

Circle of Care

Fostering Fostering: Enhancing Supports to Foster
and Kinship Care Families

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Circle of Care

Fostering Fostering: Enhancing Supports to Foster and Kinship Care Families

All children deserve the best care possible. The care system is based on the understanding that a family and community is the most beneficial and desirable environment for raising a child. The goal of care programs is to return a child to his or her own family as soon as possible when it is in the best interests of the child. While many new resources have been added to the child welfare system to provide better care for children in care more can be done to assist foster and kinship care families throughout their fostering journey.

In recent reviews of the child welfare system, Manitoba's Office of the Children's Advocate called upon the Manitoba government to demonstrate its commitment to the system by improving communication between all stakeholders. The Circle of Care strategy is the foundation of this ongoing commitment.

The core components of the Circle of Care strategy are:

- enhanced communication
- increased basic maintenance
- improved placement stability
- enhanced capacity through training
- stronger families of origin
- improved foster home licensing
- increased recognition of foster and kinship care families

Manitoba is committed to supporting a child and family services system that is responsive to the needs of children, families and communities, and that provides flexibility at the community level to support the needs of foster and kinship care parents and the children in their care.

Enhanced Communication

The primary purpose of the Circle of Care strategy is to improve communication between the child welfare system and foster parents. It's essential to develop effective communication tools that clearly outline roles, responsibilities and expectations of a child's care team. This will ultimately help create positive communication between agencies, authorities and foster parents. This goal can be met through improvements to the foster care system, including plain language documents for foster parents about the complexities of the system.

The Need

- clear, to the point information for foster parents and agencies

Our Commitment

- Create plain language documents for foster parents who want to appeal an agency's decision to remove a foster child from her or his home
- Implement a user friendly, easy to navigate update to the Child and Family Services Division website: [Helping Keep Kids Safe](#)
- Support of the Manitoba Foster Family Network peer support line
- Work with the Manitoba Foster Family Network to develop a "Caregiving Agreement" that clearly states the shared expectations between foster or kinship care parents and agencies in providing care for a child
- Engage with the Manitoba Foster Family Network to develop more local foster parent associations throughout Manitoba
- Work with the four Manitoba Child and Family Services Authorities to ensure all concerns raised by foster parents are fairly and thoroughly reviewed, and that foster parents are treated with dignity and respect.

Increased Basic Maintenance

There are three levels of funding for children in care that child and family services agencies can access to provide for the care of children. Basic maintenance is the first level of funding and provides for the everyday care of a child. The cost of caring for children is reviewed regularly to make adjustments to the established rate.

The Need

- Increase the amount of basic maintenance paid to foster parents to help keep pace with inflation

Our Commitment

- Increase the basic maintenance rate paid to all foster parents (beginning September 1st, 2011) with an overall, annual commitment of \$635,000
- Develop a new, standardized method for assessing special rates paid to foster parents.

Improved Placement Stability

Out of home care is an option when a family is facing challenges that cause safety concerns for their children. It is often a temporary measure while families receive services to mitigate those concerns. However, some children need outside care for longer periods. In these cases, children greatly benefit from being in stable placements. Reducing the number of moves they have to make and developing long term placements allow children to develop and maintain family, peer and community relationships.

The Need

- Build and strengthen respectful, supportive and collaborative relationships between all of a child's caregivers. This includes the agency, the foster or kinship care providers and the child's biological family. Doing so increases understanding that ultimately benefits children
- Ensure all care options are explored (ex: customary care, kinship care and adoption).

Our Commitment

- Conduct a review of the Post-Adoption Subsidy program to enhance flexibility for supporting families in permanently caring for foster children
- Explore legislative or regulatory changes that may be needed to increase the number of children in kinship care arrangements
- Strengthen reunification planning and reduce the amount of time children spend in care
- Explore new tools for successful family engagement and reunification
- Work with the Manitoba Foster Family Network to develop a "Caregiving Agreement" that clearly states the shared expectations between foster or kinship care parents and agencies in providing care for a child
- Strengthen information sharing between agencies and foster parents through the implementation of a newly revised standard for CFS agencies that requires agency workers to seek higher levels of supervisor approval when moving a child. The newly revised standard also ensures that agencies share as much information as possible with the caregiver when a child is being moved, in accordance with *The Child and Family Services Act*.

Enhanced Capacity through Training

It is important to build capacity within child and family service agencies and the foster and kinship care community. With this in mind, increased training opportunities will be provided to agency workers and foster parents. Each of the four Child and Family Service Authorities and their agencies provide training for foster parents. The training needs to be culturally relevant and locally accessible. Training will improve the knowledge and skills needed to provide quality care for children.

The Need

- Standardized training for foster parents available province-wide
- More training for agency workers and foster parents.

Our Commitment

- Augment foundational training for agency workers and foster parents to emphasize retaining resources, strengthening relationships, and providing enhanced services to children and families
- Piloting the community-based Mentorship Program for new foster parents
- Continued development of basic and advanced curriculum training modules for foster parents (ex: effects of abuse and neglect on child development, benefits of attachment and culture and diversity). The goal for completion is 2012.

Stronger Families of Origin

While no one approach will work for all children and families, most experts agree that early intervention is important in improving a family's ability to stay together. Children and their families in Manitoba may require a range of supports and services. By strengthening supports for families of origin, child and family services agencies can better support their existing foster home and kinship care resources.

The Need

- Provide timely access to services for families of origin
- Increased opportunities to access preventative services
- Enhanced funding for child and family services agencies.

Our Commitment

- Implement the Family Enhancement stream of service
- Implement the new Manitoba Child and Family Services funding model.

Improved Foster Home Licensing

Easy access to informative resources is an important part of supporting foster parents in caring for children in care. Existing resources will be updated and new resources will be created for them.

The Need

- Easy access to foster parent educational resources

Our Commitment

- Completed updates of the *Foster Family Manual*, *Foster Homes Licensing Reference Manual*, and foster home licensing forms
- Adopt new tools for foster home study
- Develop a strategy to better match children's needs to the strengths and skills of foster families
- Enhance the process for the investigation of foster care parent complaints/appeals (such as the suspension, cancellation or non-renewal of a foster home license).

Foster and Kinship Care

Foster care is when children are placed in temporary homes with people they may not have a previous relationship with.

Kinship Care is when children are placed with extended family, such as a grandparent, or someone with whom they have a significant relationship.

Both types of care receive financial compensation, training and support for the care provided.

Increased Recognition of Foster and Kinship Care Families

Child welfare agencies, the Government of Manitoba and the four Child and Family Service Authorities recognize and appreciate the hard work and dedication of foster parents and kinship care providers.

The Need

- Well supported caregivers who are recognized for their work

Our Commitment

- Develop mechanisms to support agencies continuing efforts to recognize the important work of foster and kinship care families

*If you are a foster family and need support, contact the
Manitoba Foster Family Network Support Line at:*

204-231-0391 in Winnipeg

or

Toll free 1-800-940-7337