents prior to their four year license renewal.

Foster parents are provided opportunities to discuss concerns, training needs, and to provide feedback multiple times throughout the year through caseworker-substitute caregiver visits, semi-annual and annual licensing monitors, and when asked to review and endorse the agency's implementation plan. Discussions with the foster parents also include whether the foster parent feels supported, is treated fairly, and is treated as a member of the foster care team. Periodically, Bethany sends out a satisfaction survey to solicit feedback to improve services in order to provide efficient, effective service delivery and achieve the program goals.

## Training

2.) The right to be provided standardized pre-service training and appropriate ongoing training to meet mutually assessed needs and improve the foster parents' skills.

Bethany recognizes that all members of the foster care team should have access to quality training. This is particularly important since the children served have increasingly complex needs. Bethany acknowledges supporting foster parents also means notifying them of training opportunities that can enhance their skills. The initial training process, PRIDE Pre-Service, is required of all foster parents and is a collaborative effort among the potential foster parents, the area foster home licensing representatives, and the trainers. Traditional foster parents are required to attend a **1.5 hour** orientation and nine sessions of PRIDE training (which totals 28.5 hours of training). Additionally, an **additional 15 hours of supplemental trainings, which can be taken online virtually, or in the classroom (when in person classes resume).** The 15 hours of training topics are: **Life of the Case Part 1 and 2, Trauma, Caregiver Social Media, Human Trafficking and Keeping Children Connected, Normalcy Reasonable and Prudent Parenting and LGBTQi+.** Due to the pandemic restrictions, in March 2020, all in person training was suspended and virtual training classes were offered. **At this time, in person training classes have not resumed.** Home of relative foster parents are required to take PRIDE Home of Relative (HMR) training (either in the classroom, virtually, or through DVD's). Relatives are informed of the training requirement at the time of placement. Prior to the pandemic in March 2020, relative caregivers were encouraged, when possible, to complete the sessions in the classroom versus DVDs, relatives are now encouraged to complete the series virtually. The foster parents benefit from the trainers being licensed foster parents and child welfare specialists, so both points of view are presented. For virtual and self-demand online classes, families complete discussion question packets that are reviewed by the trainers and forwarded to the licensing worker. Families submit their PRIDE Connections Packets (homework) directly to the licensing worker. After the families complete the PRIDE training, the licensing representative can meet with the trainers and discuss each applicant. The trainers can identify strengths and needs of the applicant and assist in assessing their readiness for licensing. Beginning in September 2021, the PRIDE online program has changed to an e-learning platform. Trainers will conduct three facilitated discussion groups where trainer notes will be taken. All participants will be required to complete and submit their PRIDE Connection packet to the licensing worker and they will no longer be reviewed by a trainer. DCFS offers several different types of in service training opportunities. **Families can participate in virtual training classes that are published on the DCFS Virtual Training Center (VTC) site, on demand classes that are published on the DCFS VTC, and 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendor classes that are available in the DCFS VTC Foster Parent Portal. Information regarding available in service classes is discussed during the monthly foster parent training meeting.**

Foster parents and the licensing representative meet during the announced and unannounced monitoring visits to mutually assess the ongoing **individual** training needs of the foster parents as related to the specialized needs of the children in their

care. Caseworkers, during the monthly foster parent visit, also ask the foster parents if there is assistance or training that they need but not receiving.

Since January 2000, foster parents are the educational advocates for the youth in care in their homes, which allows for more control over the special education process. Educational Advocacy training is offered throughout the Central Region of Illinois to foster parents, and virtually beginning in March 2020. One foster parent from each home must be certified. While one does not need Educational Advocacy training before being licensed, one foster parent from each home must obtain the training by the time they renew their license at four years. However, it is highly recommended that the class be taken within the first six months of the license.

Bethany recognizes the importance of foster parents receiving appropriate training and support. In August 2014, Bethany contracted with a certified trainer to provide monthly trainings regarding the issues with which foster children and foster parents deal with. The two hour trainings, held the first Monday of the month from 6:00pm to 8:00pm, began in January 2015. Child care and food was provided by the agency, and foster parents receive two credit hours of training. Topics are selected by the trainer and the licensing representative, along with input derived from foster parents during annual and semi-annual monitors. Subsequent topics are selected by foster parents who attend the trainings and with input derived from the foster parents during annual and semi-annual monitors. The program supervisor, the licensing representative, and the caseworkers also talk about the struggles and needs that foster families appear to be having in monthly unit meetings and trainings that would be beneficial. **In December 2021; "Library Programs" was held. In May 2022, in person trainings were resumed and "Foster Care and Covid" was held; in June 2022; "Low Cost, No Cost Summer Activities" and the Foster Parent Law was held; in October 2022, the first half of LGBTQ+ was held; and in November, the second half of LGBTQ+ was held. In October 2022 and November 2022 the Foster Parent Law was held. The participants expressed they are very happy monthly trainings were resuming and were able to discuss how stressful the pandemic has been, however participation has been extremely low in the last year.** Foster parents have expressed that not having child care has been a barrier to attending trainings. Furthermore, virtual trainings tend to be impersonal and are not able to meet the needs that the homes have as well as in person trainings do. The trainings allow for foster parents to exchange resources and discipline techniques that have worked for them. The trainings have assisted foster parents in developing a support network and allow foster parents a place to discuss some of the sensitive issues of being a foster parent in a confidential setting. Providing child care has been critical since many foster parents had expressed this was a barrier to attending trainings.

**Bethany recognizes the importance in maintaining CPR training for foster parents who have waterways on the property and the goal is to periodically provide this training at no cost to the foster parents as a way to keep them in compliance with licensing standards. The agency will also reimburse a foster family if they take the training elsewhere.**

The use of the co-trainer model has been utilized and **will be utilized in the future as more in person trainings resume**. Several of the trainings have involved a guest speaker who collaborates with the Bethany trainer to provide accurate and appropriate information about the training topics. The use of a co-trainer has been extremely beneficial and allows for more specific and accurate information to be presented. It also allows the foster parents to ask questions of the co-trainer and to share their experiences as well.

Several foster parents have requested "Reactive Attachment Disorder" training. The agency actively looked for a formal training, however, there were no affordable trainings readily available in the area. The agency has addressed this need by having the child's therapist address Reactive Attachment Disorder with the foster family during ongoing counseling sessions. During monitoring visits, the licensing representative also discusses required training for license renewal with the foster parents. The licensing staff are also utilizing the DCFS Virtual Training Center. Foster parents are encouraged to use their local library to access resources and other foster parent support groups. DCFS also encourages foster parents to utilize the Foster Parent Portal and On Demand Portal (found in the DCFS Virtual Training (VTC)). **DCFS has created new virtual in-service modules that are currently being offered called micro learning sessions. They are only two hour sessions and not part of a series.** Currently, Educational Advocacy, Adoption Guardianship Readiness, Caring for Children who have Experienced Trauma, Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture, and Advance Development, Working as a Member of a Professional Team, as well as Teen, and Pre-Teen Development are being offered. DCFS has significantly increased the availability of On Demand Trainings for our foster homes, and they are encouraged to access these. DCFS looks forward to returning to in person trainings as soon as it is deemed safe to do so. During monitoring visits, the licensing representative talks with foster parents about these resources and distributes handouts to outline the resources. During monitoring visits and in discussions with the caseworker about the child, a specific training need may be identified. In that case, Bethany will locate the training resource and ensure that the foster parent has the resource (e.g., book, online training, etc.). There are mailings regarding classroom trainings that are being offered and if a foster parent has provided an email address, information on trainings from other agencies can be electronically sent. In addition, both the licensing worker and caseworker will notify foster parents when additional trainings are available either online, in-person, or virtually.

