



Over the past year, this newsletter has shared the ways that DCFS is going beyond the Family First Act to challenge existing practices and inspire transformative change. Each issue of the newsletter highlighted a current initiative in alignment with the substance and the spirit of Family First, and now, for our final issue of 2024, we are looking forward. We are sharing two initiatives in development focused on maximizing the opportunities within the Family First Act to serve more families, and to serve them better. Finally, check out the end of this newsletter for some data highlights from our DCFS Family First implementation through FY24!



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**Looking to the future:
kinship navigation**

A “small but mighty” section of the Family First Prevention Services Act addresses kinship navigation services. The Act allows states and jurisdictions to claim federal funds for providing a program that serves kinship caregivers through system navigation support. Like the prevention services portion of the Act, the service must be categorized as “supported” or “well-supported” by the evidence and listed in the *Prevention Services Clearinghouse*. There are also several requirements and recommendations for a kinship navigation service, outlined in the graphic below.

Illinois is a kin-first state – we prioritize placing children with relatives, when possible, if they require foster care. As we described in our *May 2024 newsletter*, Illinois has been providing services to informal relative caregivers through the Extended Family Support Program (EFSP) for a long time. However, EFSP as it currently stands does not meet all the criteria above and is not currently in the Clearinghouse.

Rather than make sudden, significant changes to a program that is already serving families effectively, Illinois DCFS is consciously choosing to take a human-centered approach to the implementation of the kinship navigator portion of the Act. This means that we are

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A kinship navigation service should:

- Be streamlined and coordinated with other information and referral services
- Be planned and operated in consultation with lived experience experts

- Establish information and referral systems that link people to people and people to services
- Provide information to kinship care families through a website, materials or info guides
- Promote partnerships with public and private agencies

Looking to the future: kinship navigation (cont)

gathering feedback and recommendations from a wide variety of interested partners who have been or may be impacted by the services – youth in care and recently out of care, formal and informal relative caregivers and our staff who support these families – to ensure we are designing with the users in mind and identifying the highest priorities for improvement. These partners have already provided invaluable feedback about what’s working and what we can do better. Thank you to the following groups who have provided feedback or who are in the process of sharing feedback through focus group discussions and surveys:

- Foster Parent Support Specialists
- Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
- Statewide Parent Advisory Council
- Post-Adoption/Guardianship Unit staff
- Permanency staff
- Illinois Adoption Advisory Council
- Statewide Youth Advisory Board
- Extended Family Support Program staff and families

If you would like to contribute to the effort, we welcome your feedback through the completion of this survey: *Kinship Navigation - Survey*.

Looking to the future: Illinois partners for system transformation (IL-PST)

When the Family First Prevention Services Act was passed in 2018, Illinois convened a diverse group of interested partners to engage in the implementation planning process and make critical decisions about how the Act would be implemented in Illinois. The overarching steering committee guided the work of several workgroups, one of which was the Communications and Integration Subcommittee. This subcommittee focused on the adaptations that DCFS and our sister state agencies would need to make to support not only the implementation of Family First but the broader vision: system transformation. That subcommittee has continued to move the transformative work forward. A significant step in that process was the Family First Summit in the fall of 2022, which brought together partners from across agencies, sectors and communities to brainstorm goals and strategies for system transformation. The goals identified at that convening are listed below.

Since then, the group has continued to engage new members, collaborate across sectors and generate ideas

and plans for ongoing well-being work. New pathways and new connections are being made at every level of every state agency, while building relationships with community leaders and ensuring individuals with lived experience expertise are participating in key decisions. The group selected a new name: the Illinois Partners for System Transformation.

This year, the DCFS Office of Research and Child Well-Being published the *Unified Theory of Well-Being, Well-Becoming and Resiliency* to provide a framework that will guide much of the work not only for youth in care, but also for those at risk of involvement in the child welfare system. When the systems and the workforce within the state of Illinois prioritize building those factors that contribute to well-being in all domains, we can better align our interventions across agencies and programs to ensure health, happiness and prosperity for children and families.

To read more about the work this collaborative has done over the past two years, check out our recent letter to our partners: *Responding to your recommendations: an update*.



