Foster Parent Law
Implementation Plan

2023
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Introduction

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is a nonprofit social service organization of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). LSSI is the largest statewide social service provider in Illinois. LSSI foster care services are provided statewide, with services in four geographical regions: Metropolitan Chicago area; Northern, located in Rockford, Aurora, and Nachusa; Central, located in Champaign/Savoy, Moline, Danville, Peoria, Canton, Galesburg; and Southern, which provides foster care services in Vienna and Marion. LSSI strives to provide quality services to children and families in each of its four served regions.

LSSI’s Children’s Community Services program has a primary focus on the safety, well-being and permanency of children in care. Foster parents are essential in achieving successful outcomes for children and are always considered vital members of the child welfare team. By providing foster parents with documentation of and guidance regarding their rights and responsibilities, LSSI hopes to empower foster parents and assist them in providing safe homes for the youth we serve. LSSI’s efforts are ongoing, including those that were made to engage foster parents and staff statewide during 2022.

Foster Parents’ Rights

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

Foster parents are treated with dignity, respect and consideration as members of the professional team. The team has the responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of the youth in care, which includes listening to the needs of the foster parent, respecting any confidential information they disclose, and ensuring the foster parents have all the critical information needed to care for a child who is in their home. The team also collaborates on issues and concerns and communicates openly and effectively. The child welfare specialist schedules quarterly Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) to discuss child related activities and developmental needs of the child. The CFTM is used as an opportunity to listen to the needs of foster parents and share their concerns with other team members, including child welfare specialist, supervisor and resource staff. By exchanging ideas in the CFTM, child welfare specialist can build a positive relationship with foster parents.

LSSI staff are provided training regarding the importance of and requirement to treat all team members, including foster parents, with dignity and respect; this includes embracing equity,
diversity and inclusion. LSSI believes the incorporation of these key behaviors will result in
greater trust by foster parents and commitment to align with the overall goals for those whom
LSSI serves.

At bi-annual monitoring visits, resource staff solicits feedback from foster parents concerning
their experience as a member of the team. In addition, any concerns or issues are addressed
monthly in the foster home with the child welfare specialist. Resource staff and child welfare
specialists work in tandem to ensure any feedback received by foster parents are addressed.
Some sites have quarterly foster parent meetings wherein concerns can be addressed.
Resource staff, child welfare specialists, supervisors, and program directors are available by
phone, e-mail, or in-person to schedule a meeting to discuss any concerns foster parents might
have. If the foster parent’s concerns are not being addressed or are not being addressed to their
satisfaction, they can request a meeting with the associate executive director in their region to
further discuss their concerns.

LSSI appreciates foster parents commitment to the children in their care. LSSI holds various
foster parent appreciation events around the state. Sites hold foster parent appreciation dinners
and awards banquets, parent cafes and holiday parties. These events have been very
successful with large participation from foster parents. Quality Improvement Surveys are
distributed annually via electronic MS Form. The survey asks questions pertinent to the quality
of LSSI foster care programs. LSSI welcomes feedback and suggestions to improve upon our
service to children and families. Feedback is shared with each program site for analyzing and
follow-up when needed.

2) **The right to be given standardized pre-service training and appropriate ongoing
training to meet mutually assessed needs and improve the foster parent’s skills.**

LSSI requires that all new non-related foster families complete the nine foster PRIDE pre-
service training sessions and utilize the Foster PRIDE training modules for foster families’ in-
service training as appropriate. In 2023 a redesign of the current PRIDE training will be
launched. Referrals to PRIDE are made by the LSSI resource team. Training locations, dates
and times are provided to the prospective foster parent by the LSSI resource team and/or can
be accessed on the Virtual Training Center (VTC) website to offer the prospective foster parents
options to meet their scheduling needs. Once a prospective foster parent becomes licensed, the
resource team provides information on training resources through letters, emails, phone calls
and direct contact or the foster parent may access the VTC training unit and register for
trainings themselves

PRIDE pre-service training is required for all persons seeking to become licensed foster
parents. It has been revised to incorporate expanded training on shared parenting, trauma-
informed practices, LGBTQI+, and reasonable and prudent parenting.

LSSI encourages relatives to attend foster PRIDE classes in person to experience a much
richer environment, which includes participants meeting other relative caregivers, which may
lead to an enhanced support system. Relative caregivers are required to complete six hours of training as well as supplemental sessions regarding reasonable and prudent parenting, LGBTQI+ and trauma informed practices. Relatives may complete the six hour training via DVD or in the classroom; supplemental trainings can be accessed on-demand via the VTC. Traditional non-relative caregivers are required to receive 39 hours of training. The first 27 hours of training are offered in the classroom or online, and the remaining 12 hours of supplemental training, which includes information regarding reasonable and prudent parenting and other valuable topics previously not covered during PRIDE, can also be completed in the classroom or online. The new PRIDE redesign being launched in 2023 will require more pre-service training hours.

All LSSI programs are expected to host training and on-going professional development opportunities for foster parents and staff. Experienced foster parents are encouraged to co-train with staff when possible. Currently LSSI partners with foster parents for some trainings, specifically those related to working with natural parents. Experienced foster parents who have worked well with natural parents are sought to co-facilitate this training, which is an area LSSI is attempting to expand as foster parents possess a great deal of knowledge that is valuable for new foster families. Foster parents identified to co-train, meet with resource and training staff to review material and are provided material to review in order to prepare. When co-training, LSSI foster parents are paired with experienced resource staff and/or trainers. Foster parents are encouraged to communicate with their child welfare specialist or resource worker if they would like to be trained on a specific topic. LSSI believes developing foster parents is one of the keys to improving foster parents’ skills, which leads to fewer placement disruptions for youth in care. Foster parents are also encouraged to participate in support groups with other foster families. This provides additional opportunities for experienced foster parents to “partner” with less experienced foster parents and impart valuable knowledge. LSSI hosts support groups both in person and virtually.

Foster parent training needs are assessed mutually by LSSI resource specialists, resource supervisors, child welfare specialists, child welfare supervisors, the foster parent and regional training specialists. This is accomplished through discussion during resource monitoring visits and visits in the foster home by the child welfare specialists. Resource and child welfare staff share information to determine additional training needs for foster parents. Additionally, training needs can be discussed during CFTMs. Foster parents are encouraged to participate in trainings geared toward their specific needs and the needs of youth in care placed in their home and/or the type of youth for whom the family has expressed an interest. LSSI resource teams consult with the LSSI regional training teams to discuss on-going foster parent training needs, which includes requests and/or suggestions received from foster parents, which has led to the development of numerous additional training opportunities. All information regarding training needs is kept confidential and is only discussed with the foster parents and the child welfare team.

LSSI offers specialized foster care. A foster parent who accepts specialized foster children is required to complete an additional 12 hours of training yearly. Foster parents may utilize the
foster parent meetings, and training sessions held by resource staff, or foster parent and staff development specialists, as well as community based training that is approved by DCFS for these additional training hours. Education by medical providers specific to a youth in care may also be used towards additional training credit hour requirements.

