

Child Welfare Strategic Transformation

Putting Wisconsin's families first



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Housing Access and Affordability

Concrete supports for Wisconsin families, such as housing assistance, are key to keeping children and families safely together. In Wisconsin, removals based on housing **declined 33%** during the pandemic-related federal moratorium on evictions. This decline has shown housing instability to be a preventable reason for child welfare removals.

For years, child welfare agencies across Wisconsin have been addressing the needs of families experiencing housing insecurity. DCF is continuing to explore exciting public and private partnerships to help support families and local agencies with this basic need. As part of the effort to understand the current housing service array, agencies across the state provided data to the Bureau of Regional Operations (BRO) showing how they support families who are unhoused or underhoused.

Overwhelmingly, agencies stated that in cases where there is a protective or safety plan in place Targeted Safety Support Funds (TSSF) have been instrumental in providing a range of supports, including housing supports. Other common practices cited by agencies, included referring families for Family Unification Program (FUP) or Foster Youth to Independence ([FYI](#)) vouchers when they meet eligibility criteria.

Many agencies mentioned limited resource availability, particularly in rural areas of the state. Erin Schiferel, Adam County children and family services manager, offered this about the challenges:

“We have limited low-income housing, long wait lists, and very lengthy wait to get an apartment. We do have a local organization which can assist if someone is homeless for even one night (car, camper, hotel) with searching for housing, but again, the housing options are limited.” Even with these challenges Erin offered some innovative solutions. “With the lack of safe and affordable housing we do assist families in looking for subsidized housing in Wisconsin Rapids. For those involved in TSSF, we have used funding to make the current housing safe for the children in any way we can-repairs to structural issues, exterminator services, etc.”



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Another great example of innovation comes from Jefferson County. Brent Ruehlow, deputy director of Jefferson County Human Services, shared,

“Due to the local housing crisis, we knew we had to begin to do something different to assist our families facing the housing crisis, while assisting with reunification and placement prevention. We started years ago by renting hotel rooms for families, which was successful, but we wanted to develop something more sustainable that looked more permanent and in line with a Housing First type of model. We were able to add a local house in downtown Jefferson that the county owned, which we made available to CPS and YJ families that needed housing to reunify or to prevent removal.

At times this has meant efforts to engage a parent to the point of relocating to this house, or as we like to call it, “our little house”, to live with their children to avoid care. Other times, we have initiated intense Family Find efforts to locate a non-custodial parent or even a like-kin adult to avoid a move into an unknown foster home or group home by having a relative or like-kin provider move in with the child.

The unique examples are endless, and we have not seen a child enter care after utilizing our “little house”. This worked so well that we then began renting two separate three unit buildings that we were able to use exclusively for our families in the same vein as our “little house” concept. **After a year, we found so much success with this expansion that we bought both units consisting of one and two bedroom units and have found housing for single parents, families, young adults transiting into independent living, as well as adults in our behavioral health programs.**

We have also been able to develop relationships with area landlords who have rented to our child welfare families, knowing we are providing financial support and case management. With these various opportunities we have seen families become self-sustaining as they have often transitioned into longer term housing without county assistance. These programs have allowed us to build individualized plans and leases for each circumstance, ranging from escalating rental payments to full self-pay situations by the client. The long-term savings to



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our alternate care system has been tremendous, but the longer-term self-fulfillment for our families has been the best part.”

At DCF, we appreciate all the work agencies are doing to address housing security among child welfare-involved families and look forward to exploring more ways to support these efforts.

If you know of other innovative local practices to support families experiencing housing insecurity, please send a note to the [Family First inbox](#).

QRTP Provider Update

The QRTP implementation is just 75 days young and we are excited about future opportunities for certified facilities. DCF’s QRTP team welcomed 11 more facilities to the [growing list](#) of certified QRTP providers. Additionally, we released an [updated Child Welfare Professionals Desk Guide](#), [Nursing Hotline Flyer](#), and a [benefits of QRTP](#) document for potential QRTP applicants.

We are pleased to announce the Children’s Court Improvement Project (CCIP) trained over 1,000 legal partners in changes to the judicial process related to QRTP and Family First. DCF trained over 850 child welfare professionals in the QRTP Emergency Rule and technical training in work-related tasks in eWiSACWIS.

