



May 29, 2020

State of Nebraska
Department of Health and Human Services
Attn: Ross Manhart, DHHS Administrator I
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509

RE: Eastern Service Area Full-Service Case Management
Contract Monitoring Summary Response
Quarter 1, 2020

Saint Francis Ministries appreciates the opportunity to provide case management services for children and families in the Eastern Service Area. This letter is in response to the summary received from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Contract Monitoring team, which covers 12 performance areas and contains 112 items over the first quarter, January through March 2020. Overall, we are pleased with the first report and look forward to adjusting practice for continued improvement. We would also like to take this opportunity to provide clarity regarding some aspects of this summary.

Measuring staffing capacity in relation to caseload size requirements can take many forms. While we agree there is continued work to be done in this area, it is important to note there are many considerations to account for when assigning cases. This includes keeping all siblings with the same case manager and aligning teams to specific counties and judges. Additionally, there are specialized teams to consider, which promotes more effective and efficient case management.

The key drivers in maintaining caseload sizes are turnover rate and employee satisfaction. At Saint Francis Ministries, we know the first year of employment has the largest impact on overall turnover rates, therefore we have put a strategy in place referred to as the "First Year Experience." This strategy requires evaluation of the employment process, from recruiting potential employees all the way through their first year of service, and will assist in determining areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Through this process, we will reduce employee turnover and increase employee satisfaction, leading to improved outcomes for children and families.

Saint Francis Ministries has worked closely with DHHS to plan and implement the Federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) services in the Eastern Service Area. We have also provided DHHS with innovative ideas for implementation strategies that will support both agencies in achieving specific goals across Nebraska. Saint Francis Ministries is very encouraged by the steps DHHS has taken to update the 5-year plan specific to FPPSA implementation, and we look forward to continued success in this area.

Saint Francis Ministries hired outside council to help develop contracts for providers and provided DHHS with a copy of the initial template during the Readiness Reviews process. We sent another copy upon receipt of this summary.

Saint Francis Ministries has begun the process of recruiting, training, and licensing foster homes in addition to contracting with provider agencies that also provide this service. We are focusing on increasing licensed foster home capacity while simultaneously working to prevent the necessity for out-of-home placements. It should be noted that the number of children in foster care used in this measure (two licensed foster homes for every youth in foster care) includes youth placed in unlicensed kinship placements. However, the count for bed availability only counts licensed foster home beds. We have experience in other jurisdictions that have successfully created specific kinship home licenses and look forward to more conversations with DHHS regarding this opportunity, which will also draw down more IV-E funds. We will also continue to work with providers to ensure the total number of beds licensed is maximized, and continue efforts to recruit new licensed foster homes.

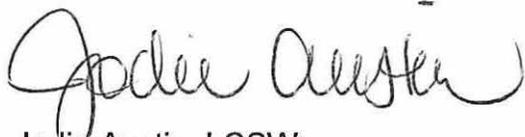
Assisting eligible families with accessing services and supports offered through non-profit and community organizations and DHHS's Economic Assistance programs is a core element of practice for child welfare professionals. While information regarding families who access public benefits can be seen by case management professionals in the data system called Nebraska Family Online Client User System (NFOCUS), there is no current functionality within that system to extract data for families who were offered or referred for these kinds of services. Saint Francis Ministries will continue to work with the DHHS teams to identify data needs and create solutions for reporting.

Providing timely payments to subcontractors is an essential business function that ensures community agencies can maintain operations. Transitioning billing functions from one payment system to NFOCUS, as required by contract, was a cumbersome task and had the potential for major disruption. Additional complications included an expedited contract start date, inaccurate rate reports, and major NFOCUS data entry errors that led to complications with providing full payments to subcontractors. Another issue is the requirement to pay providers from the "Rejected Claims Report" from NFOCUS. While doing so ensured standard accounting practices, audit compliance, and maximized IV-E draw down, it also led to an inability for Saint Francis Ministries to

make payments for services that were not supported by authorizations as quickly as we had hoped.

Saint Francis Ministries is very grateful for the partnership, understanding, and help from the provider agencies in the Eastern Service Area. Through that support, Saint Francis Ministries and DHHS were able to forge ahead with identifying and correcting systemic data issues and great strides have been made regarding timely and accurate payments.

While there will always be room for improvement, we remain pleased with the steady progress as we work together to provide healing and hope to children and families.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jodie Austin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jodie Austin, LCSW
Regional Vice President
Saint Francis Ministries