



LB 1173 Reimaging Child Welfare in Nebraska

Workgroup Monthly Status Report

March 2023

Monthly Accomplishments, Highlights, and Planned Activities

Accomplishments

- March 2nd the Stephen Group (TSG) presented at the Nebraska Children’s Community Well-Being Monthly State Partner meeting where there was a robust discussion around their “Thriving Families, Safer Children Working Agreements” – draft document reviewed by TSG
- March 13th LB 1173 Workgroup meeting held in Omaha and virtually - *see Meeting Minutes for update*
- March 13th to 17th included several engagement sessions with diverse stakeholders including law enforcement, lived experience, CFS staff, and tribal members. These were productive sessions that yielded a great deal of perspective and insight into the current state of the NE child welfare system for a range of stakeholders. *See Highlights and Emerging Issues/Key Themes below*
- March 22nd Open forum with the Buffalo County Community Collaborative. John Stephen (TSG) attended with Nanette Simmons (DHHS)
- Individual interviews held with stakeholders and subject matter experts (SMEs) in Public Health, Medicaid, Child Welfare to discuss issues related to Safe Plan of Care, MCO support/coordination opportunities, and potential funding stream opportunities related to these areas
- Connections made with lived experience and child welfare advocates, including individuals from Nebraska Children & Families Foundation (NCFE), Annie E. Casey Foundation. Meetings requested with Head Start, Area Agencies on Aging, the Omaha Urban League and several LatinX orgs
- Research conducted on disproportionality; review of data related to placement and licensing of kinship/relative homes, call center reporting
- TSG continues to track and review the work of CEO Smith’s Behavioral Health Assessment Workgroup for alignment
- Completed survey questions for County Attorneys related to key principles contained in LB 1173 that will be sent the week of April 3rd
- Initial Finance Workgroup meeting held on March 29th
- Corresponded with Kari Rumbaugh, Assistant Deputy Administrator of Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation; setting up front line probation staff focus groups, participation of local probation staff in community forums and interviews of administrative staff
- Reviewed Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Title IV E Prevention Plan “candidacy” definitions best practice for Connecticut, Indiana, New York, Florida and the District of Columbia
- Statutory review of current case management rules under way

Highlights

Feedback received from engagement sessions with individuals with lived experience and providers

- Placement disruptions occur frequently and are traumatizing
- Communication issues with CFS case workers in the Omaha returning calls to families and updating on case plan
- Transition planning for youth in foster care should happen earlier than when the child is 18/19 and being transitioned out



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- Lived Experience needs be valued
- Parents with disabled children sometimes feel isolated and unsupported
- Behavioral health and addiction issues may be missed or sometimes dismissed
- Peer support for families is a valuable option and a right for families in Nebraska, but there is often a delay in having peers put in place and many parents do not know of or fully appreciate this service until months after their child has been removed
- Providers in the community would like better data and “flourishing metrics” to show outcomes. They are not afraid of monitoring for outcomes and being held accountable as long as there is better data
- Providers would like to have access to on-going system of record that can be shared across systems with proper consent
- Staff shortages making it a challenge to keep up with parental inquiries about children’s status after placement
- Disparities among families of color regarding removals
- The need for more equitable recruitment and training of foster parents
- The need to review statutes during Transformation to ensure less punitive and more supportive

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Feedback received from engagement sessions with CFS staff in Lincoln

- Placement challenges for children and youth with high trauma, behavioral health needs, aggressive, assaultive, and sexualized; shared living, extended family homes, and residential providers are unwilling to take these kids even where homes are available
- Difficulty finding foster homes for older youth
- Some provider relationships have been damaged during privatization/COVID era and need to be repaired
- Some providers are not following contract terms and go without repercussion (example given, transportation required and not doing it)
- “Through the Eyes of the Child” initiative in Nebraska Judicial Branch is a best practice that is paying dividends in the Lincoln area.
- The need for revamping N-FOCUS database
- Child Support should hold parents more accountable
- Need for better education in the schools about reporting – “is it necessary to always call in a report to the hotline?”

Feedback received from engagement session with tribal nations

- Psychiatric service crisis - Lack of psychiatric services upon discharge following hospitalization
- Need for access to Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse outpatient services in the community
- Tribes want more recognition that they are not just communities, but sovereign nations and have their own “agencies” under the law, so any intersectoral focus on LB 1173 should include the tribal nations as an “Agency” partner
- “Come to the tribes” when developing the trust needed; respect the strength of the tribal nations
- The need to build services “inside the tribal culture”
- State workers need to respect and understand traditional values
- Lack of services available west of Lincoln for crisis and high need care cases. Transportation is also an issue
- There is a lot of strength in tribal placements but no services to support treating trauma, which is a need
- Need for an understanding of what trauma is for people that live on reservations
- DHHS has really improved relationship over the years – “Been a positive journey over the last 12 1/2 years”
- Quality of care on reservations is high - lots of capacity and strength in the community and tribal families that can be used for kinship placement
- Families and youth voices need to be heard within the system