In the new year there will be more opportunities for child welfare professionals to discuss QRTP implementation and receive technical assistance with eWiSACWIS forms and documentation in the form of office hours with DCF staff. You can find the dates and times [here](#). Additionally, feedback sessions from providers and county and community stakeholders will be held to help inform folks of necessary changes and updates needed in eWiSACWIS, development and revision of the QRTP permanent rule, and other technical issues encountered during implementation.

For the most recent information about QRTP, please visit our QRTP [webpage](#). If you have questions or would like to schedule a one-on-one technical assistance virtual meeting with DCF staff regarding QRTP, please email [Dana Johnson](#).



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eWiSACWIS Changes

You may have noticed some updates to eWiSACWIS around placements in qualified residential treatment programs (QRTP). As a reminder, a video outlining the minor changes to case plans, permanency plans, and requirements related to expecting and parenting youth in out-of-home care can be found [here](#). Additional updates will be provided in our January 2022 newsletter.

Lived Experience Provides Parent Leader Meeting Update

Over the last few months, the lived experience team has collected important feedback from the DCF hosted parent leader meetings. This feedback will enhance the ongoing child welfare strategic transformation efforts to better serve families and children in home. In addition, many staff members from the Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP) attended parent leader meetings last month to help educate parents on child welfare practices. From these meetings, the lived experience team recruited volunteers to help work on future projects including the Tailored Court Conditions project and the Safety and Workforce Language project.

To increase awareness for lived experience initiatives and expand the parent leader group, informational sessions were held for child welfare professionals to learn more about what DCF is doing to engage lived experience. Twenty-five child welfare professionals from 15 different counties participated in the sessions and some of the highlights include:

- Learning what other counties are doing to enhance lived experience.
- Getting input on ways we can continue to incorporate parent voice within system change.
- Received increased interest for parents who would like to participate in the Parent Leader Group.

Lived experience voice is a new and innovative approach for our division as we continue to engage parents. This input is critical to our overall child welfare strategic transformation. Continue to check out the [Lived Experience](#) page to stay in the know for the latest updates.



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New Child Welfare Professional Training

The New Worker Training Team continues to develop the new training model for child welfare professionals as mentioned in the fall Town Hall meeting and last month's newsletter. As the program comes into sharper focus, so do its benefits to professionals and their agencies. These benefits include:

- Innovative, state-of-the-art approach to learning.
- Focus on essential skills for working with families, including partnering, cultural responsibility and a commitment to keeping children safe in their homes.
- Real time and self-paced learning components.
- Opportunities to learn with peers from around the state, while minimizing costly, time-consuming travel.

Over the next few months, this newsletter will provide updates on the status of the new training program, including important transition dates, lunch and learns, and webinars. For the latest on the training program, please visit the [web page](#).

Spring Town Hall Meetings

Spring topics are already in the works. The DCF Spring Town Hall is tentatively set for April 2022 and will cover a variety of subjects related to the Strategic Transformation and Family First. Please send suggestions to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.

For those who were not able to attend the most recent Fall Town Halls, you can view the recordings on our [Family First website](#).

Communications Update

As transformation efforts continue, check the [transformation web page](#) for updates and additional resources. Articles within this newsletter are hyperlinked to the newest information available on the DCF Family First website. The new year will bring updates to our videos on the Family First pages, and additional tools your team can use.

For more information or questions, please reach out to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.



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Happy Holidays!

From all of us working on Family First initiatives at DCF, we want to wish you and yours a very happy holiday season! With a new year on the horizon, we are excited to be on this path with you transforming the child welfare system to better serve children and families in Wisconsin. A lot of work has been completed in the past few years, and 2022 is looking so bright!

As we head into the new year, we wanted to reflect on the four major priorities of the child welfare strategic transformation.

1. To strengthen local communities + build services to support families in their homes.
2. To keep children in family-like settings whenever possible.
3. To improve our group care system.
4. To support our workforce with solutions and improvements.

DCF's Family First teams are focused on these initiatives now and the work in progress is a positive reflection of these transformative efforts. We want to extend a huge, heartfelt thank you to everyone creatively working to help families every day. Your efforts are noticed, and we appreciate you!

Cheers to a new year and even stronger, more robust child welfare system.