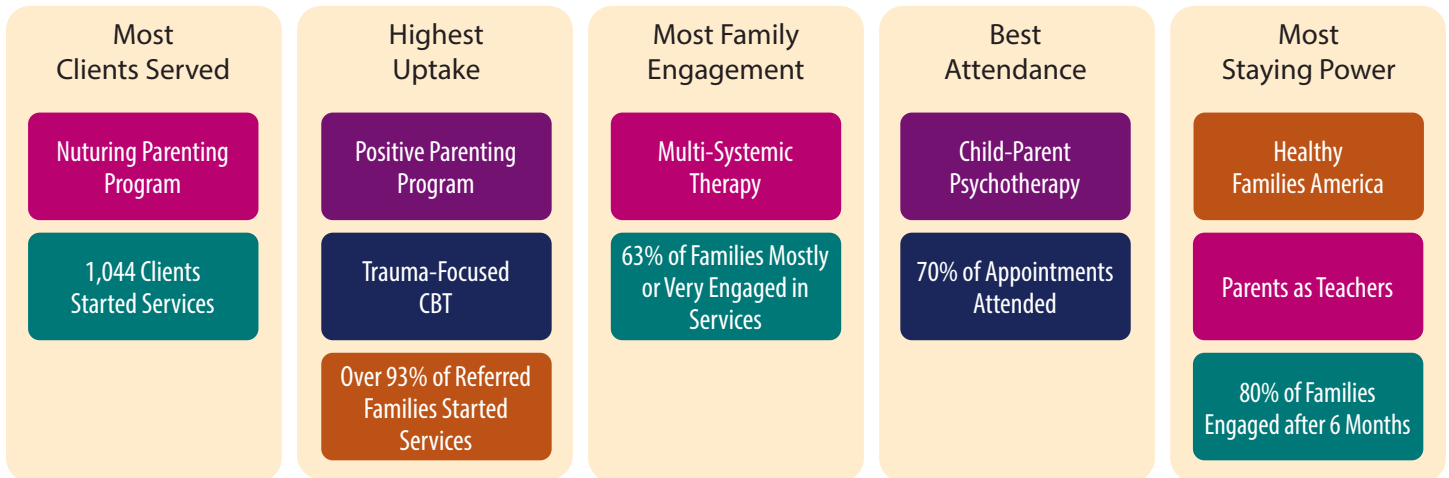
FY24 Data

We are thrilled to share some updated data from the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act in Illinois. We recognize that that statewide implementation of a significant piece of legislation like the FFPSA is a long-term process that is likely to take 15-20 years to reach full effectiveness and seamless integration into practice. Therefore, this is “early” data showing what we have accomplished in just a few short years.

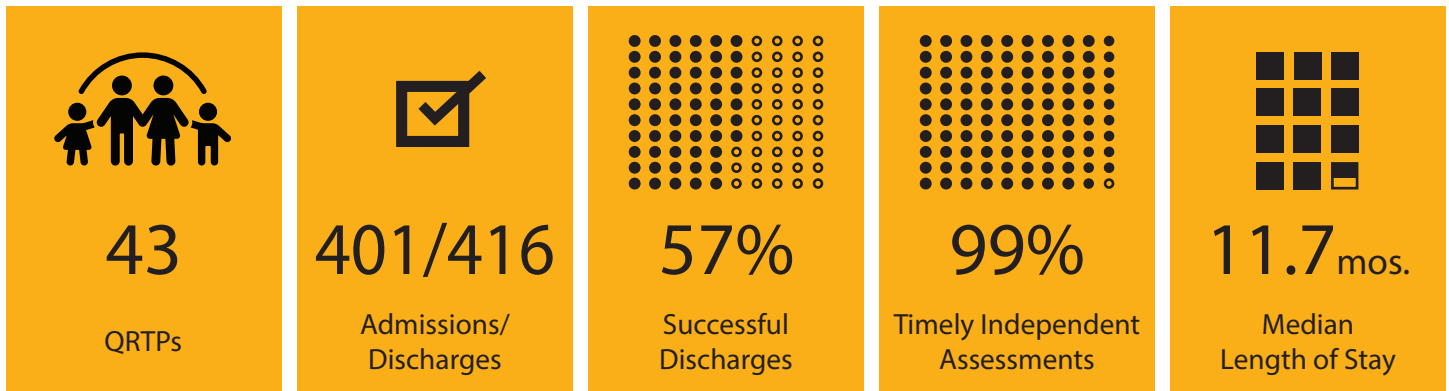
Prevention Services Data Highlights



Celebrating Prevention Services Successes



Celebrating Prevention Services Successes



Celebrating QRTP successes

The road to effective implementation of qualified residential treatment programs (QRTP) has challenged us to develop new ways of thinking about and serving families with youth who need residential treatment. It requires a team approach focused on effective family engagement, intentional discharge planning, intensive clinical support and effective aftercare services. The graphic below illustrates the many individuals, divisions and agencies involved in providing coordinated care to youth in QRTP. While we continue to improve services to youth receiving residential treatment, we are thankful for the collaboration and dedication of our many partners!



Shout Outs!

None of our success would be possible without our implementation support specialists and our Family First community-based agencies, both those providing evidence-based interventions and those providing qualified residential treatment services. Our 2025 newsletter series will focus on these different roles and how they are contributing to the work, with spotlights on some champions of high-quality Family First practice!

Thank you for your support and dedication this year, and we look forward to sharing more with you in 2025!



Questions? DCFS.FamilyFirst@Illinois.gov

DCFS.illinois.gov