Feedback received from engagement session with rural sheriffs

- Mental health resources and funding for them are significant areas of need – “We are seeing more and more Mental Health issues than we ever have in children of young ages; “Sheriffs struggling to find behavioral health resources/where to send these youth”
- Sheriffs would like more information on services available to children, parents and family



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- Lack of resources in rural Nebraska. “There is little in our community to tell parents where to go”
- “Would help to have more Mental Health professionals in the schools to do community work”
- Schools are viewed as a resource: “School systems can steer kids to a successful life”
- Focus on prevention
- A co-responder program to triage is something Sheriffs see as helpful, but question where the money will come from to fund the program
- No real system of crisis response in the rural communities
- Good relationship with CFS and Probation

Other/Practice

- Prenatal Plan of Safe Care (POSC) Program still in the early stages with only 2 pilot sites; CPS Hotline vs POSC Notification; hospitals have not consistently used the POSC notification pathway, instead providers have called all exposed infants into the child abuse hotline, resulting in unintended consequences – CFS required by policy to open a case whenever a physician or medical professional makes a report on a child aged 0-3, causing increased number of reports opened on low-risk families. Tribal partners were not represented at the site visit or within the steering committee for POSC initiative. There will be concerted effort to secure tribal representation going forward. There are 3 MCOs sitting on the steering committee but their role is not yet mapped out nor is their accountability for POSC support or collaboration. Currently the only outcome required is identifying infants who are drug exposed at the time of birth and how many POSCs are completed.
- Behavioral Health Assessment Workgroup synthesis: systems improvement initiatives are ongoing on a macro-state level as well as on a child well-being level. Behavioral Health assessment instruments are being discussed on a pediatric, primary care, child welfare, and general population level indicating a need for alignment and coordination of the use of chosen Assessment tools for specific purposes across Medicaid, Behavioral Health and Child Welfare.
- Continued discussions with Community Collaboratives have found a very robust network of providers coming together at the local level that represent many organizations. Established community pathways that could play a vital role in Reimagining Child Well-Being in Nebraska

Finance

- TSG providing Finance Workgroup with ideas around finance priorities to leverage federal funding across all areas of service by increasing penetration rates and improving outcomes of services and care for foster children
- Connected with Dr. Josh Kramer, Executive VP of NCFE on work they are doing with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Nebraska DHHS, and the Children’s Funding Project on fiscal mapping to identify various funding streams coming into Nebraska.



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- During Plan of Safe Care (POSC) interviews, noted that CFS is still exploring opportunities for the use of braided funding through behavioral health and Medicaid to support and sustain the prenatal POSC implementation

Emerging Issues/Key Themes

- Lack of mental health and substance abuse services, especially in rural Nebraska
- The need to build trust among all system partners
- The need to listen to families - co-creation of plans of care
- Prevention as a first choice
- Enhance social supports
- Schools as a real partner in system re-design
- Communication and follow up with families should be a priority of case workers
- Trauma sensitivity in all services and supports for families/children and youth
- Re-imagine supportive case work, where silos between families and case workers are broken down
- The need for more shared accountability
- All agencies recognize success by one is tied to success for all (Success Alignment)
- Outcomes, rather than outputs prioritized
- N-FOCUS system reform needs to be a part of Reimagining Framework (need for more useful data and technology)
- Placement challenges, especially with high needs and older youth
- Provider relationship challenges
- The need for improved training for educators and mandatory reporters in the schools about alternative options to reporting
- Heightened increase in children and youth mental health issues being observed by law enforcement in rural Nebraska
- The need for funding for behavioral health services and promoting more access
- Need for broader community support for high-risk families, which may require financial investment
- Foster care stipends may be insufficient
- How to best align NDE, Medicaid and Child Welfare resources
- Improve support to families fostering special needs children
- Community Collaborative work that is on-going could be a key prevention model going forward in developing Framework for transformation



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- Attention needs to be given to reviewing CFS substance exposed infant mandatory reporting policy

Planned Activities for April

- Next Workgroup Meeting will be held on April 6th at 5220 South 16th Street, Lincoln Nebraska from 2 PM to 4 PM
- Delivery to Workgroup of LB 1173 Child Welfare Practice and Finance Model Framework Vision/Mission/Values and Practice Priorities Draft
- Continued meetings with stakeholders including tribal stakeholders, ecumenical leaders, and lived experience; research on promising practices that help mitigate disproportionality in child welfare
- April 4th
 - Community Forum in Columbus (afternoon and evening session)
 - Meeting with Community Collaborative in Columbus
 - Focus group Meeting with probation front line staff in Columbus
 - Focus group with CFS front line staff in Columbus
- April 5th focus group with probation front line staff in Omaha at Juvenile Probation office, 1723 Harney Street 1 PM to 3 PM
- April 6th meeting with probation administrative staff in Lincoln at 521 South 14th Street Suite 500 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM
- Other meetings being scheduled in April with courts, providers and GAL/continued finance subcommittee meetings
- Week of April 3rd survey of county attorneys

Issues/Risk

- No risk

[The Annual NE Juvenile Justice Association \(NJJA\) Conference will be held May 3rd in Kearney.](#) How can LB 1173 effort be connected?

Project Status

On track