Foster homes that care for specialized children are required to take additional training hours. The licensing representative assess the needs of the specialized child and make recommendations to the foster parents regarding applicable trainings which would be helpful in addressing the behavioral and emotional needs of the child. Foster parents are also encouraged to attend counseling at Bethany, free of charge, to ensure that they have additional support. The Bethany therapist provides the foster parents with resources and training materials. Specific training may be required as a result of a licensing violation or a corrective action plan. In these instances, the licensing representative will suggest training topics that will educate the foster parent in any area of need.

## **Contact with the Agency**

3.) "The right to be informed as to how to contact the appropriate child placement agency in order to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for children in the foster parents' care."

Bethany understands the importance of having a caseworker available at all times to address issues a foster parent may have during their 24 hour care of children. During normal business hours, the child's specific caseworker can be contacted by office phone, the caseworker's cell phone, **and via email**. In addition, foster parents can obtain support after hours in case of emergency by utilizing the on-call system. The agency has a 24 hour on-call system in order to be available in this capacity. This system is managed by rotating staff responsible for emergencies on a weekly basis. This number is provided in writing in the foster care binder and is also on the automated voicemail system for the agency during non-business hours. Caseworkers remind foster parent during home visits about the on-call system, and business cards with the on-call number are given out at the time a child is placed, and are also periodically mailed out to the foster homes.

Each Bethany foster home receives a list of resources for support and information in the child's foster care binder. The list includes telephone numbers for the Inspector General, Advocacy Office, the Foster Parent Hotline, Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) Emergency Medical Consents, and the CARES line. Also listed in the binder are the names and telephone numbers of the caseworker's supervisor, the Guardian Ad Litem, and the Child Abuse Reporting Hotline.

Bethany caseworkers also review with the foster parents the many resources available in the community to meet a child's needs. The foster parents are encouraged to participate in additional support services for the child, such as Birth to Three, Head Start, Child Care Resource & Referral, Robert Young Community Mental Health Center, and Wraparound services. A list of commonly used referral sources are provided in the foster care binder that comes with each child placement. Bethany caseworkers and licensing staff inform foster parents of their ability to utilize the full-time counselors who are available to see youth in care, as well as foster parents.

### **Timely Financial Reimbursement**

4.) "The right to receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with the care needs of the child as specified in the service plan."

Another way that Bethany for Children & Families show foster parents the dignity and respect they deserve is by reimbursing them in a timely manner for the professional services they provide.

Bethany provides case management services for youth in care in two levels of foster care; Traditional and Specialized Foster Care. Foster parents are reimbursed according



to the foster care program within which the child is served. Foster parents who are licensed relatives or traditional are paid directly by Bethany for Children & Families' business office. As of July 1 2021, unlicensed relatives are also paid by Bethany. All foster parents are also able to collect additional reimbursements for nonrecurring expenses such as clothing, camp fees, activity fees, and educational expenses.

The majority of youth in care are in a standard level of care. However, if a foster child has significant behavioral, emotional, physical, or educational issues, then Bethany will schedule a Clinical Intervention to Preserve Placement (CIPP) with DCFS. At that time, the child's needs are discussed and the CIPP team decides whether the child meets the criteria for his/her level of care to increase from Traditional to Specialized Foster Care. If an increase in the level of care is approved, then the board payment for the child increases. The Bethany caseworker will notify the business office of this change. Once DCFS sends approval to Bethany's business office, the foster parent is reimbursed accordingly.

Bethany's goal is to reimburse foster parents promptly and accurately. Three business days is the normal turn-around time after the first of the month for the board payment to be issued. The foster parents submit mileage requests and receipts for other approved reimbursable expenses directly to the child's caseworker. The caseworker is then responsible to complete a purchase order requesting payment or reimbursement be made to that foster parent. Mileage reimbursement or reimbursement requests for other approved expenses, such as respite, camp, tutoring, etc. that are submitted by Tuesday of a business week, holidays excluded, will be paid on the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month. If a foster parent is receiving a special fee, it is sent with their monthly board check.

When a caseworker completes a CFS 906 Placement/Payment Authorization Form for a child, a copy is sent to the business office within 24 hours. If the business office receives verification from DCFS the foster home can be paid for that time period, the payment is made. The Program Supervisor reviews the current billing each month prior to monthly board runs to ensure accuracy. If payment problems or delays arise and the foster parents are unable to resolve the issue with the caseworker, they may contact the caseworker's supervisor, who will consult the agency Business Office. If they are unable to resolve the issue at this supervisory level, they may call the agency's Illinois Director of Child Welfare & Placement Services, or they may file a grievance. Foster parents receive information concerning Bethany's grievance procedure during the licensing process; and with the yearly implementation plan. Additionally, at the time of placement of each child in an agency foster home, a copy of the agency's grievance procedure is in the foster care binder provided to the foster parents.

## **Placement Planning**

5.) "The right to be provided a clear, written understanding of a placement agency's plan concerning the placement of a child in the foster parents' home. Inherent in this right is the foster parents' responsibility to support activities that will promote the child's right to

relationships with his or her own family and cultural heritage.”

It is the standard operating procedure in Rock Island, Mercer, and Henry counties to form and conduct Child and Family Team meetings for youth in care. At the 14<sup>th</sup> day and 40<sup>th</sup> day, of a child being in foster care, a Child and Family Team Meeting is held to review why a child has come into care, what issues need to be resolved, and any current barriers impeding the child returning home. The foster parents are invited to be a member of this team and to participate with the other members of the treatment team, including family members, and the child (if appropriate) in the development of goals for the case. The ongoing Child and Family Team meetings are required quarterly to continue to monitor the case progress and obtain information from the team.

Through ongoing collaboration with foster parents, Bethany uses the DCFS's client service plan to enable foster parents to obtain the child's portion of the service plan as soon as it is developed. Any revisions or updates are provided to foster parents in a timely manner. Information provided includes all known information on medical, psychological, behavioral needs, educational history, visitation plan, case history, child's legal status, permanency goal of the child, and any previous placements and reasons for change in placement.

Further, it is the practice of Bethany caseworkers to discuss the rating of the client service plan and the content of the new service plan with the foster parent prior to the Administrative Case Review (ACR). With this procedure, the foster parents' input can be obtained before the ACR.

In addition, Bethany foster parents are also trained and provided information on the opportunity to participate in the Family Reunification Support Special Service Fee program. This encourages foster parents to be involved with biological parents in the process of reunification. The incentive/reimbursement for foster parents is for the work they do mentoring and role-modeling to better prepare biological parents for their children returning home.

The foster parents are consulted in regards to the visitation schedule that is set between the caseworker and birth parent. A youth in care's school schedule, extra-curricular activities, additional services, and the foster families schedules are always considered in determining the best day and time for visitation. In return, the foster parent shall keep the caseworker informed of any changes in his/her schedule that affects visitation.

All relatives are assessed in regards to their ability to supervise parent/child visits. When this is approved by the agency, the relative foster parent and biological parent can coordinate a visitation plan that is more open in regards to days and times.

## **Investigations**

6.) “The right to be provided a fair, timely, and impartial investigation of complaints concerning the foster parents' licensure, to be provided the opportunity to have a

person of the foster parents' choosing present during the investigation, and to be provided due process during the investigation; the right to be provided the opportunity to request and receive mediation or an administrative review of decisions that affect licensing parameters, or both mediation and an administrative review; and the right to have decisions concerning a licensing corrective action plan specifically explained and tied to the licensing standards violated."

