LOB #115:

FOSTER CARE, RELATIVE PLACEMENT AND ADOPTION SERVICES

Purpose

Foster Care and Adoption and Foster Care and Adoption Resource and Support

The purpose of these programs is to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being for children by: (1) providing a safe, temporary living arrangement for children who can no longer live in their homes because of abuse, neglect or other severe family problems endangering their health and/or safety, and (2) helping those children leave foster care to a permanent legal family through reunification, adoption, or transfer of custody to a relative.

Family Engagement Program

The Family Engagement Program encompasses a number of programs with distinct purposes:

- Kinship Care: The purpose of the Kinship Care unit is to ensure a safe and permanent home within one year for children who are living with relatives as an alternative to foster care.
- Family Partnership Meetings: The purpose of Family Partnership Meetings is to ensure that families and their supports are actively engaged in all decision-making to promote the safety, well-being and permanency of their children.
- Father Engagement: The purpose of the Father Engagement unit is to strengthen families by supporting CYF staff in their efforts to effectively engage fathers and involve them in service planning and decision-making for their children.

Description

Three program areas have been combined for the LOB as they all involve work with children living away from their parents or prior caregivers.

Foster Care and Adoption

Staff provides foster care services to:

- Children from birth to 18 who are in the custody of the Department and who the court has determined cannot remain safely in their home. Children may be in foster care for a few days, a few months, or longer. Children receive placement services as well as services to address their educational, mental and physical well-being.
- Parents whose children have been removed from the home. Parents are offered services aimed at changing the behavior or circumstances that caused the child to be unsafe in the home and which must be successfully changed for the child to be safely returned home and to end DFS services.
- Foster youth who are age 14 to 21 to help them learn needed skills and increase the likelihood of successful transition from the foster care system.
- Youth who emancipate from foster care after age 18 and who are eligible for Independent Living Services until they reach 21 years old.

Department of Family Services

When a child must be removed from home, the initial goal focuses on the provision of services to return the child home. If reunification is not possible, the goal becomes achieving permanency for the child with another family through either adoption or custody transfer to relatives based on the best interests of the child. Permanency also involves facilitating lifelong connections for the child with siblings, extended family, and other significant adults.

When a child enters foster care, the Department is mandated to provide services to the family to help reunify the child with his or her previous caregivers. It is also mandated to work with absent parents and extended family members in order to reunify that child with their family. Staff works continuously with all family members individually and through Family Partnership Meetings.

Foster care services are monitored by the courts: staff goes to court throughout the year to update the judge on the progress of the parents or prior caregiver(s). The goal is for a child to reach legal permanency within 12 months of entering foster care. To do this, permanency plans are developed by conducting a comprehensive family assessment and providing services to enhance the capacity of parents to care for their children.

If parents and relatives are unable to care for their children, adoption is often sought. Adoption is a social and legal process which gives new parent(s) the same rights and obligations as biological parents. Adoption services are provided to children who have been permanently and legally separated from their birth parents. Staff seeks adoptive families and provides adoption counseling for birth parents and post adoption support services for families of children with special needs.

Foster Care and Adoption – Resource and Support

Resource and Support has several distinct programs:

Placement Services
This involves placing a child with a foster family, group home, residential children's facility, or an independent living arrangement. Extensive efforts are made to place children in the least restrictive environment in a family setting. Children and caregivers are carefully matched to promote placement stability.

Resource Family Support
Staff provides supportive services for DFS foster parents to promote foster parent retention and improved placement stability for children in foster homes.

Foster Parent Recruitment and Training
Recruitment of foster families involves outreach to the community, conducting orientation sessions, and carrying out in-depth home studies to mutually assess a family's suitability to be a foster care placement resource. A single process is used to approve families to provide foster care, adoption, and respite services. Training includes both pre-service training to prepare new resource families and in-service training to enhance the skills of current resource families.

Permanency and Life Skills
These services include:

- Permanency coordination to enhance efforts to find permanent families for older youth in foster care.
- Teaching independent living skills to help youth in foster care ages 14-21 develop the skills necessary to transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. Personal development skills such as self-esteem, communication skills, decision-making, conflict resolution and anger management are emphasized.
- Mentoring to provide role models for youth
- Fostering relationships between youth in foster care and their relatives or previous caregivers to help the youth find a permanent living situation. For older youth leaving care this might include helping find an apartment or a roommate.

<u>Post Adoption Services</u>
These services include:

- Management of adoption assistance payments to families who have adopted children with special needs.

- Provision of post-adoption services which include support, education, coordination and referral for services to adoptive families.

