

## Family First – Kinship and Foster Care Workgroup Charter v.1.21.2020

This charter creates a clear and mutually agreeable description of the Connecticut Kinship and Foster Care Workgroup’s role and purpose. The charter may be revised as better ways of functioning emerge and will be reviewed when major changes to the group’s structure or function occur to ensure relevance and appropriateness to the work.

### Definitions

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For the purposes of this charter, the term relative includes those individuals who are related by birth, adoption or marriage to a child and the term kin includes those individuals who have a close bond, friendship or other affiliation with a child or the child’s family that is not based in a familial relationship. The term caregiver here is broad, including relatives and kin who are in formal and informal caregiving relationships, ranging from family arrangements to DCF supported foster care.

### Purpose

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The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) was passed in February 2018, introducing historic reforms with the potential to dramatically change child welfare systems across the country. Among other provisions, Family First includes provisions to help keep children safely with their families and avoid the traumatic experience of entering foster care, while helping to ensure that children are placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate to their special needs when foster care is needed.

Connecticut has embraced the legislation as a tool for system transformation and outcomes improvement. Connecticut seeks to engage families, youth, experts, sister agencies and staff in developing its response to Family First, by focusing on the opportunities to become a prevention oriented system. Connecticut seeks to ensure that:

- Parents and kin are better equipped, supported and informed to raise their children, resulting in overall better outcomes for children and families;
- Children maintain their culture, connection to community ties, and access to their extended families;
- Workers gain access to tools, resources and services to assist in their efforts to better serve children and families;
- Connecticut continues to build upon its prior efforts to ensure the delivery of quality services to include evidence based practices; and,
- Where appropriate, there are overall cost savings to the system of care.

### Workgroup Goals & Key Deliverables

The goal of the Kinship and Foster Care workgroup is to increase Connecticut’s ability to support children’s safe, supportive and nurturing care in the most family-like caregiving setting possible when children cannot be with their parents. As such, the deliverables of this workgroup are to:

- (1) **Identify** and assess **barriers** to children living with relatives or kin – both in informal family arrangements or formal and legal arrangements.
- (2) Recommend ways **to address and mitigate the identified barriers** and **support relatives and kin** better so that they can meet ongoingly the needs of children who live with them.

- (3) Identify **strategies to engage** relatives and kin at the onset of the potential disruption in a birth parent or caregiver relationship and continue engagement for as long as the agency is involved with the family.
- (4) Identify **strategies to increase children’s placement with well-prepared kin** and family-based caregivers when foster care is necessary as a primary way to avoid congregate care.
- (5) Identify **key components of a Kinship Navigator** program that can help facilitate relatives getting care for children outside of formal systems of care.

To accomplish its work, the workgroup must consider the experience of children in non-parental care in the community, during contact with DCF, while in DCF care, and after exit from DCF care. A connecting principle for the workgroup is to identify opportunities to avoid deeper system involvement no matter what point along the continuum of DCF contact a child and family in non-parental care is identified as in need of additional support.

The figure below connects the workgroup’s deliverables to where non-parental caregivers caring for children may be identified as in need of additional support to stay intact and/or avoid deeper system engagement. The grid is intended to guide the focus of the areas of recommendations so that the workgroup is inclusive of the different dynamics that may impact relatives/kin, depending on where they may experience contact with the child welfare system. It is not intended to convey that a relative/kin should move through all aspects of system involvement.

<b>Areas of Recommendations</b>	<b>~Relative/Kin Stage of System Involvement~</b>			
	<b>In the Community</b>  (no ongoing contact with DCF)	<b>During Careline Engagement &amp; Voluntary Services</b>  (e.g., during investigation, FAR and voluntary services)	<b>In Foster Care</b>	<b>After Achieving Permanency</b>
<i>Identify and assess barriers to living with relatives/kin</i>	✓	✓		✓
<i>Address and mitigate barriers/supporting relatives/kin</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Engaging relatives/kin during contact with DCF</i>		✓	✓	
<i>Preparation of family-based caregivers</i>			✓	✓
<i>Kinship Navigator components</i>	✓			✓

### **Scope & Governance**

The Kinship and Foster Care workgroup will report its recommendations to a governance committee, which is then responsible for making all decisions related to Family First. The governance committee is a committee comprised of DCF executive level staff along with various stakeholders and partners. The

governance committee will review all workgroup recommendations, raise questions as needed and make decisions about the incorporation of those recommendations into the state's title IV-E Prevention Plan and related plans.

The Kinship and Foster Care workgroup's scope is to use data and qualitative information, the experiences of workgroup members and other invited guests to identify recommendations that will ensure that children are able to live safely and be supported by relatives and kin or family-based foster care providers.

While the scope of this workgroup requires knowledge of programs and services for relatives, kin and foster family homes caring for children, assessing the entire service array and recommending specific program and services, including kinship navigator models, is the province of the Programs and Services workgroup.

Additionally, other workgroups are tasked with related work, a description of their charges follow:

- *Candidacy* – Develop a data-informed definition of candidates for the Prevention Plan and the target population for broader prevention efforts.
- *Programs and Service Array* –Align Connecticut's vast array of services and programs to the identified needs of the children and families served, while ensuring a focus on quality services and interventions.
- *Fiscal & Revenue Enhancement* - Enhance and maximize Connecticut's federal reimbursement claiming.
- *Community Partnership & Family and Child Engagement* - Support full participation of parents, youth, legislative officials, community providers, and other state agencies in the planning, development and communication of Connecticut's plan.

