

MRS!

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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June 2009

How Will *Fostering Connections* Impact Child Welfare Practice in North Carolina?

On October 7, 2008 President George W. Bush signed into law the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* (H.R. 6893/P.L. 110-351). This law will have a significant impact on child welfare practice in North Carolina and across the country.

Currently the NC Division of Social Services is working with the Children's Services Committee of the NC Association of County Directors of Social Services and other stakeholders to ensure compliance with this important new law. Following is a summary of the major provisions of *Fostering Connections*, along with an update on their implementation in our state.

1. Title IV-E Plan Requirements for Notice to Relatives

Fostering Connections adds a requirement that counties must, within 30 days of a child's removal from his or her parents, notify all grandparents and other adult relatives: (a) that the child has been or is being removed from the parents; (b) of the options the relative has under federal, state, and local law to participate in the care and placement of the child, including any options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notice; and (c) of the requirements to become a licensed foster home and the additional services and supports that are available for children in a licensed foster home.

Counties must now include any relatives suggested by the parents and exercise due diligence to identify and notify any close relatives (grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, great grandparents, nieces, or nephews) who are adults. **Due diligence around identification and notification applies to both paternal and maternal relatives.** Though the requirement is for notice within 30 days of placement, this should be an ongoing process over the life of the case.

The form and policy to meet this new requirement are being developed by the Division and will be discussed at the August 2009 meeting of the NC Association of County Directors of Social Services' Children's Services Committee.

2. Title IV-E plan requirements for assuring school attendance. The law adds a requirement that each child receiving a Title IV-E foster care, adoption, or guardianship payment is a full-time elementary or secondary school student, or is incapable of attending school due to a documented medical condition.

North Carolina policy regarding foster care and adoption is already consistent with this provision of *Fostering Connections*.

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MRS Meetings

MRS and System of Care meetings take place three times monthly via conference call. Questions about IV-E will be answered right after each MRS/SOC call. Dates and call-in information are listed below.

July 15, 21, & 30

August 11, 20, & 26

September 16, 17, & 29

Call times: 10-11:30 a.m.
Call-in number:
(219) 509-8020
Access code: 956303

MRS Questions?

If you have questions regarding the implementation of any aspect of MRS, please contact Holly McNeill 828/757-5672 holly.mcneill@ncmail.net

For future meeting dates consult the MRS Calendar on Google at <http://www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=multipleresponsesystem@gmail.com>

Training Dates

Adoptions Training

August 4-6

Charlotte

Contact: Bonnie English
(fax) 704/395-2101

October 20-23

Fayetteville

Contact: Amy Campbell
(fax) 910/677-0468

Effects of Separation and Loss on Attachment

Contact: Judy Prophet
(fax) 704/ 573-4802

September 14-15

Asheville

October 15-16

Greensboro

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Comments?

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Online

www.ncdhs.gov/dss/mrs

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3. Educational stability case plan requirement. The law amends case plan provisions by adding the requirement of a plan to ensure the educational stability of the child in foster care. Under *Fostering Connections* the child's case plan must include:

- Assurances that the child's placement takes into account the appropriateness of the current education setting and the proximity to the school in which the child was enrolled at the time of placement;
- An assurance that the state agency has coordinated with appropriate local educational agencies to ensure that the child remains in the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement; and
- If remaining in the school is not in the child's best interests, assurances by the state agency and the local educational agencies to provide immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school, with all of the educational records of the child provided to the new school.

To meet this requirement, the Educational Status Component (DSS-5245) of the Out-of-Home Family Services Agreement and the policy chapter on child placement are being revised and are in the approval process.

4. Title IV-E plan requirements for sibling placement. *Fostering Connections* requires agencies to make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, adoption, or guardianship placement, or facilitate visitation or ongoing frequent contacts among siblings who cannot be placed together, unless it is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings to do so.

North Carolina policy regarding foster care and adoption is already consistent with this provision of *Fostering Connections*.

5. Title IV-E plan requirement to inform parents of adoption tax credit.

Fostering Connections requires agencies to inform prospective adoptive parents of the adoption tax credit. Persons should be referred to <http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html> or encouraged to call the IRS (tel: 800/829-1040).

6. Title IV-E plan case-by-case licensing waivers for relatives.

The law explicitly permits a licensing agency to waive, on a case-by-case basis, a non-safety licensing standard for a relative foster family home. North Carolina policy currently allows waiver of non-safety licensing standards for relatives pursuing licensure. Counties are encouraged to consider requesting waivers for non-safety related issues that may currently be preventing relatives from becoming licensed. Note: any child in DSS custody, placed in a licensed foster home, is eligible for any funding reimbursement for which the child would otherwise be eligible. This includes foster homes licensed with approved waivers.

7. De-linking, over time, eligibility for IV-E adoption assistance to 1996

AFDC criteria. Beginning October 1, 2009 (and continuing through federal fiscal year 2018), the link to AFDC will be phased out for adoption assistance. Starting October 1, 2009, children who are age 16 or older when their adoption assistance agreement is finalized will have no income or resource related eligibility

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requirements. With each new federal fiscal year, this age will be lowered by two years so that by FFY 2018 any child with special needs may qualify for IV-E adoption assistance under the new rules. In addition, beginning in FFY 2010, any child who has been in foster care for 60 continuous months may qualify for federal adoption assistance under the revised eligibility rules (regardless of age) and any sibling of a child who is eligible under the revised rules (whether due to age or length of stay in care) may also qualify under those criteria.