- Post adoption searches for adoptees and birth parents who wish to access information about or make contact with each other.

Family Engagement Program

The Family Engagement Program has several distinct programs:

<u>Kinship Care Unit</u>
The Kinship Care Unit (KCU) supports relatives or fictive family as they provide care, nurturance and safety to children placed in their homes. Staff provides ongoing clinical and supportive case management services to the kinship triad (caregiver, prior caregivers and child) to support the family in achieving safety, permanency and well-being for all children. Staff provides services and interventions in a culturally sensitive and flexible manner based on the families' strengths and changing needs. The KCU team works to provide holistic, client-centered interventions that address the unique and complex needs of kinship families. The unit also places importance on assessment and outcome measures for continuous process improvement.

The KCU serves referrals from Child Protective Services (CPS) where children are at imminent risk of entering foster care if not otherwise cared for by kin. Kinship cases must meet all of the following criteria: (1) child is at imminent risk of abuse and/or neglect by their current caregiver (2) change in placement and/or caretaking role from prior caregiver(s) to kin and (3) prior caregiver resides in Fairfax County, VA. The kinship caregiver and child may reside in Fairfax County or in a contiguous Virginia jurisdiction.

<u>Family Partnership Meetings (FPMs)</u>
As required by state policy, FPM referrals are required at, but not limited to, five decision points; emergency removal, high risk cases, placement change, goal change and family/CYF specialist request. In FY 2015, CYF began holding FPMs at case opening and quarterly throughout the life of a case. This is based on research that indicates family team meetings enhance the ability to achieve the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families. FPMs are recognized as a national best practice in child welfare.

FPMs also are used as a team based planning process by the following County agencies: Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, Comprehensive Services Board, Fairfax County Public Schools and Falls Church City Public Schools.

FPM staff facilitates structured meetings that include key family members, others invited by the family, DFS staff, and other service providers. The meetings focus on family strengths and provide a safe venue to discuss safety concerns for children and other family challenges. Members of the family team work together to agree on family goals and services needed to achieve the goals. Meetings are held regularly throughout the life of a case to promote strong teamwork and shared responsibility for making steady progress towards goal achievement.

<u>Father Engagement</u>
Staff in this unit leads the division's efforts to strengthen work with fathers by providing ongoing staff training, implementing effective father engagement strategies, developing father inclusive policies, developing and providing father-friendly services, and collaborating with system of care agencies and community-based organizations to meet the needs of fathers and their families. The services provided by the unit include consultation services on effective father engagement strategies, fatherhood classes and the Father2Father peer mentoring program which is in its pilot phase.

Benefits

Foster Care and Adoption and Foster Care and Adoption Resource and Support

Foster care provides a safe, temporary placement for children who cannot live safely with their families. Without these services, children would be at risk of further harm, and potential serious injury through child abuse or neglect. Foster care services include not only a safe placement, but numerous supportive services to the child and family to help the child return to their family or find a permanent family, and to enhance the child's well-being. The community needs these services to ensure that this vulnerable population is well cared for.

Family Engagement Program

Kinship Care Unit
The primary benefit of the Kinship Care Unit is that these services keep children safely with their families and out of foster care. This prevents the trauma of removing a child from their family to place with strangers, and saves thousands of dollars in County services. The clinical case management services help families begin the journey of ensuring safety, well-being and stability for the triad: children, relative caregivers and the children's biological parents. The unit works to prevent these children from entering foster care where the average cost per *child* per year is $54,495 while the average cost per *family* in the Kinship Care Unit is $20,687 per year.

Family Partnership Meetings
The primary benefit of FPMs is that they enhance the abilities of families and staff to achieve key goals in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being by bringing parents and their natural supports to the table as equal voices in decision-making. Specifically, FPMs have been shown to prevent out-of-home placements, shorten the length of time children spend in foster care, and increase the likelihood that children will leave foster care to a permanent family.

Father Engagement
The primary benefit of these services is that CYF staff continues to improve their efforts to better assess fathers and paternal relatives and include their voices in decisions about the lives of their children. By improving practices with fathers and paternal relatives, more children are kept safely with their families and more children are returned from foster care to their families.

Mandates

Foster Care and Adoption and Foster Care and Adoption-Resource and Support

The Foster Care and Adoption and Foster Care and Adoption - Resource and Support programs are heavily mandated by both federal and state governments.

Federal law mandates and appropriates funding for the provision of services to enhance the safety, permanency and well-being of children in foster care in Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Federal regulation defines foster care as twenty-four hour substitute care for all children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility (45 CFR 1355.20). The amount of financial participation by the federal government is dependent upon compliance with federal regulations.