LSSI also offers intensive services to youth age 6 years through 14 years old via our Treatment Foster Care (TFC) program, which is modeled after the Treatment Foster Care of Oregon program. This program focuses on youth in care who have experienced high trauma and multiple placement disruptions. TFC teams provide a consistent and reinforcing environment with mentoring and encouragement; daily structure with clear expectations and specific consequences; a high level of supervision; limited access to problem peers and an increase in access to prosocial peers; and create an environment that supports daily school and homework completion. TFC foster parents are required to complete the same PRIDE pre-service and ongoing in-service training as non-relative caregivers as well as specific TFC training prior to accepting youth in their home. TFC training is on-going and specific to the youth placed in the home. TFC foster families have frequent contact with LSSI staff and numerous opportunities to increase knowledge and skills to ensure the best outcomes for youth placed in their homes.

LSSI hosted various training sessions in 2022 and made it convenient for foster parents to attend by offering virtual in addition to in-person sessions. LSSI continues to monitor the Covid-19 pandemic and adheres to CDC guidelines and DCFS directives regarding in-person meetings. Many sites continue to utilize virtual platforms to ensure safety as well as convenience for foster parents. When in-person training occurs, caution is used in order to maintain the health and safety of foster families and the trainer. Training is offered at convenient times for foster parents to attend by considering work and school schedules, with some events being held on multiple dates and times. For those unable to attend in person, some training is offered through online resources, such as PowerPoint with voice-over explanation or recorded Zoom sessions. A few of the training topics include: CPR/First Aid, De-escalation/Trauma, Self-Care, etc. LSSI helps foster parents locate training sessions offered by the Department and outside community agencies by continuously communicating dates and times. LSSI also forwards training dates from external organizations and creates a monthly calendar of foster parent events and meetings. This information is typically provided to foster parents via email, newsletters, or verbally and are also located on LSSI’s newly re-designed webpage.

3) **The right to be informed as to how to contact the appropriate child placement agency to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for children in the foster parent’s care.**

Foster parents are informed during the licensing process regarding how they can contact staff to receive information and assistance. Each program site has an answering service or voice mail system that gives foster parents specific instructions on how to reach an LSSI on-call staff person during non-business hours. The on-call staff person is expected to call the foster parent back within the hour.
At the time of placement, the foster parent is given the child welfare specialist’s and supervisor’s contact information. Also, in the event of an emergency, the foster parent is informed to contact the on-call person. The on-call caseworker may direct the foster parent to call the Crisis and Referral Entry Service (CARES) hotline if the child is in need of Screening, Assessment, and Support Services (SASS). A CARES worker will come to the home or hospital and screen the child to determine if there is a need for psychiatric evaluation and/or hospitalization. A child who is in specialized foster care may have a medical or behavior plan which should be available to the foster parent. The CARES phone number is 1-800-345-9049.

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

LSSI ensures board payments are processed and either mailed or directly deposited into bank accounts on the third Friday of each month following the end of the service. Child welfare specialists have been trained to adhere to a schedule that ensures all financial reimbursement documents are received in time for board payments. Foster parents are educated regarding when board payments are made and understand they are made the month following placement. Board payments are made to foster parents in accordance with DCFS Rule 359 and LSSI’s contracts.

- For October 2022 services - November 18, 2022
- For November 2022 services – December 16, 2022
- For December 2022 services – January 20, 2023
- For January 2023 services – February 17, 2023
- For February 2023 services – March 17, 2023
- For March 2023 services – April 21, 2023
- For April 2023 services – May 19, 2023
- For May 2023 services – June 16, 2023
- For June 2023 services – July 21, 2023
- For July 2023 services – August 18, 2023
- For August 2023 services – September 15, 2023
- For September 2023 services – October 20, 2023
- For October 2023 services – November 17, 2023

Foster parents are paid a higher rate according to the care needs of each youth in their home. This includes a higher rate for youth who have been assessed as requiring a higher level of care. Assessment occurs through the Clinical Intervention to Placement Preservation (CIPP) process and includes input from all team members.

Child welfare specialists are trained how to handle specific issues when there is a payment or reimbursement concern. When foster parents are having a payment concern they should first contact their case manager or licensing representative who will then contact the accounts.
Foster parents and staff are trained regarding policies and procedures for reimbursement for bed holds and non-recurring expenses, such as camp, music lessons, graduation costs, etc. The latter are paid out of the agency’s allotted specific assistance funds. There are specific criteria that must be met for the foster parent to be eligible for payments due to a bed hold (For example, the child must be in a medical or psychiatric hospitalization. The foster parent must remain involved with the child and the child must return to the foster parent upon discharge). Reimbursement for respite services are allocated in the specialized contracts and there is a small amount of funding for respite in the downstate and Cook County performance-based contracts, as described in the program plans. A statewide policy is in place with clear
expectations regarding these services and the rates of reimbursement for respite provided under each level of care/contract. For programs with a large number of specialized youth in care, respite training is provided for respite providers. Foster parents may identify their own respite provider for the agency to screen and train, or the agency will help identify a respite provider who has already completed these steps. Respite providers must provide care that is consistent with the child’s service and treatment plans. For situations not addressed in the contracts/program plans, programs seek out community resources and facilitate collaboration among foster parents to address respite needs.

All children who come into care receive a clothing voucher and children under three years of age are eligible for equipment vouchers when the lack of appropriate equipment is a barrier to the placement of an infant in a foster or relative home. Programs may use donations to provide supplemental assistance to foster parents before the first board payment arrives. These may include food, equipment, or clothing. Gift certificates to major stores are available to assist in emergency situations as well. LSSI also has an Amazon business account, which can be used for quick purchasing of needed items and expedited shipping. Children already placed in foster care whose cases transfer to LSSI from another private agency or DCFS foster home are not eligible for clothing or equipment vouchers; however, program directors may approve assistance for this type of need on a case-by-case basis. Program supervisors are responsible for ensuring staff members are knowledgeable on the procedures to access these options.

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 parent’s home. Inherent in this right is the foster parent’s responsibility to support activities that will promote the child’s right to relationships with his or her own family and cultural heritage.

Foster parents participate in the assessment of the child’s needs, the development of the child’s goals, the creation of a service plan, and the evaluation of progress toward those goals. The foster parents often have a unique perspective regarding the child’s strengths and needs, which is valuable in the plan’s content. The service plan is comprehensive, addressing the child’s functioning and development needs, as well as those needs relating to the child’s right to have a relationship with his or her own family and ongoing access to cultural heritage. Also, foster parents have the opportunity to provide input into their youth in care’s visitation and communication plan with the youth’s biological family.

Foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend all court hearings pertaining to the child in their care. They may be informed of a goal change during permanency hearings, which occur every six months. If a foster parent is unable to attend court, information regarding the outcome of the hearing, including goal change is shared by the child welfare specialist within 48 hours of the hearing. Information regarding the hearing is shared through a phone call, email or the foster parents’ preferred method of communication.

Foster parents and children 12 years and older receive a clearly written summary of the foster parent goals, the child’s goals, and the child’s summary of the service plan. This written plan is
provided to the foster parents within 45 days of a child’s initial placement in the foster home, at regular six month intervals when service plans are updated for ACR and within five days of any subsequent re-placement. The child welfare specialist is responsible for providing a printed copy of the above-mentioned information or may send electronically if approved encryption is used, which protects confidential information.

