



DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
DIVISION OF FAMILY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY
ADMINISTRATOR'S MEMO SERIES

DFES 20-08

ISSUE DATE: 10/26/2020

DISPOSAL DATE: 12/31/2022

- ACTION
- NOTICE

PROGRAM CATEGORIES:

- W-2 - Wisconsin Works
- RA - Refugee Assistance
- CS - Child Support
- CF - Children First
- TJ - Transitional Jobs
- TMJ - Transform Milwaukee Jobs

TO: Child Support Agency Directors
W-2 Agency Directors
Tribal Child Support Agency Directors
Tribal Economic Support Directors
DCF Regional Coordinators

FROM: Connie M. Chesnik
DFES Administrator

RE: 2021-2022 Children First Program Plan Proposals

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to request plan proposals from agencies interested in providing Children First services during calendar years 2021 and 2022. This contract will be for two one-year periods unless one of the parties ends the contract after the first year.

BACKGROUND

The Children First program provides case management services to connect noncustodial parents (NCPs) with employment and job search services for work, to provide opportunities for self-improvement through enhanced case management, and employment referrals. The goal of the program is that NCPs will obtain employment and pay court-ordered child support to their families.

Over the past 30 years, many NCPs have benefited from the additional case management services offered through participation in the Children First program. CSAs may elect to offer Children First services as an initial enforcement resource in lieu of taking more punitive enforcement steps. Offering additional case management services to the NCP will allow the CSA to determine whether the NCP is willing to cooperate in finding employment.

POLICY

Agencies interested in providing Children First services in 2021 and 2022, including those agencies that currently offer Children First services, must submit a new Children First Program Plan ([Attachment 1](#)) by November 18, 2020. The plan must include a Letter of Support from the CSA in each county/tribe that will be served by the program. A sample Letter of Support is attached ([Attachment 2](#)).

As in previous years, each plan will be reviewed to determine whether it meets the core mission of the program. Agencies will be required to submit justification for the number of participant slots requested, and for currently participating agencies, the reason for any increase or decrease from the previous year. Funding will be allocated to selected agencies. Additionally, child support agencies are requested to provide methodology on how cases are prioritized to obtain Children First orders. The Bureau of Child Support (BCS) will notify the agencies selected and provide information regarding funding allocations for the 2021-2022 Children First plan period.

CHILDREN FIRST AND COVID-19

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic early in 2020, the nature of service provision by Wisconsin's CSAs has, in most cases, changed dramatically. Services that were previously provided and facilitated in person, and which depended heavily upon participants' geographic location and ability to secure reliable transportation, have now evolved into a virtual service provision model.

In cases where agencies had contractually committed to participating in specific programs, such as Children First, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, they found it necessary to make a dramatic shift in their mode of service provision, with very little time to prepare. Across the state, an impressive effort was put forth by CSAs who chose to rise to the challenge, and as a result of their hard work, we have learned that not only is the same level of service provision possible to achieve virtually, but that it can be achieved effectively.

DCF has had many months to observe new and innovative approaches to service delivery employed by our partners, and to learn which strategies have worked well and which have not. For this reason, we are including below a number of suggestions for agencies wishing to participate in Children First for the 2021-2022 contractual period.

Some ideas for enhanced service provision during the period of time in which the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect normal business operations, might include the following:

Case Management Services:

Wisconsin's CSAs have found that in the absence of building rapport with program participants via face to face contact, maintaining frequent virtual contact, whether by phone, email, or social media platforms has helped to keep participants engaged in achieving program goals. Toward this end, CSAs have found it useful to be available outside of typical business hours, as well as to provide program case managers with work cell phones to prevent them from having to block their personal phone numbers from being identified by program participants when they call. They have found that program participants are often unlikely to answer calls from blocked numbers.

Social media platforms have also proven to be very effective in the delivery of services to program participants. Through the provision of virtual case management meetings, job interviews, and job readiness instruction, participants have been able to stay connected, receive guidance, and ask questions in real time.

Two social media platforms that Wisconsin child support agencies have found to be particularly effective in virtual services delivery are FaceTime and Google Meet.

Enhanced Child Support Services:

The Children First provider may use details entered in WWP, to track NCP activities and progress in the completion of activities, job readiness assessments, and child support payments history, etc. The CF agency is also strongly encouraged to collaborate with the child support case manager as well as the child support liaison in providing enhanced case management services.

