



Introduction to Virginia's Foster Care System

Foster Care and the Child Welfare Continuum of Services

To understand Virginia's foster care program, it is necessary to consider its place within the child welfare continuum of services. The child welfare continuum includes the interventions and services provided during a child protective services (CPS) investigation or family assessment, CPS ongoing and prevention casework, foster care, and adoption and post-adoption services. It also includes the work involved in the recruitment of foster families. Although each program area may have a different function, they do not operate autonomously, and the work is interconnected. All program areas focus on providing and ensuring safety, permanency, and well-being for the children we serve. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) continues to identify and build upon opportunities to improve the child welfare system.

The beginning sections of this binder (identified by the heading, "VDSS Initiatives") are current initiatives VDSS is developing and implementing in partnership with our community stakeholders. For example, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), which was adopted in February 2018, includes historic reforms to the child welfare financing streams by providing prevention services to children in families who are at imminent risk of entering foster care. It underscores the importance of children growing up in families and seeks to avoid the traumatic experience of children being separated from their families and entering foster care. Specifically, federal reimbursement will be available for trauma-informed mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and in-home parenting skills training to safely maintain in-home family placements. It also aims to improve the well-being of children already in foster care by incentivizing states to reduce placement of children in residential treatment, and instead place children in the least restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate to their individual needs. This legislation marks a sweeping overhaul of the child welfare system, the largest seen in nearly 40 years. In preparation, VDSS has implemented the Three Branch Model approach (legislative, judicial, and executive) to integrating the FFPSA into our practice.

Another driver to our system is the ongoing development and maintenance of a committed and competent workforce. The increasing staff turnover rates in child welfare are a nationwide concern. VDSS has partnered with the Butler Institute to ensure we have the most skilled and trained workforce to do this challenging work. Other workforce strategies to address this issue include reinstating the child welfare stipend program in partnership with Virginia's colleges and universities. VDSS is in the process of designing a mobile application through the COMPASS (Comprehensive Permanency Assessment and Safety System) program for frontline staff to utilize in the field to meet the demanding but necessary casework documentation requirements,

and more importantly, to allow staff more time to engage and partner with families, and also increase job satisfaction.

In order to understand the challenges our children in foster care face, it is important to understand the entire child welfare continuum of services and how each impacts the entire system. We anticipate the current initiatives in foster care and across the continuum of child welfare programs will continue to improve outcomes for children and families served in Virginia.

About the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS)

VDSS is one of the largest agencies in the Commonwealth, partnering with 120 local departments of social services, along with faith-based and non-profit organizations, to promote the well-being of children and families statewide. We proudly serve alongside 1,650 (state) and 8,500 (local) human services professionals throughout the Social Services System, who ensure that thousands of Virginia's most vulnerable citizens have access to the best services and benefits available to them. Together, we work each day to serve, empower, and create opportunities for brighter futures.



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