Any information that is available after placement about the child regarding his or her health, safety and emotional well-being must be shared with the foster parent. Foster parents have the right to request additional information, which will be provided to the foster whenever it is essential to meet the child’s needs. It is the foster care supervisors’ responsibility to ensure child welfare specialists are aware the information is appropriate to share with foster parents. Foster parents have received training on confidentiality and sharing information. No information is to be shared without signed consent to release information.

Quarterly CFTMs are crucial in addressing any current issues and ensuring the child’s well-being needs are met. Foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend all CFTMs that occur every 90 day. Foster parents, biological parent and other child welfare team members are invited by the child welfare specialist. These meetings are opportunities for the foster parent to address any changes they feel need to occur and allow for input on the child’s service and visitation plan. Foster parents are encouraged to voice their concerns and opinions regarding the visitation plan for the youth, as foster parents are often involved in assisting with transportation and coordination of youths attending visits with their birth families. The child welfare specialist is also required to notify the foster parent of upcoming court hearings, ACRs, school meetings, and counseling appointments; foster parents are encouraged to attend these meetings whenever possible.

Child welfare specialists are required to complete a case note documenting any information or discussion shared with the foster parents. These case notes become part of the child’s case file. Child welfare specialists also are required to provide any documents specific to the safety, health and well-being of the child in the foster home. Additionally, child welfare specialists and supervisors are to have monthly supervision to discuss relevant issues in the foster home. Supervisors will keep in contact with the foster parent to ensure they are treated fairly and will document their discussion in the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS).

6) The right to be provided a fair, timely, and impartial investigation of complaints concerning the foster parent’s licensure, to be provided the opportunity to have a person of the foster parent’s 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.
LSSI’s resource team is trained regarding foster parent and child rights, and how to conduct an investigation for a licensing complaint. The resource team assumes the responsibility of explaining the investigations of complaints concerning the foster parent according to the timeframes as required by 89 Ill. Adm. Code 383.

When a licensing complaint is received, the resource specialist has two business days to immediately begin the licensing investigation. At that time, the CFS 596-29 Right to Have an Advocate, is shared with the foster parent. If an advocate is requested, that person has four hours to arrive at the home. The resource specialist will have thirty days to complete the investigation. The resource specialist must also interview other persons relevant to the investigation and document these interviews. If extenuating circumstances prevent the resource worker from completing the investigation and making a final finding within 30 days, the foster parents will be informed and approval for a thirty day extension, which is approved by the resource supervisor, is requested. Once the final recommendation regarding the investigation is submitted to the resource supervisor, he/she has seven business days to approve or request corrections. The DCFS Agencies and Institutions licensing staff person assigned to monitor LSSI must also approve the licensing investigation. Within five calendar days of the investigation’s approval, the foster parent must be informed in writing of the outcome of the investigation and corrective action plan, if applicable. If violations are substantiated, the written notice includes information on how to request a supervisory review. The foster parent must request the supervisory review within 10 calendar days and it must be held within 14 calendar days of the request. The results of the supervisory review must be given to the foster parent in writing and include information on how to request an informal review. The informal review is held with the DCFS Regional Licensing Administrator and can determine: 1) the corrective action has or has not been completed; 2) initial or further corrective action should be offered; or 3) enforcement action is needed. If enforcement action is taken, such as revocation or refusal to renew the license, the foster parent has a right to request an administrative hearing. The foster parent would then receive information on the administrative hearing process.

Licensing training for child welfare staff is ongoing. The regional training staff, supervisors, and lead foster care workers include licensing standards and procedures at new employee training. Also, seasoned staff have been trained on the rights and responsibilities of foster parents at team meetings. It is the responsibility of the resource supervisors to make sure the licensing policies and procedures are followed. In addition, LSSI’s DCFS licensing representative reads all investigations and provides detailed feedback to help ensure consistency with this process across the state.

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

At the time of placement, foster parents should receive information concerning the child’s behavior, health, education, concrete supports, visitation schedule, and any other pertinent information. Child welfare specialists are provided with training about what information should be shared with foster parents during new employee training and through continuous training.
provided by regional training staff, supervisors, lead foster care workers, and other qualified staff members. One topic covered during this training is how to complete a Sharing Information with Caregiver form (CFS 600-4) to ensure all proper information is shared with the caregiver. The foster parent and the child welfare specialist should sign the form to ensure the information was given appropriately. Also, this form should be included in the case file and the discussion should be documented in SACWIS. Supervisors then review this information in SACWIS and recommend changes when needed.

Child welfare specialists are required to document any discussions with the foster parent in SACWIS within 48 hours. These case notes will be part of the child’s case file. Supervisors review these notes monthly and ensure proper documentation is completed and foster parents are receiving the information they need. If it is found that a foster parent did not receive information regarding the youth in their care, supervisors are required to hold the child welfare specialist accountable in providing that information in a timely manner. Also, child welfare specialists and supervisors are required to discuss any issues in the foster home and document in SACWIS on a monthly basis. Supervisors are required to keep in contact with foster parents to ensure they are being treated with dignity and respect and as a member of the child welfare team.

At any time, foster parents have the right to request additional information about a child in their care. In order to protect the birth parents’ rights and confidentiality, the requested information will be shared only if it is essential to the safety, permanency and well-being of the child. It is the foster care supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that the child welfare specialists are aware of appropriate information to share with foster parents. Both foster parents and staff have received training on confidentiality and what information is appropriate to share. Moreover, confidentiality and sharing of information is included in the new employee training offered by the foster parent and staff development specialists.

Foster parents, biological parents, and members of the child welfare team meet quarterly to discuss the child’s progress and permanency goal. These CFTMs allow for all team members, including foster parents, to discuss the well-being of the youth in care. During these meetings, child welfare specialists are required to inform the foster parents about upcoming court hearings, ACRs, school meetings, and any other meetings that concern the child in their care. Foster parents are encouraged to attend these meetings as a means to provide input and be kept informed of case updates. If the foster parent is unable to attend, the child welfare specialist will discuss any pertinent information concerning the child and provide feedback to the foster parent during the next home visit or via a phone conversation.

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

LSSI has established rules and procedures for sharing information with foster parents. At the time of placement the child welfare specialist will complete a CFS 600-4 Sharing Information with Caregivers form, discuss the information with the foster parent, and sign the form together.
This will ensure compliance with HIPAA regulations and DCFS policy Section 340.40. The foster parent should receive a packet that includes medical and educational history, along with other pertinent information. When the service plan is complete, the foster parent will receive the child’s portion of the plan as well as their own. In addition, the Integrated Assessment (IA) process and social history gathering includes foster parents in initial interviews regarding the child’s needs. This process determines appropriate interventions from the outset of the case. The results of this assessment, or social history, are shared with foster parents to the fullest extent possible.

In the case of an emergency placement, all pertinent information must be shared with the foster parent and the CFS 600-4 form must be signed by the foster parent and child welfare specialist. The CFS 600-4 form must also be reviewed by the supervisor at the time of placement to ensure all important information is relayed to the foster parent.