State law defines foster care services as the provision of a full range of casework, treatment, and community services, including but not limited to independent living services, for a planned period of time to children, and their families, who are abused or neglected as defined in §63.2-100 or in need of services as defined in §16.1-228 (§63.2- 905). Services shall be provided to the child and his or her family and should include services to the relative or other caregivers as necessary (§§63.2-905, 2.2-5200, and 2.2-5208).

State law specifically mandates the provision of foster care services through the Comprehensive Services Act for At-Risk Youth and Families (CSA) (§2.2-5211 C and B3). CSA provides services that are child centered, family focused and community-based and that address the unique and diverse strengths and needs of children and their families. CSA strives to preserve families and provide appropriate services in the least restrictive environment, while protecting the welfare of children and maintaining the safety of the public (§2.2-5200).

Adoption procedures are governed by Virginia Code §§ 63.2-1200 through 63.2-1253.

Additional federal mandates include:

- The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA)
- The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-272)
- The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994
- The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997
- The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999
- The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. Title VII of this act provides for reauthorization of the TANF program, Healthy Marriage and Family funds, Court Improvement Program, Safe and Stable Families Program, and other child welfare programs.
- The Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006
- The Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006
- The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006
- The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008
- The National Youth in Transition Database regulations (45 CFR 1356.80 through 1356.86)
- The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148)
- The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148)

Family Engagement Program

Kinship Care and Father Engagement
Services are addressed in state law:

- The local board shall first seek out kinship care options to keep children out of foster care and as a placement option for those children in foster care, if it is in the child's best interests, pursuant to Virginia Code § 63.2-900.
- Reasonable efforts have been made to prevent removal of the child from his home and there are no alternatives less drastic than removal of the child from his home which could reasonably protect the child's life or health pending a final hearing on the petition. (Virginia Code § 16.1-251)

Services also are addressed in state policy:

- During the course of the investigation, the worker should gather information to identify maternal and paternal relatives and the kinship network providing support and resources to the family and child.... When appropriate, these individuals may become resources in protective interventions, family partnership meetings, and case planning during the CPS process or any future case involvement. (Child Protective Services, 4.5.11)

Both Kinship Care and Father Engagement services focus on keeping children with family members whenever that is safe and in the child's best interests. Local departments must make diligent efforts to locate and assess absent parents, relatives or other alternative caregivers to support the child remaining in his home or as a placement option if the child cannot safely remain in his home.

<u>Family Partnership Program</u>
Services are addressed in state policy:

- The LDSS must schedule a family partnership meeting when the worker assesses the child's safety to be in jeopardy or at risk of removal or out of home placement (Child Protective Services, 4.5.20.1). FPMs also are required by the VDSS Family Engagement Guidance Manual published January 2010.

Trends and Challenges

Foster Care and Adoption and Foster Care and Adoption-Resource and Support

Fairfax County has made significant progress in safely reducing the number of children living in foster care, largely due to the many efforts to keep children safely with their families and prevent abuse and neglect. There has been a 27 percent decrease in the monthly average number of children in care from 349 per month in FY 2011 to 255 in FY 2015. While fewer children are in foster care, the youth who continue to reside in foster care become more difficult to place as they grow older. Improvement has been made in the percentage of children who are placed within families in foster care; however discharges to permanency have had uneven results.

Some of the key challenges faced in delivering high quality foster care services and achieving permanency for children in foster care include the following:

- Many children in foster care have had a traumatic past, primarily having been abused or neglected by their families. Most have also had significant instability in their early lives. Developmental and behavioral problems are almost always evident in foster homes and such issues pose a challenge to foster care parents. The Department has recognized the need for trauma informed care and has implemented trauma training for departmental staff. A recent partnership with The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Child Strategy Group, and Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency (ARC) developers has been forged to provide foster parents, including kin, with trauma-informed parenting skills and a more significant role on their child's case planning teams. It is hoped that this will result in fewer placement disruptions, improved foster parent retention, more timely permanence, and improved well-being for children and teens.

- Finding permanent families for older youth in care continues to be challenge. National statistics show that older children stay in foster care longer and achieve permanency at lower rates than younger children. Those youth who age out of foster care often face lifetime challenges, including homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment. During FY 2015, 76 children in foster care achieved permanency, but only 17 of them (22 percent) were between the ages of 12 to 17 even though 36 percent of all children in care are ages 12 to 17. Eight of 10 youth waiting for an adoptive home on June 30, 2015 were 12 to 17 years of age. Also, older youth who have been adopted often have higher needs making it more challenging for post adoption workers to support adoptive families and prevent adoption disruptions.