Since July 2009, Bethany's licensing representatives have been responsible for logging, investigating, and resolving all complaints on the agency's foster homes and reporting the outcomes to DCFS. The licensing staff members follow Procedure 383 to conduct stand alone or concurrent investigations when there has been a licensing complaint or child abuse investigation. Licensing staff members understand that the foster parents have a right to have an individual of their choosing present during the investigation. The foster parents receive notice of this right either by phone or in writing before the investigation. In the case of a concurrent investigation, the DCFS investigator also provides the foster parents with a written statement of all of their rights and asks if they have a clear understanding of those rights. Bethany licensing staff are permitted and encouraged to attend the initial home visit with the investigator. Foster parents are informed that the DCP investigation should not take longer than 30 days from first receiving the report, and if a longer amount of time is required, they are notified in writing regarding the need for an additional 30 days. Foster parents are notified of the DCFS licensing decision within five days of the determination in a certified letter. They are also informed that they have a right to appeal the decision.

When there is a licensing investigation, the foster parents are first notified by the licensing worker that there is a concern regarding the non-compliance with a licensing standard, what the standard is, and what it pertains to. The source of the complaint is not disclosed if concerns were raised by someone other than licensing staff. The foster parents are provided with detailed accounts of which licensing standards have been violated. Further, they are instructed in a Corrective Plan as to how to meet the standard, the timeframe for completion, and who is responsible for specific duties in order to meet the standard. Most violations can be corrected within 30 days. If extra time is needed to complete the corrections, two additional 30 day extensions can be granted. If the Licensor and Program Supervisor determines that a Protective Plan should be put in place, the foster home is notified of the details of the plan, including who the plan covers and who can be present with the foster child. During the Protective Plan, the home is monitored by licensing staff on an unannounced basis. The Protective Plan is dismissed upon completion of the licensing investigation and when any compliance issues are corrected.

Foster parents can appeal licensing violations by requesting a Supervisory Review with the Bethany licensing supervisor. A letter is mailed to the foster parent indicating that they must request a Supervisory Review in writing, and that it must be mailed, e-mailed, or faxed within ten days from the postmark of the letter. Foster parents have the right to request an Informal Review for a failed Corrective Plan with the DCFS licensing supervisor. A letter is mailed to the foster parent indicating that they must request an

Informal Review in writing, and that it must be mailed, e-mailed, or faxed within ten days from the postmark of the letter.

### **Additional Information on the Child**

7.) "The right, at any time during which a child is placed with the foster parent, to receive additional or necessary information that is relevant to the care of the child."

At the time the caseworker places a child with foster parents, the worker shall provide available information known at that time either verbally or by written documentation necessary for the proper care of the child. This procedure is further mandated by the development of the Sharing Information with the Caregiver, CFS 600-4, which is a checklist for caseworkers to go through with foster parents to show that information has been provided. If the written items are not available at the time of placement, the caseworker has ten days to provide the information in writing. The foster parent signs the CFS 600-4 acknowledging that he/she have received the information. A copy is forwarded to the Guardian Ad Litem and to the Program Supervisor.

At the Program Supervisor's discretion and with signed consent of the parents, the foster parents may be invited to the initial family meeting that will occur no later than 45 days after the child's placement, in order to share information among all participants; review the initial and comprehensive assessments; discuss and prepare the initial service plan; and determine the permanency goal.

Prior to inviting foster parents to the initial family meeting and all subsequent Child and Family Team meetings, the caseworker must consider the statutory requirement that protects foster parents' names, addresses, and telephone numbers from disclosure. Such information regarding the foster parents shall not be disclosed to the child's parents at the initial Child and Family Team meeting.

Caseworkers review on a monthly basis (or more frequently, if necessary) concerns about the child with the foster parents. If changes are made concerning the care or needs of the child, the service plan is revised and reviewed with the child (if age appropriate), foster parents, and the biological parents. The agency requires any changes made to areas of the service plan that concern the child be provided to the foster parent verbally within 48 hours. Any additional information regarding the child is given to the foster parents verbally and in writing during monthly home visits, or more often as needed. This information pertains to the child's educational, physical, emotional, and mental health issues. The Program Supervisor ensures during monthly supervision that the caseworker is sharing all necessary information about the child with the foster parents.

The inclusion of foster parents in the Child and Family Team process facilitates the timely exchange of information, and they are a key component of the team. Bethany staff members, through the Department of Children & Family Services, are trained upon new employment and during foundations training concerning the issues of confidentiality

and the guidelines regarding the dissemination of information about children.

### **Written Information Regarding a Child**

8.) "The right to be given information concerning a child i) from the Department as required under subsection u of section 5 of the Children and Family Services Act and ii) from a child welfare agency as required under subsection (c-5) of section 7.4 of the Child Care Act of 1969."

At the time the caseworker places a child with a foster parent or prospective adoptive parent, or prior to placement of the child, whenever possible, the worker shall provide available information in writing about the child necessary for the proper care of the child to the foster parent or prospective adoptive parent.

- a.) Bethany will provide the following information to the caregiver:
- 1) The medical history of the child including known medical problems or communicable diseases, information concerning immunization status of the child, and insurance and medical card information;
  - 2) The educational history of the child; including any special educational needs and details of the child's individualized educational plan (IEP), Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP) when the child is receiving special education services or 504 Special Educational Special Needs Plan, if applicable;
  - 3) A copy of the child's portion of the client service plan including any visitation arrangements and all amendments or revisions; case history of the child, including how the child came into care; the child's legal status; the permanency goal for the child; a history of the child's previous placements; and reasons for placement changes, excluding information that identifies or reveals the location of any previous foster or relative home caregiver; and
  - 4) Other relevant background information of the child, including any prior criminal history; and information about any behavior problems including fire setting, perpetration of sexual abuse, destructive behavior and substance abuse habits; and likes and dislikes, etc.

Bethany's Program Supervisor **reviews and must provide approval** before providing any information to the foster parents or prospective adoptive parents.

In the case of emergency placement, Bethany provides any known information about the child verbally, and inform the foster parents with the Sharing Information with the Caregiver, CFS 600-4, that this and any other information is provided in a written format within ten (10) days. When advanced placement is known, the CFS 600-4, which outlines the content of information, is completed in its entirety and will accompany all the required documents. The caseworker is required to obtain a signed verification of receipt of the information described in subsection CFS 600-4 and for youth in care a copy of the information to the child's Guardian ad Litem. This will be completed within

ten (10) working days after placement with the foster parents, adoptive parent, or other caregiver. A copy of this form can be found in the foster parent binder that is provided at the time of initial placement. The casework staff has been trained to provide this form and ongoing implementation will be reinforced during weekly supervision. In addition, at this time, the Program Supervisor will monitor the caseworker's compliance with the policies and procedures by reviewing the notations of monthly foster home visits and Child and Family Team Meetings.

### **Notifications on a Child**

9.) "The right to be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings concerning the foster child in order to actively participate in the case planning and decision-making process regarding the child, including individual service planning meetings, Administrative Case Reviews (ACRs), interdisciplinary staffings, and individual educational planning (IEP) meetings; the right to be informed of decisions made by the courts or the child welfare agency concerning the child; the right to provide input concerning the plan of services for the child and to have that input given full consideration in the same manner as information presented by any other professional on the team; and the right to communicate with other professionals who work with the foster child within the context of the team, including therapists, physicians, and teachers."

In order for foster parents to be notified in a timely manner, Bethany's assigned caseworker is responsible for sending either a written notification or an in-person notification of the dates of all court hearings, staffings, Child and Family Team meetings, Clinical Intervention for Placement Prevention (CIPP), and ACRs to foster parents within 48 hours of receiving this information. Caseworkers are also instructed to contact the foster parents in person or by telephone to notify them of changes to the service plan or visitation plan that impact the children in their care. The Program Supervisor ensures that the caseworkers are notifying foster parents of Court, ACR's and all other meetings either in-person or through an email (child's name is not used, initials only) or letter by speaking with the caseworker during weekly supervision.