Sharing Information with Caregivers is part of new employee training and is an on-going training topic for foster parents and staff. The child welfare specialist is accountable for providing information about the child known at the time of placement and updating information as part of regular contact with the foster family. Child welfare specialists should use their supervisor for consultation if unsure about what information should be disclosed. Failure to disclose appropriate information is addressed during monthly supervision, as would disclosure of information to which the foster parent is not entitled. If the disclosure error was due to lack of knowledge, the staff person will be asked to complete additional training (one-on-one or group) on this topic. If the failure to disclose (or over-disclosure) was blatant or purposeful, the matter will be dealt with through the staff appraisal process and/or the disciplinary procedures of the agency.

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 the decision-making process regarding the child, including individual service planning meetings, administrative case reviews, interdisciplinary staffings, and individual educational planning meetings; the right to be informed of decisions made by the courts or the child welfare agency concerning the children; the right to provide input concerning the plan of services for the child and to have that input be 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.

LSSI child welfare specialists are accountable for giving notification in a timely manner to foster parents regarding scheduled meetings and staffings concerning foster children in their care. These are done in writing and followed up with an in-person reminder or phone call. Child welfare specialist make attempts to include foster parents by scheduling meetings at times most likely to allow foster parent attendance. Foster parents are encouraged to attend and to receive all pertinent information regarding the needs of the child.
The child welfare specialist will notify the foster parents about the time, date and location of all CFTMs, court hearings, ACRs, individualized education plan (IEP) meetings or other relevant staffings as soon as they are scheduled. All attempts are made to provide sufficient notice (30 days) of upcoming meeting, ACRs, etc. Foster parents are encouraged to attend these meetings and to give input about the child’s needs. LSSI understands that foster parents have direct involvement in their foster child’s education and can provide relevant feedback at IEP meetings. LSSI trains foster parents to be advocates for children in their care. Educational Advocacy training, facilitated by DCFS, is required for licensed foster parents and unlicensed relative and fictive kin care givers are highly encouraged to participate in the training as well. If the foster parents cannot attend an IEP meeting in person, they may attend by phone, or the child welfare specialist or the assigned educational liaison will follow up with them within 24 hours to ensure they are informed of the outcome. The child welfare specialist will provide foster parents the names, addresses and phone numbers of therapists, physicians and teachers. Foster parents are encouraged to utilize these supports for any questions or concerns regarding the youth in care or their case.

If foster parents are not able to attend meetings or staffings, the child welfare specialist will notify the foster parents of any decisions that are made by the agency or court. As a member of the child welfare team, foster parents have the right to be informed and involved in any case planning for the child in care.

During the child’s initial placement, the foster parents are included in the IA process and can give their assessment of the child and what their needs may be in order to develop the service plan that lists specific treatment outcomes and objectives. The service plan is continually reviewed, assessed and adjusted if there are things that need to be added or discontinued.

LSSI prides itself on working collaboratively with foster parents who are active participants in case planning regarding the needs of the child in their care. When issues or changes occur, the agency will consult the foster parents because they have first-hand knowledge about the social and emotional well-being of the child.

If a decision to move a youth is made, the child welfare specialist informs the foster parent within 48 hours of the decision. Foster parents are given a 14-day notice of any placement change plan unless safety concerns necessitate immediate removal from the home. The child welfare specialist provides the foster parent with a completed CFS 151B – Notice of Change of Placement in person. The CFS 151B also informs the foster parent of his or her right to appeal the decision.

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 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 parent**
and the child’s family, the child’s family may consent to disclosure of additional information.

As important members of the team foster parents have significant information on the health and well-being of the child in their care as well as the most up-to-date information on the child’s developmental, educational, emotional, mental health and medical needs. When considering initial placement of a child, the child welfare specialist and resource specialist staff will advise the foster parents of all relevant information regarding the child that is consistent with the rules of confidentiality, and foster parents must be given non-identifying information pertaining to the child’s family medical and mental health background. When a foster parent receives a call about placement, they are encouraged to ask specific questions so they can make an informed decision regarding the child who may be placed in their home.

At the time a child is placed in a foster home, the child welfare specialist will provide the foster parents with information that may be used to support and properly care for the child. Moreover, the child welfare specialist should provide medical information, educational history, visitation arrangements that support the child and the biological parents, and any special needs information.

The child welfare specialist shares information that is pertinent to the health, safety and well-being of the child as it becomes available, either via a phone call or during home visits. Child welfare specialists are provided guidance during supervision on information that should be disseminated. Foster parents are encouraged to attend CFTMs and ACRs to share information to the child welfare team and biological parents. Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to build a relationship with the biological parents and share information that also allows biological parents to be prepared for reunification with their 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 parent, and the reasons for change or termination in placement. The notice will be waived only in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.

When a change of placement is determined to be necessary, foster parents will be provided a 14-day notice via the Notice of Decision form (CFS 151). This document includes the reason for change in placement, attempts at remediation, and a final determination of placement status, including the anticipated move date. The child welfare specialist informs foster parents of any decision to move a youth in their care within 48 hours of the decision being made.

The child welfare specialist will also provide the foster parent, biological parent and guardian ad-litem with the Notice of Change of Placement form (CFS 151B), which explains how to request a Clinical Placement Review if they wish to do so. Prior notice is waived if the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm or a judge has issued a court order to move the youth. Foster parents have the right to appeal decisions regarding change of placement. In order to appeal,
foster parents must call or fax their request for appeal within three business days of receipt of the notice to change placement.

Additionally, foster parents are provided a copy of the Service Appeal Brochure (CFS 1050-32), which is consistent with the appeal information in the CFS 151 and CFS 151-B. The child welfare specialist or the supervisor will review the brochure and explain the different options available to the foster parent.

When foster parents give notice to have a child removed from their home, the child welfare specialist immediately starts the process of finding another placement. If the removal of the child is going to be a difficult transition for the foster parent, a member of LSSI’s clinical team is available to provide therapeutic service for the foster parents and their immediate family.

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 hearing the case, the location of the hearings, and the court docket number of the case; and the right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek mandamus under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987.

The child welfare specialist should provide in writing and/or verbally notify foster parents of upcoming court hearings at least two weeks prior to the scheduled court date. The information should include date, time, judge’s name, court docket number, and caseworker information. This is to be documented in a case note and retained in the case record. The child welfare specialist will remind the foster parents of their right to attend court proceedings and of their right to be heard. If the foster parents are unable to attend, the child welfare specialist should provide the foster parents all information pertinent to the child. All communication between the child welfare specialist and the foster parents should be documented in case notes in SACWIS. Child welfare specialists are held accountable in their notification of foster parents of court proceedings in supervision meetings with foster care supervisors, as well as when supervisors review the case documentation.

Foster parents are informed of their right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek action from the court for the youth in care in their home, under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 as part of their on-going in-service training. During the child’s placement, the child welfare specialist provides education to the foster parents as to the purpose of Shelter Care, Adjudication, Dispositional and Permanency Hearings. Additionally, LSSI encourages and supports foster parents in their seeking additional training regarding court procedures.

13) The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parent 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 parent’s home.
Foster parents who previously had a youth in care in their home are given priority consideration as a placement option in the event that a child who was formerly placed with them re-enters foster care. Placements are tracked in SACWIS and previous placement information is accessed by staff when moving a youth. This priority consideration is given unless such replacement is not considered consistent with the best interest of the child in question or that of other children in the foster home. Additionally, the foster home must have available capacity for the child to re-enter.