Employment Services:

One unexpected benefit of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has created new job opportunities in sectors that did not previously have a need for as many workers. For participants who may have lost employment as a result of the pandemic, encouraging them to seek work in different job sectors and to work collaboratively with other programs providing employment services, such as the W-2 program, has been an effective means of helping them obtain employment during this time period.

CHILDREN FIRST FUNDING

Funding for the 2021-2022 program will be \$1.14 million each year, the amount of funding available for employment services and activities will be up to \$800 per participant. These funds **are not** eligible for federal financial participation (FFP). Services authorized under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act for the administration of the child support program or to meet the federal match requirements of the child support program do not qualify as Children First funding. Agencies will use SPARC Line 0700 to report Children First employment services and activities with the participant.

Case management activities related to the program **are** eligible for 66% FFP reimbursement. Agencies will use SPARC Line 0701 to report Children First case management activities costs. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) will report these expenditures through the OCSE-396 Child Support quarterly expenditure report.

Per OCSE PIQ 12-02, there are several ways child support funding may be used to achieve the program's core mission - collecting and disbursing payments to families. The following case management activities may contribute to improving child support outcomes:

- identifying noncustodial parents that are unemployed, underemployed or experiencing other social and family circumstances that impede the parent's ability to pay child support
- making referrals to other service agencies
- tracking and monitoring child support payments

- follow-up and tracking noncustodial parents' activities where the court issued an order directing a noncustodial parent to attend a work program
- collecting and analyzing data, as well as entering documentation in the state child support system KIDS and (Wisconsin Works) system
- conducting timely reviews and modifications, and
- providing specialized enforcement

Case managers may be employed by private, public, or non-profit community organizations pursuant to a cooperative agreement or contract. If a case manager also performs functions unrelated to child support, the agency must allocate costs as appropriate.

DCF reserves the right to decline contracts with programs that are not meeting program requirements as referred to in this Administrator's Memo and the 2021-2022 Children First Program Guide ([Attachment 3](#)). Additionally, the state reserves the right to make appropriate shifts in funding.

CHILDREN FIRST PROGRAM GUIDE AND WWP DATA ENTRY REQUIREMENT

The 2021-2022 Children First Program Guide attached to this memo, describes current state policies and procedures for program operation. Children First case managers are required to enter participant data in the Wisconsin Works Program (WWP) on-line application. Case managers must also update the CARES system with pertinent participant information. New Children First case managers may enroll in Children First and WWP training. Trainings will be scheduled based on training needs. The child support agency must enter the court order information for CF participation in KIDS before referring the participant for Children First services.

CHILDREN FIRST PROGRAM MONITORING

DCF will routinely monitor various aspects of program implementation and operation, including financial monitoring of Children First expenditures, as well as compliance with state statutes and policies. To be eligible for reimbursement of state funding, Children First case managers are expected to complete the following processes; Clearance, Request for Assistance, Referral/Enrollment, Informal Assessment, and Work History in the WWP on-line application. Case information must also be updated in the CARES system.

Agencies are expected to demonstrate collaborations and partnerships with local, state, and community partners in their plan to provide services to Children First participants.

Children First agencies are also required to complete and submit a monthly electronic survey of drug screening, testing, and treatment results.

CHILDREN FIRST REQUIREMENTS AND STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The statutory authority and program requirements regarding the Children First program are contained in Wis. Stat. §§ 49.36, 767.55, 49.162 and Administrative Code DCF 154.

ACTION SUMMARY STATEMENT

Counties / W-2 agencies / Tribes and consortia who plan to offer Children First in 2021 and 2022 must do the following:

- Complete a Children First Program Plan form ([Attachment 1](#))
- Obtain a signed Letter of Support from each county/tribal child support office served by the Children First program ([Attachment 2](#))
- ***Submit the 2021-2022 Children First Program Plan and Letter(s) of Support to the Bureau of Child Support no later than November 18, 2020, using the email address below.***

Mail to: WI Bureau of Child Support
ATTN: Alicia Breininger
PO Box 7935
Madison WI 53707-7935

Email to: BCSINFO@Wisconsin.gov

If you are a child support agency with questions regarding the Children First program, please contact BCS via the KIDPOL Request Form, Subject Area Other – Policy Issues. Other agencies may contact BCS at BCSINFO@wisconsin.gov.

CONTACT: DCF Regional Coordinators

Attachments: [2021 and 2022 Children First Program Plan \(Attachment 1\)](#)
[Child Support Agency Letter of Support \(Attachment 2\)](#)
[2021 and 2022 Children First Program Guide \(Attachment 3\)](#)

cc: 2020 Children First Agencies
BRO Regional Coordinators
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