

FOSTER CARE

Foster care is provided to children and families when children must be removed from their homes because their parents or guardians are not able to provide the care they need for their safety and well-being. Foster care is intended to provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children until they can either be safely returned home or placed in another planned permanency arrangement.

- Children are most often placed in foster care due to allegations of abuse or maltreatment on the part of their parents or caregivers. Foster care placements also can occur for other reasons. If a child has been adjudicated by the court as a person in need of supervision (PINS) or a juvenile delinquent (JD), he/she may be temporarily placed in foster care for rehabilitation and treatment. A child may be placed in foster care after being found by a court to be a destitute child.
- When children are placed in foster care, their legal custody is transferred to the commissioner of the local department of social services (LDSS) in which they reside. This means that the LDSS has the full responsibility for their safety and well-being. Children in foster care can live in a variety of settings, including foster family boarding homes, agency operated boarding homes, supervised independent living programs (SILPs), group homes, group residences, and institutions.

When a child is placed in foster care, caseworkers are responsible for finding safe and suitable homes for children as quickly as possible. These responsibilities include:

- Identifying relatives and other suitable adults who are able and willing to care for the child on either a temporary or permanent basis
- Arranging for the provision of services to meet any identified medical, behavioral, or educational needs the child may have
- Informing and working with the child's family, non-respondent parents, and relatives with the goal of making it possible for the child to be returned home safely
- Arranging for services and/or training to support foster parents, if needed
- Arranging for visits between the child and his/her parents, siblings, and other relatives as permitted by the court
- Working with the case planner and case manager to establish the best permanency planning goal for the child, while planning concurrently for alternative goals
- Preparing permanency hearing reports and attending permanency hearings in Family Court
- Supporting foster families when a child is removed from the home or is discharged from foster care
- Preparing children and youth for discharge from foster care, including the transition from foster care to adulthood

THE KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (KINGAP) is a federal and state program designed to help children live permanently with adults with whom they have a strong connection,

when the children are not able to reunify with their families. A relative caregiver (this could be an extended family member or close friend) assumes legal guardianship for the child. This program provides financial assistance to these caregivers and medical benefits for the child.

To be eligible for KinGAP, the caregiver must be related to the child or one of the child's siblings by blood, marriage, or adoption or have a positive relationship (like a family friend, godparent, or neighbor) that already existed before the child's current foster care placement. The prospective guardian is required to have served as a foster parent to the child for six consecutive months before entering a KinGAP agreement.

KinGAP does not require that parental rights be terminated.

ESSEX COUNTY CONTRACTS WITH TOGETHER FOR YOUTH (FORMALLY KNOWN AS BERKSHIRE FARMS) SERVICES TO PROVIDE:

All foster care services for youth, birth families, foster parents, and collateral stakeholders. These services include, but are not limited to, all case management and coordination, assessment, treatment planning, visitation, transportation, 24/7 crisis intervention and facilitation of placements. There are two different levels of care identified for child and family: Treatment and Therapeutic. The level of care depends on the needs of the child.

TREATMENT FOSTER CARE

Treatment Foster Care program services youth with less therapeutic needs. All treatment level youth are assigned a Family Specialist with a ratio of 12:1. The Family Specialist and Treatment Foster Care program provides the following:

- All birth family, sibling and permanency resource visits.
- Monthly contacts with birth families, children and foster families.
- Independent living services, as applicable for youth age 14+
- Enhanced trainings for foster parents, biological parents and youth
- Respite opportunities
- 24/7 support to all families
- After hours crisis support/management
- After hours placements
- Behavioral Health Evaluation within 30 days of admission (see Behavioral Health Services)
- Support of Nursing staff for youth medical needs

THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE

Therapeutic Foster Care program services youth with higher therapeutic/clinical needs requiring more intensive services and support. All therapeutic level youth are assigned a Family Specialist with a ratio of 6:1. A lower caseload allows for additional intensive level of service and support for the youth and family. The Berkshire Therapeutic Foster Care program provides the following:

- Psychological/psychiatric assessments conducted by a psychologist or Psychiatrist through Berkshire

- Coordinate medication management by a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner
- Community Family Assessments
- All transportation
- All birth family, sibling and resource visits
- Independent living services, as applicable for youth age 14+
- Discharge planning beginning at intake
- Enhanced trainings for foster parents, biological parents and youth
- Respite opportunities
- 24/7 support to all families
- After hours crisis support/management

WORKING WITH BIO-PARENTS:

Encourage and enhance reunification of children with their parents through supervised visitation working with the parents on safety and parenting skills and/or clarifying and identifying appropriate permanency plans for the children placed in their care.

NURSING SERVICES:

Nursing staff will coordinate and confirm completion of comprehensive health services including an initial 24-hour health screen. The Nursing program will be responsible to ensure that a youth's medical and dental needs are met.

HOME FINDING SERVICES:

Provides Essex County a Home Finder to recruit, train, dually certify (Treatment and Therapeutic) and maintain all future foster homes.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES:

The purpose of the Independent Living Program is to help youth in foster care, or those recently discharged from care, develop the life skills, knowledge and education they need so they can live independently as self-sufficient, contributing members of their community.

Beginning with life skills assessment and continuing with a combination of classroom and experiential learning opportunities, youth will develop an array of skills and knowledge about living on their own and the resources in their community

PREVENTIVE RESPITE:

Facilitate preventative respite for Essex County youth who meet agency referral criteria and when a match can be identified for up to 21 days.