LSSI will make every effort to reunite children with foster families with whom they were previously placed. When choosing a placement, LSSI always considers what is in the best interest of the child. In making that decision, LSSI considers what would be the safest and most stable option for the youth and looks for foster placements that will nurture healthy psychological and physical development. Also, the child welfare specialist will consult with children 12 and older concerning their placement. In the event the former placement is no longer an option, the child welfare specialist will make attempts to locate relatives with whom the child is acquainted.

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 provided with a copy of the agency’s written Foster Parent Grievance Procedure and appeals procedures. An acknowledgement of receipt of this information is included in the foster home file. Foster parents also receive training on the Foster Parent Law, which includes instructions on both the DCFS and LSSI appeals processes.

When a foster parent indicates a desire to grieve a service decision, the child welfare specialist refers them to the Foster Parent Grievance Procedure, the immediate foster care supervisor and the DCFS Service Appeals Process. If the issue cannot be resolved internally, the child welfare specialist will provide information to allow the foster parent to access the DCFS appeal system. The foster parent will be provided this information and a copy of the service appeals pamphlet at a formal meeting.

Foster parents should not be treated disrespectfully, harassed, or retaliated against by any party when exercising their right to appeal. Any such action by an LSSI staff member will result in disciplinary action, including possible employment termination. Any perceived retaliation or harassment should be reported immediately to LSSI management and the DCFS Advocacy office at 1-800-232-3798.

15) The right to be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline established under Section 35.6 of the Children and Family Services Act and of 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.
Foster parents are well informed of their rights. Foster parents receive information regarding the foster parent hotline, and all sites make available the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) brochure, which is displayed at each LSSI site location in a public area. LSSI wants foster parents to be aware of all resources available for them. LSSI cooperates fully when it receives a call from the OIG and/or the Advocacy office to provide additional information and addresses any concerns immediately. The Foster Parent Hotline number is 1-800-722-9124.

The OIG office was created to reform and strengthen the child welfare system. Its mandate is to investigate misconduct, misfeasance, malfeasance, and violations of rules, procedures or laws by Department of Children and Family Services employees, foster parents, service providers, and contractors with the department (See 20 ILCS 505/35.5, 35.6, and 35.7). The DCFS OIG can be reached at 1-312-433-3000.

DCFS has established a statewide toll free Foster Parent Helpline Number that provides advice and referral services. It is given to the foster parents at the conclusion of PRIDE training and upon licensure with LSSI. The Helpline number is 1-866-368-5204.

LSSI does not tolerate any misconduct by employees, service providers or contractors. LSSI provides ongoing training about the Foster Parent Helpline and OIG investigations. When appropriate, child welfare specialists and supervisors will provide support and information to foster parents in the event of reports of misconduct.

**Foster Parents’ Responsibilities**

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

Foster parents are required to participate in pre-service and ongoing training. The importance of open communication is discussed with foster parents during PRIDE training and continues throughout their involvement with LSSI.

Foster parents are encouraged to keep copies of the child’s physical, dental, vision, hearing, and school records. During home visits, the child welfare specialist will initiate conversation about the child’s records, safety, well-being, and permanency. Foster parents are encouraged to openly discuss any concerns they may have; this provides the foster parent and child welfare specialist the opportunity to openly communicate as well as address any concerns quickly.

Since open communication is one of the keys to placement stabilization, foster parents are encouraged to discuss the youth in care placed in their home during home visits, CFTMs, ACRs, or other pertinent meetings. Also, foster parents can and should speak with the child welfare specialist, supervisor, program director, or the area associate executive director if concerns arise or to provide positive feedback.
2) The responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information concerning foster children and their families and act appropriately within applicable confidentiality laws and regulations.

Foster parents are informed about the importance of confidentiality, and this is reinforced on an ongoing basis during visits to the foster home. When foster parents understand the importance of confidentiality for children and their families, they are more likely to understand and abide by the expectations. Confidentiality is also covered in the pre-placement agreement. Rules, limits and necessity of confidentiality are also covered by the resource specialist at monitoring visits and documented on the appropriate forms.

Foster parents are encouraged to participate in training regarding confidentiality and how information is shared. Specific information regarding what can and cannot be shared will be documented by the child welfare specialist in a case note, which becomes a permanent record in the child’s case file. In addition, staff and foster parents need ongoing training regarding the handling of foster parents’ confidential information and the laws and regulations available to protect foster parents’ privacy. This training is part of the LSSI new employee training conducted by the foster parent and staff development specialist, and refresher trainings are facilitated during team meetings.

When foster parents have concerns regarding confidentiality issues, they are encouraged to seek out the appropriate answer to assure compliance with the confidentiality standards. LSSI staff is available at any time to assist with questions.

3) The responsibility to advocate for children in the foster parent’s care.

LSSI has a responsibility to strengthen the relationship between the foster parent and the child. This includes them building a trusting relationship that is open and honest. Foster parents learn during PRIDE training to advocate for the child in their care, and their responsibility to the child. They are encouraged to attend all meetings, staffings, ACRs, placement reviews, CFTMs, and court hearings to discuss the care of the child in their home and give open and honest feedback. As trusted advocates, foster parents have valuable input on the child’s service needs and goals help shape the life of a child in their care.

Foster parents are encouraged to work closely with all other professionals involved in the care of the youth placed in their homes. These professionals may include the guardian ad litem, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), other court personnel, doctors, nurses, school teachers, therapists, mentors, etc. Not all Illinois counties have CASA programs, but foster parents are encouraged to research if their community has an active CASA program by visiting the Illinois CASA website. Child welfare specialists can assist with locating an active CASA program in the area too.

Foster parents are to receive training on educational advocacy within a year of licensure, and are informed of this responsibility while in pre-licensure PRIDE training. Reminders are given
during monthly home visits and during bi-annual home visits with assigned resource staff. Child welfare specialists will continue to inform foster parents of the benefits of advocating for the educational rights of children through discussions during home visits, and the resource specialist will discuss the benefits of advocating throughout the licensing process and during bi-annual monitoring visits.

During pre-service training, foster parents will receive training on working with the court system and the appeal process. These topics are also covered during in-service training. Programs serving special needs populations have additional training for foster parents caring for specialized children. Since these children tend to receive services from many providers and have complex needs, the training for these foster parents includes emphasis on advocacy skills.

It is the child welfare specialist’s responsibility to follow-up with foster parents regarding their concerns or requests. If foster parents feels the child welfare specialist has not taken proper action regarding their request, they are encouraged to contact the child welfare specialist, supervisor, program director or associate executive director. If a resolution cannot be reached, the foster parent is encouraged to follow the Service Appeal Process which is outlined in a brochure given to the foster parent at the time a child is placed in the home.

4) The responsibility to treat children in the foster parent’s care and the children’s family with dignity, respect, and consideration.

