



*Over the last year, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services has used this newsletter to demonstrate the Department's commitment to advancing the goals of the Family First Prevention Services Act. Each issue has highlighted initiatives that not only align with the substance of Family First but also embody its underlying principles by challenging existing practices*

*and driving meaningful change. As we look ahead, DCFS will introduce initiatives currently in development. These efforts are designed to maximize the opportunities presented by the Act, enabling the Department to expand services to a greater number of families and enhance the quality of support provided.*

## **“Right sizing the front door” of prevention services**

Through the Family First Prevention Services Act, DCFS has an extraordinary opportunity to reimagine our approach and deepen partnerships with community providers and state agencies while strengthening family engagement. This systemic transformation positions DCFS to both maximize the use of Evidence Based Interventions (EBIs) and broaden the array of services aligned with the Title IV-E Clearinghouse standards for “supported” or “well supported” prevention programs.

DCFS has made intentional efforts to reach underserved communities where access to evidenced-based prevention services is limited. To expand access, the Department is re-examining referral processes and eligibility criteria while strengthening program alignment through

outreach, collaboration, sustainability and workforce development.



As part of this work, DCFS is also “right sizing the front door” by adjusting the restrictive processes and re-evaluating eligibility, exploring the potential to enable access to evidenced-based interventions for families outside of the traditional child welfare system. Through strategic investment in community partnerships, these initiatives deliver critical support to families navigating challenges such as substance abuse, mental health needs and parenting skill development. In doing so, DCFS seeks to prevent deeper system involvement while fostering resilience, stability and long-term well-being and well-becoming.



## Introducing the SAFE Model

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has adopted the Safety and Family Evaluation (SAFE) model, a comprehensive safety assessment and practice model that was developed by Action for Child Protection. Adoption of the SAFE model provides an opportunity to re-examine how families are served within the child welfare system and is expected to have far-reaching implications on programs, policies and daily practice. By centering child well-being, safety and family engagement, the SAFE Model represents a critical advancement in strengthening outcomes for children and caregivers.

## Implementation and impact of the SAFE Model

The SAFE Model enhances the Department's ability to gather comprehensive information about the child and family being reported to the State Central Register (SCR) more effectively and efficiently. This helps ensure that assessment information is more accurate, and service matching is more responsive to families' needs. This change directly affects cases currently supported through Intact Family Services and the Office of Community Connections. Accordingly, services offered through Family First initiatives remain essential to achieving the Department's goals of keeping children safe while restoring caregivers to their protective role and responsibility.

## Key features of the SAFE Model

- Embeds child safety into every stage of a case.
- Provides structure and clear decision-making criteria.
- Promotes consistent, sound decisions that meet the needs of children and families.

## Guiding values and principles

- Proactive and timely response.
- Caregiver involvement.
- Partnerships with families and stakeholders.
- Commitment to the least intrusive interventions.
- Belief in the ability to change.

## Kinship Navigation Services

In addition to the formal adoption of the SAFE Model, DCFS is advancing additional initiatives that strengthen prevention and family preservation. A small but important provision of the Family First Prevention Services Act focuses on Kinship Navigation Services. This provision allows states and other jurisdictions to claim federal funds to support programs that help kinship caregivers access and navigate services. Like the prevention service portion of the Act, these services must be evidence based and included in the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse under "supported" or "well supported" programs. Unlike many other programs, Kinship Navigator Services are not limited by a single definition of "kinship caregiver" or by the requirement that a child meet the federal definition of a foster care candidate. This flexibility allows services to extend to grandparents, other relatives, tribal kin, extended family, close family friends or other fictive kin caring for children.

## The Kinship Navigator Program equips kinship caregivers with:

- The tools to access and navigate programs and services designed to meet the needs of both the children in their care and the caregivers themselves.
- Strengthens collaboration across public and private agencies to provide coordinated services.

Importantly, Kinship Navigator Services are not required to operate in every county or region, which provides flexibility for implementation across the state.

## Key opportunities for advancement

- Intensive family finding.
- Accessible information and resources.
- In-home supports.
- Assistance navigating multiple systems

DCFS will continue to engage individuals and families with lived experiences in identifying the features of a Kinship Navigator Service that are most important to youth and families, as implementation planning continues this fiscal year.