It will be the responsibility of the Kinship and Foster Care workgroup co-leads and Family First co-leads to reinforce the distinctions between the groups and to raise questions to the governance committee when workgroup charges need clarification. Additionally, the Kinship and Foster Care workgroup co-leads will create a running list of *Parking Lot* issues and questions that are more appropriately discussed in other workgroups. As needed, the Kinship and Foster Care workgroup will work in collaboration with these other groups, answering questions and sharing information generated by the Kinship and Foster Care workgroup to allow other workgroups to meet their responsibilities.

### **Membership, Roles and Responsibilities**

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The members of this workgroup have been selected to serve based on their lived experience, expertise and perspectives. To support a collaborative environment where each member's contributions can inform the recommendations, the role of each workgroup member is to:

- Respect each other's ideas, provide constructive feedback, and have balanced participation so that we hear perspectives of family, public agencies and providers.
- Attend all meetings, unless extenuating circumstances do not permit it.
- Come prepared to each meeting by reviewing agendas, meeting minutes and other material that may be provided in advance.
- Actively participate in any workgroup breakout activities designed to accomplish meeting objectives.

- Actively contribute to proposal, recommendations and deliverables by participating in meetings and following up on assigned action items outside of regular meetings.
- Use quantitative and qualitative data to understand the needs of children at risk of foster care placement and at risk of congregate care placement; the existing processes and quality of services, and to test perspectives and justify recommendations.

Workgroup co-leads will be primarily responsible for setting meeting agendas and facilitating the meetings with group input. The co-leads will also be responsible for collecting additional feedback on workgroup deliberations, products and deliverables outside of regular meetings; in particular, to ensure robust feedback from families and youth with lived experience. Co-leads may assign this additional feedback gathering task as an action item to one or more members or engage the *Community Partnership & Family and Child Engagement* workgroup in this task.

Workgroups co-leads will be the only persons responsible for inviting new members or guest speakers to the workgroup. It is not necessary for members to send other persons in their stead to meetings, but may do so after confirming the appropriateness of a substitution with Workgroup co-leads.

### **Recommendations & Decision-Making**

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Recommendations to the governance committee will be a direct result of the work of the workgroup. The governance committee is ultimately responsible for decision-making regarding Family First and system prevention efforts. Workgroup consensus is not necessary for recommendations; rather a majority of the workgroup can decide to move a recommendation forward. Minority or non-consenting opinions may be provided to the governance committee along with majority recommendations. In the event of a need to break ties, the co-leads will serve as tie-breakers.

### **Meeting Cadence**

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The workgroup will meet approximately every two weeks until April 2020, typically at Beacon Health at 500 Enterprise Drive, Rocky Hill, with some meetings locations TBD. A subsequent meeting cadence will be determined through agreement so that the workgroup can respond to governance committee feedback and/or successfully accomplish its remaining goals. Below follows a high level description of the agenda for each scheduled meeting. The agendas intentionally build on one another iteratively:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Agenda Topics</b>
December 20	9am – 12pm	Understanding the current service array for foster parents and kin, licensing standards for caregivers, and identifying the needs of children/parents and caregivers
January 10	9am – 12pm	Debriefing last meetings kinship care exercise, establishing a charter, clarifying the scope of recommendations, roadmap for arriving at recommendations

January 24 CHR Manchester	9am – 12pm	Data exploration - What do we know about relatives/kin families who may be in need? (e.g., probate cases, grandparents served via aging, 211 data/service requests, foster parent association & ombudsmen info, data runs on disruptions and return to care); what do we know about current system functioning? (e.g., CFSR on alternative caregiver arrangements and seeking/placing/assessing relatives, placement stability, foster parent licensing information, foster family home recruitment, training data); what does the data suggest in terms of exploring barriers, challenges and successes? What data do we not have to understand family-based care and who do we need to talk to better understand?
February 14 Beacon	9am – 12pm	Policy Exploration – Using questions and concerns developed via data exploration, revisit licensing standards, review policies on family finding and notification, legal barriers to relatives/kin caring for children, etc. Identify barriers and potential strategies including policy that may be needed re kinship navigation.
February 28 Beacon	9am – 12pm	Services exploration – Using questions and concerns developed via prior meetings, revisit services information and add services presentations as needed, identify gaps in services for relatives, kin and foster family homes. Identify barriers, potential strategies and additional services needed, including service elements of kinship navigation.
March 13 CHR	9am – 12pm	Practices exploration – Add presentations as needed, to further understand practices associated with working with relatives, kin and foster family homes. Using questions and concerns developed during earlier meetings, identify barriers and potential strategies, including practice elements for workers staffing kinship navigation.
March 27 Beacon	9am – 12pm	Training exploration – Add presentations as needed to further understand initial and ongoing training and preparation of relatives, kin and foster families. Using questions and concerns developed during earlier meetings, identify barriers and potential strategies.
April 13 Beacon	9am – 12pm	Review all barriers and potential strategies across the functional areas (e.g., data, policy, services, practices and training). Identify intersections, alignment and implications; begin to reconcile and scaffold recommendations.
April 24 CHR	9am – 12pm	Final review and refinement of findings and recommendations.