8. Transition plan for emancipating youth. *Fostering Connections* amends the case review system to create a new requirement that during the 90-day period prior to the youth's emancipation, the caseworker must develop a personalized transition plan as directed by the youth.

To reduce confusion with North Carolina's Transitional Plan for youth ages 16 and 17, in our state this plan is being called the "Emancipation Plan." The form and policy to meet this new requirement have been approved and will be effective August 1, 2009. DSS agencies will receive a policy change notice about this in late June 2009.

Other Possible Implementation Plans

In addition to these eight provisions, the Division continues to explore and develop implementation plans on the following:

- **Travel to school added to foster care maintenance payment definition.** *Fostering Connections* amends the definition of a "foster care maintenance payment" to include the cost of reasonable travel for the child to remain in the same school he or she was attending prior to placement in foster care. North Carolina county DSS agencies can request reimbursement for reasonable school travel expenses the same way they request clothing reimbursements.
- **Title IV-B plan health oversight and coordination plan requirements.** The law amends the existing title IV-B plan requirement that states, in coordination with the state Medicaid agency, develop a plan for ongoing oversight and coordination of health care services for children in foster care, including mental health and dental health needs. The Division is currently working with the Division of Medical Assistance to develop this ongoing oversight and coordination. Counties will be informed at a future time of any changes or additions to policy.
- **Good faith negotiation with Indian Tribes requesting the development of title IV-E agreements.** The law requires states to negotiate with federally-recognized tribes interested in developing their own IV-E child welfare programs. The Eastern Band of the Cherokee, the only federally-recognized tribe based in North Carolina, has informed the State of North Carolina that it will not develop its own child welfare system at this time.
- **Guardianship Assistance Payments.** *Fostering Connections* gives states the **option** to use federal IV-E funds for kinship guardianship payments for children raised by relative caregivers. North Carolina has elected not to exercise this option at this time.

Training Dates

Introduction to the Monthly Foster Care Contact Record

This 90-minute, self-paced online course is continually available. To take it, simply log on to <http://www.ncswLearn.org> and access this course via the Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP) / Online Courses section of the website.

CPS Assessments in Child Welfare Services

July 27-30

Kinston

Contact: Betty Williford
(fax) 252/520-2417

September 1-4

Charlotte

Contact: Bonnie English
(fax) 704/395-2101

September 8-11

Greensboro

Contact: Elaine Highsmith
(fax) 336/954-1750

October 20-23

Charlotte

Contact: Bonnie English
(fax) 704/395-2101

October 26-29

Asheville

Contact: Bonnie English
(fax) 704/395-2101

December 8-11

Fayetteville

Contact: Amy Campbell
(fax) 910/677-0468

Training Dates

Methamphetamine: What a Social Worker Needs to know

This self-paced online course is always available. To take it, simply log on to <http://www.ncswLearn.org> and access this course via the Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP) / Online Courses section of the website.

Introduction to Supervision for Child Welfare Services

Starts July 21

Charlotte
Contact: Bonnie English
(fax) 704/395-2101

Starts September 30

Greensboro
Contact: Elaine Highsmith
(fax) 336/954-1750

Child Development in Families at Risk

To learn about this course or to register, go to <http://www.ncswLearn.org>. Upcoming sessions will start on the following dates.

July 15

August 12

September 1

October 7

October 28

November 5

November 17

Update on North Carolina's County-CFSR

At the suggestion of its federal partners, North Carolina has modified the process the state uses for biennial county Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs). These changes are designed to better mirror the federal CFSR instrument, process, and protocol and to more accurately assess the outcomes of safety, permanence, and well-being.

These refinements will move North Carolina's review process even further along the improvement continuum. Enhancements include:

- Increasing the period under review (PUR) from 6 to 12 months
- Decreasing from 60 to 8 the number of days a child must be in care in order for his or her case to be eligible for review.

In addition, in future county-level CFSRs case sampling stratification will be used to ensure that specific outcomes (e.g., foster care re-entry, use of APPLA, outcomes for older youth in care) are addressed through the CFSR process.

CFT Facilitator Forums Have Gone Digital

Child and Family Team (CFT) facilitator forums have gone digital. In their online format these forums continue to offer networking with other facilitators in DSS and other child serving systems, occasional guest speakers, topical discussions, and resource sharing. Participation in the online forums requires access to a computer and the Internet as well as permission to make a long distance call.

If you would like to be added to future facilitator forum e-vite lists, send your contact information to Ashley Duncan (amduncan@chass.ncsu.edu). Include your name, e-mail address, county, agency, your role at your agency, and phone number. These forums are a great resource for anyone else who attends CFTs!

On-Demand Online Courses!

In addition to existing online child welfare training offerings such as *Child Development in Families at Risk* and *Pre-Service*, the Division of Social Services has added a new variety of e-learning course—the on-demand course.

On-demand courses are entirely self-paced trainings that require no registration and can be taken at any time simply by logging into your ncswLearn.org account, accessing your "Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP)" and selecting the option "Online Courses."

After completing an on-demand course you will be able to print your certificate. On-demand contact training hours are automatically credited to your training attendance history once you complete the course.

Currently, there are two on-demand online courses available: *Introduction to the Monthly Foster Care Contact Record* and *Methamphetamine: What a Social Worker Needs to Know*.

Stay tuned—more on-demand courses are coming soon!