- Failure of the General Assembly to pass the Foster Care to 21 legislation hinders the department's ability to provide needed services to youth who are aging out of foster care. As stated earlier, youth who age out of care are at heightened risk for homelessness, incarceration, unemployment, and other social challenges. It is crucial that we are able to provide placements and supportive services to youth as long as possible. The Foster Care to 21 legislation would have introduced code changes and secured state funding permitting the implementation of the federal Fostering Connections program in Virginia allowing for a full range of placements and supportive services for both foster and adoptive youth to age 21. Since this legislation did not pass, youth who turn 18 in foster care are no longer eligible for foster care placements and must be transitioned to independent living services unless they are in Permanent Foster Care or are covered by federal Title IV-E funds through their 19th birthday. Not all youth are able to be transitioned to Permanent Foster Care and are therefore not eligible for placement services. This significantly hampers the department's ability to support them in becoming self-sufficient young adults.

Family Engagement Program

Kinship Care
According to the 2010 Census, 7,460 grandparents in Fairfax County were responsible for raising their grandchildren. Relative caregivers' needs are multi-faceted and span across the human services systems of care. Fairfax County's Kinship Care Unit (KCU) is the only kinship-focused unit within child welfare in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Fairfax County began piloting these services in June 2013 and now has a fully-formed unit with four staff and a supervisor.

Staff face a number of challenges in providing these services:

- There is a significant financial toll on the kinship caregivers. Virginia does not have a subsidized guardianship program. This would provide income support to relative caregivers and legal permanency for the children in their care without terminating parental rights.

- There is a lack of state guidelines regarding kinship care.

- Specific challenges for grandparent caregivers include the generational differences in parenting skills and the confusion of loyalties to their own children versus the grandchildren in their care.

- Few service providers have experience with kinship families, and few are equipped to provide the trauma-informed care that is needed.

- The prior caregivers in these cases, usually the biological parents, often have complex needs such as co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders for which treatment is hard to find.

Family Partnership Meetings
In FY 2015, staff facilitated 935 FPMs, a 23 percent increase from the 763 meetings held in FY 2014. The increase is largely due to changes in local practice such that meetings are now being held at case opening and throughout the life of a case rather than just the five decision points. More families and children are benefiting from this best practice that works towards identifying and maintaining families' natural supports in the care of their children and reducing out of home placements and other child welfare interventions. Part of the success of these meetings centers on the skilled facilitators: they are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the process, ensuring that the family voice is heard; that strengths and natural supports are identified and incorporated in planning; and that team cohesiveness is built to create realistic and strong plans that are agreed upon through consensus.

Challenges include a shortage of staff to facilitate the meetings and a lack of meeting space available as a result of an increase in the number of FPMs held. One new facilitator is being hired to help manage the increased workload, and meeting space in other County agency buildings is often used to handle the overflow.

Father Engagement Unit
In FY 2015, 28 fathers graduated from the Fathers in Touch (FIT) program and 9 potential mentors were trained. There were only 3 Father2Father mentor matches due to challenges associated with starting the mentor program including finding qualified mentors and developing procedures for creating successful matches. The unit trained 153 CYF employees regarding the importance of engaging fathers in their casework. Father Engagement staff also has increased the amount of consultation with other CYF staff which has had a positive impact on fathers' participation in FPMs and in fathers receiving the services they need.

Engaging fathers is challenge across the country in child welfare. The federal government recently released a multi-million dollar RFP to which we applied to further strengthen father engagement efforts.

Department of Family Services

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #115: Foster Care, Relative Placement and Adoption Services			
FUNDING			
Expenditures:			
Compensation	$6,854,770	$7,440,643	$7,621,130
Operating Expenses	11,208,041	10,912,246	11,769,466
Work Performed for Others	(319,110)	(342,706)	(397,026)
Total Expenditures	$17,743,701	$18,010,183	$18,993,570
General Fund Revenue	$14,106,939	$13,823,511	$13,220,021
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	$3,636,762	$4,186,672	$5,773,549
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
Positions:			
Regular	106 / 106	105 / 105	105 / 105
Total Positions	106 / 106	105 / 105	105 / 105

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Cost per child in foster care	$49,971	$51,733	$54,945	$56,442	$56,442
Percent of children placed with foster families	84%	86%	87%	86%	86%
Percent of children in foster care less than 12 months who have two placements or less	79%	88%	85%	86%	86%
Percent of children exiting foster care to permanency	65.4%	63.2%	73.1%	80%	80%
Percent of families served by Kinship Care whose children remain safely with a relative or prior caregiver and do not enter foster care	NA	100%	98%	95%	95%

Summary of Key Performance Measures

This LOB had $18,993,570 in expenditures for FY 2015, offset by $13,220,021 in revenue for a net cost to the County of $5,773,549. These funds support 105 FTEs.

