



April 25, 2024

Lincoln Arneal  
Nebraska Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel  
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation  
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200  
Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Annual Report and Recommendations 2022-2023

Dear Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel Members,

We want to express our gratitude to all Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel (CRP) members for their valuable time and effort in providing recommendations to ensure the child welfare system promotes safety, well-being, and permanency for the children and families of Nebraska.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has reviewed the recommendations and responded below.

**1. Reference book/glossary for Family Guidebook**

***-Make the reference book a mandatory item handed out to every party involved in the case.***

DHHS consistently examines the language used within the child welfare system to bridge the communication divide between families and DHHS. Our objective is to refine service-related language to reflect a family-oriented approach, thereby improving transparency for families, community stakeholders, and our partners.

In October 2021, the Family Run Organization (FRON) partnered with DHHS to create a Family Guidebook to support parents and families involved in the child welfare system. DHHS is committed to exploring ongoing upgrades to the guidebook so that it is most beneficial for families. Recently, a list of resources was added to the Guidebook. The DHHS Family Advocacy Unit is collaborating with case management teams to ensure that families and stakeholders have access to the guidebook. DHHS shared the additional recommendations regarding the guidebook with FRON.

**2. Integrate the entire family/both parties into the kinship process**

***-Preventative education in foster care, education to foster parents and birth parents, support for the entire family before and after the case closes, reinforcing trauma-informed care.***

DHHS uses family team meetings to bring together the family's support network, including kinship caregivers when the family chooses, to promote open dialogue and collaborative decision-making.

DHHS provides training tailored specifically to kinship and relative foster homes. Online Foster Parent Training is mandatory for all relative/kinship homes. The required modules provide information on the

grief associated with removal, the importance of working with the biological family, and the complexities of navigating being a relative/kinship foster parent.

DHHS values a trauma-informed care approach to provide effective support to families. DHHS case managers receive training on trauma-informed care and secondary trauma in new worker training. Key training principles include expectations of a foster parent, caring for children in foster care, family connections, and self-care.

### **3. Examining recidivism and elevation prevention (in cases where children are not state wards/court involved)**

#### ***-Simplify the foster care process for kinship caregivers***

DHHS partners with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation on Bring Up Nebraska, a statewide prevention partnership to advocate for local community collaboratives to increase the availability of critical support and services, and reduce unnecessary government system involvement for families.

When families come to the attention of DHHS, prevention programs are aimed at reducing further system involvement. Alternative Response (AR) is an approach to responding to allegations of abuse and neglect while working with families to safely care for children in their own homes and connecting families to services and support. Nebraska has implemented evidence-based programs, such as Family Centered Treatment, as part of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) implementation aimed at preventing entry into foster care. Another provision of FFPSA is the Kinship Navigator program. CFS contracts with two organizations to deliver the program to non-system-involved kinship families aimed at connecting kinship caregivers to resources.

When not providing formal foster care, CFS assists relative and kinship caregivers in applying for economic assistance benefits and connecting to community resources. DHHS also has internal Community Support Specialists who assist families in navigating formal support or community-based support resources.

When providing formal foster care, DHHS reimburses foster care providers, including relatives and kinship, according to the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility tool. Relative/kinship homes do not have to become licensed. Nebraska is currently implementing separate licensing standards for relative and kinship caregivers to streamline the process for families and increase the availability of federal funds for child welfare services.

DHHS is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of families we serve. We look forward to continued collaboration this coming year. Thank you again on behalf of the children and families of Nebraska.

Sincerely,



Dr. Alyssa Bish  
Director of Children and Family Services  
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services