Foster parents are informed about their responsibility to treat children who are in their care as well as their families with dignity, respect, and consideration during PRIDE training, foster parent teleconference training provided by LSSI, and ongoing DCFS and LSSI training. Child welfare specialists and resource specialists monitor the treatment of children and their families through home visits, CFTMs, and clinical staffings. Resource staff will provide support when an issue arises or when foster parents feel their issues or concerns are not being addressed. Child welfare specialists encourage foster parents to use positive reinforcement to build on the child’s strengths and abilities. All foster parents sign an Acknowledgment of Understanding Concerning Prohibition of Corporal Punishment (CFS 452-3) at the time of licensure acknowledging corporal punishment is never allowed, and negative comments cannot be used when disciplining. Foster parents are instructed not to talk about negative case dynamics with the child, and are encouraged to discuss educational, medical and mental health information with the biological family during CFTMs. As foster parents provide support to the child in their care, they are encouraged to support the biological family. This fosters the child’s social and emotional well-being.

Child welfare and resource specialists are trained to monitor the attitudes toward and treatment of youth in care by foster parents and their families. Child welfare specialists are required to speak to children alone during home visits. This allows the child to express any concerns, fears or questions out of the presence of the foster parents. The child welfare specialist can address any issues presented by the child directly with the foster parents or speak to the resource representative and supervisor. Foster parents are required to allow youth in their care to speak
with the child welfare specialist and provide a separate/private space in their home to ensure privacy. The resource representative also evaluates the foster family’s ability to support the identified permanency goal at bi-annual home visits. Permanency goals are an ongoing discussion between the caseworker and the foster family. The resource specialist and child welfare staff encourage the foster family to be involved with court hearings, case reviews, parent/child visits, and CFTMs.

As stated elsewhere in this plan, foster parents are encouraged to meet and become involved with the birth families of their foster children. This is not mandatory, but is strongly encouraged because in almost all cases it assists the foster family, child and birth family in meeting the child’s service and permanency needs. The opportunity to work together with the birth family also gives the foster family the ability to demonstrate their respect and consideration for the child and his/her birth family. When a child returns to the home of a biological parent, foster parents are encouraged to be involved in the process, thus increasing the likelihood of a smooth transition. Sometimes foster parents are able to stay in touch with the birth family, providing ongoing support and encouragement as they reunify.

5) The responsibility to recognize the foster parent’s own individual and family 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.

Every effort will be made to assure a good fit for both the child and the family providing care for the child. This process includes completing the Sharing Information with the Caregiver form (CFS 600-4) and the Child/Caregiver Matching Tool (CFS 2017). The mutual assessment begins during PRIDE training and the process continues during interaction with the resource specialist and the child welfare specialists during regular home visits and bi-annual monitoring visits. Referrals for added services are a part of ongoing work with foster families and are important in maintaining stable placements for children. Child welfare specialists assess the needs of the foster parents throughout the case. When additional support or training is needed, foster parents are referred to appropriate workshops, training and counseling; given educational materials; and provided extra support by LSSI staff. Moreover, the LSSI training staff assists with support, training and consultation that includes teleconference, virtual and in person learning opportunities. LSSI encourages foster parents to establish a network of support in order to further utilize their strengths and receive assistance for areas that need improvement.

During the licensing process, the resource specialist will discuss with the foster family the need to develop a list of questions they would like answered before a child is placed in their home. Foster families are informed that they may choose not to foster a child if they are not comfortable with the information given regarding the child at intake. Foster families work with the resource specialist to identify a capacity and age range that best fits their daily routines and parenting skills.
If foster parents experience difficulty caring for a child or understanding his or her trauma, or needs, they are encouraged to ask for assistance from LSSI staff so that their needs as well as the child’s are met. Resources to assist foster parents include training provided by LSSI and DCFS, books, videos, and in-home individualized training.

Moreover, it is LSSI’s responsibility to recognize the foster parent’s personal support needs and assist them in finding resources and training that is collaborative, effective, and innovative. Many times this is achieved through support groups that share an affinity for providing care for youth in need.

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.

LSSI provides ongoing training and facilitates support groups throughout the state wherein foster parents can receive the benefits of affiliating with other foster parents such as sharing ideas, networking and connecting with likeminded individuals. Some of these avenues include regular foster parent meetings, newsletters, advisory councils, and training opportunities. LSSI staff provides information on and hosts support groups in an effort to encourage alliances among foster parents.

The resource staff shares the availability and benefits of support groups during the licensing process and ongoing home monitoring. Through LSSI local sites, foster parents are presented with the opportunity to participate in support groups. Moreover, LSSI encourages foster parents to become co-trainers to share their knowledge and expertise. All foster parents have strengths and skills in different areas; for example, a foster parent caring for a child with behavior concerns can be connected to other foster parents experiencing the same or similar challenges with a youth in care currently or previously placed in their home.

LSSI distributes information on state and national foster parent groups as well. LSSI statewide training manager and foster parents are currently members of the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council. LSSI has foster parents who are not members, but attend the meetings too.

7) The responsibility to assess the foster parents’ ongoing individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.

Foster parents have many opportunities to receive training related to their identified needs. They can request training through their resource specialist or child welfare specialist and are informed about community sponsored parenting and training opportunities at their local site. The resource specialist and the foster parent mutually assess strengths and needs in order to continue improving the skills essential for a youth in care. The resource specialist will document the strengths and needs of foster parents on the CFS 597-FFH Family Foster Home Licensing
Monitoring Record and case notes. Training needs are reviewed and assessed at every licensing home visit and at the foster parent/worker visit every 30 days.

Once the foster parents have identified specific training that they would like to attend, the resource specialist or child welfare specialist will assist in registration if needed. Foster parents are kept updated about training materials such as books, internet resources, tapes, videos, and LSSI virtual and in-person training schedules that might be helpful to them. Those already active in support groups can inform other foster parents about their experiences and urge them to attend training. Resource specialists can inspire one-to-one training by asking seasoned foster parents to discuss their personal stories, which can occur at meetings, support groups and trainings.

8) The responsibility to develop and assist in implementing strategies to prevent placement disruption, recognizing the traumatic impact of placement disruptions on a foster child and 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 disruption occurs.

After a child is placed in a foster home, the child welfare specialist will continue to assess the home every 30 days for signs indicating an impending disruption of placement. The caseworker will talk to the foster parent about trauma and any adverse experiences the minor may have had before being placed and will continue to update the foster parent about relevant information that may be gathered throughout the life of the case. The caseworker also will speak to the minor alone and offer emotional support. Moreover, the child welfare specialist and foster parents will communicate if the child needs additional support to prevent placement disruption. The child welfare specialist may suggest de-escalation/safety and trauma training to help foster parents become more knowledgeable regarding strategies and techniques that can be used for children who have experienced complex trauma. Resource staff will ask foster parents if they would benefit from additional training support every 6 months during regular monitoring visits and help locate these supports if necessary. It is the foster parents' responsibility to report any unidentified issues to their child welfare specialist immediately to address needs that may have not been met at the time of placement.

LSSI understands that both foster parents and youth in care may require services after hours. As a result, the agency provides foster parents with a 24-hour on-call number, which is staffed by a child welfare specialist at each site. Additionally, foster parents are given the CARES hotline, 1-800-345-9049, which provides emergency services to children who are in care.

If a youth in care has been identified as needing more supportive services and appears at risk of placement disruption, a CFTM will be convened to develop a plan to enhance support to the foster family in order to stabilize the placement. LSSI employs therapists who will assist foster parents by providing education/instruction regarding specific behavior techniques. Additionally, the child welfare specialist can make a referral for Intensive Placement Stabilization (IPS) services. This program is designed to assist families with placement stabilization through
counseling, mentoring and intensive support for high-risk children to maintain placement and prevent escalation into a higher level of care (like residential placements, psychiatric hospitalization, etc.). Child welfare specialists are asked to advocate for foster parents and make efforts to avoid placement disruption to support the permanency for the youth.

