



Conference at the I Hotel in Champaign, IL (Nov. 1, 2022)

## Family First Conference

We are excited to announce an upcoming CEU event for the child welfare workforce! The Family First conference, titled “A Shared Responsibility to Keep Families First,” is designed to strengthen our practice in prevention services, case management and residential treatment services. Anyone involved in intact or permanency casework practice or QRT programs will benefit from attending.

**When:** **May 29, 2024, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.**  
**May 30, 2024, 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

**Where:** **I-Hotel & Conference Center, Champaign, IL**

### What’s in it for you?

- **Insight:** Gain a deeper understanding of how the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) is implemented and its direct implications for your work.
- **Resources:** Access a range of resources on current and upcoming Evidence-Based Interventions (EBIs).

- **Perspective:** Increase your understanding of the impact of FFPSA services on youth in QRTPs, while also fostering stronger family engagement and community connections.
- **Development:** Elevate your expertise and our overall fidelity to the Motivational Interviewing (MI) intervention through skill enhancement opportunities.

The conference is presented by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in collaboration with the UIUC School of Social Work.

### To register, visit:

<https://calendars.illinois.edu/detail/7831/33485496>.

If you have questions, please contact [DCFS.FamilyFirst@illinois.gov](mailto:DCFS.FamilyFirst@illinois.gov) or [lania.west2@illinois.gov](mailto:lania.west2@illinois.gov).

In our last issue, we introduced the theme for this year's Family First newsletter series, which is: **"Beyond the Act: Challenging Practice and Inspiring Change."**

In each issue, we are featuring a current initiative in alignment with either the substance or the spirit of Family First—or in some cases, both! Future issues will highlight new initiatives that are inspired by the act and in alignment with the broader strategic plan. This month, we are proud to share information about the Extended Family Support Program, DCFS' kinship navigator service that deflects families away from the child welfare system and to the legal, financial and community supports that caregivers need.

## Extended Family Support Program

The Extended Family Support Program (EFSP) serves kinship caregivers in Illinois who are not part of the formal child welfare system. The EFSP provides short-term support to the kinship caregiver and their children to ensure that the family is stable and that the caregiver possesses the tools to care for their children.

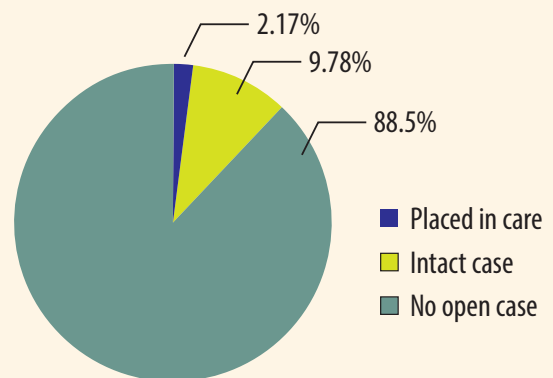
The main goal of EFSP is to help kinship caregivers provide a permanent home for their relative's children without formal involvement of the child welfare system.

The core services provided by EFSP include:

- Education and advocacy to help the kinship caregiver obtain guardianship.
- Education and advocacy to enroll children in their local school.
- Education and advocacy to obtain the TANF Child-Only Grant as well as other entitlements and benefits.
- Making referrals for other community services, including medical, behavioral health, childcare and more.
- Providing cash assistance for legal services to obtain guardianship, and to cover the cost of items needed to care for their relative's children (e.g., beds, dressers and clothes).

Most EFSP cases are self-referred when the caregiver calls the DCFS hotline to request services. Caseworkers from all child welfare teams, including the intake, child protection, intact and post adoption and guardianship, can also refer these kinship caregivers to EFSP. While the number of referrals to EFSP slowed during the pandemic, referrals have returned to pre-pandemic levels. The program referred over 750 families across 21 offices throughout Illinois in FY2023 and expects to continue to grow.

### Children remaining in home after receiving EFSP services



### Data Shows Success

In the summer of 2021, DCFS examined the stability and permanency of the youth and families served by the EFSP program. A random sample showed that **88% of children whose families were served by the EFSP program remained in their kinship caregiver's home.** For so many children, EFSP services helped them avoid formal involvement in the child welfare system.