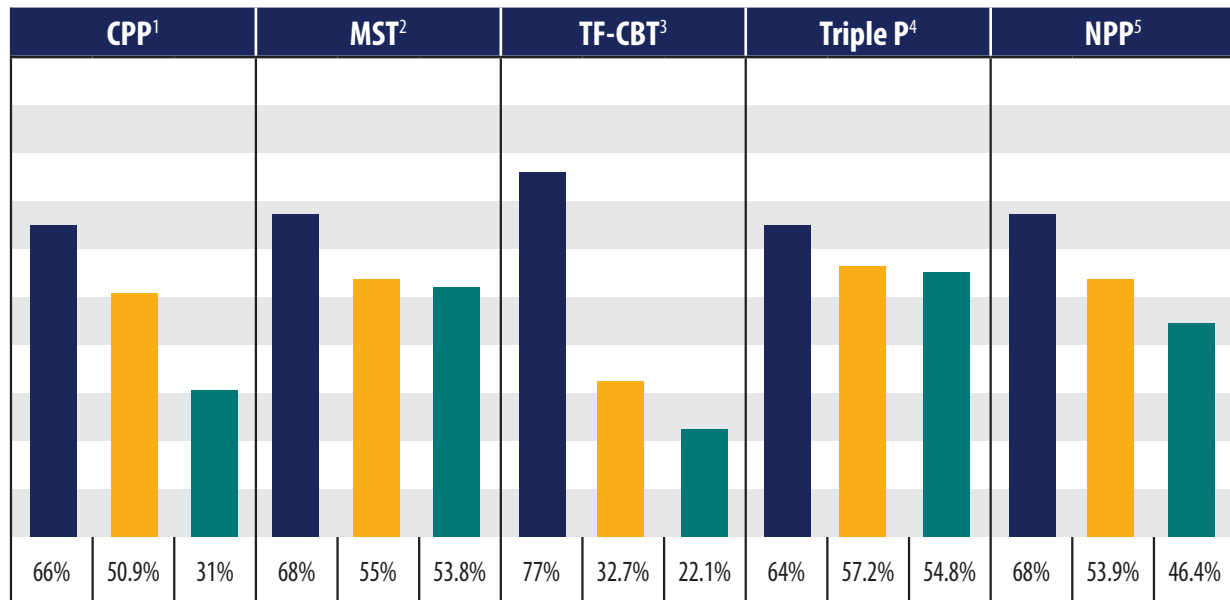
## A Look back: Family First Evidence Based Interventions (EBIs) data

In 2024, DCFS evaluated data from the evidenced based interventions implemented under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Statewide implementation of a landmark law like FFPSA is a long-term effort, one that may take 15-20 years to fully realize and integrate into everyday practice. Yet in the first few years, the early results show meaningful progress and a strong foundation for lasting change and long-term system transformation.

### Implementation highlights

- 2,334 referrals were made to Family First Evidence Based Interventions (FFPSA EBIs).
- In FY 24, FFPSA EBIs were available in 82% of 102 counties in Illinois.
- In FY 24, 32 agencies provided FFPSA EBI services to families in Intact Family Services.
- In FY 24, Intact Family Services made up 96.9% of referrals.
- The Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) represented 56% of all referrals.
- 80% of families engaged in Healthy Families of America and Parents as Teachers Home Visiting programs remained engaged after six months.

### FY22 Q3 – FY24 Q4



- Average session attendance
- Percentage rated mostly engaged or very engaged
- Number of successful closing as % of all discharges by FF interventions

<sup>1</sup> Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)

<sup>2</sup> Multisystemic Therapy (MST)

<sup>3</sup> Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)

<sup>4</sup> Positive Parenting Program (Triple P)

<sup>5</sup> Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP)



## Coming up next:

- Kinship Navigator: Enhancing services and supports for relative caregivers
- The Kind Act: Kin-first approach to prevention and permanency
- Provider Module updates: Navigating challenges and enhancing referrals for Family First EBIs



Questions? [DCFS.FamilyFirst@Illinois.gov](mailto:DCFS.FamilyFirst@Illinois.gov)

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