



Foster Care in Wyoming

Lindsey Schilling
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WYOMING DEPARTMENT
OF FAMILY SERVICES



Presentation Outline

- What is Foster Care?
- Who is in Foster Care?
- Who provides Foster Care?
- When is Foster Care provided?
- What is a MDT?
- What is the goal of Foster Care?
- Adoption Overview

What is “Foster Care”?

- The Department of Family Services (DFS) supports two distinct categories of cases in respect to where a child resides - in-home vs. foster care
 - In-home case - a case in which the child(ren) was(were) not removed from the home. In-home cases can also include situations where a child(ren) has(have) been placed back in the home on a trial home placement for longer than 6 months
 - Foster care cases - a case in which a child has been removed from the home and placed in an alternate 24-hour substitute care setting. These alternate settings can include a foster family home, a relative foster home, a group home, a residential treatment center, a crisis shelter, child care institutions and pre-adoptive homes. In foster care cases, through a court action, the child(ren) have been court ordered into the legal and physical custody of the Department.
 - 12-month average monthly caseload: 1,871 in-home cases, 858 foster care cases

“Who” is in Foster Care?

- In Wyoming, there are three “doors” into foster care:
 - 1) Child Protection Act - focused on child abuse and neglect
 - 2) Children in Need of Supervision Act - children/youth who are habitually truant, disobedient or ungovernable and beyond contract, but whose offenses do not rise to the level of breaking the law
 - 3) Juvenile Justice Act - to include Juvenile Probation
- In Wyoming, DFS administers both the child welfare and juvenile justice programs. In some states, this isn't the case.
 - Research has shown that as many as $\frac{2}{3}$ of youth involved in the juvenile justice system have a maltreatment background.
- Wyoming's foster care population reflects youth from all three “doors”. A child(ren) may also transition between programs, or exit foster care and re-enter through another “door”.
 - It's not uncommon for a child(ren) to enter foster care due to abuse or neglect, and later engage in behaviors or activities that lead to a juvenile delinquency action

“Who” provides Foster Care ?

- Foster family home (relative & non-relative)
 - 21 years of age and older
 - Fingerprint based background checks to include state and national criminal & sex offender registries and Wyoming’s Central Registry
 - 30 hours of initial training, CPR certification, successful home study
 - 2-year recertification - updated background checks and 24 hours of continuing education
 - 73% of all out of home placements are youth in family-like settings (33% of placements are in relative care, 58% are in non-relative care)
- Congregate care
 - DFS-licensed group homes, crisis centers, residential treatment centers, and psychiatric residential treatment facilities, as well as the Wyoming Girls School, Wyoming Boys School, detention, jail and hospitals
 - 26% of all out of home placements are youth in congregate care settings

“When” is Foster Care provided?

- In Wyoming, DFS does not have statutory authority to take protective custody of a child(ren).
- Shelter care hearing- no later than 48 hours after protective custody has been taken
 - Court determines whether the child(ren)’s full time shelter care is required pending further proceedings.
 - Child(ren) may be placed in the legal custody of DFS or in the custody and supervision of a parent/guardian under the supervision of DFS, etc. with or without additional conditions
- The court will also appoint a guardian ad litem (GAL) and the multidisciplinary team (MDT)
- Primary objective is to locate and place children with relatives or kin whenever possible, and to keep siblings together.

What is a MDT?

- Court-appointment multidisciplinary team charged with collectively informing and monitoring case plan adherence, assessing the best interests, safety and well-being of the child(ren) involved, discussing permanency plans and making recommendations to the court
- MDT reports and recommendations are provided to the court ahead of review/permanency hearings
- MDT members include: parents/guardians, school district representative, DFS, a psychiatrist/psychological/mental health professional, district attorney or designee, GAL, volunteer lay advocate (i.e. CASA), and foster parents

What is the “goal” of foster care?

- Reunification with a child’s biological family whenever possible.
 - FFY21 - FFY23 2,156 children were reunified and exited care (72%)
- Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 requires reasonable efforts toward maintenance and reunification of children with their birth parents
- 15 of 22 - consider termination of parental rights (TPRs) and alternative permanency arrangements. TPR actions are initiated separate from the existing court case and include due process rights for parents.
 - Permanency options include adoption, guardianship or another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). APPLA is a permanency option available to youth 16+ when other efforts have been unsuccessful.

Adoption

- Two avenues for adoption in Wyoming -
 - Foster care
 - Private adoption agencies
- Private adoption agencies in Wyoming:
 - Fall under DFS Substitute Care Licensing rules
 - Rules outline basic operational and administrative requirements for certification

- On March 1, 2024 - 91 children in foster care had a primary permanency goal of adoption - 17 were legally free

Questions?

Lindsey Schilling MBA, CPM

Senior Administrator, Social Services Division

Department of Family Services

Lindsey.Schilling1@wyo.gov

307-777-6203