Based on the fundamentals of good social work practice and due to requirements of the Council of Accreditation and Federal Review Outcomes, Illinois has established a thorough and complete process to capture assessment data throughout the life of the case, known as the Illinois Model of Integrated Assessment. During the assessment process, the caseworker and the clinical screener interview foster parents regarding the child's educational, physical health, and mental health needs. This provides a framework for the development of a comprehensive service plan and all subsequent service plans.

Additionally, foster parents are strongly encouraged to attend all meetings where scheduling is done on site. At the ACR, all upcoming or proposed dates are written and disseminated. Foster parents have a right to attend court hearings, at which the judges in Rock Island, Mercer, and Henry counties schedule time for the next hearing date. At the court hearing, foster parents can be introduced to the Guardian ad Litem and may

share their availability for an appointment to discuss the child in their care with the child's attorney. If a foster parent is not able to attend a meeting outside of the foster home the caseworker will explore having the foster parent call into the meeting, if possible. If the foster parent cannot attend in-person or call and the meeting cannot be rescheduled, the caseworker will gather the information in advance from the foster parent to present at the meeting about the child.

When a foster parent is not able to attend a meeting, court, or other event the caseworker notifies the foster parent within 24 hours either via email or by phone of the specifics of the meeting.

Foster parents are encouraged to take the children in their care to medical and dental appointments, as well as to psychological/counseling appointments. Foster parents hear firsthand the information concerning the physical and mental health of the child in their care. They can also provide the most accurate report of a child's daily activities and behaviors. Any information provided to or by the physician should be given to the caseworker following the appointment.

Bethany's caseworkers have adhered strictly to the procedures of providing a written 14 day notice if movement of a child in care is necessary or a plan for movement is being developed. This allows the foster parents time to appeal the decision, if desired.

### **Necessary Information on a Child and Family**

10.) "The right to be given, in a timely and consistent manner, any information a caseworker has regarding the child and the child's family which is pertinent to the care and needs of the child and to the making of a permanency plan for the child. Disclosure of information concerning the child's family shall be limited to that information that is essential for understanding the needs of and providing care to the child in order to protect the rights of the child's family. When a positive relationship exists between the foster parents and the child's family, the child's family may consent to disclosure of additional information."

Foster parents are made aware of the agency's policy and the DCFS policy regarding confidentiality and the Release of Information. Foster parents sign an agreement form acknowledging that they have read and understand the required confidentiality surrounding DCFS youth in care. This signed form is placed in their licensing file for licensed providers or in the case file for unlicensed relatives. At times, the birth parent agrees to sign a Release of Information to the foster parent allowing for additional information to be shared.

At the time of placement, foster parents are provided with any known medical, emotional, and developmental needs of the child. Within 45 days of placement, an Integrated Assessment is completed which assesses the child's needs and gathers additional information about the birth family. Information is given to the foster parents on

an ongoing basis during phone calls, home visits, Administrative Case Reviews, and Child and Family Team Meetings, within the guidelines of confidentiality. Caseworkers discuss with foster parents the permanency plan for the child and keep foster parents informed of changes to that plan through regular communication. Administrative Case Reviews and Permanency Review Hearings are crucial times when the permanency plan for the child is discussed. The Affidavit of Information Disclosure for Adoption/Guardianship form (470-H) outlines the information which must be provided to the foster family at the time they are deciding to adopt or provide guardianship for a child. Information provided to the foster family must be non-identifying with regards to the birth family. The Program Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the appropriate information is shared with the foster family.

### **Notification for Moving a Child**

11.) “The right to be given reasonable written notice of any change in a child's case plan, plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster parents, and the reasons for the change or termination in placement. The notice shall be waived only in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.”

Bethany follows Illinois Administrative Rule and Procedure when requesting a change in placement. Foster parents are given the required 14 day notice on form CFS-151-B Notice of Change of Placement that outlines their right to appeal, unless timely notice cannot be given based on imminent risk of harm. If the foster parent disagrees with the decision to change the child's placement, they may request a clinical review of the decision within three (3) working days upon receipt of the CFS-151-B. The CFS-151-B outlines how to request a clinical review and the time constraints associated with the clinical review. Once the Department of Children & Families Services receives the request for a clinical placement review, the Department must convene a clinical placement review within five (5) working days of receiving the request. Once the Department receives the request they will request specific materials from the worker and involved parties will be notified to attend the review. If appealed, the child remains in the same placement, until a decision is rendered. Bethany staff members participate in all mediation or fair hearings. If there is a court order to change the child's placement or in cases of imminent risk to the safety of the child, the notice shall be sent the same day as the action being taken. At no time are the foster parents subjected to retaliation or harassment if they choose to appeal an agency decision.

The procedure for responding to the necessity for an unplanned move of foster children is as follows:

- The caseworker assesses the immediate need of the child needing replacement.
- The caseworker confers with the current foster parents.
- The caseworker consults with the Agency Performance Team's (APME) contact at the Department of Children & Family Services.



- In collaboration with the foster parent, the DCFS monitor, the APT contact, and any other service provider involved, a determination for a plan of action to be taken is developed that is in the best interest of the child.
- Once a plan of action has been agreed upon and approved by the guardian, it is implemented by the private agency caseworker.
- A Status Alert is sent notifying the appropriate Juvenile Court.

Note: If the need to re-place the child is immediate, emergency placements will be contacted and an appropriate placement chosen with the approval of the guardian. Once the child has been placed in the emergency placement, the process for responding to the unplanned movement from a foster home is implemented.

Caseworkers are trained to identify risk of disruption. It is the goal of Bethany to maintain a child in their foster care placement. Placement changes are minimized, if at all possible. Bethany caseworkers are trained to identify the signs of a possible placement disruption through assessment training at Foundations Training. Ongoing training is provided through Bethany at unit meetings, during supervision, and through educational information provided by the Program Supervisor. The caseworker, during meetings, home visits, and phone calls with the foster parents, assesses the stability of the placement. Risks of disruption are also assessed during parent /child visits, and contact with collaterals, such as the school and mental health providers. If issues arise, the caseworker and the supervisor, determine what the child and foster parents, including the foster parent's biological or adopted children, need in order to stabilize the placement. Typically, Bethany licensing staff, the Bethany therapist, and other team members are involved in trying to stabilize the placement.

### **Court Hearing Notification**

12.) "The right to be notified in a timely and complete manner of all court hearings, including notice of the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer handling the case, the location of the hearing, the court docket number of the case, and the right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek Mandamus under the revised Juvenile Court Act of 1987."

In Bethany's service area, the first court hearing after protective custody is taken may not be known by the agency. The foster parents are informed by Division of Child Protection staff (the investigator) of the next hearing. After the case has been assigned to Bethany, the caseworker informs the foster parents of all scheduled hearing dates and times in writing or in-person. The Program Supervisor ensures that caseworkers are notifying foster parents of court hearing either in-person or through an email (child's name is not used, initials only) or letter by speaking with the caseworker during weekly supervision. In Rock Island County, Mercer County, and Henry County, the court provides this information immediately following the initial hearing.

Foster parents have the right and responsibility to understand the rules and procedures that govern them, as well as the law that guides the procedures under the Juvenile

Court Act. Upon their request for a copy of the Juvenile Court Act, workers will provide foster parents with a copy and discuss any questions they may have concerning the document. Foster parents are informed during their PRIDE training of their right to attend all court hearings, their right to seek Mandamus, as well as their right to hire an attorney to file a motion on their behalf if they choose.

### **Rights When Children Return to Care**

13.) “The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parents is to be re-entered into foster care, if that placement is consistent with the best interest of the child and other children in the foster parents’ home.”