If stabilization efforts put into place are unsuccessful, LSSI will work with the foster parent and the biological family to locate another placement. The caseworker will use the Relative Resource and Positive Supports Worksheet (CFS 458-B) to locate supports and possible placement for the child. Foster parents are asked to give at least 14 days’ notice when requesting removal of a child from their home.

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 receive de-escalation/safety, trauma and Lifebook training to recognize signs of stress and other related signals that may ultimately lead to disruption of placement or undue stress on the youth in care or the foster parents and their families.

Specialized training topics may also be designed by programs or the regional training team to deal with stressors. For example, constant exposure to separation in foster care (attachment issues and separation from a biological parent) is very trying on a child. Foster parents also experience separation and loss when a child returns home or leaves their care for another reason. Topics like self-care are covered to help teach foster parents how to counteract feelings of burnout.

LSSI understands that foster parents may need a break from caring for youth in care. Therefore, the agency provides respite care for all levels of foster care, based on the program plan, including relative, traditional, specialized, and treatment foster care. The methods for obtaining respite and the rates of reimbursement vary depending on the child’s level of care. Foster parents should contact their child welfare specialist in the event that respite is needed. Additionally, staff and foster parents are educated regarding the difference between “respite” and “childcare.” Respite is intended to provide the foster parent time to relieve stress or address issues that may result in a youth in care being moved such as a family crisis, emergency, etc.; whereas childcare is when a foster family needs care for a youth for everyday activities (work, etc.).

Licensed foster parents also may access the DCFS Voluntary Placement Hold system. All child welfare specialists, supervisors and resource and intake staff members are knowledgeable about the placement clearance and “hold” processes and make that information available to foster parents. If they would like to request a voluntary hold on placements, foster parents should contact their resource specialist. The foster parent licensing and recruitment manager authorizes holds and is required to review and authorize a home to become active.
again. During the period of time a home is on hold, the foster family is required to maintain compliance with all Child Care Act and DCFS 402 rules and procedures.

As vital members of the CFTM, foster parents should be given the opportunity to create relationships with providers for the youth in their care and are encouraged by child welfare staff to assist the youth in ensuring they attend services for which they are referred. Foster parents are invited to provide input on needed services when appropriate and share relevant information with the youth’s counselors, if applicable, to provide further insight to what behaviors (positive and negative) the youth is exhibiting in the home environment. If there are any concerns with the services provided to the youth, the foster parents may request a CFTM where all parties can convene to discuss these concerns.

Foster parents receive information such as names, addresses and phone numbers about service providers for youth in their care and are responsible for informing child welfare staff of any changes in services.

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

Knowing the rewards and benefits to children, parents and families that come with providing protection and nurturance, foster parents help meet the developmental needs and support the permanency goals of children in their care. Foster parents are rewarded by seeing families strengthened and are encouraged to actively assist and mentor families to support them in improving the environment from which the children were removed. They understand this could aid in a successful reunification. If reunification is not possible, foster families see reward in helping children develop lifetime connections and providing permanency through adoption, guardianship or assisting a youth in care reach independence. Foster parents also see the reward of being a member of a professional foster care team in working together to meet the needs of a child in their care.

LSSI staff formally acknowledge the rewards and positive benefits of fostering through various outlets. The agency hosts several foster parent appreciation events during the year, placing special emphasis during National Foster Care Month in May. In planning these events, LSSI asks foster parents to help identify community contacts who might be willing to assist and uses National Foster Care Month as an opportunity to raise the profile of fostering within local communities by urging local press contacts, churches and businesses to honor foster parents in their midst. Foster parents are informed of special events by child welfare and resource specialist via e-mail notices, monthly newsletters, the LSSI events calendar, the LSSI foster care Facebook page and personal invitations sent directly to their homes.

Foster parents are encouraged to speak positively about foster parenting in their communities. Foster parents also are encouraged to participate in recruitment activities and invite friends, family members and neighbors to LSSI’s Foster Care Informational meetings. Friends or family
members of current foster parents are often the most successful new applicants. Reminders about referring others are provided via program newsletters, churches and the LSSI foster care Facebook page. Child welfare and resource specialists provide current foster families with recruitment material and/or promotional items to use, such as LSSI flyers with QR code, magnet notepads, etc., to use when spreading the word regarding the need for foster families. Newer foster parents are welcome to attend events with veterans and LSSI training staff to learn how to recruit. Foster parents who present at any recruitment activity are provided with individual or small group preparation for these responsibilities. LSSI staff and foster parents are also invited to participate in the annual advocacy day or “Lutheran Day” in Springfield. This is an opportunity for foster/adoptive parents to meet with legislators and talk about the needs of the families. A morning meeting before the legislative meetings prepares all participants for their sessions. These events allow LSSI foster parents to promote a positive image of foster care to the wider community.

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.

During PRIDE training, foster parents receive a thorough overview of their role, rights, and responsibilities within the child welfare system. Caregivers hear a panel presentation by professionals who discuss their various roles and responsibilities and the importance of the child’s family of origin is discussed. Training on teamwork, respect and communication is part of ongoing training for staff and foster parents.

Foster parents are encouraged to be an active and vital part of the services provided to both the child and family. If a child is receiving counseling services, the foster parent is consulted regarding any behavioral issues and should be actively involved in the therapeutic process. The child’s progress in counseling is strongly correlated to the foster parents’ participation, including close communication with the therapist and attendance at family sessions. LSSI is committed to encouraging this participation by considering the foster parents’ schedules when planning sessions. Moreover, LSSI foster parents have a voice and are encouraged to communicate issues or concerns to the child welfare specialist or supervisor for clarity and resolution. If there is no resolution, foster parents are encouraged to seek out the site program director.

LSSI plans to continue its emphasis on developing training that is designed for foster parents. Numerous new trainings have been initiated and more will be offered in 2023; these include Self-Care for families, updated trauma training, updated de-escalation training, etc. In addition to training, attending the meetings allows foster parents to be kept informed of policy changes, staff changes, and other important agency and DCFS announcements.

Foster parents are surveyed once a year by LSSI Quality Assurance staff and the information is aggregated and presented in a report to the agency management team. Additionally, survey data is provided to site staff as well. If Quality Assurance notes a comment that is concerning or that requires follow-up, the appropriate program director and associate executive director are
immediately notified. Likewise, positive comments are also shared as they serve as confirmation of good practices being utilized. The surveys are anonymous, but foster parents may include their names if they wish. The report is also uploaded on the agency’s internal website so information is available to all staff. LSSI has initiated electronic surveys for foster parents in an effort to increase engagement.

12) The responsibility to know and, as necessary, fulfill the foster parent’s responsibility to serve as mandated reporters 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 the foster parents have committed child abuse or neglect and applicable administrative rules and procedures governing investigations of those allegations.