### Alignment with Family First

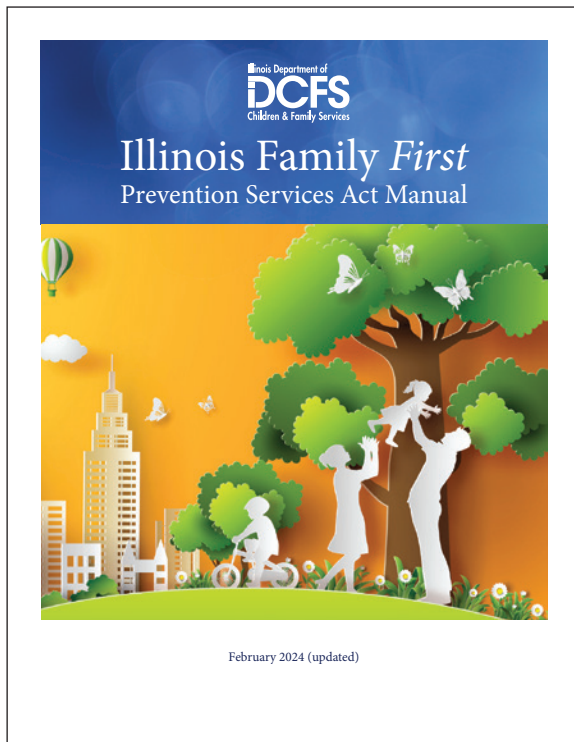
DCFS has been supporting kinship caregivers (as well as relative foster home placements) for many years before federal legislation like the Family First Act created financial incentives to do so. Illinois is a leader in child welfare practice in our emphasis on keeping children with their families and existing support networks. The Family First Act challenges us to take these efforts even further and encourages coordination with other statewide and community entities who are also providing supports to relative caregivers. In 2024 and beyond, we are exploring how DCFS can increase our collaboration with our sister state agencies and community providers to ensure a supportive network of easily accessible services statewide for kinship caregivers and their children.

## Family First in the Strategic Plan

Have you ever wondered how DCFS decides what we will do to keep children safe and strengthen and support families? Some of you may remember that, while the Family First Act was passed in 2018, Illinois's five-year [Prevention Plan](#) was approved in 2021, after extensive consultation, analysis and planning with stakeholders across the state. That means we are still in the first five years of Family First Act implementation and will begin developing our next five-year prevention plan in the coming months. In addition, 2024 begins a new [Child and Family Services Plan \(CFSP\)](#), which is completed every five years. The CFSP is a federally mandated strategic plan that sets forth Illinois' vision and goals to strengthen its child welfare system. And finally, DCFS' own [Strategic Plan](#) sets the child welfare agency's ambitious vision, goals and strategies through 2025. The transformational work of keeping children safely in their homes – a hallmark of the Family First Act – appears in all these documents and plans in myriad ways.

Needless to say, we are doing a LOT of planning here at DCFS, as we determine what the next few years of child welfare will look like in Illinois. To do that, we want to hear from you!

On April 11, 2024, we hosted a Stakeholder Joint Planning meeting, and invited a core group of stakeholders from Child Welfare Contributing Agencies (CWCA); sister state agencies; foster, adoptive and biological parents; community partners; child welfare experts; and current and former youth in care, to join us for an intensive discussion of the department's vision and priorities to inform our next CFSP. This inaugural meeting begins a series of ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to DCFS' priorities, plans and strategies. If you are interested in being involved in future stakeholder advisory opportunities, please contact Kara Hamilton at [kara.hamilton@illinois.gov](mailto:kara.hamilton@illinois.gov).



## Family First Manual is Released!

Finally, we are thrilled to announce that the Illinois Family First Prevention Services Act Manual has officially been published! Representing years of work by DCFS and our child welfare partners, this manual walks through the foundation, core services, processes, protocols and key strategies for supporting the implementation of Family First in Illinois. The information provided in the manual is designed to support staff in the implementation of the program and application of the information acquired in training in your work with families. This manual focuses on prevention programming including the use of Motivational Interviewing by staff. To access the manual, visit: <https://dcfs.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dcfs/documents/about-us/documents/family-first-manual.pdf>.



Questions? *DCFS.FamilyFirst@Illinois.gov*

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