When a child is returned to foster care or has been stepped down from a higher level of care, Bethany staff members review records and check with the Placement Clearance Desk to see if the child may be re-placed in his/her former foster home. Illinois Administrative Rule and Procedure dictates that if at all possible, siblings should be placed together unless contraindicated in their service plan. Primary consideration is given to placing with other siblings who are in foster placement or choosing a new home where the sibling group can be placed together. This may change placement options for the child. If the home is licensed with another agency, staff members of that agency are asked about the re-placement of the child in that home. If approved for re-placement, the foster parents are contacted and asked about the acceptance of the child back into their home. It is Bethany’s policy to do all in its power to accept the case of a child previously served who is now returning into care. For those children who are placed in residential care and are now ready to return to the community, Bethany participates in the Child and Family Team process that reviews all previous placements and examines if any of these placements are current options for the child’s return.

### **Right to Appeal**

14.) “The right to have timely access to the child placement agency's existing appeals process and the right to be free from acts of harassment and retaliation by any other party when exercising the right to appeal.”

Foster parents are informed of the appeal process during PRIDE training, and receive ongoing information from the State of Illinois concerning foster parent rights. Bethany foster parents have direct access to their worker’s immediate supervisor, as well as the Director of Child Welfare & Placement Services, and President of the agency. At the time of initial licensure and annually thereafter, foster parents sign an acknowledgment form showing that they have received Bethany’s grievance procedure and that they understand what rights they have upon signing the form. The Grievance procedure is also included when sending out the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan at least once a year. Foster parents are asked to sign the Grievance procedure if they agree with it, or to provide input if they would like to see changes. Virtual meetings were held in November 2020, June 2021, and November 2021 to review the Foster Parent Law

Implementation Plan and the Grievance procedure. Foster parents that attended concluded that the Grievance procedure was acceptable and no changes were indicated. The foster parents' rights statement from Bethany has been revised to include more specific mention of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan.

In addition, foster parents also have access to the Bethany licensing representative to receive clarification concerning the licensing standards. The foster parents can utilize the Agency Statement of Client Rights to address any grievances they have during the licensing process and throughout their licensure with Bethany. The agency licensing representative also informs the foster parents of their right to appeal any decision during the twice-annual mandatory licensing visit.

At no time will the foster parents be harassed or retaliated against for exercising their right to appeal a decision made by the agency. When a grievance has been filed by a foster parent, the content of the grievance is only shared with the caseworker, licensing representative/foster parent law liaison, and the appropriate agency management staff. The foster parent will be granted the same level of confidentiality during this time that is provided to the birth family.

Bethany foster parents and caseworkers are familiarized with Part 337, the Service Appeal Process, which applies to children, parents, and foster parents. It is distributed at each ACR. The Administrative Case Reviewer describes the process and purpose of the service appeal. It is usually used to resolve discrepancies in the case. The foster parents have 45 days to file a service appeal in regards to an investigation; case plan issue; decision to reduce, suspend, or terminate services; *and* a change in service goals, frequency or length of visitation, or change of placement of a child.

Foster parents can use service appeals to address payment issues services such as medical, educational, and psychological services, or placement changes unrelated to a return to birth parents.

All parties have the right to file a service appeal within 45 days. The caseworker has an obligation to assist clients or foster parents with the service appeal. However, the caseworker is not required to be in agreement with the foster parents' decision to file a service appeal. Bethany gives a State of Illinois Service Appeal Informational Procedure brochure to each foster home in the foster care record binder that comes with each foster child placed in their home.

### **Foster Parent Hotline**

15.) "The right to be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline established under Section 35.6 of the Children and Family Services Act and all of the rights accorded to foster parents concerning reports of misconduct by Department employees, service providers, or contractors, confidential handling of those reports, and investigation by the Inspector General appointed under Section 35.5 of the Children and Family Services Act."

Prospective foster parents receive this information during PRIDE training. Bethany, in addition, has developed a Foster Parent Binder for foster parents that contains this information. This information has also been disseminated to the foster parents in mailings from the Springfield office of DCFS. Foster parents also are given information about the State Central Registry (SCR) hotline and the phone numbers to call in the Foster Parent Handbook that they receive upon completion of the PRIDE class. **The number for the Foster Parent Hotline is 1-800-624-5437, the Advocacy office number is 1-800-232-3798, and the Inspector General's phone number is 1-800-722-9124.**

### **Foster Parent Responsibilities**

As a part of the foster care team, Bethany for Children & Families makes every effort to support foster parents in knowing and adhering to a set of responsibilities in the same manner as casework staff. When each foster parent and team member follows the set of responsibilities outlined by the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan, the children and families have consistent care.

#### **Communication**

16(1). "The responsibility to openly communicate and share information about the child with other members of the child welfare team."

Caseworkers are required by DCFS Rules and Procedure to be aware of any changes concerning the children in their care. When workers meet with foster parents monthly (at a minimum) and review the foster home medication administration and behavioral logs, information is exchanged on how the child acts at home, in the community, and in school. The foster parents may convey verbally, and in writing on the monthly form, issues and/or resources that are needed by the child in their care. Foster parents may attend ACRs to share opinions concerning the child's service plan and may attend court hearings. Foster parents may be requested to excuse themselves at the request of the biological family during discussions that do not concern the foster child. Foster parents are expected under the Permanency Initiative to be available to meet with the Guardian ad Litem at least annually concerning the child in their care.

In cooperation with the HealthWorks of Illinois Program, caseworkers, and foster parents will work collaboratively to gather ongoing medical information and treatment recommendations to insure that the child is compliant with required medical documentation and services. Health Works compiles acute care visit summaries, dental care history, medical history, immunization records, well-child visits, vision, and hearing evaluations. This is an essential tool for the caseworkers.

#### **Confidentiality**

17(2). “The responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information concerning foster children and their families and act appropriately within applicable confidentiality laws and regulations.”

The PRIDE training discusses confidentiality. All foster parents receive a Bethany Foster Care Record when a child is placed in their home. This handbook discusses confidentiality. Unlicensed relatives sign the CFS 458 “Relative Caregiver Placement Agreement” at the time of placement. In this document it states the caregiver shall not discuss the confidential information about the child or the birth parents with an unauthorized person. Licensed foster homes sign the Bethany Foster Family Home Licensing Agreement at the time of licensure. They agree to abide by Licensing Standards, Section 402.24, stating that all information concerning the child, their family and background is to be kept confidential and can only be shared with the caseworker and those authorized by the caseworker. Bethany licensing staff reviews and expects that foster parents follow DCFS policy regarding confidentiality, and foster parents are encouraged to seek clarification from the caseworker if there are questions, such as what can be revealed to a teacher or child care provider. If the caseworker is unable to assist, the issue is referred to the Program Supervisor. If an answer requires further clarification, the agency’s Director of Child Welfare & Placement Services is consulted and/or the DCFS regional counsel may be contacted.

With the increasing popularity of social media, in 2014 DCFS instituted Administrative Procedure #28 Social Media/Mobile Technology for Children/Youth in Care. Within the first 30 days of placement, the caseworker, the foster parent, and the youth in care are required to establish a social media safety agreement by reviewing and signing the CFS 2034 Social Media/Mobile Safety Agreement. The responsibility to respect confidentiality includes but is not limited to posting information on social media websites in regards to the youth in care in their care. Under the new social media policy, foster parents are allowed to post photographs of their youth in care on social media websites, however, they cannot identify them as youth in care or give their last name. Personal and confidential information in regards to any youth in care or their birth family may not be shared with any public social websites. When a violation of this responsibility is discovered, the licensing staff will discuss the importance of this responsibility with the foster parents. If no changes are made or if the foster home violates the child’s confidentiality (or that of the family), the licensing staff will initiate licensing enforcement action.

### **Advocating for Children**

18(3). “The responsibility to advocate for children in the foster parents’ care.”