There was an average of 255 children in foster care each month during FY 2015, a 27 percent decrease since FY 2011. They key outcome for the Foster Care program is the percent of children who leave foster care to permanent families. In FY 2015, 73 percent of the 105 children who left foster care went to permanent families. In Kinship Care, 98 percent of the 38 families served were able to safely maintain their children with relatives or parents.

Foster Care and Adoption are fully mandated services. Other programs included in this LOB are addressed in state policy or guidance.

Metric Discussion

Placements with Foster Families
Spending more time in family settings and less time in institutional settings results in marked improvements for children. There has been improvement in the percentage of children who are placed with foster families rather than in congregate living facilities. The Department has exceeded the state goal of 85 percent for the past two years. However, it is important to note that 25 of the 33 youth (76 percent) placed in congregate care settings during June 2015 were between the ages of 12 to 17.

One factor contributing to the increase in the use of foster families is stronger internal controls over the decision-making process. A case review process has been established by the department for all youth being considered for congregate care placement. The case review/staffing must occur prior to a child being placed in congregate care.

A challenge for this metric is youth who have experienced significant trauma or have other significant needs. These youth often have difficulty being placed in family settings due to these issues.

Setting Stability
Multiple placements can result in additional traumatization of children in foster care while fewer placement changes can help children achieve their goals and establish permanent connections. DFS continues to strive to meet the State goal of two placements or less for 86 percent of children who have been in care less than 12 months. Staff is enhancing recruitment efforts for homes for older youth and foster homes located within the County to better meet the needs of youth in foster care and prevent placement disruptions. In addition, resource worker positions were recently established within the Department to focus on supporting foster parents and stabilizing placements when necessary.

Discharges to permanency
The increase in percent of youth exiting foster care to permanency from FY 2014 to FY 2015 (63 percent to 73 percent) is primarily due to modified reporting methods by the State to more accurately capture the federal permanency outcome measure. Prior to FY 2015, the State's reporting system captured permanency data through age 21 while the federal standard calculates the permanency rate through age 18. During FY 2015, the State revised its report to match the federal standard. This has resulted in fewer children being included in the calculation, thereby improving the local rates across the State.

Staff continues to work towards achieving the Federal and State target of 86 percent. Some of the targeted strategies we have employed to accomplish this include:

- Increased use of Family Partnership Meetings to strengthen the teamwork among family members and providers in working towards permanency.

- Establishment of Permanency Coordinator positions to provide intensive case work services to help achieve permanency and/or lifelong connections for youth in foster care.

- Implementation of a new policy on parent-child visitation to promote stronger bonding between children in foster care and their parents at home which supports reunification and preserves family connections and increases child well-being.

- Strengthened efforts to identify, locate and engage parents, extended family members and other supportive people in children's lives to consider them as possible permanent family placements or as lifelong supportive connections for the children.

- Training for staff, foster parents and relative caregivers to employ trauma-informed practices in their work with and care of children and parents.

<u>Kinship Care</u>
In FY 2015, the Kinship Care Unit served 38 families with 70 children. Ninety eight percent of these families were able to safely maintain their children either in their kin caregiver home or back at home with their prior caregivers.

Three primary factors contribute to this success:

- Staff's focus on the triad—child, relative caregivers, and biological parents—ensures we assess and meet the needs of all family members. This helps ensure the best decision is made for the children's safety, permanency and well-being – whether that is returning to their biological parents (or prior caregivers), or remaining with their relative caregivers.
- Staff's use of Family Partnership Meetings ensures all members of a family's team have a voice in decision-making and helps ensure appropriate services are provided to achieve the family's goals.
- Having highly skilled, trained, and committed clinical staff ensures the work with families addresses the complex issues underlying the families' current situations.

Grant Support

FY 2016 Total Actual Funding: $330,100, including $128,010 in Federal revenue and $202,090 in Local Cash Match. There are no positions associated with this funding.

The Virginia Department of Social Services foster and Adoptive parent Training Grant is funded by federal Title IV-E monies plus a local match. It provides for the enhancement of community education regarding foster care and adoption; pre-service training, in-service training, and in-home support of agency-approved foster and adoptive parents and volunteers; training for child welfare staff; and employee educational stipends.