During pre-service training, foster parents are informed of their legal responsibilities as mandated reporters. The resource specialist also addresses this responsibility pre-licensure and during ongoing home visits. Foster Pride also includes information regarding both mandated reporting requirements and foster parents who are subjects of abuse/neglect reports. Also, foster parents are given copies of the Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes (Rule 402), which outlines the requirements for foster parent licensure and the investigation process. Foster parents are required to complete and sign the Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status form (CANTS 22) during the licensing process. This requires them to report to the child abuse hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873) whenever there is cause to believe abuse and/or neglect has occurred. After licensure, foster parents will receive refresher training on their responsibilities as mandated reporters during foster parent meeting, during bi-annual monitoring visits and as a part of the licensing renewal process.

Foster parents are given information about the investigation process at the time of licensure. If there is a child abuse or neglect investigation involving the foster home, the child abuse/neglect investigator from DCFS will explain the investigation process and will inform the foster parents of their rights during the investigation. Typically, there is a concurrent licensing investigation conducted by LSSI. The LSSI resource specialist will also explain the foster parents’ rights during the licensing investigation. If the foster parent has further questions regarding the policy, they are encouraged to contact their resource specialist or supervisor to discuss their questions to develop a clear understanding of such policy. Licensed foster parents have a responsibility to cooperate with DCFS and licensing staff during an investigation.

13) The responsibility to know and receive training regarding the purpose of administrative case reviews, 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.

Foster parents receive ongoing training regarding ACRs, client service plans and court processes and are encouraged to take an active role in permanency planning. Foster parents are continually reminded of the importance of their participation in the permanency planning of a
child in their home during PRIDE training, bi-annual monitoring visits and at regular visits from the child welfare specialist. LSSI promotes participation from foster parents because they know the child best and their input is valuable to sound decision making and planning for the youth in care.

LSSI wants foster parents to have a voice in the life of the child who is placed in their home. As a result, child welfare specialists may provide one-on-one information to foster parents before, during or after ACR meetings and court dates to help them fulfill their roles as advocates and inform them of what has taken place. If foster parents are unable to attend, they are encouraged to submit documentation as to their input and recommendations or phone in to an ACR. Administrative case reviews are now also largely completed via Zoom, which in many instances allows foster parents to be involved when they may have previously struggled to attend due to work or other commitments.

14) **The responsibility to know the child welfare agency’s appeal procedure for foster parents and the rights of foster parents under the procedure.**

It is the responsibility of LSSI to inform foster parents of the appeal procedure and they are encouraged to contact their resource specialist or child welfare specialist with questions if they do not understand the appeal procedures and their rights. LSSI notifies foster parents of their rights and responsibilities during the licensing process, as well as when requested. They receive their rights and responsibilities in writing and are strongly encouraged to keep a copy for their files. All foster parents must then sign a form stating that they received this information. Any questions or concerns regarding rights and responsibilities are addressed by the licensing team or child welfare specialist. LSSI resource and child welfare staff offer guidance and assistance to foster parents who wish to appeal a decision. Foster parents can also contact the child welfare supervisor, program director or associate executive director with any specific information pertaining to an appeal decision.

Informational brochures that include both the DCFS process and the internal LSSI Interaction and Grievance process are distributed to all foster parents. The foster home record contains an acknowledgement demonstrating that the foster parent both received and had the LSSI process explained to them. The brochure includes the process for reporting violations of the Foster Parent Law not covered by an already existing appeal or grievance procedure. It also delineates time frames for resolution as well as all steps necessary for discussion and a satisfactory conclusion. This brochure also lists the foster parent’s right to appeal to an advocate outside of LSSI if needed.

The OIG brochure offers excellent information regarding its role and how it can assist foster parents and staff. All LSSI sites have been given copies of this brochure and are expected to make this brochure available to their foster parents. As noted in the brochure, the Foster Parent Hotline is 1-800-722-9124.
15) The responsibility to know and understand the importance of maintaining accurate and relevant records regarding the children’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.

Foster parents receive training regarding the need for keeping records of significant events, medical incidents, medication/behavior charts (where applicable), and other items. Keeping accurate records ensures adequate medical, educational and therapeutic services are provided. In addition children may have questions about their lives as they grow older and accurate record keeping can help answer their questions. Subsequent providers and child welfare specialists may also need the information to plan for the children in the future. During training, LSSI expectations for record keeping are discussed and written expectations are distributed.

Records are reviewed regularly by the child welfare specialist. The resource specialist may also review foster parents’ record-keeping methods to provide support and assistance with this task. Informal one-on-one training is provided by both resource staff and child welfare specialists to assist foster parents in effective record keeping and to ensure that all procedures regarding the medication and behavior logs are being fulfilled, as well as ensuring that all significant events/issues are recorded timely and accurately. Each LSSI location assists local foster parents by showing them how to store files for the children in their care. Some materials that are provided include physical forms for documentation, folders, notebooks, storage boxes, and binders. Foster parents are made aware by LSSI staff that they may request further assistance with record keeping whenever necessary.

16) The responsibility to share information, through child welfare teams, with subsequent caregivers (whether the child’s parent or other substitute caregiver) regarding the child’s adjustment in the foster parents’ home.

As members of the professional team, foster parents may be asked to meet with subsequent caregivers and provide them with children’s records. In addition, foster parents are encouraged to participate in the transition process whenever possible and appropriate. This is important given that children’s adjustment to new caregivers is significantly enhanced when the children’s routines are kept as similar as possible and the children observe their past and subsequent caregivers cooperating with one another.

LSSI offers training for foster parents on how to help children create a meaningful and completed Lifebook. In this training, it is explained what information is helpful to be shared with subsequent caregivers. Lifebooks are an essential tool to aid children in the child welfare system understand the narrative of their lives and the meaning of the changes they have experienced. In addition, Lifebooks are a catalyst to conversation and relationship building between children and their foster parents. Working together on a Lifebook not only promotes the child’s positive adjustment to a new home, but the foster parent learns how the child views his or her life story and the transitions and difficulties the child has experienced. Moreover, this collaborative process helps the foster parents better understand how to support and parent the
child. By completing the Lifebook with the youth in care, the foster parent can help track important memories and experiences that can be shared with any subsequent caregivers as well as any trusted supports in the youth's life.

17) The responsibility to provide care and services that are respectful of and responsive to the child’s cultural needs and are supportive of relationships 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.

LSSI works to ensure that the cultural needs and identity of all clients are understood, respected and encouraged. Foster parents receive ongoing training on cultural sensitivity and are expected to respect and support a child’s ties to his or her birth family and cooperate with the supervising agency and the service plan for the child and family. Foster parents are also trained on keeping families connected, and the importance of maintaining a child’s cultural identity.

Foster parents are encouraged to actively support the birth family through involvement in family visits and other events. This provides a wonderful opportunity for the foster and birth families to learn from one another and support the child; birth parents can often learn caregiving ideas from foster parents. In addition, this provides opportunities for exchange around cultural and racial differences. Foster parents whose race, ethnicity and/or culture differ from the birth family may find special benefit in these opportunities to learn about cultural traditions and values. Workers are available to help facilitate these exchanges.

Foster parents are encouraged to meet the cultural needs of the youth in care in their home through books, trainings, outside resources and through conversations with biological family members. The resource specialist and child welfare specialist are responsible for assisting foster parents with a training plan that addresses cultural and racial sensitivity as needed.