Bethany’s foster parents are encouraged to work closely with individuals who are working with the foster child in their home, e.g., Bethany’s staff members, SASS, Guardian ad Litem, Crisis Intervention staff, etc. Foster parents are strongly encouraged to be involved in medical, dental, and psychological appointments that a child in their home may have. Foster parents with children who are receiving any of the above

services are the best advocate for them since they witness the day-to-day events of a child.

An expectation set forth in the Responsibilities of Foster Parents is that at least one foster parent complete the Educational Advocacy training within the first four (4) years of licensure. The Department for Children and Family Services and Bethany believe that the individuals who know the child are the best educational advocates. Therefore, while a child is in care, foster parents should be the child's educational advocates, attending parent teacher conferences and IEP/IFSP meetings.

Bethany foster parents are expected to meet monthly with the child's caseworker to discuss any concerns/progress in order for the worker to assist the foster parents in meeting the child's needs. It is also part of the Permanency Initiative that foster parents are available to meet with the Guardian ad Litem a minimum of annually concerning the child in their care. Foster parents are encouraged by the casework staff to participate in the child's court hearings, ACRs, and Child and Family Team meetings concerning the child. Foster parents are also supported in their decision to write a letter directly to the judge, if they choose.

All foster parents are informed of the service appeal process and are given a pamphlet of this process at each ACR by the ACR reviewer. If they are unable to attend an ACR, they will receive the pamphlet along with their portion of the service plan from their assigned caseworker. Bethany caseworkers are available to assist the foster parent in the filing of a service appeal and also have literature about the appeal process that can assist the foster parent.

## **Respect**

19(4). "The responsibility to treat children in the foster parent's care and the children's families with dignity, respect, and consideration."

Foster parents receive PRIDE training which introduces them to different aspects of being foster parents such as grief and loss issues, working with birth parents, working with the Illinois Juvenile Court System, and the impact that being a youth in care has on a child, his/her birth family, the foster parents, and his/her families. Foster parents also discuss with their licensing representative the standards that set the expectations that a foster child will be treated equitably and with respect. Caseworkers and the licensing representative monitor that foster families are treating biological families with dignity and respect during home visits, Child and Family Team meetings, and annual and semi-annual licensing monitors. Caseworkers continually reinforce with foster parents the need to respect the child's ties to his/her biological family and support the permanency goal of the child. **Bethany staff recognizes the importance of a child's biological connections with his or her family, and will stress the importance to foster parents to adhere to the standard of not speaking negatively about biological family members.** DCFS has a training, Keeping Children Connected to Their Brothers and Sisters, which is mandatory for foster parents to take. It is a short online training.

This information was sent out to all foster homes, and the licensing representative will ensure that the training is completed.

In February 2014, DCFS instituted a policy that every youth in care needs to have a Lifebook. A Lifebook is a scrapbook used to record and maintain life milestones, photographs, and mementos. The Lifebook should remain with the child and should be updated regularly. During the first 45 days after initial placement, the caseworker should discuss with the birth family, the child and the foster family the Lifebook. The caseworker should provide the necessary supplies to start the Lifebook, and should supply additional supplies as needed on an ongoing basis. The caseworker is required to document discussions about the Lifebook in a contact note. The Program Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the Lifebook is being done, and should document the Lifebook utilization in quarterly supervision notes.

DCFS has begun a new training program entitled Trauma Informed Care. This training attempts to show what trauma is for a child in foster care and the mental health effects trauma has. Many trauma's a child experiences are unable to be seen. Foster parents who can participate in this training will be provided insight in many areas that can cause frustration when caring for a traumatized child. Understanding the backgrounds and challenges the children and their families of origin were experiencing assists foster parents in having respectful and supportive interactions with both of them.

It is expected that all efforts and activities related to the foster care and child welfare delivery system be completed in such a way that all members of that team, especially the child and the family, are treated with mutual respect, dignity, and consideration. The caseworker discusses the process of concurrent planning in order to support and assist the decision-making process of the foster parents. This process has become more formalized and routine with the development of the Child and Family Teams. In this forum, all parties involved in the case are invited to come together monthly to discuss the needed cares and services for the children in placement and for the expedient pursuit of the case permanency goal.

### **Identify Strengths and Needs**

20(5). "The responsibility to recognize the foster parent's own individual and familial strengths and limitations when deciding whether to accept a child into care; and the responsibility to recognize the foster parent's own support needs and utilize appropriate supports in providing care for foster children."

As a placement agency, Bethany tries to match the needs of the child with the strengths of its licensed foster parents. Through the home study process at initial licensure, the family is asked about any particular strengths and child rearing practices that they believe will enhance their abilities to provide foster care services. The licensing representative also completes an assessment of the family's skills through references and home visits to make sure that the potential foster parents are realistic in their expectations and their abilities. In addition, the Child Caregiver Matching Tool can also

be used to ascertain how the child's needs can be met by a particular family and the family is encouraged to develop a list of questions to ask when they are called about placements. The family is continuously supported in making decisions on children that will fit in their home and family prior to accepting a child.

Beginning with the licensing process and continuing on to the caseworker and foster parent relationship, foster parents of Bethany are encouraged to explore and acknowledge their own strengths and areas in need of improvement. Self-awareness is viewed and presented to foster parents as a dynamic process that must be developed and constantly reassessed. Caseworkers continually assess the placement needs of the child and meet with the foster parents a minimum of monthly to discuss the needs of the child, as well as the needs of the foster parents. The caseworker's feedback provides insight to the licensing representative regarding the ability to parent with different ages and behaviors. The licensing representative uses the information to update the weekly Foster Parent Vacancy List, **which Bethany staff uses to match children to families.**

The licensing representative also meets twice a year and during the renewal visit with the foster parents to discuss placement history and experiences that may have changed their preferences for placements. The licensing worker discusses the family's support system during these visits to ensure that people and groups they previously identified are still provide support in times of need. Foster parents are encouraged by Bethany staff to develop supportive relationships with the fellow participants in their PRIDE trainings and to attend the monthly trainings at Bethany. This serves as an ongoing support and potential respite providers when in need.

### **Foster Parent Relationships**

21(6). "The responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations in improving the quality of care and service to children and families."

During PRIDE training, trainers inform foster parents of their options in terms of various types of support groups and encourage their participation. Bethany licensing staff will speak with the foster parents during the licensing process and during annual and semi-annual monitors about support groups and foster care affiliations. Presently, Rock Island County and Henry County have a support group which foster parents are able to utilize for support. Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, the Foster Care Alliance has hosted several recruitment/visibility events. Foster parents have participated in these events and have formed valuable connections at these events. Emails and mailings are sent to the foster parents about support groups and foster care affiliations. Furthermore, Bethany and the support groups have Facebook pages where important information is posted. During the pandemic, social media was vital in disseminating information and resources to foster parents whether they needed furniture, formula, training, or educational resources in collaboration with all area agencies. Bethany also shares with its foster parents the benefits of attending trainings so they can meet other individuals involved in providing service to foster children. The monthly trainings held by Bethany, prior to the



pandemic, provided a forum for foster parents to connect and communicate. Bethany looks forward to continuing to host google zoom trainings, and holding in person trainings when practice allows.

## Training

22(7). "The responsibility to assess the foster parent's ongoing individual training needs and take action to meet those needs."

Foster parents are informed in PRIDE that they must complete 16 hours of training prior to licensing renewal at four years. Educational Advocacy must be taken by at least one foster parent prior to renewal, as well as Keeping Children Connected and Normalcy. LGBTQ1+ was recently added. Bethany licensing staff informs foster parents of their training requirements at annual and semi-annual monitors. The caseworker meets with the foster parents at least once a month and interact with them at staffing's, court, and ACRs. Conversations are held with the foster parent's training needs at these times. Bethany licensing staff meet with the foster parents at annual and semi-annual monitors and discussions are held about specific training needs. At times, the child's counselor or teacher may recommend training for a foster parent.

Foster parents are encouraged by their licensor to avail themselves of community-sponsored trainings that may be offered in Illinois and Iowa in order to sharpen their skills, as well as to meet the minimum requirements of the licensing standards. Each licensed foster home has been provided a training account through the Virtual Training Center on the DCFS website, which has trainings listed by area or type. **Foster parents are given documentation on how to create a Virtual Training Center account and how to navigate it to register for the trainings offered on this site by the agency and also through PRIDE, if they are a fully licensed foster home.** This account will allow foster parents to track their own training hours, register for trainings, and complete online trainings when convenient for them. Foster parents are highly encouraged to attend the monthly trainings at Bethany. The Bethany licensing staff and caseworkers make every attempt to locate specific trainings, if indicated.

## Minimizing Placement Disruptions

23(8). "The responsibility to develop and assist in implementing strategies to prevent placement disruptions, recognizing the traumatic impact of placement disruptions on a foster child and all members of the foster family; and the responsibility to provide emotional support for the foster children and members of the foster family if preventive strategies fail and placement disruptions occur."

The agency uses the Child Caregiver Matching Tool to determine the appropriateness of placements in order to lessen the chances of disruption in placements. Bethany caseworkers have a close relationship with all foster parents that they work with and that ease of communication has prevented potential disruptions in the past. The licensing staff is also informed by the caseworker if they sense a potential for disruption

of a child's placement. At these times, licensing staff can be seen as an unbiased participant and listen to the stress or frustration the foster parent is experiencing.

Bethany staff are trained in the resources available to assist in stabilizing a placement. One available resource is the Intensive Placement Stabilization Program (IPS), formally known as the System of Care program, which provides more intensive services and support to children and foster parents in order to prevent placement disruptions. The foster parent, the caseworker, or other providers identify the need for this service. Caseworkers are trained about the IPS program and are encouraged to refer youth in care who are in need of the service. Furthermore, the supervisor and the licensing representative make referrals for youth in need of this service to stabilize placements. The caseworker makes the referral for the service, which is provided by the Center for Youth and Family Solutions. Foster parents may access counseling with their child through Bethany in order to better understand the dynamics surrounding the possible disruption.

Foster parents are encouraged to use their support systems in times of stress. During the home study process, the foster parent is asked to identify supports that they already have in place that will continue to assist them in their role as foster parents. This support system can include family members, friends, clergy, caseworkers, licensing staff, co-workers and many others. The agency also makes sure that foster parents remember to ensure confidentiality when discussing events in the home with others.

Another way foster parents can prevent placement disruptions is by utilizing respite services for youth in care. Respite services is available to foster parents for a variety of situations, including stress and/or crisis, illness or surgery in the foster family, and medical/education training for foster parents to improve their ability to care for the youth in care in their care. Traditional youth in care are eligible for a minimum of one (1) day of respite per month. A minimum of two days per month of respite services must be available to all specialized youth and their foster parents. Unlicensed relative foster homes are not eligible for respite, however, Bethany is flexible regarding foster parent's need for respite and will accommodate all foster parents to the best of the agency's ability and resources. Bethany will make every effort to locate appropriate respite in a timely manner for a foster parent who requests it. It is recommended that foster parents give at least two week notice prior to the time respite is going to be needed. Efforts should be made to provide respite in the foster family home and to utilize an individual who is familiar with the child. This could include a close family friend of the foster parent, a relative of the foster parent, or a child care provider that the foster parent utilizes for day care. All of these individuals would be subject to a CANTS/LEADS check and the final approval of the agency. If the foster family cannot identify someone then the agency will locate a licensed foster home to provide respite services.

**If disruption is not preventable, the foster parents share with staff the challenges they had and give a good assessment of what type of home would best care for the child. Foster parents provide this information as they have gotten to know the child well, but it is at the agency's discretion to make the final decision where**

**a child is placed.** In the event of a disruption, the licensing staff conducts a follow-up visit after the child has left the home to discuss the reasons for the move and the needs the foster parents feel they may have with future placements. This alleviates much of the stress incurred from moving a child from the home, and begins to vent the frustration the foster parents may have. The program supervisor also reviews with the licenser the feedback from the foster parent as to what was working or not with this particular placement.

## **Stressors**

24(9). “The responsibility to know the impact foster parenting has on individuals and family relationships; and the responsibility to endeavor to minimize, as much as possible, any stress that results from foster parenting.”

Foster parents are trained to recognize signs of stress during PRIDE training and other signs that would warn of a possible placement disruption. Training module eight of the DCFS training curriculum also addresses the signs of stress and how foster parenting affects the family. Additional trainings are available through DVD's, online trainings, and the DCFS approved websites. Foster parents are informed of trainings through emails, letters, and during annual, and semi-annual monitors. Foster parents are also notified of the availability of support groups. Support and training is also provided at the monthly trainings at Bethany.

All support to Bethany foster parents is provided in a respectful and confidential manner. Foster parents are encouraged to use healthy outlets to reduce stress including respite if necessary. Respite services are available to foster parents for a variety of situations, including stress and/or crisis, illness or surgery in the foster family, and medical/education training for foster parents to improve their ability to care for the youth in care in their care. The need for respite is assessed by the caseworker and the foster parent. At times, other service providers may recommend respite for the foster family. Traditional youth in care are eligible for a minimum of one (1) day of respite per month. A minimum of two days per month of respite services must be available to all specialized youth and their foster parents. Unlicensed relative foster homes are not eligible for respite, however, Bethany is very flexible regarding foster parent's need for respite and will accommodate all foster parents to the best of the agency's ability and resources. Bethany makes every effort to locate appropriate respite in a timely manner for a foster parent who requests it.

Foster parents are able to place themselves on a voluntary hold and not take placements, if they wish to do so. Foster parents may formally do this with their licensing representative through the Central Office of Licensing. They can also informally notify their licensing representative in writing or via verbal communication that they do not wish to take placements for a specified time.

Bethany foster homes are also made aware that counselors are available through the agency to assist them with personal issues or issues with the foster child that may be

affecting their lives. Counseling for foster parents and their children is provided free of charge. They are also ensured confidentiality with this service.

### **Rewards of Foster Parenting**

25(10). "The responsibility to know the rewards and benefits to children, parents, families, and society that come from foster parenting and to promote the foster parenting experience in a positive way."

Bethany encourages its foster parents at every opportunity to assist program staff in promoting the public image of foster care and to participate in the recruitment of prospective foster parents. Bethany strives to promote greater public support and recognition of foster parenting through various activities, such as the **Shopping for Siblings in December 2022, a Christmas celebration to honor foster families at a local resort in December 2022, the Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner through Foster Hope in May 2022, a kayak event hosted by Bethany foster parents in July 2022, the Boo at the Zoo in October 2022, the Annual Community Celebration event held in November 2022, and media interviews with local television stations in May 2022 and November 2022.** Bethany did participate in the annual Jordan Rahn Run, which benefits all local foster care agencies and families. Recruitment events have been limited to the COVID 19 pandemic. **Bethany has recently started to partner again with the other three local foster care agencies to collaborate together to recruit and retain foster homes.**

Foster parents are also informed of the agency's annual Family Awards event, now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year. At this event, a foster family and adoptive family is awarded the titles of "Foster or Adoptive Family of the Year." This event provides an opportunity for community members to learn about these families and the jobs that they do. The event is also publicized in local news outlets. The agency recognized foster parents during National Foster Care Month in May 2022 by giving every foster family a \$100.00 gift card. Foster families are regularly encouraged to speak about foster parenting positively. Bethany foster parents generally do an excellent job in doing so, and are a consistent source of new homes for the agency.

Typically, Bethany regularly speaks to local churches, rotary clubs, banks, and other establishments and groups about the foster care program, and the rewards of fostering. This year, however due to the pandemic, in person presentations were limited.

### **Understanding Various Roles**

26(11). "The responsibility to know the roles, rights, and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the foster child, and the foster child's own family."

Bethany's foster parents are introduced to these various roles in the PRIDE training. Information is disseminated through the licensor's regular communication with foster parents. Changes in licensing standards are discussed during monitoring visits that are scheduled twice annually. Licensing standards are mailed to licensed foster parents yearly. Foster parents are notified of trainings provided by the agency and the Foster Care Alliance committee and they are encouraged to attend. Foster parents are also encouraged to attend trainings held in the community. Community members and agency staff are provided with information on trainings sponsored by Bethany through mailings, website postings, and the agency lobby information board. The agency encourages the caseworkers and their supervisors to attend appropriate trainings to not only meet our foster families, but also to hear the stories of what foster parents deal with in their homes. In addition, the caseworker discusses with the foster parents any changes in DCFS Administrative Rules and Procedure that would affect the way they provide for the child in their care.

In addition, as cited previously within this document, the advent of Child and Family Team meetings have fostered better and regular communication among all of the members of the Child Welfare Team. Foster parents can participate in these meetings and be identified as a valued team member, and be introduced to DCFS and agency personnel.

Bethany foster parents have direct and regular access to a member of the Management Team of the agency. The Program Supervisor and the Program Coordinator for Bethany's Foster Care Program are very visible and usually at least one of them attends almost all court hearings, ACRs, and Child and Family Team meetings. The regularity of this communication between foster parents and program management allows for prompt resolution to administrative or policy concerns that arise within the agency's foster care programs.

### **Mandated Reporter Role**

27(12). "The responsibility to know and, as necessary, fulfill the foster parent's responsibility to serve as a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse or neglect under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act; and the responsibility to know the child welfare agency's policy regarding allegations that foster parents have committed child abuse or neglect and applicable administrative rules and procedures governing investigations of those allegations."

During PRIDE training, foster parents are informed of their status as mandated reporters and given the DCFS hotline number to report abuse/neglect. Bethany foster parents sign an acknowledgment stating that they are mandated reporters under the law. The acknowledgment is placed in the licensing file. Upcoming training is noted and disseminated for the foster parents concerning mandated reporting.

Further, Bethany offers bi-monthly all-staff training modules. As needed, agency caseworkers are retrained in the responsibilities of mandated reporting. Training also

allows for the inclusion of agency foster parents, if they so wish to attend. Bethany licensing staff also talks to the foster parents during annual and semi-annual monitors about the DCFS Mandatory Abuse training through the Virtual Training Center online.

### **Administrative Case Reviews (ACR's)**

28(13). "The responsibility to know and receive training regarding the purpose of administrative case reviews (ACRs), client service plans, and court processes, as well as any filing or time requirements associated with those proceedings; and the responsibility to actively participate in the foster parent's designated role in these proceedings."

The purpose of ACRs, client service plans, and the court process is covered in PRIDE training. Foster parents receive clarification of these services as required on an individual basis by the agency caseworker or licensuror. They are encouraged and invited to participate in all ACRs, provide input on the client service plan, and attend court hearings. The information form assists in keeping the agency's foster parents informed about upcoming ACRs and court sessions.

Bethany works with foster parents **throughout the time a youth in care is in their home** to understand the parameters of a case, the timelines involved, and the roles that they play in each of these. When appropriate trainings are offered by agencies in the area, foster parents are invited to attend to be trained in the specific procedures of ACRs, service plans, and Juvenile Court.

### **Appeal Procedure**

29(14). "The responsibility to know the child welfare agency's appeal procedure for foster parents and the rights of foster parents under the procedure."

Foster parents are highly encouraged by licensing staff members to familiarize themselves with the appeal process of DCFS and Bethany, and they sign an acknowledgment of the grievance procedure form that is placed in their licensing files. Foster parents are given a list outlining the appeal process and the appropriate person to contact. Foster parents are encouraged by their caseworkers to contact the foster care Program Supervisor with concerns. In addition, all agency foster parents are given a brochure at each ACR or by the worker if unable to attend that describes in detail the DCFS appeal process and their rights under this appellate system.

This grievance process is to be used by foster parents for grieving alleged violations of the Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan that are not covered by an already existing grievance or appeal process. For example, it cannot be used to address issues that are covered by the service appeal process, the appeal process for indicated cases of child abuse/neglect, the process for appealing licensing investigation findings or license revocations, etc.

## **Maintenance of Records**

30(15). “The responsibility to know and understand the importance of maintaining accurate and relevant records regarding the child's history and progress; and the responsibility to be aware of and follow the procedures and regulations of the child welfare agency with which the foster parent is licensed or affiliated.”

This process, as well as the importance of accurate documentation and record Maintenance, is addressed in PRIDE training. The adherence of maintaining documentation and record maintenance is stressed within the context of on-going interactions with the agency's caseworker and licensing representative. The licensing representative monitors the records bi-annually (if a youth in care is present in the home). At the time of the foster child's placement in the home, the foster parent is given a foster care binder for each child. The binder contains medication logs, behavior logs, important telephone numbers, names of service providers involved with the child, medical information, and a breakdown of the foster parent reimbursement, including a place to store receipts for clothing purchases and the youth in care's allowance. The foster parent is informed by the caseworker and the licensing representative that this binder needs to follow the child to any subsequent placements. It is also a way to document expenses and reasons for deducting amounts from a child's allowance. The procedures of the agency in regards to reimbursement, obtaining travel permission, and providing medications are outlined in the binder.

## **Providing Information with Subsequent Caregivers**

31(16). “The responsibility to share information, through the child welfare team, with the subsequent caregiver (whether the child's parent or another substitute caregiver) regarding the child's adjustment in the foster parent's home.”

The agency ensures that foster parents keep required records relevant to a child in their care by checking these for completeness at a minimum, at monthly home visits. The licensing representative also checks the required records during monitoring visits and ensures that the foster parent does not have any questions about the information which must be maintained. Upon placement of the child, the foster parents are given a folder in which to keep medical information, clothing receipts, etc. Information in these records are made available to any subsequent caregivers, including Lifebooks, which must be maintained for all children in foster care.

The advent and utilization of the Child and Family Teams facilitates the exchange of information concerning the child's adjustment and progress in the foster home. Child and Family Team members may also invite former foster parents to team meetings in order to address issues such as continuity of care. This inclusion of former foster parents is done only if those safeguarding confidentiality grant permission.

## Showing Respect to Child's Culture

32(17). "The responsibility to provide care and services that are respectful of and responsive to the child's cultural needs and are supportive of the relationship between the child and his or her own family; the responsibility to recognize the increased importance of maintaining a child's cultural identity when the race or culture of the foster family differs from that of the foster child; and the responsibility to take action to address these issues."

Foster parents receive this information in their PRIDE training. In addition, Bethany's Training Committee provides regular training on sensitivity to and awareness of cultural differences. If DCFS foster parent module trainings are offered on the topic of cultural diversity, Bethany encourages their parents to attend and participate.

Foster parents work with the foster care staff, the biological parents, and/or community resources regarding multi-cultural issues as needed to further address this issue. A myriad of trainings are offered to foster parents and the general community. The topics of these trainings included ethnic hair and skin care, as well as self-esteem issues and the importance of developing racial and/or ethnic identity.

DCFS has mandated a new training for foster homes and staff regarding working with the LGBTQi+ community. The training is available through the On-Demand Training site of the Virtual Training Center. Bethany licensing staff are making all homes aware of this training and that it is mandatory before licensure of new homes. Additionally, all existing are being notified in-person during monitor visits, or through phone calls. Bethany staff have already completed this training through the VTC and have been credited accordingly.